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ARTICLE

Planning, delivering, and evaluating formalised sport coach mentoring: exploring the role of the Programme Director

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ABSTRACT

While research into sport coach mentoring is steadily increasing, currently the literature base is overly mentee-centric, overlooking the role and importance of additional stakeholders (e.g. mentors, programme directors, and sport governing bodies) involved within formalised sport coach mentoring programmes. Consequently, the aim of this research was to address this issue by examining the experiences of Jason, a Programme Director (PD) of a high-performance formalised female sport coach mentoring programme. Data were collected via three in-depth semi-structured interviews, which were analysed thematically. The findings highlight the inherent complexities of planning and delivering effective formalised sport coach mentoring provision, especially within high-performance contexts. Challenges associated with mentor recruitment and training were outlined, alongside the external influences of organisational agendas and beliefs on mentor pedagogy and practice. Jason also critically reflected upon to the problematic nature of evaluating formalised sport coach mentoring programmes. Practical recommendations and future avenues for empirical inquiry are discussed.

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Introduction

Over the last decade empirical research exploring sport coach mentorship has grown in stature, due to the profound impact of mentoring on the professional learning and development of sport coaches (e.g. Bloom, 2013; Chambers, 2015, 2018; Groom & Sawiuk, 2018; Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021). Despite this advancement, Leeder and Sawiuk (2021) recently outlined several areas worthy of further investigation for sport coach mentoring scholars: the multifaceted nature of gender, recruiting and training mentors,

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and the importance of role models, in addition to innovative delivery formats. While mentoring as a pedagogical and educational strategy is well established within fields such as nursing, education, and business (Lefebvre, Bloom, & Loughead, 2020), mentoring practice has started to undergo a process of re-conceptualisation within the sport coaching domain (Jones, Harris, & Miles, 2009; Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021).

To date, research into sport coach mentorship has primarily focused on the nature and structure of the mentoring relationship between coach and sport coach mentor; for example, the political nature of formalised elite sport coach mentoring programmes (Sawiuk, Taylor, & Groom, 2017), the value of multiple mentors to support mentees (Sawiuk, Taylor, & Groom, 2018), the dyadic and hierarchical nature of mentor-mentee relationships (Zehntner & McMahon, 2019), the role of developmental networks (Lefebvre, Bloom, & Duncan, 2021), and the potential opportunities associated with e-mentoring (Grant, Bloom, & Lefebvre, 2020). These conceptualisations of sport coach mentorship can be broadly categorised as either formal or informal (McQuade, Davis, & Nash, 2015). Informal mentoring is common within sport coaching, referring to natural, organic, and unstructured relationships which evolve within coaching contexts (Cushion, 2015). In contrast, formal mentoring programmes are designed and delivered by a Sport Governing Body (SGB) to oversee the development of the coaching workforce. Formalised sport coach mentoring programmes are often aligned to institutional agendas, while funded by a set budget and measured by key performance indicators (Leeder & Cushion, 2020; Sawiuk et al., 2017, 2018).

Mentoring as a method for coach development continues to be touted as an enriching practice for both personal and professional learning (Chambers, 2015; Griffiths, 2015). The benefits of sport coach mentorship are often associated with the experiential, contextual, and authentic learning experiences of the mentee when they are guided and supported within their own coaching environment *in situ* (Bailey, Jones, & Allison, 2019; Cushion, 2015). However, at present there are suggestions *for*, but limited evidence *of*, successful mentoring programmes, with the literature base failing to justify the widespread delivery of such provision across both the United Kingdom (UK) and globally (Lyle & Cushion, 2017). Importantly, within formalised sport coach mentoring programmes, relationships are traditionally dyadic between a mentor-mentee pairing, which have been critiqued for their one-dimensional nature (Groom & Sawiuk, 2018; Sawiuk & Groom, 2019; Sawiuk et al., 2017). Alongside this critique, a dearth of research exists within the field of mentoring more broadly which focuses on programme design features (Cornelius, Wood, & Lai, 2016), and specifically *who* designs and implements these programmes in practice. Furthermore, while empirical work exploring formal sport coach mentoring continues to progress,

there is a paucity of research examining the wider role of key stakeholders within such formal coach education settings (cf. Kolić, Groom, Nelson, & Taylor, 2020), such as the role of the Programme Director (PD) within formalised sport coach mentoring provision.

