"Learning the hard way": Understanding the workplace learning of sports coach mentors.

Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to understand the workplace learning of sports coach mentors. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 coach mentors employed by a sport governing body (SGB) as part of a formalised mentoring programme. 'Current' coach mentors (n=9) had been employed for a minimum of one year by the organisation and were all interviewed once. 'New' coach mentors (n=9) were all interviewed twice, once at the start of their employment and once again 9 months later. Moreover, regional mentors (n=8) who oversee the training and practice of the coach mentors participated in one focus group. Data were analysed thematically, with the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu and relevant workplace learning literature used to support the analytical process. The findings highlight how habitus structures coach mentors' participation in learning opportunities afforded to them in the workplace. In addition, habitus and embodied capital will impact how coach mentors interact with and interpret mentor training, whilst influencing their level of engagement with other employees. It is argued SGB social fields are crucial in the production of promoted norms and 'legitimate' knowledge within workplaces, which subsequently influences mentor learning. Recommendations are made for critically transformative approaches to training coach mentors.

Keywords: *mentoring, coach education, mentor development, Bourdieu*

1   **Introduction**

2   Understanding coach development has been an area of increased interest within the sports

3   coaching field over recent years. At present, we are aware that coaches encounter

4   situations for learning in variable ways, with current thinking proposing learning to coach

5   through practical experience, observations, and interactions with others is inevitable

6   within sporting environments (Cushion, 2015; Stodter & Cushion, 2017). Trying to

7   manage the learning that occurs in these situations is somewhat impossible, with both

8   micro (individual) and macro (contextual/cultural) factors interweaving to either enable

9   or prevent meaningful learning from occurring (Cushion, 2015; Stodter & Cushion,

10   2017). Therefore, attempting to facilitate experiential learning opportunities through

11   appropriate pedagogical mechanisms would appear logical, in order to develop coaches

12   in a relevant and consistent manner in situ (Cushion, 2015). One method which may help

13   to achieve this is mentoring, through enhancing critical thought and encouraging coaches

14   to reflect upon the experiences and interactions they encounter.

15   Mentoring has been heavily advocated within coaching as a means to harness the

16   influential power of experience through guidance, observation, and support, empowering

17   coaches to become better equipped to deal with the ambiguous and complex nature of

18   their work (Cushion, 2015; Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2003; Nash & McQuade, 2015).

19   Although much overlap occurs between the terms in a sporting context, mentoring is

20   generally viewed as a process of supportive guidance and facilitation, whereas coaching

21   can be seen as a more performance orientated action to enhance a specified skill area

22   (Jenkins, 2013). Coaches who have access to a mentor or critical friend are said to receive

23   sport-specific knowledge, alongside increased professional growth and self-confidence

24   (Griffiths, 2015; Purdy, 2018). Despite mentoring's positive discourse, recent reviews

25   have demonstrated that the sports coach mentoring literature is less advanced in

1 comparison to domains such as business, nursing, and education (see Bloom, 2013; Jones,

2 Harris, & Miles, 2009). Subsequently, there are many suggestions 'for' but limited

3 evidence 'of' successful coach mentoring provision, with it being argued the practice is

4 "perceived as important, but there seems little evidence to support this" (Cushion, 2015,

5 p. 157).

6   Mentoring can be conceptualised as either an informal or formal process. Informal

7 or 'found' mentors are often unplanned and naturally formed relationships between

8 individuals, with these on-going interactions becoming an evitable feature of the coaching

9 environment. However, found mentors are more likely to support rather than challenge

10 existing ideologies, potentially contributing to the reproduction of pre-existing coaching

11 cultures and practices (Griffiths, 2013). In contrast, formalised coach mentoring

12 programmes have grown in prominence and are regularly incorporated into coach

13 education provision. Formalised mentoring programmes are often designed and

14 implemented by an organisation i.e. a sport governing body (SGB). Having greater

15 structure and control is deemed valuable, yet the formalisation process might introduce

16 problematic elements relating to institutional agendas and financial constraints. Through

17 this increased formalisation, employed coach mentors may begin to adopt normalising

18 and disciplinary practices, to ensure mentee coaches are working towards prescribed

19 coaching frameworks and objectives required by the administering organisation (Sawiuk,

20 Taylor, & Groom, 2016; Zehntner & McMahon, 2018). This will of course pose

21 challenges towards coach learning and development, where the focus of the mentoring

22 relationship is on socialising coaches, whilst collecting and recording empirical data to

23 meet institutional targets (Jones et al., 2009; Sawiuk et al., 2016).

24   Recent research (see Sawiuk et al., 2016; Zehntner & McMahon, 2018) has begun

25 to add an enhanced level of criticality to sports coach mentoring and has challenged the

1   prevailing "distorted and utopian view", whilst revealing the "essential social and

2   relational complexities" inherent within the practice (Potrac, 2016, p. 84). Mentoring is

3   multifaceted and contextual, with organisational structures influencing how the process

4   is perceived and enacted, alongside dictating the volume of training and support mentors

5   receive (Griffiths, 2015). Currently, the recruitment of sports coach mentors is haphazard,

6   with coaching experience and qualifications often valorised and uncritically assumed to

7   be the necessary pre-requisites for effective mentoring provision (Chambers, Herold,

8   McFlynn, Brennan, & Armour, 2015; Cushion, 2015; Nash & Mallett, 2018). It is taken

9   for granted that 'expert' coaches naturally transition into mentoring positions. This is

10   despite Purdy (2018, p. 144) warning that "not all coaches should be mentors", suggesting

11   more thorough procedures need to be undertaken in the preparation and training of

12   mentors. By assuming coaches effortlessly 'become' mentors has meant professional

13   development opportunities are "often missing or extremely limited", with existing

14   training procedures grounded upon restricted "conceptions of the mentor as learner"

15   (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006, p. 8). Positioned through discourse as 'educators' rather

16   than 'learners', it is regularly assumed mentors do not require additional support within

17   their role, heightening the importance of learning through social practice in the

18   workplace. Consequently, this research aims to enhance our understanding of the

19   workplace learning and development of sports coach mentors.

