



Beginner-Coaches and Connectivity of Knowledge: Real-World Coaching and Self-Reported Importance of Prior Playing Experience

Authors' contribution:

- A) conception and design of the study
- B) acquisition of data
- C) analysis and interpretation of data
- D) manuscript preparation
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Abstract

In what amounts to essentially being a part two to our previous work with six beginner-coaches that found noticeable benefits to reflective practice, yet a number of possible drawbacks such as time constraints and at times over-focusing on negative emotions (Hamblin & Crisp, 2022), we build upon the aims of that study that related to what beginner-coaches (in recreational sport fields) considered ideal coach learning within in-situ, practice-based contexts. Through revisiting the data of the first study (Hamblin & Crisp, 2022) and exploring an additional theme related to how the beginner-coaches identified sporting experience as a beneficial prerequisite to their own coaching practice, the present study sought to further investigate, and build upon, the findings and aspects of the first study. Continuing to explore how beginner-coaches who operate more within recreational (although still competitive) sport fields perceive in-situ, ideal learning, and continuing the same methodological approach, the present study conducted semi-structured interviews with another five beginner-coaches, adding to the six in the first study for a total of 11 participants.

Transcriptions were analysed using thematic analysis and the themes found included sporting experience, traditional learning, and the benefits of reflective practice which highlights the ways all of the beginner-coaches (within both 'part one' and the present study – 'part two') felt they learn best. Importantly, these findings showed the self-reported importance of actually coaching ('real world' applications) and, of particular note, what were considered by the beginner-coaches to be the significant benefits of having accrued playing experience prior to starting coaching. These findings then may well provide further evidence to uphold and develop methods of coach education in the future to facilitate learning.

Keywords: Coach development, beginner-coaches, scaffolding knowledge

Introduction

The scale and complexity inherent in the various contexts that exist within sport coaching, arguably render them difficult to discuss and analyse at times. Recreational sport, disability sport, and youth sport, all illustrate additional coaching contexts alongside the more widely

accepted, and understood, performance sport. However, literature does offer some consensus in that at the centre of coaching contexts content, variety, and complexity, a relatively wide, yet convergent discourse and understanding demonstrates how sport coaching operates. This is perhaps best explained as an extremely multifaceted, yet all-encompassing system. Indeed, many authors have

conceptualised the process of coaching in practice, in different contexts, through such terms as youth, recreational, disability, and performance coaching (for instance, Côté et al., 2007; Crisp & Brackley, 2022; Trudel & Gilbert, 2006), and wider policy approaches applied within the UK context, such as the SportsCoach UK (now UK Coaching) 4x4 model have defined coaching through youth, participation, performance, and high-performance contexts.

Fundamentally, however, all definitions related to coaching contexts will in some way refer to a standardised, underlying approach to conceptualising a number of essential distinctions around performance and participation sport coaching, irrespective of whether outcomes are related to physical, skill, or psychosocial development, and/or social policy objectives. All told then, these contexts can be seen, in one way or another, to encapsulate contexts of recreational, developmental, and performance sport (i.e. Trudel & Gilbert, 2006), and participation for youth, participation for adults, performance for youths, and performance for adults (e.g. Côté et al., 2007). And ultimately, despite the wide differences that may present themselves within these contexts, there exists a perennial *reciprocal* (two-way) identification throughout – that sport coaches look to support participants (Jones, 2006).

There has also been a relatively thorough consideration of how sport coaches learn, oftentimes through formal (qualifications etc.), non-formal (i.e. short courses), and informal learning (unstructured, interaction with others), and how these intersect and coalesce into processes of developing effective coach knowledge, behaviours, dispositions, and practice (Cushion et al. 2010). Yet despite these detailed considerations, and meta-analyses of coach learning (Smith et al., 2022), many proponents of sport coaching research in the field of coach development and learning have articulated how many questions remain – fundamentally related to identifying what coaches can do to develop sufficient knowledge and practitioner bases for effective, applied coaching practice.

Coach development in the UK

Moreover, and using the UK as an example, an on-going reliance on the voluntary sector calls into question how, and why, there is not more investment in understanding the mechanisms by which coaches can learn. Sport coaching in the UK then, in general, and the community sport coaching sector/context, in particular, has been affected by historical patterns of restricted knowledge, understanding, and limited opportunities to develop outside of what can be considered the performance sport context. Indeed, historically, it is widely recognised that much sports coaching education has been predominantly confined to performance-based outcomes (Taylor & Garratt, 2008; Crisp, 2016, 2018a). Much of this is a direct reflection of the fact that up until the late 1960s, govern-

ments had a distant approach to sport – unless it benefited political wherewithal through established (‘popular’) professional sport, or international success. Admittedly, during the 1970s government policy began to draw closer with the wider nuances that sport inhabited and potentially offered to other areas of social interest (not just performance, but also recreational and even transformative), such as through the establishment of the GB Sports Council which fundamentally altered this relationship and manner in which governments used sport (Coghlan & Webb, 1990; Roche, 1993; Houlihan, 1991, 1997).

Successive documents such as the *Wolfenden Report* (Wolfenden Committee, 1960) and the *Second Report of the Select Committee of the House of Lords on Sport and Leisure* (Cobham Report, 1973), also engendered the use of sport (and by implication its coaches) by bringing it to the attention of a wider body of policymakers concerned with the welfare state (Roche, 1993). In the same period of time, a formalised call for a more integrated direction within coaching was called upon by the then GB Sports Council regarding the professionalisation of coaching and establishing a framework within it (Department for Culture, Media and Sport [DCMS], 2002; Sports Council, 1991; UK Sport, 2001). Preparation for this occurred during the 1986 Commonwealth Games Conference whereby it was suggested that due to the nature of coaching’s performance-based outcomes, internal developments, recognition and systems (including the National Coaching Foundation [NCF] that had been set up in 1983 to organise coaching) were important in the acceptance of the professional status that coaching sought (Chelladurai, 1986; Taylor & Garratt, 2008).

