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Shifting perspectives: Transitioning from coach centred to athlete centred – challenges faced by a coach and athlete

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Introduction

Thank you for taking time to read the JACC. In this issue, we have a global representation of athlete centered coaching articles for you to read. We hope that you will gain a deeper understanding about the dedication and commitment of scholars in the field of sport coaching to the dynamic discipline of athlete centered coaching. Furthermore, we hope that you will join us in this movement that is designed to make athlete's experiences more meaningful, and positive social change possible through sport. We dedicate this issue to all of the coaches in the world who are making the athlete centered coaching paradigm the paradigm of choice for them.

Summit.Edu Publishing is also pleased to announce an open access open peer reviewed Journal entitled: The Journal of Coaching Action Research Excellence <http://jcare.summit.edu/>. JCARE invites all to take part in this journal for active coaching practitioners interested in conducting action research for athlete centered coaching projects.

Shifting perspectives: Transitioning from coach centred to athlete centred – Challenges faced by a coach and an athlete

Author 1 – Dr Jenny McMahon, University of Tasmania. Author 2 - Mr Chris Zehntner, University of Tasmania

Abstract

This paper outlines the voices of a practising coach and also athlete who reveal their experiences as they transitioned from the coach centred approach to the athlete centred approach within the Australian swimming culture. Using narrative accounts, their stories of experience are presented. While the benefits that the athlete centred approach to coaching can have for both athletes and coaches have been detailed in numerous research investigations, not as much has been done in relation to challenges faced by the coach and athlete as the transition occurs from coach centred to athlete centred. Inherent challenges in the transition phase from coach centred to athlete centred are important to understand in order to assist coaches and athletes when such a transition occurs. The athlete and coach in this study revealed a number of challenges. Firstly, the extent to which dominant cultural ideologies had permeated their thinking and doing was extensive even though both of them had self-determined the transition. Other issues that arose included disciplinary power and a concern for the approach being untested in terms of competitive performance. From these findings, the authors make a number of suggestions to better support both athletes and coaches during the transition from coach to athlete centred.

Key Words: Coaching; athlete centred; transition; disciplinary power; athlete; coach

Introduction

Much has been written recently about the benefits that an athlete centred approach to coaching can have for both athletes and coaches (Kidman, 2005; Kidman & Lombardo, 2010; McMahon, 2013). These benefits range from ensuring the athlete has agency within the coaching process to enabling athlete learning and growing as a sentient being. From a coaching perspective, it enables the coach to work alongside an athlete, in a socially collaborative manner and more importantly in a humanistic way (Penney & Kidman, 2014). While some challenges have been detailed by Hadfield (2005); Norton (2005) and Smith (2005) in relation to problems that may result from the athlete centred approach once it has been implemented, not as much has been done in relation to challenges faced by the coach and athlete as they transition from coach centred to athlete centred. Inherent challenges in the transition phase from coach centred to athlete centred are important to understand in order to assist coaches and athletes when such a transition occurs. This paper outlines the voices of a practising coach and also athlete whom reveal their experiences and the challenges they faced when transitioning from the coach centred approach to the athlete centred approach within the Australian swimming culture. It is the authors' intentions to firstly highlight the impetus that caused them to transition and second the challenges they faced as they transitioned from coach to athlete centred. From these findings, suggestions for future investigations may be drawn.

The athlete centred coaching approach is far from being a simple method (Kidman & Lombardo, 2010). It promotes a sense of belonging, as well as giving athletes a role in decision making and a shared approach to learning (Kidman, 2005). The athlete centred approach is about embracing

a social constructivist approach by knowing that the athlete has a history - psychologically, cognitively and physically, and being committed not only to trying to find out what that is but also come to understand it and with that understanding, explore with the athlete how to best enable them to become self aware and independent, responsible for their own learning and performance (Penney & Kidman, 2014, p. 3).

In contrast, the coach centred approach is described by Kidman (2005) as controlling "athlete behaviour not only throughout training and competition, but also beyond the sport setting. This kind

of coach espouses all knowledge to the athletes and actually disempowers the athlete by taking total ownership” (p. 14). Further, Kidman (2005, p. 15) says that coach centred coaches “believe they are expected to win and that successful coaches are (and should be) hard-nosed and discipline orientated.”

The coach and athlete at the centre of this investigation were both involved in the Australian swimming culture. In previous research conducted by McMahon and others (McMahon, 2010; McMahon & Dinan Thompson, 2011; McMahon, Penney & Dinan Thompson, 2012), it was revealed that the Australian swimming culture was deeply entrenched with technocentric practices and coaches were typically coach centred in their approaches to coaching. Bain (1990) explains “that within such a technocentric ideology, people are viewed as human resources where attention is focused on the development of an increasingly effective and efficient means for achieving goals” (p. 29). As the technocentric ideology was widespread and deeply embedded in practices implemented by coaches and team managers at various levels, these practices were also normalised all in the name of performance. A surprising finding in this previous research was that the swimmers revealed that the technocentric practices that they were exposed to during their adolescence and while they were immersed in the Australian swimming culture were being recycled some 10-30 years later on as adults after they were no longer embedded in the culture. This reveals the extent to which these practices were deeply embodied. These findings resonate with Garrett’s (2004, p. 140) notion that our “bodies are both inscribed with and are vehicles of culture.” Hughes and Coakley (1991) discuss the often repressive systems of social control that occur in sporting cultures and how athletes are taught to uncritically accept what they are being told by their coaches. Athletes internalise these accepted norms and use them as a basis to assess themselves and others as ‘real’ athletes.

In other research conducted by Zehntner and McMahon (2013), it was revealed that within a mentee-mentor coaching relationship in the coach education pathway of Australian swimming that disciplinary techniques occurred which in turn influenced the coaching practice, personal behaviours and beliefs of the mentee coach. The Australian swimming culture and its intermediaries encouraged conformity by mentee coaches (Zehntner & McMahon, 2013). As such, it is important to recognise, particularly in relation to this paper, how deeply entrenched cultural ideologies are within the Australian swimming culture, specifically technocracy and the coach centred approach (as detailed above). Further, there are disciplinary techniques that are at play for both coaches and athletes to ensure conformity to such ideologies occurs.

The athlete and coach who feature in this research take on the dual role of researchers and participants. McMahon (writing from an athlete perspective) was a five time Australian representative who had the same coach for 20 years, having taught her to swim at age three. Her coach over this 20 year period very much adopted the coach centred approach. It was much later in McMahon's sporting career when there was an impetus to seek out an alternative approach to coaching. Inadvertently she chose a coach who utilised the athlete centred approach, as she felt this approach more conducive to her social and emotional wellbeing. This particular coach was not respected amongst other coaches, classified as 'having out there' approaches and often ostracised from the culture. Zehntner (writing from a coach perspective) is an established silver license swimming coach who has had experience coaching amateur through to elite athletes. Zehntner has been coaching for 22 years. Until recently, he utilised the coach centred approach. Both authors represent encounters within the Australian swimming culture, albeit from the perspective of one athlete and one coach. As such, it must be acknowledged that the findings of this research are confined to one swimmer and one coach who transitioned from the coach centred approach to the athlete centred approach and therefore are not representative of all swimmers or coaches who undergo this transition. Using narrative accounts, the authors (McMahon & Zehntner) present stories of experience in retrospect and also in the present day. Simplistically, narrative can be described as any written or verbal representation (Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 1993). The narratives below are made up of written stories, poems and diary extracts and have been arranged into two sections to allow ease of readership. The first section is entitled 'impetus.' This is the time when the authors first realised that they no longer felt comfortable utilising or being a part of the coach centred approach. The two stories that are included were their experiences that brought about a change, a shift in perspective that enabled them both to transition to new ways of thinking and knowing – that being the athlete centred approach. The authors felt it was important to include the impetus to change to this paper to firstly highlight their intrinsic motivation to change and the internal battles they faced. The second section is entitled 'transitioning' and represents encounters that occurred to both McMahon (athlete) and Zehntner (coach) as they transitioned from the coach centred to the athlete centred approach. Some of the narrative accounts include inner thoughts and feelings. These inner thoughts and feelings provide personal insights as athlete and coach. By including these very personal insights, the authors hope that the readers are able to resonate or even confirm a verisimilitude with their stories as they attempt to immerse themselves in new ways of being – that of the athlete centred approach.

Impetus

Jenny (athlete perspective)

I achieved a lot as a swimmer; Australian representation, gold medals and records. However, never was I given the space to have a voice; make a decision or have input into my training or my body. Throughout my time with my coach, I was always told "if you do not want to listen to me; then go somewhere else." I saw others during this time who did find the courage to speak up, only to be berated in front of the rest of the squad. I feared speaking up; I feared voicing how my body was feeling. Most of all, I feared losing my coach as I truly believed that I could not possibly achieve success without him. I also loved him like a grandfather – he was special to me. As I approached adulthood, I found myself battling with my inner thoughts and feelings on what was best for my body. I found part of myself wanting to have input to my swimming and the other part so fearful of speaking up and the possibility of losing my coach or even worse failing. Below is an extract written from this conflicting time. The poem represents the precise time, when I realised that my own voice wanted to be heard. It was like my consciousness finally recognised the need for my own athlete voice to emerge. While I silenced it for the moment, it was shortly after when I realised that things needed to change.

