Coach Developers and reflective practice: Evaluating exercises, mechanisms, and challenges in facilitating reflection within novice coach education

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Abstract

Developing coaches as reflective practitioners is a key tenet of coach education frameworks, with coach developers playing a significant role in facilitating reflection. Consequently, the aim of this research was to explore the exercises, mechanisms, and challenges coach developers utilise and face when facilitating reflective practice within formal coach education. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six active coach developers within an Irish sport governing body (SGB), with transcripts subject to a *reflexive* thematic analysis process. Findings indicated that while coach developers' understanding and conceptualisation of reflective practice varied, they each attempted to facilitate reflection through similar pedagogical practices. Specifically, coach developers' roles included adapting sessions to utilise learning opportunities, addressing the needs of coaches struggling with reflective practice mechanisms, and active engagement through prompts and feedback. While the relationship between the coach developer and coach was deemed significant in facilitating reflection, time constraints were highlighted as a major challenge when seeking to enable meaningful reflection. Furthermore, learners' motivations for, and attitudes towards, coach education influenced their engagement in reflective discussions. This research adds to the growing body of literature on coach developers by specifically highlighting the practical demands they face in facilitating reflective practice.

Key words: *reflection, coach learning, coaching curriculum, novice coaches, tutor, experiential learning.*

Introduction

Coach education programmes can be shaped by their method(s) of delivery just as much as their underpinning pedagogical assumptions, particularly regarding the role of reflection. Corresponding literature shows the importance of placing coaches (i.e., learners) at the centre of the educational process (Carson & Walsh, 2019; Cassidy et al., 2006; Gordon, 2017; Stoszkowski & Collins, 2017; Voldby & Klein-Dossing, 2020) to create nurturing learning contexts (Trudel et al., 2013), with sport governing bodies (SGBs) considered knowledge brokers (Willem et al., 2019). Coach education encapsulates formal, informal, and non-formal learning contexts. Formal learning contexts typically refer to coach certification programmes, designed and delivered in accordance with SGBs' standardised curricula (Nelson et al., 2006). Within formal coach education, sharing experiences and purposeful interactions (i.e., social learning) may encourage reflective practice, enabling coaches to acquire meaningful and practical insights from experiences (Cushion, 2011), while uncovering previous unknowns, contradictions, and inadequacies in their practice. As a method to develop reflection, social learning must be purposeful and supported, rather than controlled (Willem et al., 2019), with coach developers (CDs hereafter) playing a pivotal role in facilitating learning activities which encourage reflection (Marshall et al., 2022; Stodter et al., 2021).

Reflection has become embedded within formal coach education, with research advocating its inclusion within coach development (Cassidy et al., 2016; Gilbert & Trudel, 2005; Jones et al., 2012). Reflective practice is considered a process of experimentation, requiring an acceptance that there are uncontrollable elements within sport coaching, where aiming for certainty can hinder critical discussion (Cassidy et al., 2016). It is argued that reflection aids coaches' professional growth, allowing them to maximise athlete development opportunities (Gilbert & Trudel, 2005). However, developing reflective skills is not simplistic, and CDs cannot assume that competency in reflection runs parallel to coaching experience (Knowles et al., 2001; Stodter & Minto, 2019), with supportive environments needed to

encourage open enquiry to enrich knowledge and perspectives towards reflection (Marshall et al., 2022).

Understanding how reflective practice theory manifests and evolves within coaching is pivotal to incorporating and facilitating it within coach education. As social learning is a desired component of coach education, it is no surprise that some of the mechanisms which enable reflective practice are influenced by this. Coaches sharing their experiences, combined with application of a theoretical framework to examine the experience(s), is characteristic of this method (Jones et al., 2012), with CDs creating or enhancing learning experiences as part of a scaffolding approach (Stodter et al., 2021; Stoszkowski & Collins, 2014). Similarly, just as CDs must understand the social and cultural influences on learning, coaches must be aware of social processes acting upon their practice and critically reflect upon expectations on them (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2014).

