1   **An analysis of the value of multiple mentors in formalised elite coach mentoring**

2   **programmes in the UK: 'No single mentor can have all the answers'**

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3

4   **Abstract**

5   *Background*: Within the context of sports coaching and coach education, formalised mentoring

6   relationships are often depicted as a mentor–mentee dyad. Thus, mentoring within sports

7   coaching is typically conceptualised as a one-dimensional relationship, where the mentor is

8   seen as the powerful member of the dyad, with greater age and/or experience (Colley 2003).

9   *Aim*: The aim of this study was to explore the concept of a multiple mentor system in an attempt

10   to advance our theoretical and empirical understanding of sports coach mentoring. In doing so,

11   this paper builds upon the suggestion of Jones, Harris and Miles (2009) who highlight the

12   importance of generating empirical research to explore current mentoring approaches in sport,

13   which in turn can inform meaningful formal coach education enhancement. The significance

14   of this work therefore lies in opening up both a practical and a theoretical space for dialogue

15   within sports coach education in order to challenge the traditional dyadic conceptualisation of

16   mentoring and move towards an understanding of 'mentoring in practice'.

17   *Method*: Drawing upon Kram's (1985) foundational mentoring theory to underpin a multiple

18   mentoring support system, 15 elite coach mentors across a range of sports were interviewed in

19   an attempt to explore their mentoring experiences. Subsequently, an inductive thematic

20   analysis endeavoured to further investigate the realities and practicalities of employing a

21   multiple mentoring system in the context of elite coach development.

22   *Results*: The participants advocated support for the utilisation of a multiple mentor system to

23   address some of the inherent problems and complexities within elite sports coaching mentoring.

1   Specifically, the results suggested that mentees sourced different mentors for specific

2   knowledge acquisition, skills and attributes. For example, within a multiple mentor approach,

3   mentors recommended that mentees use a variety of mentors, including cross-sports and non-

4   sport mentors.

5   *Conclusion*: Tentative recommendations for the future employment of a multiple mentoring

6   framework were considered, with particular reference to cross-sports or non-sport mentoring

7   experiences.

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9   **Keywords**: Sports coaching, coach education, multiple mentor, formal coach learning, elite

10   coach development.

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Introduction and Background

As an educational approach to facilitate practice, mentoring is widely acknowledged

as a valuable tool to support a range of competencies and attitudes, such as the development

of knowledge and skills, working practices, role clarity and role satisfaction, and to assist the

development of a professional identity across a range of contexts (Baker and Lattuca 2010;

Higgins, Dobrow and Roloff 2010). Within the context of sports coaching, coach education

and coach learning formalised mentoring relationships are often depicted as a mentor–mentee

dyad (Cushion 2006; Nash 2003; Mallett, Rynne and Billett, 2016; Piggott, 2015; Wright,

Trudel and Culver, 2007). Thus, mentoring within sport is typically conceptualised as a one-

dimensional relationship, where the mentor is seen as the powerful member of the dyad, with

greater age and/or experience (Colley 2003). Here, the more experienced individual (i.e. the

coach mentor/coach educator) willingly shares their knowledge with the less experienced

individual (i.e. the athlete mentee/coach learner) through a relationship involving mutual trust

(Clutterbuck 1991). As a result, the sports coaching literature has tended to treat mentoring in

practice as an uncomplicated and one-dimensional dyad, encompassing a naïve portrayal of

knowledge sharing (Bloom 2013; Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke and Salmela 1998;

Chambers 2015; Cushion 2006; Griffiths and Armour 2012; Jones *et al*. 2009; Nash 2003;

Wright and Smith 2000). With this in mind, this study attempts to empirically explore formal

mentoring practice, with a specific focus on the structure and types of mentoring relationships

that are currently being deployed to develop elite coaches within formal mentoring

programmes within the UK.