*I am not with you today...my swimmer body is here...but I am not.
I wonder what you have planned...my body is ready...it is YOURS!
I see the other swimmers...slim in physique...
You smile approvingly; I don't get the same treat.
My body fails MY expectations...YOURS as well...
Holding me back from Olympic representation.
Here I sit on the side of the pool...waiting...
Ready...for your master critique.
My body is yours...make it win.
I look up to you...following the rest...
I will do what you want...to be the best.
I listen to HIM now not you...one of my voices say.
The other conveys...this is not the way.
An internal battle of the voices transpires...momentarily...
Before one says...If you fail...you will pay.
Olympic representation I want...he can give me...
Not you I say as I will be history.
The struggle continues...momentarily...
Listen to me...NO I say...the coach is the only way!
I ignore YOUR voice...and ready myself for his. He has produced champions in the
past...beside me they sit...
Listening to his voice...IT is the key...
Succeed I will...without you indeed.
His way now...or fail indeed.*

I surrender to his voice – coach knows best.

Coach: “If you are serious about making that Olympic team next year, you are going to have to lose weight. You are carrying too much weight.”

Warmness is absent from his voice. It is déjà vu. I have heard these types of comments many times before from him and other coaches on the Australian swimming teams. I want to reply. I bite down on my tongue as I have learnt to silence my voice, because a reply is usually met with disapproval. I bite down hard but I cannot help myself.

Me: “What do you mean? I have been meeting with my dietician on a weekly basis for the past two months. We have made some real progress. I am losing weight each week.”

Coach: “You need to lose more weight if you are serious, you can’t swim fast with the weight that you are carrying.”

Me: “But, I have lost 6 kilograms.”

Coach: “It needs to be more; you are carrying too much weight on your bum.”

I try not to let his comments affect me. I have been swimming so strongly, so fast – my coach knows this. Even though I try to remind him, he refuses to listen. I try to focus on that rather than him feeling my bum is too fat to make the Olympic team. I start to question that my coach’s comments might not be the only way, that my voice and opinions might be valid.

(McMahon, 2010; McMahon & Dinan Thompson, 2011)

Chris (coach perspective)

As a beginner coach, I hung on the words of my instructors and mentors within the coach development pathway. I readily embraced the phrase ‘record the recordable – control the controllable’. This phrase and the accompanying rhetoric insinuated that in order to achieve a high performance edge, my athletes, their training performance and their racing performance must be tightly controlled. This pseudo-scientific approach was palatable to swimmers’ parents and created a sense of importance among the swimmer athletes as they felt the value placed on their efforts by coaching staff. I found myself embracing the pseudo-scientific approach, until one day – I had a revelation, a moment that made me reflect on my approach. I outline this moment below.

‘Did you see this in the paper?’ asked Michael, proffering the crumpled newsprint.

‘Someone wrote in to letters to the editor about how you don’t let your swimmers take toilet breaks during the session!’ His tone was slightly accusatory and I felt a little defensive.

'What, really, they wrote that?' I asked, reaching for the paper.

'Yes, apparently they overheard you saying it to someone during a session'

'Wow, listen to this' I exclaim, reading with a slight nasal tone. 'I was recently swimming laps at my local pool when I overheard the swimming coach say to his swimmers that they were not allowed a bathroom break. I am disgusted that this coach (who was dealing with some young children) would not let his swimmers take a break, is this child abuse?'

Shaking my head I quickly explain to Michael who is a past club president that I do allow toilet breaks, just never in the middle of a set. 'I expect them to commit to the session and once they start I expect they will finish what I've set. I live and breathe this stuff Michael, and I expect the same in return from my swimmers. This lady has obviously just heard a snippet and blown it out of proportion, she doesn't understand about commitment. There is no way I would let a swimmer weasel out of the hard stuff, I'm committed to them, I'll support them, besides if I let one of them go there will be a flood of full bladders. You can bet your last dollar the Kieren Perkins¹ doesn't get out mid set!'

Michael nodding throughout my response approves with a curt 'Quite right too'.

I am secretly gutted by this accusation; I don't want to come over as a pushover to my swimmers or to Michael for that matter. Who wants to be remembered as a soft coach? I secretly feel like I am pretending to be the 'hard liner' and it begins to dawn on me that I don't have the stomach for it (Zehntner and McMahon, Under Review).

This excerpt illustrates conflicted thinking surrounding athlete decision making and the degree to which I controlled the athlete training artefact. On the continuum that is my personal coaching philosophy I was yet to realise the benefits of athlete self-determination as described Kidman and Hanrahan (2010). Unfortunately this approach also created an unbalanced meritocracy that differentiated swimmers, by placing value on performance without consideration of social and emotional development (McMahon, Penney & Dinan Thompson, 2012).

Chris (coach perspective)

¹ Kieren Perkins is a dual Olympic gold medallist and only the second Australian to defend an individual Olympic championship. He overcame adversity to succeed in one of the most gruelling races on the Olympic program, the 1500 metres freestyle (Gordon, n.d.).

This camp which I have been asked to be a part of will bring together coaches to work with the National Age Squad under the tutelage of the National Age-group coach attendants. I am stoked to be here. I am determined to soak up as much information as possible and spend a lot of my time listening to the conversations of other coaches and watching their interactions with their swimmers and the head coach. This camp, we are told, is to help prepare swimmers and coaches for more advanced squads such as the National Open Squad. At various times throughout the three day camp, the coaches as a group were taken aside by the Head coach and his assistant for lectures and seminars. Towards the end of the camp, the coaches were called into a small room at the aquatic facility that we were using for training. What followed was initially a very informal talk about balancing work-life-coaching pressures and then progressed to a review of the expectations of a coach on the national open team.

Head coach: 'If you are selected as a coach on a national open team there will be a huge expectation that you will deliver quality results for your swimmers and the team. As a part of the process of learning how things happen on the national team, you will be expected to defend your sessions to the other coaches in the team.'

Ok this makes sense, I talk about what I propose to do and the other coaches offer input on the options I have, win-win.

Head coach: 'It is not a very pleasant experience; however all of us have had to go through this in our time.'

What? Suddenly I am not so sure of what is about to happen.

The Head coach steps purposefully to front row of assembled coaches and glares over our heads towards a coach at the back of the group.

Head coach (in a gruff and snappy business like tone): 'As he is one of the more experienced coaches here I have decided to look at Aaron's work. Firstly Aaron, could you tell us what you hope to achieve by doing hard fly workouts so soon after a big competition and so close our event?'

The room goes deathly quiet, I feel myself shrink into my chair, and I just know that this is not going to be nice. Aaron tries to stand but the packed nature of the room restricts him, he settles on a semi crouch at the front of his chair. Aaron (who is usually a confident and outspoken coach starts to respond with a detailed justification of the workout):

'I chose a hard fly set because I felt the swimmers in my lane needed ...'

Head coach (interrupting): 'I am not sure that you were looking at the same swimmers that I was, they were struggling physically, their technique was poor, a poor choice.

Have you spoken to their home coaches? Have you determined from the swimmers their

mental and physical state? Are you even looking at how they hold themselves in the water?’

Aaron: ‘I thought that by reintroducing hard efforts, their bodies would not turn off and begin to relax ...’

Head coach (interrupting): ‘Turn off? Are you kidding? They will shut down ... That is just ridiculous!’

Aaron: ‘I do this in my home programme after some competitions ...’

Head Coach (interrupting): ‘I don’t care about your home programme! You are dealing with other coaches’ swimmers here. These kids are obviously not coping with what you are giving them. Can you see that?’

The questions were rhetorical as each of Aaron’s responses no matter the validity was cut short or picked apart in an extremely aggressive tone by the head coach. Ten to fifteen minutes pass and the attack continues, I watched with mounting trepidation as Aaron’s answers become weaker and less convincing, his face flushed with colour and his body language at first confident now clearly shows how uncomfortable he is. If he starts on me I am going to bolt out of here ... Yeah but where does that leave you, idiot?... Better to face the music ... What is the bloody point though? This is ridiculous! If I don’t do it ‘their’ way all the time, I will be torn to shreds like Daniel. If I do I am fine. Even though I know ‘their’ way will avoid such a conflict encounter by the head coach of Australian swimming, some of their ways do not feel right.

(Zehntner & McMahon, 2013)

Transition

The below stories are presented by the athlete (McMahon) and coach (Zehntner) as they transition from the coach centred approach to the athlete centred. Both authors indicate that these stories occurred within the first six months of transitioning from coach centred to athlete centred.

