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A heutagogical approach to coach education: what worked for one particular learner, how and why?

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Abstract

No longer the exclusive domain of national governing bodies (NGBs), an increasing number of coaches now engage in professional development through higher education (HE) routes. One educational approach that has gained a recent foothold in the HE sector is heutagogy, or the focus on self-determined learning by the learner. The aim of the present study, which was underpinned by a realist-inspired research philosophy, was to explore one particular student-coach's success (Ellie) on a sports coaching Bachelor degree module that was underpinned by a heutagogical approach to learning. Asynchronous email interviews provided insight into the development and understanding of Ellie's personal circumstances, resources and goals. This insight was then used to shape and conduct a realist interview. Data were analysed using an adaptive theory approach, resulting in three causal arguments that attempt to explain what worked for Ellie, how and why: (a) self-regulation (b), self-driven and (c) characteristics of the module tutor. The findings offer both philosophical and practical implications for coach education programme designers, deliverers and researchers.

Introduction

In recent years, significant investment has been geared toward ensuring that the sports coaching workforce is appropriately skilled and well-supported in fulfilling their role. As a result, coach education and development programmes, once the exclusive domain of national governing bodies (NGBs), are now increasingly being offered by disparate organisations including; charities (e.g. Street Games), local authorities, private enterprises and further education colleges (FE) (Lara-Bercial, *et al*., 2016). Similarly, there has been a rapid increase in the number of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) offering sports coaching degree programmes (Hay, Dickens, Crudgington, and Engstrom, 2012; Lara-Bercial *et al.,* 2016), with around 67,000 students enrolled in sport related programmes in 2016/17 (HESA, 2018). Clearly then, the importance of assuring the quality coach education and development initiatives is paramount, however, an understanding of the learning and development

practices of sport coaches and their effectiveness is still a 'relatively young and yet growing area of scholarship' (Stodter and Cushion, 2017:321).

To date, much of the coach education research has typically centred on a small number of sports, with a focus on coaches who are engaged in formal certification programmes delivered by NGBs (Griffiths, Armour, and Cushion, 2016; Stodter and Cushion, 2017). This research has often drawn pessimistic conclusions about the impact of formal coach education on coaching practice, the learners' experiences of formal coach education and the subsequent role formal coach education plays in the long-term development of coaches (Abraham and Collins, 1998; Piggott, 2012, Nelson, Cushion, and Potrac, 2013). Furthermore, these research outputs have tended to provide either prescriptive ('you should') or descriptive ('it does') guidance for coach education programme designers, developers and deliverers. This has led to a more recent focus on how coaches prefer to learn, with informal modes of learning, driven by a desire for social interaction and more accessible 'methods' of acquiring coaching knowledge, appearing to be most popular (Stoszkowski and Collins, 2017a).

Although this work is important, we question the extent to which current research reflects recent changes to the delivery of some contemporary formal coach education programmes. For example, many programmes are attempting to move away from traditional didactic, 'tutor-led' approaches toward more 'learner-centred' modes of delivery (Paquette and Trudel, 2018). Indeed, the largest NGB and one of the largest educators of sports coaches in the UK, the Football Association (FA), has recently rewritten many of its core coach education and programmes, allowing for the inclusion of new features such as in-situ visits (contextualised learning) and project-based assessments (The FA, 2018). England Hockey, a smaller, less resourced NGB, supplement on-course learning with a bespoke online 'hockey hub' (England Hockey.co.uk), where coaches can engage in online learning at any point in their coach education and development journey. Similarly, the educational approach of heutagogy, or the study of self-determined learning (Hase and Kenyon, 2001), has recently received focus in sports coaching (cf. Stoszkowski and Collins, 2017a; Stoszkowski and Collins, 2018). The heutagogical approach puts learners firmly in control of their own learning, moving beyond the development of knowledge and skills, and instead focussing on capability, or the ability to integrate and effectively apply one's knowledge and skills in novel and unanticipated situations (Hase and Kenyon, 2007). Heutagogical learning is grounded in real-world practice and is said to nurture more autonomous, adaptive and critically reflective learners, potentially better aligning coach education with the complex and dynamic nature of the coaching environment (Collins and Collins, 2014).

The aim of the current paper was to understand how a coach education module delivered in a UK university context, underpinned by heutagogical principles, worked

for a student-coach who was successful on it, and why. Specifically, we aimed to offer a causal explanation of a single learner's experiences. Furthermore, we present a philosophical argument to suggest that our understanding of coach education may be enhanced through the use of realist research tools (North, 2017).

