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Educative mentoring in sport coaching: a reciprocal learning process

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ABSTRACT

Educative mentoring positions mentors and mentees as co-learners within a collaborative relationship, while emphasising reciprocal learning. However, research exploring educative mentoring is limited to teacher-mentors, restricting our understanding of the potential learning opportunities an educative stance provides mentors in other occupational fields. Consequently, the aim of this research was to explore the learning of sport coach mentors, with a specific focus on whether they were able to learn reciprocally from their mentees in a two-way process. As part of a wider project, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 sport coach mentors employed by a sport governing body, with interview transcripts subject to *reflexive* thematic analysis. Findings indicate that when an educative stance is adopted by a sport coach mentor, they are able to engage with collaborative learning opportunities with their mentees, which results in possibilities for growth and professional development. Practical implications for sport coach mentor training are discussed.

Introduction

Mentoring is defined as the 'one-to-one support of a novice or less experienced practitioner (mentee) by a more experienced practitioner (mentor), designed primarily to assist the development of the mentee's expertise' (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009, p. 207). However, despite its implementation across a variety of domains including education, nursing and business (Lefebvre, Bloom, & Loughead, 2020), mentoring is continually positioned as a contested practice (Kemmis, Heikkinen, Fransson, Aspfors, & Edwards-Groves, 2014). Consequently, mentoring is significantly structured by the context in which it is enacted (Kemmis et al., 2014), with organisational norms and individual perceptions enabling or inhibiting opportunities for learning (Feiman-Nemser, 1998; Griffiths, 2015).

While research examining mentoring and its association with supporting teacher learning would seem plentiful over the last 20 years (e.g. Castanheira, 2016; Kwan & Lopez-Real, 2005; Rachamim & Orland-Barak, 2018), in comparison, empirical exploration into sport coach mentorship is less developed (Lefebvre et al., 2020). This is surprising, considering

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sport coaches engage in similar pedagogic functions as teachers (Jones, 2006), with their learning and development needing to be bespoke and situated in context (Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021). Crucially, sport coach mentorship can be formal or informal in nature. Formalised sport coach mentoring programmes are often controlled by Sport Governing Bodies (SGBs), where mentoring relationships are structured, monitored and evaluated (Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021; Sawiuk, Taylor, & Groom, 2018), whereas informal sport coach mentoring relationships develop organically, beyond organisational control (Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke, & Salmela, 1998). For novice teachers and sport coaches, engagement with either formal or informal mentorship is likely to result in several benefits for their professional development, including enhanced content and pedagogical knowledge, increased confidence and self-esteem, career progression, and reduced workplace stress (e.g. Bloom et al., 1998; Castanheira, 2016; Cushion et al., 2010; Koh, Bloom, Fairhurst, Paiement, & Kee, 2014).

Mentorship is pivotal to enhancing teacher and sport coach learning. However, research has often overlooked the benefits and learning opportunities available to individuals performing a mentoring role (Gilles & Wilson, 2004; Haber-Curran, Everman, & Martinez, 2017). Neglecting issues related to mentor learning creates a crucial gap in our understanding of the holistic mentoring process (Jones, 2013; Langdon, 2014), resulting in a mentee-centric literature base. Problematically, research which has attempted to explore mentor learning has been limited to teacher-mentors (e.g. Hobson et al., 2009; Hudson, 2013; Kwan & Lopez-Real, 2005; Simpson, Hastings, & Hill, 2007), with these studies tending to 'lack depth and . . . not include the specific skills and areas of growth that mentors experience' (Haber-Curran et al., 2017, p. 488).

Within sport coaching, mentoring is generally considered a secondary profession for sport coaches (Chambers, 2018), with the assumption these individuals will seamlessly transition into a mentoring role due to their accumulated coaching experience (Leeder, Russell, & Beaumont, 2019). However, sport coach mentors should be conceptualised as learners (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006), with future research needing to explore the 'individual, contextual, and cultural differences with respect to mentor coaches' development' (Koh, Ho, & Koh, 2017, p. 529). Subsequently, given the growth of mentoring as a professional learning strategy for sport coaches (Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021), in addition to mentor learning and development becoming an area of increased scholarly research (Langdon, 2014; Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021), there is a pressing need to understand the reciprocal nature of sport coach mentorship. Therefore, in drawing upon the concept of educative mentoring (Feiman-Nemser, 1998), the aim of this research was to explore the learning of sport coach mentors (SCMs), with a specific focus on whether they were able to learn reciprocally from their mentees in a two-way process, while outlining the skills and areas of growth they experience. To address this aim, two broad research questions were developed: (1) How do sport coach mentors demonstrate educative mentoring within their practice? And (2) What learning opportunities are available to sport coach mentors who adopt an educative stance?

What is educative mentoring?

Mentoring has traditionally positioned the mentor as expert and mentee as novice, emphasising a one-way flow of information, where mentors offer generic strategies to help mentees in need (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006; Wexler, 2020). However, re-

conceptualising mentoring as an educative practice has resulted in a move away from knowledge transmission towards a shared process of knowledge transformation (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006). Developed by Feiman-Nemser (1998), the notion of educative mentoring suggests mentors should privilege long-term growth over short-term technocratic rationality, encouraging a 'disposition of inquiry' from both sides of the dyad (p. 28).