A growing number of scholars have begun to critique the application of formalised sports coach mentoring in practice, while suggesting innovative conceptual frameworks which move away from traditional dyadic models (e.g. Bailey et al., 2019; Sawiuk et al., 2017, 2018). Moreover, research has explored the benefits of formalised sports coach mentoring programmes for female coaches (Banwell, Stirling, & Kerr, 2019), while identifying the challenges female coaches face within such programmes e.g. a lack of female role models (see Banwell, Kerr, & Stirling, 2021; Sawiuk & Groom, 2019). Empirical research has also begun to uncover the impact of formalised mentoring for volunteer coaches through adopting sociocultural frameworks (Griffiths & Armour, 2012) and highlighting examples of cultural reproduction and institutional agendas (Leeder & Cushion, 2020; Sawiuk et al., 2017, 2018), alongside the problematic nature of mentor recruitment and training (Leeder, Russell, & Beaumont, 2021).

The use of sociocultural frameworks has also demonstrated the presence of surveillance and power within formalised mentoring, which significantly structures and impacts upon the likelihood of meaningful coach learning (Zehntner & McMahon, 2014, 2019). While insightful, these empirical studies have predominantly focused on either the mentee or the mentor, subsequently neglecting the role of additional contextual stakeholders within the mentoring process, such as the PD. Indeed, all of the aforementioned studies have significantly enhanced our understanding of the realities of sport coach mentorship, yet there is still a need to further understand formalised mentoring programmes from a macro perspective, by focusing on how organisational structures, agendas, and beliefs dictate the design and delivery of any mentoring provision (e.g. Leeder & Cushion, 2020; Leeder, Russell, & Beaumont, 2019; Sawiuk et al., 2018). Formalised sport coach mentoring programmes are a social construction (Cushion, 2015); therefore, it is important we begin to dissect which individuals are responsible for planning and delivering such provision, in addition to uncovering exactly *why* they have been structured in that manner.

The role of a Programme Director

At the time of publication, no empirical work has been conducted which acknowledges or explores the role of a PD within formalised sport coach mentoring programmes. In the field of business, Clutterbuck (2006) states the role of the mentoring co-ordinator is to recruit both mentors and mentees, train the mentors, and manage the programme's expectations

and delivery within an agreed budget. However, within sports coaching practice and academia, little attention has been awarded to the organisation and management of formal mentoring programmes. Indeed, Leeder and Sawiuk (2021, p. 147) have recently argued that "areas such as structure and evaluation, successful achievement of purpose, and the role of the Programme Director warrant further investigation" with regards to sports coach mentorship. The lack of attention towards the role of the PD within formalised sport coach mentoring is surprising, given that the design, structure, and intentions behind any formalised mentoring provision will be influenced by how the administering organisation perceives the practice (Griffiths, 2015). Consequently, this work addresses Leeder and Sawiuk's (2021) call by exploring how a PD plans, delivers, and evaluates a national SGB formalised sport coach mentoring programme.

While no research within sport coaching has explicitly focused on the role of the PD within formalised sport coaching mentoring programmes, research by Leeder et al. (2019) has highlighted how sport coach mentors' workplace learning is influenced by both agentic and structural factors. Specifically, the authors outlined how the recruitment and training of a group of sport coach mentors were significantly controlled by regional mentor officers (who oversaw the mentoring programme), with their beliefs impacting upon the perceptions and practice of the employed mentors (Leeder et al., 2019). Within wider fields, some articles have alluded to the existence and importance of the PD role. For example, within academia, Storrs, Putsche, and Taylor (2008) suggest that the role of a PD was integral to the delivery and effectiveness of formalised mentoring programmes aiming to support female scholars. Perhaps more significantly, within the medical domain Donovan and Donovan (2009) explored the perceptions and experiences of formalised mentoring PDs. While the research outlined the benefits of mentoring for the development of doctors, the authors suggest there is a need to further conceptualise the PD role, and how mentoring programmes are structured and evaluated to ensure good practice can be replicated. Thus, PDs who oversee formalised mentoring programmes are pivotal to the overall structure and delivery of any provision, yet these individuals are frequently disregarded and considered benign within the literature. Furthermore, PDs are pivotal when seeking to evaluate formalised sport coach mentoring initiatives, with many programmes currently lacking robust measures of success (Bloom, 2013; Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021).

Consequently, the aim of this research was to further understand the role of a PD within a formalised sport coach mentoring programme and shine a light on some of the practical everyday realities, contextual challenges, and complexities associated with overseeing and implementing such provision. Specifically, this article highlights the process of recruiting and training

sport coach mentors, programme delivery, and educational philosophy, alongside the personal evaluation and reflection of the PD. The investigation of these areas was underpinned by the following research questions:

(1) How do PDs recruit, train, and support the practice of sport coach mentors?
(2) What practices and pedagogical approaches are promoted by PDs within formalised sport coach mentoring programmes?
(3) How do PDs evaluate and measure success within formalised sport coach mentoring programmes?