As part of a wider effort to professionalise coaching during the 1990s, the NCF looked to introduce National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) frameworks to transform existing coaching awards into recognised qualifications (Twitchen & Oakley, 2019). Subsequently, in 2002, the establishment of a Coaching Task Force reviewed the role of coaching and aimed to recognise it as a profession (Taylor & Garratt, 2008). From then, the emergence of a centralised approach to vocational education and training became apparent in the formation of a coherent, formalised, and recognised qualification system. The initiation of the United Kingdom Coaching Certificate (UKCC) levels 1-4/5, as recommended by the Coaching Task Force, provided a pathway with generic content across National Governing Bodies (NGBs) for individual coaches to obtain accredited awards with a clear professional development structure (Crisp, 2018b; Cushion et al., 2010). Furthermore, NGBs needed to meet a set of operational standards and through achieving these, successfully endorsed NGBs underwent professional induction of its coach-education practice and delivery, and any coach holding a UKCC award was subject to professionalisation (Taylor & Garratt, 2008).

However, this system's generic approach often failed to accommodate individual coach needs. Thus, it was reviewed and the Sport England report *Coaching in an Active Nation: The Coaching Plan for England* (2016), found there was a huge emphasis on professional standards, and not necessarily focusing on how coaches can prioritise connections and facilitate behaviour change. A move was therefore made away from 'coach education' and towards coach learning and development. In this way, Sport England sought to develop a broader definition of coaching with a person-centred approach that fosters improvement and ownership through lifelong learning habits (Sport England, 2016).

'Traditional' coach learning – pathways, competency, and reflection

There are, perhaps, two main ways in which coach education in the UK can be conceptualised. The first suggests coaches experience, learn, and progress through the developmental stages of novice, competent, proficient, and expert, with the four-stage Coach Development Model (CDM) providing reference to this progression (Schempp et al., 2006). The second is conceptualised through the United Kingdom Coaching Certificate (UKCC) model, whereby it offers a linear pathway to improve coaching expertise whilst simultaneously complementing (purposefully mirroring elements of, when appropriate) the NVQ and National Occupational Standards (NOS) competency-based criteria. In the same vein as Schempp et al.'s (2006) CDM, the UKCC model operates through four levels, beginner to master coach. At the beginners' stage, a coach may be deemed not (quite) competent, and a number of authors have highlighted how many beginner-coaches coach children within grassroots settings whilst assisting a more qualified coach (Berliner, 1994; North, 2009; Taylor & Garratt, 2008; Turner et al., 2012). At the next level, coaches work more autonomously and gain the necessary knowledge and skills to plan, deliver, and review coaching sessions on their own. Level three of the UKCC focuses on the planning, implementation, and evaluation of annual coaching programmes, essentially recognising those at this level as a 'lead' coach. And finally, level four allows experienced coaches to continue developing their methods and mastery of their craft (Turner et al., 2012).

However, these schema in and of themselves, and with no significant reference to how critical reflection and experiential learning can occur, can seem at first glance to remain fairly superficial. This is not to say that these models do not advocate professional expertise nor require an element of higher order thinking and professionalism in application, but much of the models' pivotal distinctions between levels are based on extensive (and progressive) education, knowledge, and what expertise

might look like in practice. (i.e. how roles are managed, responsibilities, know-how, and skills). Fortunately, coach development as a whole recognises, and stresses, that coach education necessitates the use of informal learning and 'meta-cognition' as a self-regulated skill to develop awareness, and control, of learning (Crisp, 2019a; Poitras & Lajoie 2013). As numerous and, indeed, the consensus of coaching literature pertains, essentialising theoretical frames through the prism of reflective practice is crucial to coach development, and particular reference is given to models that enforce metacognitive activities.

For instance, Kolb's Learning Cycle is an established model of learning that involves the acquisition of abstract concepts that may be applied flexibly to a range of situations. Its overall concept is 'do again, think again, conclude again, and reflect again' to ensure experience is transferred into knowledge and into creating successful practices (Kolb, 1984). Learning occurs when a coach progresses through stages of gaining concrete experience, observing and reflecting, forming an analysis and conclusion based on their reflection, and using conclusions within new experiences (McLeod, 2017). Other models have drawn from this, such as Plan-Do-Review which is based upon reflective practice in allowing coaches to gain a clearer picture of their sessions (Robinson, 2014; UK Coaching, 2020). Here, *planning* involves a clear focus on objectives that allows a coach to be prepared for a number of things that may happen within the delivery of a session, as well as a knowledge of how, why, what, where and when in relation to the environments they coach in (Robinson, 2014). *Doing* is the execution of the session plan with leading via instruction, demonstration, and correction. Finally, *reviewing* is to seek improvement through critical thinking (Miles, 2003).

Opportunities for learning then are necessarily negotiated with previous experience and disaggregating, reconfiguring, and iterating through a range of possibilities – inevitably increased and conceptualised through previous thinking, experiences, and the scaffolding of each to reflexively assign importance, and become metacognitively aware of one's own strengths, weaknesses, and reasons for behaviour and practice.

Beginner-coaches

As our 'part one' (Hamblin & Crisp, 2022) study outlined, beginner-coaches are thought to have less than three years of experience whereby they lack a sense of responsibility and are therefore learning the norms of coaching (Schempp et al., 2006). and when studies do involve beginners, limitations of reflection are predominantly addressed (Burt & Morgan, 2014; Hamblin & Crisp, 2022; Winfield et al., 2013).