20   Mentoring is generally a secondary profession in addition to a coach's principal

21   role of developing their athletes (Chambers, 2018). This factor amongst others has

22   contributed to the minimal or insufficient training provided for coaches when they

23   transition into mentoring positions. The need to explore in greater depth the process of

24   learning to mentor and the specific facets which influence the development process seems

25   paramount, in order to support coach learning in a more desirable and efficient manner.

1   It has been argued a large proportion of the sports coaching literature is 'coach-centric'

2   in nature (Cushion, Griffiths, & Armour, 2017), whilst regularly neglecting and

3   underrepresenting individuals placed in mentoring or coach development occupations.

4   This is problematic, as individuals in coach development positions can significantly

5   influence any learning culture they are a part of, with their dispositions, experiences, and

6   practices impacting upon coaches' perceptions and beliefs on what 'good' coaching

7   entails (Cushion et al., 2017; Hodkinson, Biesta, & James, 2008). Developing coaches is

8   fundamental to a mentor's role, therefore how this is interpreted and understood will

9   subsequently influence a mentor's practices and behaviours which in turn, might impact

10   upon mentee learning. The learning pathways of coach educators has recently been

11   examined within the coaching domain (see Brasil, Ramos, Milistetd, Culver, &

12   Nascimento, 2018), yet despite enacting a similar role in facilitating coach development,

13   less attention has been paid to investigating the learning of coach mentors (Koh, Ho, &

14   Koh, 2017).

15   With this in mind, the aim of this paper is to understand in greater detail the

16   workplace learning and development of sports coach mentors. By understanding how

17   micro (individual) and macro (contextual/cultural) factors structure the recruitment,

18   training, and learning process for coach mentors, we can begin to explore the origins of

19   mentoring practice, explaining why certain approaches are adopted and uncovering what

20   might restrict mentor development. The significance of this paper therefore lays with its

21   ability to extend our currently limited understanding of how coach developers, such as

22   mentors, learn and develop, shedding light on both agentic and structural factors which

23   have a substantial influence on individual learning pathways. This research attempts to

24   highlight the learning processes of a sample of SGB employed coach mentors as part of

25   a formalised mentoring programme. To add a layer of theoretical sophistication and to

1   assist in the analytical process, the social theory of Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1990, 1998,

2   2000) alongside relevant workplace learning literature (e.g. Billett, 2004; Hager &

3   Hodkinson, 2009; Hodkinson et al., 2004, 2008) have been applied. By possessing a more

4   coherent understanding into the nuances and complexities of coach mentor learning, it is

5   hoped critically transformative support mechanisms can be designed and developed,

6   which in turn may result in more desirable and efficient practices for mentors when

7   developing learning coaches.

8

9   **Workplace learning: An overview**

10   Workplace learning can be defined as "the learning which derives its purpose from the

11   context of employment… learning in, through and for the workplace" (Sutherland, 1998,

12   p. 5). Workplaces are significant environments for individual learning by providing

13   opportunities to participate in activities and practices for professional development.

14   Within workplaces learning is organic and embodied in action, where experiences at work

15   are dynamic, unpredictable, and complex (Beckett & Hager, 2002). Workplaces are social

16   environments, each possessing cultural norms and values that can shape and re-construct

17   learning, where workers are constantly transformed by fluctuating workplace experiences

18   (Beckett & Hager, 2002). At present, workplace learning is best understood through a

19   range of constructivist and sociocultural theories which help to recognise the significance

20   of context for learning, alongside the role of power relations and individuals' embodied

21   dispositions. Prior to these recent conceptualisations, Hodkinson and colleagues (2008)

22   argued that traditional dualist views of learning as either an individual or social process

23   have prevailed, with the use of Sfard's (1998) metaphors of learning as acquisition or

24   participation deployed rigorously.

1   Sfard's (1998) acquisition metaphor epitomises the 'standard paradigm of

2 learning', a predominantly individual and cognitive approach where learning is

3 understood as the transference of a 'product' to the inside of people's minds (Beckett &

4 Hager, 2002; Hager & Hodkinson, 2009). In contrast, the participation metaphor accounts

5 for the situatedness of learning, popularised within the workplace learning literature by

6 the concept of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). This 'emerging paradigm of

7 learning' maintains learning is a process of participation which extends beyond the

8 individual through engagement with social practices and activities within a given cultural

9 setting (Hager & Hodkinson, 2009). Despite their merits, Hodkinson et al. (2008, p. 28)

10 have argued a reliance on these perspectives is problematic, as it is necessary to

11 understand "learning from both the perspective of the individual learner, and that of the

12 learning situation". Consequently, a growing body of research into workplace learning

13 has introduced a new metaphor, which conceptualises learning as a process of

14 'becoming'.

15   In drawing significantly upon the social theory of Pierre Bourdieu, Hodkinson and

16 colleagues understand learning to be a cultural and transformational endeavour,

17 overcoming the limitations of the acquisition and participation metaphors (Hager &

18 Hodkinson, 2009; Hodkinson et al., 2008). For example, the acquisition metaphor

19 assumes learning has a specified end point once the 'product' has been successfully

20 transferred into an individual's mind (Hager, 2008). Furthermore, although insightful,

21 situated learning theories can be critiqued for overlooking the role of power and the

22 positions of agents within social spaces, whilst the influence of workers' dispositions and

23 capital is often unaccounted for (Billett, 2004; Hodkinson et al., 2008). Thus, the

24 metaphor of 'becoming' overcomes these issues by emphasising the on-going re-

25 construction and transformation of both the learner and context, where learning is a

1   complex, social, and embodied process determined in part by an individual's position

2   within social fields (Hager & Hodkinson, 2009). It is through this notion of learning as

3   an embodied process where the complementary theoretical concepts of Bourdieu are

4   useful.