However, advancements within the mainstream mentoring literature suggest

theoretically informed mentoring frameworks could be organised in three key areas:

developmental (cf. Levinson, 1978; Kram, 1985), learning (cf. Clutterbuck, 1991) or social

(cf. Dobrow *et al.*, 2012), with one social framework worthy of greater exploration being the

1   concept of multiple mentors (Dominguez and Hager, 2013). Additionally, within the business

2   literature, researchers have begun to reconceptualise 'mentoring in practice' as consisting of

3   either a *multiple mentor* (Higgins and Kram 2001) or a *developmental network* (Dobrow,

4   Chandler, Murphy and Kram 2012; Higgins, Chandler and Kram 2007) support system, as

5   opposed to a singular dyadic relationship. Within this literature, the discussion of the concept

6   of multiple mentoring precedes the introduction of developmental networks. The concept of

7   multiple mentoring can be traced to Kram's (1985) foundational mentoring theory, which

8   suggests an individual could utilise support from multiple sources. Specifically, a multiple

9   mentor approach consists of different mentors providing different *amounts of* and *types of*

10   support (Higgins and Kram 2001; Higgins and Thomas 2001). Within a multiple mentoring

11   framework, mentors would be influential individuals from the mentee's working

12   environment, with an advanced level of knowledge or experience that can provide the mentee

13   with what they require for upward mobility (Baugh and Scandura 1999). As a result, multiple

14   mentors often represent a relatively small number of key individuals from inside the mentee's

15   working environment, or consist of a larger number of individuals from outside the mentee's

16   organisation (Baugh and Scandura 1999; Mezias and Scandura 2005). For example, within

17   sport a netball coach's multiple mentoring support system might include a mentor who is

18   currently positioned within the organisation and who can provide career-related technical and

19   tactical support alongside other mentors (e.g. a strength and conditioning coach and an

20   experienced coach from another sport). Each of the mentors in this example possesses

21   specialist knowledge that is useful for the mentee, although each would provide varying

22   levels of context (or sports specific) understanding. Importantly, a mentor from outside the

23   sports domain with an advanced level of knowledge and experience might offer guidance on

24   general 'good practice' and personal or professional support with a different perspective

25   away from the political workings of the context (i.e. the sports organisation). Indeed, drawing

upon a complexity theory perspective, Garvey and Alred (2001, p. 519) have suggested that for people living in complex environments where there are few rules, no right answers and no predictable outcomes, mentoring can play an important role in helping them to 'tolerate' complexity and remain effective.

A developmental network consists more broadly of individuals who actively take *an interest in* and *actions to develop* the protégé's career and provide them with direct assistance (Dobrow *et al.* 2012; Higgins and Kram 2001). A key component of the developmental network approach encompasses a *social network lens* (Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve and Tai 2004; Granovetter 1973, 1983) that considers the *network diversity* (i.e. range of people or sources providing support) and *strength of ties* (i.e. emotional closeness and frequency of interactions). Therefore, developmental networks can consist of a wider range of people from both inside and outside an individual's organisation. For example, the developmental support a tennis coach might receive could include a developer from the sport of tennis (i.e. from inside the organisation), a developer from the sport of badminton (i.e. from inside the context of sport but outside the sports organisation), a developer from an educational institution (i.e. from outside the context of sport and also outside the sports organisation), and a developer that assumes a more social connection with the coach, such as a family member, a peer or friend.

However, such theoretical advancement regarding 'mentoring in practice' in our understanding of mentoring from mainstream mentoring research is yet to be explored within the sports coaching literature. More broadly, Dominguez and Hager (2013) imply that empirical work should explore the effectiveness of multiple mentoring and mentoring programmes in different cultural contexts. Consequently, there is a paucity of research within the field of sports coaching that directly explores 'mentoring in practice'. In particular, no empirical work currently exists within sports coaching that explores the efficacy of multiple mentoring. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore the concept of a multiple mentor

1 system, in an attempt to advance our theoretical and empirical understanding of sports coach