While there is considerable research on coach learning and coach education programme structure (e.g., Cassidy et al., 2006; Jones et al., 2012), limited examination of CDs' roles, perspectives, and challenges exists (Dohme et al., 2019). 'Coach developer' is often used as an umbrella term encompassing the roles of a mentor, tutor, and coach educator (ICCE, 2014; Stodter & Cushion, 2019), who support the learning and development of coach learners (Callary & Gearity, 2020; ICCE, 2014). However, there are concerns affecting CDs' tasks that shed light on the complexity of their role. For example, the role involves recognition of learner needs, but also acknowledgement that a solution in one context does not transfer unproblematically to another (Cushion et al., 2019). Similarly, to remove sole responsibility for programme success from CDs, and avoid isolating them, a systems-thinking approach to coach education programmes with defined roles, responsibilities, and realistic course design is recommended (Culver et al., 2019).

Research to date provides a generalised insight into the dynamics of CDs' tasks. They are considered passionate about their practice and vital to all levels of learning, establishing them as facilitators of a blended-learning approach (ICCE, 2014). It is important that CDs understand learning design, particularly where learning is facilitated through traditional classroom and practical mechanisms (McQuade & Nash, 2015; Dempsey et al., 2021). To achieve this, CDs must be cognisant of learners, learning processes, and lifelong learning as there are multiple skills and behaviours required (Abraham et al., 2013). These skills and behaviours, as outlined by Abraham et al. (2013), are embedded in both thoughtful and intuitive modes, including understanding context, adult-learning principles, coaching curriculum, and understanding of self. CDs are deemed agents of change but can be influenced by social and cultural factors. Indeed, based on experiences and beliefs, socially constructed legitimating principles can dictate, and possibly inhibit, practice (Cushion et al., 2019; Downham & Cushion, 2020; Stodter et al., 2021). To avoid unintended outcomes, CDs must reflect critically on how they present themselves in the learning environment and appreciate the emotional and micro-political nature of their work (Allanson, et al., 2021). CDs who display attributes associated with reflection can have a positive impact on their learners (Gordon, 2017), as they function as a "*condition* for reflective practice" (Stodter et al., 2021, p. 12), with their tasks influencing how reflection is perceived and enacted (Marshall et al., 2022).

The reliance on CDs for successful delivery of coach education and developing coaches as reflective practitioners as part of these programmes has been highlighted (Culver et. al., 2019). However, the literature also presents reflection as a benign and taken-for-granted concept within coach education research, lacking critical depth and assuming coach empowerment (Cushion, 2018; Downham & Cushion, 2020). While frequently cited as a positive mechanism for coach development (Carson & Walsh, 2019), reflective practice has potential to be narrow and restrictive (Cushion, 2018; Dixon et al., 2013; Downham & Cushion,

2020). Problematically, CDs are expected to facilitate coach reflection, yet it is unknown what experience, or even understanding of, reflection is needed to successfully perform this role (Cushion et al., 2019), alongside the aims and objectives of reflection within coach education. Moreover, there is a need to review the exercises and mechanisms used to facilitate reflective practice throughout a coach education framework (Marshall et al., 2022), while acquiring CDs' perspectives to understand the challenges and difficulties they face in attempting to implement such practices (Gordon, 2017). This may help to clarify CDs' interactions with coaches when attempting to enhance the development of reflective practice (Stodter et al., 2021). Consequently, the aim of this research is to explore CDs' perspectives on the practical mechanisms utilised to facilitate reflective practice, identify associated challenges and pre-requisite expertise a CD may require within their role. In doing so, it is hoped CD practice regarding reflective practice can be conceptualised and understood further, to enhance future pedagogies.