The significance of this work rests with its ability to illuminate the perceptions and experiences of a PD, helping us to further understand the complexities and nuances associated with implementing meaningful mentoring initiatives to facilitate coach learning and development. Practically, this research provides empirical evidence to support current PDs, SGBs, coach mentors, or other stakeholders who are involved in the planning, delivery, and evaluation of formalised sport coach mentoring programmes.

Methodology

Philosophical underpinnings

Following the seminal work of Berger and Luckmann (1960), the present study was underpinned by the social construction of reality. Berger and Luckmann (1960, p. 15) explain that as "human knowledge is developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations, the sociology of knowledge must seek to understand the processes by which this is done." Similarly, according to Airo (2021) many of the things we perceive to be truths are socio-culturally constructed, meaning social reality is created (or co-created) through interactions, and that knowledge is created in social networks, which can be illuminated through discourse and narrative analysis. Social constructionism is positioned within the interpretivist paradigm, where both knowledge and reality are constructed by the individual participant case (Nelson, Groom, & Potrac, 2014). The interpretive paradigm appreciates the world is social and multifaceted, where individuals (e.g. coaches, athletes, educators, and researchers) define their own meanings within a unique historical and social context (Nelson et al., 2014).

In this case, following a narrative analysis approach, we explore how Jason (pseudonym), a PD of a SGB sport coach mentoring programme, inteprets his personal experience and negotiates his social world. This work was grounded by a subjectivist ontology (subjective and socially constructed knowledge), where we were interested in the participant's culturally and

contextually bound experiences of operating within a formalised sport coach mentoring programme (Nelson et al., 2014). For example, in this instance this would include, but was not limited to, mentee and mentor needs, recruitment and training of mentors, and programme funding, alongside the aims, objectives, and evaluation of the initiative. However, we, as the research team, accept that the social world does not contain "hard, tangible and relatively immutable facts", but is instead constructed by Jason's values, subjectivities, interests, and motivations (Sparkes, 1992, p. 20).

The case, participant, and context

Drawing upon the work of Stake (1995, 2005), an instrumental case study design was utilised, meaning that focusing on a specific case (e.g. Jason) enables exploration into a broader issue (e.g. the role of a PD within sport coach mentoring). Thus, this instrumental case study can help advance our current understanding of formalised sport coach mentoring provision (Hodge & Sharp, 2016). The research team explored in depth the complexity and uniqueness of Jason's PD role, and how he implemented the sport coach mentoring programme within a bound context (Hodge & Sharp, 2016). In examining the case of Jason, the research team selected the case "we felt we can learn the most" from (Stake, 2005, pp. 450–451). Consequently, a criteria-based purposive sampling strategy was used to identify the participant for the study (Smith, Sparkes, & Caddick, 2014). The participant inclusion criteria were:

(1) holding the highest coaching award available (UKCC 5[1])
(2) holding the role of PD for a SGB coach mentoring programme for over 5 years
(3) having 10 years' experience of coach developing and mentoring

Jason was identified as an information-rich source of insight into mentoring and the role of a PD and he possessed over 15 years' experience in this role. Following institutional ethical approval, Jason was invited to take part in several in-depth interviews about his role as a PD of a high-performance (cf. Mallett, 2010) formal coach mentor programme aimed at developing female coaches. He subsequently agreed to share his thoughts and feelings related to his experiences of the PD role, the mentoring programme itself, and how it was implemented in practice. Jason holds the UKCC Level 5 qualification in his specialist sport, an MSc sports coaching degree, and a Postgraduate Certificate of Education. He had coached and coach educated at the highest level of performance sport for his SGB for over 20 years, in numerous roles which include national team head coach and assistant coach, for over 250 competitive matches at major European and World tournaments.

