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Exploring professional coach educators' journeys and perceptions and understandings of learning

Darren W. Watts , Christopher J. Cushion  and Lorraine Cale 

School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, Loughborough University, Loughborough, UK

ABSTRACT

Coach educators' voices rarely feature in the coaching literature. To address this gap, this research explored the journeys and perceptions and understandings of learning of 16 coach educators (tutors) in the United Kingdom (UK). As such, the research enabled the voices of these coach educators to be heard and their socialisation processes to be investigated. Semi-structured interviews were used to gain exploratory insights and the data were analysed thematically through inductive and deductive processes. Themes were identified that related to the coach educators' journeys and lives as well as their understandings of learning and coach education. To offer a theoretically informed and sophisticated appreciation of coach educators and coach education, the sociological framework of Pierre Bourdieu was adopted. The analysis showed the coach educators' beliefs and perceptions had been formed, inculcated and reproduced as a result of taken-for-granted and doxic experiences as athletes, learners and coaches and in coach education and tutor training (and tertiary education in some cases). The coach educators suggested that knowledge of 'learning' was important for coaching and coach education and associated it with contextualised and situated practice. The participants viewed the coach education they delivered to be decontextualised and to have low impact. Additionally, the findings suggested that coach educators may have limited pedagogical knowledge and conceptual understanding. The analysis typically positioned the professional coach educator habitus as being unreflective, unreflexive and compliant as they appropriated legitimate (but questionable) methods. The findings are significant in that they highlight the need to: (i) appreciate and explore coach educators' roles, contexts, experiences and understandings and (ii) conduct critical inquiry with coach developers, those occupying senior Sport Governing Body (SGB) positions, policymakers and stakeholders in order to enhance our knowledge of this complex but crucial practitioner and role, and ultimately tutor training and practice.

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Introduction

Coach educators (e.g. tutors) play a central role in influencing coaches' learning and practice (Abraham et al., 2013; Allanson et al., 2019; Cushion et al., 2017). Indeed, coach educators are typically the 'face' of formal coach education programmes, tasked with certifying coach learners undertaking formal coaching qualifications. In the United Kingdom (UK), coach educators are involved with, and integral to, the delivery of each tier of formal coach education (e.g. levels 1–5) and

CONTACT Darren W. Watts  D.W.Watts@lboro.ac.uk

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continuing professional development (CPD) (McQuade & Nash, 2015). However, empirical research has been critical of formal coach education and its outcomes, specifically suggesting that it does not contribute to meaningful change in coaches' future practice and learning (e.g. Nash et al., 2017; Piggott, 2012, 2015; Stodter & Cushion, 2017).

Despite this, coach educators remain key to coach education systems playing an important role in formal coach education (Cushion et al., 2017). Importantly, they leave a long-standing impression on coach learners that contributes to experiences and perceptions of formal learning effectiveness, or lack thereof (Watts & Cushion, 2016). However, aside from recent progress in the UK (e.g. Allanson et al., 2019; Stodter & Cushion, 2019; Watts, 2020) and emerging international contributions (e.g. Brasil et al., 2017; Callary & Gearity, 2019a, 2019b, 2020), research has tended to be coach-centric and neglect the coach development workforce, often taking them for granted or positioning them as a by-product of coach education (see Cushion & Nelson, 2013; Watts, 2020). Given the significance of the coach educator role, it is still surprising that there is limited empirical research exploring the coach educator, and that their perspectives have remained largely absent from the literature.

The criticisms levelled at coach education have extended to coach educators (Chesterfield et al., 2010; Nash & Sproule, 2012; Watts & Cushion, 2016). Yet, some of this criticism may be undeserved, with coach educators arguably being 'blamed' for broader issues outside of their role, remit and control. Put simply, some researchers may have been too quick to attribute some of the ills of coach education to the coach educator, without the underlying evidence and understanding of how the coach educator 'fits' into coach education (see Watts, 2020). Indeed, almost 20 years ago Lyle (2002) argued that 'coach educators are in an impossible position unless they are operating within an appropriate framework of knowledge and skills' (p. 26). Research, however, has yet to address this position. Equally, the limited empirical research suggests coach educators have been misunderstood and inadequately conceptualised, leading to some rather superficial understandings (e.g. Vella et al., 2013), and reinforcing the fact that they have largely lacked representation and voice.

Indeed, coaching mirrors the broader education literature where the professional educator (e.g. the practitioners who educate and certify coaches and teachers) is a complex and under-researched phenomenon. For example, teacher education scholarship suggests that more needs to be known about professional educators, their roles, different types of educator roles, their preparation processes, and educators' pedagogies (e.g. MacPhail et al., 2019; Soysal & Radmard, 2020; Williams, 2019). Similarly, in formal coach education there are different coach development roles; namely, coach educators, coach developers and coach mentors, with each engaging with different aspects of coach education. Consequently, coaching research needs to clearly distinguish between them to provide clarity and understanding of the similarities and differences of each role. This research focusses on coach educators who deliver formal coach education and continuing professional development (CPD) to coach learners, and who certify coaches and lead and support their learning in classroom and practical contexts, rather than 'coach developers' (qualification/programme designers) or coach mentors (McQuade & Nash, 2015).