Background context

In 2016, the first and second author were awarded funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to run an 18 month 'experimental innovations in learning and teaching' project, with the specific aim of enhancing coach education and development practices on undergraduate sports coaching degree programmes at two UK HEIs. The project aimed to overcome a problem highlighted within the literature (Nelson, Cushion, and Potrac, 2012; Adams, Cropley, and Mullen, 2016) and common (in our experience as coach educators at least) to both NGB and HEI coach education and development programmes; that of in-authentic or simulated peer-coaching experiences. More specifically, a learning environment where student-coaches are asked to collaborate, reflect and challenge one another being made problematic by the fact that student-coaches tend to have both pre-existing friendships leading to impression managed situations, and similar levels of expertise and experience resulting in narrow and/or similar repertoires to draw upon when supporting the learning and development of one another.

The problem situation was such that we felt that the module did very little to foster reflexivity or emphasise the importance of context and learner agency (Boud and Falchikov, 2006), which appear important considerations in preparing learners to become effective practitioners. Furthermore, we found that these situations are often ineffectual in achieving desirable coach education and development outcomes e.g. demonstrating decision-making and problem solving skills, and commonly give rise to what we perceive to be demotivation and disengagement in some course participants while, conversely, others experience a lack of sufficient challenge (Stoszkowski and McCarthy, 2018). In attending to this problematic situation, we endeavoured to design and deliver an undergraduate module that encouraged cross-institutional collaboration between student-coaches at the two study HEIs. The module was delivered in parallel at both HEIs to 62 final year undergraduate student-coaches, with the aim of encouraging them to take personal responsibility for, and ownership of, what and when they learned (Ashton and Elliott, 2007). We also wanted student-coaches to become active participants and co-producers of knowledge, by engaging in cross-institutional dialogic reflection and supportive peer mentoring.

In being led by the principles of heutagogy as described earlier (Stoszkowski and Collins, 2017a), we had some general theories and expectations of what would happen. Firstly, in expanding the peer group and exposing student-coaches to new experiences and expertise, we envisaged that the student-coaches would develop new

knowledge and understanding. Secondly, we anticipated that as the student-coaches interacted with peers at another university, they would develop a heightened sense of curiosity in themselves and the sports coaching discipline due to the broader and more varied range of contexts and prior experiences they were being exposed to. Finally, we hoped that since 'content' on the module was being driven by their own interests i.e. student-coaches would focus on their own 'real-world' coaching issues, the module would become more meaningful to them and in turn motivate them to engage in a regular and sustained manner.

In attending to the first problem situation, however, we encountered a second one. During our preliminary analysis of the module in the initial weeks of its roll out, we observed that many student-coaches appeared to lack the knowledge, skills and attitude required to learn in more autonomous, self-directed ways, with their prior educational experiences; they had a reliance on didactic, teacher-led learning which appeared to be a limiting factor on their participation (Stoszkowski and McCarthy, 2018). In increasing the authenticity of the coach education experience and making student-coaches accountable to other student-coaches, it was clear that the module was differentially effective, with some student-coaches clearly struggling and only a small minority beginning to thrive (Stoszkowski, McCarthy, and Fonseca, 2017). It was unclear, however, why at that stage the winners on the module were winners and the losers were losers (Pawson, 2013). Indeed, we posited that different mechanisms, student-coaches' reasoning and response to resources offered by the module, will likely give rise to different outcomes in different circumstances for different people, and it would be too simplistic to assume that a coach education and development programme would work in the same way for all learners (North, 2016; Stodter and Cushion, 2016).

Method: Methodological background

Based on the explanatory nature of the research questions and a consideration of what has come before, the current study adopted a realist-inspired research design (Pawson and Tiley, 1997). In taking such an approach, our work is positioned in the 'broad and welcoming church of realism' (Pawson and Manzano, 2012) and draws upon the principles of realist evaluation. Using realism as a broad research strategy was both desirable and beneficial for several reasons. Firstly, we appreciate the explanatory focus of realism and its concern for theory generation; this sits comfortably with the aims of the current study. Secondly, that realists are interested in delving inside the black box of programmes (Pawson, 2006, 2013). By this, we mean it becomes possible to identify how and why particular things work, rather than simply identifying inputs and outputs (Dalkin, Greenhalgh, Jones, Cunningham, and Lhussier, 2015). Finally, in taking this approach we were able to focus on context, specifically that of the individual learner and also that of the programme itself. We

contend that programmes are neither all good, nor all bad, and suggest that nothing works everywhere or for everyone (RAMESES II, 2017). Context affects how things are done, how people respond and to which resources they respond to. That is, no two programmes work in the same way and for all people (Duffy, North and Muir, 2013). In taking a realist-inspired approach we aimed to generate a tentative explanatory account.