Jenny (athlete perspective)

It was shortly after this encounter when I started training with another coach, a coach who adopted an athlete centred approach. Some may say that is all I needed in my swimming career to develop into all that I could have been earlier, however this time was filled with mixed emotions and mixed experiences. I was constantly second guessing myself, second guessing my voice that not so long ago battled to keep suppressed. I truly believed that with my input into my training, that I would fail.

I sit down with my new coach to discuss my goals for the season. It is just him and me. He greets me as I walk into his office. I like that I don’t have to share my goals with anybody else but him.

Coach: "Have you thought about what you think you might like to aim for this season?"

Me: "yeh, I have. I don't know if you are going to like it? I don't even know if it is achievable. It is kind of what I want to do though."

Coach: "so, let me know what it is."

Me: "I am kind of sick of pool swimming. I just don't feel like I can achieve in the pool anymore. I know I probably can physically, but I just keep talking myself out of it mentally – you know?"

Coach: "so, what would you like to do?"

Me: "I want to give open water swimming a crack. I like swimming in the ocean and I know I have done lots of background miles in the past to provide a good foundation for me."

Coach: "so, have you looked at what events are coming up? And what distance in particular that you would like to do?"

Me: "The first race is not until April, which is 3 months from now. It is 2 kilometres. I don't think that I would like to go over 2 kilometres in distance."

Coach: "I agree with you that you have a good foundation to do this. I think that doing a race in 3 months is more than achievable. What do you think you need to be doing in your training to get you ready for this?"

I am panicked by this question. Like, I do have ideas about what I should be doing. But I am the athlete, not the coach. I don't want to say my ideas, because what happens if we do them and they don't work? I don't trust myself. As thoughts race through my head, I feel pressured to respond. But, I definitely don't trust my ideas enough to say them so I just shrug.

Coach: "That's ok. Let's meet every week and if you feel like we need to be doing anything extra, let me know. We can talk about them and adjust your training. I think that your mileage is good but we could focus on doing a little more distance at 15 beats below maximum heart rate. How does that sound to you?"

Me: "Cool."

I am glad I did not have to risk trying my ideas – don't want to fail.

Jenny (athlete perspective)

I am in the middle of the main set but my coach stops me. I get frustrated. I don't want him to stop me. I want to keep going. I don't want to miss any laps.

Coach: "How is your technique feeling right now?"

Me: "I don't know to tell you the truth – I wasn't really thinking about it."

Coach: "Ok, I want you to think about it over the next 400 and let me know how you feel?"

400 metres later the coach stops me again.

Coach: "So, how do you feel?"

Me: "Ok, I guess. I am not sure what you mean?"

Coach: "We are in the final kilometre of a 3 kilometre main set. You are starting to feel fatigued. How does your technique feel? How you are feeling now is how you will be feeling in a race so I want you to be able to counteract any things that you might do with your technique as you become fatigued."

Me: "Oh ok, well, I kind of feel like I am just sludging up and down the pool."

What they hell do I actually mean by sludging...I don't even know?

Me (again): "I suppose my body roll doesn't feel that even."

Coach: "what do you think you can do to get a more even body roll?"

Me: "Well, I suppose I can breathe to on both sides?"

Coach: "Great. Work on trying to breathe bilateral when you feel like that it will help you even out your roll on both sides."

I push off and start swimming again. I do what my coach has said....and breathe bilateral. Then I think about that conversation and I start to get worried. I realise that my coach did not actually tell me that I needed to concentrate more on my body roll, it was me. I am not sure if I even need to concentrate on it. I just tried to come up with something and that was the only thing I could think of. How do I know if it is right? Why can't he just tell me if that is what I need to do or if it is something

else? I finish of the final part of the set and am not sure if my technique is actually feeling better. After I finish, my coach asks me again.

Coach: "So, how did it feel when you started breathing bilaterally?"

Me: "Good, I guess."

I get out of the pool, confused and worried. Why can't he just tell me what I am doing wrong – he is the expert after all. How will I ever achieve my goals if he doesn't tell me? Even though I purposely chose to swim with this coach because I knew he gave his swimmers more input, it is not as easy to do as I thought. I am constantly filled with self-doubt and a fear of failing.

Chris (coach perspective)

I was determined that I no longer wanted to be a 'traffic cop coach' shouting instructions and constantly being the centre of attention. I wanted my swimmers to take more responsibility for their performance in the training session. At this particular training session we gained a new member. I asked one of the senior girls to help this chap get started.

The swimmers arrived sporadically to the aquatic centre and in a general way began to complete a short stretch and strengthening routine before assembling in their bathers at the end of the pool. I talked briefly about the aim of the session and as the first swimmer dived in I walked around to the side of the pool to vie the session. At various times throughout the session I spoke with the group, but it was not until the end of the session when we did some race start practice that I interacted more closely with individual swimmers.

At the conclusion of the session as the swimmers were towelling off, I was approached by the mother of our new member, smiling I greeted her.

Point blank she asked how much the sessions were going to cost per week. I explained the breakdown according to the number of sessions a swimmer attended. She then asked;

Mother: "And what do we get for our twenty dollars a week? It looks like they (the swimmers) just do their own thing."

I was stunned and after a long pause just managed to mumble;

Me: "Well at the moment, I am the only practicing silver licence coach in this town, and we are reigning state-wide club champions." This felt very hollow as I said it and I knew it was unconvincing.

She looked at me a little dubiously and asked how much attention I would give to her son's technique. I had recovered my shock at this stage and began to explain my philosophy in relation to giving the athletes more space to make decisions, but I could feel her disapproval and at the conclusion of the conversation knew I had not explained myself to her satisfaction.

I dwelt on this mother's comments for weeks and the incident still gives me a little anxiety years later as I wrestle with her simple question. Have I done a disservice giving greater choice, could they (my swimmers) have been better had I dominated decision making and not allowed them to opt in or out of a particular session? Was this my failing as a coach or something that I could be proud of?

Chris (coach perspective)

Working with adult swimmers has many challenges, including multiple strong personalities, well established patterns of movement and strong expectations of a coach's role in their swimming experience.

Recently I was working with a small group of swimmers concentrating on body position and balance in the front crawl. Using an athlete centred approach, I was trying to focus the swimmers' attention on the feedback that they could get from their own body rather than rely on a third party (me) to tell them when it was right or wrong.

Me: "The aim of these activities", I explained "is to help us maintain a horizontal streamlined and balanced body position using our upper body and head rather than our leg kick"

As we progressed through each skill or drill, I could see one particular chap getting more and more frustrated. I sought his feedback regarding how his body felt in the water and what effect the activity was having on his leg position.

Swimmer: "I feel like a bloody idiot wallowing around like this, what's the bloody point! Can't you just tell me how to fix my freestyle?"

Stumped, I explained how it would be more advantageous if he could develop an awareness of what his body was doing in the water and then he could self-correct his stroke. Grumbling to himself he pushed off for the next lap, but as soon as he got to the other end of the pool he ducked under the lane rope and into the adjoining lane where a group was completing a set of short repeats in freestyle.

I was exasperated, yes I could have just said; press your head and chest deeper into the water, make sure your eyes are looking directly down. How many times am I going to have to say that though? Why can't he feel what I want him to feel? Did I not describe the drill clearly enough?

Frustration and self-doubt creeps in as I realise my total failure to connect with this swimmer. I wonder secretly if the remaining swimmers are just humouring their beloved coach and really just want the token technical feedback that I have offered in the past. I know in my heart that it would be easier for me to offer the correction mid-session, but time and time again I watch as the next 5 strokes alter, closer to a more proficient technique only to fade back to a more familiar pattern of movement.

The club directive was for a greater focus on specific stroke correction instruction I say to the president as he comes up to me at the end of the session to discuss my new approaches.

Me: "well what I am doing is smart stroke correction! I need them to be patient, this is not something that can be fixed like that" I say, clicking my fingers.

I secretly hope I am not losing respect from the president and the swimmers with my new approach.

Discussion

Within the Australian swimming culture, the coach centred coaching approach was a deeply embedded practice where swimmers were viewed by coaches as instruments and object for manipulation (McMahon & Dinan Thompson, 2008; McMahon & Dinan Thompson, 2011). The notion that the coach is the bearer of all knowledge in order to achieve success was a dominant ideology that permeated not only coaches' thinking but also athletes' thinking and provided the foundation of all overarching practices (McMahon, 2010). This was evident in McMahon and Zehntner's initial stories where they both continued to live and play out the culturally dominant norm (coach centred approach). Both participants after a 20 year period, had encounters which they identified as the impetus to transition from a coach centred approach to an athlete centred approach. It is important to acknowledge the extent to which culturally dominant ideologies such as the coach centred approach (accepted practice) continued to permeate their practice, behaviour, conversation and being as can be seen in the narrative accounts detailed by McMahon and Zehntner. Particularly as those who did not conform to the culturally accepted way of practice (coach centred) were disciplined (as mentioned by McMahon) or ostracised from the culture.