Coach educators, as former coaches and products of coach education systems, are influenced by their experiences that create dispositions and orientate and facilitate certain beliefs, behaviours, practice and learning whilst inhibiting or preventing others (Cushion et al., 2017; Hodkinson et al., 2008). They assist learners' development and practice, but both learning and practice can be 'influenced by wider social, economic and political factors, which lie outside as well as inside the person and the learning situation' (Hodkinson et al., 2008, p. 28). Therefore, a coach educator's trajectory, often from an athlete, then coach, and coach educator creates a powerful interpretive framework through which beliefs and understandings are formed (see Brasil et al., 2017). Indeed, as Christensen (2014, p. 207) argues, 'biography structures and is structured by that person's learning processes' (see also Holmes et al., 2020). The implication here being that coach educators are in a constant process of constructing an identity and practising in ways that are socially legitimised for the culture in which they operate.

Importantly, as Bottero (2010) argues, embodied social practice is an element of any meaningful account of 'identity'. To this end, Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' (Wacquant, 1989) of habitus, field and capital are useful in that they offer theoretical leverage to considerations of 'identity' that incorporate social identity as embodied structure. Habitus refers to the way that an individual has learned to perceive and act in the world based on previous experiences (Bourdieu, 1990); therefore, habitus not only generates meaningful practices but also 'meaning-giving perceptions' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 170). Field is useful for considering social spaces and relates to agents' pursuit of the goods or currency at stake (Bourdieu, 1989; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Importantly, a field does not exist in isolation; coaching is made up of interconnecting relations and thus fields exist within fields and have sub-fields with their own orthodoxy and legitimacies (cf. Bourdieu, 1989). As coach education is related and connected to coaching, it can be viewed as a sub-field of the coaching field where coach educators practise and coaches learn how to coach. Without the coaching field, the coach education sub-field would not exist, serve any purpose or have any connecting relations (Watts, 2020). The dialectical nature of Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital can be seen through capital (i.e. power) as it only exists and functions in relation to a field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Capital can exist in various forms in coaching and the workings of the field can determine what is symbolically valued (see Townsend & Cushion, 2015).

Essentially, coaching and learning to coach through time are likely to reproduce and legitimise certain orientations of oneself that gradually stabilise into schemes of disposition or habitus for coaches (Holmes et al., 2020) and coach educators (Cushion et al., 2017) and each can be viewed as a significant central generative site that has the power to shape the consciousness (Bottero, 2010). Accordingly, research that explores the coach educator habitus is important as the coach development workforce is central as both products and producers of coaching and coach education. Therefore, the aim of this research was to explore coach educators' insights and understand coach education and learning from their perspectives. To facilitate this, qualitative research was used as a form of social inquiry that considers the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and their worlds (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Coach educators' journeys and working contexts undoubtedly impact their views on coaching and the education of coaches, and this study sought to analyse the coach educator in depth and position them within the broader relational system of coach education. Consequently, this research is novel in that it sought to understand how coach educators are positioned within coach education (i.e. the coach education sub-field) and it provides new insights into coach educators, their practices, and the structured and structuring nature of the coach education setting.

Methodology

Participants

Sixteen participants (thirteen males and three females aged between 24 and 54) were invited and recruited via email to participate in the research using criterion-based sampling and snowball sampling techniques (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The coach educators' ethnicity was 'white British'. The participants were employed on a part-time basis, had experience across all levels of coach education (Table 1) and practised in various sports across the UK. Ten coach educators operated in team sport environments (football $n = 3$, hockey $n = 2$, netball $n = 2$, rounders $n = 1$, futsal $n = 1$ and rugby league $n = 1$) and six in individual sport contexts (swimming $n = 3$, tennis $n = 2$ and boxing $n = 1$). This facilitated an exploration of different sporting contexts, cultures, types and contrasting SGBs.

Fifteen coach educators were also currently practising coaches, and all had athletic experience in the sport in which they were employed, whilst four had experience in performance environments. The participants' coaching experience ranged from 8 to 22 years and their experience as coach educators ranged from 2 to 20 years. Ten of the sample had gained qualifications in tertiary education (Table 1), with all but one of these qualifications having a 'sporting' emphasis (e.g. sport science, coaching, physical education [PE] and strength and conditioning). To protect the participants'

Table 1. Overview of the participants' level of coaching certification, tertiary education, coaching experience and coach educator experience and level.

