

Teaching Styles of Australian Tennis Coaches:  
An exploration of practices and insights using Mosston and Ashworth's Spectrum of  
Teaching Styles

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## **CERTIFICATION OF DISSERTATION**

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as otherwise indicated in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

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## **PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS ARISING FROM THIS THESIS**

### **Journal articles**

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Hewitt, M., & Edwards, K. (2012, October). *Self-identified and observed teaching styles of junior development and club professional tennis coaches in Australia*. Paper presented at the 10<sup>th</sup> Postgraduate and Early Career Research Group research symposium, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Qld, Australia.

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## ABSTRACT

Many educational theorists believe that there is no *best* teaching style. A common principle in the discipline of sports coaching is that coaches should base their teaching style(s) on a number of considerations. These include: the developmental characteristics and individual requirements of the player, as well as the subject matter intent. Apart from anecdotal reports, however, the subject of tennis coaches and teaching styles remains largely unexplored. It is unknown what teaching styles coaches are employing during coaching sessions and whether these teaching styles are associated with recommended pedagogical principles advocated by scholars. The insights with regard to teaching styles that underpin and inform the coaches' decisions to employ particular teaching styles during coaching sessions are equally undetermined. Perhaps this noted lack of information regarding teaching styles is due to the theoretical and practical difficulty of comparing the various terms and interpretations that tennis coaches enact in relation to their instructional practices. Arguably, many of these conceptions about teaching styles are not organised in a common theoretical framework but rather exist with the individual interpretations of tennis coaches. It has been anecdotally suggested that the terms used to define teaching styles largely lack consistency and uniformity and are frequently employed interchangeably. Conceivably, this has led to the perceived confusion and the absence of a definitive set of concepts and principles reflective of the tennis coaching process and effective practice within it. As diverse learning conditions and experiences are often created by employing different teaching styles, the necessity for coaches to understand and purposefully implement a range of teaching styles to achieve various learning aims and objectives is vital. Contrary to educational convictions and perceptions, however, the results from this study indicated a different view in relation to the recommended employment of a variety of teaching styles. The requirement for a tennis coach to possess the capacity to employ a range of teaching styles when appropriate is perhaps reliant on a number of considerations. Coaches must be prepared to cater for the diversity of players' learning needs, interests, preferences and developmental readiness or stage of learning. Additionally, tennis involves learning aims and objectives from the psychomotor (physical/motor skill), cognitive (decision making) and affective (enjoyment/motivation) domains. This might suggest the application of specific teaching styles to develop each learning area comprehensively. As no one teaching style encompasses all learning eventualities, an effective coach must have the capability to change, combine and transition between various teaching styles during sessions. To understand fully the holistic nature of sports coaching and to aid in the investigation of the teaching styles that tennis coaches employ, quantitative and qualitative research methods have been employed in this study. It was anticipated that the combination of self-report survey questionnaires, observations and interview methods would result in the creation of data whereby the qualitative findings complemented and extended the meaning of the quantitative results. It was also expected that this combination of research methods would more precisely focus on the entirety of coaches' practices and insights by revealing the multidimensional and intricate level exchanges that epitomise the complex reality of the everyday tennis coaching habits of Junior Development (JD) and Club Professional (CP) tennis coaches in Australia. This thesis presents the findings of research completed on the self-identified teaching styles of 208 JD and CP tennis coaches in Australia as well as the observed teaching styles of 12 tennis coaches from three 30 minute tennis sessions. As well as these observations, an additional coach participated in an extended observational period of 18 hours of

coaching at their local tennis club. This study also explored the coaches' insights of teaching styles in addition to the motivations that informed their decisions to employ particular teaching styles during coaching sessions. Therefore, a total of 13 coaches participated in the observation and interview of this study. Mosston and Ashworth's *Spectrum of Teaching Styles* (2008) (which is referred to as *The Spectrum*) was used as a basis for identifying the coaches' teaching styles.

*The Spectrum* (Mosston & Ashworth, 2008) consists of 11 landmark teaching styles that function as indicators that represent considerably different teaching and learning experiences. Located between the landmark teaching styles are many, if not an infinite number of, pedagogical variations that share similar, or approximate, but not precise, decision structures of the landmark teaching style(s) that they are located near or between. These variations are termed canopy designs. The results showed that JD and CP tennis coaches in Australia do not use a range of teaching styles during their coaching sessions throughout the year. The coaches were primarily observed employing a canopy design that approximated the decision structures of landmark teaching style Practice Style-B.