Data collection

Jason participated in three semi-structured interviews, conducted over the course of a day, with two members of the research team at the National Centre of Sport (a pseudonym), a base which he regularly attended for work purposes, meaning it was an accessible and familiar location for him. The three semi-structured interviews lasted a total of 197 minutes. The interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone and were transcribed verbatim. This transcript was then shared with all members of the research team. The semi-structured nature of the interviews helped to create "an attitude of curiosity, inviting the participant to elaborate on a point, clarify it, and or add more detail" when required (Smith & Caddick, 2012, p. 64). Interview questions were asked in an open manner to encourage the participant to answer with freedom and reduce the likelihood of bias. Further elaboration probes (e.g. what, why, how, specific examples from practice) were used when appropriate to uncover "rich insight" from Jason (Purdy, 2014). A single interview guide was used to ensure the questions remained focused on the PD role and the sport coach mentoring programme (e.g. "why was the programme set up?", "who were the mentors and how were they recruited?", "what types of support were offered on the programme?"). Interview one focused on the role of the PD, alongside the programme's structure, aims, and objectives. Interview two explored the sport coach mentors and their role, mentoring delivery, practice, and pedagogy. Lastly, interview three provided an opportunity to revisit and probe interesting topics in more detail and focused on the needs of the mentees and programme evaluation.

Data analysis

The data were analysed using a theoretically flexible *reflexive* thematic analysis (TA) method, where the research team in collaboration navigated their way through the process of coding, discussion, and inductive (data-driven) thematic development (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2021). Braun and Clarke's (2021) six recursive phases of familiarisation, coding, generating initial themes, reviewing and developing themes, refining, defining and naming themes, and writing up were followed. Each member of the research team read the interview transcripts and selectively coded them in isolation, searching for patterns which informed the development of themes, which cannot exist separately from the researcher. Indeed, analysing the data collaboratively was an attempt to "develop a richer more nuanced reading of the data, rather than seeking a consensus on meaning" (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 594). Each member of the research team engaged with *reflexive* TA in a subjective, analytical, and interpretative

manner, underpinned by the interpretive paradigm which informed meaningful knowledge co-production (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Following the research team's first attempt at TA, we met virtually to discuss and reflect upon our initial thoughts, patterns, and perspectives towards the dataset as part of the TA method. Following this stage, codes were organised into initial categorised themes. As a research team, we then worked collaboratively to conceptualise and agree on the theme allocation of coded extracts and how to interpret and attach meaning, to enhance both reflexivity and interpretative depth (Braun & Clarke, 2021). We aimed to engage with this analytical method in a *reflexive* manner, where we afforded time and space for change, discussion, and inspiration to develop. TA in this instance involved an iterative process between mentoring research and data, where the research team made decisions on the data, codes, and themes. The developed themes did not simply "emerge" from the data but should instead be considered as the output of the research team's collaborative TA process (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2019). Following the data analysis process, a decision was made to present the findings in a narrative manner, with a chronological focus upon programme preparation (the beginning), delivery (the middle), and evaluation (the end), reflecting the focus of each interview. The research team was guided by Tracy's (2010) conceptualisation of quality in qualitative research and Smith et al.'s (2014) judging qualitative research criteria. Specifically, the concepts *worthy topic, rich rigour, trustworthiness, sincerity*, and *transparency* directed the data collection and analysis process. For example, all four members of the research team engaged with the TA process, firstly in isolation and then in collaboration. Here, virtually via Zoom we could adopt the role of critical friends to cross-check, sort, organise, and analyse the data until we reached an agreed consensus. Our approach achieved credibility (cf. Tracy, 2010; trustworthiness, verisimilitude, and plausibility of the research findings) by creating a space for exploring alternative viewpoints followed by collaboratively agreeing on a co-constructed theoretical reading of the data.

Results and discussion

As a result of the collaborative *reflexive* TA process, three themes were developed which helped to address the aim of the research and the designated research questions:

(1) Preparing to deliver a sport coach mentoring programme: Mentor recruitment, training, and mentor-mentee matching.
(2) Delivering a sport coach mentoring programme: Capturing the pedagogical approach.

(3) Reflections on a sport coach mentoring programme: Evaluation, success, and challenges.

These themes are discussed below in relation to the mentoring and sport coaching literature.

Preparing to deliver a sport coach mentoring programme: mentor recruitment, training, and mentor-mentee matching

Organisations administering formalised sport coach mentoring programmes often fail to develop "clear criteria for the establishment of mentoring teams" (Castanheira, 2016, p. 339). Yet, sport coach mentoring programmes are socially constructed, with the design, aims, practices, and underpinning assumptions varying between organisations and across contexts (Griffiths, 2015; Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021; Nash & McQuade, 2015; Sawiuk & Groom, 2019; Sawiuk et al., 2017). Within this research, Jason outlined the aims, intentions, and purpose of the formalised sport coach mentoring programme he oversaw. In his own words:

> The scheme was set up by **** in the late nineties primarily to address the lack of qualified female coaches . . . it probably wasn't a mentoring scheme in its widest sense. It was really targeted at getting people through awards. Certainly, I would say a lot of it was about UKCC Level 4 prep and wisdom of people who've gone through it. In terms of other aims I suppose there was more informal discussions about coaching scenarios and coaching problems.