Participant	SGB Coaching Certification Level (L)	Tertiary Education (UG/PG)	Coaching Experience (years)	Coach Educator Experience (years)	Coach Educator Level (L)
Henry*	3	PG	8	4	2
Ben*	3	UG	8	2	2
Kris*	3	PG	19	7	2
Brian*	5	UG	20	12	4
Colin*	4	PG	22	20	4
Ernie*	3	UG	20	6	2
Fred*	4	No	20	12	3
James*	2	PG	12	10	2
Ruth	2	No	10	7	2
Sarah*	3	UG	8	6	2
John	4	No	12	10	3
Mick	2	No	6	4	1
Angus	3	No	15	10	2
Sam*	3	UG	16	12	2
Peter	3	No	10	8	2
Joan*	2	PG	11	7	2
Totals	4 × L2	5 × PG	217 years	137 years	1 × L1
	8 × L3	5 × UG	<i>M</i> = 14 years	<i>M</i> = 9 years	11 × L2
	3 × L4	6 × No			2 × L3
	1 × L5				2 × L4

*Currently educators in further education or higher education in PE, sport science and/or coaching.

anonymity, pseudonyms are used and details of their specific tertiary achievements, coaching contexts and workplaces are not outlined.

Procedure

Following ethical approval, semi-structured interviews were used to gain insight into the coach educators' journeys including their perceptions and understandings of learning. Being mindful of the coach educator role typically being an 'add-on' to their full-time occupations, but also that their voices had rarely featured in the literature, the participants were asked to commit to an interview of at least one hour in duration. The coach educators were invited to express their preference for the interview location for their ease and to try to ensure their comfort with the process (cf. Hesse-Biber, 2017). Six of the interviews were conducted at a University location and ten took place in either a coffee shop, restaurant or public house.

Prior to the interviews, a 30-min informal discussion with each of the coach educators took place about the research, during which their anonymity and confidentiality were assured. During the interviews written notes were taken and the interviews were audio-recorded for subsequent transcription. The interview process began with broad questions akin to a 'grand tour' (e.g. how did you become interested in sport and coaching?), and then gradually became more specific, challenging and targeted to further align with the aims of the research and to probe further in certain areas of interest as the interviews evolved. For example, 'Do you know the philosophy underpinning coach education programmes? Do you know if any sort of research informs them?' This approach has been recommended for accessing subjugated voices and subjugated knowledge (Hesse-Biber, 2017). The mean interview duration was 126 min with interviews ranging from 62 to 157 min. Almost 34 h of interview data resulted in 430 pages of verbatim transcription. In addition, the informal discussions produced a further 8 h of data that were read and analysed in conjunction with each participant's interview.

Data analysis

Whilst there is no 'gold standard' procedure for data analysis (cf. Braun & Clarke, 2019), Smith and McGannon (2018) suggest 'research methods cannot be divorced from their philosophical

undercarriage’ (p. 104). The present study was ‘underpinned by ontological relativism (i.e. reality is multiple, created, and mind-dependent) and epistemological constructionism (i.e. knowledge is constructed and subjective)’ (Smith, 2013, p. 111). Thus the analyses and findings were constructed through diachronic means that enabled the data to be considered in a temporal manner and embrace the biographical elements of the interviews. Thematic analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2019) was utilised which offered accessibility and flexibility, with this flexibility extending not only to theoretical consideration but to approaches to meaning generation when developing and constructing findings in relation to the participants’ perspectives and understandings (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

The analysis highlighted similarities and differences across the data but also relied heavily on interpretation (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The TA was iterative, reflexive and recursive, meaning the analysis commenced from the first interview and continued throughout the data collection process. The method and analyses enabled the data to be initially considered through a descriptive and semantic process, then at a latent level. Clarke and Braun (2017) suggested inductive (data-driven) approaches are useful for investigating under-researched topics (e.g. coach educators) and, when used in conjunction with deductive (theory-driven) analyses, can help to explore underlying meaning. Bourdieu (1977) was particularly useful to bring the ‘undiscussed into discussion’ (p. 168) and it enables consideration of ‘accepted ways’ of thinking in a range of educational contexts. In addition, given Bourdieu’s consideration of the inter-play of structure and agency and his ‘thinking tools’, his concepts were an effective way to explore the participants’ journeys and understandings (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The more abstract level of analysis enabled the research to move beyond what the participants said and endeavoured to examine, understand and interpret the assumptions, dispositions and perceptions that may have shaped and informed their understandings.

The data analysis process commenced with re-visiting the interview recordings, accompanied with the handwritten interview notes. During this pre-immersion stage, additional notes were made and then considered alongside the original notes made during the interviews. Following this, immersion in the data involved reading the transcripts multiple times and data-driven coding across the entire data using a constant comparison method (e.g. Strauss & Corbin, 1990). From here, codes were generated in relation to possible themes and these were then cross-checked, reviewed and, where necessary, further defined and named (Table 2). Following this, vivid data extracts were drawn on to report the analyses and findings. To support the data analysis, the repeated use and editing of large thematic maps on A1 flipchart paper was helpful (see Figure 1 for an abbreviated example). This type of process led to the construction of the following themes:

Table 2. An example of raw data, coding, theme development and generation (Theme 2).