The module

The module in question was an optional module that was self-selected by student-coaches on the final year of a BA (Hons) Sports Coaching degree programme. The module aimed to facilitate heutagogy by providing opportunities for self-determined learning and professional development. Indeed, heutagogy is characterised by 'highly autonomous learners taking personal responsibility for, and control of, what will be learnt, when it will be learnt and how it will be learnt' (Stoszkowski and Collins, 2017a:353). Student-coaches were responsible for completing a 12-week long work-based placement in a community coaching setting of their own arrangement. During their placement, and consistent with the protocol outlined by Stoszkowski and Collins (2017b), the student-coaches were asked to reflect upon their on-going self-determined learning and practical experiences. Online group blogs, using the externally hosted and free to use blogging platform WordPress.com, provided the main teaching and learning environment, with student-coaches encouraged to find and share relevant resources to inform ongoing supportive discussion and exploration with both course peers at their home institution and student-coaches at the other HEI institution. Each group blog, one group with eleven members, four groups with ten members, one group with eight members, was private and could only be viewed by its members and the module tutors (Stoszkowski and Collins, 2017b), with each group made up of student-coaches from each HEI. Each student-coach's module grade was based on their individual participation in their group blog (i.e. the quality and quantity of their posts and interactions).

An initial introductory workshop highlighted the module's aims, learning objectives and delivery method. A second workshop then focused on the conceptual purpose and potential educational value of heutagogy (Stoszkowski and Collins, 2017a) for sports coaches and gave an overview and demonstration of the WordPress platform. Following this session, in order to introduce themselves to the other members of their group and identify any technical issues. Each participant was asked to make an introductory post on their group blog outlining their background experience and current applied coaching context. From the third week until the end of the semester (12 weeks), monthly workshops focussed on the coaches' work placement experiences. Each workshop was interactive and involved tutor-facilitated discussion and debate, the aim of which was to encourage student-coaches to question

their previous assumptions, providing an initial knowledge-base upon which to critique their subsequent reflections and peer discussion. The demands of the module were such that student-coaches were required to operate autonomously, be self-driven and show a demonstrable amount of interest in the expertise and experience of people they did not know personally (Stoszkowski and McCarthy, 2018).

The participant

Using purposive sampling (Manzano, 2016), we identified a single student-coach, Ellie (pseudonym), who would be the focus of the study. That is, after the first five weeks of the module, Ellie appeared to be highly engaged and doing well by evidencing regular and sustained contributions to her group's blog. The quality of these contributions was deemed to be of a high standard, evidencing critical depth and insight into her ongoing learning experiences. Initially, Ellie was approached informally by the second author during an unrelated tutorial discussion, whereby he outlined our observations and invited her to participate in the study. After agreeing in principle to take part, a more formal written outline of the study was sent via email, along with written consent information. A brief first person biography, written by Ellie, can be found in the appendix.

Data collection

Ethical approval was obtained from both authors' institutions prior to the commencement of the study. Data collection was conducted in two phases; the former informing the latter. First, and once Ellie was confirmed as the participant for the research project, we began to engage in asynchronous email interviews with her over a period of ten weeks (O'Connor, Madge, Shaw, and Wellens, 2008). This provided us with the opportunity to explore Ellie's prior experiences, her present circumstance and coaching context, and her ongoing views and perceptions of the module in the context of our upfront ideas. This mode of interviewing gave Ellie ample time to reflect before responding, as well as the flexibility to respond at convenient times (Hewson, 2014). It also had the advantage of providing an immediate text-based record of the interview, eliminating the need for time consuming transcription of audio recording (Debenham, 2007). Then, the insight gathered during email interview exchanges was used to inform the topic guide for a realist interview (Pawson and Tilley, 1997; Manzano, 2016), which was carried out between Ellie and the two authors. The topic guide consisted of 15 questions or opportunities to put forward our theories of how the module might work for her, with some prior knowledge of her context based on the prior email interaction. The questions were framed by causal language and would often consist of 'what' we did, 'how' we expected that to bring about desirable outcomes and 'why' we thought that. Layder (1998) suggests that entering into interviews 'armed with' prior reading, concepts and theoretical ideas is useful in generating new theory, which was the ultimate aim of the research. The