5

6   **Situating Bourdieu in the workplace:**

7   The social theory of Pierre Bourdieu has been used extensively within the sports coaching

8   literature, most recently to explore the learning and practices of both coaches and coach

9   educators (see Cushion et al., 2017; Griffiths & Armour, 2013). Perhaps Bourdieu's most

10 influential and pivotal concept within his framework is that of habitus, defined as

11 "systems of durable, transposable dispositions… which generate and organise practices

12 and representations" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53). The value of habitus lays with its ability to

13 highlight the process of learning in a manner which overcomes the dualisms of much

14 social and learning theory, which are objectivism/subjectivism, structure/agency, and

15 mind/body (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Therefore, in attempting to produce a

16 'complete picture' of mentor development in sports coaching, it would appear drawing

17 upon Bourdieu's theoretical tools may help in "understanding the relationship between

18 experiences, dispositions, and social contexts in practices of learning" (Stahl, Burnard, &

19 Perkins, 2017, p. 59). An individual's habitus is the product of past experiences, which

20 over time produces classification schemes and dispositions, orientating a person's

21 perceptions and beliefs (Bourdieu, 1990, 1998). Dispositions can be perceived as an

22 attitude or preference towards practice, which will influence how people act and carry

23 themselves in a given cultural setting. The recognition and importance of individuals'

24 embodied dispositions has been observed within the workplace learning literature as a

25 key factor in understanding why learning opportunities are engaged with or not by

1 employees (e.g. Hager & Hodkinson, 2009; Hodkinson et al., 2004, 2008). These

2 entrenched dispositions within an individual's habitus will influence their 'horizons',

3 determining whether a person recognises and elects to participate in the opportunities for

4 learning the workplace affords (Billett, 2004; Hodkinson et al., 2008).

5   Bourdieu emphasises the habitus has a generative capacity and should not be

6 viewed in a prescriptive way. Consequently, an individual's dispositions might be

7 unconsciously developed and transformed through exposure to diverse cultural spaces,

8 known to Bourdieu as fields, defined as "a network, or a configuration, of objective

9 relations between positions" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97). Within fields,

10 individuals are positioned in relation to the volume and type of capital which structures

11 their habitus. Capital in this instance can be economic (financial), cultural (attitudes,

12 qualifications, objects), and social (associations and networks) in nature, with each of

13 these forms becoming symbolic when valued within particular fields (Bourdieu, 1986).

14 Viewed as a form of power, the capital a mentor possesses within social fields is

15 significant, as it may restrict or enable access to sources of learning within workplaces.

16 As Biesta and colleagues (2011, p. 90) argue, an individual's position with social fields

17 "influences learning in ways that are multifaceted, non-deterministic and fully cognisant

18 of power relations and inequalities". Learning opportunities in the workplace are

19 structured by power, interests, and social norms within fields of practice – which will all

20 interact to significantly influence the possibilities for learning (Billett, 2004). Thus, the

21 work of Bourdieu helps to articulate how individual agency (habitus, capital) and

22 workplace structures (field) interact within contested working environments and affect

23 coach mentor development.

24   Through adopting the metaphor of learning as 'becoming' and the associated

25 theory of Pierre Bourdieu, we can understand learning for coach mentors as a process in

1 which embodied dispositions, meaning, and capital are constantly being negotiated and

2 altered within the workplace. The use of Hodkinson and colleagues (2004, 2008) work

3 on cultural and workplace learning which draws upon Bourdieu's theoretical tools has

4 been used to some extent to explore the development of sports coaches (e.g. Stodter &

5 Cushion, 2014; Mallet, Rossi, Rynne, & Tinning, 2016). Nonetheless, there is an absence

6 of literature which uses these sociocultural frameworks to explore the learning and

7 development of sports coach mentors. This paper aims to address this gap and utilise the

8 social praxeology of Bourdieu alongside supporting concepts to understand the

9 workplace learning of sports coach mentors.

10

11 **Methodology**

12 *Context*

13 A UK based SGB has designed and implemented a formalised mentoring programme,

14 aiming to provide predominantly volunteer coaches, either in local clubs or other

15 community settings, in-situ mentoring support. The mentors are encouraged to adopt a

16 variety of practices to develop the coaches under their lead, including session

17 observations, coaching demonstrations, individual feedback, and promoting the use of

18 reflection. The mentors operate on a paid part-time basis across the UK and work in one

19 of eight geographical regions, which are overseen by a regional mentor (RM). To be

20 employed by the SGB as a mentor, individuals must hold a UKCC[1] Level 2 coaching

21 qualification in the respective sport whilst preferably having prior mentoring experience.

22 After successfully completing the application and interview process, mentors must attend

23 an initial one day training induction, alongside a further one day regional and two day

24 national training event each year. The mentoring programme is structured through the

1   SGB with the mentor-mentee dyad often prearranged to increase the effectiveness of the

2   process, whilst also helping to reach targeted groups of coaches.

3

4   *Research design*

5   Placed within the interpretivist paradigm, this research adopted a relativist ontology with

6   the view that social reality is constructed and multifaceted, along with a subjectivist

7   epistemology, assuming the knower and the known are merged together (Creswell, 2013;

8   Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Based upon these factors, a qualitatively-orientated instrumental

9   case study approach was utilised in order to understand the overlooked issue of how sports

10   coach mentors learn and develop within the workplace (Hodge & Sharp, 2016; Stake,

11   1995). An instrumental approach is required when there is "a puzzlement, a need for

12   general understanding, and feel that we may get insight into the question by studying a

13   particular case" (Stake, 1995, p. 3). With instrumental case studies the case itself is of

14   secondary interest and helps to facilitate the understanding of a broader issue. Thus,

15   although this research focuses on a select case of mentors as part of one SGB's formalised

16   mentoring programme, a greater emphasis is placed on understanding the object of study,

17   i.e. the workplace learning of sports coach mentors. Case studies are frequently

18   misunderstood for lacking generalisability (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Nonetheless, it has been

19   proposed that single and instrumental cases, such as the one exemplified in this study,

20   may help to provide a broad understanding of the issue in question and enable

21   generalisability through transferability to other contexts (Smith, 2018; Stake, 1995;

22   Tracy, 2010). For example, the findings of this research can be applied to similar settings

23   such as mentoring within physical education or other sporting contexts. In adopting the

24   work of Pierre Bourdieu alongside supporting workplace learning literature, analytical

25   generalisation is highlighted as the use of the theoretical tools and concepts within this

1 research can be generalised and adopted elsewhere regardless of the domain (Smith,

2 2018).