Theme 2 – Data	Theme 2 – Coding/analysis	Theme 2 Theme generation
It can be visual, auditory or kinaesthetic. And, we don’t spend much time on this	Pedagogy – learning styles in coach education	Understanding coaching, learning and coach education
We cover learning styles, your visual, ‘audio’, kinaesthetic, yes, we cover all of that	Pedagogy – learning styles (participant struggled to name them) in coach education	Understanding coaching, learning and coach education
Maybe I’ve not worked with athletes of a high enough level to get to the ‘nitty-gritty’ of coaching and learning	Pedagogy – understanding (?) learning	Understanding coaching, learning and coach education; situated experiences
Very much so (we cover learning). It’s very geared around the fact, you know, as a level one, taking mini (sport), you know, we pretty much know that 83-point whatever percent it is of those children who learn best by actually seeing something	Pedagogy – understanding (?) learning in coaching and coach education	Understanding learning and coach education

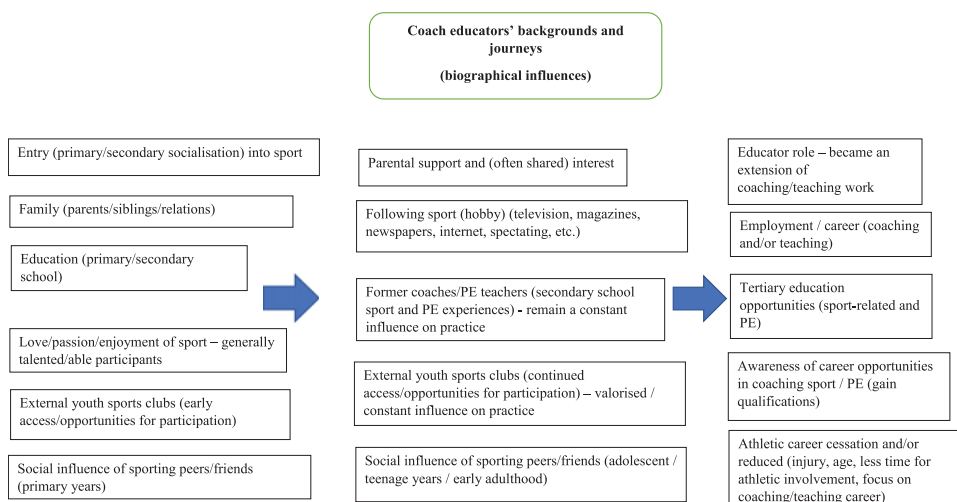


Figure 1. An example of the analysis process for Theme 1.

1. Coach educators' backgrounds and journeys.
2. Coach educators' understandings of learning and coach education.
3. A lack of consideration, awareness, confusion, and possibly knowledge.

These themes form the basis of the subsequent results and discussion, with theme 3 being an integrated latent thread. Additionally, the analysis identified one participant (Henry) as an interesting case. Whilst the data analysis revealed some similarities between him and the other coach educators' backgrounds, journeys and understandings, it also revealed noticeable differences. It is important to remember in qualitative research that 'just one 'case' can lead to new insights' (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006, p. 493) and as such, and in accordance with the TA and relativist approach undertaken (Smith & McGannon, 2018), Henry is featured as a juxtaposition to the other participants in the presentation and discussion of the results.

Results and discussion

Backgrounds and journeys – early experiences and influences

Habitus results from early socialisation experiences in which external structures are internalised (Swartz, 1997). In this respect, the participants' family influences, athletic and PE experiences, led to them internalising dispositions that set broad parameters and boundaries of what was possible in sport and coaching. Specifically, habitus generated perceptions, aspirations and practices that corresponded to the structuring properties of their earlier socialisation. In other words, parental support, encouragement and reinforcement, and positive athletic experiences, contributed to sporting interests in adulthood, and decisions to become coaches and teachers. Kris and Brian commented:

I have a very sporty family; so, my grandad ran football teams that my dad and uncle played in. My dad, uncle and grandad all played multiple sports, so they were decent sportsmen. Mum played netball, so even on my mum's side. It was pretty much (sport) all the way really for me (Kris).

We played (sport) as a family. Ironically, I talked about it at my dad's funeral. Something we always did as a family at the local village (sport) club, of which my parents were quite a big part of (Brian).

Sam explained how this support had continued into adulthood:

He (dad) and mum to be fair took me everywhere to watch me play and like most parents wanted to me to be the best I could be. I had a lot of encouragement from both parents even up to my early twenties (Sam).

