Coaching for Teachers

An evaluation of the programme in Leicestershire

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INTRODUCTION
Towards the end of 1999, the Institute of Youth Sport was invited by Leicestershire County Council/Leicestershire Education Authority (LCC/LEA) to evaluate the effects of the Coaching for Teachers programme on teaching and learning in school physical education and sport. This article focuses on teachers' perceptions of how the Coaching for Teachers programme has promoted their own professional development and the effectiveness of the programme resources in the school context. Suggestions are made for the future of the Coaching for Teachers courses.

COACHING FOR TEACHERS
The Coaching for Teachers programme is a joint initiative funded by Sport England and coordinated by the National Coaching Foundation. Coaching for Teachers is supported by BAALPE and PEAUK. Emerging from the document 'Sport: Raising the Game' (Department of National Heritage, 1995), the programme aims to provide opportunities for teachers and other adults involved with school to obtain qualifications for coaching sports in schools. The claim is made that the Coaching for Teachers programme:

"...provides opportunities for teachers... to improve their teaching and coaching update their knowledge by attending sports governing body courses, and obtain qualifications" (p2, NCF; 2000)

The courses are aimed at primary, secondary and specialist physical education teachers who contribute to extra-curricular work. Adults involved in coaching extra-curricula sport may be recommended by a school to attend the courses. Physical education undergraduate students also attend.

There is a minimum fee for attending a course and a range of courses are available across the country. All Coaching for Teachers courses are run by accredited NGB tutors and are usually offered during the school day, although courses are also held during the holiday periods and over weekends. By July 1999, almost 25,000 teachers had participated in the programme nationally.

METHODS
A questionnaire was constructed to address the issues of concern raised by the LCC/LEA. The LCC/LEA were interested in evaluating the effectiveness of the Coaching for Teachers programme as a form of coaching support in school, an issue that the Department of National Heritage (1995) document was keen to promote. The Authority had no information to verify or expel the notion (mentioned previously in this article) that the Coaching for Teachers programme was in fact improving teachers' training and coaching ability and upgrading their knowledge. Subsequently, the questionnaire investigated the ways in which the programme benefited teachers.

A questionnaire was sent out to a sample of 350 participants, identified by LCC/LEA, who were involved in the Coaching for Teachers programme. One hundred and fifty-four participants returned the questionnaires to the LCC/LEA. This resulted in a 44% response rate. The data from the questionnaires were entered into an Excel spreadsheet, allowing basic statistics to be calculated. In order to collect more detailed information relating to the issues raised in the questionnaire, seven teachers working with children of different ages were interviewed after they returned the questionnaire. Teachers, including primary teachers, secondary teachers and teachers working in special schools, were visited at their place of employment. The qualitative data from the interviews provided some explanations of why patterns of responses emerged from the questionnaire.

RESULTS
Demographic information
Of the 154 respondents to the questionnaire, 76% were female and 23% male. The large number of female responses is due to the number of primary school teachers in the sample (72%). The age of respondents was evenly distributed although it should be noted there were fewer younger (20-25 y.o.a) teachers surveyed. As might be expected from this age profile, there were fewer inexperienced teachers in the sample with only 4% of teachers with less than 1 year of teaching experience.

Emerging issues and pattern of responses
Teachers' responses to Coaching for Teachers were generally positive and the programme appeared to benefit them in four ways. Teachers claimed that Coaching for Teachers helped them:

- develop teaching and coaching skills
- improve subject knowledge
- increase confidence to teach aspects of physical education, and
- meet the NCPE expectations.
The development of teaching and coaching skills

Figure 1 illustrates the belief that the Coaching for Teachers (CfT) programme assisted in developing teaching and coaching skills. The teachers we interviewed also commented on this issue:

'Giving me new ideas, different approaches. You can get very stale in teaching so it was nice to see various skills delivered in various ways and I've come back and used them.' (45 years old female with 19 years teaching experience. Head of girls' physical education at an upper secondary school)

'It's just focusing you again on different ways of tackling the sort of guidelines... it gives you a greater variety of ideas so you're not always using the same ones.' (52 year old female who qualified as a teacher in 1971. Primary schools class teacher and physical education coordinator).