The second challenge that McMahon and Zehntner had to overcome was that they both had achieved competitive performance with the coach centred approach. Although their impetus for change was due to the coach centred approach 'not sitting right with them,' they both had doubts in regard to the new athlete centred approach as it was unfounded in terms of competitive performance and deviated from the cultural norm. McMahon embodied the notion that she could not be successful without coach decision making. Even though she had committed to try the new athlete centred approach, she still displayed characteristics of a coach centred trained athlete. Kidman and Davis (2006) say that a coach centred trained athlete would lack confidence and competence in regard to making any decisions and is dependent on the coach. Her uncertainty stemmed from her fear of failing and not trusting her own voice and opinions in regards to her training. Further, she felt her voice could not be a voice of authority that would achieve success. The deeply embedded ideology that the coach is the bearer of all knowledge in order to achieve competitive success was realised when analysing her inner dialogue.

I am panicked by this question. Like, I do have ideas about what I should be doing. But I am the athlete, not the coach. I don't want to say my ideas, because what happens if he does them and they don't work? I don't trust myself. As thoughts race in my head, I feel pressured to respond. But, I definitely don't trust my ideas enough to say them so I just shrug.

A third challenge that occurred specifically for Zehntner was the hierarchical power structures that existed for him as a coach in his employment situation; within a mentee-mentor relationship and within the culture. In Zehntner's narrative, the club president expressed his concerns on behalf of the club in regard to a lack of specific stroke technique directions. This in turn created doubt in relation to the approach as so many people were unhappy with it.

President: The club directive was for a greater focus on specific stroke correction instruction.

Chris: "They asked for stroke correction, well what I am doing is smart stroke correction. I need them to be patient, this is not something that can be fixed like that" I say, clicking my fingers.

I secretly hope I am not losing respect from the president and the swimmers with my new approach.

Even though Zehntner had explained his new way of doing things to the club president and committee which was in turn was communicated to the swimmers, the narrative reveals that the

swimmers struggled with the new approach, particularly in regard to the questioning and self analysis of their own technique. They were more accustomed to listening to the coach's directives and the coach making the decisions. This is indicative of a coach centred athlete (Kidman & Davis, 2006).

Zehntner, as a mentee coach operated within a power relationship – that being the mentor-mentee coaching relationship and was expected to conform to a certain way of doing things by his mentors otherwise he could not progress along the coach education pathway of Australian swimming. Even though some practices did not 'feel right' for Zehntner, if he did not implement them he could experience disciplinary action, and place at jeopardy, his position within the hierarchy of the Australian swimming culture. The narrative revealed that the mentee-mentor relationship that the head coach, Daniel and Zehntner became engaged in could be viewed as a site where disciplinary actions were taken out. Even though Zehntner's interactions with the head coach were brief but intense, they housed most of the rich experiential learning that in turn informed his coaching practice. The sport's governing body as a collective of practitioners, subscribe to a set of attitudes and behaviours that are key indicators of coaching ability.

Conclusion

The athlete and coach in this study revealed how during the transition from the coach centred to the athlete centred approach that a number of challenges occurred. Firstly, the extent to which dominant cultural ideologies had permeated their thinking and doing was extensive even though both of them had self-determined the transition from the coach to the athlete centred approach. Other issues that arose included the disciplinary power which occurred for Zehntner as a mentee coach within a mentor-mentee coaching relationship. Even though the impetus was there to adopt the athlete centred approach, mentors (senior coaches) expected him as a mentee (junior coaches) to conform to their way of doing things which has been found in previous research to be technocentric and coach centred (McMahon, 2010; McMahon & Dinan Thompson, 2011; McMahon, Penney & Dinan Thompson, 2012; Zehntner & McMahon, 2013). Disciplinary issues in Zehntner's place of employment arose when a number of swimmers did not respond in a positive way to the athlete centred way of doing things. While the workplace as a site of disciplinary power is a difficult obstacle to overcome, dominant cultural ideologies may be somewhat easier to address. A small scale research project conducted by McMahon (2013) with ten Australian swimming coaches investigated the use of narrative, where coaches were able to engage with swimmers' lived

experiences. These lived experiences in particular were events that actually occurred to the swimmers during their involvement in the Australian swimming culture. Coaches were presented with a number of swimmers' stories. These stories initiated self reflection for the coaches to occur. They were an educational tool that was effective in providing coaches with space to cast the beam of consciousness over their own practice. As a consequence, self reflection was initiated, as was empathy and more of a holistic and athlete centred approach to coaching. While this research conducted by McMahon, 2013 was only done with a small number of coaches, the findings are promising particularly in relation to moving coaches beyond dominant ideologies and practices to a more holistic, empathetic, athlete centred way of practice. Further research could be conducted using McMahon's (2013) approach and applying it to coaches and athletes as they transition from the coach centred approach to the athlete centred approach, to see (if at all) how it might assist them. While McMahon's study (2013) was conducted with coaches, the same approach could be applied to swimmers, where they could engage with other swimmers' stories who have transitioned from the coach centred approach to the athlete centred approach. Athletes engaging with other athletes' narratives may offer some space for them to resonate and understand the obstacles others faced as they transitioned from coach to athlete centred. This could also be another avenue for future research could better support athletes as they transition from coach to athlete centred.

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The Coaching Process as Sensemaking

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Introduction

The last decade has seen the concept of ‘player’ or ‘athlete centered coaching’ firmly established in the coaches’ lexicon amongst both practitioners (Sport New Zealand; International Rugby Board) and academics (de Souza and Oslin, 2008; Kidman, 2005; Kidman and Lombardo, 2010). Therefore, as an academic, I was delighted that in the first edition of the Journal for Athlete Centered Coaching, Lynn Kidman and Dawn Penney recognized the need to ignite some scholarly discussion surrounding athlete centered coaching, and in doing so explore the meanings, values and practices of this coaching approach. I certainly concur with Kidman and Penney (2014) that in attempts to operationalize what athlete-centered coaching may look like for the practicing coach, “there are dangers that the significance of underpinning values may become lost amidst somewhat functional ways of thinking about Athlete Centered Coaching” (Kidman and Penney, 2014, p. 2). Therefore, in response to the call to arms to “re-think and extend the meanings of athlete centered coaching” (Kidman and Penney, 2014, p.2), I present my commentary to extend our understanding of athlete centered coaching through the application of sensemaking (Weick, 1995).

The Coaching Process as Sensemaking

Sensemaking is a process of social construction whereby as people negotiate their lives and confront events and endeavor to interpret and explain salient cues based on their experience (Weick, 1995). As people make sense of their experiences, they give meaning to them and this guides future behaviour (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Weick, 1995). Consequently, Weick (2009) postulates that there are a number of intermingling 'sensitizing concepts' underpinning the process of 'making sense'. In applying sensemaking to the coaching process, as athletes (and coaches) come together and collectively experience events, when they act based on their pre-defined socially constructed beliefs [identity] and generate tangible outcomes [cues]. Athletes use these cues to review and discover what is occurring, construct credible explanations of their experience (e.g., rationales for coach behavior and decisions), whilst further constructing and re-constructing their own identity through the process.

A sensemaking understanding of the coaching process celebrates the agency of athletes in constructing the meaning of their experience (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Human agency is the capacity for people to make choices, and in particular refers to both the creativity and the motivation that drives individuals to break away from scripted patterns of behaviour (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). As Weick (1995, p. 8) argues "sensemaking is about authoring as well as interpretation, creation as well as discovery". The applicability of sensemaking to athlete centered coaching lies in the central agency given to those within the social network to be the author of their future. This central agency can both be a concern for the athlete centered coach and an outcome for those practicing it's philosophies (Kidman, 2005). These processes are depicted in the notion of the self-fulfilling prophecy whereby "believing is seeing" (Weick, 2009, p. 14). For the athlete, an awareness (conscious or subconscious) of their agency and role as author (or personal authority) is likely to capitalize on their self-determination (Deci and Ryan, 1985) and lead to self-actualization (Maslow, 1968). This process further supports the empowerment drive and humanistic beliefs associated with athlete centered coaching.

Despite sensemaking's central role in constructing experience and behaviour, it is apparent that as sensemaking can be a subtle, socially located process and easily taken for granted, "the transient nature of sensemaking belies its central role in cultivating meaning and determining human behaviour (Weick et al., 2005). However, if coaches identify themselves as athlete centered, and consider athletes' needs as paramount, sensemaking (despite its subtlety) offers not only a framework for coaches to breakdown the complexities of the athlete experience from a point of

praxis, but also a framework to enact Kidman and Penney's (2014) understanding of athlete centered coaching.

The Athlete Centered Coach and 'Sensible Environments'

'Sensible environments' are shaped by identifying and understanding sense-giving triggers, enabling the act of sense giving by leaders and members (Maitlis and Lawrence, 2007) and the socially discursive and educative practices in negotiating and cultivating meaning (Lesser and Storck, 2001; Sonenshein, 2007; Wood and Bandura, 1989). All of these constructions become important when we consider the position of the coach, who Goosby-Smith (2009) cites as a sense maker and sense giver. For athlete centered coaching, there are two relevant applications for sensemaking I would like to raise in this short commentary; sensemaking as a form of self-awareness and 'leading by compass not map'.