2 mentoring. In doing so, this paper attempts to build upon the suggestion of Jones *et al*. (2009),

3 which highlights the importance of generating empirical research to explore current mentoring

4 approaches in sport, which in turn can inform meaningful formal coach education

5 enhancement. The significance of this work therefore lies in opening up both a practical and a

6 theoretical space for dialogue within sports coach education in order to challenge the traditional

7 dyadic conceptualisation of mentoring and move towards an understanding of 'mentoring in

8 practice'. As such, this work aims to critically consider *who is* and *who could be* a mentor in

9 sports coaching (c.f. Haggard, Dougherty, Turban and Wilbanks 2011).

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11   **Methodology**

12 *Participants*

13   A purposeful sample was used to access 15 participant elite coach mentors from a

14 variety of different formalised mentoring programmes that operate across different sporting

15 contexts (Sawiuk *et al*., 2016. The participants had experience of mentoring within different

16 sports and in some cases within different operational contexts (e.g. business, education and

17 nursing). Participant coach mentors were selected using three guiding principles: (1) the highest

18 formal coaching award within their sport, (2) a minimum of 8 years' practical coaching

19 experience, and (3) working as a coach mentor on a formal programme for a minimum of two

20 years. Participants were recruited using the authors' contacts from their personal experience of

21 formal governing body mentoring programmes. Pseudonyms are used within the text which

22 enables the participants' identities and names to remain anonymous, although the participants'

23 primary sport/s are provided to give some context to the data extracts.

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1   **INSERT TABLE HERE**

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Design and procedure

4   The present study was conducted within the interpretivist paradigm, underpinned by a

5 relativist ontological position, in that "realities exist in the form of multiple mental

6 constructions, and are socially and experientially based" (Guba, 1990, p. 27), and a

7 subjectivist epistemology position, where the inquirer and the inquired are fused into a single

8 entity and "findings are literally the creation of interaction between the two of them" (Guba,

9 1990, p. 27). Therefore, through the inquiry process, the construction of meaning of actors

10 are the foundations of knowledge (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba 2011).

11   Following ethical approval, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15

12 participant elite coach mentors either face to face ($n = 13$) in a private location close to the

13 participants' place of work, or, where the participants were unable to meet in person, via the

14 phone ($n = 2$). Follow-up interviews were then conducted on the phone, and they focused

15 specifically on multiple mentoring nuances ($n = 3$). All of the interviews were recorded using

16 a Dictaphone and were then transcribed verbatim by the lead author. During the interviews

17 the first author recorded comments and notes regarding the answers provided. No difference

18 in depth, length and quality of data was observed between the telephone or face-to-face

19 interviews. Interview questions were asked in an open manner which gave the participant

20 freedom to answer the questions and reduced the likelihood of bias.

21   The interviews ranged from 35 to 105 minutes, and interview questions were open-

22 ended in nature and delivered in a flexible manner (Purdy 2014). Elaboration probes were

23 used when required to uncover 'rich' data surrounding the *what, why* and *how* of the elite

coach mentors' practices (Purdy 2014). The construction of an interview guide ensured that questions remained focused on the topic of investigation in the present study. Specifically, the interview guide explored the participants' experiences of formal mentoring. Questions broadly focused on exploring the participant's perceptions of their engagement with formal mentoring schemes (e.g. 'Could you tell me about the formal mentoring scheme within your sport?', 'What challenges/benefits have you encountered operating within a formalised mentoring scheme?'), how the mentor interpreted the role of the scheme (e.g. 'What are the aims of the scheme?', 'How is progress monitored within your scheme?'), the challenges that the mentor experienced working within a formalised scheme (e.g. 'How does the GB [governing body] support you in your mentoring role?', 'Have you ever experienced conflict between stakeholders working within your formal mentoring scheme?'), and areas that could be improved in the future (e.g. 'What could be done to further improve your formal mentoring scheme?', 'What are the strengths and weakness within your current scheme?'). All questions were followed up with elaboration and clarification probes (e.g. 'How do you achieve that in practice?', 'Why is that the case?', and 'Can you give me a specific example from your practice that highlights that point?').

