

1 **Exploring formalized elite coach mentoring programmes in the UK:**

2 **‘We’ve had to play the game’**

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## Abstract

Formalized mentoring programmes have been implemented increasingly have been implemented by UK sporting institutions as a central coach development tool, yet claims supporting formal mentoring as an effective learning strategy are often speculative, scarce, ill-defined and accepted without verification. The aim of this study, therefore, was to explore some of the realities of formalized elite sports coaching mentoring programmes. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews with 15 mentors of elite coaches on formal programmes, across a range of sports. The findings were read through a Bourdieusian lens and revealed the importance of understanding the complexities of elite sports coaching environments, that elite sports coach development is highly specific and, therefore, should not be over-formalized, and how current elite sport coach mentoring programmes may be better conceptualized as a form of social control rather than being driven by pedagogical concerns. Following this empirically based analysis of practice, a number of implications for Governing Bodies (GBs), mentors and mentees were considered.

**Keywords:** Sports coaching, coach education, mentoring, formal coach learning, elite coach development, micro-politics.

## Introduction

1  
2       The need to broaden coaching's theoretical and empirical basis has been previously  
3 acknowledged within the coaching literature (e.g. Jones, 2006; Lyle & Cushion, 2010).  
4 However, Nelson *et al.* (2013) have cautioned that although an increase in theoretically  
5 informed delivery is evident, there seems to be a reluctance to assess the merits of existing  
6 modes of education before moving on to more fashionable pedagogical modes of delivery. For  
7 example, a number of scholars have suggested a variety of approaches which may be used to  
8 inform the education of coaches, such as the establishment of mentoring schemes (Bloom *et*  
9 *al.*, 1998), competency-based programmes (Demers *et al.*, 2006), problem-based learning  
10 (Jones & Turner, 2006), communities of practice (Culver & Trudel, 2008 and reflective  
11 practice (Gilbert & Trudel, 2001). However, within the sports coaching literature scant  
12 attention has been paid to exploring the efficacy and realities of such approaches in practice.  
13 This oversight is perhaps best illustrated within the sports coaching mentoring literature. For  
14 example, although formalized mentoring schemes have been considered a 'worthwhile addition  
15 to coach development' (Bloom *et al.*, 1998, p. 223), and have been viewed by coaches as an  
16 essential method contributing towards their development as a coach (Bloom *et al.*, 1995),  
17 similarly to mainstream mentoring literature (Noe *et al.*, 2002; Wanberg *et al.*, 2003), empirical  
18 research examining formal mentoring remains scarce (Bloom, 2013; Chambers, 2015).  
19 Typically, within the literature, mentoring situations are categorized as being either informal  
20 or formal across different contextual domains (Tourigny & Pulich, 2005). Informal mentoring  
21 refers to an organic mentorship that is unstructured and without a formal contract; it occurs  
22 through mutual identification and is often concerned with personal or professional development  
23 outcomes (Kram, 1985). These relationships allow for frequent personal feedback and  
24 interventions, usually because the mentor-mentee dyad occurs within the actual work setting  
25 (Tourigny & Pulich, 2005). Formal mentoring has been defined as 'a contractual relationship

1 where the terms are defined in such a way as to foster greater acceptance of and conformity to  
2 formally recognized organisational norms and expectations' (Tourigny & Pulich, 2005, p. 69).  
3 Commonly, formalized mentoring programmes are employed by organizations as  
4 institutionalized in-house training programmes that promote the development of employee skill  
5 sets, competencies, policies, procedures and standards (Tourigny & Pulich, 2005; Wright &  
6 Smith, 2000). Although recommendations for 'best practice' exist for the utilization of these  
7 formal schemes, scrutiny or empirical exploration is somewhat absent (Murray, 1991; Allen *et*  
8 *al.*, 2006). Often, the process of formalizing institutional mentoring programmes involves a  
9 number of key elements, such as establishing mentoring objectives, selecting and matching  
10 mentors and protégés, setting achievable expectations and goals, outlining responsibility, and  
11 duration and frequency of mentoring sessions or workshops (Tourigny & Pulich, 2005).  
12 Mentoring within sports coaching remains an 'ill-defined activity' (Jones *et al.*, 2009, p. 280).  
13 That is, despite the claims surrounding the adoption of coach mentoring schemes within sports  
14 coaching, mentoring continues to lack clear conceptual clarity and is often depicted in a  
15 fragmented manner (Bloom *et al.*, 1998; Jones *et al.*, 2009; Nash, 2003).

16         Unlike the centralized national sports education systems in North America (e.g.  
17 National Canadian Coaches Association) formalized coach mentoring schemes in the UK  
18 have been designed and implemented by individual sporting GBs. Consequently, these  
19 formalized mentoring schemes lack a standardized curriculum, and the content of these  
20 courses is dictated by the needs of the individual sporting body (e.g. more female coaches,  
21 more UKCC Level 4 coaches, etc.). Indeed, considerable variation of coach mentoring  
22 provision is evident within UK sports across UKCC Level and gender (cf. The FA, 2012).  
23 Therefore, there remains the need to analyse the development of sports coach mentoring  
24 schemes within the UK from an empirically based and theoretically informed perspective in  
25 order to provide a sound conceptual basis for the implementation of such schemes.