Methodology

Context

The Irish SGB in question unveiled a new coach education framework in 2018. Moving from a four-stage pathway (i.e., Levels 1-4) to a five-stage framework, an introductory course was initiated (pre-Level 1) for novice coaches. The introductory course was aimed at coaches involved in coaching children aged 5-11 years old but was not a prerequisite for enrolling on a Level 1 course. Content on the Level 1 course was refined and included key concepts of coaching but less technical, sport-specific information. While the introductory and Level 1 courses were run nationally by the provincial bodies, Levels 2-4 remained aligned to and accredited by the SGB's UK counterpart. The redesigned course structure is intended to compliment the SGB's desired coaching principles, encouraging coaches to consistently reflect on their practice.

During introductory and Level 1 courses, reflection takes place via two mechanisms: group discussions, and written reflections in coaches' workbooks. There is a brief module (15 minutes) to introduce reflective practice on Level 1 courses. Each coach, assigned to mini groups, has the opportunity to deliver a simulated coaching scenario. Subsequent group discussions take place to engage the coaches in reflection (see Marshall et al., 2022). Written reflection is encouraged throughout each course where reflective practice is part of the syllabus. However, reflection is not incorporated into the assessment criteria until a coach reaches Level 2 of the framework.

Research Design

Ontologically, an interpretivist position was employed to facilitate the exploration of experiences to provide insights into the social complexities of phenomena at the heart of the research (Sparkes & Smith, 2014), where reality is socially constructed through language, consciousness, instruments, and shared meanings (Myers, 2008). The interpretivist paradigm assumes a subjectivist epistemological position, where knowledge is formed by uncovering patterns and perceptions, which can be investigated through qualitative methods of data collection (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

Participants and sampling

Following initial communication via the SGB, participants were contacted and expressed their interest in participating in the research. Criterion-based sampling (Patton, 2015) was utilised to recruit participants over 18, actively delivering courses, and currently accredited by the SGB to deliver courses. Six participants (four male, two female) participated in the research, with an average of fifteen years coaching experience and six years CD experience between them. All participants had progressed to minimum Level 2 within the framework and were all involved in delivering both introductory and Level 1 courses. Brief biographies of participants (identified by pseudonyms and age) below:

Brendan (41): Fifteen years coaching experience and ten years as a CD. Experience in coaching at an elite level of the sport. On coach education, Brendan discussed adopting a learner-centred approach: “that is one of the first questions you are trying to find out… why are people in the room?”.

Thomas (55): Seven years coaching experience and two years as a CD. Long-term athletic career at an elite level, has a certificate in teaching. Combining pedagogical knowledge and sporting experience, Thomas concluded that “it takes time to soak that information [course content] … before you get the opportunity to put that learning into practice”.

Robyn (39): Twenty years coaching experience and one year as a CD. Long-term career playing at an elite level. Robyn identified a shift in the focus of coach education which is now “more about player-centred coaching and making sure the player is the most important thing and are being catered to”.

Ian (48): Twenty-five years coaching experience and fifteen years as a CD. Level-3 qualified coach and background in teaching. Ian described ‘nurturing’ within coach education: “it’s quite a supportive network. You want to see people make the most of the opportunities and everybody feels that they’ve been catered and cared for”.

Grace (34): Thirteen years coaching experience and seven years as a CD. Currently working within the sport and has a teaching degree. On the recently revised coach education programmes, Grace concluded: “It reinforces that these new courses have been good because of the chance to peer-coach a lot more than the older-courses”.

Oisín (25): Six years coaching experience and two years in CD role. Previous experience in development role within the sport and currently obtaining a postgraduate teaching degree. On the coach education revisions, Oisín suggested "the courses are always evolving themselves as coaching moves forward through research".