Sensemaking and Self Awareness

It is important to note that for the athlete centered coach there are two layers of sensemaking that one needs to be cognizant of; sensemaking of the athletes and their response to coaching, as well as that of the coach as a consequence of his or her experience. As Kidman and Penney (2014) stipulate, "The essence of athlete centered is awareness, it is about athletes becoming aware of themselves, and coaches becoming aware of themselves so they can help athletes" (p. 3). A product of 'sensible experiences' for both athlete and coach is a heightened sense of cognition in order to interpret experience, from which facilitate a state of self-awareness. For the coach, it could be argued that the very acknowledgment and awareness of the presence of sensemaking in the coaching process will enable the coach to enact the underpinning values of athlete centered coaching. For example, coaches need an awareness of athletes and the coaches' socially constructed histories (Kidman & Penney, 2014), the agency of athletes and a need for decentralizing of power (Kidman, 2005) and the role of environmental cues and therefore the significance of coaching behaviors (good and bad) in athletes making sense and constructing meaning (Jones and Wallace, 2005). If athlete centered coaching is to offer a "change in coaching focus that empowers athletes towards discovery based learning" and ultimately ownership of their sporting experience (Kidman and Penney, 2014), then a coach needs be able to offer what Weick (1995) terms as 'sensible environments' (with sensemaking emphasis at the fore).

'Leading by compass not map'

One particular salient leadership approach relevant to athlete centered coaching that has a powerful 'sensitizing effect' on the social landscape is that of relinquishing power and authority by acknowledging "I don't know" (Weick, 2009, p. 263). This notion shares considerable similarity with the underpinning of athlete centered coaching, namely an emphasis on promoting athlete awareness, independence and responsibility for learning and performance (Kidman, 2005; Kidman and Lombardo, 2010; Kidman and Penney, 2014). Weick (2009, p. 265) argues,

People who act this way help others make sense of what they are facing. Sensemaking is not about rules, and options and decisions. Sensemaking does not presume that there are generic right answers about things like taking risk or following rules. Instead, sensemaking is about how to stay in touch with context...The effective leader is someone who searches for the better questions, accepts inexperience, stays in motion, channels decisions to those with the best knowledge of the matter at hand, crafts good stories, is obsessed with updating, encourages improvisation, and is deeply aware of personal ignorance.

Weick (2009, p. 264) uses the metaphor of "navigating by means of a compass rather than a map" to describe these leadership practices that create sensible environments. He argues that whilst maps may be the basis of performance but in an equivocal, unknowable world, the compass is the basis of learning and renewal. He states:

It is less crucial that people have a specific destination, and more crucial for purposes of sensemaking that they have the capability to act their way into an understanding of where they are, who they are, and what they are doing.

(p.265)

In a partially charted world, if coaches admit that they don't know, then athlete and coach are more likely to mobilize resources for meaningful mutual direction (Weick, 2009), namely learning. The coach who can lead with a compass invariably will be able to cater to individuality when working with athletes (Kidman and Penney, 2014), the variance of their needs and rates of development.

Conclusion

I aimed to present a case that if we are to stay true to the underpinnings discussed by Kidman and Penney (2014), applying the notion of sensemaking (Weick, 1995) to our understanding of the athlete and coach experience, may shed new light in our journey towards a clearer understanding of athlete centered coaching approaches so that we can effectively understand the athlete and their individual needs.

The concept of sensemaking offers a medium to re-connect philosophically and practically with the underpinning values of athlete-centered coaching, and in doing so commits to both the notion of 'athletes' voice' (Kidman and Penney, 2014, p. 2) and gives agency to the athlete as author of both their experience and future. The acknowledgement of the world as unknowable and unpredictable, and the place of sensemaking amongst the milieu re-acknowledges athlete centered coaching as not "an approach with a magic formula" (Kidman and Penney, 2014, p. 3) but rooted in complexity. A sensemaking perspective further grounds athlete centered coaching as a non-linear pedagogy, and helps to ensure that practice does not become reduced to a set of functions or tools.

I hope this short commentary offers a fresh and alternative response to Kidman and Penney's (2014) call for discourse to reflect upon present understandings of athlete centered coaching practice and in turn may generate some discourse of its own. To the practitioners I hope this paper presents some thought provoking concepts to help understand athlete centered coaching. To academics I hope sensemaking may offer new perspective through which to investigate phenomena connected to athlete centered coaching, to further explore ways athlete centered coaching is interpreted and enacted (Kidman and Penney, 2014).

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Developing a Coaching Philosophy: Exploring the Experiences of Novice Sport Coaching Students

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Abstract

Sport coaches play an essential role in developing positive and engaging sport climates and coach educators have identified that a strong coaching philosophy is a central factor in the provision of these positive experiences. A coach's philosophy is composed of their values and beliefs and is influenced by their life experiences and background. This study explored the coaching philosophies of 1st year sport coaching degree students in order to establish; their understanding of the concept of philosophy, the primary values and beliefs expressed, and the origins of these beliefs. The written coaching philosophy statements of 77 sport coaching students, submitted during their first semester were examined.

Inductive content analysis generated several key areas to which students tended to refer; Defining Success, Encouraging Fun, Building Character, and Origin of Beliefs. Consistent with previous research on novice coaches, it was noted that participants appeared to struggle to articulate the precise nature of their philosophy and in particular, how it would translate into action. Developing coach education systems which encourage deep reflection and critical analysis of coaching philosophies is imperative for inclusive and effective sport provision.

Introduction

Sport coaching has been the focus of increasing academic interest (Cassidy, Jones and Potrac, 2008), particularly in the areas of coach behaviour and its impact on athletes, development of knowledge and expertise, mentoring, experiential learning, and reflection (Gilbert and Trudel, 2004). Yet paradoxically, despite the fundamental relationship that exists between coach behaviour and coaching philosophies (Jenkins, 2010), the latter have been relatively unexplored. This lack of attention to the development and articulation of coaching philosophies is particularly surprising given the pervasiveness of personal reflective exercises and resources in coach education courses; activities intended to develop precisely these philosophies. Indeed, most of the work purporting to explore philosophies originates from anecdotal accounts, often drawn from media interviews or the autobiographies of high performance coaches .

This study presents an analysis of the coaching philosophies of novice sport coaches studying for a sport coaching degree at a university in the United Kingdom (U.K.). Using written statements submitted by students near the beginning of their course, the paper seeks to explore both the content and the perceived origins of their coaching approach. The results focus primarily on elements relating to the principal purpose for coaching and to the relative influences of previous sport experience, significant others, and self-reflection. This paper is underpinned by the necessity to develop deeper understanding of coaches' philosophies, with the ultimate aim of facilitating the development of more effective athlete-centred coaching through improved coach education.

Background and context

The concept of a coaching philosophy has been defined most frequently as linked to the importance of values (Cross and Lyle, 1999). A particular coach's philosophy can therefore be considered as comprising their beliefs regarding the role, purpose, and approach to the coaching act. Lyle (2002) suggests that a coach's set of values provides context for behaviour and a conceptual framework through which experiences are evaluated and ranked. He proposes that these personal values are more deeply embedded than beliefs and remain relatively stable over time. In his work on the constructs of beliefs, values, and principles, Rokeach (1973) describes a useful framework for analysis. He categorises values as "prescriptive or proscriptive" beliefs, which identify one mode of conduct (instrumental value) or resultant end-state (terminal value) as being preferable to others. From Rokeach's study on American societal values, examples of instrumental values included ambitious, courageous, honest, and responsible, while terminal values included such concepts as freedom, happiness, and self-respect. Applying this to a coaching context then, it could be assumed that elements such as being reliable, kind, organised, or strict could be considered to be instrumental values, while end-state, or terminal values could include for example equality, respect or self-determination. Coaching practice is therefore assumed to be a reflection of the core values held by each individual coach, which can be expressed in a set of guiding principles, or a coaching philosophy. This interpretation however is less simplistic in practice for a number of reasons. While coaches may state a certain set of core values, their behaviour may not always match this. Firstly, a lack of effective self-reflection may result in the coach being unaware of any incongruence between their alleged values and their actual behaviour. Alternatively, the coach may deliberately misrepresent their value system, in order to either present a more socially desirable front, or to conform to specific organisational value systems.

Identifying one's coaching philosophy is a complex task and can be easily confused with possessing a philosophy about a certain sport, which in reality merely amounts to technical/tactical knowledge or models. Rather than a more holistic set of values regarding practice in general, technical/tactical models are likely to be a set of beliefs about the ways to approach preparation, game strategies, or desirable performer qualities. In order to develop an awareness and reach a genuine understanding of one's philosophy, suggests that in-depth self-reflection and potentially the use of critical incidents from practice are crucial.