Yet most coaches often employ structured processes that provide a framework for greater reflection in encour-

aging methods of understanding that are linked to theory (Jackson, 2004; Johns, 1995). This is a consequence of the fact that these have been identified as essential elements of coach education, but they often offer minimal opportunities to facilitate the integration of new knowledge into practice – meaning these structures could arguably be questioned in terms of efficacy for beginner coaches. This is because, through limited coach education hours/contact at beginner coach level (i.e. entry or L1 coaching qualifications) a large proportion of knowledge, practice, and reflection is not necessarily covered, or employed through NGBs (Cushion et al., 2003). Indeed, alluding to notions of experience as essential to forming new pathways and approaches to learning and doing, automatically presents a juxtaposition, in the sense that there are contrasting perspectives on the construction of meaningful thought and conceptual self-analyses. Beginner-coaches then, in particular, perhaps lack deep connections and understanding (possibly even contradictory) between practical and theoretical discourses, and it is only possible to navigate out of this dialectic through critical reflection in an experiential field.

Acknowledging different developmental and starting needs, and integrating prior knowledge

There are, however, other means of initially establishing and meaningfully impacting on the development of new coaches (beginner-coaches) than just through NGB courses. Success here can be seen through effective partnerships between new learning and previous sports experience. The Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) in England, for example, offers subsidised courses and enhanced funding to current and ex-professional players, with the 'fast-tracking' of candidates and even preferential recruitment acknowledged for applicants for coaching roles from this pathway (Blackett et al., 2018). Similarly, support for the transition of elite athletes to coaching roles across a variety of different sports has also been noted to follow 'fast-tracking' principles, and even at times the appointment of ex-players/athletes to coaching positions with no requisite experience and not having followed any formal coach education or preparatory pathways (Rynne, 2014). Irrespective of any concerns related to recruitment processes that may favour ex-players and athletes, and the different 'starting points' for coaches (i.e. PFA/membership that can lead to 'better' starts for coaches), there is also a reasonable argument that prior knowledge can be used by new coaches, and is valued by recruiters (Chroni et al., 2021).

Although these kinds of starting points are not available to all beginner-coaches, many come to undertake sport coaching through previously having taken part in sport (Rowe, 2012) Indeed, researchers point out that many sports coaches initially interacted with, and learnt

from, other coaches through their own sports careers or activities within social settings (Blackett et al., 2018). Given the variety of starting points for sports coaches, and the mechanisms through which preferred candidates with prior playing experience have and are fast tracked in professional and elite sport coaching constructs (as evidenced by the work of Blackett et al., 2018, Chroni et al., 2021; and Rynne, 2014), the purpose of this study is to consider the impact of prior playing experience on learning and development in the context of beginner-coaches, without elite or professional playing experience, in recreational sport fields. Based on these considerations, and making connections to our previous work where we explored the benefits and limitations of reflective practice for beginner-coaches (Hamblin & Crisp, 2022), we query how they (beginner-coaches) feel they can bring about some progress and improve practice as coaches through having previously played (non-elite) sport, particularly coaching within grassroots, community, and participation contexts.

Essentially a part one to this paper, our previous work related to how beginner-coaches learn and operate within recreational fields focused on two areas. The first, the benefits and limitations of reflective practice for beginner-coaches, and the second, to explore how beginner-coaches viewed and perceived ideal learning mediation in the context of in-situ coaching practice. The beginner-coaches in the first study comprised of three male coaches and three female coaches all aged between 18 to 25 years old, all with between twenty months to three years of coaching experience, and a sports coaching representation across nine sports. All of them coached young people in recreational fields, five of the coaches were part time, one full time, and three held coaching qualifications (two at level one, one at level two), and three had at the time of the study no coaching qualifications (note – not a necessity to work within all recreational sports fields in the UK, the site of the first study, and indeed the present study). The part one study (Hamblin & Crisp, 2022) was undertaken through conducting semi-structured interviews with six beginner-coaches, and thematic analysis revealed that the use of reflective practice resulted in an increase in perceived additional competency and critical thinking. Additionally, however, a more critical approach to reflective practice was illustrated through a number of reported limitations, principally centred on constraints of time, and how a negative focus within the participants' reflections could cause unfavourable feelings, increase anxiety, and adversely affect self-confidence (Hamblin & Crisp, 2022)

In line with the philosophy of this paper, one that questions how learning and progress for beginner-coaches may be influenced through having previously played sport, over an extended period of revisiting the data from the first paper, we were able to assess and interpret ad-

ditional themes related to knowledge gained through sporting experience. These essentially outlined how prior playing experience was seen as a key contributory factor in their accumulation of confidence and initial coaching knowledge capital.

Acknowledging that the data set from the first study could be considered quite thin, and seeking to further question the idea that sporting experience may well be considered a helpful, ancillary process by which beginner-coaches may feel that prior playing experience is useful, the purpose of the present (second) study was to provide an increased understanding of how beginner-coaches position, signify, and illustrate their beliefs of the extent to which playing experience may have mediated, shaped, and influenced their learning process and applied practice.

In order to do this, we extended our initial, unpublished findings from our 'first paper' research (Hamblin & Crisp, 2022) through carrying out further research with another five beginner-coaches with similar criteria as our first study, for a total sample size of 11. Importantly, given the first study was undertaken through a constructivist (ontological) view, an interpretivist (epistemological) approach, and a qualitative method (semi-structured interviews), we deliberately sought to replicate that in this study and - whilst looking to confirm data from the first study - used the same philosophy of methods and an inductive approach whereby theories are derived from the data (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007), as opposed to a specific hypothesis-deductive approach.

Our two aims then for this (second) study were: 1) in a confirmatory, extended fashion to the first paper, further investigate the manner in which beginner-coaches describe any perceived benefits to having played sport before in their coaching habits, behaviours, and development and practice, and 2) to determine the extent to which formal coach education can be situated and substantiate improved coaching performance for beginner-coaches.

