Re-thinking coach education with Robin Usher: An 'Usherian' approach to innovative coaching

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Robin Usher - A short biography

Robin Usher was born in 1944. He completed his Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics and Politics at Oxford University, where he then continued to earn a PhD in Education in 1967. Usher has worked as a Senior Lecturer at the University of Southampton and currently lives in Melbourne, Australia where he is a consultant for the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT). Usher previously worked at RMIT as Professor of Research Education & Director of Research Training. Usher is an established educational theorist who throughout his career has critiqued the grand narratives of modernism as they apply to education, specifically by using the 'incredulity' (Lyotard, 1984) of postmodernism to revisit the meaning and purpose of adult education and lifelong learning. It is not an overstatement to suggest that Usher's work should be described as a central part of a paradigmatic shift in understanding learning that has occurred over the last decade. Much of Usher's work has been in collaboration with Richard Edwards, amongst others. Here we examine how Usher's alternative analysis of

education can lead to a better understanding of how to achieve ethical and effective sports coaching practices.

In 1989 Usher published *Adult Education as Theory, Practice and Research: The Captive Triangle.* Later, in 1994, Usher published *Postmodernism and Education* with Edwards. This text, using the theories of leading postmodern thinkers, established a detailed critique of the existing concepts, structures and hierarchies that framed educational discourse in the 1990's. In 1997 with the help of Ian Bryant and Rennie Johnston, Usher published *Adult Education and the Postmodern Challenge,* a text that built further upon the problematisation of education through a postmodern stance. Usher's 2007 joint publication with Edwards, *Lifelong Learning: Signs, Discourse and Practices* is his most recent text. It is the reading of lifelong learning presented within this book that we apply to the sports coaching context later in this chapter.

Robin Usher - key concepts

According to Usher and his colleagues it was apparent that in the 1990's the adult education system in the United Kingdom was failing those it was attempting to serve. Usher et al (1994, 1997, 2007) saw that existing modernist approaches to adult education were proving to be inadequate due to their incompatibility with the increasingly diverse needs of learners. In an age defined by the 'decentering of knowledge' and 'multiple truth claims', alternative attitudes to learning were required. Usher et al also recognised that the strength of modernist 'truths' about education were preventing alternative, more fluid interpretations of adult learning from flourishing. As a result, pedagogical approaches reliant on modernist meta-narratives fuelled by a quest for 'competence' (Edwards and Usher, 1994:12) meant that adult learners were not being provided satisfactory or

appropriate 'learning experiences'. To rectify these shortcomings, Usher and his colleagues turned to postmodern social theory in order to develop alternative theoretical interpretations of learning that might encourage adult educators to appreciate the 'contested nature of knowledge' in the consumer age.

The key idea that underpins Usher's approach to adult education is that 'learning is neither invariant nor unchanging because 'learning' is a socio-culturally embedded set of practices' (Usher and Edwards, 2007: 2). Instead of endeavouring to find the 'truth' about 'how people learn', Usher saw that through the process of deciphering how truths about learning have emerged and come to prominence, adults' education experiences could be enhanced. For example, Usher asked: how are the meanings that are created about learning established? For according to Usher, it is through the study of meaning-making, that an understanding of what learning actually is, can emerge.

Modernity has been defined as the search for reason or knowable truth as an alternative to religion (Cahoone, 2003). Adopting a postmodern stance, Usher's work in the 1990's established that since the Enlightenment, educational theory and practice have been firmly grounded on a 'discourse of modernity'. Drawing upon Foucault's (1991) analysis of the classroom as a disciplinary setting, Usher has problematised the basic teaching arrangements and techniques that comprise education. Foucault identified that historically, educational content and practices have upheld powerful modernist beliefs about learning and the human body. According to Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997: 10),

> Educational discourses and practices have had a powerful role in the
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> development, maintenance and legitimization of modernity. Education has
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> traditionally been the site where ideals of critical reason, individual autonomy and

benevolent progress are disseminated and internalized. It is here that the project of

modernity is most obviously realized.