Data collection

Ethical approval was granted by the lead author's affiliation. From the areas identified for further exploration within the literature review, an interview guide was developed and shared with participants in advance of the data collection. Also provided was a project information sheet, which detailed confidentiality and data storage policies. Initial communication with participants was via email and each participant signed an informed consent form. A pilot interview was carried out with a CD in the sport, which helped to generate some contextual knowledge and refine the interview guide. Semi-structured interviews lasting between 45-60 minutes (mean = 52 minutes) were conducted with each participant via videoconference. Videoconferencing (Zoom) was utilised due the geographic-dispersal of participants (Smith & Sparkes, 2016) and COVID-19 restrictions during April and May 2020. Videoconferencing allowed for greater flexibility in interview scheduling and no additional limitations in recording data compared to face-to-face interviews (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Semi-structured interviews examined participants' attitudes, beliefs, and values (Purdy, 2014) towards reflective practice mechanisms and challenges in coach education. Interviews covered areas including experience and background, understanding of reflective practice, mechanisms to facilitate reflection, challenges to reflective practice and evaluation of mechanisms. All interviews were recorded via Zoom and transcribed verbatim by the lead author. Each participant was provided with a pseudonym and all audio recordings and transcripts were password-protected and stored by the lead author. A key code was created to de-identify participants and their pseudonyms were

used for the recordings and transcripts. All identifiable characteristics was removed from the data provided as part of the study results.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was adopted as part of an inductive approach to conceptualise the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As an accessible and applicable method of analysis in qualitative research, thematic analysis enables the investigation of more nuanced and complex areas through identification of patterns and interpretation of meanings (Braun et al., 2016). Following a process of familiarisation with the data, each transcript underwent an initial coding phase to establish contextual information and illuminate the discourse around participants' perspectives on reflective practice. All first-round codes and quotes were amalgamated in a spreadsheet and a second round of coding was conducted to determine specific characteristics of the CD role in this process. In line with Braun and Clarke's (2020) *reflexive* thematic analysis framework, codes were interpreted organically with initial themes generated before being developed further, refined, and named in a recursive manner (see Table 1). Throughout the data analysis process, the second author acted as a critical friend to provide feedback, review interpretation of findings, and support trustworthiness in the research process (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Following the *reflexive* process, three core themes were developed: (1) CDs' understanding of reflective practice; (2) Facilitating reflective practice; and (3) Challenges engaging coaches in reflection. These themes are presented in the results section below.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Results

Understanding of reflective practice

All six CDs unanimously conceptualised reflection as a positive and continuous process within coaching practice, assuming that engagement with reflective practice would ultimately enhance athlete development.

> …coaches will reflect on not just how they have delivered a session but what the content was and whether it was appropriate for the group. (Brendan)

> …now players can sit with coaches and really analyse and critique… those methods of reflective practice give the coach a better understanding of themselves and ultimately, they can provide a better service and product. (Thomas)

CDs valued interaction between coaches, such as the "constant evaluation and reflection" (Robyn) on what is happening in the coaching environment and "having an outside point-of-view" (Grace) for objective feedback. However, there was a clear differentiation in how the CDs defined and perceived reflective practice characteristics. Each participant had attributed reflective practice to enhancing practical skills (i.e., delivering coaching sessions) and the application of sport-specific technical knowledge. Despite this, for some participants, reflective practice was considered a solution-focused activity.

> ... if they [learners] coach in a way that helps players reflect then, within that one session, they could have players realising things are too easy and knowing how to make it harder. (Brendan)

> The main thing is getting them [learners] to think before and after about what they are doing and what they are going to do… asking them, 'what happened in the game, what do we need to work on?' (Robyn)

Alternatively, other participants described reflective practice as a structured learning activity, influenced by existing reflective practice models. The integration of theory legitimised the use of reflection, formalised the activity, and enabled a level of criticality to be applied to the learning process.

