Volunteer sport coaches and their learning dispositions in coach education

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ABSTRACT

There is agreement in the literature that dispositions act as mediating factors in directing the cognitions of individuals. In the context of coach professional development, dispositions direct and energise individuals’ interpretations and actions as they engage in a range of learning situations. Drawing data from a study that examined the professional development of 19 volunteer coaches and 2 coach educators in one region of the UK, this study sought to elicit an understanding of coaches’ dispositions towards coach learning. Findings indicated that coaches’ dispositions of intentionality (e.g. inquisitiveness, attentiveness and open-mindedness) and reciprocity (e.g. readiness to engage with others, ask questions, willingness to accommodate alternative perspectives) arbitrated their engagement with any formal development activity. There is, therefore, a clear role for coach educators and governing bodies to consider how materials, pedagogies and assessment tools are developed that serve to facilitate, confirm or challenge coaches learning dispositions towards professional development activities.

INTRODUCTION
During the past decade, there has been a discernible shift in the ways in which professional development, across a range of professions, has been conceptualised (1). A clear example of this can be found in contemporary approaches to professional development that reject passive notions of knowledge acquisition, and instead conceptualise learning as an active and dynamic process of knowledge construction (2). Such an approach reconceptualises learning as an embodied process; hence learning is the integration of the mental, emotional, physical and practical (3). From this perspective, learners construct understanding (meaning) collectively through their involvement in events which are forged by cultural and historical factors (3). In the context of coach education, cultural forms of meaning might include beliefs, practices, language and stories that permeate particular sports, and particular ways of supporting coaches’ development. Yet despite this reframing of the learning process, there remains a lack of understanding about how and why individuals construct particular interpretations of different learning activities (4). In this regard, the study reported in this paper examined coach dispositions in order to understand the relational interdependence between the personal (coach) and social (learning situation) in the process of learning. The impact of coach education on practice continues to be questioned (5), so we see merit in focusing on what drive coaches to act, or not, upon information delivered or offered in formal learning settings. This study seeks to add to existing research by focussing on the needs of a large (and disparate) population of learners and addressing the question:

What are the sources of volunteer coaches learning dispositions, and how do dispositions influence coaches’ decisions to engage in or disengage from professional development?

BACKGROUND
There is agreement in the literature that dispositions (e.g. values, interests, and attitudes) direct the cognitions of individuals as they engage in any form of interaction. Although debate continues about the precision of the term, theoretically and practically, a focus on individual dispositions is valuable in understanding the inclination of a person to behave in a particular way, and in a particular context. The utility of identifying dispositions in the learning process is illustrated in teacher education in the USA, where professional dispositions (e.g. behaviour that creates caring and supportive learning environments) alongside skills and knowledge, are widely incorporated into the design of teacher education programmes, and the assessment of teacher candidates.

In the context of professional development, dispositions direct and energise individuals’ interpretations, understandings and actions as they engage in a range of learning situations (e.g. formal, informal). Where dispositions are described as “embodied history, internalised as second nature and so forgotten as – history” (9 p. 56), it could be argued that research examining the impact of professional learning on the learner needs to acknowledge personal biography in order to optimise professional development activities for individual learners. In this paper, we draw on data from a study that examined the professional development of volunteer coaches in one region of the UK. It has been estimated that over 8 million people in the UK engage in sports activities in their communities each week, under the guidance of 1.1 million active sports coaches, three quarters of whom are volunteers. In Australia, 1.7 million volunteers contribute to community sport, the vast majority being coaches; in Canada, 2 million volunteer coaches are active in leading community sport. Volunteer coaches are, by any measure, major community assets for the global sporting landscape.
Until recently, the volunteer coaching community, as a site of empirical research, has been largely ignored, so there is little robust knowledge available on volunteer coaches, their motivations, aspirations, learning needs and ideal forms of organisational support. A better understanding of the learning needs of this large and dynamic workforce could result in more effective, and cost effective, forms of learning support for their activities. This understanding would also address Jones et al. (13) observation that coach education should offer opportunities for coaches to reflect on role fulfilment and identity in supporting the development of purposeful, motivated, adaptable and caring practitioners. Yet where the ends for coach education are acknowledged, the means to achieve such ends have received less attention. A study, therefore, that examines the learning dispositions of volunteer coaches in interaction with the learning situation is an important step in understanding how best to support volunteer coach development. In the first part of this paper, we consider how Bourdieu’s social practice theory might be used in understanding coaches’ decisions to engage (or not) in professional development opportunities. In the second part, the paper proceeds to report on methods used to collect and analyse data, and present the findings that were constructed from this process. The paper then considers implications for the professional development of volunteer coaches.