Habitus shapes individual action so that existing structures are perpetuated. As Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argue there is a 'system of circular relations that unite structures and practices; objective structures tend to produce structured subjective dispositions that produce structured actions which, in turn, tend to reproduce objective structure' (p. 203). As such, the participants' athletic experiences and time spent as recipients of coaching reinforced and became an integral influence on their current coaching practice and understandings of it (see also Holmes et al., 2020; Light & Evans, 2013). In particular, the coach educators had internalised their coaching knowledge from 'real' coaching practice through their athletic and coaching experiences believing these to be a fundamental social condition for 'good' coaching practice. For example, Angus and Ruth commented:

Playing the sport helps you to learn about it. Don't get me wrong, not all of my coaches were great, but if I didn't have this (playing) experience I would struggle, I think. You know, I'm not sure I'd actually be comfortable coaching sports I'd never played, and I'm not sure you can. Playing the sport gives you a massive advantage. (Angus)

You learn from playing the sport at all levels and remember those that taught you. As you get older and develop your coaching, I suppose you look back at those experiences and the people coaching you. You consider what they did and how, and how they made you feel, even. (Ruth)

Similarly, Fred and Peter explained:

The reason I've become the coach that I am is because I've been in and around people that I've learnt from. I've been very fortunate in my time to have worked with and performed under some very good coaches. When I played under (coach's name and coach's name) they just had the knack of getting people to feel good and together and bonded well. (Fred)

You constantly look back at those coaches you had. I learned a lot from watching other coaches too – I still find that really useful. You get different approaches, ways of doing things, and then you think yes, I could use that. So really you add to your knowledge-base and take bits from other coaches and add bits as you go. (Peter)

As Bourdieu (1984) suggests, habitus acts to orient action and conveys a sense of place and out of place in the social world, setting ideas of objective limits. As has been reported previously (e.g. Cushion et al., 2017), the participants' privileged knowledge, understanding and learning from their prior situated athletic and coaching experiences, which reaffirmed and corresponded to the formative conditions of their respective habitus that, in turn, shaped and legitimated the coach educators' ways of thinking (or not thinking) about coaching, learning and practice (Bourdieu, 1977, 1988; Hodgkinson et al., 2008; Watts, 2020).

In contrast, the participants had a sense of social distance between their dispositions toward experiential learning, which they considered authentic and meaningful, and their formal coach education and CPD experiences, describing coach education experiences as being decontextualised, artificial and generally unhelpful. The participants had experienced a mimetic 'do as I do' (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 160) educative approach as coach learners led by coach educators. Indeed, Angus and Ruth summed up the participants' overall feelings:

It's that old thing that where you jump through the hoop really. They (coach education courses) are pretty limited and a bit false really. They don't really prepare you for the real thing. (Angus)

You just need to follow what they (coach educators) want really. I wouldn't say they've had much influence to be honest, I hope it's okay to say that. (Ruth)

Therefore, it was evident that there was conflict between the participants' valued contextualised situated experiences and what they perceived coach education offered. They deemed the methods in coach education to be socially distant and alien to them, and different to what they had previously experienced and valued as coaches. As a result, the participants arguably engaged in what Bourdieu (1977) describes as 'practical evaluation' whereby, in their eyes, their coaching experiences and

coach education served different purposes feeling that they had 'learned' in the former but 'had to do' the latter. John commented:

It (formal coach education) didn't really make me a better coach if that's what you're asking - yet, here I am delivering it now. To be honest, they (e.g. the courses) didn't really help at all. They're pretty basic and something you just have to get through.

The findings support the notion that the participants' journeys and socialisation experiences had produced habitus with intransient and intransigent dispositions (cf. Cushion, 2011) which were durable and fairly resistant to change. This is because, as Bourdieu suggests, primary experiences are more formative of internal dispositions than subsequent experiences (Swartz, 1997). The findings are illustrative of what Bourdieu (1984) describes as 'hexis', that is the development of habitus over time that builds and draws upon a repository of ingrained history and dispositions.

Further, Bourdieu (1977) developed the notion of 'hysteresis' which also seems relevant here. For example, it was possible that the questions asked of some of the participants during the research were 'unsettling' and created a social environment that was 'out of line' with their dispositions, as well as the culture and workings of the sub-field, producing a 'hysteresis effect' (Bourdieu, 1977). Conversely, for some coach educators, participation in this research facilitated an 'awakening of consciousness' (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 60) and encouraged reflexivity (Bourdieu, 1977) through being invited to think about their journeys and understandings for the first time. As such, an 'unsettledness' of the habitus (hysteresis) facilitated change, certainly for Peter and Henry. For example, Peter noted:

Actually, when you put it like that ('what are the assumptions that underpin your coaching and coach educator practice?'), it's quite hard to answer. It's not something I've really had to think about a great deal. We spend a lot of time doing (coaching and educating), but less on this - it's a good question. It's not something I've really done before - I think I need to go away and have a good think.

