Observation Report

Laszlo Pokorny

New Jersey City University

Author Note

Laszlo Pokorny, Department of Educational Technology, New Jersey City University

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Laszlo Pokorny, 37 West Long Drive, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648. Contact: LPokorny@trenton.k12.nj.us

Observation Report

**Introduction**

This observation was conducted at a public space that the researcher is familiar with because his sons routinely play soccer on these fields. The researcher approached this observation with an interest in the coach-player dynamic. Observation jottings were taken on an iPhone 6 Plus using voice dictation. The notes were subsequently emailed, transferred, and organized in the jottings section below. The observer was careful to record events and exchanges exactly as he saw them take place.

**Jottings**

2:30pm Sunday

Switching fields, confusion

Finding coach

Medley of jerseys

6 teams, 6 half-field practice

Cones, goals, balls

Spanish and English-speaking parents

Some children reluctant to leave parent’s side

Drinking water

Coach sets up cones and models weaving and shooting

4 of 7 watch the coach

2:40pm

2 children know where to stand

Remaining children need to be instructed

Children watch first child

Some children slow and careful

Coach praises each child after shot on goal

Coach smiles as one child takes a long time to shoot

Two fathers and one mother very vocal

Father (tattoo): “watch the ball”

Father (bald): “nice job”

Mother (long hair): serious face, says something in Spanish

Coach pulls one child aside, kneels down, shows where to hit ball with inside of foot

Coach stands up, prompts child to pass ball, child tries to use inside of foot

Gets back in line, goes to front and kicks lightly with inside foot, no goal

Two players ask coach for water break, go to parents

2:50

Stop weaving and shooting exercise

Coach gives three kids ball, tells them not to let anyone take the ball

Coach tells other four to try to take ball

One child kicks ball hard and looks at coach

Coach says get ball and start again

One child (Steve) by himself dribbling ball

Coach tells Julio to get the ball from Steve

Julio runs near, both kids stop and look at each other

Coach in encouraging voice instructs Julio to try to take the ball from him

Julio kicks the ball from Steve

Both kids look at coach

Coach tells them to get the ball and try again

Other children are randomly kicking ball around

Coach approaches Steve and Julio and says something inaudible (back turned)

Steve tries to protect ball while Julio tries to kick it

Coach walks to other kids, drops a ball he has in his hands, and says try to take from me

Three children try to kick ball while coach dribbles, turns around, and protects ball

Coach picks up ball, says something inaudible (back turned) to children

Coach drops ball to one child, and other two children try to kick it from him

All children are engaged in exercise

Whistles

2:59

Coach instructs 4 children to go to neighboring half of field

3 children from neighboring field (different team) come to our half of field

Parents/guardians line up alongside of field

Coach instructs children to come to center of field, 3 red shirts, 3 blue shirts

Coach “blue team first”, rolls ball to blue team

2 children on blue team are engaged and aggressive, move down field

3rd kid on blue team is in a daze, looking around, a man (probably father) yells “get the ball Isaac!”

Red team runs towards the ball and blue players

Parents/guardians of the red team yelling in English and Spanish

“defense!”

“Get the ball Andy!”

Coach stops play when ball goes out of bounds.

Rolls ball to red

Andy stands still with the ball for a moment

Coach says, “kick it up the field towards the goal!”

Andy kicks and runs after it.

One blue player is stronger than all players on both teams and dominates the ball.

Isaac is still in a daze, just walking up and down the field not paying much attention to the game

Isaac’s father keeps yelling “c’mon Isaac, kick the ball!”

Coach instructs red team to make sure blue doesn’t score a goal

Three reds surround the strong blue player in front of red’s goal, but the blue player gets off a shot and scores

Break for water

3:15

**Fieldnotes**

**Date, time, and place of observation:**

Sunday, October 1, 2017, 2:30-3:15pm

Zimmer Soccer Field bleachers, 124 Eggert Crossing Rd, Lawrence Township, NJ 08648

**Research question:** How do 4-5-year-old children respond to coaching in a loud distraction-filled environment?

The Zimmer Soccer Fields in Lawrenceville has 6 fields where the township leagues hold practices and games on weekdays and weekends. All fields were in use on Sunday October 1, 2017, which was a beautiful fall day with no clouds in the sky and the air was filled with sounds of whistles, laughter, and screams of young children. Three fields were used to play full field soccer matches for older children, and three fields were used by younger children’s teams for practice and games. The fields used by smaller children were divided in half, i.e. each team used one half of the field for practice and games. On this particular day there was some confusion at the outset about where each team would be located; therefore, it took some scrambling to get 6 teams composed of children between ages 4 and 8 to finally locate their coach and begin the practice. The fields were a medley of different color uniforms until players began to locate their coaches and their teammates. It also took parents extra time to settle in because many brought folding chairs and coolers. Sunday soccer is divided in to 30 minutes practice, and 30 minutes match play. The red team coach set up his cones, the folding goals, and he dumped a net of soccer balls on the field.