Data analysis

A data-driven thematic analysis technique was employed which enabled the first author to stimulate useful comparisons between themes (Braun and Clarke 2006). Thematic analysis is a process for encoding qualitative information which follows a unique procedure (Boyatzis 1998). Thematic analysis has been described as a foundational method for qualitative analysis for 'thematizing meaning' from theory by reporting patterns (Braun and Clarke 2006). The thematic analysis followed an inductive protocol, to develop key themes within the interview transcripts.

The thematic analysis process followed a six-phase process: (1) familiarisation with the data; (2) the generation of initial codes; (3) searching for themes within the codes; (4) reviewing the themes; (5) defining and naming the themes; and (6) producing the research report (Boyatzis 1998). First, the researcher familiarised herself with the data sets through engaging in the process of selective transcription and by repeatedly listening to the audio recording of the interviews, which has been described as a key phase of data analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). The raw data sets were explored by assessing the commonality of articulated themes, thus creating the categorisation of the three focused key themes: (1) experience of multiple mentoring; (2) micro-political nature of elite formalised mentoring; and (3) benefits of using a multiple mentoring system. Secondly, individual occurrences were explored across the first order themes to identify comparisons within the data sets (Boyatzis 1998; Braun and Clarke 2006).

Data were analysed as an iterative process between data and theory, although it is important to acknowledge the researcher's role in the thematic analysis. Specifically, the researcher made decisions on the data, the codes and categories within the present study; that is, the themes did not simply 'emerge from the data' but rather should be considered a result of the on-going analysis, interpretation and critical reflection.

Results and Discussion

Experience of multiple mentoring

The mentoring role traditionally encompasses an individual who guides and supports the personal or professional development of a mentee, although this perspective implicitly assumes a single mentor has all the answers (Bloom 2013; Bloom *et al*. 1998; Chambers 2015;

Cushion 2006; Griffiths and Armour 2012; Jones *et al.* 2009; Nash 2003; Wright and Smith 2000). However, sports mentors within the present study describe the existence of different strategies: Sophie (Olympic sports mentor) said, 'I just don't think one mentor has all the answers, I have different mentors who I would access for different developments.' Further, Mark (football mentor) adds, 'I think a good mentor will be able to mentor and signpost effectively, depending on the mentee's needs.' Some of the coaches also suggested that different sports have different levels of openness and engagement when considering the concept of mentoring. For example, as Romeo (water and Olympic sports mentor) stated, 'I think the reality is with accessing more than one mentor, it depends where the sport is.' However, Emma (hockey and netball) notes, 'If you're going to point someone in a direction which could possibly conflict with current thinking you have got to be wary of that.' In the following extract, Romeo (water and Olympic) provides an example of when he would signpost a mentee in practice:

No single mentor can have all the answers; if a swimming coach came to me and said I need to develop my physiological understanding I would be passing them on to someone straight away. Yes, I know enough about adaptation but if you're really wanting to develop that individual then go and put them in touch with another expert. And maybe mentor that process; just because someone has expert knowledge doesn't always mean they can teach it, so having a learning mentor which sits alongside them becomes quite effective.

Similarly to the work of Kram (1985), and more recently Dobrow *et al.* (2012), the extract above highlights how the participant mentors would 'signpost' the mentee to other

potential mentors when they did not possess the specific knowledge required to benefit the

mentee. In the following extract, Alex (Olympic sports/business) highlights an example of a

multiple mentoring system in practice in sports coaching:

> I have four to five people I would go to regularly, for mentoring, if I needed something,
> to ask opinions, get knowledge of. But there's probably only one or two of them who
> act as a mentor who challenge you, provide you with some provocative questioning,
> whereas the other people you go to will provide you with feedback but won't
> necessarily challenge. This menu of support could perhaps take the form of people who
> can offer that at the centre, who are closer to the mentee, then three or four people on
> the outskirts of the structure who feedback and have areas of expertise the mentee will
> access as and when they need to.