Jason openly discusses how the formalised mentoring programme perhaps lacked "mentoring" content, and instead centred on the performance-driven target of increasing female UKCC Level 4 holders. In this case, mentors within the programme were positioned as mere providers of information privileging technocratic rationality (Cushion, 2015). Mentoring as a contested practice is shaped by cultural and institutional factors, which impacts upon how the practice is perceived and enacted (Griffiths, 2015; Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021; Sawiuk et al., 2017, 2018). Jason viewed mentoring in a functionalist manner and emphasised the mentor role as a form of information transmission (Cushion, 2015; Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2003; Griffiths & Armour, 2012). Thus, Jason highlighted the importance of recruiting knowledgeable and experienced individuals as mentors, to ensure this process occurred.

> The mentors, originally in my time it came down to about seven or eight people. They were coach educators who held the UKCC Level 4, and the idea was that they would have the knowledge to impart to people to support them getting their UKCC Level 4 and 3. So, they were mostly mentors. Very experienced, a lot of them, as . . . No, all of them were very experienced . . . That was the idea of the scheme.

Possessing high level coaching qualifications alongside practice-based knowledge are frequently assumed to be pre-requisites for successful sport coach mentorships (e.g. Bloom, 2013; Cushion, 2015; Cushion et al., 2003; Leeder, 2019). Jason explained how mentor recruitment was dependent upon experience as a coach educator in addition to holding the UKCC Level 4 qualification. It was also suggested that some individuals were recommended for the role.

> The mentors were recruited in a number of ways. Obviously, you had to be . . . You had to have a UKCC Level 4 and you had to be on the coach education tutor list . . . and then it was a question of are you suitable, either through formal education, or recommended?

Within sport coaching, the recruitment of mentors is haphazard (Chambers, 2015), with SGBs often utilising a subjective approach to recruiting individuals who they believe embody a desired set of dispositions and attitudes (Leeder et al., 2019). The assumption that mentors arrive ready-made for practice is problematic and generally results in limited training opportunities for sport coach mentors (Leeder et al., 2019; Nash & Mallet, 2018). However, Jason described the application process further and identified a need for mentor training. As he explained:

> What skills do they possess? A variety. But we didn't at the time have any formal mentoring training. So, I could see that that would be an area which we could have addressed more . . . We went for a formal application process. But people who were invited also that we knew particularly had an affinity with the women's game as well . . . So, they had to be the right sort of people to be mentors of female coaches . . . I think there were a few of the old-school mentors who were quite quickly weeded out who didn't have an affinity with the women's game or female coaches.

The importance of recruiting the "right sort of people" was emphasised by Jason, and to some extent justified the lack of mentor training and support (Leeder et al., 2019). While attendance at mentor training does not guarantee meaningful and positive mentoring relationships (Chambers, 2015), it may help to provide consistency and clarify role expectations (Lyle & Cushion, 2017). Another factor which will impact upon the overall success of any mentoring relationship is the process of matching mentors and mentees, with Jason outlining this process:

> Regionally. Basically, on region . . . Not on likeminded personalities. It wasn't . . . We didn't have the time to do that. It was like, you know, if you live in the South East you've got ****. I did change them around sometimes. If there was . . . not toooften but we had occasions where personalities clashed or, you know, or theyweren't the right fit. I'd change them around.

The process of matching mentors and mentees must consider the dispositions and perceptions of both parties (Jones et al., 2009), while considering age, gender, and cultural issues, which will either enable or inhibit the development of mutual trust and respect (Bloom, 2013). While initially pairing mentors and mentees based on geographical location may solve logistical issues, to avoid futile mentoring relationships PDs should ensure that "potential mentors and mentees are matched carefully, not simply thrown together" (Cushion, 2015, p. 159). In short, the sport coach mentoring programme Jason oversaw was primarily aimed at getting female coaches "through" the UKCC Level 4 qualification, with mentors recruited for their sport-specific knowledge, with limited training provided.