Educative mentors demonstrate a move towards collaborative knowledge sharing while encouraging mentees to challenge accepted norms and engage in critical reflection (Langdon & Ward, 2015). Thus, learning is reciprocal, with the relationship positioned as a mutual partnership as opposed to the traditional expert–novice hierarchy (Langdon, 2014; Langdon & Ward, 2015). Educative mentoring encourages reciprocity, collaboration and openness (Schwille, 2008), therefore, common mentoring practices such as session planning, observation and feedback, as well as analysing individual learning, are enacted differently (Stanulis et al., 2019; Wexler, 2020). Specifically, educative mentoring encourages an inquiry stance which interrogates the *why* and *how* of professional practice (Stanulis et al., 2019), generating considerable learning opportunities for both mentor and mentee (Trevethan & Sandretto, 2017). As Wexler (2020, p. 213) advocates, 'an educative mentor takes a stance of a learner, seeing him/herself not only as a holder of knowledge but also as a receiver'.

Problematically, the potential for educative mentoring to flourish is influenced by both agentic (individual) and structural (organisational) factors (Feiman-Nemser, 1998). For example, within traditional mentoring approaches, the mentor tends to dominate the use of discourse and power, which subordinately positions mentees as passive knowledge receivers (Rachamim & Orland-Barak, 2018). However, if mentors and organisations promote an educative stance, they provide growth opportunities for all stakeholders (Stanulis et al., 2019), where individuals 'act as co-mentors and co-mentees for one another in their mutual professional development' (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 161).

What do mentors learn through mentoring?

Educative mentors focus on the relational nature of mentoring, appreciating the collaborative learning opportunities which are available (Kemmis et al., 2014). To learn from their mentees, mentors need to demonstrate a disposition of reciprocity, which involves engaging in dialogue with others, respecting differing opinions and communicating ideas (Trevethan & Sandretto, 2017). However, it is often difficult for mentors to move away from the hierarchical expert–novice model of mentorship and their accompanying habitual practices, beliefs and assumptions (Trevethan & Sandretto, 2017). This shift towards educative mentoring is hindered by the fact mentors are generally neither expected nor required to learn from their mentees (Trevethan & Sandretto, 2017). Thus, the limited expectation for mentors to learn results in a poor awareness of the possible learning opportunities available (Jones, 2013).

However, through mentoring, mentors become exposed to several professional development opportunities, especially when they anticipate the reciprocal nature of learning through sharing experiences and reflective practice (Jones, 2013). For example, mentors can enhance their own self-development and awareness (e.g. increased confidence, responsibility, broadened perspectives), skill development (e.g. organisational,

interpersonal) and career prospects (Haber-Curran et al., 2017; Hobson et al., 2009; Hudson, 2013). Moreover, evidence suggests teacher-mentors within education are able to enhance their own pedagogical content knowledge while acquiring new ideas and perspectives towards teaching practice (Hobson et al., 2009; Hudson, 2013; Simpson et al., 2007). Reflection has also been outlined as an area of growth for individuals who perform a mentoring role (Hobson et al., 2009; Kwan & Lopez-Real, 2005; Simpson et al., 2007). Specifically, encouraging mentees to reflect enables mentors to critically review their own practice and beliefs (Jones, 2013), which over time allows mentors to view themselves as co-learners (Langdon, 2014).

Since Feiman-Nemser (1998) first outlined the notion of educative mentoring, the concept has been explored extensively with teacher-mentors in education (e.g. Langdon, 2014; Langdon & Ward, 2015; Stanulis et al., 2019; Trevethan & Sandretto, 2017; Wexler, 2020), with other studies exploring mentor learning more generally also restricted to this domain (e.g. Hobson et al., 2009; Hudson, 2013; Simpson et al., 2007). Within sport coaching, research from Singapore (Koh et al., 2014) and North America (Grant, Bloom, & Lefebvre, 2020) has begun to identify the potential benefits for individuals performing an SCM role. These studies have indicated that SCMs are likely to develop their interpersonal skills, increase their coaching knowledge and facilitate meaningful self-reflection, in addition to feeling a sense of fulfilment (Grant et al., 2020; Koh et al., 2014). While insightful, these studies investigated formalised sport coach mentoring programmes more broadly, rather than explicitly exploring the professional learning and development of SCMs. Indeed, Lefebvre et al. (2020, p. 9) have recently argued that 'sport scholars can stand to benefit from the wealth of existing mentoring literature in other disciplines'. Therefore, this research builds upon existing studies in sport coaching (e.g. Grant et al., 2020; Koh et al., 2014) by applying the established concept of educative mentoring, derived from the education literature, to explicitly enhance our understanding of SCM learning and re-conceptualise sport coach mentorship as a two-way process (Griffiths, 2015).