1 In building upon previous work, Jones *et al.* (2009) have suggested that the next step is  
2 ‘to generate empirical evidence regarding the current nature of mentoring in sports coaching in  
3 order to inform more meaningful coach education programmes’ (p. 276). In an attempt to  
4 answer such a call, this study aims to empirically explore the realities of coach mentoring  
5 within formalized elite sports contexts. In doing so, it seeks to provide a more complete  
6 representation of the current practices employed within formalized elite coach mentoring  
7 schemes in order to better understand the realities of elite coach mentoring. In addition, a  
8 Bourdieusian reading of the field data is offered, to deepen the level of understanding of the  
9 social context of mentoring practice (Bourdieu 2007, 2004b). The significance of this work is  
10 grounded in the recognition that mentoring within elite sports coaching is distinctive in nature  
11 (Griffiths & Armour, 2012), nuanced and contextually bound (Jones *et al.*, 2009) and uneven  
12 in quality and outcomes (Cushion, 2006). Such a conceptualization acknowledges the inherent  
13 complexity evident within the formal mentoring literature (e.g. Allen *et al.*, 2006; Chun *et al.*,  
14 2012; Eby *et al.*, 2008; Eby & Lockwood, 2005; McManus & Russell, 1997). In this regard, an  
15 empirical analysis of the current practices of formal mentors working with elite sports coaches  
16 attempts to reflect the realities of formalized coach mentoring and may assist in the design of  
17 future coach mentoring schemes.

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## **Methodology**

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### *Philosophical underpinnings*

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Engaging more explicitly in both the philosophical and procedural elements of the  
research process is an essential step to increase the quality of research within sports coaching  
(Nelson *et al.*, 2014b; Nelson *et al.*, 2014c; Potrac *et al.*, 2014). In an attempt to explicitly  
address this issue, the present study was conducted within the interpretivist paradigm (cf.  
Potrac *et al.*, 2014) and underpinned by a relativist ontology (i.e. participants hold socially

1 constructed views of reality) and a subjectivist epistemology (i.e. knowledge is created  
2 through an interaction between the researchers and the participants). In addition, within the  
3 analysis of the findings, the paper draws on the work of Bourdieu to provide a theorised  
4 reading of the data and to illustrate the inherent social dynamics found within elite coach  
5 mentoring contexts (Grenfell, 2008). From a representational perspective, the present paper  
6 follows the traditional representational prose of the dominant form of representation within  
7 qualitative research, the ‘realist tale’, in that we, as authors, deploy a neutral voice, written in  
8 the third person (Groom *et al.*, 2014). However, it is important to recognize that this is a  
9 textual strategy and a decision made by the research team, rather than a *true* or *real* account  
10 of the complexity of the lived experiences of the participants (Groom *et al.*, 2014).

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## 12 *Participants*

13       Following institutional ethical approval, mentors who mentored elite coaches across a  
14 range of mentoring schemes were contacted and informed about the purpose and nature of the  
15 present study. Following this initial contact, 15 participants were purposefully selected as  
16 formal coach mentors. The process was underpinned by a guiding frame: (1) holding the  
17 highest formal coaching award within their sport; (2) a minimum of 10 years of practical  
18 coaching experience; (3) had worked as a coach mentor for a minimum of three years. All  
19 participants have actively participated in a UK elite coach mentoring programme, which  
20 requires the mentor to contractually deliver mentoring sessions on behalf of a sporting  
21 institution.

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<< INSERT TABLE HERE >>

## 23 *Interviews and procedure*

24       Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the 15 participant mentors, either  
25 face to face ( $n = 13$ ) in a private location close to the participant’s place of work or, where the

1 participants were unable to meet in person, via the phone ( $n = 2$ ). All of the interviews were  
2 recorded via a Dictaphone and transcribed verbatim by the lead author. The participants'  
3 names have been replaced with pseudonyms within the text to preserve their anonymity;  
4 however, to contextualize the data, the participants' main sport/s are reported within Table: 1.  
5 alongside each data extract. The interviews were open in nature and allowed for the  
6 exploration of key themes regarding the participants' experiences within formal mentoring  
7 schemes. The interviews typically lasted from 45 to 60 minutes and were conducted in a  
8 flexible manner using open-ended questions and elaboration probes.

9 An interview guide was utilized in an attempt to structure the conversation towards  
10 the research aims of the study. A literature review was completed. Its findings, together with  
11 author 1's previous experience as a mentee on an elite sports coach mentoring scheme and  
12 author 2's experience as an educator on an elite sports coach mentoring scheme, increased the  
13 research team's theoretical sensitivity to the questionnaire design (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).  
14 Questions broadly focused on exploring the participants' perceptions of their engagement  
15 with formal mentoring schemes.