**Conceptualising Professional Development**

Research on coach learning (i.e. coaches learning in a mix of different learning situations) has consistently identified informal situations, such as experience and observation, as key modes of coach learning (14, 15, 16). At the same time, and reflecting research from the wider literature, evidence suggests practitioners place comparatively modest value on formal professional development provision (2). For example, based on their research with physical education teachers, Armour & Yelling (17) argued that it is ineffective to provide a series of
‘one shot’ professional development activities, undertaken away from the place of work, without specific follow up and without making links with previous learning. Similarly, Klinger (18) labelled much existing professional development as ‘sit and get’, characterised by stand alone workshops / sessions where relatively passive participants are introduced to the latest thinking by experts. Yet, although there is a large body of international research on effective and ineffective forms of professional development, questions remain about the ways in which this research can be applied to learners at different developmental stages, and about impact on practice.

Contemporary approaches to professional development conceive learning as a process of social participation, situated in the cultural practices of organisations (3). A social learning approach acknowledges behaviour as a consequence of personal dispositions, derived from engagement in multiple and overlapping forms of cultural practices (4). One way of examining the dispositions of volunteer coaches’ in the context of professional development is to draw upon Bourdieu’s (9) concepts of habitus and field in accounting for the interrelationship between individual, and the social practices (e.g. knowledge, context, practices) of a given learning situation.

Bourdieu describes habitus as battery of enduring and adaptable dispositions through which individuals observe and evaluate social practice (9). In turn, practice shapes habitus, hence Bourdieu’s employment of habitus in capturing the socialised subjectivity (i.e. those processes that lead to the attainment and communication of organisational norms, customs and ideologies) of the individual participating in practical activities (19). For this reason, understanding how learning dispositions influenced an individual’s inclination to engage in learning requires an understanding of both adult cognition theory, and social
structures (e.g. learning cultures at the level of the local sports club or the National Governing Body). In the case of the former, whilst acknowledging coach learning grounded in past experiences (14), the application of personal domains such as learning dispositions, internalised schemes and personal knowledge have not always been recognised or embraced when examining the nature of different learning situations (20, 21). This oversight is problematic because recognition of the personal constructs of learners underpins an appreciation of what is perceived as relevant and meaningful when coaches engage with any form of coach learning. In the case of the latter, it is important to consider how organisational cultures shape, direct and energise individuals’ learning dispositions towards professional development. Indeed, where habitus embodies the assimilation of certain actions, knowledge and feelings within a social setting, it is important to acknowledge that volunteer coaches belong to myriad social settings simultaneously (e.g. occupation, sports club), each one influencing their coaching habitus.

In the context of this study, Bourdieu’s examination of the intersection between agency and structure is valuable in focusing attention to how individuals are disposed to learn in a variety of situations, and how learning cultures influence the practices, actions and dispositions of individuals. In Bourdieu’s work, learning cultures are captured by the term field, which is considered a set of social relations that characterize particular social arenas (e.g. work, coach education). A field is characterised by a configuration of relations, such as intellectual property (education), power, and status, and defined by its own logic, structures and germanenness (9). Within this arena, individuals perceive the field differently, and through this act of interpretation, construct their habitus through the accumulation of subjective dispositions (as opposed to shared dispositions e.g. accepted coaching behaviours within a community). Coaches’ engagement with learning opportunities, therefore, is a consequence
of their interactions with multiple fields of learning, and hence learning is better understood as a process where, “dispositions that make up a person’s habitus are confirmed, developed, challenged or changed” (3, p.39). It is important to make clear that our examination of learning dispositions conceptualises them, not as something to be obtained, but as a mediating concept that shapes, affirms and challenges action. In this regard, it is useful to understand dispositions, “not as a state of possession, but as a state of performance” (7, p. 85).