> There are different mechanisms of reflection that we use in our assessments [teaching practice]. We're told, 'use Brookfield', look through different lenses, a student, a teacher, and a supervisor. In Level 2, it's a lot of, 'what do you think went well? How

> did this work?'… whereas now, I think that all these different concepts and theories of reflection allow me to see things through different lenses. (Oisín)

> In my view, we [CDs] do it anecdotally and informally. It looks a lot like a jigsaw but, without being able to make the reference to theory, it does not help put the jigsaw together. Schön's reflective practice… gives the coach a better understanding of themselves and ultimately, they can provide a better service (Thomas)

Participants attributing models and theory to enhancing reflective practice had all engaged in reflection outside of sport (e.g., teaching qualifications or professional practice). Thus, several participants demonstrated their awareness of reflective practice's existing presence in other industries and its relatively recent introduction into coach education.

Facilitating reflective practice

Adherence to the SGB's curriculum content regarding reflective practice exercises was consistent. While reflection occurs via group discussions and written reflection, the module introducing reflective practice does not incorporate theoretical frameworks or models. Post-simulation group discussions provide coaches with an immediate opportunity to reflect on the activity and generate feedback from peers. The CDs asserted that their primary aim during these exercises is to facilitate reflection through guidance and probing questions. However, the approach to these exercises appeared to be task-oriented and did not allow for in-depth reflection.

> It's [reflective exercise] on their overall delivery, tactically, technically, mentally, physically. How was it delivered? Reflection is incorporated in it all but not explicit, reflective learning. It is touched on and talked about…'so what would you do differently in your next session? Well, I might turn up 10 mins earlier, I might have a schedule timetable or watch my time more'. (Thomas)

> So, if they're doing a little demo session with their peers in a group, doing a particular technique and coaching as a coach to the players as such, and there would be a built-in thing around reflecting on how you did. (Grace)

As most courses will be run over 1-2 days, participants highlighted how the limited timeframe for coaches to adopt the desired reflection has implications for future practice. The intended outcome ensures coaches are not simply replicating what they observed during courses, but "they are thinking about how they can do that for themselves" (Brendan). In doing so, the CDs considered themselves responsible for aiding coaches to "administer a structure" (Ian) and acknowledged the "willingness to engage and give it a go" (Oisín) amongst the majority of course cohorts. To engage coaches, often for the first time, during reflective exercises and counteract discomfort or lack of familiarity, the importance of building rapport was outlined.

> We have got to put people at ease that you learn from failure… It is a secure environment to fail, we are here to support you and to offer advice … You just need to get to know your coaches on a course. (Ian)

> We would try not to be too hands-on in a judgemental kind of role because you do find that sometimes it's better… it depends on the participants but just reflecting within their peer group can be a little bit less daunting for them in some senses… it would be very much starting the conversation off with asking how do they think it went. (Grace)

Another key trait was CDs' observations of the reflective practice exercises and identification of coaches struggling to engage. They are tasked with being able to "pick up very quickly on body language" (Oisín) and utilised opportunities to seek "reflections from those people when they were in the smaller groups" (Robyn) through "maybe a little direct question here or there" (Ian). The coaches' learning needs (e.g., limited coaching experience or sport-specific knowledge) can dictate the exercises' structure. As such, detection of these issues and appropriate intervention was expected within the CD role.

Challenges engaging coaches in reflection

Challenges that can hinder reflection were time and motivations for enrolling in coach education. While not all participants felt this impacted curriculum structure, there was a consensus that time constraints can result in superficial reflection. The exercises provide "a good base, an insight into reflective practice" (Oisín), while time is needed for coaches to "focus on the particular stage of their coaching journey" (Ian). Both internal and external factors impeding time for reflection were discussed.

> The big issue is the time commodity. What you find is that you rush from one session, maybe at a school, you go then on to a club session… you're holding down a full-time job as well, so the time is one of the inhibitors. (Thomas)

> The challenge… is when you have participants where you need to spend more time on other parts of the course. Sometimes you will end up focussing a lot more on the 'what to coach' skills. Then you would end up shortening some things down. (Grace)

Coaches' expectations from the courses impacted their engagement in reflective exercises. Coaches protecting their reputation manifested in a perceived lack of honesty and disclosure during reflection.