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### 17 *Thematic analysis*

18 For the purposes of this study, a data-driven inductive thematic approach was employed  
19 (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to stimulate useful comparisons between themes. Methodologically  
20 such an approach is informed by a phenomenological epistemology concerned with  
21 understanding meaning and experience as socially [re]produced through interactions, thus the  
22 importance of socio-cultural contexts and structural conditions of the context remain at the  
23 centre of the analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Consequently, the data analysis was not  
24 viewed as a singular event but instead can be better conceptualized as an iterative process  
25 between data and theory. However, it is important to recognize that as researchers we made

1 decisions on the data, and that the categories in the present study did not simply ‘emerge’ from  
2 the data but rather are a result of ongoing analysis, interpretation and embedded critical  
3 reflection by the research team. Following Taylor (2014: 189), we suggest that the analysis of  
4 qualitative data is not easy; instead it is ‘often messy, at times confusing, and rarely presents a  
5 complete picture’.

6         During the analysis process a method of working back and forth was adopted between  
7 data and theory (Boyatzis, 1998). The research team met on a regular basis during the data  
8 collection phase, and we talked aloud about the data and what we thought it meant (Taylor,  
9 2014). The sharing of these thoughts and feelings was not a single isolated event but a  
10 collective one, often involving us reconsidering and challenging our own and each other’s  
11 ideas (Taylor, 2014). This process was themed around the importance of culture and context  
12 in elite sports coach mentoring, the problematic nature of institutional agendas in elite sports  
13 coach mentoring, the dangers of over-formalizing elite sports coach mentoring and micro-  
14 politics in elite sports coach mentoring, which are discussed below and throughout the study.  
15 Additionally, the creation of theoretical codes enabled potentially important concepts to be  
16 explored through an iterative process in which the research team asked questions of the data  
17 to assist in the development of insightful comparisons and analytical reflection (Boyatzis,  
18 1998).

19         In the first instance, the primary researcher and author familiarized themselves with  
20 the data sets by engaging in the process of transcription, which has been described as a key  
21 phase of data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were then identified by the research  
22 team (authors 1–3) in relation to the questions asked, and responses presented in a patterned  
23 format. The data was interpreted by assessing the commonality of emerging articulated  
24 themes, which in turn produced the first order categorization, for example institutional  
25 influences impacting the formalized scheme. Secondly, individual occurrences were explored



1 across the first order themes to identify comparisons within the data set (Boyatzis, 1998;  
2 Braun & Clarke, 2006).

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4

## **Results and discussion**

5 Within this section, the paper utilizes the work of Bourdieu in attempting to shed light  
6 on the selected themes represented here. Particularly, it applies the concepts of field, habitus,  
7 capital, symbolic violence, doxa and misrecognition to the reading (Grenfell, 2008). Whilst it  
8 is beyond the scope of this paper to provide an outline of Bourdieu's body of theory, it should  
9 be acknowledged that to a limited degree it has helped to illuminate coaching research.

10 Taylor and Garratt (2010) used 'field and capital' to investigate the experience of coaches  
11 and the professionalisation of their practice; Cushion and Jones (2006) explored the verbal  
12 interaction of coaches, citing the 'symbolic violence' inherent in their exchanges with  
13 athletes; Taylor and McEwan (2012) used the notion of 'educational capital' to examine the  
14 nature of interprofessional relationships; and Noble and Watkin (2003) provided an  
15 interesting use of the concepts of 'habitus' and 'embodiment' within the sports training  
16 literature.

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### *The culture and context of elite sports coach mentoring*

18 This first section builds a case for and highlights some of the contextual nuances of  
19 elite sports coach mentoring within sport (Griffiths & Armour, 2012). The following extracts  
20 in this section explore how important it is for mentors to understand the elite sports milieu  
21 and how this differs across operational contexts, with reference to effective formalized  
22 mentoring and elite coach education. It further discusses the benefit of an elite sports mentor  
23 from a different sport or context. The following section highlights a number of examples of  
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1 how the participant mentors discussed the importance of context within elite coach  
2 mentoring:

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4 When you're working in sport and you do sport yourself you do have an  
5 understanding of the environment people are operating within ... Sometimes there's  
6 the element of rapport because there's that something in common and that can fast  
7 track that relationship. (Mark)

8

9 In business if you're operating within a totally different context every time you don't  
10 have an appreciation of the complexities of the environment [in] which the individual  
11 is working. However, it doesn't seem to be an issue for the people from business that  
12 you don't come from business, but I suspect if you come from sport it's more of an  
13 issue: you understand it, you work it and you live it ... There's an element of culture,  
14 the way sport has a mind-set and is set up, this desire or want or need to have this kind  
15 of credibility around the technical element of sport. (Mark)