Method

Our previous study on beginner-coaches was constructed through ensuring that the coach sample met two criteria. The first criterion was that, per Schempp et al.'s (2006) work, beginner-coaches are still learning how to coach and have no more than three years coaching experience. And our second criterion was based upon existing UK coach levels that place level three coaches as 'head coaches', with the inference that level two coaches have still not fully developed the expected competencies to demonstrate expertise. Accordingly, the second criteria meant that the participants had no more than a level two coaching qualification.

For our first paper, a qualitative research method was considered suitable given we sought to undertake our study from an inductive position that emphasises an understanding of human behaviour (Smith, 2010). This enabled patterns, processes, and differences to be explored based upon multiple realities which facilitated the exploration of feelings, values, and perceptions of coach learning held by beginner-coaches (Braun & Clarke, 2014; Connolly, 1998). Whilst questionnaires may have been appropriate as they quickly provide large amounts of data, information can be superficial (Munn & Drever, 1990), and we felt that the use of interviews allowed a freedom of expression that helped develop reliable and valid data as a depth of knowledge was provided through the use of open-ended questions and a clear guide allowing responses to be compared (Hutchinson & Skodol-Wilson, 1992; Smith, 1992).

As stated previously, the rationale for this second paper was based (in part) on our *revisitation* of the data of the first paper, and the identification of a particular (unpublished) theme related to how previous sporting experience seemed to contribute, and underpin the participants' interpretation of the processes that they felt had supported their own coaching development. Seeking to move beyond our previous narrative and findings in the first paper that were related, fundamentally, to issues connected to reflective practice, we sought to extend and explore our research agenda for this second paper. In order to more systematically investigate this theme related to previous (non-elite) playing experience as beneficial to coaching knowledge, and compare and combine with our previously unpublished findings, we continued this research under the guise of identifying patterns among our results, and used (as previously mentioned) an additional five participants with the same selection criteria as the first paper (less than three years' experience, and no more than a level two qualification), but also used the additional criteria of ensuring the new participants had all played (recreational, not professional) sport as well. Note, this new criteria was not one that was specifically asked for in the first paper, but all of the participants in that study had played sport previously. See Table 1 for full participant demographics.

In essence then, this study was designed to act in a confirmatory fashion to the first paper, and sought to interpret the nature and meaning of how previous sporting/playing experience could be considered a benefit for the construction of knowledge and applied practice of beginner-coaches. Whilst the first paper used just semi-structured interviews, for the present study we also used informal observations (i.e. we did not use any observational instruments) alongside short interviews related to the 'extra' theme from the first paper, as a way of ensuring validity. The observations, of the additional five beginner-coaches for this second study, in *action*, was used

Table 1. Coach Characteristics/Experience

Coach	How long coaching	Qualification	Preferred sport (experience/playing)	Gender
1	1.5 years	1	Football/gymnastics	F
2	1.5 years	0	Football/multi-sports	M
3	1.5 years	0	Football	F
4	2 years	0	Football	M
5	2 years	1	Football/swimming	F
6	3 years	2	Multi-sports (football player)	M
7	2 years	0	Flag football/American football	M
8	1.5 years	2	Basketball	M
9	1.5 years	0	Basketball	M
10	1.5 years	1	Basketball	F
11	2 years	1	Flag football	M

to help provide some detail as to how they coached, but far more so fundamentally to ensure that a more natural environment could (we hoped) foster more natural interview processes and ensure that the research participants were more comfortable and did not suppress their ideas, thoughts, and perceptions, to comply with our research agenda (that of ‘confirming’ what we had identified as an additional theme from the first iteration of data collection and analysis in our first paper).

In short, we sought to increase validity of this study by fostering a more narrative form of interviewing and meeting the coaches ‘on their turf’. To be clear, we did not just undertake interviews in and of themselves, but focused more on collating a series of conversations (and field notes) in order to more accurately ascertain their thoughts through a more narrative tone.

In total, the five additional coaches for this second study were observed between two and four times each in their sessions, and as stated each time questions (semi-structured interviews) were asked related to extending (and reinforcing) the previously held, yet unpublished, themes of experiential learning and the addition of self-reported importance of prior playing experience for beginner-coaches. The observations and questions then (‘on their turf’), facilitated a series of unfolding narratives with the beginner-coaches related to their perceptions and thoughts of the importance of previous playing experience for their coaching.

In summarising the specifics of the methods then, the first study (Hamblin & Crisp, 2022) used semi-structured interviews lasting between 36 and 45 minutes for the six participants, all of which were undertaken through Skype in order to comply with the then COVID-19 government guidelines regarding non-essential travel. The present study also used semi-structured interviews, with open questions such as ‘what strategies do you use in practice/’,

‘how do you feel that any previous qualifications might have helped you/’, ‘where do you think you have learned the most from/’, and ‘how much do you think playing sport previously has helped?’ were used to encourage the beginner-coaches to outline their reflections and thoughts on how they had developed as coaches and what had benefited them. The interviews lasted between 25-40 minutes, recorded on iPad and transcribed verbatim. A key difference between the first and present study, however, was the lifting of COVID-19 guidelines that allowed the researchers to enter the coaching environments of the sample and ask the questions before and after their sessions, as well as to observe and make field notes. The field notes were descriptive, and included observations and thoughts such as who was being coached, what the setting was like, what relationships between the coaches and players looked like, what activities took place, and any informal conversations (snippets) that took place between the researchers and the coaches. In total then, the data analysis used 11 beginner-coaches, six from the first study, and five from the second.

In terms of data analysis, much of the same system used in the first paper of transcribing the interviews verbatim was undertaken. Influenced by the research aims of this study (to extend the first paper’s unpublished findings related to perceived benefits of having played sport before coaching, and to question the role and impact of formal coach education for beginner-coaches), a qualitative approach and thematic analysis was used to identify themes, and the new data was labelled and coded in ways that were related to the research aims/questions, and then combined with the unpublished data of the first study (Hamblin & Crisp, 2022).