This quote highlights how the traditional perception of modern education is built around

the benevolent transfer of knowledge from teacher to pupil in a linear, progressive

fashion. Modernist logic has led to 'discovered knowledge' being bound into text

books/online databases, that are subsequently used as canonical resources (for example

they include historical dates, scientific facts, and the bio-medical 'truth' about the human

body). These bodies of knowledge were/are disseminated through traditional, overtly

disciplinary classroom/laboratory settings, placing the learner as an inactive recipient in

the learning process. Usher has embraced the skepticism of postmodernism and has

called these sources of knowledge, and the pedagogical approaches used to distribute

them, into question.

Importantly, Usher's skeptical stance allows for other conceptions of what

learning is to arise and to gain recognition. For example, an alternative 'Usherian'

consideration of learning might encompass 'learning as energized by desire which can

follow many paths, rather than learning governed by the pursuit of universal truth

(science) or unproblematic democracy (citizenship)' (Usher and Edwards, 2007: 30). In

contrast to a modernist perspective of learning that would advocate a progressive, linear

acceptance of rational knowledge, Usher's work has sought to re-consider knowledge as

a fluid and decentralized concept.

Usher has also described lifelong learning as an 'endless' process (Usher and

Edwards, 2007: 32), a statement that should encourage educators to recognize that how

their pupils/athletes are learning is constantly changing. Usher believed that in order to

keep pace with the way in which adults learn in post-modernity, the traditional practices of teaching and dominant assumptions surrounding learning have to be reconsidered. In a response to this 'failure of modernity' (Usher et al,. 1997:1) to encompass the diversity of learning experiences present and needed in any society, where curricula remain 'implicitly structured by the social engineering of the project of modernity' (Usher et al,. 1997:11), Usher and his colleagues sought to instigate a re-examination of educational theory and practice in the context of a developing postmodern society.

Usher et al's (1994, 1997, 2007) postmodern critiques have helped to catalyze an ontological shift in the way in which adult learning is considered in contemporary learning theory. This approach, although not universally well received (Hill, 2001), has introduced tenets of postmodernism to a field previously saturated by behavioral psychology and a positivist research mindset. Historically the study of learning has been characterized by an obsession to discover 'the true nature of learning' (Usher and Edwards, 2007: 4). Usher and Edwards (2007) have instead encouraged the educator to reconsider what learning is and that beliefs about what learning is need to be seen as emerging from dominant social practices. For example Usher et al (1997: 20) established that,

> Adult educators tend to see 'lifelong learning' in a transcendental and largely psychologistic way. They thus fail to locate it in contemporary social developments, a failure which is largely attributable to inadequate theorizations about the social field in which adult education is located.

In their most recent work, Usher and Edwards (2007) have expanded upon their earlier analysis of learning to explain how learning is embedded in social practices, and not only

in humans' minds/bodies as a transactional process (as traditional modernist assumptions dictate). To disrupt this problematic 'truth', Usher and Edwards argued for a more expansive perception of learning that moves beyond the production of docile, 'educated citizens' trained primarily to facilitate the economic needs of this consumer age. They strived to locate lifelong learning in a variety of practices, be they social, cultural and/or political. To achieve this, they drew upon the linguistic turn in social theory, including the work of the preeminent post-structural philosopher Michel Foucault.

Usher, Foucault and learning

Foucault (1978) was well known for his critique of society's steady progress based upon reason. He countered modernism by suggesting that because truth is a 'thing of this world', a careful genealogical analysis of 'the hazardous play of dominations' (Cahoone, 2003: 245) present in any social moment should establish the rejection of absolutes. Similarly, Foucault also countered the modernist assumption that truth is an outcome of methodologically controlled and rational investigations. With regard to 'Usherian' learning theory, this means that any truth surrounding how individuals learn has been established through dominant, but flexible, relations of power. Therefore, any 'truth' about education must be considered as contestable.