16

17 Formal mentoring has to happen. When you're embedded within the sport you're  
18 much more situationally based; where I have physically had to come up here. So when  
19 I worked in sailing, if a coach wandered into the office and we had a bit of a chat and  
20 said 'do you want to grab a tea?' That informality is incredibly useful. That can't  
21 happen in my role because I'm not embedded as I would like to be. (Simon)

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23 Although elite sports coach mentoring delivery appears to be distinctive in nature, the  
24 participant mentors identified the benefits of drawing upon mentors from outside the  
25 mentees' sporting domain:

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I would advocate at an elite level there's a stronger argument for the mentors to be outside the sport, but having a mentor skill set to facilitate the development of the elite coach is beneficial. Lower down the sports a mentor from the same sport can be important, like the 'buddy-up' system. My overall feeling on mentoring is that it's still very global and it's not specific. I think we need to differentiate between maybe not only the demands between different sports and how mentors look within different sports but more importantly at different levels and a coaching journey from where they started coaching seriously to an elite end. (Danielle)

Similarly to the work of Feiman-Nemser and Parker (1992) within teacher education, different forms of mentoring occur within different contexts. Bourdieu refers to these emplotments as fields, which are common spaces where individuals and organizations interact and mutually construct shared experiences (Bourdieu 2007: Grenfell, 2008). These fields are often in conflict over resources and issues such as time, and are constrained by the informality that Simon (sailing and canoe coach) values as being built by members as they co-experience field conditions (Grenfell, 2008). Within business, Cox (2003) highlighted 'the imperative that context places on the enhancement of professional practice, the implications it holds for the use of standards and the opportunity that it provides for a creative approach to coach/mentor development' (p. 21). Thus, mentors operating within a sports coaching context require specialized coaching expertise and contextual sensitivity (Lyle & Cushion, 2010).

Within the present study, coach mentors describe scenarios whereby contextual differences exist not only across mentoring domains (i.e. sport and business) but also between different sports and within the developmental pathway in a single sport. As a result, participant mentors suggest that the elite coach requires a unique, individualised mentoring

1 approach which takes longer and is more likely to address behaviour change. Furthermore,  
2 the role requirements of high performance coaches demand an amplified contextual  
3 knowledge base: something which has previously been highlighted as a shortcoming of  
4 current coach education provision (Griffiths & Armour, 2012; Lyle & Cushion, 2010). The  
5 work of Chesterfield *et al.* (2010) highlighted the problematic nature of coach education  
6 programmes in the UK, in that they lack contextual sensitivity and are delivered in a ‘one-  
7 size-fits-all’ approach. Bourdieu, in his consideration of the ‘naturalisation of best fit’,  
8 applies the term ‘doxa’ to situations where certain cultural assumptions become embodied to  
9 the degree that they are rarely questioned. Assumptions remain unspoken because they came  
10 without speaking (Bourdieu, 2004a). The idea that the contextual field is not central in the  
11 emergence of sport-related coaching norms is an example of doxa. The importance of place  
12 and culture is amplified within the idea of habitus, which is a set of dispositions that colour  
13 our everyday actions and provide us with aligned behaviours (Deer, 2008). Within the current  
14 treatment of sports coach mentoring in the literature, coach education programmes suggest  
15 this ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach will effectively upskill the coaching workforce, whereas elite  
16 coach mentors in the current study suggest the need to revise this mode of delivery and to  
17 challenge the doxa of the fields (Deer, 2008). Therefore, there remains a need to recognize  
18 that elite coach mentees require a contextually bound individually focused development  
19 programme based upon developing a reflective, flexible and critical understanding of the  
20 coaching role.

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## 22 *The problematic nature of institutional agendas in elite sports coach mentoring*

23 The employment of formal mentoring schemes by sporting institutions as a workforce  
24 development tool continues to increase in popularity (Cushion, 2006). Often, institutions  
25 utilizing this approach align the mentoring scheme to long-term objectives or the strategic

1 position of the institution, instead of adopting a bespoke approach for the coach mentee  
2 (Bloom *et al.*, 1998; Tinning, 1996; Thomson, 1998). As a result, formal mentors feel  
3 restricted in both the topic and format of mentoring delivery. The participant coach mentors  
4 in this study highlighted a number of specific social and cultural issues within their sport,  
5 which impacted the aim and the philosophy of the mentoring schemes:

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7 At times the awards dictate the content; it's what is for the greater good of most. I  
8 would like mentoring in the future to be more about philosophy and the things that  
9 really do affect what we do every day. And it is about philosophy in some respects at  
10 the moment, but the scheme was devised because of the perceived lack of highly  
11 qualified female coaches. (Geoff)

12

13 It's really to take talented coaches who work within NGBs at the minute and really  
14 fast track them and accelerate their development. So we are hoping there will be some  
15 short-term gains in the role they're in at the moment but we are hoping they will  
16 become the elite coaches of the future. And we are trying to fast track their  
17 development by helping them with some of their skills and knowledge. (Dawn)