The significance of examining learning dispositions is to understand how an individual’s biography directs action towards learning engagement. Moreover, it seems logical to assume that not all dispositions are equally significant in coach learning. Intuitively, dispositions such as persistence and curiosity would seem important in supporting coaches’ inclination towards any learning opportunity. Others have also attempted to identify optimal dispositions for learning. Examples include Carr & Claxton’s (22): resilience, playfulness (interpreting and reacting to problems) and reciprocity; and Crick & Yu’s (23): critical curiosity, meaning-making, creativity, strategic awareness, learning relationships and dependence. Further, in 1990, the American Philosophical Association Delphi panel (24) examined the concept of critical thinking and identified 19 affective dispositions including open-mindedness, willingness, diligence and persistence that were associated with the act of critical thinking. Although these studies are helpful in illustrating facets of an individual’s agency in the learning process, it may be more valuable to build a stronger understanding of the source of these learning dispositions, and the conditions that might challenge and shape their construction and performance. The aim of this study, therefore, was to examine the impact of coaches’ learning dispositions towards coach learning, and to consider the sources that mediated their performance.
METHODS

Overview

This paper draws data from a research project that examined volunteer coaches’ learning. Nineteen volunteer coaches and two professional coach educators were purposively sampled because they were taking part in a formalised mentoring programme in one region of the UK. Data were generated through two individual interviews (with all participants) and one focus group, and conducted over a 12 month period. The first phase of interviews focused on coaches’ biography and their experiences of coach learning. The second phase involved some coaches (n=8) participating in a focus group which aimed to capture a “collective remembering” (25, p. 105) concerning perceptions of coach development. The aim of this phase was to examine learning dispositions in the context of coaches’ participation in a formalised mentoring programme. The final round of interviews acted as a form of triangulation in confirming coaches’ understanding of, and actions toward, coach development. Drawing on phase 1 interviews, participants were presented with preliminary findings which directed the conversation in terms of what was memorable, what was remembered, what had impact. The question format used in all 3 phases were open-ended and emergent, and contained lots of ‘what’, ‘how’, and ‘can you tell me about’ questions. The researchers’ role was to let the story unfold but to probe concerning coaches’ perceptions, implicit meanings, and actions towards professional development. Interview duration ranged between 17-60 minutes, and all were digitally recorded. Data were transcribed immediately after interview completion.

Characteristics of the participants

The coaches in this study came from a range of sports (Rugby Union (n=1), Soccer (n=2), Tennis (n=4), Athletics (n=2) and Field Hockey (n=10)). Participants were volunteer coaches in the South East region of the UK who had achieved a range of coaching qualifications (1-3).
from the UK’s National Coaching Qualification Framework. Thirteen men (mean age: 33 years) and six women (mean age: 30 years) participated in this study. Two coach educators were selected because of their professional role in supporting the learning of coaches in this particular region. In reporting data, participants are anonymised and are distinguished by their level of coaching qualification.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was undertaken using a constructivist revision of Grounded Theory Method (GTM) (26). GTM was used because it provided flexible analytical guidelines for analysing processes, and helped in articulating the links between individuals and their practices. A constructivist GTM is considered a development from ‘traditional’ GTM which, it has been argued, identifies the researcher as an unbiased observer, and theories that ‘emerge’ from data for the researcher to ‘discover’ (27). A constructivist GTM, on the other hand, acknowledges the shared relationship between researcher and participant, hence data collection and analytical process are contextual and mutually negotiated.

Transcribed interviews were read and a process of labelling or coding events and actions in the text was applied. The coding stages used in this study included open, focused and theoretical coding (26). First, a line by line/word by word coding process was conducted in which open codes were applied to capture meaning. Through this process, 101 open codes were constructed. Examples included: experiencing disappointment; growing awareness; recognising quality; assessing content as lacking relevance; recognising strengths; and improving knowingness. Secondly, and building on this first activity, a more focused phase in which the most frequent codes were synthesised, gathered, consumed under category headings that not only began to identify significant concepts within data, but began to create a
sense of what was happening. Focused coding required us to make decisions about which
codes gave us the analytical sense to best capture the meaning of a segment of data. Both
open and focused activities were characterised by an iterative process of constant comparison
(28), and involved us constantly moving between data and coding. As a result of this process,
3 core categories were constructed (conditions of coach learning; negotiated boundaries;
barriers to engagement). The final process of data analysis involved considering plausible
relationships between categories; a process termed theoretical coding (26). By considering
how categories conceptually related to each other helped us begin to construct a theoretical
direction to our understanding of dispositions and coach learning, while attempting to “weave
the fractured story back together” (26, p. 63). Through this process we identified 2 theoretical
codes (intentionality and reciprocity) and these are discussed more fully in the findings
section. Throughout the data analysis process, the primary researcher undertook the initial
coding, with the secondary researcher acting as an independent advisor on the consistency of
the coding process and calibration of code meanings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the following section we identify and discuss constructed theoretical codes that address the
research question. Intentionality and reciprocity were identified as coaches’ overarching or
‘executive’ (4) dispositions towards learning and are used to examine individual decisions to
engage or disengage in coach learning activities.