Edwards and Usher (1994: 84-87) adopted Foucault's disciplinary analysis in order to show that 'modern forms of governance and social discipline are secured through education'. This can be attributed to what is promoted and accepted as 'rational and truthful' in curricula. Importantly, therefore, the taken-for-granted manner in which an individual learns throughout his/her life is heavily influenced by the conditions of the current 'regime of truth' that influences what is taught and in what manner. An example

of this is how Edwards and Usher (1994: 14) have revealed that since the establishment of National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) in 1986, 'competence' in education came to exclusively mean the ability to accumulate and regurgitate facts and answers. This change led to educators ignoring 'the human qualities and wider notions of knowledge and understanding which are integral to the education of people'. Drawing further on Foucault (1991), Edwards and Usher (1994) problematised the existing power relations that produced these 'truths' about 'competence' in learning. Another example of this would be how Edwards and Usher highlighted the way that disciplinary techniques employed by modernist education have, 'lowered the threshold of describable individuality' and 'become a means of control and a method of domination' (Foucault, 1991: 191). Using Foucault, Usher has re-emphasised that the modern educational arrangement cements a problematic assumption of what learning is. And, as a consequence, this generates a normalised population of compliant, uncritical learners or, what Foucault might call 'docile' bodies.

Edwards and Usher (1994) illustrated how the dominance of certain 'educational truths' have marginalised any potential alternative understandings of how an individual might learn throughout his/her life. Foucault's well-established critique of modernity has helped Usher and his colleagues' claims, strengthening their call for educational theory to be amended to arrest the mass production of 'docile' learners. That is, learners who simply regurgitate the 'centralized knowledge' they have acquired in compliance with the (often economic) objectives of adult education institutions. Indeed, Usher's theorizing of learning could be seen as a response to Foucault's invitation to 'reverse' the modern rhetoric of progress, in this case, in the field of education.

Usher's work has used Foucault (amongst others) to reveal that educational institutions that rely on a modernist understanding of learning have the propensity to reduce all learning practices to simple transactional experiences. This is especially so in an increasingly consumerist environment where, in some instances, higher education is rapidly evolving into a product to be bought and sold. Education practitioners (including coaches), have become 'vendors in the educational hypermarket' (Usher et al., 1997: 107). The quicker and more efficiently the transaction of knowledge, and the subsequent 'equipping' of the learner can occur, the greater margins of profit. Adult learners now exist in a time where learning and knowledge acquisition is being increasingly tied to the financial agendas of the neo-liberal climate. Usher (2007: 31) is wary of this trend where 'knowledge has become consumable', and has repeatedly warned that the reduction of education to a transactional process masks the different and multiple meanings that could be attributed to the process of learning across time and culture. Usher insisted that to comprehensively assist lifelong learners, alternative meanings associated with learning must be recognised and incorporated into the manner in which higher education operates. This should allow for the emergence of more appropriate pedagogical approaches (like the exercise we propose below), which recognise diversity and attempt to encourage critical thinking.

According to Usherian postmodern thinking, the modernist project has reduced learning to an autonomous act involving the acquisition of knowledge from a source of expertise. Consequently the idea persists that it is the responsibility of every individual to accrue knowledge to expand him or herself as a learner. This seemingly productive status quo remains an unquestioned 'truth' in education. What possible reason could there be

for this seemingly worthwhile project to be framed as a problem? There is at least one. For Foucault, learning experiences do not occur in the isolated core of an individual's mind, rather they are governed by the spaces individuals occupy and the relationships they hold. Importantly, the strength of this educational truth means that the conditions (conducive or otherwise) within which this project occurs are left unexamined as 'the way things are'. This is a problem as it not only perpetuates the myth that education occurs within a 'level playing field', but it restricts innovation and smothers alternative ways of thinking about learning from surfacing. As a result of this status quo, education in practice has given birth to 'certain kinds of pedagogical interventions' (Usher and Edwards, 2007: 5). These practices include self-reflection, and importantly come with their own consequences for the learner and how learning is understood. For example, Usher and Edwards (2007: 72) explained 'pedagogic practices have always been associated with the incorporation of individuals into discursive regimes of truth. People are governed through these regimes but also; through their actions support their reproduction'. Specifically, Usher was interested in the composition and maintenance of the 'truth regime' responsible for consolidated approaches and knowledge about adults as lifelong learners. As Usher and Edwards identified (2007: 74):

> For Foucault, the modern disciplined, normalized social order is underpinned by a set of pedagogical practices which at one and the same time are explicitly the concern of educational discourse, but which are practiced in *all* social organizations and institutions...This wider understanding of pedagogy across the social order and with other disciplines is denoted through the emergence of the discourse of lifelong learning. In this sense, discourses of lifelong learning can

fashion and mobilize a range of embodied subjectivities within and through wider

disciplines.