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19 Further, the participants within the present study acknowledged how institutionally  
20 driven agendas had problematically impacted their own mentoring schemes, as bespoke  
21 coach development becomes neglected. Bourdieu suggests that the ability to challenge these  
22 field-based agendas is based on the possession of various forms of capital (Grenfell, 2008).  
23 Capital is essentially symbolic in nature and is used to influence your own and others' field  
24 positions. Without such capital, be it institutional capital (such as working for an NGB) or the  
25 symbolic capital inferred by the acquiring of higher coaching awards, the prevailing

1 conditions and discourses are hard to confront (Taylor & Garratt, 2010: Taylor and McEwan,  
2 2012). In the participants' own words:

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4 The coach themselves identifies the area of need, although there's a performance-  
5 driven target by the organization. ... I'd probably say to a certain level formalized  
6 mentoring could be of use but I think at a certain level, more towards the elite end,  
7 coach development is so specific you tick the boxes but you might not actually be  
8 developing the coach. (Danielle)

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10 Often the format and mode of delivery of mentoring programmes are dictated by the  
11 institution in line with providing measurable outcomes for funding purposes. Here, Adam  
12 highlighted that:

13

14 Due to the [mentoring] scheme being tightly funded there's a few more bits that are  
15 sort of overly measured [i.e. performance-driven targets]. I mean, my issue is funding  
16 comes in, the programme gets developed, it's quite glossy, it's supposed to be  
17 bespoke for the coach, [but] it's too structured at the moment. (Adam)

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19 Obtaining funding for coach education adds limitations to the formalized mentoring  
20 session and structure, which in turn drives the monitoring of mentoring effectiveness towards  
21 an audit culture. These fields are, in turn, influenced by external fields that are more powerful  
22 in terms of the control of and allocation of economic capital (e.g. sport body funding) (Taylor  
23 & Garratt, 2010). Consequently, these external institutional pressures and stakeholder  
24 influences may be problematic and confine coach mentor practice, which may, in turn, reduce  
25 the value of the mentee's experience. Here, Tony noted that:

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On the odd occasion, you might feel like sometimes the formalized scheme has got the chains on you. I think that's when your experience, intuition, gut feeling, call it whatever you like, help you because you would have been in a situation like that before. There have been a couple of times where I have done that and it's not actually worked. It hasn't worked for the mentee I'm working with. Afterwards, when I've evaluated it, it's not worked for me either and I have to learn from those lessons.

(Tony)

Similarly to the work of Tourigny and Pulich (2005) within nursing, the participant mentors described scenarios where institutional norms, hierarchical structures or political influences dictated the format of delivery for the mentors. Indeed, one of the dangers of implementing a sports coach mentoring scheme which is heavily driven by institutional agendas and assessed through the collection of metrics is a reduction in the bespoke educational impact of the mentoring scheme. The work of Hansford *et al.* (2004) explains that such realities may be understood as the 'darker side' of mentoring (Duck, 1994; Long, 1997). In addition, this controlling of the field conditions can lead to 'misrecognition'; this state, according to Bourdieu, produces an illusionary belief where agents are compliant to the dominant agenda, believing it is the only and best option open to them (Bourdieu 2004a; Grenfell, 2008).

Coach mentors in the present study noted the impact of 'tightly funded' schemes which manifested into a structured, regulated and generic approach to coach mentoring delivery. Furthermore, one of the difficulties institutions faced whilst designing and implementing formalized mentoring programmes was the ongoing concern relating to insufficient funding or the impact of funding being terminated before the programme was

1 established (cf. Long, 1997). Here, a number of financial pressures were placed upon the  
2 demonstration of the success of sports coach mentoring schemes through the audit of tangible  
3 increases in target demographics. However, such a climate may be contradictory to, and thus  
4 discourage, supportive behaviour (Kram, 1985).

5

### 6 *The dangers of over-formalizing elite sports coach mentoring*

7 The over-formalizing of sports coach mentoring schemes occurs in numerous ways; for  
8 example ridged structure, specific formats, generic workshops or conferences with rules and  
9 regulations. As a result, these mentoring schemes reduce the bespoke value of mentoring and  
10 learning outcomes for the mentorship (Jones *et al.*, 2009). This section outlines the extent to  
11 which over-formalizing the mentoring process is influenced by the institutions' desire to  
12 attain continuous funding and the problematic nature of measuring programme effectiveness.  
13 The threat of a reduction in or complete withdrawal of funding manifests itself as an act of  
14 symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2007), where compliance and orthodoxy are rewarded capital  
15 above localism and bespoke development. Here, coach mentors expressed their concerns  
16 about over-formalizing the schemes due to the complex nature of measuring mentee  
17 development:

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19 I think it's important, the political environment the coach sits in. Some [contexts] are  
20 so large the formalized process just gets the same [delivery] to every individual. But  
21 they all come with different experiences and are individuals and will need different  
22 things. ... It's finding the right people to mentor and it doesn't become so washy that  
23 nothing is achieved. And I think that's the sad thing, politically, that if you look at  
24 processes with players there's a formal monitoring process of where funding is given  
25 to the development of a player and you can see that through physiological data, or