Although identifying a distinctive coaching philosophy is by no means a simple task, it should not be avoided. Examining one's coaching philosophy helps to ensure practice is consistent and not reactive,

and also that power in the athlete-coach relationship is not misused. The development of an appropriate philosophy has been touted as being key to successful coaching and positive sport experiences by a number of authors (Martens, 2004), and Cassidy, Jones and Potrac (2008) state that being able to articulate a philosophy is a prerequisite to good practice as a coach. Coaches can be highly influential socialising agents, particularly for young athletes, and an appropriate philosophy plays a role in helping participants to develop life skills. (Camiré, Trudel and Forneris, 2012)

As discussed however, problems may arise when claimed philosophies are actually actioned, or not as is more likely. Coaches will often feel at ease writing descriptions of their values and approach but find it difficult to articulate how these aims are actually implemented (McCallister, Blinde and Weiss, 2000). The constraints and contextual pressures of real-world coaching are often ignored when describing philosophies and in practice, the coach is likely to revert to comfortable and familiar territory, rather than critical self-awareness. This is epitomised by Stewart (1993) when coaches are described as “talking” rather than “walking” their philosophy. For a philosophy to be functional then, it needs to take account the constraints of real-life practice and be specific enough to influence behaviour. This requires an in-depth engagement with the process, rather than the production of a list of meaningless, generic statements.

The literature explicitly exploring philosophy has been somewhat divided on coaches’ abilities to articulate their philosophy. In their series of studies designed to examine the means by which high school coaches teach life skills and build character in their players, Collins *et al.* (2009) uncovered an unanticipated volume of data on the importance of the coaches’ philosophical beliefs. The ability of these coaches to discuss their philosophies at length could be attributed to their level of expertise, as they were considered to be highly experienced and successful in their fields. In contrast, Nash, Sproule and Horton (2008) examined the philosophies and beliefs of sport coaches across a range of experience from novice level to expert. One of their findings was that early-career coaches tended to focus on more practical aspects such as safety and discipline predominately and seemed to struggle to define the enormity of the coaching role. They also tended to attribute their approach and values to personal experience gained as athletes or to rely on their own previous coaches’ philosophies. The means by which coaches learn their craft has been the subject of considerable attention and has resulted in a body of work too broad to explore in any great depth here. The consensus from this work however is that experience and observation of peers remain the primary sources of knowledge for coaches (Cushion, Armour and Jones, 2003). Nash *et al.* also suggest that novice coaches tend to focus on sport-specific skills and content, rather than more general values. This is reminiscent of Lyle’s assertion that, when

asked to discuss their philosophy, many coaches will tend to confuse a particular and sport specific approach to training and match-play with a deeper, more value-based analysis of their principles.

The suggestion that less experienced coaches found the articulation of a philosophy difficult was challenged however by Collins' *et al.* (2011), who concluded that pre-service coaches in their study appeared to have reasonably clear ideas of their philosophies. The authors concluded that despite, their lack of coach education or experience, the participants already held strong beliefs regarding the purpose and process of coaching. They did feel however that, while the coaches could express their philosophy, they were less sure of the process of implementation. This sentiment is echoed in McCallister's *et al.* (2000) work with youth baseball and softball coaches, who also seemed to demonstrate difficulties in expressing the means by which they actually implemented their philosophies and in fact had produced accounts of behaviour which was directly contradictory to their supposed beliefs. For example, while the coaches stressed that they did not emphasise the importance of winning, team meetings were reportedly only held after a loss. While the coaches suggested this was for the purpose of reassuring participants, one coach was quoted as saying, "they need to know what they did wrong so they won't make the same mistake again" (p41).

With regards to the actual content of coach philosophies, the interplay between coaching objectives (e.g. fun versus success) and the beliefs which underlie the desire to achieve these objectives are a common focus (Collins *et al.*, 2009). Despite some suggestion that an emphasis on winning and competitive success is prevalent (and potentially damaging in youth sport) (Marten, 2004), empirical evidence from the limited studies available implies the issue is rather more complex. Personal, social, and emotional development of players has been highlighted by coaches as a prime objective, as opposed to winning games and competitions (Bennie and O'Connor, 2010; Camiré, Trudel and Forneris, 2012; Collins *et al.*, 2009). For example, the high school coaches in Collins *et al.* (2009) study emphasised the importance of player development; socially, psychologically, and academically, rather than just physically, and the development of key life skills such as teamwork, discipline, and a good work ethic, off and on the field were considered to be a core element in their philosophies. Wilcox and Trudel (1998) pose an interesting conclusion in their investigation of the philosophy of a youth ice hockey coach, suggesting that their participant was able to balance the achievement of both winning games, and focusing on the development of social and emotional skill. These examples could of course be reminiscent of Lyle (2002)'s assertion that coaches may misrepresent their values in favour of those deemed more socially acceptable. Nonetheless, it would appear that the construction of beliefs and

values in coaching, particularly around the issue of competition versus fun, may be more complex than previously thought.

Procedures

This study is part of a wider research project following the development of student coaches' philosophies in Higher Education. Students on a sport coaching degree at a U.K. university submitted written coaching philosophies as part of a first year, first trimester coaching practice module. Following ethical approval from the author's institution, the students were informed of the research focus and purpose during a lead lecture. Interested parties were given an information sheet with further details and a consent form, which would allow their assessments to be accessed by the researcher after the conclusion of the module. It was stressed both in person and on the participant information sheets that the analysis would in no way influence their performance in the module, nor any future module within their programme, that participation was entirely voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any point in the study. 77 students subsequently granted permission for their statements to be used.

The written statements contained descriptions of how the students viewed their current approach to coaching; the underpinning values, primary influences, and an attempted concretisation of their perception of their current philosophy. Using an inductive, qualitative approach, the documents were read and reread to enable familiarisation with the data, and recurring themes and sub-themes were established and coded using NVivo software (Patton, 2002).

While it is acknowledged that students in the study described in this paper may have been subject to either social desirability bias or an inadequate level of reflection, the results are viewed nonetheless as a useful starting point for the exploration of the development of coaching philosophies.

Findings and Discussion

Analysis of the written statements generated a large volume of data and while there were a number of emergent themes, this paper considers the interplay between coaching objectives, sub-themed as defining success, building character, and encouraging fun, and the perceived origin of these beliefs.

Purpose of coaching

Previous literature (Bennie and O'Connor, 2010; Camiré, Trudel and Forneris, 2012; Collins et al., 2009; McCallister, Blinde and Weiss, 2000) has challenged the notion that coaches are predominantly concerned with winning. Rather, it has been suggested that the coach's focus is more complex and often depends upon the context. These findings were replicated within the novice coaches' statements. While students considered encouraging achievement to be a main focus of their philosophy and purpose for coaching, most used terms such as "fulfilling potential" or "being challenged", indicating a reference to personal development, rather than winning. There were still a number of students however who were more forceful in their language in referring directly to competitive success.

Defining success

"The main idea of sport is based on pushing the limits and being better than ever before. For me athletes should be prepared and are expected to make sacrifices for their team or sport, athletes should strive to be the best that they can be in and outside their sport, and finally participants should strive forward in their pursuits and except [sic] no limits in sport."

This is a particularly provocative quote as it seems to replicate almost verbatim the language describing the norms of the sport ethic; the expectation that athletes should push beyond normative boundaries to achieve an athletic identity. Over-conformity to the sport ethic was proposed by Hughes and Coakley (1991) as an explanation for deviant behaviour e.g. use of performance enhancing drugs, eating disorders, in athletes. The sport ethic encapsulates four key elements thought to be essential in the achievement of the status of "true" athlete: being an athlete involves making sacrifices for The Game, being an athlete involves striving for distinction, being an athlete involves accepting risk and playing through pain, and being an athlete involves refusing to accept limits in the pursuit of possibility. These

norms are thought to become internalised by fans, journalists, coaches, and sponsors, becoming an accepted and indeed expected standard of behaviour for athletes. It is clear from the excerpt that this discourse has been incorporated into the philosophy of this particular novice coach, which is perhaps a little troubling, considering the potential implications. While these elements may appear valid and necessary tenets for athletic success, some participants will “over-conform”, pushing them to; play through pain to the point of permanent damage, over-train, engage in disordered eating or performance enhancing drugs, or perhaps participate in cheating, all in the effort to fulfil what they perceive to be the requirements for athletic identity. As discussed previously, a coach can have a considerable influence upon their participants and the potential for transmission of harmful discourse is high. Rynne and Mallett (2014) utilise the analogy of “bashing a bag of eggs against a wall”, where only a few will eventually remain intact, to represent the process of elite sport development and the tendency to opt for short-term gains, which could potentially risk the future career of their athlete (and indeed, their own).

The tendency for sport to reproduce discourse emphasising high performance, oppressive coach-athlete relationships, and elitism (Fernández-Balboa and Muros, 2006; Light and Evans, 2011; Sparkes, Partington and Brown, 2007) was not the most dominant theme emerging from the coach philosophies but there were certainly several references to the ideologies of achievement and autocratic practice.