Methodology

Research design

This research is situated within the interpretivist paradigm, which assumes individual perspectives are varied and developed over time through interactions within cultural contexts (Patton, 2015). Specifically, this research is guided by social constructionism, defined as a framework which 'sees the world, and what we know of it, as produced (constructed) through language, representation, and other social processes, rather than discovered' (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 336). Consequently, a relativist ontology is emphasised, with the assumption individual perspectives depend on a particular worldview developed through interactions within varying sociocultural settings (Patton, 2015). Epistemologically, social constructionism represents a non-foundational perspective towards knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2013), where the researcher is engaged in social construction as opposed to objectively depicting individual reality (Patton, 2015).

Following these paradigmatic assumptions, a qualitative instrumental case study design was adopted to uncover SCMs' perspectives, meaning and understanding in relation to a particular issue, e.g. learning reciprocally from their mentees (Stake, 1995). Holistically, a case study provides an in-depth picture of a unit of study (e.g. a group), therefore, a key premise of case study research is how the case is bounded, which situates the case in context (Stake, 1995). Therefore, this research focused on the reciprocal learning of one group of SCMs employed by a SGB in England. While this group of SCMs are 'one among others' (Stake, 1995, p. 2), at the time of writing, these SCMs formed part of the largest and most established formalised sport coach mentoring programme in England. Thus, due to the lead author's accessibility to the case, alongside the relative size and established nature of the formalised sport coach mentoring programme, this group of SCMs was chosen to facilitate our wider understanding of how SCMs learn reciprocally from their mentees (Stake, 1995).

Context: the sport coach mentoring programme

This research focuses on SCMs employed by a SGB in England as part of a formalised sport coach mentoring initiative, which has been running for over five years, employs over 300 part-time SCMs, and supplements the current formal coach education pathway of the respective sport. The SCMs operate across England and work in one of eight geographical regions, with each region being overseen by a regional mentor officer. The programme aims to provide free *in-situ* mentoring opportunities to volunteer coaches, who typically coach at community sport clubs within the participation domain (Lyle & Cushion, 2017). The SCMs are employed on part-time, 100-hour contracts by the SGB to work with coaches at community clubs within their designated geographical region over the course of a season (September to June). To be employed by the SGB, SCMs must possess a minimum Level 2 coaching qualification in the respective sport, while preferably having prior mentoring and sport coaching experience.

After being recruited, all SCMs must attend an initial one-day training induction, alongside attending a one-day regional and two-day national training event each calendar year. However, more localised support and training is available to SCMs throughout the year (e.g. regional SCM meet-ups, online webinars, peer-observation opportunities). Following initial training, SCMs are directed by the SGB towards local clubs who have expressed an interest in receiving mentoring support. SCMs are then encouraged to contact club stakeholders to understand their needs, while outlining the aims of the initiative (e.g. to provide free and bespoke mentoring support to local sport coaches). Having commenced the mentoring relationship, SCMs will provide *in-situ* mentoring support to coaches within that club. Comparable to research investigating formalised sport coach mentoring programmes in Singapore (Koh et al., 2014), North America (Grant et al., 2020) and the United Kingdom (Sawiuk et al., 2018), the SCMs utilise a variety of mentoring practices, including training and match-day observations and coaching demonstrations, as well as providing individual feedback, alongside facilitating reflective practice. In sum, this initiative is an example of a formalised sport coach mentoring programme due to being overseen by an SGB which selects and recruits

mentors, provides in-house training, outlines the frequency of the relationship, controls mentor–mentee matching and emphasises the use of specific mentoring practices (Cushion, 2015; Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021; Sawiuk et al., 2018).

Sampling and participants

As part of a wider research project, this manuscript explores the process of SCMs learning reciprocally from their mentees. However, published research stemming from the same project explicitly focuses on the influence of SGB mentor training and workplace learning (see Leeder et al., 2019). Thus, in developing the wider research project, sampling occurred at two levels: (1) to initially select the case; and (2) recruiting participants within the case (Stake, 1995). A homogenous purposive sampling strategy was used to select a group of SGB employed SCMs. Due to the size and nature of the SGB formalised sport coach mentoring programme they were involved with, it was hoped this selection of SCMs would provide information-rich cases to understand SCM learning and development more broadly (Patton, 2015). After the case of SCMs was selected, sampling within the case was convenience based, reflecting the situated, interpretative and pragmatic nature of sampling within qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2021a; Sim, Saunders, Waterfield, & Kingstone, 2018). In total, 50 SCMs were contacted via email, with the first 18 who agreed to participate recruited immediately (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Within qualitative research, pre-determining sample size before data collection and analysis is considered problematic (Braun & Clarke, 2021a; Sim et al., 2018). Thus, in adopting the notion of *information power* developed by Malterud, Siersma, and Guassora (2016), due to the study's narrow aim, dense sample specificity, use of established concepts (e.g. educative mentoring), strong dialogue with participants and case study design, an initial sample of 18 SCMs was deemed adequate (Braun & Clarke, 2013). However, due to the breadth and depth of data collected from the initial sample of 18 participants as part of the wider research project, this paper depicts the voices and lived experiences of 10 male SCMs to present 'a rich, complex and multi-faceted story' (Braun & Clarke, 2021a, p. 211), while specifically addressing the designated research questions and aim of the study, alongside maximising our understanding of the phenomenon in question (Patton, 2015).