1 performance data or rankings. And I think that in many respects we take that  
2 [approach] and we try and apply it to coach education where it shouldn't be as  
3 formalized. (Danielle)

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5 Christian outlined a number of realities of the audit culture within which many of the  
6 elite sports mentoring programmes operate:

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8 Often, I mean there's a real challenge out there because if we talk strictly, you know,  
9 funders would say 'if we are going to fund a programme we want to know exactly  
10 how many people are on the programme. We want to know the exact outcomes of the  
11 programme and we want to measure the processes.' And what we are looking at is a  
12 natural relationship which has troughs and peaks with points of contact and it doesn't  
13 always fit in with a structured programme or recording form. So on one end you've  
14 got this real need for structure and on the other you've got the need for a natural  
15 relationship, which may or may not work. (Christian)

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17 Interestingly, Arthur highlighted the political pressures placed upon publicly funded  
18 formal mentoring programmes that are targeted for elite coach development:

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20 Who accredits a mentor? The only real accreditation is from the coach or athlete  
21 they're working with. The accreditation is, 'I need to see you again next week', but  
22 of course we can't do that if we are using public money to run this programme so we  
23 have had to find a way to assess people against a competence framework which is a  
24 real pain in the arse. It's subjective; it's really difficult to say how self-aware  
25 somebody is. You know we can spend hours doing it, and the sad thing is, we've had

1 to play the game. We appreciate we live in a political world and sometimes we have  
2 to do it. It's not right but that's what we have had to do, so we do have a framework  
3 against which we assess. (Arthur)

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5 Such findings are mirrored in the work of Roberts (2000) who argued that excessive  
6 structure and imposed guidelines upon mentorships could hinder the development of the  
7 mentee. A further factor discussed by Ragins and Cotton (1999) is the complex nature of  
8 balancing the bespoke nature of the mentorship with the structure and expectations of the  
9 formal agenda. Philosophically, mentoring may be considered to operate on a continuum  
10 from 'coach-centred programmes' to 'institutionally driven programmes'. Coach-centred  
11 approaches may focus upon assisting coaches to become 'the best that they can be', where the  
12 role of the coach mentor is that of a *facilitator of learning* (Nelson *et al.*, 2014a). For  
13 Bourdieu (2004a), the corporation of education and the control of what is valued in learning  
14 rarely serve those whom they were designed to educate. Learning, in this case, becomes  
15 instrumental for both the agency it serves and those actors within that field who lack the  
16 capital to effectively challenge, thus contributing to the field doxa by being cast 'silently  
17 silenced' (Mathiesen, 2004). The role of the coach mentor in an institutionally driven  
18 programme would be to ensure that mentees progress in line with a competence framework,  
19 ensuring the institutional agendas are met, often with the aim of securing continued financial  
20 support. The coach mentors were acutely aware of the difficulties associated with working  
21 within highly politicalized environments where a number of stakeholders held contrasting  
22 agendas (Jones & Wallace, 2005), and the impact that those influences often placed upon  
23 formal mentoring schemes (i.e. over-formalizing mentoring schemes reduces the  
24 individualised, bespoke, mentee-centred nature of the learning experience). Consequently, in  
25 an attempt to develop the mentees in accordance with measurable modes of delivery, generic

1 workshops, sessions or conferences are often also implemented by GBs, which at times  
2 results in an ineffective decontextualized ‘tick box’ approach to coach learning (Chesterfield  
3 *et al.*, 2010; Nelson *et al.*, 2013).

4

#### 5 *Micro-politics in elite sports coach mentoring*

6 The thematic analysis of the data further revealed how formalized elite sports  
7 mentoring programmes, like coaching more broadly, are not immune from social and political  
8 pressures from a number of stakeholders who have, at times, contradictory agendas (Jones &  
9 Wallace, 2005). Drawing upon the work of Ball (1987) and Blasé (1991), Potrac and Jones  
10 (2009) have highlighted that, when applied to sports coaching, micro-politics encapsulates  
11 the ‘political interactions that take place between social actors in different organizational  
12 settings’ (p. 225). More specifically, micro-politics relates to ‘the use of formal and informal  
13 power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals’ (Blasé, 1991, p. 11). For Bourdieu,  
14 the social is relational: each actor attempting to maintain an advantageous position within  
15 each field as it struggles with constrained resources. An individual’s own position and  
16 security in each field are governed by the value accrued by various forms of capital; this  
17 process only gives a temporary sense of security as outside forces determine the symbolic  
18 value these are afforded (Bourdieu, 2004b). Micro-political intercourse is a display of this  
19 unsettling condition and where individuals struggle to enhance or maintain field location. The  
20 following extracts highlight the micro-political nature of elite sports coaching mentoring  
21 programmes, particularly with regard to social power and interpersonal influence:

22

23 One of the KPIs [Key Performance Indicators] for the future will be to get as many  
24 mentees onto the Level 4 as possible [UKCC Level 4]. All of them have to be Level 4  
25 by 2016, which is what canoeing have requested; which is useful because the whole

1 issue is to get people to engage in coaching and their own development, and you can  
2 either do that by inspiring people to do that, or with the carrot and the stick. (Simon)

3  
4 Importantly, Geoff highlighted that he was well aware that elite sports coach  
5 mentoring programmes may be viewed as a form of formal power to achieve specific goals:

6  
7 Our mentoring scheme, the prime aim is to help female coaches get higher  
8 qualifications, whereas the men's scheme is not necessarily for that ... If you are  
9 asking 'is our mentoring scheme a form of social control?', absolutely, I am sure it is.  
10 Now, do we try and guard against that? Yes. How? Well, in discussions in trying to  
11 encourage people to look at solving problems in different ways. But we are all a  
12 product of our society. (Geoff)

13  
14 The previous extracts highlighted the potential for elite sports coach mentoring  
15 schemes to be used to control the career development of mentees. Indeed, Simon made the  
16 point that you can inspire people 'with the carrot and the stick', whilst Geoff recognized that  
17 formal coach mentoring schemes can be seen as a form of 'social control'. The following  
18 extract highlights an extension of one of the formalized elite sports mentoring programmes  
19 and some of the micro-political realities of trying to encourage knowledge sharing:

20  
21 The second strand of it [the mentoring scheme] was to mentor the assistant coaches.  
22 Both our main coaches were foreign, university educated and had coaching degrees.  
23 One [was] running the coach education system in Finland, very bright, very switched  
24 on, [and was] also running the international federation shooting training academy,  
25 working with very experienced Olympic medal winning coaches. Try as I may I could

1 not get them to do any mentoring whatsoever and that was a real disappointment. And  
2 after I saw that this was happening, this is really when I started the programme,  
3 because I had hoped to do it even more informally as a leader-follower type of  
4 mentoring, [but] they didn't want to do it. I also felt the time wasn't there, but again I  
5 instinctively felt that a lot of it was 'my secrets, my power, my knowledge, and I am  
6 not sure where I am going in the future and may not have a role in Great Britain. I  
7 don't want to tell you all my secrets.' (Steve)

8

9 The following paired quotes from Arthur and David highlight the issues that mentors  
10 and mentees face working within the same sport:

11

12 We find the coaches much prefer to be coached by somebody who doesn't have an  
13 agenda in their sport. Often NGBs will employ mentors from within and they are  
14 often seen very suspiciously as a spy. As soon as you have that there's no trust, so  
15 mentoring doesn't happen. (Arthur)

16

17 Sometimes I ask my mentor 'how would you do this?' His responses are not as clear  
18 or forthcoming as I'd like. I sometimes feel like it's because it's a competitive  
19 exchange, in terms of, you know, his athletes doing well and my athletes doing well  
20 because they compete against each other, and it's been a problem. (David)

21

22 Again, one of the stark realities faced by many GBs is the availability and willingness  
23 of senior coaches to engage in mentoring programmes as coach mentors. This is particularly  
24 evident within elite sporting contexts where coaches may be competing for the same  
25 employment opportunities in the future. Each coach's habitus is one that emerges in a culture

1 where competition and competitiveness are rewarded and a disposition towards self-  
2 preservation helps to ensure longevity in the field (Bourdieu, 2004b; Grenfell, 2008). Sharing  
3 sporting capital in the form of a free exchange of knowledge may be regarded as a weakening  
4 of individual capital (Taylor & McEwan, 2012). In this regard, this study presents some  
5 initial findings which suggested that to progress their own careers senior coaches may, in  
6 some instances, purposely resist engagement within mentoring programmes. Steve  
7 highlighted how some coaches were keen to retain their ‘secrets’, ‘power’ and ‘knowledge’ to  
8 protect themselves from vulnerability and further their own individual career aspirations.

9

10

### **Conclusion**

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This study aimed to address the dearth of empirical work exploring the realities of formalized elite sports coach mentoring. Specifically, this work sought to generate an empirically based picture of current practices in elite sports mentoring contexts in order to inform more meaningful coach education programmes (Jones *et al.*, 2009). Following a thematic analysis of the data, four principle themes were generated which provided additional insights into the realities of formalized elite sports coach mentoring programmes. These themes were subjected to a Bourdieusian reading, which, it is argued, provided a richer insight into the political and cultural grammar of elite coach mentoring.

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First, elite sports coach mentoring is contextually bound and distinctive in nature; thus, mentors operating within a sports coaching context require specialized coaching expertise and contextual sensitivity (Griffiths & Armour, 2012; Lyle & Cushion, 2010). That is, knowledge, value systems, competition and interpersonal skills will vary across coaching domains, which in turn requires coach mentoring approaches to be context sensitive. Coaching domains, therefore, necessitate behaviours, practice and expertise to suit the domain the coach is operating within. However, the extent to which generic or cross-sport

1 mentoring may impact upon coach learning remains an as yet unexplored avenue for future  
2 coach learning research.