3

4 *Sampling and participants*

5 Within case study research two levels of sampling are utilised; sampling to select the case,

6 and sampling within the case (Merriam, 1998). To select the case, a homogenous

7 purposive sampling technique was adopted, as coach mentors employed by a SGB were

8 chosen to provide information and understanding on the process of learning to mentor

9 (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). After the selected case was chosen, sampling within the case

10 was convenience based. Coach mentors were contacted, with those who agreed to take

11 part recruited immediately (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

12   In total, 18 coach mentors (17 males and 1 female, average age 44), alongside 8

13 regional mentors (6 males and 2 females, average age 39) employed by the SGB took part

14 in this research. The 18 coach mentors had accumulated on average 14 years of practical

15 coaching experience, whilst the regional mentors had accrued on average 18 years. Prior

16 to any data collection, all participants were informed of the voluntary nature of their

17 participation, guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality, and signed consent forms

18 sanctioned by the researchers' university ethics committee.

19

20 *Data Collection*

21 Analytical eclecticism is viewed as an important element of case study research (Thomas,

22 2011). Qualitative research methods in the form of semi-structured interviews and focus

23 groups were employed to understand how context and personal experience are negotiated

24 to inform coach mentor learning. Semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted

25 with 18 coach mentors, organised into two distinct groups. Initially, interviews (average

1   62 minutes) were conducted with 9 'current' coach mentors (CCMs), with 'current'

2   defined as individuals who had been employed for a minimum of one year as a mentor

3   by the SGB. These interviews concentrated on the CCMs' experiences of mentor training,

4   previous mentoring experiences, the influence of the SGB, and available learning

5   opportunities within the workplace. Simultaneously, a first set of interviews (average 55

6   minutes) were conducted with a second group of 9 'new' coach mentors (NCMs). These

7   mentors were interviewed immediately after their training induction and before delivering

8   any mentoring practice for the SGB. The first interview explored the NCMs' previous

9   mentoring experiences, dispositions towards mentoring, and expectations for the role.

10 Follow up interviews were conducted 9 months later with same cohort of NCMs (average

11 63 minutes) to investigate the challenges faced in their first season of mentoring and the

12 learning they had experienced. This gap between interviews with the NCMs is significant,

13 as it permitted "time for participants to reflect and deepen their subsequent responses"

14 (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 481), whilst allowing trust and rapport to be developed, which

15 can lead to more 'in-depth' information (Flowers, 2008).

16   Despite the absence of visual cues often considered problematic, the use of

17 telephone interviews with both CCMs and NCMs provided a flexible method to overcome

18 geographical constraints and obtain data regarding mentors' learning experiences that

19 "they might be reluctant to talk about in face-to-face interviews" (Sparkes & Smith, 2014,

20 p. 88). The semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted via three pre-planned

21 interview guides (CCM interview, NCM first interview, NCM second interview) to help

22 facilitate focused but open-ended questions (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). The interview

23 guides helped to direct the interaction between the researcher and the mentors, whilst the

24 semi-structured nature provided an element of adaptability to steer the interviews in

25 evolving directions as the conversations progressed (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

1   To supplement the interview data, one focus group (84 minutes) was conducted

2   with all 8 regional mentors (RMs) who oversaw the SGB's mentoring programme. The

3   focus group was conducted in a semi-structured style at a convenient location for the

4   participants, with the lead author acting as a facilitator to prompt discussions around

5   specific themes. Exchanges centred on the aims of the mentoring programme, mentor

6   training, and the role of the SGB in facilitating workplace learning opportunities. This

7   research was guided by a relativist approach, from this perspective no universal criteria

8   can successfully 'judge' qualitative research, with an alternative criteria being adopted

9   (Burke, 2016; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). In utilising Tracy's (2010) criterion for

10   characterising qualitative research, this research can be judged on the worthiness of topic,

11   rich rigor (the data collection and analytical procedures used), the use of theoretical

12   constructs, and meaningful coherence (whether the study achieved its intended aims). All

13   telephone interviews and the focus group were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim

14   by the lead author.

15

16   *Data analysis*

17   Due to its flexibility and capacity to produce interpretative analysis, a thematic analysis

18   procedure was employed that followed Braun and Clarkes' (2006) six-phase model.

19   Specifically, thematic analysis was adopted due to its compatibility with a range of data

20   collection methods, whilst not being tied to a specified theoretical framework.

21   Subsequently, the use of thematic analysis enabled Bourdieu's sociology and relevant

22   workplace learning theorists to be combined and integrated throughout the data analysis

23   phase. It is important to view thematic analysis as an active analytical process, where the

24   steps taken were influenced by the researcher's conscious choices, in addition to the

25   theoretical assumptions adopted and the principle content of the data (Braun, Clarke, &

Weate, 2016). Initially, the lead author familiarised himself with the interview transcripts by thoroughly reading and re-reading all data items, becoming immersed with the data's content. The data were coded in both a data driven (inductive) and theoretically driven (deductive) manner, with the aim of identifying passages of interest which capture both content and theoretical relevance (Braun et al., 2016). Recorded codes were then collated and organised into candidate themes which highlighted higher level patterns and captured significant aspects of the data set (Braun et al., 2016). Themes were then reviewed, refined, and named to develop a rich analytical narrative, before integrating both data extracts and analytic commentary during the write up phase (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results and Discussion

The aim of this research was to understand in greater depth the workplace learning of sports coach mentors. Consequently, through the analytical process three themes were developed and are discussed below in relation to Bourdieu's social theory and relevant workplace learning literature. The three themes are: (1) "It just underlined what I already knew": Training sports coaches as mentors; (2) "Hiring mentors in our own like": Experiential learning and a discourse of trust; and (3) Responsibility for learning and the role of capital.