Similarly, Bill (football mentor) recalled a scenario where he engaged in a multiple

mentor system in sports coaching practice to support the bespoke nature of the coach mentee:

> Sometimes you need more than one mentor. I did a session with somebody on wing
> play and I was working at a football club and next door there was a rugby club. I knew
> the coach so I asked them if they could put a session on around how they get their
> wingers to receive the ball in terms of timing, because in rugby you can't throw the ball
> forward. That was my out of the box thinking when you're mentoring and helping
> people. Now, my national governing body and whoever else might say, well, you can't

1   be doing that, that's not the sport, but for me that's working outside the box and using

2   your network to help the mentee.

3

4   Drawing on Ragins and Kram's (2007) evolution of the traditional mentor–mentee dyad

5   towards a 'multiple mentor' system, useful comparisons can be made between the 'multiple

6   mentoring' theory (Burlew 1991; Kram 1985; Ragins and Kram 2007) and the view of

7   'mentoring in practice' within the present study in sports coaching. Indeed, whilst the potential

8   practical and political problems in a traditional mentor–mentee dyad have been widely noted

9   (e.g. insufficient expertise and the influence of institutional political agendas), the multiple

10   mentor concept might address some of the current shortcomings of traditional mentoring

11   approaches in practice. Indeed, Burlew (1991) suggested that the complexity of the mentoring

12   process often requires the mentee to access different mentors. Moreover, recent advancements

13   within the workplace have rendered the single master–apprentice mentoring model insufficient

14   (Janasz and Sullivan 2004). Therefore, the adoption and expansion of multiple mentoring

15   within sport might provide the mentee with a variety of mentors who possess different skill

16   sets, knowledge bases and perspectives, and who can provide different mentoring functions

17   and types of support (Ragins and Kram 2007). As a result, formalised programmes should

18   consider the utilisation of a multiple mentor system, where a diverse set of individuals provide

19   needed developmental support to the mentee (Higgins and Kram 2001; Nelson, Cushion and

20   Potrac 2013; Nelson, Cushion, Potrac and Groom 2014; Sawiuk *et al*. 2016).

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1   *Micro-political nature of elite formalised mentoring*

2   Micro-politics within sports coaching encapsulates the 'political interactions that take

3   place between social actors in different organizational settings' (Potrac and Jones 2009a, p.

4   225). Furthermore, micro-politics refers to 'the use of formal and informal power by

5   individuals and groups to achieve their goals' (Blasé 1991, p. 11), which influences tension,

6   conflict, struggle and rivalry (Ball 1987; Blasé 1991). At times, the micro-politics 'at play'

7   within these schemes had a negative impact on the open nature of the mentoring process; for

8   example, as Jamie (shooting mentor) explained, 'sometimes mentors are like my secrets and

9   it's very difficult to break that taboo down, particularly when you are in a professional arena

10   or you are trying to earn a living at it'. Moreover, Gary (athletics mentor) suggested that

11   'mentors engage in withholding knowledge', and Rhys (athletics mentor) added, 'we find the

12   coaches much prefer to be mentored by somebody who doesn't have an agenda in their sport'.

13   Thus, Kevin (athletics and cycling mentor) concludes, 'so as soon as you have that there's no

14   trust so the mentoring doesn't happen'. Kevin continues:

15

16   Mentors and mentees engage in knowledge shielding, using knowledge as a shield; you

17   know, when coaches compete for the same athletes, like in athletics, why would anyone

18   share anything with anyone? Because they might 'nick it'. Now if coaching is your

19   livelihood why would you want to share it?