interview lasted 82 minutes and provided us with an opportunity to share our theories of what we thought would work, while allowing Ellie the opportunity to accept, refine or refute those theories based on her interaction with the programme (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). The theories were regarded as provisional (Layder, 1998:58) in the sense that they could be 'modified, abandoned, confirmed or retained as required by the unfolding of new data or changing theoretical priorities and relevances'. With this in mind, it was important to place the theories front and centre of the interview, and not, as may be common in other qualitative interviews, the participant's thoughts or feelings. As interviewers, we abandoned the 'traditional neutral territory' (Manzano, 2016) and instead engaged with Ellie directly on issues relating specifically to the theories we had in mind and prior knowledge of Ellie's context. We intended to assume the role of both teacher, in respect of sharing our theories with Ellie, and learner, with regard to trying to understand how these theories played out in Ellie's world. For this reason, the realist interview is also commonly referred to as the 'teacher-learner' cycle (Pawson and Tilley, 1997).

Data analysis

The interview was transcribed verbatim and Ellie was invited to read the transcription of the interview and confirm its accuracy, as well as modify or expand upon any points where perceived ambiguity was identified (Sparkes, 1998). This provided an opportunity for member reflection (Smith and McGannon, 2017). We then used an adaptive theory approach (Layder, 1998; 2013) to analysing the data for its concern with causal explanation, i.e. what works for Ellie, how and why. Both authors familiarised themselves with the interview transcript by reading it twice. Then, the first author undertook a provisional coding exercise by identifying any data that could be understood by concepts associated with the upfront theories that informed the interview topic guide. These were labelled as orienting concepts e.g. 'motivation' and they provided an anchor point from which to begin further analysis (Layder, 1998). The chosen concepts 'have proven value from the stock of established knowledge and previous research' and they were selected, 'on the basis that they have an established pedigree for explaining social behaviour' (Layder, 2013:134). After the first author had identified provisional connections between concepts within the data, the second author then carried out the same process. Following this provisional coding stage, both authors undertook a second review of the interview transcript, whereby we remained open to the discovery of new codes. We established a set of new concepts, which helped to explain aspects of the data that were not previously captured by the initial read through. This iterative process represented a three-way interchange between data, upfront theory and the researchers, which helped towards a comprehensive accumulation of theoretical knowledge (Layder, 1998). Although working as a pair of researchers during this time, both authors openly challenged and contested each other's ideas and actively explored potential blind spots.

Results and discussion

An explanatory account of what worked for Ellie on this particular module, with some tentative suggestions as to how and why, is presented below. From this, we identify a number of distinct areas where the 'conditions for theory development are most fertile' (Layder, 1998). These areas are titled i. self-regulation, ii. self-driven and iii. characteristics of the module tutor. To promote resonance in the study, the results are accompanied by illustrative quotes to help readers interpret the data (Biddle, Markland, Gilbourne, Chatzisarantis, Sparkes, 2001).

i. Self-regulation

Self-regulation describes how some students recognise and actively seek out the necessary information for their studies and take time to master it (Zimmerman, 2010). It is also suggested that self-regulated learners proactively set goals, consistently overcome conditions not conducive to learning and often self-evaluate to monitor progress (Zimmerman, 2010). Sometimes demonstrated as a three-phase process, we noted how our original explanatory concept of motivation (which was later dispensed with in favour of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation) and emergent concepts of goal-directedness were consistent with 'the forethought phase' - the first in the three-phase process (Zimmerman, 2002).

Intrinsic motivation: Zimmerman (2002) suggests that self-regulation begins with learners valuing tasks and associated skills for their own merits. Learners develop intrinsic motivation from both this and as a product of noticing subtle progress in their work, which in turn affects perceived efficacy in relation to the task (Zimmerman, 2002). We understand this to be a self-fulfilling process; *I value the task and associated skills therefore; I will begin to have a go at it... I am self-regulated enough to notice subtle increases in my performance and therefore keep going*. As self-regulated learners proceed to manage their learning alone, it is suggested that intrinsic motivation is a key part of the process (Hrbackova and Suchankova, 2016). We define intrinsic motivation as, 'the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one's capacities, to explore, and to learn' (Ryan and Deci, 2000:70). What is more, while it was clear that Ellie placed a high value on learning, commenting that, 'I'm so, like, really passionate about learning different things, I love it...because I'm like developing like individually, I love it', she perhaps did so to support the learning of others too:

> I love when people ask me 'what's this?' I can tell them because I already know, and I've been reading about it and I love helping people. I've done it, like, twice this year…I love telling people about how to do it and what to look at.