> Sometimes you can see that they don't want to feel like they don't know what they are talking about. The sense of honesty can differ… that is probably a challenge in itself. (Grace)

> They have to be into coaching for the right reasons as well. If coaches know why they are doing it and ask certain questions, then it makes it easier for the players… it makes it easier to stay involved because you are there for a reason (Brendan).

Similarly, a lack of buy-in and acceptance that reflective practice is a desired part of the coaches' skillset was another inhibiting factor to engaging in reflection beyond the formal educational environment.

> Your reflective coach will always be looking to improve themselves but what we suffer from a little bit at times is someone who goes, 'right, level 2 done, that's it. I don't need to learn anything else'. (Oisín).

> Lack of focus on the benefit it can bring is another inhibitor. The coach leading your programme… if that is a traditional coach, very much tutor-led… those are the areas that generally would inhibit the ability to do that. (Thomas)

There was an expectation that younger coaches (aged 16-18) can encounter difficulties engaging in reflection due to discomfort with it and misinterpretation of the course and coaching role. This resulted in a limited dialogue from these coaches during discussions:

> The younger the participant is, the less likely they are going to buy into it… they just want to learn the absolute basics of coaching a 6/7-year-old. (Grace)

> They are quite thrown by having to coach in front of a group of peers older than them, so they find it intimidating. It is quite challenging for someone in a new environment to process what's happened (Ian)

Understanding the limits of formal coach education, and the role for learning development within informal and non-formal settings were also considered as challenges which restrict the capacity for reflection to flourish.

Discussion

The aim of this research to explore CDs' perspectives on the practical mechanisms utilised to facilitate reflective practice, while identifying challenges and pre-requisite expertise a CD may require within their role. Results illustrate differentiation in participants' understanding of reflective practice, as well as the demands of facilitating reflection within formal coach

education. Participants' rapport with coaches and awareness of the related challenges were key factors in initiating reflection. Firstly, the evolving relationship between reflective practice and coaching is exemplified in this SGB's recently revised coach education framework. The participants embodied their SGB's intended learner-centred approach in recognising the importance of the learning environment and their role in facilitating learning. Similarly, reflective practice was deemed an essential part of coaching practice and its inclusion in formal coach education was unquestioned (Cushion, 2018). Engagement in reflective practice was valued to enhance coaches' development which, ultimately, would enrich athlete learning (Gilbert & Trudel, 2005). Appreciation of reflective practice as part of a CD's ongoing learning was demonstrated (Ciampolini et al., 2020), as was the general acknowledgement that reflective practice is a continuous process (Gordon, 2017). Capacity and competence were built by the participants' personal experiences with reflection, enabling them to refer to their accumulated knowledge when facilitating learning opportunities (Abraham et al., 2013). It was rationalised that opportunities to facilitate reflective practice would benefit a coach's development holistically, thus aligning with the SGB's pedagogical strategy. However, contrasting perceptions on the nature of reflective practice demonstrated remnants of prioritisation of professional and technical knowledge, something considered to be devalued within formal coach education (Côté & Gilbert, 2009).

Differentiation in the participants' perceived characteristics defining reflective practice was clear and, despite a consistent approach, suggested CDs were delivering content that was not completely aligned with their own views (Horgan & Daly, 2015). Those advocating for the addition of theoretical frameworks and models indicated that their qualifications and experiences outside of the sport had shaped their understanding, echoing that greater awareness of the way reflective practice understandings are adopted for coach education is needed (Cropley et al., 2010). As highlighted by Cushion et al. (2019), principles underpinning the