3         Second, formalized mentoring schemes are frequently driven by a number of, at times  
4 contradictory, agendas, which often served to fulfil the political agendas of the institution  
5 through meeting GB coaching workforce demographic targets (cf. Jones & Wallace, 2005).  
6 Each sporting domain, in terms of a Bourdieusian notion of field, is one of internal tensions  
7 and subject to the influence of political field, which governs economic capital (resources and  
8 money) and symbolic capital in terms of the value placed on each sport by organizations such  
9 as UK Sport and the British Olympic Association (Taylor & Garratt, 2010; Taylor &  
10 McEwan, 2012). Furthermore, formal mentoring schemes were seen to be important in  
11 sustaining and increasing funding for their sport from national funding bodies. From an  
12 internal GB perspective, formal mentoring schemes were identified as a vehicle to clearly  
13 demonstrate the success of current coach education programmes in coping with an  
14 increasingly evident audit culture within elite sport.

15         Third, a number of dangers existed if mentoring schemes were over-formalized and  
16 coach learners were required to progress through generic training programmes. Here, overly  
17 rigid programmes reduce the bespoke nature of the learning requirements of elite sports  
18 coaches (cf. Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Therefore, over-formalized schemes designed primarily  
19 to satisfy a competence framework approach run the risk of only satisfying institutional  
20 agendas, which at times results in an ineffective decontextualized approach to coach learning  
21 (cf. Chesterfield *et al.*, 2010).

22         Fourth, from a micro-political perspective, elite sports coaching mentoring  
23 programmes held significant potential as a tool for social and political control of the coaching  
24 workforce, whilst at the same time potential mentors could be seen to exert resistance to such  
25 programmes to further their own future career opportunities (cf. Ball, 1987; Blasé, 1991;

1 Potrac & Jones, 2009). A great deal of interest in the pedagogical value of formalized coach  
2 mentoring programmes is evident within the sports coaching literature, but similarly to the  
3 suggestion of Jones and Wallace (2005), elite sports coaching mentoring programmes are not  
4 immune from the tussles of stakeholders' at times contradictory agendas. As such, directors  
5 of elite sports mentoring schemes should recognize the tension between the individual goals  
6 and agendas of potential coach mentors and the institutional goals and agendas which often  
7 drive formal mentoring programmes.

8           In summary, this paper highlights several important issues for GBs, mentors and  
9 mentees to consider when engaging in formalized elite sports coach mentoring schemes.  
10 Whilst coach learning may remain, at least implicitly, the overarching goal of formalized elite  
11 sports coach mentoring programmes, consideration should be given to the institutional  
12 context and associated pressures upon stakeholders to 'tick boxes', 'hit targets' and maintain  
13 and increase levels of funding. Furthermore, conflicting institutional and individual agendas  
14 may limit the number of senior coach mentors who are willing to participate within  
15 formalized mentoring programmes because of concerns regarding the reduction in future  
16 career opportunities. Finally, it is important to recognize that whilst some elements of sports  
17 coaching may remain generic across sporting domains, there exists a need to educate coaches  
18 in a contextually sensitive manner if coaches are to be given an educational programme  
19 which they value and which is useful and relevant in informing their everyday coaching  
20 practice.

21

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<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Sport/s</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>Formal Mentoring Experience</b>
<i>Adam</i>	44	Male	Hockey	International coaching experience, coach educator and mentor.	12 years'
<i>Alfie</i>	59	Male	Athletics	National coach, coach educator and mentor.	8 years'
<i>Arthur</i>	48	Male	Cricket & rugby	National coach, coach educator and mentor.	10 years'
<i>Christian</i>	36	Male	Athletics & cycling	National coach, coach educator and mentor.	3 years'
<i>Danielle</i>	42	Female	Hockey & netball	National coach and mentor.	3 years'
<i>David</i>	48	Male	Athletics	National coach and mentor.	3 years'
<i>Dawn</i>	31	Female	Olympic sports	Head of a formal mentoring programme and mentor.	6 years'
<i>Geoff</i>	58	Male	Football	Head of a formal mentoring programme and international coaching experience.	13 years'
<i>Lawrence</i>	48	Male	Football	National coach, coach educator and mentor.	5 years'
<i>Lucy</i>	24	Female	Football	Club mentor.	3 years'
<i>Mark</i>	36	Male	Olympic sports/business	Head of a formal mentoring programme and mentor.	6 years'
<i>Sally</i>	48	Female	Athletics	Performance Director, national coach and mentor.	4 years'
<i>Simon</i>	48	Male	Water & Olympic sports	International coaching experience, coach educator and mentor.	13 years'
<i>Steve</i>	64	Male	Shooting	Performance Director, international coach and mentor.	14 years'
<i>Tony</i>	47	Male	Football	National coach, coach educator and mentor.	7 years'

1

2 Table 1. Participant Demographics.

3

