



***Analysis of the current coach program and to what extent it is
addressing the issues of social inclusion***

Situation in Greece



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1. Introduction

Since antiquity, sport has been a value of democracy. It is targeted at all citizens regardless of gender, race, age, disability, religion and belief, sexual orientation and social or economic background. It represents a large and rapidly growing sector of the economy and contributes significantly to growth and employment, while encouraging social participation for young and elderly people, both women and men. As far as sport is concerned, international surveys have shown that engaging people at all stages of life with athletic activities strengthens the body, contributes to a better psychological state and increases self-esteem.

In this context, the coach is one of the most significant factors as he affects not only the performance of athletes but also their emotional state and health. In particular, the coach of developmental ages determines to a great extent not only the acquisition of athletic skills but also the development of psychological abilities. The coach determines whether the young athlete will gain positive or negative experience from organized sports activities and will have the incentive to try to get better. The creation of conditions that promote the mental and emotional development of young people through sports activities is the foundation not only for the development of high performance athletes but for their psychosocial adaptation as well.

It is an undoubted fact, therefore, that the coach in developmental ages can play a very important role in the integration and social inclusion of children living in underprivileged districts or for various reasons face racist behavior or belong to the so-called vulnerable social groups and their opportunities for socialization are limited. The integration of these children through sports will contribute drastically not only to their personal development, but also to social cohesion and general welfare of their community. Coach can be one of the key factors that can lead in this direction, aimed at tackling social inequalities and exclusion.

A program coordinated by the Greek government focusing on social integration through sports, was organized for the first time in 1982-83 by the Ministry of Youth and Sports under the name of "Popular Folk Sports" and included exercises and sport programmes for all social groups regardless of age, sex, race and physical or mental capabilities. It was a free of charge program and worked through local authorities, but with centralized coordination, control and funding, as a leisure activity for the citizens and with a great deal of participation, at least during the first decade of its implementation.

Program with a similar philosophy ("Exercise and Sport for All") could have been designed as a continuation, adapted to social developments and based on the organization of the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens. Unfortunately, since then little effort has been made towards this direction on behalf of the state. On the other hand, local authorities and sport clubs around the country have taken such initiatives over the years. At the Municipality of Megara (where about 1070 families are living below the poverty line), for example, there are around twenty-two active sport clubs, most of them having academies consisting of girls and boys aged 3-16 years, who come from low-income families, immigrants or Roma community.



Thus it seems that the potential of sports-based social interventions for vulnerable youth and the coaches' role in such activities have not yet been extensively addressed in Greece. Neither is the current training program specifically referring to this field, nor is there a sufficient number of surveys to substantiate whether training practices in country today meet the principles of social inclusion.

Coaching behavior will be examined in Greece from this point of view based on relevant research, hoping that in the future there will be more research in this field and a regulation that will focus on the sport-based social inclusion.



2. Current condition of coaching behavior in Greece and the extent to which it addresses the issues of social inclusion

2.1 Research related to the subject

According to the Greek new sports law in force [Art 22 (1)], the coach is *"a professional who, through scientific and pedagogical training, experience and specialized knowledge of sport or sport or physical activity recreational activity or extreme sports tourism, undertakes the preparation, guidance, increase of athletic performance and the progress of athletes, as well as those engaged in mass sports program or exercised in gyms, public and private and simultaneously preserves and improves the health of these persons"*.

The relationship between coaches and athletes is considered as the most important in the whole sports system and is defined as a situation in which the knowledge, feelings and behavior forms of a coach and an athlete are related to each other in a causative way (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett , Paull, & Pensgaard, 2005; Poczwardowski, Henschen, & Barott 2002).

This relationship may reduce or develop the leadership skills of those occupied with a sports activity, his / her autonomy, internal motivation and decision-making, so it can improve the overall performance (Cannole, Kadushin , & Watson, 2011) and -in the case of vulnerable social groups- contribute to integration and social inclusion.

As for the development of children and adolescents especially, the kind of behavior that the coach exhibits in training and in sports events meant to be an extremely important factor. Indeed, a large number of surveys have shown that the form, frequency and quality of reinforcement seems to have a strong impact on young athletes. Training behaviors that emphasize frequent encouragement in conjunction with providing specific instructions and correction of mistakes, seem to be preferred by the athletes themselves and promote internally motivated behaviors. Severe criticism -on the other hand- combined with ignoring desirable behaviors seems to lead to the opposite.