20

21   Here, Kevin describes how mentors and mentees engage in 'micro-political strategies'

22   and use 'formal power' in an attempt to foster their personal agenda or interest. For example,

23   the use of 'nick it' suggests coaches might steal a rival coach's ideas or strategies. Such

strategies are adopted by the mentor or mentee to reflect the contextual situation or individuals

in practice. Elliot (cricket and rugby) discusses the strategy of being diplomatic instead of

honest:

> Yes, we have actually tried mentors from healthcare. We have one lady who was the
> chief executive of a national health hospital trust who mentored two people in cricket
> and did a brilliant job. They said to me they found it much more beneficial, and said
> she is so good she doesn't talk to us about cricket she talks to us about us; she's got
> no agenda, she's not a spy, all she cares about is us. She's wonderful and she is, she is
> very good. It was an older lady mentoring younger lads, it was a different sport,
> different gender, everything.

At an institutional level, individual sporting GBs may be seen to apply pressure to mentors to 'give back' to their own sport. In the following data extract Sophie (Olympic sports mentor) highlights the pressure that mentors can face from within the GB of their own sport:

> Cross-sports mentoring can at times have a political influence on the varying sports
> who are interested in it; for example, some mentors who had been mentoring mentees
> from a completely different sport were receiving pressure and criticism from their
> respective GBs. Things like, why are you not investing and giving back to your own
> sport? So, I think there needs to be a generic buy-in from all sports, so all sports can
> receive the benefits and less sports would feel threatened.

Within these elite formalised sports mentoring programmes, the political landscape of the sport can be seen to impact the mentoring process in two principal ways: firstly through the social and political control the institution has on the workforce (i.e. coach mentors and mentees) and secondly in how mentors might use their power to withhold knowledge (cf. Ball 1987; Blasé 1991). Such findings mirror the work of Potrac and Jones (2009b) who outlined that coaches, similarly to people in positions of influence, engage in strategic micro-political actions demonstrating *micro-political literacy* (i.e. reading the political landscape of their contexts), constantly forging and re-forging alliances with relevant contextual stakeholders to secure their objectives. Further, Hoyle (1982) suggests that individuals use strategies and tactics within a formal setting to further their own interests. With this in mind, the participant coach mentors clearly illustrated the 'micro-political realities' of mentoring in practice when mentoring within the elite sports context in which they operate. However, the concept of multiple mentoring offers a potential avenue to further support mentoring in practice, particularly within the highly political context of formalised elite coach programmes (Sawiuk *et al.*, 2016).

To further understand the micro-political dynamics, considerations should accommodate the meaningful interaction between an individual and a group, and the context in which the interaction takes place (Kelchtermans 2005). Although there is a dearth of research exploring the notion of 'micro-politics' in sports coaching, Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002a, 2002b) developed the concept of micro-political literacy within the profession of teaching. Here the teacher was encouraged to interpret and understand the dynamics of 'power' and 'interest' by deploying 'seeing and reading' strategies (Kelchtermans and Ballet 2002a, 2002b). Mentors described scenarios where they 'read' the situation through a micro-political lens, which enabled them to understand the context and effectively implement coping strategies

1 (Kelchtermans and Ballet 2002a, 2002b). Not only do individual mentors employ micro-

2 political strategies, but GB institutions often align mentoring programmes and the deployment

3 of the mentors with their own personal agendas (Sawiuk *et al*., 2016). Some sporting

4 institutions attempted to prevent mentors from engaging in cross-sports mentoring or multiple

5 mentoring strategies through fear that these mentors would not have a sufficient amount of

6 time to give back to their sport. If a cross or multiple mentoring strategy is to be utilised in

7 these formalised programmes, such schemes should seek to obtain a generic buy-in to these

8 approaches to maximise the benefits for the bespoke mentor–mentee pairings.