"It just underlined what I already knew": Training sports coaches as mentors

Coach mentors in this study were provided with a range of training events which aimed to enhance their professional development through increased role clarity, whilst creating an open environment for mentors to pose questions. Research on mentor education is sparse, thus little is known about the importance of mentor training events in relation to individual learning and development for those in attendance (Aspfors & Fransson, 2015).

An individual's, such as a mentor's, developed dispositions will influence how they interpret, engage with, and what they acquire from formal learning opportunities such as structured training events. Within this research, mentors were largely sceptical about the training (induction, regional, national events) they received from the SGB, suggesting attendance had little impact on transforming their dispositions and subsequent learning.

> If I'm honest with you I've sort of came away thinking "what have I learned there?" Have I learned masses of what's happening? It was quite subjective in that, these are the sort of practices that you could put on or sessions you could put on, this is the speaker, this is a workshop, and this is a teambuilding workshop. I know I came away with certain things but with others I was like "hmm I'm not overly sure about that" (Micky, CCM).

> A lot of it just underlined what I already knew… I'm not being arrogant, but I seem to go to these events and they are telling me stuff that I've already got in my head or thought about or bounced around… It's nothing new, but they are underlining or just reminding me of some of the things that I have got in the front of my thinking (Samuel, CCM).

Hodkinson et al. (2008, p. 39) have proposed learning can be considered "a process through which the dispositions that make up a person's habitus are confirmed, developed, challenged or changed". Consequently, it would seem the training events provided by the SGB failed to develop or transform some mentors' dispositions towards practice. Their embodied beliefs towards mentoring remained fairly stable and unchallenged, with perceptions reaffirmed through the delivered content. An individual's habitus is inscribed

1   in their body through past experiences (Bourdieu, 2000). Over time, mentors' will have

2   developed their own dispositions towards mentoring, which will orientate them towards

3   behaving and enacting the practice in variable ways. Coach mentors do not arrive at

4   training events and workplace settings as blank slates with no prior involvements or

5   existing beliefs. Instead, they embody "all of the experiences that have shaped them as

6   the particular person that they have become thus far" (Hager, 2008, p. 684). Hence, sports

7   coach mentors might attend the same training event, yet their dispositions and perceptions

8   towards their role will differ. This was recognised during the focus group by the regional

9   mentors, who design and deliver the training events.

10

11   I think part of the challenge is it's just going to be one day, between 4 and 8 hours.

12   I have 55 mentors, so we will do some generic stuff, but if we asked those 55

13   people how useful it was you will have some big differences. We do try to

14   individualise it, but realistically that is a challenge (Jimmy, RM).

15

16   The problem is you could have an experienced mentor of 4 years and almost a

17   mentor of 'one day' sitting on the same table. That's the challenge, it's a good

18   challenge but it's a problem for us because for the new guy it's going to be great

19   and informative, but for the experienced mentor are you galvanising what they are

20   going to do in the next year? (Harvey, RM).

21

22   Although Bourdieu emphasises dispositions can and do change, it is important to

23   recognise that early experiences tend to be quite significant in the structuring of the

24   'primary habitus', which forms the basis of reception and assimilation of educational

25   messages (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Dependent upon the interaction between an

individual's dispositions and a field's social structure, the habitus may attempt to defend

"against change through the selection it makes within new information by rejecting

information capable of calling into question its accumulated information" (Bourdieu,

1990, p. 60/61). For some coach mentors their habitus and embodied dispositions towards

mentoring rejected the espoused training content, significantly influencing how

transformative the formal mentor training was for those individuals. Furthermore, coach

mentors' developed classification schemes distinguished what they perceived 'good

learning' to entail. In this case, the ability to network and share ideas with others mentors,

at the expense of the training event's prescribed content, was heavily advocated.

One of the big things that I did pull from the events, it's not so much the event and the educator putting on something, what I got to learn was talking to the other mentors about experiences that they had... I was getting so much more from just talking to mentors… they are able to tell me a story and I'd be able to relate to that (Samuel, CCM).

I think what I felt on the days of the training events is that I learned more from the other mentors than the presentations and the bits from the regionals. Mainly because I was thinking what is it going to be like on the ground in terms of talking to a club secretary or whoever is coordinating it? What's it going to be like dealing with coaches? What happens if people aren't receptive… the other mentors have that feedback at hand, whereas the presentations by design go through certain things and certain processes, but they didn't get down to those things (Dylan, NCM).

1   In the context of this research, the training content had a limited impact on developing

2   and transforming coach mentors' dispositions. As a result, some mentors attained greater

3   value on the process of collaborating and networking with other mentors within the

4   training sites. To understand how this influenced mentor learning, the concept of

5   'horizons for learning' helps to illuminate what learning is possible for individuals within

6   specific workplace settings (Hodkinson et al., 2008). The notion of 'horizons for learning'

7   refers to what opportunities an individual can see based upon their developed dispositions

8   and their workplace's learning culture. As Bourdieu (1984, p. 170) alludes to, the habitus

9   generates "meaning-giving perceptions". Consequently, for some coach mentors their

10   dispositions interacted with the learning culture of the mentor training site, to enable them

11   to perceive the opportunity to network and collaborate with other coach mentors as a

12   meaningful learning endeavour, at the expense of learning from the set content.

13

14   ***"Hiring mentors in our own like": Experiential learning and a discourse of trust***

15   After successful application and interview, coach mentors were required to attend a one

16   day training induction prior to heading out into the field. In the context of this research,

17   it would appear the SGB had a clear idea on the 'type' of individual they wanted to recruit

18   and employ as a coach mentor. Social agents are placed unevenly within fields as a result

19   of their accumulation and volume of capital. Those located in 'dominating' positions

20   through their possession of capital attempt to defend the field's doxa, viewed as specific

21   ways of being which become legitimised and unchallenged (Bourdieu, 1977). Individuals

22   in dominant positions are granted the ability to determine "the appropriation of profits"

23   whilst possessing the "power to impose the laws of functioning of the field" (Bourdieu,

24   1986, p. 49). Fields produce knowledge, which is essentially a form of capital, associated

25   with prestige or power and viewed as a symbolic product (James, 2015). The regional

mentors in charge of employing the coach mentors possessed the requisite capital to

govern what knowledge is perceived as legitimate within the SGB fields. Thus, the

regional mentors' spoke highly of their recruitment process and possessed the required

symbolic power to regulate what a 'good' mentor was. In this case, they tended to employ

individuals who embodied comparable cultural capital in the form of dispositions towards

both mentoring and coaching as themselves.