Intentionality – an outcome of meaning making

Intentionality captured a host of learning dispositions that coaches identified in their
reflections on professional development. Characteristics of the dispositions for intentionality
included, inquisitiveness, awareness of support opportunities, self-efficacy, attentiveness and
open-mindedness. Under this umbrella term, coaches acknowledged that their commitment to pursue, or abstain, from any professional development activities were mediated by their rendered reflections of practice. That is, intentionality described the process of meaning-making coaches attached to their professional development, and as a consequence, their perception of the relevance of future development activities. For instance, Alan, a level 3 hockey coach, recalled his previous experiences of coach education. It captures a sense that his interpretations of practice were confronted with doubt, and in this instance, an inquisitiveness to seek out;

Originally, I had been wanting to improve my coaching because when we came up to National League level, I felt limited and I did feel that there was more going on than I was really understanding. My motivation for going on the course was really to improve myself so that I could maybe understand that (Alan: Level 3).

The act of introspection and the process of self-examination are termed reflexivity (29). Reflexivity is principally informed by the thoughts and actions of the individual, which in turn, shape the direction, ideas, observations, and analysis of practice. In this study the process of reflexivity appeared to sharpen coaches’ view to the nuances of their practice. For example, Martin (Level 3) recounted particular powerful learning situations within his club;

In our own club it made sense for me to take on a mentoring role. They are very useful sessions because the coaches start to talk about not just what they are doing, but what are the other teams doing, “did you see how well they could hit the ball”? “How did they get them to do that”? And suddenly
they are thinking themselves, “How can I get my lot to do it like that”? And
that’s where I think the learning comes in as well because you are analysing
a situation and saying” we can’t do that”, and that’s the whole learning thing
isn’t it?

Reflexivity was therefore an outcome of individual interpretation (e.g. coaching
experience and the observation of other coaches), and shaped by the field (e.g. sports club). Whether through an isolated incident at practice, attendance at a coaching course or
workshop, or a casual conversation with another coach at the club, reflexivity was an
outcome of reflection on rather than of practice, and was the initial stage for any conceptual
change

In Bourdieu’s theory of practice, reflexivity arises from disturbance between habitus
and field. Illustrative, data from the study suggested that coaches’ perceptions of
professional development were grounded at the intersection where coaches’ perceived roles
and functions (habitus) were confronted by uncertainty of practice (field). Such discord
served the purpose of raising questions from which coaches might then be disposed to seek
out supporting and development opportunities. For example, Tom reflected on his
experience of a level 1 qualification, observing that, “You come away from the course
thinking I enjoyed that but all it really taught me was that I know nothing. It gave me the
appetite to go learn more I think”. Conversely, reflections also influenced decisions not to
participate in coach learning opportunities; for instance, Matt’s (Level 1) observation that,
“if I could see that the kids just weren’t getting it; I might consider asking someone for help.
At the moment I don’t run into that”. Similarly, another coach demonstrated a degree of self-
confidence in their capabilities, “There is nobody that I feel I need to speak too to get advice
on…but maybe that’s wrong because you’re always learning and I think you should always be learning as a coach to get better” (Julie, Level 1).

For the coaches reported in this study, learning dispositions were a legacy from previous encounters with coach education. For some, there was real concern about the quality of previously experienced professional development activities and the perceived lack of relevance and authenticity to practice. These experiences filtered the way they perceived future activities. Examples included;

I went on Match Analysis [3 hour workshop] and he [coach educator] told us to go home, watch the tennis and then come back and tell them what you think about it. So I did that and came back three hours later and picked up my certificate and went home but that wasn’t what I wanted off the course. I got 6 credits but I haven’t learnt anything (Heidi: Level 2).