9

10 *Benefits of using a multiple mentoring system*

11 Participants within the current study frequently outlined the benefits of a multiple

12 mentor support system in practice. For example, as Alex (Olympic sports/business mentor)

13 outlined, 'sometimes it makes mentoring simple; if you know the person you're mentoring or

14 you work in the same sport or organisation, I find myself asking if I am ethically best placed

15 to work with you'. Jamie (shooting mentor) suggests 'accessing mentors from another country

16 or sport is about sharing expert knowledge, keeping it in sport and not losing it when people

17 finish their role in sport'. Further, Michelle (athletics mentor) states, 'If I wanted a conversation

18 around the technical detail in my sport I would have somebody who I would go to; if I wanted

19 to explore my coaching style I would speak with a mentor with an educational background.'

20 Participants highlighted numerous benefits of multiple mentors within elite sports coach

21 formalised mentoring programmes. For example, Emma suggested:

22

1   Cross-sports mentors, I think they're knowledgeable enough about coaching to help.

2   They have no interest at all in the sport itself other than developing me as a coach to

3   maximise my performance so there's not a threat, or a feeling that they could do the

4   job better or that they're judging me. They also don't have all that political baggage

5   so you can actually be honest; that's the key thing, that honesty. If it's not honest it's

6   not going to work.

7

8   Here, Emma outlines the benefits of a multiple mentoring system which includes

9 mentors from outside the mentee's primary sporting context, for example, who also have less

10 'political baggage', enabling the relationship to be open and honest within the mentoring

11 relationship. Further, as Sophie (Olympic sports) outlines:

12

13   It's far better if the mentors are not from your sport; if they are from your sport they

14   will start to have an opinion about what you're doing. In many ways mentoring isn't

15   about having an opinion about their technical aspects, it might be about having an

16   opinion about how they're coaching, but as soon as you have someone from your own

17   sport you start talking about the sport … Whereas mentoring is about talking about the

18   person, so if your sport's football and I have nothing to do with football, I can't talk to

19   you about football but I understand sport. I am going to talk about you and that we find

20   is far more powerful.

21

22   Similarly to the work of Allen and Eby (2007) within business and education, multiple

23 mentoring approaches encompass a variety of benefits, although there is a need to acknowledge

1 the contextual sensitivity of the sporting environment and the contextual expertise required for

2 a mentoring role (Lyle and Cushion 2010; Sawiuk *et al.*, 2016). Multiple mentoring approaches

3 in practice were utilised in elite formalised schemes by drawing upon mentors from different

4 sporting or non-sporting backgrounds to assist with the development of the mentees. Multiple

5 mentoring aligns itself with the idea that one primary mentor within a sport may no longer be

6 realistic or desirable, which mirrors the wider mentoring literature (Baugh and Scandura 1999;

7 Higgins and Kram 2001; Kram and Higgins 2009). The findings from the present study suggest

8 the mentoring process within these formalised schemes, despite the contextual sensitivity, is

9 most effective when the mentee has access to a portfolio of mentors (Higgins and Kram 2001;

10 Ragins and Kram 2007). Moreover, this includes access to mentors from both inside and

11 outside the context of sport and mentors with sport specific knowledge sets.

12 Participant coach mentors describe scenarios whereby a multiple mentor concept or a

13 non-sport specific mentor was utilised within a formalised scheme and these mentors further

14 suggest that these strategies could reduce the micro-political nature or problematic nature of

15 the institutional agenda. Mentors working in the sports context who came from the business or

16 nursing sectors were praised for their lack of political sport baggage or dual agendas and

17 because they were focused on the bespoke needs of the mentee. Additionally, sports mentors

18 working with mentees from a different sport possessed the relevant sport specific expertise to

19 aid the mentee's development without engaging in micro-political strategies. Participants

20 described situations where they could focus on the mentee without ethical considerations,

21 political strategies or a personal agenda leading them to withhold information, and they could

22 use an approach that was centred on being open and honest and that allowed the mentee to

23 speak freely without feeling threatened.

24

Conclusion

This study aimed to address the dearth of empirical work exploring the realities of formalised elite sports coach mentoring. The thematic analysis resulted in the creation of four principal themes.