The 10 SCMs (average age 43.4) had accumulated on average almost 15 years of practical coaching experience, with sport-specific coaching qualifications ranging from Level 2 to Level 5, with each SCM employed by the SGB for 1.7 years on average (see Table 1). Thus, we are of the opinion that these 10 SCMs are able to provide a succinct 'opportunity to learn' how SCMs demonstrate educative mentoring, while understanding the learning opportunities available (Stake, 1995, p. 6). Prior to data collection, all participants were informed of the voluntary nature of the research and guaranteed anonymity, before signing consent forms approved by a university's ethics committee.

In reflecting the paradigmatic assumptions of this study, a relativist approach to judging qualitative research has been adopted, which rejects a universal and positivist criterion (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Therefore, an open-ended and context-dependent criterion, which is neither fixed nor rigid, should be used by readers to guide their judgement on this qualitative research (Smith & McGannon, 2018). For example,

Table 1. Participant information.

Pseudonym	Age	Coaching experience (years)	Highest coaching qualification	Mentoring experience with the SGB (years)
Milo	34	16	Level 3	1
Anthony	30	11	Level 3	1
Sebastian	42	10	Level 3	1
Harvey	55	20	Level 3	1
Melvin	54	12	Level 3	5
Jimmy	54	13	Level 3	3
Dean	28	7	Level 2	1
Jamal	26	4	Level 3	1
Simon	52	14	Level 3	2
Kevin	58	40	Level 5	1

throughout the data collection and analysis process, each author acted as a critical friend to one another to stimulate reflection, interrogation and encourage openness to appreciate multiple interpretations, as opposed to seeking a common consensus (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Moreover, to further enhance rigour, interview transcripts were shared with all SCMs as member reflections. Rather than attempting to objectively access the truth, member reflections from the participants functioned as a means to generate additional insight, perspectives and data (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Smith & McGannon, 2018).

Data collection

Semi-structured telephone interviews (averaging 64 minutes) were utilised to understand SCMs' 'attitudes, opinions, beliefs, and values with respect to a particular phenomenon' (Purdy, 2014, p. 162), which in total produced 253 pages of verbatim transcription. In this instance, the phenomenon and the object of the case more broadly was the learning and development of SCMs, with a specific focus on educative mentoring and reciprocal learning. In following the suggestions of Smith and Sparkes (2016), an interview guide was utilised,[1] with its construction influenced by the existing mentoring literature, while incorporating open rather than closed questions structured by thematic sections. Having reintroduced the aim and context of the research, the first section of the interview guide explored the participants' previous mentoring experiences and the process of transitioning from a coach to an SCM. The second section focused on the SCMs' current mentoring practices and beliefs, alongside their learning and development as part of their mentoring role. Third, participants were questioned on the impact and quality of their mentor training, in addition to their recommendations and perspectives towards the influence of the SGB on their mentoring practice. The final section invited the SCMs to identify any areas yet to be discussed within the interview, while closing with several broad questions to summarise the thematic areas previously mentioned (Smith & Sparkes, 2016).

Despite dividing the questions into designated thematic sections, the semi-structured nature of the interviews enabled a degree of flexibility, allowing the conversations to develop and diverge into different topic areas if desired (Purdy, 2014; Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Indeed, while often considered inferior to face-to-face interviews, the use of telephone interviews provided several distinct advantages such as greater accessibility,

more convenience and empowerment for participants, alongside helping to promote increased disclosure (Braun & Clarke, 2013). All telephone interviews were conducted, audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by the lead author.

One of the defining features of qualitative research is reflexivity, which involves researchers critically reflecting upon their influence on the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Thus, when conducting the interviews, it is important to acknowledge that the lead author had obtained *partial insider* status, referring to when a researcher shares similar characteristics to their participants, albeit with some level of detachment (Greene, 2014). Consequently, due to the lead author's biography (higher education lecturer, researcher, coach and coach developer), coaching experience (10 years within both participation and performance domains), and qualifications within the respective sport (Level 3 qualified coach), alongside their understanding of the SGB, building rapport and trust with the SCMs was a smoother process (Greene, 2014).

Data analysis

Due to its compatibility with social constructionism, a *reflexive* thematic analysis process was adopted (Braun & Clarke, 2020, 2021b). Within thematic analysis, the notion of reflexivity 'emphasises the importance of the researcher's subjectivity as analytic *resource*, and their reflexive engagement with theory, data and interpretation' (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p. 3). Reflexive approaches towards thematic analysis (e.g. Braun & Clarke, 2020, 2021b) involve delayed theme development, derived from codes, which can form implicit or latent meaning. Consequently, Braun and Clarke's (2006) seminal six-phase model was followed throughout the analysis process, in a recursive rather than a rigid manner. This procedure involved progression and regression through the developing stages: data familiarisation; coding; developing themes; refining themes; naming themes; and eventually writing up (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

