

Examining the challenges of engaging volunteer coaches with professional development

Dr Mark Griffiths



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Examining coach learning
through a pedagogical
perspective

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Learning Outcomes:

- Examining learning in the context of volunteer coaches
- Identifying the characteristics of adult learning when applied to coach education
- Consider practical strategies for both tutors and organisations
- Where to find more information

I have to say that the usual thing with the courses is that the best bits are the coffee breaks and lunches when you are talking to the other coaches. To me that Level 3 should have been one long lunch hour” (Coach)

Effective and ineffective CPD

- Research confirms that coaching experience and learning from other coaches are the primary sources of knowledge for coaches
- Sporadic, one-off, centralised-site courses are disconnected from prior learning and the context in which learning is to be applied
- Little research evidence of the impact of coach education on coaches' practice – and athlete learning
- Little research on how coach education constrains/enables professional learning

“Fine in theory – but divorced from reality”

Jones & Wallace (2005)

What should coach learning look like? (Armour, 2010)

- Engage coaches as active learners
- Organised around practical content
- Grounded in the context in which the learning will be applied
- Collaborative



What should coach learning look like? (Armour, 2010)

- Continuing/Continuous – rather than sporadic
- Focused on building capacity
- Support reflective practice
- Innovative
- Support coaches as autonomous learners
- Coach educators need professional development to model the learning approach that will inform the development of the learning coach

A learning Approach

- CPD should be grounded in an understanding of learning theory and practice
- Learning is complex and multidimensional – different views of learning result in different guidelines for practice

Your theories of learning

1. **Identify your *top three personal beliefs about learning* that you feel should influence the ways in which CPD is designed or delivered... i.e. beliefs about what is 'best' for learners**
2. **Where did your beliefs come from?**
3. **How do you know that your beliefs about learning are good/better/best?**

Views of Learning

- Behavioural - “I know it – you learn it”
- Cognitive - acquisition
- Constructivist - participation

Learning...or 'strategic passing'

“The big thing is that there are lot of things that they will tell us and some of the things that you may not agree with. At the end of the day you are there to pass and *if you want to pass you take it in and you relay it back to them in a way that seems as though you’ve agreed.* Whether you do or not is another matter”

(tennis coach)

In short

Most CPD systems fail to take account of the sheer complexity of the learning concept/process

Examples from research

Formalised Mentoring With Volunteer Coaches

- **Duration: 12 months**
- **Case Study: 7 mentors and 18 coaches**
- **Mentors (5 years exp + min Level 3), coaches (level 1)**
- **The programme was formalised through:**
 - matching of mentors and mentees, development training for mentors, constructed development plan and tracking system**
 - Mentors and coaches were matched by a professional coach educator working for the CSP, and linked by their sport.**

Findings

- **6 out of 7 mentoring relationships reported little mentoring interaction after initial setup phase**
- **Barriers to formalised mentoring: time, role expectation, readiness for change, motivation**
- **Informal mentoring emerged to compensate for the perceived weakness of formalised mentoring**
- **Effective mentoring took place at the club**