Firstly, the mentoring process between the mentee and the mentor lacks a clear and consistent definition within the literature (Bloom 2013; Chambers 2015; Jones *et al.* 2009). Moreover, not only does the mentoring process lack conceptual clarity but also the role and mentor function within the context of sport are worthy of further exploration; for example, the ambiguity surrounding the role of 'coach developer' and 'coach mentor'. Despite this reality the implementation of formalised mentoring schemes continues to grow as a viable strategy for the development of the coaching workforce (Bloom 2013; Bloom *et al.* 1998; Chambers 2015; Cushion 2006; Griffiths and Armour 2012; Jones *et al.* 2009; Nash 2003; Sawiuk *et al.*, 2016; Wright and Smith 2000).

Secondly, the mentoring process within these schemes has evolved from a traditional mentor–mentee pairing towards a multiple mentoring system (Burlew 1991; Ragins and Kram 2007). The utilisation of a multiple mentor approach was advocated within sports coaching practice, similarly to in business research (Allen and Eby 2007; Dobrow *et al.* 2012; Haggard *et al.* 2011; Ragins and Kram 2007). In the dynamic climate of elite sport and coach development, often the mentee or mentor were part of a wider multiple mentoring system. Furthermore, mentors were limited by their own knowledge and at times needed to signpost the mentee towards a different mentor or expert.

Thirdly, from a micro-political perspective, elite sports coach mentoring schemes encompassed mentors who utilised strategies to gain social or political control over specific situations (Sawiuk *et al.*, 2016). Some mentors were seen to resist the development remit of

1 such schemes in an attempt to further their own career opportunities (cf. Ball 1987; Blasé

2 1991; Potrac and Jones 2009a, 2009b; Sawiuk *et al*., 2016). Mentors who engaged in strategic

3 micro-political actions were often from the same primary sport as the mentee, which at times

4 caused the mentee to feel threatened and thus reduced the open and honest relationship.

5 Despite the pedagogical value of mentoring within formalised schemes, the problematic

6 nature of micro-political strategies continues to hinder the open and honest environment

7 required for effective mentoring (Sawiuk *et al*., 2016). However, the extent to which the

8 multiple mentoring concept could reduce the micro-political influence on the mentee, from

9 the mentee's perspective, remains an under explored avenue available for future sports

10 mentoring research (Sawiuk *et al*., 2016).

11 Fourthly, the implementation of the multiple mentor system within sports coaching

12 practice could help to overcome some of the inherent micro-political problems within

13 formalised schemes. Non-sport or cross-sports mentors were suggested to provide bespoke and

14 personal support to the coach mentees, and mentees felt such mentors were less threatening

15 and judgemental, which enabled them to be open in their mentoring relationship. However, the

16 extent to which a technical mentor from a sport could be useful for mentee development

17 remains an unexplored avenue for future research.

18 In summary, this paper attempts in part to answer the call of Jones *et al*. (2009),

19 Bloom (2013) and Nelson *et al*. (2013) for rich empirical work exploring the efficacy and

20 merit of mentoring approaches in sports coaching practice. Furthermore, this paper highlights

21 some of the issues surrounding mentoring in practice, alongside providing 'evidence of

22 support' and recommendations for the delivery format of formalised mentoring in practice

23 (Bloom 2013; Bloom *et al*. 1998; Chambers 2015; Cushion 2006; Griffiths and Armour

24 2012; Jones *et al*. 2009; Nash 2003; Sawiuk *et al*., 2016; Wright and Smith 2000). The

25 findings of this paper have generated initial evidence of the value of utilising multiple

mentoring in elite sport, and specifically to enhance bespoke mentee development (Ragins

and Kram 2007; Sawiuk *et al.*, 2016). This paper advocates the potential of the multiple

mentor concept to begin to address some of the inherent complexities and micro-political

problems within the traditional mentoring perspective. Although empirical research exploring

mentoring in the context of sport is scarce, this paper outlines possible future lines for

enquiry surrounding the perspective of the mentee within these formalised schemes.

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