This study also indicated a lack of congruence between the landmark teaching styles that coaches' reported using during their coaching sessions throughout the year and the landmark teaching styles that they actually used. The survey questionnaire respondents reported using all of the landmark teaching styles on *The Spectrum* (Mosston & Ashworth, 2008). When the video-recorded sessions of the coaches were coded, a total of two landmark teaching styles was actually observed. As a percentage of total time observed, the results from the 12 coaches indicated that they employed landmark teaching style Practice Style-B for 12.87% of the time and landmark teaching style Command Style-A for 0.18% of the time. The 12 coaches were also observed performing two canopy designs. A variation of landmark teaching style Practice Style-B (Canopy design Practice Style-B) was observed for 71.38% of the time and a variation of landmark teaching style Command Style-A (Canopy design Command Style-A) was observed for 10.40% of the time. Among the 12 coaches, no other landmark teaching styles or canopy designs were observed. The results from the extended observation period (18 hours) of the single coach revealed that as a percentage of total time, landmark teaching style Practice Style-B was observed for 13.42% of the time, and landmark teaching style Command Style-A was employed for 1.61% of the time. This coach was also observed using two variations of the landmark teaching styles. Canopy design Practice Style-B was employed for 72.05% of the time and canopy design Command Style-A was used for 9.44% of the time. No other landmark teaching styles or canopy designs were observed. The observed landmark teaching styles and canopy designs strongly correlated with the pedagogical principles associated with direct instruction guidelines. Direct instruction is commonly represented by the coach making decisions about what the students are learning in addition to *how* and *why* they are learning it.

The interviews demonstrated that the terms that the coaches used to describe teaching styles lacked consistency and accuracy and were often used interchangeably. It was also revealed that coaches were incapable of accurately describing and identifying their own teaching styles during their observed lessons. This suggests that coaches exhibit a reduced self-awareness of their coaching in practice. However, the findings established that despite the coaches' limited

awareness of the teaching styles they performed during the observed lessons, they were able to articulate the type of environment they wished to produce and the behaviours they wanted to encourage. For example, all the coaches (n=13) believed in asking the players questions, allowing the players to solve challenges independently, and not prescriptively informing the players *what* to do or *how* to do it. In spite of all the coaches advocating the employment of teaching styles that share similar pedagogical principles with indirect instruction, they were unable to explain the theoretical assumptions that underpin these practices. All the interviewed coaches stated that their choice and employment of a particular teaching style did not alter as a function of the age or ability of the players they coached. Modifying, changing or enhancing the practices of tennis coaches necessitates recognition that they can identify their coaching practices as well as understand the assumptions that inform these behaviours. Consequently, research that has the capacity to identify the teaching styles that coaches employ during coaching sessions and the underlying explanations of these practices presents a pathway for coaches to contest and reflect on the effectiveness of their practices. This might produce a more coherent connection between beliefs and practice. Exploring the teaching styles of tennis coaches may provide assistance in identifying *how* coaches facilitate learning and *why* coaches decide upon the application of teaching styles during coaching sessions. With an understanding and an awareness of coaching behaviours, theorising about current limitations becomes likely. The possible identification of different features within pedagogical behaviour among tennis coaches in Australia will be particularly crucial in the design of coach education programs and professional development initiatives. These findings may also extend relevance into sports coaching more broadly.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>ACC</b>	Australian Coaching Council
<b>ASC</b>	Australian Sports Commission
<b>CP</b>	Club Professional level tennis coach
<b>GBA</b>	Game-Based Approach
<b>GCAs</b>	Game-Centred Approaches
<b>HP</b>	High Performance level tennis coach
<b>IFITS</b>	Instrument for Identifying Teaching Styles
<b>IOA</b>	Inter Observer Agreement
<b>ITF</b>	International Tennis Federation
<b>JD</b>	Junior Development level tennis coach
<b>MCP</b>	Master Club Professional level tennis coach
<b>NASP</b>	National Association for Sport and Physical Education
<b>NCAS</b>	National Coaching Accreditation Scheme
<b>NCPE</b>	National Curriculum Physical Education
<b>QSA</b>	Queensland Studies Authority
<b>QSPES</b>	Queensland Physical Education Senior Syllabus
<b>TA</b>	Tennis Australia
<b>TCA</b>	Tennis Coaches Australia
<b>TCAs</b>	Technique-Centred Approaches
<b>TCAV</b>	Tennis Coaches Association of Victoria
<b>TGfU</b>	Teaching Games for Understanding
<b>TGM</b>	Tactical Games Model
<b>TPAA</b>	Tennis Professionals Association of Australia

The listed terms will be defined throughout the thesis