In addition to being critical of their experiences as coach learners and feeling that coach education was decontextualised and removed from the authentic situated experiences they valorised, the participants echoed similar sentiments in relation to their education as *coach educators* in tutor training. It is perhaps telling that becoming a certified coach educator tended to take less time than coach learners undertaking a level one coaching certificate. The participants reported the process to be regimented, repetitive, and to constitute adopting specific methods and providing and delivering a product. Being a coach educator certainly did not appear to require the participants to *think* about the role and their practice. They felt tutor training was far removed from coaching in the 'real world' but seemed to accept that that this was 'how it was'. James and Joan explained:

The (tutor) training is more to do with what you need to cover in the book (course handbook), not how you need to cover it. (James)

There's just too much content, and I think they've just rushed things through, and their argument would be, well, we're empowering these wonderful tutors to do that. We've had three orientation days, which were awful - it was rushed. (Joan)

These findings notwithstanding, the data also showed that the participants outlined that they had rarely considered the methods, pedagogies and practices they adopted in their coaching and coach educator roles and furthermore struggled to articulate them. Indeed, this lack of awareness, prior reflection and reflexivity tended to be a strong and consistent feature of the coach educators' interviews, as exemplified by Ernie when invited to reflect on the methods, content, and pedagogies:

We don't really need to do that or get involved with that side of things - we just deliver the stuff. (Ernie)

Previous research (e.g. Chesterfield et al., 2010; Townsend & Cushion, 2015) has highlighted an unquestioning acceptance of coach education's methods and doxic environments (Bourdieu, 1990), but what is significant here is that for the first time it is coming from the voice of the

coach educator. It seems that their role and working environment did not promote or warrant coach educators having a voice, independence, or being curious and innovative. Understandably then, they struggled to reflect on their role and practice as coaches and coach learners – they had not been socialised to do this. In this sense, their previous experiences could also be deemed to act as a barrier to the development of their knowledge and understanding.

Understandings of learning and coach education

Participants recognised that knowledge of ‘learning’ was important, an orthodox discourse, and the cornerstones of what they did:

You need to understand how people learn, you need to understand how you use a syllabus or criteria to help people learn. I think having theories and ideas, particularly in teaching and coaching, spoken to you is not pointless but it seems so obvious and so simple (Kris).

However, data showed (with the exception of Henry) that the coach educators’ understanding of learning was limited and confused and often revealed a conflation of contradictory philosophies, positions, methodologies and ideologies under a broad banner of ‘learning’. On this issue, coach educators made some of the following comments:

Yes, kids learn in different ways but as learners themselves kids love to be told what to do. (Mick)

We pretty much know that 83-point whatever percent of children learn best by actually seeing something. So, your demonstration skills are really, really, important. When you start to get to teenagers and adults, they probably want to see less and want to hear a little bit more. But the most important thing is if you can get used to being able to show something, to demonstrate something, because that means you can cut out all the talk that goes with it and get them playing. (Colin)

Brian offered the following view based on his experiences of driving and cycling that seemed to suggest he considered learning to be individual, automatic and to just happen.

I’ll say, ‘leave your hand up if you drive exactly the same way you did to pass your test.’ You almost start to get a sixth sense when you drive, when you think that car’s going to pull out, and the same happens on a bike. You know, I cycle, and when I first cycled I was pretty naïve as a cyclist, now I’m a lot more wary because, one, I can see the damage it does if you don’t, but also you start to get this sixth sense and you start to read different things around you because you’re out there more, experiencing it.

Indeed, learning styles were expressed as an orthodox discourse for describing learning, that is, that individuals will have learning preferences that are either visual, auditory, or kinaesthetic, as the following quotes illustrate:

The only thing we are really required to cover on learning is that it can be visual, auditory or kinaesthetic, and we don’t spend much time on this, we just kind of say it and explain each one. (Sam)

Yes, we cover learning styles, your visual, ‘audio’, kinaesthetic, yes, we cover all of that. And to be honest, this is quite a new thing. (Ernie)

We talk about visual, auditory, kinaesthetics, and trying to make sure that you’ve got a demonstration that people can see and, you know, make your introductions and your ‘talky’ bits as short as possible and give lots of opportunity to practice their skills. (James)

Moreover, the participants highlighted the following areas as features of their practice in delivering coach education, and that to be effective this should be for example: ‘holistic’, ‘athlete’ or ‘player-centred’ and include ‘question and answer’, ‘learning in the game’, ‘group learning’, and ‘group tasks’. Brian commented:

When it’s possible, we encourage lots of group work in classroom sessions and so they learn from each other and, more recently, we’ve focussed on the importance of coaches always being athlete-centred by giving athletes choices. (Brian)

However, the coach educators typically struggled to express the rationale for these, and what they looked like in their practice.

Arguably, the understandings of learning presented by the participants can be described as 'polymorphic, supple and adaptable, rather than defined, calibrated and used rigidly' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 23). While learning was discussed, the participants' responses represented an organised assemblage of thoughts and practices that can be characterised as a dominant system of meanings, or an ideology. Indeed, during the interviews questions around learning and pedagogy seemed to be somewhat 'side-stepped', and only Kris, Henry, Ben, and Joan discussed 'learning theories'. Kris explained:

Learning to me is as much about learning in (sport) as it is through (sport). The (SGB) would say, well everything we do (as coach educators) is constructivism, and it probably is, but to me it's too simplistic to put out there a group of fifteen coaches and they can plan something together and review it together and that's effective constructivism impacting on learning, I just think it needs refining and understanding. (Kris)

In this sense, an opaque, ideological view of learning was not only an instrument of knowledge but became symbolic and could act as an instrument of domination. That is, the participants decided what could be described as learning, what that looked like, and therefore how the social world should be perceived and, as Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) argue, engaged in a struggle to impose the definition of the world most congruent with their interests. However, adherence to an ideology of learning in fact served to impose language, meanings and symbolic systems on coach education, with the participants 'misrecognising' the arbitrary and culturally derived nature of their understanding and practice.