“Beginners in the sport want to have fun and enjoy themselves, however when you progress in your sport it is not only about having fun but also about winning and in order to win you must work hard. “

“I think it is important for players to be of a competitive nature and to strive and push themselves to the best of their capabilities, no matter what.”

The emphasis on competitive success in modern sport is now so deeply ingrained it is little wonder the novice coaches should demonstrate at least some trace of the desire to win within their philosophies. Watson and White (2007) highlight the prevalence of the “win at all costs” message in sport media and advertising, citing examples such as; “you don’t win silver, you lose gold”, “you are nothing until you are number one”, and second place is the first loser” (p64). The persuasive power of this discourse contributes towards the current, dominant, western sport culture; one which Watson and White (2007) propose is characterised by a willingness to; mistreat opponents through acts of violence and

aggression, use performance enhancing drugs, overtraining, or disordered eating, and engage in the practice of deceiving officials or manipulating rules for personal or team gain. Although student coaches will be exposed to many conflicting discourses concerning the values inherent in sport, for example from education, peers, and organisations, overcoming the omnipotence of the “win at all costs” discourse would seem to be a major challenge for coach education.

Other novices however conceded that, while winning may be important, they were less concerned with the outcome of matches or games and more interested in their athletes’ personal development.

“I consider the results or outcome of a tournament or competition to be less important than increasing the athletes [sic] knowledge of the sport and developing on their performance. Educating the athletes is extremely more significant than the results of a match. I need to focus on how the athletes perform the skill and making sure they have a clear understanding of exactly how to execute it”

“I see success in many ways winning a league, not getting relegated, reaching a cup final. My ultimate goal is getting the best out of my team. All I ask is my team play to their strengths and improve upon their weaknesses. This will include both training sessions and competitive matches. Success is also measured by respecting rules from the manager, coach and referee. If we lose a game but have respected the rules, the other team, and played the style I want them to play as a team. If we have set out a goal for a certain game and we achieve this, or I ask for them to improve on certain aspects which we were poor from the previous game, I consider these all successes. If we win the game then that's an added bonus.”

The reluctance to emphasise competitive success as a component of these philosophies may be a genuine reflection of the coaches’ value systems, but it is also possible that these statements embody the rhetoric described by Lyle (2002), suggesting that they become merely a list of ideological statements, which would not be enacted in practice. This could be due to an inability to reflect in enough depth to ensure there is no incongruence between “talking” and “walking” the philosophy (Stewart, 1993), or a desire to deliberately misrepresent their approach to; present a more socially desirable front, to fulfil what they believe to be the expectations of the module marker, or to conform with a specific organisation’s set of values. Several of the quotes above also demonstrate incongruences

in the coaches' philosophies, as they perceived it, similar to those described by McCallister, Blinde and Weiss (2000). For example, the last quote emphasises a strong player development theme but, when giving examples of success, mentions winning a league or avoiding relegation; both very outcome focused objectives.

Building character

The assertion by Collins *et al.* (2009) that their high school football coaches were more concerned with the social, psychological, and academic development of players than competitive success appears to be substantiated by the novice coaches in this study. At this early stage in their development however, it is possible that they have not yet considered the actual implementation in practice of this form of development (Collins *et al.*, 2011; McCallister, Blinde and Weiss, 2000) or indeed whether the constraints of real world will allow it (Stewart, 1993).

“As a coach, I want the best for my athletes. I feel that coaching is as much to do with building character and developing life skills, as winning. Through coaching I aim to inspire my athletes to be the best they can be not only in their chosen sport but life in general. I believe that through participation in sport you learn how to socialize with your peers and adults, what the qualities of a good leader are and develop the qualities required for good decision making and accepting responsibility, which are all important parts of an adults' day to day life.”

“This means that our role as the coach is to, teach and educate through sport. We must help our athletes not only develop the skills and techniques they need to perform at the highest level their ability allows. We must also coach them in becoming better people”

The assertion that sport participation can produce positive developmental effects in young people is common in literature but some aspects of the coach's role in facilitating these life skills is less well known (Collins *et al.*, 2009). Gould *et al.* (2007) clarify this by positing that, while much research has examined, for example, the effect of coaches' relationship skills upon psychosocial development, and the teaching of mental skills to young athletes, the elements which are less clear are whether these life skills transfer beyond sport and how these skills were actually taught. Indeed, several authors have

attempted to explore the mechanisms by which coaches transmit these skills but found that, while the coaches are able to identify certain values as being important, they are less certain of the teaching strategies through which this is achieved. In their series of papers on a wider project examining this area, Collins *et al.* suggest that the development of life skills in participants cannot be separated from routine coaching, that strong coach-athlete relationships and an understanding of the social context were essential in the process, and that an emphasis on personal development within coaching philosophies was critical.

The use of sport as a means of developing desired character traits has been a common theme throughout history but perhaps most notably in the Muscular Christianity movement of Victorian Britain. The term, which was first used in 1850 to describe the traits portrayed in the novels of Kingsley and Hughes, refers to the connection between godliness and physical fitness (Watson, 2007). Sport was advocated as a means of developing both the physical and mental strength necessary in particular to prepare boys and men for a life advancing British imperialism across the continent. The notion that sport can develop characteristics such as honour, discipline, and restraint is a belief still held strongly by many, often without due criticality or understanding of mechanism.

Encouraging fun

Perhaps predictably, the concept of “fun” was highlighted frequently by the student coaches but some were clearer on the execution or importance of this than others.

“As a coach I feel that it is my job to enforce the element of fun into my lessons and decide how much fun should happen throughout my class, whether it is younger children at a beginning level or an athlete at an elite level training for the Olympics.”

This is a thought-provoking quote as, while the meaning may have been obfuscated by the writing style, from the use of the words “enforce”, and “decide” it would appear to demonstrate a strong degree of coach control, despite apparently discussing the concept of fun.

“Sport was initially created as a way to have fun, so I believe it should stay like this. Sport participation and coaching should be treated as a gift and talent that you should appreciate and work at because it is almost your responsibility, if you have a gift it is for a reason. If you do not enjoy a sport then you do not have the motivation to be successful and be

victorious or have a competitive edge, however if you love it and have fun whilst playing it you will most certainly be more motivated to do better in it.”

Similarly, while this second quote employs quite emotive language to stress the importance of retaining the element of fun, it is still strongly tied to the notion of competitive success. There are also underlying fatalistic tones; the use of the terms, “gift”, “talent”, “responsibility”, and “it is for a reason” imply an almost spiritual bent to sport participation i.e. that the athlete has been bestowed with a natural talent by a higher power and that not acting upon this talent would be in some way immoral. The link between sport and spirituality has, of course, been discussed briefly in relation to the influence of Muscular Christianity.

“By making my coaching session more fun orientated than serious skill development I believe that I fulfil Martens philosophy "Athletes First, Winning Second" I believe that this is my coaching philosophy because I would rather my athletes had fun when training in their sport, than be disciplined in training. For most people sport is a hobby, something that they do out of their own free time and should therefore be an enjoyable experience. Not one that they go home with a negative outlook on. Something that they want to do out of their own motivation rather than the feeling that they need to come back.”

“Despite my beliefs that the sessions should be fun, I admit, from my own experiences, you can enjoy a sport more through playing well and being reasonably good at something. For example, if you are playing a game and are unable to make many shots it can be demoralising a little for some people, including myself. I appreciate though that this statement is biased based on my beliefs as there are those who happily play games even if they are not that great at curling and don't make any shots; they enjoy the game and enjoy the social part of curling”

In a similar vein to the findings of McCallister, Blinde and Weiss (2000), it is interesting to note that, while fun was deemed to be an important element within sessions, it was believed by some coaches that this was often linked to winning, i.e. that in order for children to enjoy their sport, they would need to experience some degree of competitive success.

The term “fun” is one which is frequently utilised by coaches, often without real understanding of why, or what actually constitutes fun. Côté *et al.* (2007) provide a useful framework of coaching contexts in which to evaluate coaching excellence. During the sampling years (~6-12 years of age) and the recreational years (13+), coaches would be classed as participation, whereas during the specialising years (13-15) and the investment years (16+) the emphasis is predominantly on performance. Côté *et al.* (2007) suggest that a different set of competencies is necessary for these two forms of coaching and highlight the importance of fun at both the sampling and recreational stages. Within these contexts, the coach ought to encourage activities which emphasise experimentation, internal satisfaction, playfulness, and opportunities to socialise. There may be some informal competition at the recreational stage but outcome-based competitive environments should be avoided within these typologies. The emphasis on fun emerging from the coaches’ statements in this study suggests that the majority have, at this point, gained experience primarily within the sampling and recreational years. This would seem logical, given their relatively novice status and it would be interesting to observe their career over some time to explore whether they remain within this remit or move to a more performance-based environment. In this case, Wilcox and Trudel (1998) would suggest that the coaches’ focus would therefore shift to adapt to the new context and that winning and player development should not be seen as opposites but rather as elements in a continuum. Côté *et al.* (2007) do not suggest that this is a natural progression however, proposing instead that the competences for excellence at each stage are distinct.