As this quote attempts to illustrate, every social institution, including sport, has a

foundation of pedagogical practices that contribute to how lifelong learning is

understood. And we believe it is our role as Foucauldian coaching scholars to interrogate

those practices that have been connected with coach education. In doing so, it might then

be possible to re-articulate understandings of adult/coach learning 'across the social

order'.

Critiques of Robin Usher's postmodern analysis of education

Robin Usher's postmodern perspective upon education has been widely

celebrated as an important step towards better understanding what learning is in

contemporary times. However several criticisms of his postmodern stance do exist and it

is important that they are included here. Hill (2001) in particular is critical of Usher and

Edwards (1994) for what he considers to be their hypothetical and unrealistic ideas that

lack practical application to the educational context. Hill (2001) has also criticized Usher

for demonstrating a profound underestimation of the intention and effects of government

policy surrounding education. Another argument is that Usher has failed to produce

applicable alternatives for practice in the educational field. McLaren and Farahmandpur

(2001) also have concerns regarding 'Usherian' thought and have warned against the

tunnel vision and myopia of postmodern thinking in education, suggesting it as incapable

of producing a politically effective project. And, Hill (2001: 140) has claimed that in

educational theory, 'no postmodern theorist (including Usher)…has gone beyond de-

construction into considering a coherent program for re-construction". Hill was also

skeptical about what the nature of the 're-configuration' of educational practices that Usher and Edwards (1994) have envisaged. Like many other postmodern thinkers, it is clear that Usher faces a critique for his lack of applicable alternative ideas.

We accept that these are valid concerns that stem from a broader critique of the postmodern stance. We also agree it is important that Usher's theories be open to contestation and critique (as are all educational truths). However, we also believe that many of Usher's standpoints, if appropriately applied to the coaching setting, can be effectively utilized (as we intend to demonstrate in the following section). Specifically, we intend to highlight how using Usher one might develop more ethical and innovative pedagogical approaches to understanding the formation and distribution of coaching knowledge.

Robin Usher - application to sports coaching

To begin to consider how Usher's post-modern/structuralist sensibility towards learning could shape or influence a coach educator's practices it is important to keep in mind some of Usher's fundamental assumptions around learning. Primarily, Usher did not see learning to be something that an individual—either the learner or the teacher— must take sole responsibility for. Learning for Usher is not just a cognitive process that takes place in a person's brain or as a function of teaching. This would be to separate learning from everyday living. Rather, for Usher, learning is social and is embedded in a multiplicity of practices that we participate in daily. And it is through our participation in life that we make meaning and hence learn. Accordingly, learning is context dependent, or a function of culture; it therefore also involves work: it is not passive. Finally, when

learning is understood to be social and contextual this calls into question the idea of 'best practices'.

Accordingly, for Usher, it was essential to develop approaches to learning that challenged the modernist notion of a singular truth—a best practice. In other words, Usher believed it was important to understand how learning is enmeshed within a wide-range of practices not necessarily privileged by certain pre-defined goals and purposes founded on specific traditional bodies of knowledge. In the case of coach learning, this would mean challenging the canonical nature of exercise physiology, biomechanics and sport psychology and their unquestioned place in the coach development curriculum. Moreover, for Usher it was also important to make learning a space that can encompass a multiplicity and diversity of practices. In this way, learning should not be conceptualized as smooth, apolitical and linear but as complex and fluid and at times even contradictory and paradoxical. Learning becomes, therefore, a process that involves continually rethinking and questioning what one is doing. This is based on the premise that knowledge is always socially constructed and a result of complex relations of power. Therefore, for a coach educator charged with facilitating coaches' learning, to 'think with Usher' means understanding how certain practices or ideas can become dominant, such that we stop asking if they are actually effective. And when this happens, innovation or new learning is most certainly stifled.