> Something Richard (RM) mentioned recently was hiring mentors in our own like.
> I think that's true. So there is that to it, I think everyone in this room is great at
> picking really good people because they are good people anyway. I'm not just
> saying that, there's a perception that those people are good. But I do look at the
> person, they are going to be building rapport, talking to coaches, supporting
> people, having a cup of coffee with them and you need to be a certain type of
> person to do that. So, I think we are strong in identifying that (Bradley, RM).

Bourdieu (2000) has proposed the habitus develops through an implicit collusion among

individuals who are the product of similar experiences and social fields. When these

individuals are brought together, this collusion results in "an immediate agreement in

ways of judging and acting… the basis of a practical mutual understanding" (Bourdieu,

2000, p. 145). Consequently, individuals will tend to surround themselves with agents

who possess equivalent dispositions, tastes, and common schemes of perception which

structure their habitus (Bourdieu, 1990). An objective class is therefore constructed,

containing a set of agents "placed in homogenous conditionings and producing

homogenous systems of dispositions capable of generating similar practices" (Bourdieu,

1984, p. 95). Agents placed within an objective class are likely to have experienced

similar situations to one another, thus developing comparable attitudes and preferences towards practice, accounting for a 'unity of style' (Bourdieu, 1977, 1998). Seemingly, the SGB in this instance had a clear idea on the 'type' of embodied cultural capital (dispositions, mannerisms, and behaviours) needed to successfully 'become' a coach mentor. As a result, some coach mentors felt this is perhaps a reason why they received a lack of guidance and training from the SGB as to how to perform their role, as it was assumed they were already capable and trusted.

> There can be some specific instances that might arise that you wouldn't have been trained for as a mentor... I don't think it's hard to prepare people for it, but obviously it requires more training, more events and more input from the SGB, I think probably the SGB might think that the calibre of people they have appointed to be mentors are in a position to be able to deal with situations that are unexpected from their own experience and knowledge as opposed to the SGB giving them training (Jason, CCM)

> It feels a little bit like we've been left to our own devices to some extent because we've not really been given any structure…maybe that's because they trust us on the basis of the qualifications and the interview we've done (Mervin, NCM).

Through employing individuals that the SGB believe embody and possess dispositions needed for success within the field, it would appear limited training and preparation opportunities exist within the workplace, with a subjective 'feel' about individuals and their possession of cultural capital deemed an adequate method of recruitment. This is

potentially an issue, as sports organisations need to take responsibility for the training and preparation of their employed mentors otherwise mentoring practice will vary in quality and consistency, subsequently affecting the development of mentee coaches (Nash & Mallet, 2018). The assumption that merely embodying and demonstrating the requisite cultural capital is sufficient in becoming an effective coach mentor has resulted in the creation of a discourse of trust. Inherent faith is placed in coach mentors to 'do the right thing', with the embodiment of the objective structures, interests, and logic of the SGB's field justifying the lack of training opportunities available within the workplace (Bourdieu, 1984; 1990).

> There is a lot of trust placed in the mentors from the SGB point of view I believe.
> There is a lot of trust for the mentors to be doing the right thing… I think mentors
> by their own nature, have the same philosophy and beliefs that underpins the
> SGB's. You know their approach is our approach. It is their approach type of
> thing, we all naturally sing off the same hymn sheet (Jason, CCM)

> Well, I think they've obviously set out certain guidelines but they trust us as well.
> I think there are guidelines in like everything else that you need to have and that…
> you're representing the SGB at the end of the day (Simon, CCM)

The assumption here rests on the notion that embodying a set of 'traits' or dispositions is considered enough to effectively mentor a learning mentee coach, without the need for extensive formalised preparation. Achinstein and Athanses (2006, p. 14) have argued that "each context promotes certain norms, practices, and expectations that inform mentors' work". Bourdieu utilises the term doxa to explain how fields can develop "a set of shared

opinions and unquestioned beliefs that bind participants together" (Wacquant, 2008, p.

70). In this instance, doxa can refer to the promoted ways of perceiving what 'good

learning' for sports coach mentors entails, which then becomes accepted uncritically by

those within that culture (Bourdieu, 1977). The doxa or logic of practice within a field

can be internalised and embodied by individuals passing through it, shaping their thoughts

and subsequent actions (Grenfell, 2007). Accepting the legitimacy of a field's doxa

implies 'a feel for the game', as such agents are socialised into unquestioned norms and

beliefs which act as a form of symbolic power, becoming embodied and self-evident in

practice (Bourdieu, 1990). Regional mentors placed in dominant positions within the

SGB field through their accumulation of capital promote the idea that learning through

practical mentoring experience in the workplace is necessary, potentially devaluing the

need for, and justifying the limited amount of, formal mentor training. Through being

positioned within SGB's social field and embodying the taken for granted doxa (learning

from experience valorised), some mentors' experienced illusio. Bourdieu uses this term

to explain when an individual's embodied dispositions align to the field's logic and doxic

order, resulting in an unquestioned acceptance of beliefs and practices (Bourdieu, 1998).

I think there's going to be an element of just learning on the job and I've just

got to embrace that and get on with that (Karl, NCM)

When I first started out with the mentoring it was sort of, like, find your own

feet, really. So, I don't know if for some of the newer guys, it might be quite

hard to know what to do to start with. And making mistakes maybe and

finding better ways to do things… it's not a taught kind of thing. Within the first

couple of years it's a bit trial and error really, self-reflecting as well. You learn

1   some of the ideas you should be doing. You become consciously incompetent

2   (Henry, CCM)

3

4   I think, I maybe felt quite unprepared going out there. And it's kind of since I've

5   been out there it's been learning the hard way if you like… of going out there and

6   making mistakes which obviously we all need to do anyway (Justin, NCM).