Origins and development of philosophy

The development of coaching knowledge has been a key theme in the literature but this has been less explicitly discussed in terms of coaches’ philosophies. The coaches in this study tended to attribute their philosophical approach to three primary sources: personal experience in sport, significant others, and reflection.

Personal experience

Most students noted that the primary motivators for them as coaches were the positive experiences they encountered through sport participation during their youth.

“I have had great times playing sport and think that if I can contribute to having the same amount of enjoyment and fun as I have had whilst participating in sport then I can be very content with myself.”

“From being a participant and having a great love of my sport and as a coach I have a drive to provide others with my passion for sport through providing competitive games and adapting situations to provide participants with the feelings of success and winning [sic] which may result in them participating in the sport for life.”

The clear accumulation of sport experience prior to engaging with the coaching degree further substantiates the claims of Cushion, Armour and Jones (2003) that coaches arrive with already deeply embedded values, or a sport habitus, which may then blunt attempts to integrate unfamiliar practices. The attraction sport holds for the novice coaches could also be linked to the assertion by Lyle (2002) that participants are drawn to continue in sport as it matches their value system. One individual seemed to be drawn to sport initially as an escape from traumatic experiences as a young person and reflects upon the potential for sport to be personally empowering and positive.

“Being bullied at school can destroy your confidence, this happened to me during primary and early secondary. The way I found best to deal with this was athletics, through the help and encouragement of coaches in my local athletics club I was able to build confidence not only in sport but in life. By learning how to run for long distances I was able to put the aggression the confusion and the pain into my running helping me to get rid of these feelings. It taught me patience, discipline and control three qualities I take into my coaching style. I went through a lot and it is because of this I want to help anyone I can, not just the people who are struggling but the people who are enthusiastic. These enthusiastic people aren't always the most talented but their enthusiasm and willingness to learn and get better inspires me to get better as a coach and as a person.”

The ability of this participant to articulate and exemplify the origins of their philosophy is laudable and produces quite useful data as it provides a relatively clear picture the underlying values which guide their coaching philosophy. The statement suggests an ability to empathise with those who are not

necessarily high performance athletes and to develop self-esteem and confidence in those who perhaps who have not already developed a traditional sport habitus (Cushion, Armour and Jones, 2003).

Significant others

The role of significant others reoccurs frequently in the literature, whether discussed as socialising agents during childhood, as formal or informal mentors (Bloom *et al.*, 1998) or within communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The primacy of this form of learning was replicated in the coaches' understanding of the shaping of their philosophies. Again, many of the key figures mentioned as being influential in the development of the novice coaches were positive role models, largely parents or Physical Education teachers. Several students however did cite the influence of negative experiences through coaches who they believe did not have an approach they themselves would care to emulate. In fact, these students suggest that they will always remember actions these coaches had taken and would use that information to do the opposite.

“During my time as an athlete myself, a number of personal experiences which I have had, are possibly the reason why I coach the way I do today. One stand out bad experience was during a training session at my athletic club. On this day, I wasn't performing to my best level and the coach picked up on this. Instead of being taken to one side and helping me figure out my flaws within the skill, I was made to stand in front of the class and show everyone what I was doing and how I was doing it wrong. By being made a bad example it made other laugh which left me feeling demoralised and underachieving. I have never been negative towards any of my pupils as I would never wish for them to leave a session feeling as put down as I did.”

This particular participant demonstrates a degree of reflection as, rather than blindly replicate the practices of what was clearly a fairly insensitive coach, they were able to process their emotional response and develop their own interpretation of the experience. The majority of participants however emphasised the importance of positive role models during their developmental years.

“I always ask myself why I got into sport. I believe I got into it due to the incredible role models I had growing up which include my P.E. teacher, my parents and sports idols like

David Beckham. I believe that as a coach I can be a huge role model on the athletes by the way I coach and the way I interact with my group.”

“My football manager has taught me that you must push your players so they work hard in training, this is a major part of my coaching philosophy as what you do on the training field, you take onto the park.”

“I believe that my coaching philosophy has been moulded through my childhood with my parents, friends and also the laid back and friendly atmosphere I have lived with my whole life through being brought up in a small island community. With this constant socialisation with a range of age groups knowing exactly who I am and talking to me on a day to day basis I have been able to build up social skills which mean I’m not intimidated by coaching a group of 5 year olds or a group of 30 year olds.”

The last quote is thought-provoking in that, rather than attributing their philosophy to one or two key individuals, the participant demonstrates an awareness of the contribution of his/her holistic environment throughout their developmental stages. The tendency for coaches to rely on informal, experiential learning has been long-established (Cushion, Armour and Jones, 2003) and appears to be replicated in the participants. In their study of expert coaches, Rynne and Mallett (2014) reported that the three primary sources of learning were unmediated; on the job experience, discussions with others, and experiences as athletes. The propensity for the coaches in the current paper to cite their own coaches, physical education teachers, and parents as influential figures, rather than coach peers may be representative of their stage of development as the majority were at the beginning of their coaching careers and perhaps did not have the wealth of workplace experience cited by Rynne and Mallett’s coaches as being important.

Self-reflection

Perhaps most surprisingly for novice coaches, there was considerable attention given to the importance of self-reflection in their philosophies. It is accepted that this is likely to have been taught or learned by the students within the assigned reading but, given that the documents were written fewer than ten weeks into the module, it is interesting to note that this reasonably high-level activity was so well represented.

“I believe that to be a successful coach I continually need to re-evaluate and assess my coaching style. I will watch and learn from the good practices of other coaches and always be aware of new techniques which may assist me in my coaching sessions.”

“The first step in my coaching philosophy is to look at myself as a coach and to discover and understand myself. To understand myself I have to look at the habits of my personality and see how they can help to communicate to the athletes that I will be dealing with in my coaching.”

It has been suggested that reflection is a relatively complex, higher order cognitive process and is less likely to be undertaken effectively by novices. Knowles et al. (2001) highlights the complexity of the process, purporting that one cannot assume reflective skills will be naturally acquired simply through participation in education or through experience. While it may be that the individuals had already achieved this stage of development, perhaps through engagement with National Governing Body coach education, it is also possible that: firstly, the coaches may have again been simply paying “lip service” to a concept which they considered the module assessors would expect them to address; and/or secondly, that they may feel they are reflective without necessarily engaging fully in the process. The literature has suggested that the process of reflection is most effective when undertaken with a “knowledgeable other” (Gilbert and Trudel, 2005), perhaps explaining the significance of discussions with others in Rynne and Mallett’s study (2014) and so it seems less likely that in-depth reflection has occurred as often it was cited in the statements

Conclusion

This paper sought to advance the relatively under-researched field examining the intricacies of coach philosophies, and to address the dearth of research into tertiary education coaching degrees. While a number of the coaches who participated appeared to be able to articulate reasonably strong views on their approach, despite their novice status, there was also some evidence of the disparity between intent and action, as reported previously in the literature. The tendency for the sport environment to replicate competitive, high performance discourse was apparent in the statements of some coaches but more chose to emphasise an approach characterised by individual personal development and encouraging fun; an outcome perhaps related to the level at which they coached at that time (Côté *et al.*, 2007). The novice coaches in this study echoed the findings of previous work suggesting that the definition of success is a complex issue and it is clear that the interplay between coaching objectives, plus the underlying values motivating these objectives, are crucial factors in the development and implementation of coaching philosophies. The nature of these elements of the coaches' practice, particularly in terms of whether they are fixed or dependent on context would benefit from further, longitudinal research.

It is hoped that the findings of this paper will be utilised by coach educators in universities to help inform the content and structure of future programmes. Of high priority for educators is the provision of resources to assist students in developing and articulating an authentic philosophy; one in which there is minimal dissonance between intention and action. Given that there is clear evidence to suggest that coaches develop expertise predominantly through experience, it seems logical to format education systems which are equipped to utilise this knowledge. Potential recommendations for implementation therefore could involve the use of a formalised mentoring system, in order to provide each student with personal access to a "knowledgeable other" to prompt deeper reflection. This mentoring relationship could be extended to include regular coach observations (in a naturalistic setting, rather than within class sessions) and the use of video footage to provide more objective confirmation of intended behaviour. While these recommendations may be easily suggested, higher education resources are often stretched, with large class sizes preventing extensive staff engagement in this manner. An appropriate solution may therefore be the facilitation of a system to match final year and postgraduate students with more novice practitioners, hopefully to the mutual benefit of both parties.

By assisting student coaches to critique their proposed philosophy and better match it to their actions in the field, educators ought to be more successful in challenging previously established values, potentially guarding against the reproduction of harmful or ineffective practices, and allowing the development of more reflective, athlete-centred coaches.

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