More specifically, however, whilst the present study sought to build upon some of the existing data from

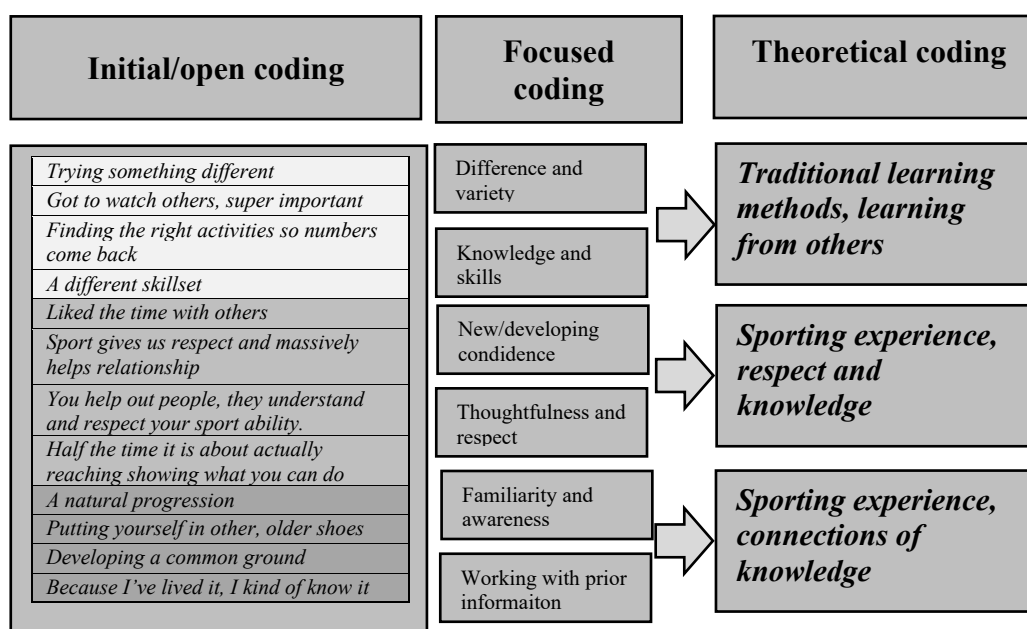


Figure 1: Coding and final higher order themes and key dimensions

the first study, it also (as mentioned previously) used an inductive approach, one based on grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) whereby theories are derived from the data. Of particular note here then, per grounded theory principles, in research that follows an inductive approach that systematically analyses the data (in this instance generated through interviews and short observations/recorded snippets and comments within sessions), it is not the ‘frequency’ of coding that matters, rather the more impactful relationships between significant reoccurring sets of data, and the way in which these can be pieced together as a ‘story’ that allows theory to emerge more naturally (Glaser, 1978).

The present study then, followed a process of aggregating and making sense of disparate data, and conceptually and coherently categorising and integrating themes through identifying possible relationships between categories. This iteration between levels of coding, in this instance, initial/open, focused, and then theoretical coding, generated the new themes within this paper. See Figure 1 (above) to see how the data were interpreted to arrive at the codes and theory. The next section outlines and discusses the findings and implications.

Discussion

In the following section, we present the findings collated, reviewed, coded, and refined, from the observations and interview data as three themes. The first, ‘*Traditional learning methods – formal coaching qualifications, and informally learning from others*’, the second ‘*Sporting*

experience – modelling, confidence, and respect’, and the third ‘*Sporting experience – underpinning, scaffolding, and connecting learning*’. In all then, this section outlines the themes that emerged from the data analysis of both studies (first study emerging, second study confirmatory) related to experiential learning and how prior playing experience was seen as a key contributory factor to confidence and initial coaching knowledge. Anonymised quotes are used to illustrate the themes and the beginner-coaches have been given numbers, with no relation to the pseudonyms in the first paper, to differentiate between them. As a combined results/discussion section, each theme will also be compared to existing research in this area, and explained in terms of wider theory and practice.

Traditional learning methods – formal coaching qualifications, and informally learning from others

All participants suggested that achieving a coaching qualification is an ideal method for learning. Those who did not hold a coaching qualification (three from the first study, two from the second) agreed that it was something they would like to complete as they believe it would expand their knowledge and understanding of the sport, skills, and techniques needed to more effectively deliver their sessions. Six participants who hold a qualification confirmed these expectations in explaining that they felt the qualification had increased their competence. For example, coach three discussed that since having gained their coaching qualifications they have increased their self-efficacy:

“Having that qualification expands my knowledge which motivates me because if someone asks me to

coach something, I can do it without a problem because I am capable and confident to deliver it. I think it helps me know how to get the best out of my drills as I have a bit more of a structure to follow with new techniques to use. I don't have to use so much trial and error and make it up to see what feels right for myself because obviously there are proven ways of doing stuff and ways of getting more out of people".

This demonstrates how the qualifications enhanced their ability to deliver sessions which supports previous research (e.g. Campbell & Sullivan, 2005; Wright et al., 2007), where conclusions have been drawn from the idea that efficacy increases for knowledge of game strategy, technique, and skill by undertaking a coaching course. Furthermore, other studies (e.g. Chase et al., 2005; Hammond & Perry, 2005; Maleté & Feltz, 2000; McCullick et al., 2005) suggest that coaching qualifications increase one's sense of competence and confidence due to becoming more efficient in employing a range of delivery methods.