7

8   Bourdieu (1991) suggests those in dominant positions attempt to protect the 'orthodoxy',

9   or cultural legitimacy of the field against new entrants and challenges who advocate

10   'heresy' (Swartz, 1997). Referring to the analogy of social field's as a 'game', the

11   dialectical relationship between orthodoxy and heresy highlights that players (mentors)

12   accept that the 'game' and doxa of the field is worth playing for. Thus the term illusio

13   elucidates how all players are complicit with the rules of the game, with their subsequent

14   behaviours reflecting their personal interests and aims in striving for success (Bourdieu,

15   1991, Swartz, 1997). Mentors learning through experience might result in idiosyncratic

16   approaches towards mentoring practice developing, based on 'folk pedagogies' and

17   uncritically embodied dispositions which will have implications for developing mentee

18   coaches (Bruner, 1999). The development of coach mentors contributes to the

19   reproduction of the field's doxa, where learning from experience is perceived as a cultural

20   norm and enacted through a discourse of trust. Good mentors are assumed to be those

21   who embody the cultural capital needed to succeed within the SGB field. Mentor learning

22   through experience is valorised and justifies the absence of regular and in depth training

23   opportunities within the workplace.

24

25   **Responsibility for learning and the role of capital**

An individual's developed habitus represents their embodied life history, orientating their engagement with opportunities for learning within the workplace (Bourdieu, 1990; Hodkinson et al., 2004). As Carr et al. (2010, p. 15) have proposed, dispositions "are the source of the recognition (or misrecognition) of learning opportunities and provide strategy and motivation for the inevitable improvisation that is learning". Subsequently, coach mentors employed by the SGB engaged with the learning affordances provided by the workplace in variable ways, with some mentors' dispositions guiding them towards taking responsibility for their own learning and development.

I find it strange when mentors are going around saying "I'm not getting the support that I need" Do you see what I mean? No, I would find it strange if they were saying "I don't have the information, I haven't had the opportunity to learn something or the information that I'm not being given". It's our responsibility to find that information (Damien, CCM).

I still think I've got a lot to learn. Every day whilst I'm in that environment I think I am learning. Every time I'm around other mentors, everyone has a different approach and you've always got things to learn. I feel competent at what I'm doing. I feel that I've taken on and I've learned a lot (Sidney, CCM).

Overlooking the influence of individuals' dispositions is problematic, as such a perspective helps to enhance our understanding of what learners perceive as relevant or not within similar situations, based upon their prior experiences and social position within fields of practice (Griffiths & Armour, 2013; Hodkinson et al., 2004). It would appear that both Damien and Sidney possess a set of learning dispositions which have been

grouped under the term 'intentionality'; these dispositions include being inquisitive, whilst also having an awareness of the available support opportunities (Griffiths & Armour, 2013). 'Intentionality' learning dispositions as part of these mentors' horizons for learning enabled them to see what learning opportunities were available within the workplace, whilst guiding them towards taking 'responsibility' for their engagement with them (Hodkinson et al., 2004). Furthermore, some coach mentors embodied another set of learning dispositions entitled 'reciprocity'; described by Griffiths and Armour (2013, p. 684) as "a readiness to engage with others and to ask questions". Due to the content of the SGB's mentor training provision often being rejected, mentors such as Justin placed increased value on the importance of networking with others in the workplace to obtain additional role clarity.

Initially I thought, as we'd had formal training, we'd get like updates and things sent through to us such as 'this is how you do this, this is how you do that'… I guess I've come to realise that when you're out there doing it no one can really give you that set of standards, you've got to kind of find it for yourself with who you're working with. And what I also realised is… I recognised early on that the team we have here is really strong. We've got really experienced people there, and I knew that I can learn from them but I realised I've got to go and ask them. I've really got to work hard to get them to support me, rather than just thinking it would come anyway (Justin, NCM).

Individuals and the social structures within workplace settings are integrated. Therefore, coach mentors to some extent are influenced by the cultural norms and doxa which operates within that environment. Nevertheless, it has been proposed that fields can also

be sites of resistance as well as reproduction, highlighting the role of agency and the degree of freedom individuals possess when electing to engage with opportunities for learning (Swartz, 1997). It has been suggested by Hodkinson and colleagues (2008, p. 41) that learning cultures are influenced by "the position, habitus and capitals of the individuals, in interaction with each other in their horizons for learning, as part of a field of relationships". Although coach mentors were employed for embodying the requisite cultural capital, some mentors still felt unprepared for their role and wanted further knowledge, valuing the opportunity to collaborate with other mentors. Despite the need for collaboration being emphasised by mentors, the learning culture seemingly prevented this from occurring.

We need to collaborate more, that's one of the things that the regionals have said, to collaborate more and share more and I totally agree with that… we are trying to get better… with limited success (Henry, CCM).

That's been interesting as well because there's been others I've not have any interaction with because they just, they've been doing their own thing. So, we have group interaction but no one-to-one stuff (Karl, NCM).

In terms of me asking people for support, I haven't really done that… it just feels like I've not got any issues. I'm just getting on with the job. I don't know if that's right or wrong, you know? For example there could be a mentor who's been doing it for five years and says "I think you should be doing this, this, and this". But from my point of view, as an individual, I think I'm doing all right with it (Mervin, NCM).

1

Bourdieu's concept of capital could help to explain why collaborative learning did not

function as efficiently as desired by mentors. Within fields, those in possession of the

requisite capital govern what knowledge is perceived as legitimate, with capital and the

positions taken by individuals as a result of their possession (or not) acting as a form of

social distinction. Atkinson (2016, p. 32) expands upon this notion when articulating

"those possessing greater quantities of capital within their respective fields… wield

disproportionate power to distribute their goods or definitions of reality in tune with their

interests and to impose them as legitimate". A mentor's dispositions will orientate their

perceptions of what they believe 'good' learning entails (Bourdieu, 1998). Thus, if a

mentor believes they cannot 'learn' or acquire knowledge from individuals who they feel

hold less capital than themselves within the field, participation in collaborative learning

practices is unlikely to occur.