practice of CDs are socially constructed and a disregard for theory was a consequence of such principles. The implication is the intended learning outcomes may be negatively impacted by the limited reflective practice theory that exists in this SGB's curriculum. The solution-focused view from other participants, which reflected the task-oriented nature of the reflective practice exercises, was a superficial form of reflection that addressed technical and practical aspects of coaching. As a process of experimentation, reflective practice requires critical discussion and recognition of effective behaviours (Knowles et al., 2005; Rodrigue & Trudel, 2018). The aim for certainty and fundamental solutions is therefore a hindering factor to critical reflection (Cassidy et al., 2016), while Dixon et al. (2013) illustrate that focusing on technical problems can lead to myopic and restrictive reflection. A focus on social learning is suggested to counter this, however, it is important to consider the CD's influence on the direction of reflective discussions within social learning settings (Marshall et al., 2022; Stodter et al., 2021). Cushion's (2018) assertion that further critical analysis on the complexities of coaching and reflective practice is relevant here, particularly with variability among the CD's definitions of reflection.

Although inconsistencies in understanding are present, the mechanisms to facilitate reflective discussion appeared to be supported by the coach education literature. Incorporating simulations within a social learning environment was the genesis of dialogue and formation of reflective discussions and 'reflective conversations' (Stodter et al., 2021). The 'habits of hand', as identified by Carson and Walsh (2019), of prioritising integrated, simulated methods to develop learning within formal coach education applied to this context. Equally, knowledge sharing among coaches is highly valued (Willem et al., 2019), and the SGB's pedagogical approach demonstrates this through simulations that replicate real-life situations in coaching environments (Roberts & Ryrie, 2014). In line with the work of Campbell and colleagues' (2021), participants advocated for the practical, social learning elements of the reflective

practice mechanisms and the need for ongoing development. There is a clear intention to engage coaches during these mechanisms to produce purposeful social interactions that aim to facilitate learning (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2014), which was rationalised by the emphasis on catering to coaches' needs (e.g., encouraging novice coaches to engage in discussions) and promoting such interactions. However, the concession that the logistics of courses (e.g., time) limit exposure to critical, in-depth reflection highlights the lack of opportunities coaches have to engage in reflective discussions (Dempsey et al., 2021). Therefore, CDs considered formal coach education to be a starting point for coaches to develop reflective practice competency. Hence, these mechanisms can be considered adequate learning tools but can only offer a narrow insight into reflective practice.

CDs' awareness of such limitations and preparations to address them were identified within their role. Their style of delivery, choice of language, and assumed responsibility for initiating learning opportunities evidenced the need for self-awareness amongst CDs (Abraham et al., 2013). As noted, CDs' influence on the learning experience can be significant and this applies to both the delivery of content and interaction with coaches. The CDs were clear about the need to build rapport with coaches and not create a barrier or perpetuate a hierarchy that would have been considered counterproductive to learning. It was suggested that reflective discussion requires sensitivity, particularly in a setting where coaches are not familiar with each other and perhaps not familiar with the concept of reflection. Fundamentally, facilitating reflective practice as a structured exercise had to be balanced with a mindful understanding of the discomfort some coaches will experience when engaging in reflection. A nurturing element was, therefore, present in the CDs' role as they planned to be approachable and supportive to learners during these exercises (Dohme et al., 2019). Optimising the learning environment displayed the CDs' appreciation for the vulnerabilities of attempting to engage coaches in reflective discussion (Gilbert & Trudel, 2005; Marshall et al., 2022). While CDs sought to

create this open and sharing learning environment, an unpredictable but nevertheless demanding side effect was the need for identifying and aiding coaches struggling with the reflective practice exercises. This demand was usually met with positive outcomes but may have residual effects on the resources available to facilitate reflective practice in an already restricted learning environment.