Spanish and English were being spoken among parents and children. Some children were reluctant to leave their parents’ side, taking long drinks of water, and looking at their parent’s cell phone before eventually making their way out to the field. Sean, the red team coach, began to show four of his seven players how to weave the ball through the cones and shoot on goal. Two children who remembered this practice routine positioned themselves at the beginning of the course and waited for the coach’s go-ahead signal. The remaining five children needed to be told to get in line behind the others. As the children watched the first child successfully navigate the cones course, they all followed suit. Some children were very slow and careful not to overshoot the cones and to make each turn properly before finally shooting on goal. Coach Sean praised each child with “nice shot” or “way to go” as they shot on goal. One child took a particularly long time to navigate the course, then he positioned the ball, took a few steps back, and finally ran and kicked the ball in the goal. Coach Sean smiled as he watched the child taking his time.

Two fathers and one mother were quite vocal from the sidelines as they encouraged their children. One father with tattoos running up both arms told his son to “watch the ball”. Another father with a clean-shaven head told his son “nice job”. A mother with hair all the way down to her waist made a serious face and said something to her son in Spanish. As one of the players finished their shot on goal, the coach went up to him, pulled him aside, knelt down, and showed him which part of his foot he should use to kick the ball. Coach Sean stands up and prompts the kid to pass him the ball. The child attempts to kick the ball with the inside of his foot. As the same child completed the cones course and attempted to shoot on goal, the child tried to shoot using inside of his foot but he hit the ball very lightly and missed the goal. The coach praised him nonetheless. The coach calls a water break after two players say they’re thirsty. The players all go to their parents to drink water.

While the kids get water, the coach picks up the cones. When the children return to the field, the coach gives three soccer balls to three kids and tells them not to let the other players take the ball. Then the coach instructs the remaining four players to take the ball from their teammates. One child with a ball immediately recognized that he must defend and maintain possession of the ball with his feet and body, while the other two kids allowed their teammates to run directly to the ball and kick it. One child kicked the ball so hard it went to the neighboring field. The child looked at the coach as the coach told him to go get the ball and start again. One child named Steve began dribbling the ball immediately after receiving it from the coach, but as soon as the coach told Julio to get the ball from Steve, both kids stop and just look at each other. In an encouraging voice, coach Sean tells Julio to take the ball from Steve. Julio kicks the ball away from Steve, and both kids look at Coach Sean, who tells them to get the ball and try again. The other children are randomly kicking the ball around at this point. The coach approaches Steve and Julio with his back to the observer and says something inaudible. Steve finally tries to protect the ball using his body and footwork while Julio attempts to take it. Coach Sean approaches the other children, drops a ball he has in his hands, and instructs the kids to try to take the ball from him. Three children try to take the ball from the coach while he dribbles, turns around, and protects the ball. Then the coach picks up the ball, rolls it to one child, and the other two children immediately try to take it from him. All children are engaged in the ball possession and control exercise.

Whistles go off one minute before three o’clock. Coach Sean instructs four of his players to go to the neighboring field, while three children from the neighboring field and different team come to Coach Sean’s half of the field to play a match. Parents of the three players also come to line up alongside the field. Coach Sean instructs all players, three red shirts and three blue shirts, to come to the center of the field. Coach says “blue team first”, and proceeds to roll the ball towards the blue players. Two blue players immediately engage and are clearly more aggressive than most players as they move down the field towards red team’s goal. The third blue player lags behind and has a dazed look on his face, looking around, while his father yells “get the ball Isaac!” The red team runs towards the ball while parents of red players yell various things in English and Spanish including “defense” and “get the ball Andy!”. The coach stops play whenever the ball goes out of bounds. At one point, the coach rolls the ball to Andy and he stands still with the ball for a moment. Coach Sean looks at Andy and says “kick it up the field towards the goal!” Andy kicks the ball and runs after it. One blue player begins to dominate control of the ball as he is clearly more skilled, focused, and aggressive about the game. Isaac’s father continues to yell at his son “c’mon Isaac, kick the ball!” as Isaac just walks up and down the field not paying much attention to the game. As the strong blue player approaches the red goal, Coach Sean encourages his players by telling them to make sure blue doesn’t score a goal. Three reds surround the strong blue player in front of their goal, but the blue player finally gets off a shot and scores.

Coach Sean Calls a water break at 3:15.