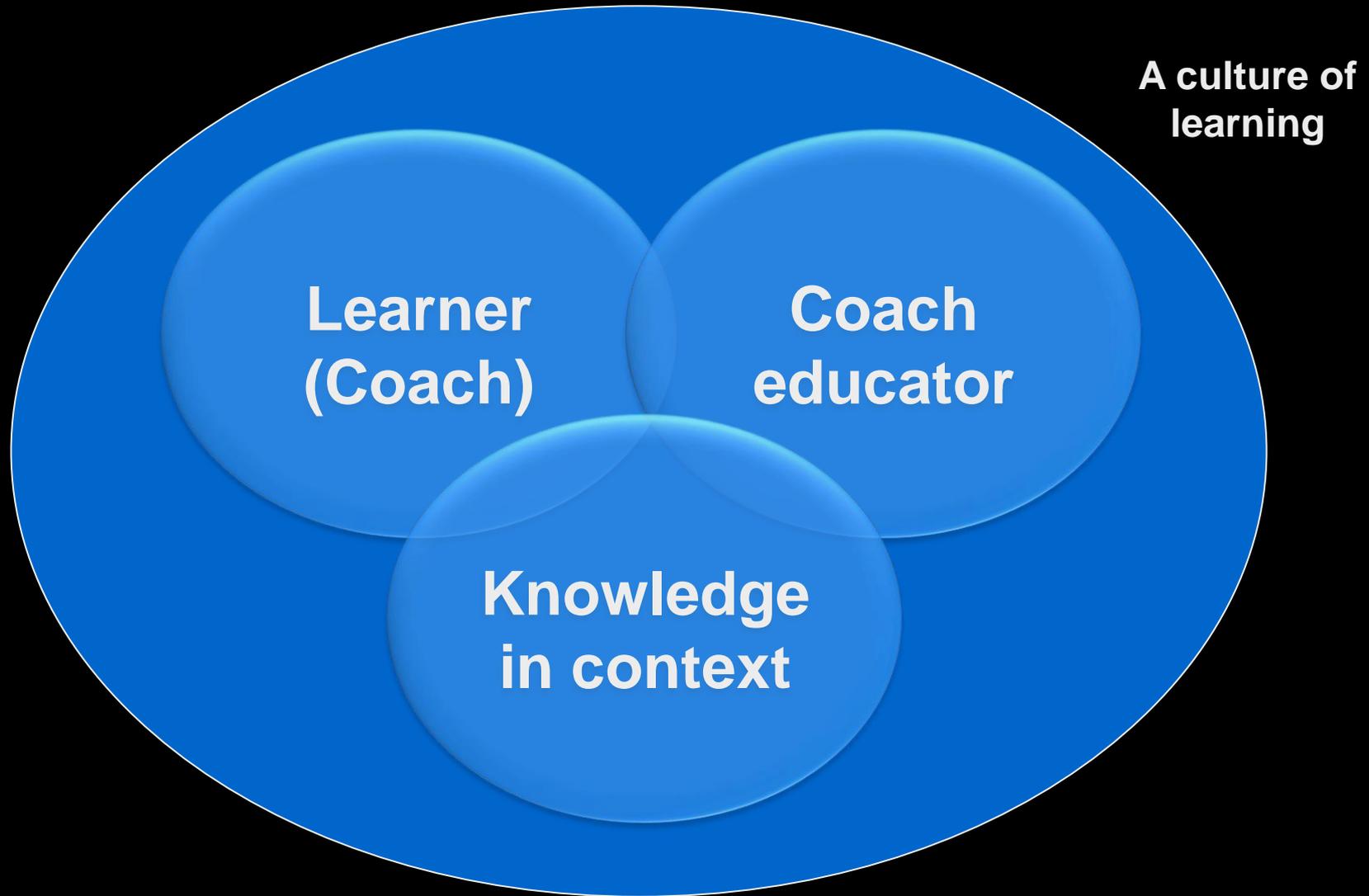
Conclusions

- ❑ **Meaningful interaction defined by the transition time between problem identification and solution**
- ❑ **Volunteer coach mentoring was career/development stage sensitive**
- ❑ **Participation required a degree of mentoring competency**
- ❑ **Formal mentoring just added another layer to an already over-crowded environment**

Implications

- **Re-conceptualize mentoring within a community model – horizontal relationships, collaborative , dynamic – behaviours based around core values**
- **Re-thinking the mentor role – mentor as a ‘cognitive coach’**
- **Expanding notions of mentoring beyond the dyad (e.g. network mentoring)**

Coach Educational – a Pedagogical encounter



Adult learners.....

- Have their own motivations for learning...they build on their existing knowledge...often value it...relate learning to their life experiences...*but rarely have the opportunity to critically reflect upon this in a structured way*
- Often initiate the learning...self-direction and autonomy are important

Remember - Why volunteers volunteer.....

Learning and Understanding

- Learn new things
- Gain a different perspective
- Utilise unique skills

Social

- Opportunities for social interaction
- Gaining approval
- Social needs

Enhancement

- A desire to feel needed
- Personal growth and development
- To be a decision maker

Summary

- Volunteer coaches value the place of socially reflective conversations in a supportive community of practice
- For volunteer coaches, learning has a personal dimension – which represents personal growth and a deepening understanding of their context

The challenge.....

To capture the essence of communities of practice in pursuit of a dynamic learning culture where formalized coach learning is valued, relevant and beneficial to practice