Certainly, when considering how coaching courses seek to underpin the whole rationale of how coaches can appropriately and competently function within the enterprise of coaching, it is no surprise that in this study all the participants believed that gaining actual coaching experience enables (or would enable in the thoughts of those yet to qualify) them to learn about real-life situations which facilitates their development. This 'real-world' coaching, irrespective of whether the beginner-coaches had yet completed a coaching qualification, was considered crucial. For example, beginner-coach 11 explained:

"I think I improved my coaching by doing a lot of practical stuff. Experience helped me improve so much. Just being out there doing it myself because without doing any practical you're not really gonna be able to coach in the real world. This just made me a better coach cos then you are able to actually look and see what works, what doesn't work, and just see things happen in practice".

This suggests that by actually coaching, one is better equipped to face its realities. Consequently, this is supported in existing literature (e.g. Crisp, 2020; Ehiyazaryan & Barraclough, 2009; North, 2010) that explains the importance of real-world experience as it can closely relate to situations one is likely to encounter in the future, thus making one more prepared. Additionally, much literature suggests that coaching experience is a primary source of knowledge whereby – as a mechanism of experiential knowledge and informal education – it contributes to practical applied behavioural change as it provides richer learning experiences (Coaching Association of Canada, 1996; Gould et al., 1990; Salmela, 1996; Wright et al., 2007).

However, despite this claim, it is also understood that experience alone does not guarantee competence but rather, one must reflect on experiences to learn (Bell, 1997; Douge & Hastie, 1993; Martens, 2012). In this study then, the results correspond to how further facilitating personal growth and meaningful improvements to coaching mirror how behavioural change within the context of in-situ coaching and 'real-world' contexts are traditionally seen through theory to be actualised.

In this vein, data analysis highlighted that the participants found learning from others valuable. Nine participants noted how observing others helps them learn new ideas and enables them to compare themselves to different coaches and practice. An example of this can be seen in beginner-coach four's comments who explained how they can use others' coaching as a benchmark against their own:

"Reflection to me is about looking back and seeing what you did well and then compare yourself to other people and reflect on other people's coaching. You can apply that to yourself and just like reflect on yourself and others. I just try and pick up on stuff that they've done and then implement it, or like I'll think about how it might be similar or different to how I do things. I have been able to learn techniques from other coaches by watching their sessions with a range of groups. It helps me see how different ages learn so I know how advanced or simple my session needs to be for them".

This demonstrates how participants find it useful to compare and contrast their own coaching with others' coaching. Consequently, these results agree with prior studies (e.g. Erickson et al., 2008; Lemyre et al., 2007; North, 2010) that suggest coaches use observation to identify bad practice to avoid, confirm their own 'good' practice, and to challenge themselves to improve such as through identifying new methods of delivery.

Additionally, all participants believed feedback from more experienced coaches helps them learn. Findings demonstrate how they valued their opinions as they considered them to have more substantial knowledge than themselves, and thought this would provide great detail and support. Moreover, the beginner-coaches in this study believed them to be trustworthy through giving honest feedback, as beginner-coach six explained:

"I can always learn from feedback from experienced coaches because they'll look at the fine details. Getting feedback is huge because they know more than me quite simply, so I listen. They're going to tell me the truth and tell me what I can work on. They might be wrong, they might be right, but you just need to test it out yourself".

This illustrates how the beginner-coaches value constructive criticism for improvement which is supported in the work of Smith and Fortunato (2008), who discussed how supervisors are likely to provide honest feedback if there are seen to be perceived benefits that would result from their honesty. Conversely, concerns surround the reliability of feedback whereby negative feedback may be avoided to limit interpersonal conflict (London, 2001; Waldman & Atwater, 2001). Consequently, it is well worth noting that these more experienced coaches may not always provide valuable feedback if they are avoiding any chances of providing criticism, as comments may not always be a true reflection of one's performance.

Sporting experience – modelling, confidence, and respect

All of the beginner-coaches talked about the importance of demonstrating a competent image of themselves to their participants, and they all felt that previous playing experience really allowed for an initial level of respect to be established. As beginner-coach two said:

“Having knowledge on how to correctly perform skills, and knowing how to effectively use them in a game from your past experiences, is crucial to being able to provide good demonstrations of complex skills and establishing yourself as a role model for the team”.

Whilst there was an appreciation of other learning methods, and as the section/first theme above (*Traditional learning methods – formal coaching qualifications, and informally learning from others*) outlined an appreciation of how coaching ‘badges’ were helpful in increasing confidence and an understanding of delivery methods, there was also a viewpoint that formal coaching systems were in some sense limited – in comparison to having played a sport before – when it came to actively promoting positive coaching behaviours and facilitating development. Indeed, and notwithstanding their beliefs that there were inherent, built-in advantages to taking coaching qualifications, previous playing experience was seen as even more beneficial than specific coaching qualifications by all of the beginner-coaches in the study. An example of how this was articulated can be seen in the comments of beginner-coach eight:

“Far more valuable than a coaching certificate in and of itself. So much of it is about confidence, and certainly trying to get people to listen and respect you. If you can do things, or you’ve been any good at any sport, you’ll get some respect. It’s a bit like someone smaller and weaker than you telling you how to bench. Yeah, they may well know more than you but your gut feeling is that you shouldn’t have to listen to them because you’re bigger and stronger! I know it’s not ideal, but it’s kind of human nature”.

The beginner-coaches also used phrases such as “commitment”, “understanding”, “gained respect”, and “admiration from players” to describe how they found the transition from playing to coaching less problematic because of the way in which they saw their own coaching as informed, positively, by their previous playing experience and – in turn – how they felt participants viewed them as more competent or knowledgeable because of this. As coach ten said, in relation to their perceived importance of playing sport before coaching “it’s everything really”. All of the beginner-coaches also discussed the importance of how any development of confidence helped sustain their interest and engagement with the craft of coaching. An example can be seen in beginner-coach one’s comments

“Because I’ve played, I just know the sport. There’s got to be a kind of feel for a game that must be really hard to get without playing. A tempo, right? how do refs control a game, how do you warmup, how do you work as a team in that sport. I’d even say a culture... who does what, what’s the best way of doing things, how’s the best way of leading? Because I’ve played, I’ve got I think a reasonable idea of a lot of this. Certainly enough for me to be comfortable and confident in what I take into my coaching”.