Delivering a sport coach mentoring programme: capturing the pedagogical approach

There is a dearth of literature which explores the pedagogical approach within formal mentoring programmes. Considering research that has been conducted to date, Banwell et al. (2021) discussed how mentors operating within a sport coaching context require specialised coaching expertise and contextual sensitivity in order to demonstrate their knowledge and to enrich the learning of the on-looking mentee(s). Within the coaching field, mentors are significant social agents who shape what counts as legitimate knowledge (Cushion, 2015). However, within this research, Jason first and foremost outlined that the educational approach was mentee-centred to help prepare them for their coaching award assessment:

> It might be the coach educator demonstrating, but not often. I told them not to do that; it wasn't about that. Sometimes it was valuable. And then a mixture of various practical and discussion activities, based on UKCC 4 topics.

Leeder and Cushion (2020) suggest it is generally accepted that learning from experience plays a significant role in the development of coaches. However, to facilitate this learning, mentors are expected to develop the required dispositions (Jenkins, 2002) and demonstrate specific ways of coaching (Cushion & Jones, 2006) to create what Bourdieu (1996) described as a "space of possibilities". Within this case, Jason had several embedded e-learning strategies to promote and facilitate mentee learning. Ensher and Murphy (2007, p. 300) define e-mentoring as a resource "which provides new learning . . . through electronic means". E-mentoring can be particularly advantageous in that it has been found to help mentees acquire specific knowledge in a highly effective learning environment (Grant et al., 2020). Below,

Jason discusses the inclusion of e-mentoring methods, such as video and audio self-observation and reflection, and the value of online learning spaces (Hudson, 2016; Sawiuk et al., 2017):

> I got them filmed and mic'd up. So not only could they watch what they delivered and get the perspective of it, but they could hear what they were saying and then did that relate to the context and was it right? That's a great learning tool, then you debrief it afterwards. I also used to put up things with websites which were useful as well.

In this case mentees were encouraged to engage with online, video, and audio tools to aid self-observation and reflection, which resultantly contests the existing conceptualisations of the mentor as a technician, where the mentor role has been reduced to mere skill and technique transference (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006; Schempp, Elliott, McCullick, Laplaca, & Berger, 2016). Here, capturing the mentees' coaching practice via video provides an opportunity to reduce "false memories" as they move towards their final assessment with less uncertainty (Tisdell & Shekhawat, 2019). Significantly, Jason rationalised the adopted pedagogical goal, which entailed an agenda to reproduce a SGB-enforced professional schema to secure accreditation (Chesterfield, Potrac, & Jones, 2010):

> I used to give everyone different sessions so while you weren't delivering yours you were watching everyone else, making notes, seeing the organisation, so that you built up this portfolio of sessions, having been involved and watched them, applied them with your team, which meant when you went to the, basically, in those days, the shit or bust UKCC 4 assessment, you were ready.

As an educational approach to facilitate sports coaching practice, mentoring is widely acknowledged as a valuable tool to support a range of competencies, such as the development of knowledge, skills, and working and pedagogical practices (Cushion, 2015; Leeder & Cushion, 2020; Sawiuk & Groom, 2019; Sawiuk et al., 2018). However, in this case, Jason suggested the educational approach was driven by preparing the mentees for their assessment and attainment of the award, rather than promoting positive coaching pedagogies and learning:

> It was very much Victorian education: teach to the test. Yes. And I wouldn't apologise for that. But, with the resources available and with the workforce available, it was very targeted at passing a UKCC 3 or 4. We'd model an UKCC 4 assessment. So, I did some sessions where, you know, towards the end, if people were nearer, what I would say to them, the ones who were coming up to the assessment would say, right, I'm going to give you a session and I'm not going to intervene at all. I'm just going to watch it and mark it as I would an UKCC 4 session.

To support the Victorian educational approach of the mentoring programme, Jason additionally outlined the importance of feedback and one-to-one individualised support:

> When I used to do feedback for them, how I kept doing it was the one thing that came back top of the list every time was one-to-one individualised support. That's what they always put as the major factor. One-to-one. Which is why I didn't succumb to pressures about, oh, it's not efficient. Can't you get 20 in a classroom? You know?

Mezias and Scandura (2005) recognised how mentoring should encompass a needs-driven approach, in which even though the needs may vary by individual, the separate developmental needs must be identified in order to seek the mentoring practice required to meet these needs. Nevertheless, apart from the infrequent one-to-one individualised support, the Victorian educational approach ingrained within the formal coach mentoring programme rather signifies institutionalised provision embodied by obtaining educational accolades, resulting in cultural reproduction (Leeder & Cushion, 2020). Arguably, the formal coach mentoring programme could be perceived as a means to support institutional agendas, rather than pedagogically developing a mentee's practice. Consequently, this may be problematic and limit coach mentor practice, which may, in turn, reduce the value of the mentee's experience.