After initial immersion within the interview transcripts, a prolonged organic and subjective coding process commenced, incorporating both inductive (data-driven) and deductive (theory-driven) elements to guide data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2020). Within *reflexive* thematic analysis, coding constitutes a process of *interpretation* rather than identification, where codes evolve over time and are not fixed entities (Braun & Clarke, 2021b). For example, when coding the extract 'when you are actually a mentor you are still learning stuff . . . you can learn bits off them, and you are always bouncing ideas off other coaches as well' (Jimmy), coding labels such as 'a collaborative approach', 'two-way learning' and 'sharing dialogue' were applied, (re)developed and grouped together to form the initial (unrefined) theme of 'reciprocal learning'. Thus, as a result of the coding process, themes were developed as analytical outputs which represent patterns of meaning surrounding shared concepts across the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2021b). It is important to recognise that themes were generated by the researchers through their data engagement and interpretive work, with this subjectivity of the primary tool informing a *reflexive* approach (Braun & Clarke, 2021b). Following theme refinement and naming, the process of writing up commenced. This involved selecting data extracts to demonstrate patterning across themes while capturing the essence of the story being told, ensuring the analytical narrative moves beyond description (Braun & Clarke, 2021b).

Discussion

Following the *reflexive* thematic analysis process, three themes were developed: (1) 'Sharing information: mentoring as a reciprocal learning process'; (2) 'Broadening horizons: positive outcomes and new perspectives from mentoring'; and (3) 'Helping those "in need": Re-positioning mentee assumptions'.

Sharing information: mentorship as a reciprocal learning process

Several SCMs were able to evidence educative mentoring within their practice. The data within this theme is comparable to Koh et al. (2014), through highlighting how SCMs perceived mentoring to be a collaborative process of knowledge sharing (Langdon & Ward, 2015), with learning a reciprocal and two-way endeavour for both mentor and mentee (Langdon, 2014). Melvin emphasised this approach:

> I will always say the mentor–mentee process is sharing of information, but I think the first thing I picked up or was reinforced that gave me the confidence from the SGB is that it is a two-way process. I think if I go in and tell them 'I'm a mentor and I would know a bit more then you, and I want to get this message across. I want to try and help to mould you to become better to take on board that philosophy' – to me that is a wrong way of doing it because it's almost like I see it as the scales are one sided, as its top heavy, as in I'm kneeling to you all the time. My basic principle is, yes of course I will look to impart or share knowledge, but I hope that's a two-way process and that we can talk about things, and I will certainly pick-up information from you, and I would hope that you will gain likewise knowledge and experience from me, it's a sharing process. (Melvin)

The notion of mentoring as a sharing process which involves exchanging ideas and perspectives (Koh et al., 2014) while demonstrating dispositions towards openness encapsulates an educative approach (Schwille, 2008; Trevethan & Sandretto, 2017). Because Melvin identified himself as a co-learner within his mentoring relationships, he was able to view himself as a receiver of knowledge, demonstrating a disposition of reciprocity and learning from the wider life experiences of his mentees (Trevethan & Sandretto, 2017; Wexler, 2020):

> I mean fundamentally it's a sharing of experiences on the way forward rather than me thinking that I'm holding the upper ground because quite often it's open-ended. You go into a situation, and someone may be on paper a certain level of coach which may be within the grand scheme of things viewed as more junior, but they have got very dynamic approach to that. And obviously they bring massive life skills from where they work and that's a transferable thing for me is, you come across some very interesting people. Who have got some very interesting backgrounds and experiences which again relate back within the mentor-mentee scheme. (Melvin)

The potential for educative mentoring to flourish and mentor learning to occur is structured by both agentic (individual) and structural (organisational) factors (Feiman-Nemser, 1998). However, Melvin outlined how both he and the SGB perceived

mentoring as a two-way learning process, creating opportunities for openness, collaboration and co-constructing knowledge-*of*-practice (Langdon & Ward, 2015; Trevethan & Sandretto, 2017). Additional SCMs adopted this stance:

> When you are actually a mentor you are still learning stuff, absolutely, you know, there are some good coaches out there, and you can learn bits off them, and you are always bouncing ideas off other coaches as well. So, I find that an enjoyable part. Sometimes you find a unique way a coach approaches a subject, and you think, yeah, that's pretty good. I can use that, or I can advise other coaches to have a go at that. (Jimmy)

> If you don't know something, I have no qualms asking somebody half my age. If you don't ask for help, you're going to get massively left behind. So, when I go out and coach mentor, would I hope to learn from a coach who is maybe 18 years of age? Yes. It's a constant learning process and a sharing of information as well. (Harvey)

SCMs who position themselves as co-learners within the mentoring relationship can facilitate growth-producing experiences for both themselves and their mentees (Koh et al., 2014; Stanulis et al., 2019). Problematically, through discourse mentors are typically positioned as experts with their mentees as novices (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006; Wexler, 2020), which has connotations for how both parties perceive the flow of information (Rachamim & Orland-Barak, 2018). Indeed, Anthony described how he had to highlight the reciprocal nature of learning to his mentees, shifting their perceptions of traditional mentoring practice towards an educative stance (Feiman-Nemser, 1998):