Within the data, there is evidence of Ellie taking deliberate action to further her knowledge and understanding, in the event that she can help others. For example, she

highlighted how she was 'finding loads of stuff just in case someone asks me about something and I can go yes, I've got that information.' This was consistent throughout the data and represented within her personal biography: 'I love giving back what I used to do and give all my knowledge and experience to athletics to the young kids that are coming in.'

In theorising the data, we suggest that for Ellie, the design and delivery of the module was appropriate and the module worked for her because she saw inherent value in being able to help and support the learning of others, this being a key feature of the module, as well as her own. Ellie's circumstance is such that she has a background of supporting others in sport from a young age, in leadership and coaching roles, as well as a desire to help people later on in her career, as a teacher. We suggest that, if student-coaches are intrinsically motivated and thus have an inherent desire to seek out new information and experiences while supporting the learning of others and themselves, a coach education module underpinned by heutagogical principles such as this, would appear to work.

Extrinsic motivation: Although Ellie's intrinsically motivated nature seemed to be a significant mediator in her success on the coach education module, it was not the only factor. We also identified the considerable motivating influence of external factors on Ellie's engagement in the module and her desire to achieve success on her broader degree programme. Ryan and Deci (2000:77) define extrinsic motivation as 'the performance of an activity in order to attain some separable outcome' and argue that taking action to pursue particular external outcomes can still be considered a self-regulated activity, as opposed to what they also describe as non-regulated or externally regulated behaviours. An example of this might be completing a piece of formative assessment in order to receive feedback from a tutor. Ryan and Deci (2000:73) argue,

> Actions characterised by integrated motivation share many qualities with intrinsic motivation, although they are still considered extrinsic because they are done to attain separable outcomes rather than for their inherent enjoyment.

A consistent feature of the data was Ellie's recall of actions which could be explained using this concept. For example, Ellie appeared to be highly motivated by a desire to be seen by her peers as succeeding, especially when progress was shared so publicly on the module,

> I've had feedback...I've been in the green [based on a traffic light system used by the module tutor to indicate progress], it's obviously motivated me even more to try and push and keep in the green...Seeing that and then giving it out and saying look this is what everyone else's grade is, this is what your grade is, it shocked some of them and it's kind of a good thing really.

From the data, we can also assume that the provision of feedback was something Ellie appreciated,

> Some modules they don't give that feedback and you don't know where you're at, and suddenly you submit your piece of work and you don't know what you're going to be.

It appears that for Ellie, features of the module such as publicly-shared formative feedback relating directly to individual progress worked particularly well because of her integrated motivations.

Goal-directed: Although the literature suggests that self-regulated learners are in part motivated because they inherently value the task and associated skills (Ryan and Deci, 2000), while being self-aware enough to notice subtle progress and, consequently, they 'stick at it', it is important to consider why these learners value the task and associated skills. Latham and Locke (1991) suggest that by simply having a goal, learners are afforded the opportunity to appraise their current performance against it. But more importantly, the nature of that goal is in itself critical; goals should be both challenging but attainable and crucially, personally relevant. When Ellie was asked to consider why the module had worked for her, she suggested it did because 'she had a plan':

> I want to be a PE teacher, I want to be the best teacher I can be…I just had a set plan all my life…it's good to know where you're going, and I just followed this plan and now I've just applied for the teacher training and I got onto that, so that's another step done.

Ellie elaborated later, suggesting that this was a long-term goal conceived well before undertaking her current study:

> I knew from probably high school that I wanted to be a PE teacher, but I didn't know what the steps were, so I talked to my PE teacher, I talked to my university tutors, asking about their experiences of what it's like...what the industry is like, obviously it's a hard industry.