While it was evident that pedagogical knowledge had not been a key feature of coach education and CPD for the participants as either coach learners or coach educators, this misrecognition inadvertently meant that the participants were not working from a 'secure evidence base' (Bailey et al., 2018, p. 9) and their practice 'implicitly endorsed non-evidenced-based practices' (Bailey et al., 2018, p. 8; Chesterfield et al., 2010). As a coach educator, the participants' authority was backed by institutional forces including their experience, qualifications, and the SGBs that had legitimised their positions (cf. Cushion et al., 2017). Thus they acted as agents of a selective tradition and cultural incorporation, where coach education practices and understandings of learning became normalised and legitimised. This, alongside the sub-field's logic and doxa, had shaped practice and contributed to the reproduction of the status quo and the harmonisation of the 'common-sense world' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 80) that maintained the doxa of the coach education arena (cf. Allanson et al., 2019; Piggott, 2012, 2015; Townsend & Cushion, 2015).

Interestingly, during the interviews the participants did not discuss any understanding of pedagogy and learning in relation to the legitimacy of experiential learning. Indeed, they demonstrated an epistemological 'difference between practical knowledge and scholarly knowledge' (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 1), a finding that supports Bourdieu's (1988) assertion that sport is an area where the problematic nature of the relationship between theory and practice 'arises in a most acute form' (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 160). Kris illustrates something of this tension by, in this case, questioning whether and when learners and inexperienced coaches should be educated about learning theories and learning at all:

I'm just thinking, at what level would a level one coach, so a parent of a child who's taken over a team, who actually probably has some really good practice without understanding learning theories or pedagogy, but they're probably doing the *right thing*, so I'm not sure at level one whether we need to be sharing that learning with the coaches. (Kris)

The coach educators' understandings of learning and coaching were clearly constrained 'within the limits of the embodied sedimentation of the social structures which produced it' (Wacquant, 1992, p. 19). These understandings had become embedded in, and conditioned by, what they had experienced before in coaching, coach education, tutor training, and, in some cases, tertiary education. Henry, however, provided an uncharacteristic contribution relative to that of the other

participants, sharing more in-depth thoughts about learning and a more informed perspective regarding coach education. As a member of a SGB's national coaching advisory group, Henry was also the only coach educator to occupy a senior role within a SGB, affording him a different perspective:

... we have the National Coaching Advisory Group in (sport) that also get to view the qualification and give feedback. I sit on that now, so I have given feedback, but it's not something that every coach educator would get a chance to do, it's just because I sit on that panel. (Henry)

For Bourdieu (1980) internal functions (coach educator) can be accompanied by external functions (National Group member) which are conferred as part of symbolic struggles in cultural fields. Such produced cultural distinctions simultaneously produce social distinctions that position agents differently in the field – as was the case with Henry. This, in turn, contributes to the struggle to maintain or subvert the symbolic order (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) and can produce different schools of thought or styles. As such, Henry's perspective was a distinct contrast to other participants. For example, he was the only coach educator to be critical of learning styles, referring to them as a 'false concept'. He explained:

One thing that always sticks out for me is we cover learning styles on a coaching course - it's quite a false concept. Also, reflective practice is really important ... it's really superficially covered in our courses. We have a specification we have to deliver and some of it goes against sort of what I believe, and I think I probably sacrifice my own beliefs to ensure that I align to the specification. I'm employed to deliver that specification and qualification. So yeah, I guess I compromise my pedagogical beliefs to do what's asked of me. (Henry)

Despite this, Henry still followed the prescribed coach education programmes and delivered them in his role as a coach educator. The collective basis of habitus, that is those who internalise a similar experience share a similar habitus, creates what Bourdieu (1990) describes as 'necessity' that leads to a 'kind of immediate submission to order' (p. 54). In this case this was also strategic (Bourdieu, 1977), as Henry had 'the feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 52), was committed to it, and wanted to maintain or improve his position in the coach education sub-field.

While recognising that the coach education sub-field was worth preserving, Henry's divergent views were challenging to the orthodoxy, particularly with respect to the knowledge and capabilities of coach educators. Questioning what Bourdieu (1989) describes as 'legitimate professional procedure', Henry reportedly engaged in this form of struggle by doubting the abilities of coach educators (including those of his colleagues) to deliver research-informed practice and learning theories in their practice.