**Coding**

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| The Zimmer Soccer Fields in Lawrenceville have 6 fields where the township leagues hold practices and games on weekdays and weekends. All fields were in use on Sunday October 1, 2017, which was a beautiful fall day with no clouds in the sky and the air was filled with sounds of whistles, laughter, and screams of young children. Three fields were used to play full field soccer matches for older children, and three fields were used by younger children’s teams for practice and games. The fields used by smaller children were divided in half, i.e. each team used one half of the field for practice and games. On this particular day there was some confusion at the outset about where each team would be located; therefore, it took some scrambling to get 6 teams composed of children between ages 4 and 8 to finally locate their coach and begin the practice. The fields were a medley of different color uniforms until players began to locate their coaches and their teammates. 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Three children try to take the ball from the coach while he dribbles, turns around, and protects the ball. Then the coach picks up the ball, rolls it to one child, and the other two children immediately try to take it from him. All children are engaged in the ball possession and control exercise.  Whistles go off one minute before three o’clock. Coach Sean instructs four of his players to go to the neighboring field, while three children from the neighboring field and different team come to Coach Sean’s half of the field to play a match. Parents of the three players also come to line up alongside the field. Coach Sean instructs all players, three red shirts and three blue shirts, to come to the center of the field. Coach says “blue team first”, and proceeds to roll the ball towards the blue players. Two blue players immediately engage and are clearly more aggressive than most players as they move down the field towards red team’s goal. The third blue player lags behind and has a dazed look on his face, looking around, while his father yells “get the ball Isaac!” The red team runs towards the ball while parents of red players yell various things in English and Spanish including “defense” and “get the ball Andy!”. The coach stops play whenever the ball goes out of bounds. At one point, the coach rolls the ball to Andy and he stands still with the ball for a moment. Coach Sean looks at Andy and says “kick it up the field towards the goal!” Andy kicks the ball and runs after it. One blue player begins to dominate control of the ball as he is clearly more skilled, focused, and aggressive about the game. Isaac’s father continues to yell at his son “c’mon Isaac, kick the ball!” as Isaac just walks up and down the field not paying much attention to the game. As the strong blue player approaches the red goal, Coach Sean encourages his players by telling them to make sure blue doesn’t score a goal. Three parents are also yelling at the children. Three reds surround the strong blue player in front of their goal, but the blue player finally gets off a shot and scores.  Coach Sean Calls a water break at 3:15. | Loud and distraction-filled  Loud and distraction-filled  Coach preparedness  Loud and distraction-filled  Group instruction and modelling  Player response to group instruction  Player non-response to group instruction  Players learning by watching other players  Individual encouragement and praise  Patience  Loud and distraction-filled  Individual instruction  Individual coaching, encouragement  Player direct response to individual instruction  Individual encouragement, praise  Coach preparedness  Group instruction  Player response to group instructions  Player non-response to group instructions  Individual instruction, encouragement  Confusion, uncertainty  Individualized coaching, instruction, encouragement  Player response to direct instruction  Confusion, disorder  Direct instruction, coaching  Player response to direct instruction  Group coaching, instruction, modelling  Player direct response to group instruction  Player direct response to group modelling  100% player engagement  Group instruction  Group instruction  Group instruction  Player response to group instruction  Player non-response to group instruction  Players applying what they learned without instruction  Loud and distraction-filled  Direct instruction, coaching  Player response to direct instruction  Group coaching, encouragement  Loud and distraction-filled  Player direct response to group coaching  100% red team engagement |

**Analysis and Interpretation of Coding and Findings**

The codes used in the above coding scheme are words or short phrases that capture the essence of the observed situation. The fieldnotes were analyzed in context of the research question, and codes were assigned accordingly. The research question emphasized a loud and distraction-filled environment. Analysis of the fieldnotes revealed six occasions that were coded as ‘loud and distraction-filled’. The sound of six fields full of children, parents, coaches, and referees talking, screaming, and whistling gives a sense of the volume and level of distraction that these children faced as they engaged in soccer practice.

The research question sought to understand players’ response to coaching amidst such distractions. Group instruction, modelling and coaching were differentiated from individualized instruction because of the difference in focus of the coach’s instructions on the entire group verses individuals. Separate codes were also assigned for player response to group instruction verses player response to individualized instruction. The field notes clearly reveal the occurrence of positive response to individualized instruction is more consistent than positive response to group instruction among certain players. Some players were immediately responsive to group instruction; whereas, other players only began to mobilize and engage after seeing other players follow the instructions or after being told individually to follow the instructions.

The fieldnotes reveal two occasions where all players were engaged in the activity or match. Full participation was preceded by a mix of group and individualized instruction and coaching to engage all players. There was one recorded occasion where the observer witnessed players applying what they learned without instruction during match play.

The findings reveal players’ ability to respond to coaching and instruction in a distraction-filled environment varies among the players. Reasons for this variation falls outside the scope of this report; however, the researcher speculates that young children have different levels of maturity and focus, which likely determines their ability to ignore distractions, pay attention, and carry out the coach’s instructions with consistency.

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