In a related fashion, confidence levels of master athletes has been discussed in literature before. A key influence here, for example, is the work of Wilson et al. (2004), who outlined how master athletes valued their ability to demonstrate sport with expertise, and how any social comparisons with peers, both led to increased confidence. Indeed, when we consider impression management, these findings are quite broadly in agreement with the work of Manley et al. (2008), who demonstrated how third-party reports and reputations of coaches, including playing experience, positively influenced athletes’ expectancies about coaches

Sporting experience – underpinning, scaffolding, and connecting learning

All the participants discussed how they believed playing experience is an ideal tool for learning within in-situ practice-based contexts. They suggested that previous participation as players had enabled them to gain a greater perspective and knowledge of sports which makes them feel more prepared, as suggested by beginner-coach four, for example:

“I feel that because I played football I am now in a better position to coach because I don’t have to wing it by any means. I actually know what’s gonna be going on in the game situations, what actually happens on the pitch and off the pitch depending on the position, and how the team plays together. It also helps me think

more about game-related aspects I can include in my sessions which is a huge thing”.

Beginner-coach nine described the connection between their own experience within playing sport, as directly transferable to their newer experience of coaching:

“Being a team leader as a player translates into being a team leader as a coach – keeping your team motivated, attentive, and engaged. If you’ve experienced it, or more to the point done loads, I’d have thought it’s a lot easier to do right?”.

Indeed, the whole sample also outlined how previous playing experience increased their capacity to construct their knowledge and coaching (social) world, coaching application, and the beginner-coaches’ ability to identify appropriate training activities. An example from beginner-coach three showed how they were conscious of how playing, knowing more people (connections), and being involved in sport helped them:

“You know what, it’s a bit like a thief, although better obviously! But you try and get in the habit of nicking bits from everyone. Just whatever sport really, not just ones you’re really involved with but whatever you’ve played. One, you get a bit of a better understanding of how something ‘ticks’, and two you can try and put things together in your own way, such as a philosophy of play and style”.

Indeed, all of the beginner-coaches stressed that their understanding of what they considered ‘good play’ (a form of knowledge capital) and even their subsequent coaching approaches had been influenced by previous playing experience. However, alongside this idea of how playing experience supported their development and understanding, some of the coaches also made a point of the role that their own coaches had played in highlighting effective practice activities, as well as reinforcing what were perceived as good habits. Beginner-coach five stated:

“Having played before, it makes things pretty easy, because I play...I kind of know what makes good play when I’m playing my position, it’s kind of natural to see what works and what doesn’t. And having coaches who have pointed that out before for me helps massively. When you know what is good, and have had good coaches use certain drills that you can see and feel work really well, then I just use them as the basis and adapt them”.

This illustrates how playing experience can increase a coach’s inside knowledge of a sport. Similar to the cur-

rent findings, research by Lemyre et al. (2007) suggests that this type of previous playing experience increases a coach’s versatility, access to sport-specific material, and understanding of technical information needed to demonstrate during practices.

These findings also, in many respects, mirror a number of tenets that underpin the concept of accelerated learning. The work of Jacobsen (2015) and Farrell and Van de Braam (2014), for instance, outlines how condensed programmes, qualifications, or education systems/courses, allow for deeper, potentially more significant immersion and thus can compress learning. Of course, this is reliant on suitably appropriate and meaningful experiences and elicited responses, and the first author has outlined how coaching within the special educational needs (SEN) and disability context ‘accelerated’ a number of student-coaches’ learning through facilitating educational and reflective transitions (Crisp, 2019b). However, whilst in the present study the application and/or use of accelerated learning to explain how the beginner-coaches developed some idea of what constitutes ‘game sense’ and in identifying appropriate training activities, we feel that simply having played sport may not be enough to facilitate coach learning. Instead, we see that any previous experience in playing sport, may lead to a process that – when placed in the context of learning to coach – may be more developmental in nature. A process, so to speak, that accounts for how more intensive, immersive learning (in this instance playing, and being coached as well), can build upon existing knowledge.

At first glance, the concept of ‘scaffolding’ perhaps helps here in that learning is facilitated through inquiry instruction and support to complete tasks, based on what learners can do, can do unaided, and can do with assistance (Cho & Cho, 2016). The work of Allen and Reid (2019), for instance, illustrates how directing the learning of coaches through scaffolding and providing assistance and structure supports the individual needs of coaches in planning, delivering, and reflecting on their practice.

Indeed, in our first paper (Hamblin & Crisp, 2022), we referred to how scaffolding strategies, such as through a mentor, could be employed to support coaches in their development. However, this means that the process of learning is essentially negotiated through an arbiter of some form (i.e. teacher, lecturer, mentor, whoever can provide students with tasks and feedback), and not necessarily based upon or dependent on prior knowledge.

In the context of the findings here then, whereby the participants felt that previous playing experience smoothly facilitated transitions to coaching, the concept of ‘connective knowledge’ fits well. This is in terms of how relationships, networks, and understanding and familiarity of different contexts that are associated (in this instance playing and coaching sport), can lead to

connective knowledge (Downes, 2008; Priaulx & Weinel, 2018). Similar to constructivism, yet predicated on understanding how other contexts (and networks) can be seen as primary sources of knowledge creation and development, it is in this sense then that ‘connective knowledge’ seems to illustrate the process and phenomena whereby the participants in this study identified previous or contemporary playing experience as essential to their coaching development. Framing, and understanding, these findings in this fashion is especially salient when we consider the rich, deep, and significantly related properties of sport participation and sport coaching.