I think if they (coach educators) did deliver it they'd probably, this sounds awful, but they probably dumb it down too much, because, you walk a fine line with behaviourism say of dumbing it down to Pavlov and his dogs. I think if we start to try and infiltrate that in some of the coach education courses, I think those delivering it would struggle. I think pedagogical knowledge is important, so how to actually go about facilitating the learning of the coaches ... but I think the understanding of it (pedagogy) within national governing bodies isn't where it should be. I think our (coach) educators would struggle with conveying some of the more research-informed approaches. (Henry)

The dispositions of habitus represent an informal and practical rather than a discursive or conscious form of knowledge (Swartz, 1997). The internalisation of objective structures to form embodied dispositions is a slow and unconscious process (Bourdieu, 1990). As such Henry's coach education practice emphasised what Bourdieu (1990, p. 59) describes as 'regularity, unity and systematicity of practice'. Further, day-to-day coach educator practice is crowded by both cultural and conceptual clutter, and reflexivity – thinking about thinking – is difficult. In this case, Henry's involvement in the research process provided him with a tool for reflexivity and a new vision or understanding, to make conscious and rationalise practice, namely the uncovering and realisation that he compromised his pedagogical beliefs delivering coach education. True reform and change can only begin with reflexivity and developing new ways of seeing to avoid the submission to conditions that are arbitrary and contingent.

Implications and limitations: considering future research and practice

The findings add empirical weight to Lyle's (2002) argument that 'coach educators are in an impossible position unless they are operating within an appropriate framework of knowledge' (p. 26) and raise questions regarding professional educators' (and coaches') knowledge base, training, pedagogies, and their developmental needs (cf. Nash et al., 2017). The findings also suggest that tutor (and coach developer) training that facilitates creativity, critical thinking, flexibility, and an understanding of the impact of structure and agency on coach educators' practice, are beyond current conceptions of training provision. As such, these are areas for future development. The study in this case suggests that coaches, coach educators, and coach developers – like teachers – can be 'theoretically innocent' (Stenhouse, 1985, p. 16) and perhaps lack a 'researcherly disposition' (Ellis & Loughland, 2016, p. 127; see also MacPhail et al., 2019). Coach development could better equip coach educators (and coaches) by providing them with greater theoretical awareness, evidence, and guidance by facilitating and embedding research-informed practice in formal coach education and CPD and/or by encouraging involvement in practitioner research (cf. MacPhail et al., 2019). Future research could also develop specific pedagogies for coach educators (see Walsh & Carson, 2019), something that has been proposed in the broader educational literature on professional educators (e.g. Cochran-Smith et al., 2020; Soysal & Radmard, 2020).

These recommendations may go some way to countering the alleged anti-intellectual understandings and appreciation of coaching and learning that appear to emanate (without question) from the repetition and sedimentation of situated and athletic and coaching experiences (cf. Cushion et al., 2017). Equally, they may assist the coach development workforce (including graduates) who struggle to develop coaches (see Callary & Gearity, 2020; Horgan & Daly, 2015). Specifically, this points to a need for future research with programme designers (coach developers), stakeholders, policymakers, and a further and closer examination of coach education and tutor training in their current forms in order to more effectively inform practice moving forwards.

While the findings from this study offer valuable preliminary insights, the caveat is that findings are drawn from just 16 UK-based coach educators using a single in-depth interview, the limitations of which have been reported (see Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Moreover, there can be potential fallibilities in interviewing, and the influence of researchers' interpretations need to be acknowledged (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). These points notwithstanding, the study can stimulate future research developments in this area. For example, it would be interesting to further investigate how individual coach educators align to prevailing orthodoxies (or not) and respond following their involvement in research that considers their perceptions and practice in similar detail.

Conclusion

This study has provided new insights into coach educators' journeys, perceptions, understandings and their roles. To this end, the research has produced new data and knowledge with respect to this sample of coach educators in the UK, raising awareness and enhancing understanding of this under-researched but integral practitioner and the 'person behind the profession' (Christensen, 2014, p. 207). It is only by including and hearing coach educators' voices that the process of understanding them and the vital role they perform can really begin to reveal and challenge 'the deeply engrained cultural practices' (Piggott, 2015, p. 25) they may experience inside the under-researched sub-field.

The data revealed that although the participants' personal sporting experiences were valorised, these, along with coach education and tutor training (and tertiary education), had contributed somewhat modestly to the coach educators' understanding of learning and pedagogy. Not only has the research given these coach educators voices, but the study highlights: (a) their journeys, perceptions, and understandings of learning and coach education; (b) their lack of awareness and critical consideration of coach education and learning (i.e. a future training need); (c) the heavy influence of

coaching and coach education experiences and cultures; (d) how some coach educators *did* begin to re-examine and reflect critically on their role, beliefs, practice and coach education; and that (e) some coach educators welcomed the interest and opportunity to reflect afforded to them through their participation in this study. Therefore, it is felt that the findings from this research offer original and valuable contributions to this field of inquiry and extends existing knowledge.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Darren W. Watts  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1451-7276>
 Christopher J. Cushion  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8674-9597>
 Lorraine Cale  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1485-4499>

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