As we have previously established, Usher's post-modern/structuralist understanding of learning was greatly informed by the thinking of Foucault. For example, as Foucault (1991) would say, and Usher would certainly echo, wherever and when learning takes place, those who are learning are required to bring forth their subjectivities

for disciplining in order that they can become a particular type of person: a productive and efficient body. In our case here, that would mean a coach (the learner) exiting a learning experience having been disciplined to think in a very specific and defined way. Interestingly, a similar 'effect' occurs when coaches then go onto coach. For as most coaches report, they prefer to work with 'coachable athletes' as opposed to athletes who might question their decisions or attempt to assert their own control or identity over their sporting experiences and choices. In this way, through highly disciplinary learning practices both coaches and athletes regulate and monitor their thoughts and behaviors to conform with dominant meanings of what it means to be a competent coach and/or athlete. In other words, through a modernist or disciplinary learning logic sports' status quo as a disciplining process is firmly maintained.

For Usher the maintenance of such a status quo was highly problematic as he believed it can only constrain and limit individuals' growth and development through the making of docile bodies. Accordingly, the challenge faced by a coach educator who has chosen to think with Usher is: how do I develop educational practices that can help coaches become actively engaged subjects? Such an aim is, of course, difficult to achieve. For as Denison and Mills (2014) illustrated, the power of self-regulated coach competence, with its roots in various government agendas that justify the value of sport to make individuals—both coaches and athletes—into useful members of society is incredibly pervasive. More pointedly, within the strict neo-liberal discourse of coach competence there is almost no space for coach educators to generate alternative views, knowledge or practices because the frameworks around which 'correct', 'normal,' and 'responsible' coaching is designed and reinforced is so strong. To coach 'differently' is to risk censure or worse. As a result,

truly innovative learning experiences for coaches are for all intents and purposes denigrated, dismissed and silenced as theoretical, irrelevant and academic. Accordingly, to develop flexible or open-minded coaches a coach educator must first be willing to problematize the effects produced by a rigid and disciplinary learning framework where it is seen as more important to be 'normal' than effective. For to believe that innovative coaches can be developed within today's current neo-liberal educational climate is to ignore how our disciplinary society functions to make individuals docile (Foucault, 1991); to develop coaches capable of problematizing dominant or taken-for-granted coaching practices coach educators need to consider specific learning outcomes— knowledges and skills—that reflect this aim. More to the point, through both Usher and Foucault, we are interested in approaches to coach education that disrupt specific relations of power produced by neo-liberal educational policies because of the docile-making effects they can have on coaches, who in turn are responsible for the development of impressionable athletes.

So what might an Usherian approach to coach learning mean in practice? By way of an example, we would like to share one exercise we developed that we have used with dozens of coaches from a variety of sports in a number of coach education contexts. We call this exercise, "The Formation of Coaches' Practices".

To begin this exercise we first talk to the coaches we are working with about the idea that all sports have established practices that influence how they coach. We then explain that this exercise involves examining where those practices have come from and how they have become established. More specifically, we ask each coach to consider how history and tradition—including chance and accidents—have influenced the way he or

she understands how to coach. We explain that this will enable them to see how their knowledge of coaching, as well as their understanding of themselves as a coach, is not necessarily fixed or true but the result of a number of social and cultural constructions or discourses. More specifically, it is our objective that the coaches will be able to do the following upon completing this exercise:

- Illustrate how power and knowledge are always linked in the formation of coaches' practices;

- Understand how this power-knowledge nexus, along with larger cultural understandings of "being human" shapes bodies—their looks, dispositions, attitudes, behaviours and functions;

- Develop an awareness of the subjective nature of coaching concepts and principles;

- Critique established training practices and their effects;

- Create innovative approaches to coaching by problematizing 'all that coaching does'.

After our general explanation of this exercise's background and aims we provide the coaches with the following set of instructions.

The 'formation of coaches' practices' - step one

In the table below list THREE established training practices in your sport and for each one record your thoughts on what you think helped shape this practice. In other words, what is the history of this training practice, where did it come from, how did it develop and why has it become so established? For example, one established coaching practice in athletics is that athletes should keep logbooks to record their workouts. This practice has been shaped by the scientific method and the belief that carefully recording one's training is the best way to predict and replicate a performance. Similarly, the use of field tests have become an established coaching practice in many team sports to measure athletes' fitness. This practice has been shaped by the belief that controlled measurements can be used to assess readiness to perform.