Challenges to facilitating reflective practice were evident in both the availability of resources and in coach motivations. From a resource perspective, time available during formal coach education courses to incorporate simulations and facilitate reflective discussion is stretched (Nelson & Cushion, 2006; Nelson et al., 2013), thus, consideration is warranted for how content design can address such limitation (Horgan & Daly, 2015). The participants' insistence that time is a significant challenge further exemplifies the complexities of facilitating reflective practice compared to more didactic methods, which has been noted as a barrier in reflective practice development (Burt & Morgan, 2014). The implication is that limited time to engage coaches in reflection and meet intended learning outcomes can result in a partial, perhaps superficial, understanding of reflective practice. Realistic course design is called for (Culver et al., 2019), as coaches can only be exposed to so much information and activity during a structured course. Therefore, it suggests there may be a role for CDs in informal or non-formal coach education settings to further develop reflective practice (e.g., mentoring). Enabling these reflective discussions amongst a community of coaches with the flexibility to engage periodically may support the development of reflective practice skills. As noted by Wenger (1998), a community of practice allows the sharing of knowledge amongst members where mutual common interests underpin community membership. Utilisation of communities of practice equip the CD with tools to create or enhance the learning experience as part of a scaffolding approach (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2014). Beyond coaching, communities of practice combined with peer videoing (Hamel & Viau-Guay, 2019) and reflective practice

groups (Mills & Smith, 2015; Dawber, 2013) are utilised to facilitate critical reflection as part of a developmental, longer-term process in medical and teacher training programmes. Perhaps there is a role for communities of practice, including online formats (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2017), or reflective practice groups as mechanisms for CDs to facilitate reflection beyond formal settings.

Finally, participants indicated that coach motivations had significant importance for buy-in and honesty in reflective practice. As noted by Voldby and Klein-Dossing (2020), CDs have observed that coaches not always associate reflective practice with becoming a better coach. Non-acceptance of reflective practice as a long-term component of a coach's practice was not considered widespread in this study. However, in the cases where this was observed, the participants speculated that there would be non-compliance from those coaches and that they would not engage in reflection after the course. Participants in this research displayed a heightened degree of responsibility to interact with these coaches and facilitate a productive outcome for their future practice (Jones et al., 2012). Similarly, the efforts to encourage interaction from neophyte coaches, who misinterpreted courses to be more didactic and tutor-led, shows the benefits of CDs using learner-centred teaching strategies (Dempsey et al., 2021). Limited engagement in reflective practice appears to be borne out of unfamiliarity and difficulty interacting in peer groups with a potentially broad age range. This may well strengthen the argument for incorporating reflective practice mechanisms into coaches' continuous development.

Conclusion

Coach education research which explores the CD role and their pre-requisite knowledge for facilitating reflection is limited (Stodter et al., 2021). This study of an Irish SGB, primarily concerned with practical considerations, contributes to the literature by evaluating the reflective practice mechanisms and challenges in coach education from the perspective of the

CD. While reflection exercises were structured in line with best practice, CDs' understanding of what defined reflective practice varied. Although some CDs valued critical analysis in reflection using theoretical frameworks, others embraced it as a solution-focused activity. Due to the dynamics of power within coach education, CDs socially constructed understanding of reflection can become the dominant discourse (Cushion, 2018; Downham & Cushion, 2020). Therefore, differing perceptions of reflection among CDs may lead to inadvertent outcomes in coaches' engagement in reflective practice. The tasks facing CDs added complexity to the exercises as they sought to build rapport with coaches, identify coaches struggling to engage and work within practical and pedagogical limitations. The potential for facilitating reflective practice beyond time-constrained courses has been highlighted, so too the problems that coaches' motivations for enrolling in coach education may have on engagement with reflection. Therefore, this study builds upon and re-emphasises the challenges present in adapting reflective practice principles into formal coach education.

Future research could begin to observe CDs in their learning environment to investigate how different perspectives on reflection may influence course delivery. Similarly, exploration into coaches' experiences of reflective practice mechanisms during formalised coach education courses and their perspectives on the resources afforded to engage in reflection would prove fruitful. Caution is warranted for SGBs regarding the potential for inconsistent understanding and superficial engagement when integrating a complex learning mechanism like reflection into realistic curriculum design. Clarity on definition, process, and underpinning theory of desired reflective practice approaches is essential to promote consistency across CDs' practice.

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