Although it is suggested that self-regulation can be facilitated by goal-setting, encouraging goal-directedness, within the confines of what we as tutors taught (i.e. a 12-week long module), it was important for Ellie to have the capabilities associated with self-regulation prior to starting the coach education module (Stoszkowski and McCarthy, 2018). We argue that if student-coaches have an 'end in mind' ahead of their engagement with an optional module, which is perhaps the reason for engaging in the module, then they are more likely to achieve success because engaging in the module becomes more personally relevant as opposed to abstract and unrelated. We also suggest that having an 'end in mind' provided the impetus for Ellie to progress through more challenging points of the module.

ii. Self-driven

Self-regulation represents a useful concept which we had not originally identified as an explicit theory to share with Ellie, however we did initially have an idea about how the module might work for self-driven student-coaches. While both concepts; self-regulation and self-driven appear similar, we believe each has unique explanatory powers worthy of keeping them distinct. The philosophical basis for realist-inspired research allows for the use of all ideas which help to explain the social world, and none should be dispensed with where they can add value to this mission. We posit that by using self-driven as a concept, we benefit from the use of satellite concepts such as emotional maturity and perceptions of knowledge and the learning process, all of which meet Layder's (2013) criteria for having established pedigree (Stoszkowski and Collins, 2017a). When designing the coach education module, we contended that learners who were self-driven would achieve desirable outcomes; that is, if learners demonstrated emotional maturity and more relativistic perceptions of knowledge and the learning process (Entwistle and Peterson, 2004), then they would be more likely to achieve success. Using the characteristics of self-driven development outlined by Stoszkowski and Collins (2017a), we attempted to explain why Ellie was one of the module's 'winners'.

Emotional maturity: Emotional maturity, as an explanatory concept, is concerned with self-perception and emotional control (Stoszkowski and Collins, 2017a). Exhibiting these characteristics is said to be fundamental to being a self-driven learner, in this context, a learner who is able to manage the demands of the module and succeed within it. Throughout the data, Ellie shares incidences where it would seem that her emotional maturity was called upon. In this instance, Ellie describes an occasion where she engaged with unfamiliar material, posted by a coach she did not know personally, on her group's blog,

> It kind of freaks me out because I don't have a clue what they're on about, it's something in-depth that I've never heard before but I kind of go away and try and research things about it.

When asked if Ellie perceived that to be a positive feature of the module she responded in a way that suggested to us she had a high-level of emotional maturity,

> Yes, I think it was good really, I can go away and do it in my own time, find the research myself in my own time and make the posts and comments…I think because I'm quite good at finding the research, getting loads of research, making loads of notes, getting it in the folder, I'm good at that kind of thing.

While exhibiting what we note as impressive levels of emotional maturity, we do not suggest that this is the only thing at play. Ellie's ability to search out and read the relevant information is in itself perhaps a precursor to her success on the module and

should be accounted for in any explanation. Speaking in more detail about the unique features of the module specifically, the self-directed nature of engagement, Ellie deliberated about why the module worked for her and perhaps not for others,

> For some students who are not motivated and driven, that's going to be one of the hardest things to do because you're not given certain things to write about and certain topics...it's about you...it's actually about you reading different articles and journals and picking things that you want to post about.

Ellie proceeded to explain:

> I think it's hindered a lot of people, especially on my course, from year one and two, they're quite, some of them are quite lazy. Some of them will only do the work the day before...you can't do that really to assure high grades.

Not only does the evidence add weight to our claim from the outset that the module had been differentially effective, we can begin to explain why. We would argue that Ellie achieved success due to her ability to respond to challenges in a mature manner and by not being deterred from action. As such, we would argue that if student-coaches possess emotional maturity, then they are more likely to achieve desirable outcomes on modules designed using heutagogical principles.

Perceptions of knowledge and the learning process: The second construct associated with being self-driven is learner perceptions of knowledge and the learning process, specifically, having a relativistic conception of learning (Stoszkowski and Collins, 2017). According to Perry (1970), relativism reflects the stage of a student's development where they reason with and recognise multiple solutions to problems. Our upfront theory centred around the notion that the module would require student-coaches to have a relativistic conception of learning to achieve positive outcomes, but they would also become more relativist in their conceptions of learning as a result of the module (Entwistle and Peterson, 2004). That is, we believed that if students could explain their arguments, offer evidence and be willing to change their mind in light of new evidence, they would be the module's winners. Ellie understood and responded positively to our intentions,

> …because I'm self-driven I will research things, I will try and make that extra effort to go in and see what they're talking about but students who just want to understand it straight away and just comment back won't approach them posts at all. They won't look at them because they don't understand what they're on about and they're not driven to go away and try and find what they're actually on about.