Conclusion

This study was designed to complement and build upon our first paper on beginner-coaches (Hamblin & Crisp, 2022). Revisiting our initial data and unpublished findings from our research from the first paper, we then extended the data set to explore, in more detail, how beginner-coaches reported the importance of prior playing experience as an influential feature of their confidence, coaching knowledge, and ability to coach, as well as to investigate how meaningful they found formal coach education.

The findings showed that the coaches felt that it is not necessarily ‘traditional’ (formal coach education) coaching courses that are of most benefit to their development, and as discussed in the first theme (*Traditional learning methods*) that experiential learning and actually coaching were seen as key to behavioural change. In many respects, this is not something of great surprise, given that a plethora of research and the general consensus agrees that experiential learning – essentially becoming better coaches by actually coaching – is perhaps of most importance for coach development when structured and facilitated in fashions that place a premium on reflective outcomes. Indeed, the findings in this paper continued to show that the beginner-coaches value gaining coaching experience (including qualifications) through doing sports coaching as this is seen to prepare them for its realities, but also, and crucially since this extends existing literature, through playing experience as this (from the perspective of the beginner-coaches in this study) increases one’s true understanding of a sport. This is particularly germane given, as this paper has previously outlined, the over-reliance on the voluntary sector for sport coaching and specifically for the community sport coaching sector/context, where expectations of sport coaches (who are most often volunteers) exceeds their understandably (because of time and limited resource/training) more limited pedagogical expertise (Pill et al., 2022).

The key difference in the findings of this paper then, ones we argue are novel, are the distinctions that

the beginner-coaches made in terms of highlighting previous playing experience as crucial to their development and confidence as coaches. Overall then, the positioning in this study of prior playing experience as central to development of coaching skills, in particular through more fully understanding the culture and practice of a sport (including coaching, but also gameplay, and importantly a pre-existing familiarity that could then be built upon) and positively underpinning the confidence of the beginner-coaches, are all evidence of how knowledge and practice could be constructed through ‘connections’ of prior learning and understanding within a related field. In essence a co-production of knowledge then, one that works on the centrality of interconnective processes between playing and coaching sport.

Whilst we have highlighted what we believe is the novel nature of these findings, we are also aware that in some sense they may well seem self-explanatory. Indeed, earlier in the paper we outlined the well-trodden path that many professional footballers take in terms of coaching, and this pathway – whilst acknowledging the professional edicts of, for instance, the PFA that in much part seeks to find employment for its members post playing career – seems to be one that exemplifies how previous playing experience can be beneficial for ex-players. In this paper though, the distinction lies in the fact that the beginner-coaches were not, and had not been, professional players, and all of them were still playing sport. The present study then provides an in-depth examination of how increased confidence, the development of knowledge, and the sense of familiarity that players can gain and transition to coaching are not then, exclusive to the context of high-performance sport. Given the fact that this paper extensively outlined the history and practice of coach education in the UK, and revisiting our position that recognising other, complimentary processes that can contribute to sufficient knowledge and practitioner bases for coaches (such as previous playing experience), we believe that this study has additional merit and relevance for coach educators to consider.

However, this research is not without its limitations. Much like the first study (Hamblin & Crisp, 2022), we acknowledge the limits of what can be accomplished by a relatively small sample size, and posit that the results cannot necessarily be generalised to the wider population (Faber & Fonseca, 2014). Whilst we attempted to ensure that our methodological rigour could be enhanced through informal observations in the coaches’ ‘natural environment’, we recognise that – without detailed observational notes – this was, whilst well intentioned, perhaps somewhat superfluous and any impact in terms of research methodology and validity was limited to becoming more well acquainted with the participants (although we argue that this in and of itself is advantageous). The thrust of the research method then was through interviews, and here

we are also mindful of the manner in which qualitative research undertaken in this way (interviews) is oftentimes fundamentally based on individual perceptions, and even just recollection of memories at times, something that research tells us is not always detailed, accurate, and reliable (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

We are also aware, as mentioned, that this research was undertaken with a small sample size (indeed, the sample was as a series of criteria particularly concise and close in terms of experience, background, and even types of sport with all essentially having experienced, played, and coached invasion/ball sports), and that as the study was undertaken using an interpretive, grounded theory style (searching for ‘narratives’ and impactful and meaningful data as opposed to frequencies of data), this significantly reduced any likelihood of finding differences between ‘subgroups’ (which were purposefully avoided through the sample). Essentially, the totality of this sample (including the sample from the first study), all felt that previous playing experience was of benefit, irrespective of sport, coaching qualifications, experience, or age. Yet this is not to say that further, larger (in terms of participant numbers and breadth and scope of sports played and coached) would not find differences or infer any possible interactions between the dependent variables.

Future research then could (and should) use a larger sample size and, moreover, some form of objectively comparing beginner-coaches who have played sport, and those who have not, could also be undertaken. Indeed, whilst on the one hand we believe that actively promoting connections between previous playing experience into coaching practice and coach development design could be beneficial, we are also wary of – in any way – shaping and forming opinions and practice that may well disadvantage those who have not played sport before in their development as coaches, or any interactions they have within coach education. A salient and germane question here then, is the extent to which – outside of personal beliefs – previous playing experience may advantage coach development, and studying how those who have not played sport before yet coach seems, intuitively, an area that should be investigated.

In summary then, whilst the findings of this study are not necessarily generalisable, they do explore and detail some of the conceptual intricacies inherent within coach education, and illustrate how learning can be mediated – through connective knowledge – within and through previous playing experience, relationships, and pre-existing familiarity. This mediation of learning and prior knowledge can then potentially transformatively effect (positively) the confidence and practice of beginner-coaches. Because of this, we suggest that coach development and learning could consider, and thus manage, ‘connections’ of prior learning and understanding within the related field

of prior playing experience, and implement these findings to ensure delivery is most effective for beginner-coaches.

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