The improvement of subject knowledge

The assistance the Coaching for Teachers programme provided in improving teachers' subject knowledge was again viewed very positively by teachers, as we can see in Figure 2. One teacher explained how the programme had improved his subject knowledge:

'It taught me some new skills which I didn't know about football (I've never actually been taught) which will help me when I play myself for a start. It's given me lots of new ideas to focus on when I'm working with my team which I run at the school for training and for identifying problems when we don't win a game... it's improved my knowledge of the game and how it breaks down to different elements and a bit of theory of the game which I've never actually looked at before.' (29 year old male with 5 years teaching experience. Primary school teacher and physical education and science coordinator)

Confidence in teaching physical education

Figure 3 suggests that the Coaching for Teachers programme increased respondents' confidence in teaching physical education. The ways in which the programme did this were reported in the interviews:

'Most probably I would imagine that the teachers having more knowledge are more prepared to do different sports that they wouldn't have confidence in personally. For example, we did rugby but you wouldn't actually even think of rugby in a special school. But the feel of the ball, the touch of the ball, the throwing, touching people rather than tackling, I would think that it's given the teachers more confidence to do what they wouldn't have otherwise have done had they not been on the course.' (40 year old female. Special school assistant)

'From a personal point of view I felt far more confident in delivering them so therefore you're more confident to try out new things and you think they work, you share good practice and then it gets imbedded.' (45 year old female with 19 years teaching experience. Head of girls' physical education at an upper secondary school)
Meeting the NCPE expectations

Also, it is clear from Figure 4 that the majority of the teachers believed Coaching for Teachers helped them meet the expectations of the National Curriculum in Physical Education. Comments from the interviews again illustrate why this is the case;

‘Definitely, very much so fits with national curriculum guidelines in physical education...Particularly the development of Fit for TOPS is excellent because there wasn’t very much around really...it was an aspect of the National Curriculum which perhaps wasn’t looked at very much by teachers.’ (52 year old female who qualified as a teacher in 1971. Primary school class teacher and physical education coordinator)

‘With OFSTED coming in we had to revisit our schemes of work and lesson plans and certainly the tennis was very helpful there in progression through...logical way through it...bit more detail as well.’ (45 year old female with 19 years teaching experience. Head of girls’ physical education at an upper secondary school)

However, not all teachers viewed the Coaching for Teachers programme as meeting the expectations of the National Curriculum in Physical Education. One teacher commented that;

‘It [Coaching for Teachers programmes] didn’t help me in incorporating it into a scheme [of work]. It was “here is some extra stuff and I thought “Augh. How is this going to work?” What year groups should I use this with?” (25 year old female with 3 years teaching experience. Year 5/6 teacher and physical education coordinator)

A final concern of the study was to establish the effectiveness of the Coaching for Teachers resources within the school contexts.

Coaching for Teachers resources

Figure 5 clearly illustrates teachers’ belief that Coaching for Teachers has impacted on sport and physical education by obtaining more resources for the teaching and coaching of sports. Respondents noted that the TOPS cards and equipment not only help teachers initiate new extra-curricula clubs but also allow more children to attend already established clubs due to more equipment being available. This in turn leads to more opportunities for pupils out of school time. One teacher admitted that the extra resources were a major attraction to such courses.

‘Because we’ve been on the courses and because we have done some extra-curricula stuff we have had bags, a lot of sports bags, and that’s brilliant, that has really helped. The whole staff has actually benefited from that. Absolutely. That has been brilliant.’ (50 year old female with 20 years teaching experience. Junior school teacher)

The same teacher claimed the resources increased the profile of physical education in her school;

‘I think it’s raised it [the profile of physical education] in the fact that because we have more equipment and the TOPS sports cards in particular, people have used those a lot and have enjoyed using them.’ (50 year old female with 20 years teaching experience. Junior school teacher)

Another teacher commented.

“We went because we were told we would get a bag of freebies which we didn’t. There’s an under fives bag and we never got that even though all five staff in the unit, including nursery nurses, went along. The infants got one, the juniors got a share of one but we didn’t get one. We don’t know why...That is how we really got everybody to go. ‘Right, if you all go you’ll all get bags.’ (53 year old female with 30 years teaching experience. Head of four-plus unit)

The importance of the resources as a major incentive for teachers to attend was suggested when this particular teacher admitted that she did not know the programme she had been on was called ‘Coaching for Teachers’.

Conclusion

Teachers’ responses illustrate that the Coaching for Teachers programme has promoted teacher professional development, increasing the confidence in teaching particular physical activities and gaining access to new teaching approaches and fresh ideas. The free equipment and resources provided by the programme were reported as having an impact on the sport and physical education provision within schools. The benefit of the Coaching for Teachers programme to teachers is captured in the following comment;

‘Programmes are very good, very positive and I think there should be more of them to cover all areas of the curriculum...For me personally, well over due and very beneficial, very beneficial.’ (45 year old female with 19 years teaching experience. Head of girls’ physical education at an upper secondary school)

Suggestions for the future of the Coaching for Teachers programme

Newly qualified primary school teachers should be made aware of the teacher professional development opportunities available through the Coaching for Teachers programme, especially in areas of the physical education curriculum that teachers are perhaps not confident in delivering. The Coaching for Teachers programme may also have the potential to attract and accommodate more teachers if the programme was school based rather than at sites outside the school.

REFERENCES