To try and encourage greater collaboration, the SGB 'promoted' a select group of

coach mentors to the position of 'support mentor'. Alongside their role of facilitating

coach learning, support mentors were tasked with overseeing a cluster of coach mentors

to offer them guidance if their RMO was not available. Yet, in a similar vein to the limited

collaboration between mentors, support mentors were also neglected and seemingly not

utilised regularly by the mentors. In the case of Archie, he suggests his assigned support

mentor does not possess the same coaching/mentoring experience (embodied cultural

capital) and coaching qualifications (institutionalised cultural capital) within the field as

himself (Bourdieu, 1986), ultimately impacting upon his engagement with this learning

opportunity.

I've tried to stay away from the group… I've tried to stay away from that sort of dialogue with the other mentors… But it's one of those where the support mentor hasn't got as much experience as me and I haven't used the support because the person who's doing it is the one in the coach mentor meetings that thinks they know everything and their way is right… I wouldn't go to the support mentor, I would go straight to the regional mentor (Archie, NCM).

Within the field of the SGB, Archie feels his regional mentor holds more capital than his assigned support mentor. Consequently, Archie's dispositions guide him towards perceiving the chance to discuss ideas with his regional mentor as a meaningful learning opportunity. In contrast, such dispositions influence Archie's horizons for learning; meaning he cannot 'see' the value in interacting with his support mentor, who he feels is positioned below him in the SGB field (Hodkinson et al., 2008). It would therefore seem that within workplaces, the dispositions of workers are crucial in the facilitation (or not) of expansive learning cultures. Moreover, the role of capital is significant in determining what is valued and desirable within fields, influencing whether available learning opportunities are utilised.

Concluding thoughts and practical implications

The aim of this research was to enhance our understanding of the workplace learning of sports coach mentors. Significantly, through adopting the social theory of Pierre Bourdieu and its recent utilisation within the workplace learning literature, this research has highlighted how a mentor's developed dispositions will structure their participation with the learning opportunities afforded to them within workplace settings. An individual's habitus and embodied capital will influence how they participate and interact with mentor

1 training, whilst affecting their level of collaboration and engagement with other

2 employees. Perhaps more pertinently, this research has emphasised how the social fields

3 of SGBs are crucial in the production and promotion of accepted norms and beliefs within

4 workplaces, all of which might contribute to the uncritical reproduction of learning

5 practices and taken-for-granted 'ways of being'.

6 The preparation of sports coach mentors is at present an under researched area;

7 however, we are aware that recruitment and training procedures are irregular and rarely

8 extend beyond one-off introductory workshops (Griffiths, 2015). Thus, having a more

9 'complete picture' of why mentors behave the way they do through exploring the

10 influences on their learning and development is beneficial, and may assist in the

11 development of more contextualised and meaningful learning opportunities in the

12 workplace. Coach mentors have a critical role in the development of sports coaches,

13 through co-constructing new knowledge, exchanging ideas, and encouraging the use of

14 reflective practice. Nonetheless, a mentor's ability to develop a coach will be constrained

15 by their own embodied habitus, dispositions, and capital. The interaction of these

16 elements within workplace learning cultures and social fields needs to be understood

17 more profoundly, as they will considerably influence a mentor's practice and

18 subsequently their mentee coach's development. This point is emphasised by Biesta et al.

19 (2011, p. 92) when they suggest "not only does position directly enable and constrain

20 learning through the nature of learning cultures and the resources available to each person

21 within the learning culture, but it also influences the habitus, which itself enables and

22 constrains learning". It is, therefore, suggested that coach mentor training adopts a

23 transformative approach, which takes into account prior experience and embodied

24 dispositions, alongside a critical exploration into what knowledge is viewed as

25 'legitimate' within SGB fields. If mentors' dispositions and prior learning experiences

are taken into consideration, SGBs administering formalised mentoring provision might begin to facilitate mentors' motivations and beliefs towards work and learning. Dispositions can be developed and changed, hence through positioning learning as a process of 'becoming' it is anticipated transformative mentor education can assist in the re-construction of dispositions, to help enhance mentors' awareness and willingness to engage with learning opportunities available to them (Hager & Hodkinson, 2009). Within fields, those in dominant positions are granted symbolic power to influence what knowledge is viewed as legitimate. Consequently, individuals considered to possess such symbolic capital (in this research, regional mentors) have the ability to transform the dispositions of coach mentors and encourage the formation of expansive learning cultures. With supported learning opportunities and collaborative relationships between colleagues increased, it is hoped more desirable cultural norms, practices, and activities are generated which may help to increase workplace affordances (Fuller & Unwin, 2004).

The need for an adapted and critically transformative approach towards mentor education was recognised within this research, with mentors showing a desire for specific support mechanisms to be implemented, due to acknowledging the idiosyncrasies of mentors' dispositions, positions, and prior experiences within their workplace.

I think it depends what background you come from. With the mentor scheme, they've got a real diversity of backgrounds that they've brought into the scheme and different experience levels and ability levels. Different people may need different types of training (Simon, CCM).

We have our individual needs. Perhaps that is down to the regionals to work with someone on a one-to-one basis through the season to try and put us in the right

1   direction, put us with other mentors that might be able to fill a gap (Damien,

2   CCM).

3

4   Monitoring the learning and development of coach mentors is vital if we wish for these

5   individuals to effectively facilitate the progression of the mentee coaches under their

6   tenure. In sum, learning to mentor is a social and embodied process, influenced and

7   continuously being re-constructed overtime by agentic (habitus, capital) and structural

8   (field, learning cultures) components, where an individual is "constantly learning through

9   becoming, and becoming through learning" (Hodkinson et al., 2008, p. 41).

Notes

1. The UK Coaching Certificate (UKCC) is a framework that supports the development, endorsement, and improvement of SGB delivered coach education.

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