Similarly, a coach described how coach education was sometimes about getting through the course and passively collecting a certificate, “At the end of the day you are there to pass and if you want to pass you take it in and relay it back to them in a way that seems as though you’ve agreed. Whether you do or not is another matter” (Simon: Level 2). Data suggested that for any professional development activity to have an impact on volunteer sports coaches, it was essential that it demonstrated clear relevance to professional needs. Indeed, there is a clear role for coach educators and governing bodies to consider how materials, pedagogies and assessment tools are developed that serve to facilitate, confirm or challenge coaches learning dispositions towards any form of professional development activity. Where this was not the case, the findings were stark; “I may have gone to a course
but I seriously don’t remember it at all. I must have done but I don’t remember it” (Ali: Level 2).

The disposition intentionality is used because it captures the agency of volunteer coaches, in terms of tendency and proclivity, to seek out (or not) new knowledge. Intentionality therefore captured the professional judgement of coaches in interpreting and then choosing to act upon perceptions of their developmental position. In considering the relational interdependence between coach and social learning situation available to them, it is useful to reflect on Bourdieu’s concept of habitus as detailed earlier, because it offers a way of analysing the subjective experiences of volunteer coaches in relation to the objective structures and contexts in which coach learning operates. Data from volunteer coaches highlighted the conscious coordination of their learning dispositions towards coach development; in other words, decisions of engagement were characterised by conscious organisation involving individual negotiation, compromise, and arrangement. As one coach described;

I suppose if I wanted to be the National Under 16 coach, I would want to do courses. At the moment, I don’t think I need to go any more courses. That sounds awful. I am very creative and I come from a huge range of backgrounds like teambuilding, outdoor pursuits, motivational type thing and chucking that into hockey. I think that I have a bigger bag of tricks than most coaches (Sarah, Level 3).

The implication for coach educators is that coaches’ conceptualisations of learning are shaped by individual interpretation, and located within wider fields’ of social practice such as
the sports club or workplace. Hence, the habitus of coaches determined the ways in which coaches engaged in coach learning, and remade practice (4). Accordingly, data suggested that a sharpened level of coaching cognizance and personal inclination are required by coaches in recognising the value of engaging with any professional development activity. As Alan (coach) acknowledged, “If people can have an understanding of what they are doing and why they are doing and what they can do to improve, then you are getting somewhere”. It is possible that supported conversations within a learning community of like minded coaches might produce perceptions of relevance to practice. It is perhaps by exploring and critically examining a coach’s intentionality towards professional development that it is possible to illuminate a meaningful relationship between coach, and coach learning opportunities. Certainly the stories of volunteer coaches’ experiences of coach education in this study revealed that the ability to function as learning professional required a degree of occupational reflexivity. As a result, future research needs to examine the reciprocal relationship in the construction of habitus and learning dispositions between coach, their coaching community, and their wider social practices.

Reciprocity – a sense of mutual exchange

Earlier in this paper we described learning as a continuous process occurring in and through interaction with the social world; hence the learner is a social individual (3). In this study, and in the context of professional development, reciprocity captured the importance of cooperation and mutual exchange between individual and context. Characteristics of the dispositions for reciprocity included: a readiness to engage with others, to ask questions, and a willingness to accommodate alternative points of view. Data in this study suggested that coaches demonstrated socio-centric tendencies in conceptualising and actioning coach learning. For instance, when asked to describe the attributes of effective professional
development, coaches framed development as offering opportunities to “socialise”, “discuss”, “probe”, “compare”, and “question” other coaches. Volunteering, in a coaching context, can be an isolated activity, and therefore opportunities to engage in coaching conversations with other practitioners were warmly welcomed. As Alan described, the opportunity to talk with other coaches offered reassurance through the realisation that others were going through similar experiences;

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” (Alan: Level 3).

It became clear from analysis of data, that reciprocity, in the context of coach learning, was conceived differently depending on the developmental stage of the coach. That is, constructed meaning was tempered by the developmental level of the learner, indicating the temporal nature of meaning-making. For example, Chris (Level 1) commented;

All that I want to do is to go on a course, let’s say it’s about coaching 10-12 year olds, and what I want that person [coach educator] to do is to tell me the best way that I can coach 10-12 year olds.