Reflections on a sport coach mentoring programme: evaluation, success, and challenges

Clutterbuck (2006) suggests that an individual who oversees a formal mentoring programme often harnesses a great enthusiasm for developing others for an organisation, is well known and respected within the organisation, and has a widespread network within the organisation to support the programme's functionality. In this case Jason had been an established member of the organisation for over 20 years, with a passion for advancing the female coach workforce. While reflecting on the impact and success of the formal mentoring programme set against the organisational targets, long-term objectives, and strategic vision (cf. Sawiuk et al., 2017, 2018), Jason was able to provide some insights into the programme's success and the challenges and constraints it operated within. Jason acknowledged the positive impact the formal mentoring programme had on the SGB's agenda to increase the number of female coaches who held the UKCC Level 4. In his own words:

> Well, I think outside of the organisation, it helped increase the pool of qualified female coaches. It was funded by a very small amount of money. It was targeted very much at passing the award to try and get more qualified females to get them in jobs What I would say is if you look back, say, up to 2013, for instance, and the previous probably

> 8 or 9 years, almost everyone who's successful on a UKCC 3 or 4 – certainly on a Level 3 – had mentoring support. Gosh. We chuckle sometimes. You know? I can remember talking to Claire (pseudonym) about this in 2002. It only took us, like, 15 years to get around to it.

This finding within this case was in keeping with the work of Sawiuk et al. (2018), which suggested formal mentoring programmes can be more concerned with the organisational agenda than with the pedagogical learning process. Importantly, the development of female coaching role models and female mentors within sport has also been highlighted by Sawiuk and Groom (2019) as an essential element of an effective and inclusive workforce development strategy. To achieve this, there is a need to support and develop more highly qualified female coaches and mentors (Norman, 2008, 2010; Sawiuk & Groom, 2019). Within the delivery itself, Jason was able to recall fond memories from some of the mentoring residential workshops in his own coaching experience:

> Things we did well? I think the two- and three-day workshops were good. I had lots of good footage and lots of good ideas and I think people enjoyed it. I did – the morning was how [International team] play their [tactic], and I think they'd won the World Tournament. I had all this footage on everything you can imagine. Then in the afternoon we'd planned Level 4 sessions attacking and defending with tactics boards based on that. Then the next two days we delivered those sessions with players – I enjoyed that. They were hard work to organise, but they were fun for me. So, there's always a selfish element in this. I wasn't necessarily *** mentor, as such; *** was. I was the one who brought them together every four or five months or twice a year on a two- or three-day workshop. We always went over budget – always . . . I mean, I can remember on the two-day ones, I mentioned about cluster groups and we used to swap emails. But again, it was more like, you know, I'd encouraged people. It's up to you do it.

In the above extract Jason drew on his contemporary, contextual coaching experiences at the highest level of sport to inform his mentoring and educational practice with the female coach mentees (Sawiuk & Groom, 2019). Despite both enjoying his role as PD and increasing the number of UKCC qualified female coaches, Jason acknowledged at times the role did have its challenges. Here in his own words:

> I'm still fighting. We're all still fighting that now. You know? It's still woeful – the number of female qualified coaches . . . Finding resources, always, as I say, were minuscule for what it was. Trying to work with females who were finding it difficult to get enough practice time at the right level. That was always a problem. Other difficulties were maybe not having the online ability to do stuff then that you do now. I mean now, you know, we use replay analysis, I would have loved to have had replay analysis then because we could have put all sorts of things online. So, all that online stuff that you can do now that supports the direct formal practical work would have been a big help – a big help. And having, I think, also, more in-depth and targeted training of mentors. That would be really nice. Training your staff in – I mean, we

> never did any training, to be honest. We had a few meetings where we outlined the philosophy and what we expect and then basically quality control was me making sure people did it whenever I could, and sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't. You know? But it wasn't – It was a sort of an hour of my 60-hour week, if you like.

The role of the PD in this case was to coordinate residential mentoring workshops, manage the budget, report back on organisational targets, and facilitate meaningful learning experiences for the female mentees. The work of Sawiuk and Groom (2019) illuminated the importance of experiential authentic learning for mentees, grounded within a coaching context and more recently. With this in mind, perhaps some of the empirical evidence supports the implementation of residential educational experiences for mentees, to engage not only with directed learning opportunities led by the PD or mentor but also with self-directed learning by establishing and developing their own developmental network within the sport, and thus hopefully improve their job prospects in the future.