Ellie was able to actively seek out information and opportunities away from the initial guidance of the module tutor and this, in-part, led to her success on the module. However, we recognise that Ellie is a highly motivated learner and not all learners are like her. Consequently, tutors may need consider their learners' prior experiences and

existing knowledge, skills and capabilities carefully during the planning stages of coach education modules.

iii. Characteristics of the module tutor

A feature of the module that we had not given explicit consideration to initially, was the skills, experience, and expertise of the module tutor and the ways that learners might reason with those to bring about successful outcomes. During the data analysis, characteristics of the module tutor emerged as a new concept, which became useful in explaining Ellie's success on the module. Although we did not have an upfront theory or give due consideration to how and why the expertise of the module tutor might bring about specific outcomes with particular student-coaches on this module, we are able to theorise. Since much of the literature in the field focuses on effective coaching, there is less to be said about effective coach developers or module tutors (we use the terms interchangeably). Nevertheless, we understand coach educators who take liberal and discursive approaches, affording coaches the opportunity to experiment, to be of value (Piggott, 2012). Equally, when discussion emerges between coaches and when coach educators allow for venturing off script without being moved on, it is perceived by coaches as desirable (Piggott, 2012). Furthermore, having good presentation and communication skills, demonstrating knowledge while reducing jargon and avoiding owning the content were seen as positive coach educator characteristics (Nelson, Cushion, and Potrac, 2012).

Without an explicit theory to share with Ellie, the insight gathered was volunteered when we were asked what made the module work for her: 'What else do you think we need to know, to really understand how and why this module has worked for you?'. Consistent with the literature, Ellie placed high value on the knowledge of the module tutor, to the extent where she was content to be confused:

> I think obviously, he's very knowledgeable and it comes across in the lessons, which makes us feel like we don't have a clue what we're on about, but it's a good thing in a way because we can look up to someone who's that knowledgeable and to think right well this is what we need to do.

With clear synergy between these desirable tutor characteristics, a desire for a more knowledgeable other, Ellie's relativistic conceptions of learning an appreciation that confusion can lead to greater insight and her motivation to proceed undeterred, a story is beginning to emerge which can help us to understand why this particular learner-coach was a winner on this module. Ellie continued to share how,

> knowing your stuff was important' to her, suggesting that 'because if they know their stuff I can feel like I can ask the right questions and they'll give me good answers, in a way. Obviously, you want to be taught by someone who knows their stuff, really!'

Yet, Ellie made it absolutely clear that, while 'knowing your stuff' was important, how that stuff was used and shared to support learner-coaches, was equally important. She observed that 'you're not an academic…you don't come across as an academic who is all in the books, like. You're talking like a normal person which is good isn't it'. Similarly, when referring to the module tutors on her wider undergraduate degree programme, she suggested that 'they know their stuff, but they still teach it on a level which students understand which is a good thing really'. In attempting to explain what worked for Ellie, how and why, we can reasonably assume that Ellie benefitted from a module tutor who, in her view at least, had a wealth of knowledge, provided significant challenge, yet supported student-coach learning in a humble way. While Ellie had the personal resolve to reason with these challenges i.e. she was self-regulated, other student-coaches may not. Although we do not encourage the prescription of any one set of tutor characteristics, we do argue that tutor characteristics should be considered when attempting to explain why winners may be winners and losers may be losers, on a module of this kind.

Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to explain what worked for one particular student-coach on a coach education module delivered in a HEI context; how and why. We felt this to be a worthy area of inquiry for a number of reasons. Firstly, while we note the number of coaches seeking professional development opportunities is increasing, current research does not reflect the changes in where this is taking place and what this looks like, that is, within Higher Education. Secondly, in seeking to understand the effectiveness of professional development in sport coaching, asking 'whether it works, or not' only provides limited insight. We consider asking 'for whom does it work, how and why?' to be more enlightening. In posing such a question, we argue that the findings will have greater utility for the designers and deliverers of coach education programmes (North, 2013). As one of the module's winners (Pawson, 2013), Ellie demonstrated a set of personal qualities which we suggest acted as enablers for her to succeed on this module, indeed, she was awarded a first-class degree. Ellie's personal goals prior to the module acted as a yardstick against which she could appraise her performance. Ellie had a desire to be a teacher and recognised not only the importance of achieving performance related outcomes, but saw the module as an opportunity to practice supporting the learning and development of others. These types of actions were consistent too with Ellie's personal biography, where she had engaged in coaching at a young age.