However, the basic prerequisite for effective coaching behaviors is first and foremost that the coaches themselves being able to recognize which kinds of behavior they demonstrate, how desirable their behavior is and their effect on performance and the psychological state of young athletes.

In general, Greek coaching program place emphasis on the pedagogical role of coaches and note that during training they should provide young athletes with positive feedback even in the case of possible mistakes, with a constant effort to increase their self-confidence. In other words, they are obliged to be positive and supportive towards their athletes. As far as team sports are concerned, the coaches should also define clear roles for athletes within the group, in order to ensure maximum satisfaction. The young athletes' satisfaction will contribute to a positive - pleasant climate and this in turn to -both personal and group- improvement and development.



Research has been conducted involving Greek coaches of team sports dealing with developmental ages (10 to 15 years of age), in the context of an initial depiction of coaching behaviors in our country. The researchers attempted to record, categorize and analyze the behaviors shown in training and matches by the above coaches. In particular, Tzioumakis et al., (2009) and Zetou, Amprasi, Michalopoulou and Aggelousis (2011) evaluated the coaching behavior through systematic observation in basketball-handball and small-size volleyball respectively. Apart from these, however, few studies have been made in order to whether there are differences between young athletes' perception of coaching behavior.

Coding and analyzing of coaching behaviors in these surveys was made using the Smithsonian Coaching Behavior Assessment System (1977), adapted in Greek circumstances. The aim of CBAS - Perceived Behavior Scale development was to examine the impact of training behaviors on children's psychological development through sports (Abraham & Collins, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c), and to suggest ways of intervention for improving coaching effectiveness. Smith et al., (1977) developed the behavioral categories of their previous work (Smith, Smoll & amp; Hunt, 1974).

The CBAS includes 12 categories classified into two main classes of behavior:

Class I: Reactive behaviors

A. Responding to desired efforts

1. Positive reinforcement (R)
2. Non-reinforcement (NR)

B. Responding to mistakes

3. Mistake-contingent Encouragement (EM)
4. Mistake-contingent Technical Instruction (TIM)
5. Punishment (Punishment, P)
6. Punitive Technical Instruction (PTIM)
7. Ignoring Mistakes (IM)

C. Responding to unwanted behaviors

8. Keeping Control (KC)



Class II: Spontaneous behaviors

These categories refer to coaching behaviors that do not seem to respond to a recognizable or completely clear previous stimulus.

D. Related to training

9. General Technical Instruction (TIG)

10. General Encouragement (EG)

11. Organization (O)

E. Not related to training

12. General Communication (GC)

- Comparison between the coach's and his athletes' perceptions of the coaching behavior in each team

-Systematic Observation and Scale of Understanding Behavior

The comparison made is based on the three variables:

(a) systematic observation (independent observer)

(b) athletes' attitudes;

c) coaches' perceptions about coaching behavior



2.2 Coaching behavior and aspects being preferred by young people occupied with sports activities

In Tzioumakis' survey (2009), about 418 behaviors per training session were observed, while the most frequently reported behaviors were the Technical Directive after False (24.6%), General Technical Guidelines (19.5%), General Encouragement (14.3%) and Positive Reinforcement (13.2%), as shown in the table below.

Kind of Coaching Behavior – Frequency per training session %

Reactive behaviors

Positive reinforcement	55.47	13.2
Non-reinforcement	6.35	1.5
Mistake-contingent Encouragement	12.7	3.03
Mistake-contingent Technical Instruction	103.2	24.66
Punishment	7.59	1.79
Punitive Technical Instruction	29.68	7.09
Ignoring Mistakes	12.7	3.1
Keeping Control	4.2	1.02

Spontaneous behaviors

General Technical Instruction	81.6	19.51
General Encouragement	60.4	14.3
Organization	37.5	9.05
General Communication	6.5	1.55

Overall	418.4	100.00
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Research results are consistent with findings from other countries (USA, Canada, Spain), as they prove correction of technical errors, as well as encouragement / reinforcement as the most frequently recorded training behaviors. Research has also shown that young athletes prefer to play for coaches who often give instructions on how exercises should be performed and correct mistakes, and also boost and encourage their efforts. On the contrary, ignoring their efforts, successful or not, as well as punishment, seem to restrict the efficiency of feedback, causing negative feelings to the young athlete and reducing his impetus.