Established training practices in your sport	Shaped by…
▪ *Athletes to record workouts in logbooks*	▪ *Use of objective data to predict performance*
▪ *Field tests to measure fitness*	▪ *Fixed protocols provide accurate fitness assessments*

The 'formation of coaches' practices'- step two

While there might be many benefits associated with the training practices on your list, consider next some potential limitations and unintended consequences that could result from the practices on your list. For example, an athletics coach who has his or her athletes use logbooks to record their workouts might be unintentionally encouraging them to neglect how their bodies feel when making decisions about their training by focusing instead on what the numbers say. Likewise, a football coach who uses the beep test to determine an athlete's fitness and readiness to perform might begin to ignore other qualities that could contribute to an athlete's ability to compete. Use the table below to select ONE established training practice from your list above and record the potential limitations and unintended consequences from this practice.

Established training practices in your sport	Shaped by…
▪ *Athletes to record workouts in logbooks*	▪ *Athletes ignore their bodies' reactions*
▪ *Field tests to measure fitness*	▪ *Coach defines fitness as physical preparedness only*

The 'formation of coaches' practices'- step three

Now try to think of how you would avoid the limitations and unintended consequences you identified for this one training practice? What changes would you make and why? Consider any potential barriers to making these changes. For example, what would make it difficult for you to change this practice and coach differently? How would you implement this change? Could this change impact on your relationship with your athletes and others? What challenges or difficulties would it present to you? Finally, having made a change, how would you avoid creating a new set of limitations or unintended consequences?

We have found the discussion this exercise generates to be highly engaging for coaches but also extremely challenging or mind-bending. It can be disconcerting for a coach to learn that the foundations he or she believed his or her practices were based on are not as solid as he or she thought. Moreover, to see how widespread or entrenched this foundational understanding of 'how to coach' is can be disheartening when thinking about ways to begin 'coaching differently'. However, through this exercise we believe we are putting into circulation Usher's educational/learning vision. For example, we have seen coaches emerge from this exercise and begin to question the many coaching maxims that are based on a binary logic: good-bad, science-art, theory-practice, hard-soft, body-mind. Following this questioning, they begin to recognize how limited and constrained they have been by sport's modernist legacy and a disciplinary learning framework. As a result, they become more capable of challenging the various orthodoxies of their sport and more confident thinking differently and coaching in more innovative ways.

This exercise has been specifically designed to promote alternative attitudes to those predominantly found in the educational realm of sports coaching. Using 'Usherian' theorizing we have presented an exercise that chiefly endorses the interrogation of restrictive coaching practices with the hope of devising alternative practices and alternative outcomes. In what follows, in a reflection embodying the approach to learning we have presented, Brian, our coach educator reveals how adopting 'Usherian' thinking has influenced how he facilitates coaches' learning.

Reflecting on an 'Usherian' approach to coaching

My coaching career took off after I injured myself playing American collegiate football and an opportunity arose to become a strength and conditioning coach intern with Major League Baseball's Cleveland Indians Baseball Club. After two years in Cleveland, I became a graduate assistant strength coach, which eventually turned into a fulltime position, at the University of Tennessee. There, I earned a Master's degree in Sport Management, a PhD in Education, and multiple certifications in strength and conditioning and athletics. During this time I studied cultural studies of education and the sociology of sports coaching. I left Tennessee to become an assistant professor of Sport Coaching, and during this five year period I also volunteered coaching high school (American) football for two years, youth soccer and baseball for a couple of seasons, and was a speed coach for a gymnastics centre for one and a half years.

For the past year, as a program director for a Masters of Arts degree in Sport Coaching and a coach educator, I've been reviewing a lot of work on learning theory, organizational learning and instructional design. Oftentimes university courses are presented as separate and distinct from any type of larger social and historical context. As

a result students can easily believe that what they have learned is exactly how things are and always have been. Professors, like coaches, are told to present themselves as omniscient and confident; yet we know that this is problematic and fails to capture the social construction of knowledge (Jones, 2006). However, as coach educators, if we were to draw upon Usher, we could teach students not what knowledge and practice are, but how they have been socially constructed to be. Throughout our curriculum, we could develop instructional activities guided by a genealogical analysis to demonstrate the historical, cultural and power relations of knowledge and practice.