> The perception is that you work for the SGB, you must know your stuff type thing. And for me I've been trying to sort of tell them look I don't know everything. I will probably learn things by observing your coaching session or observing your coaching, as you will by me providing you feedback. By making them sort of understand that it's a two-way relationship . . . . I think that really helps with certainly communication but the relationship aspect as well. (Anthony)

For some SCMs, time was spent working with mentees towards re-conceptualising the mentor role as a co-learner and co-producer of knowledge and understanding (Stanulis et al., 2019; Trevethan & Sandretto, 2017). While both SCMs and the SGB identified mentoring as a two-way learning process, to maximise the professional development opportunities available, both mentors and mentees need to embody dispositions of reciprocity, openness and collaboration (Kemmis et al., 2014; Schwille, 2008). Thus, the findings within this theme build upon those of Koh et al. (2014) and Grant et al. (2020), by outlining how SCMs adopt principles of educative mentoring to facilitate reciprocal learning from their mentees.

Broadening horizons: positive outcomes and new perspectives from mentoring

Generally, there are no expectations for mentors to learn from their mentees when establishing mentoring relationships (Trevethan & Sandretto, 2017), with mentors often struggling to identify potential learning opportunities (Jones, 2013). However, when an educative stance is adopted and mentors anticipate the reciprocal nature of learning (Jones, 2013), several personal, professional and technical outcomes are available (Hudson, 2013; Simpson et al., 2007). In building upon the work of Grant et al. (2020) and Koh et al. (2014) within sport coaching, the development of technical outcomes for SCMs featured predominantly within this research, which refers to the process

of acquiring new strategies, perspectives, resources and skills towards practice (Simpson et al., 2007). Harvey outlined how he is always searching for new ideas towards coaching practice from his mentees:

> I'm always looking for little things myself, so it's been a joy from my perspective really . . . . You watch something and you'll think 'I like that, that's good' . . . . But things on the pitch I have learned from as well. Little bits and pieces here, about setup and various things for sure. (Harvey)

Adopting an educative stance increases the likelihood an SCM will obtain technical outcomes from mentorship (e.g. coaching strategies, pedagogies, practice designs). Indeed, in utilising educative mentoring and perceiving mentoring as a two-way learning process, both SCMs and mentees will 'develop dispositions towards engagement in a professional community committed to individual and collective self-development' (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 157). Both Simon and Kevin encompassed such dispositions towards wanting to learn with and from their mentees:

> It's about wanting to learn, it's about trying to get more knowledge, it's about trying to apply best practice, it's the same really. (Simon)

> I still continue wanting to learn. Even at 58 I am still hungry for knowledge myself. (Kevin)

Identifying and engaging with opportunities to learn new skills, perspectives and ideas while adopting a multidimensional view of knowledge resonates with an expansive learning environment (Fuller & Unwin, 2004). Individual biographies and embodied dispositions influence the extent to which individuals can see and engage with learning opportunities within their workplace (Hodkinson et al., 2004). Therefore, SCMs who embody dispositions related to educative mentoring can facilitate expansive learning environments and envision the learning opportunities available to them. Several SCMs alluded to the technical outcomes they have been able to see and acquire from their mentees, which have altered their perspectives towards coaching practice:

> I think there's been a couple of practices, a few technical sorts of observations that I've gone 'I like that, I get that'. (Sebastian)

> You'll always take something from it. And I can see that now through just running work-shops and speaking to volunteer coaches who are Level 1 but some of the discussions you have are great, and when you think about them on the journey home you just think 'wow'. That's changed the way I think about that. (Jamal)

While mentors' technical outcomes, such as acquiring new ideas and perspectives towards practice, have been well documented (e.g. Hobson et al., 2009; Hudson, 2013; Koh et al., 2014), mentors may also enhance their ability to reflect and critically review their own practice through informal, experiential learning opportunities (Jones, 2013; Koh et al., 2014, 2017). For example, Simpson et al. (2007, p. 457) suggest mentoring may result in mentors developing professional outcomes, defined as 'opportunities to reflect

upon professional and ethical behaviour'. Harvey described how his mentoring relationship with one coach stimulated critical reflection upon his own mannerisms as a coach regarding how frequently he connects and engages with the parents of his players:

> I mentioned the female coach earlier, she is so good with the parents as well. And I've noticed that every time she comes off, a lot of the coaches, myself included sometimes, you've got your balls, you've got this, you've got that. You're in such a rush to get on the pitch to lay everything out, you don't really spend that much time with the parents. She makes a point, two or three minutes, as she comes on, it gives them a little vibe . . . . It's not just Mum and Dad standing there, and it gives them a sense of importance . . . . I thought to myself, I looked at that a couple of times and I thought I need to do that more. I need to speak to parents more because sometimes we can get a little bit full of ourselves as coaches. (Harvey)

In this instance, Harvey was able to accrue professional outcomes from his mentoring experience and develop a heightened awareness of his own coaching practice (Koh et al., 2014; Simpson et al., 2007). However, in addition to technical and professional outcomes, individuals who perform a mentoring role may also positively experience personal outcomes, which refers to opportunities to reflect upon challenges and receive affirmation (Simpson et al., 2007; Trevethan & Sandretto, 2017). This was demonstrated by Jamal, who was able to articulate how his role as an SCM enabled him to critically discuss, share and receive affirmation on his beliefs towards best coaching practice:

> It has been all the things I hoped it would be in terms of very rewarding . . . I guess an interesting way to get a perspective on how grassroots clubs are run in different ways. A great way to network with people, like with coaches of all different ages and experiences, and qualifications, and share ideas of best practice with people. Which you know, it improves me I think as a mentor but also as a coach as well interestingly. (Jamal)

The literature base which explores mentor learning and development has been able to identify an array of potential benefits for individuals who perform a mentoring role, including increased confidence, broadened perspectives, skill development, enhanced reflection, and several technical, professional and personal outcomes (Grant et al., 2020; Hobson et al., 2009; Hudson, 2013; Jones, 2013; Koh et al., 2014; Simpson et al., 2007). However, the likelihood and potential for mentors to learn from their mentees and acquire benefits from the mentoring relationship is significantly increased if they adopt an educative stance, which helps to facilitate expansive learning environments (Fuller & Unwin, 2004; Trevethan & Sandretto, 2017).

Helping those 'in need': re-positioning mentee assumptions

Educative mentoring involves re-positioning the role of the mentor as a co-learner in the learning process. However, it also involves re-positioning the mentee and the assumptions mentors hold over knowledge (Wexler, 2020). Traditional mentoring approaches position the mentor as an expert, who can ultimately determine how situations are understood and what knowledge is considered relevant for mentees (Rachamim & Orland-Barak, 2018). From this perspective, mentees are viewed as novices and recipients of knowledge within a hierarchical structure, who should model their mentor's

exemplary practice through a supervisory process (Kemmis et al., 2014; Trevethan, 2017). Nevertheless, educative mentoring recognises mentees as critical inquirers and co-producers of knowledge, who possess various experiences which can support mentor learning (Gilles & Wilson, 2004; Stanulis et al., 2019).

Several SCMs were able to recognise the strengths and unique skill sets their mentees possess. Sebastian highlighted the importance of modifying a mentor's perception towards mentees by avoiding subjectively positioning them as individuals who need help (Leeder, 2019):

> I think what's really interesting is that because when you think of, like you said, a mentee, we kind of assume they are someone who is in need, they need help. They're doing something horribly wrong, and they need us to, you know, guide them on the right path but I think that's something I've noticed as well when you go and observe these coaches, you know . . . they're good people and they're good coaches, and they have, you know, some of the practices they put on. The kids are having fun, it's great. And I'm watching them and thinking 'wow' . . . maybe my perception of the role of the mentor is to, you know, is to help someone who, who needs help. But, you know, some of the people have experience perhaps, you know, don't necessarily need as much support and guidance as I maybe thought they would. (Sebastian)

The perception that mentees are coaches who need to be fixed was effectively challenged by several SCMs (Leeder, 2019). In addition to Sebastian, Milo also demonstrated a modification of his dispositions towards his mentees, by highlighting how the coaching approaches, pedagogies and behaviours his mentees adopted were better than he initially anticipated:

> I just assumed that it's going to be poor, poor quality, and I just, I don't know, almost a bit snobby I guess to some extent . . . but I just thought, you know what, I want to do this job because I've seen some grassroots coaching in my hometown. It is poor so I thought if I do this role, this is an opportunity for me to make it better. I went into it thinking, it's probably going to be like what I've seen on like a Sunday at my local park or whatever. But it isn't at all, you know, the coaching I've seen, you know, don't get me wrong, they are not the complete article but some of the stuff that they're doing is really good. (Milo)

Educative mentoring takes time to develop and necessitates specific dispositions towards both mentoring and learning (Langdon, 2014; Trevethan & Sandretto, 2017). While mentors can acquire a range of positive outcomes from mentoring (Koh et al., 2014; Simpson et al., 2007), both Sebastian and Dean described how exploring their mentees' strengths and current coaching approaches was a humbling experience, which provided them with an opportunity to give back and feel a sense of satisfaction (Koh et al., 2014, 2017):

> I think what I've been able to take away is their understanding of their players and . . . perhaps to start with not giving them enough credit. 'You're a mentee you need help. Right, I'm here to help you'. Hang on just, you know, these are capable people who function, you know, in the outside world and they have a passion for sport because they wouldn't be involved otherwise . . . . So that for me has been quite humbling. So, watching and observing those coaches interact with their players and understanding how they have got a deeper connection with those individuals . . . . Like, yeah, when you say what's your take from it in

those kinds of things that I think, maybe that humility to understand the coaches are in tune with some of their players and squads, I can just home in on some of those subtleties and those behaviours and that could help me in different situations. (Sebastian)

So that interested me because things that I sometimes take for granted that I know, actually other people don't know, or new coaches don't know. And I think it's one of those where you coach for a while and then you almost forget that you were a novice, because everyone starts somewhere. (Dean)

For Sebastian and Dean their experiences as SCMs enabled an interrogation and reflection on their beliefs and practices, both past and present. An educative mentor can develop growth-producing experiences for themselves and their mentees (Feiman-Nemser, 1998; Stanulis et al., 2019). Positioning himself as a co-learner, Melvin identified an opportunity to learn from his mentee's wider life experiences, which he could adopt and apply to other domains:

As a mentor you will go and deal with a mentee on a sport specific basis but as a larger-than-life situation that person has a massive amount of experience to bring to the table . . . that can rub off on you as a mentor that you can then take on board, you know it's not sport-specific . . . but how can I use my experiences not only within sport but outside of sport? (Melvin)

Individual biographies and dispositions are significant in recognising and exploiting opportunities for learning within workplaces (Hodkinson et al., 2004). For the SCMs within this research, it would appear many possessed the requisite dispositions towards educative mentoring, such as openness, reciprocity and an inquiry stance (Schwille, 2008; Trevethan & Sandretto, 2017). Embodying these dispositions enabled these SCMs to re-position the roles of both mentor and mentee, dismantling the expert–novice model and perceiving the mentoring relationship as a two-way learning process (Trevethan, 2017). Therefore, through adopting an educative stance, SCMs were able to not only see, but also engage with opportunities to share experiences, co-produce knowledge, problem solve and stimulate critical reflection (Jones, 2013; Koh et al., 2014; Langdon & Ward, 2015; Stanulis et al., 2019).

Limitations

This research has provided insight into the reciprocal nature of learning within sport coach mentorship; however, some limitations are present. First, it should be acknowledged that this study illustrates the experiences of 10 male SCMs from one SGB within England, with a diverse range of ages and coaching experience, potentially resulting in varied approaches towards mentoring practice. Future research should look to include the voices of female mentors, while investigating the impact of gender and cross-gender relationships on SCM learning (Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021). Furthermore, future projects should attempt to explore how mentor biographies (e.g. age, gender, coaching and mentoring experience) from different SGBs directly influence their beliefs towards mentoring practice, in addition to understanding how the role of technology can help to support the development of global mentoring networks (Grant et al., 2020). Second, this research focuses on SCMs working with youth sport coaches within the participation domain (Lyle & Cushion, 2017), therefore, the learning opportunities available to SCMs operating within other domains (e.g. performance coaching) may vary. Third, the

experiences of the mentees who were mentored by the SCMs are absent within this research. Their perspectives and thoughts might have contributed towards a holistic understanding of how and why SCMs were able to learn from the experiences and practices of their mentees. Finally, in recognising the importance of context, at the time of writing the SCMs involved in this research are employed by the largest formalised sport coach mentoring programme in England. Consequently, due to the size and scope of the programme, SCMs had access to multiple mentees, from several community sport clubs within their geographical region. This might have contributed towards increased learning opportunities, which might not be available to SCMs operating within smaller-scale programmes.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to explore the learning of SCMs, with a specific focus on whether they were able to learn reciprocally from their mentees in a two-way process, while outlining the skills and areas of growth they experience. In addressing the designated research questions, the evidence suggests that SCMs demonstrate aspects of educative mentoring, through emphasising reciprocity, openness and collaboration, resulting in possibilities for growth. Moreover, in building upon existing sport coaching literature (e.g. Grant et al., 2020; Koh et al., 2014, 2017) through the application of educative mentoring, the findings indicate that SCMs can acquire several technical, professional and personal outcomes, through the facilitation of an expansive learning environment which broadened their horizons towards coaching practice (Fuller & Unwin, 2004; Simpson et al., 2007).

While the adoption of educative mentoring by teacher-mentors has been well documented within the education literature (e.g. Feiman-Nemser, 1998; Stanulis et al., 2019; Trevethan & Sandretto, 2017; Wexler, 2020), this research is the first to explicitly explore and apply the concept within the field of sport coaching. In comparison to teaching, sport coaching is still grappling with issues surrounding volunteerism, professionalisation and inconsistencies regarding the best way to educate and support the coaching workforce (Cushion, 2015). Significantly, this study has now positioned mentoring as an initiative which encompasses multiple benefits and learning opportunities for not only sport coaches, but also the SCMs supporting coach development. The findings from this research have crucial implications for the training provided to sport coach mentors, which needs to emphasise the importance of dismantling traditional hierarchical perspectives towards mentorship to facilitate an educative stance (Langdon, 2014; Trevethan, 2017). Indeed, within formal mentoring programmes, SCMs are likely to receive a sink-or-swim induction, provided with generic workshops which do little to enhance professional learning (Griffiths, 2015; Leeder et al., 2019). Therefore, to promote educative mentoring and to encourage dispositional change, transformative training for SCMs which provides on-going support is necessary (Feiman-Nemser, 1998; Leeder et al., 2019; Stanulis et al., 2019), where SCMs can 'practice, document, analyse, and discuss their experiences as mentors' (Stanulis et al., 2019, p. 578).

In summary, this research has explicitly identified that SCMs have the potential to learn reciprocally from their mentees and experience several growth opportunities when an educative stance is adopted. If SGBs administering formalised mentoring programmes embrace an expansive approach towards mentor development which emphasises

principles of educative mentoring, it is likely this will extend an SCM's 'learning territory' and be embedded within their future practice and increase the potential for reciprocal learning (Fuller & Unwin, 2004).

Note

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Disclosure statement

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