Ellie was self-driven in nature and her knowledge and understanding of learning and the learning process can be understood using the concept of relativism. She was capable of navigating some of the more challenging features of the module, such as negotiating group discussion and creating complex and compelling arguments to be

tested. While being open to and inviting challenge from her peers, Ellie also demonstrated some comfort in being challenged by her module tutor. Ellie's ability to persevere when things may have been less clear, coupled with shared conceptions of learning between her and the module tutor, may have been a contributing factor to achieving desirable outcomes.

While we are realistic about the reach and fallibility of the empirical findings presented here, we argue utility in this research beyond those alone. We believe that there is a significant philosophical argument for using realist research tools in explaining what is happening on coach education programmes. In attending to questions of for whom? how? and why? it becomes possible to understand how the raw ingredients of programmes can lead to certain outcomes in a given a context. However, we recognise the limitations of this research, most notably the exploration of a single case context (Ellie) at the expense of multiple learners. Pawson (2013) advises that there is potentially no end to a labour of this kind, and that we should proceed as far as resources will allow; which was certainly true on this occasion. Nevertheless, we encourage more researchers to adopt a realist-inspired approach in understanding their objects of study and, in so doing, the field may be richer for its ability to explain what works in particular contexts and for whom.

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APPENDIX

Context statement: The document is intended to communicate a first-person biography, written by Ellie, the coach under study.

My name is Ellie, I'm 21 years old. I have been passionate about sports since I was a small child, with a long-held ambition to become a PE Teacher. With this in mind, I am currently completing my degree in Sports Coaching at the University of Central Lancashire. Now in my final year, I have an expected outcome of a first, which requires hard work and determination to achieve the highest grades. However, education hasn't always been easy. Throughout high school, I was in bottom sets for every subject apart from Physical Education. Unfortunately, my passion for sport become 2nd priority very quickly, when my parents were notified at parents evening. Even though I had tutoring most evenings, I would always find time to carry on playing my hobbies. I am proud of my sporting achievements to date, which include gaining a black belt in Karate at the age of 11. During Years 7-11 at high school, I was the district champion in cross country. In athletics, I competed at county level in the middle-distance squad for a city athletics club. At 15, I became the 1500m Steeplechase champion in a national athletics competition. In addition, I have played netball at regional level, which I enjoyed playing as a team. During my childhood, sport played a significant role in my life. To achieve success, it involved a lot of hard work, motivation and determination, which has carried on throughout each stage of my life (high school, college and university). Over the past few years, coaching athletics (middle distance) has become one of my hobbies. I coach a group of athletes aged 8-14, that train 5 times a week. For the last two years, I have taken all the athletes on a warm-weather training camp to Portugal for two weeks, where I worked in collaboration with highly qualified coaches. These were fantastic opportunities to progress and develop my knowledge and skills and to become a more effective sports coach. The past 3 years of my degree have encouraged me to be more focused on my future career in becoming a secondary school PE Teacher. After applying and being accepted onto a PGCE course to start in September 2018, this has made me realise anything is achievable through hard work and effort. Sport has made me the person who I am today, very determined, career focused and a dedicated individual who is willing to work long and hard to succeed.

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Reviewer Comments

This paper presents an interesting analysis of a student-centred pedagogy, or heutagogical approach, applied across a coach education module but with insights from an individual perspective; Ellie. Ellie sheds light upon how the teaching worked for her but it may not come as a surprize that treating people as valued individuals; including them and tailoring a programme of teaching for the person, rather than serving up a [restricted] menu for the masses, may yield good results in the short and longer term. That is, good feedback responses on modular teaching at the end of a semester and hopefully, life-long memories from a truly satisfying teaching and learning experience. These positive experiences may create a desire in the person to replicate them when, Ellie in this instance, assumes a teacher role later in her career. The authors clearly understand the challenges of learning for these undergraduate coaches – that learning involves confusion, problem solving and sometimes difficult reasoning. Real learning is not an easy ride. A perenial challenge for the authors may be convincing the HEI hierachy that their methods are really having an impact upon learning, particularly in this area of NGB coaching awards, given that it may not be the students who need convincing of this, and long-term data difficult to substantiate. Either way it is refreshing to see in this research some genuine attempts to include the students as active particiapnts in their learning. Teaching is not something that is done to people, foisted upon them in a sterile classroom, or students exposed to some wisdom through a PowerPoint made available for later consumption – out of context. Learning is more likely through challenging beliefs and communicating new ideas, shared between fellow students and the teaching staff, through online blogs in this case. This research may usefully set a stage for the practical challenges ahead in a sports coaching career, but also open an avenue for student-centred research in sports coaching.