According to the results Greek coaches of team sports usually exhibit behaviors based on a positive approach emphasizing on reinforcement, encouragement, and proper technical guidance, while punishment and corrective technical instruction were limited. Furthermore, ignoring the athletes' effort has been observed in an extremely small percentage, while the minimum time spent on Keeping Control and Organizing Behaviors demonstrates correct preparation and maximization of active training time. It is therefore concluded that the coaching practice followed by Greek coaches is likely to contribute to creating a positive learning and motivation environment in training, a more effective skill acquisition process, and ultimately their high efficiency in a highly demanding training environment such as developmental age. Such training practices could also serve as a guide for the development of sports program aimed at the social integration of children belonging to vulnerable social groups and / or living in deprived areas.

Factors likely to have shaped the above behaviors are the years of coaching experience, as well as the fact that all of the coaches had been trained by their respective coaching schools, making it clear that training of coaches is a necessity of whatever level.



2.3 Difference between how coaches and their young athletes perceive coaching behavior

An element that should be carefully taken into consideration is the difference between how coaches perceive their behavior during the training sessions as well as during the matches and how young athletes do. A remarkable research result points out that coaches of developmental ages could only partially recall the behaviors they displayed in training and during the matches. Athletic psychologists record a reduced ability of perceiving the psychological state of their athletes (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003), while Wandzilak, Ansoerge and Potter (1988) underline the fact that coaches only partially recall the coaching behaviors, even reporting that coaches tend to perceive the attitudes they exhibit to their athletes as more encouraging and supportive than they actually are, compared to videotaped records and opinions of the athletes themselves.

In a more simple way, research findings show that several coaches behave in training and during the matches quite differently than they themselves think. In a survey aimed at recording and assessing the coaching behavior of national basketball coaches in Greece, Lemonidis (2014) found significant differences in perceptions between coaches and athletes. A large percentage of the recorded coaches' behavior consisted of the general technical instruction (42.3%), the positive reinforcement (15.2%) and organization (14.5%). The coaches reported that they often used behaviors expressing support, encouragement and corrective instructions after mistakes, and rarely displayed punishment, error, and inability to offer support after desirable behaviors. The athletes, however, did not understand the behavior of their coaches to be as supportive as the coaches themselves claimed. The observation proved that the athletes' perceptions were not objective in the categories positive encouragement and lack of support. Also, differences have emerged between observers, coaches and athletes in the cases of mistake-contingent Encouragement, punishment and punitive technical instruction. These kinds of behavior were recorded at a lesser frequency than athletes and their coaches perceived.

Vlachos' (2014) research on the training climate prevailing in Greek football academies leads to similar conclusions. The survey involved 22 football coaches of developmental ages 10 to 14, recorded during three training sessions in one year. From the analysis of the results it appears that the coaches are oriented towards creating a stimulating climate, but on the one hand there is a relative lack of autonomy as they often exhibit highly controlling behaviors.

The statistical analysis showed that the coaches' average did not manage to have a significant improvement concerning the support of autonomy, while they proved significantly at the fields of quality motivation, support of good relations, structure and decreasing egoistic behavior, but keeping control remained at high levels throughout the training sessions. It seems that the coaches are oriented towards creating a secure and pleasant climate, but on the other hand there is a relative lack of autonomy. Also, the findings show that the coaches appear willing, but they need more guidance in order to improve themselves.

3. Conclusions

If we assume that cultivating a climate of security and co-operation, strengthening the team, providing positive reinforcement and encouragement after technical mistakes, reducing stress levels, and enhancing self-confidence among young athletes are key elements in a sports program that aims at integration and social inclusion, the related research overview shows that Greek coaching behavior -in broad lines- is in compliance with those terms. The need, nevertheless, for carrying out further research in this field focused on good practices is evident.

Further progress should definitely be made in Greece concerning sport-based social inclusion interventions, as not so many initiatives promoting the active involvement of coaches and sport clubs have been taken during the previous years. If recent economic crisis and increase -as a result- of the number of children and adolescents living below poverty line are taken into consideration, the need for implementing such interventions in order to help young people integrate and to improve quality of life in their communities is more than necessary.



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