For example, in strength and conditioning it was once believed that resistance training would make you slow and tight. People thought this because they observed massive (male) bodybuilders who were deemed too "muscle bound" to be a good athlete. With the birth of a scientific view of the body and a positivistic approach to research, and the promise of progress packaged with this Enlightenment paradigm, exercise physiologists could conduct experiments to debunk the "myth" that full range of motion resistance training causes the human body to be slow, tight or muscle bound. However, following Usher, we should not stop there, or be satisfied with our current understanding of the body. In my own work I have acknowledged some of the problems (e.g., coach-athlete conflict, injury, under performance) that may occur in practice when the coach is framed as an expert. An expert who justifies his or her coaching approach with scientific "truths" that leads to the production of athletes as docile bodies (Gearity & Mills, 2013). Several potential negative effects of relying upon a scientific understanding of the body exist. For example, the idea that all bodies are the same and respond the same to training or that our training programs should draw predominantly from resistance training

methods to build muscle mass and maximal strength. Therefore, aside from our dominant scientific understanding of the body, are there other ways of moving and training that could reduce or lessen the severity of injury, increase performance, or keep athletes engaged in sport? Under a competency-based approach to education and assessing student-coach achievement by their ability to conform to the expert's view of knowledge and standardized testing, we (re)produce a system of thought that is largely unimaginative, creative or innovative. Learning is reduced to a relatively stable point based on universal truths in one's mind. Therefore, because students and novice coaches lack coaching experience to reflect upon, a useful instructional practice could be to analyse and evaluate the thoughts and practices of other coaches. Such a learning activity would comply with Usher's conceptualization of social learning and relations of power. The learning outcome for this sort of activity would be to create a critical post-modern, post-structural critique of "learning" in sport coaching. By design, this outcome is less predictable than competency-based approaches and standardized tests, but the hope is that the skill of thinking sociologically would be used over a lifetime. Indeed, lifelong learning that does little than conform to modernist assumptions is the antithesis of an Usherian approach.

Based upon a scientific view of the body, in the 1980's many coaches eagerly used powerlifting techniques to improve strength and size, while the 1990's saw the rise of weightlifting techniques probably due to research showing it was better at improving power than powerlifting. In the 2000's, with the rise of technology to measure athletes' heart rate, acceleration and distance, knowledge of the body has become increasingly technocratic. There is also a growing interest in rest and recovery, which suggests that

previous methods were too stressful although most coaches didn't think so at the time. Perhaps all parties were too caught up in their modernist assumption of scientific progress to problematize prevailing taken-for-granted assumptions. In current practice oftentimes coaches don't have to think but merely hook athletes up to technology to be given a simple to use and guaranteed successful program. Following Usher, my point here is to show how each period has a prevailing mental model or grand narrative based on a dominant way of coaching and power relations. From a post-structural lifelong learning perspective, we should critique these 'truths' and continuously encourage coaches to think and to exercise their power not just to create docile athletes. Indeed, throughout all of these periods athletes' bodies have been tightly controlled and their own embodiment marginalised. It's a contradiction, although common practice, for a coach to preach simultaneously "Listen to your body" while implementing technologies of dominance! But the promise for coaches to think, to coach differently, is always possible. My own experience has demonstrated that Usher's ideas on learning can be helpful for coach educators to develop coaches committed to being and thinking differently in their everyday practice.

Critical questions

1. How, and it what way, does Robin Usher's interpretation of lifelong learning differ from a behaviourist or constructivist understandings of adult learning?

2. This chapter has identified that Robin Usher's postmodern position would be sceptical certain underlying assumptions about learning. What are these underlying assumptions?

3. What problems did Robin Usher and his colleagues identify surrounding the association between adult education and the increased transactional nature of learning in adult education institutions?

4. Robin Usher was critical of the 'modernist truths' that have underpinned educational practices. What are these 'modernist truths'? What are the educational practices that he was critical of?

5. How might the coach re-design a coaching programme in light of his exposure to an 'Usherian' understanding of learning? – For example how might the practices chosen vary from existing dominant coaching practices?

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