However, the PD role was not without its challenges. Bailey et al. (2019) stated for mentors and mentees time was often a big obstacle, with mentors managing busy workloads. This concern was mirrored by the PD in this case: the design and delivery of the mentoring programme were both onerous and time-consuming tasks. Secondly, our evaluation showed the mentoring programme was delivered with a "small amount of money", and as a result the number of qualified female coaches in the UK remains "woeful". Thirdly, identified areas of improvement included the training of mentors for their role within the formal programmes and better integrating e-mentoring and e-learning platforms into the formal provision offered, although a point of great significance here is that the PD role in the formal mentoring programme was an add-on to a full-time organisational role.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to understand and explore the PD's role within the planning, delivery, and evaluation of a formalised mentoring programme which targeted the development of female sport coaches (mentees). Specifically, this article has begun to answer the call of Leeder and Sawiuk (2021) for researchers to focus on the role of PDs within formalised sport coach mentoring provision and to explore how these individuals plan, deliver, and evaluate programmes. Within the first theme, Jason explained the aims of the programme, alongside how he recruited and trained mentors, before matching them to mentees. Jason suggested recruiting the "right type of person" to a mentor role was key to ensuring programme success, while acknowledging the absence and potential benefits of formalised mentor training. Within theme two, we discuss the negotiated and contested

nature of the pedagogical delivery of mentoring in practice, which consisted of both face-to- face and e-learning techniques. The role of the PD was to balance the SGB agenda, that being, increasing the number of UKCC Level 4 female coaches and the bespoke and individual needs of the female mentees. Thirdly, we outline Jason's personal reflection on and evaluation of the programme's performance, with some of its measures of success (e.g. increased number of qualified female coaches) as well as the challenges he faced in his role as PD, such as a lack of time and resources to fulfil the role, a limited number of qualified mentors, a lack of mentor training and support, limited technology, and the length of time required to achieve mentoring programme results.

Moreover, the findings of this study echo recent research within this field (e.g. Leeder & Cushion, 2020; Leeder et al., 2019), in suggesting that SGBs and their employed PDs/co-ordinators are significant stakeholders in the mentoring process, and influence the intentions, design, and delivery of all formalised mentoring provision. Specifically, this study has further contributed to the suggestion that PDs employed by SGBs structure mentor recruitment and training (or lack of it), while imposing their perceptions and dispositions on practice (e.g. Griffiths, 2015; Leeder et al., 2019). Thus, it is evident that the PD should not be considered a benign or neutral stakeholder within formalised mentoring provision.

Practical recommendations

If we are to improve our current offering of formalised sport coach mentoring in practice, organisations need to consider in greater depth the constructive alignment between the PD, mentors, and mentees (e.g. a cohesive understanding of the aims and objective of the programme), while providing adequate resources to create an effective pedagogical environment. That is, if we are to move beyond the "rhetorical rush to mentoring" to a more effective pedagogical practice within formalised mentoring programmes (Bailey et al., 2019), PDs must design and structure provision which promotes both mediated (effective mentor-mentee dialogue) and unmediated learning opportunities (e-mentoring and online), in addition to ensuring that coach learners have adequate contextual mentoring support (Groom & Sawiuk, 2018; Sawiuk & Groom, 2019).

Importantly, consideration needs to be given to the role of the PD itself: how are PDs recruited, trained, and supported? Furthermore, what characteristics are required to be a successful and effective PD? Here, the knowledge, experience, and role specification of the PD remain largely unexplored. We recommend SGBs reflect and consider these aspects of formalised sport coach mentoring alongside the specific nature of adopted pedagogical language; is the role of the PD to facilitate or dictate?

Future research

As a result of this research, we acknowledge several worthwhile avenues for future research. Firstly, we need to better understand how PDs are recruited, trained, and prepared to oversee a formalised sport coach mentoring programme. Secondly, there is an absence of literature which investigates the planning, delivery, and evaluation of sport coach mentoring programmes, specifically, which considers the perspectives and experiences of all stakeholders involved in the mentoring process. This line of empirical enquiry might also include structured evaluation which maps the thread of mentoring (e.g. how SGBs and PDs deploy the mentoring programme, how the vision, aim, and pedagogical approach are embedded in the recruitment and training of mentors, and the impact this has on the mentee in practice). Thirdly, as we move towards online and e-learning engagement for sports coach development, against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic (Callary et al., 2020; Grant et al., 2020), we need to further explore the design and delivery of e-mentoring and its effectiveness across different contexts.

Note

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

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