Level 1 coach’s typically conceived learning interaction as a means of knowledge acquisition. In contrast level 2 and 3 coaches described interactions differently. For these coaches, learning interactions needed to be rich in social context where knowledge construction was an outcome of deeper cognitive coaching exchanges (e.g. mentoring, problem based learning). As Paul (Level 3) illustrated when describing a previous experience
that involved observing and then talking with a more experienced coach; “it was quite good to sort of go along with and say "what are you doing" and "how are you delivering it", and “why are you delivering it". For the more experienced volunteer coaches in the study, evidence suggested that learning through social participation represented greater opportunities for developing meta cognition (learning to observe and critically examine one’s own practices), or what King & Kitchner (30) have called, developing “reflective judgement” (p.5).

The findings from this study and the wider literature support and validate the potential of communities in the learning and sharing of coaching knowledge (23). A community of coaches, and the social practices within, has an identity that shapes the identities of its members. As a community, they have a way of talking about coaching and through this process coach learning is defined as worth pursuing and participation recognised as a way of developing competence. Billett (4), for instance, argues that personal dispositions towards learning are sourced and transformed by engagement in different, and overlapping, social practices, such as occupation, home and social networks. In this study, learning dispositions appeared to shape a coaching identity that influenced perceptions of relevance. For example, John (level 2) illustrated how professional identity compounded to underpin his perceived obligatory attendance in coach education, “I’m a PE teacher, so I found there was a quite a lot of duplication. It was useful in that you got to get together with other hockey players and coaches. But, this sounds quite arrogant, but I felt that I was a bit above it”. In another example, Jake, a coach educator, described how his experience of quality control in his professional occupation influenced his approach to coach education, “as an electronics engineer I would go into the mechanical engineering and ask fundamental questions about practice and challenge practice which has been going on for years”. As a result, coach
education should, “challenge coaches to examine their practice”. Finally, Steve (coach educator) described his partner’s influence:

“She’s a primary school head and into brain compatible learning and I’m starting to tell them that into my coach education, so when I say to coaches I am going to tell them what was wrong. Well actually that’s not going to work because all you are doing is telling”.

These examples support Schussler et al., (6) contention that dispositions act as a filter that “influences inclination to process knowledge of content and pedagogy, and act in particular ways in particular context” (p. 724). Data from this study indicated that social learning opportunities for volunteer coaches were a condition of both temporal and spatial factors. That is, and as Jake observed, any professional development activity needed to have immediate and contextual impact; hence, formalised learning should be about “providing the right learning opportunity for the coach at the right time”.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we identified learning dispositions that contribute to volunteer coaches’ engagement (or not) in professional development, acknowledging that their performance is an outcome of coaches’ engagement in the practices of multiple fields. Further, the conceptual themes intentionality (meaning-making) and reciprocity (socio-centric tendencies) were identified in mediating coaches’ engagement with formal professional development activities. Whilst the application of Bourdieu’s social theory brought into focus the significance of the interaction between habitus (dispositions), field (social structures), there is a need for both coach educators and researchers to acknowledge the conscious organisation of a coaches
habitus towards coach learning. Volunteer coaches interact and belong to multiple social
settings, each one culturally constituted, and impacting on coaches’ perceptions, behaviours,
dispositions and actions towards new learning. It could be argued that coach learning is
constrained and/or liberated by the movement of volunteer coaches between fields, and such
movement is characterised by cognitive processes such as filtering, selecting and rejecting.
These processes then had the power to constrain or extend the opportunities afforded by
learning structures, and thereby acted as legacies and sources of volunteer coaches’ learning
dispositions towards coach development activities.

We acknowledge that our study offers a narrow window from which to view volunteer
coaches’ motivation towards professional development. We were unable, for example, to
examine a possible hierarchy of dispositions towards coach learning (4), or the trajectory of
their construction between levels of coach (e.g. learning life phases of
volunteer/professional). The study does, however, begin to illustrate the profound influence
of dispositions on learning and the sources of their constant remaking. Moreover, the
employment of habitus and field is valuable in framing and illuminating how culturally
configured practices impact upon subjective learning dispositions. In turn, such a framework
offers a valuable way in considering the pedagogical processes in supporting volunteer
coaches in education, training and professional development activities (e.g. pre-course
preparation, on-course pedagogy, post-course follow up). The contribution of this paper,
therefore, is that we have begun to identify key characteristics of ‘learning coaches’ in an
attempt to capture an emerging understanding of learning dispositions that allow us to
identify the building blocks of engagement in professional learning. The value of
acknowledging dispositions is to inform knowledge about the purpose of coach education. As
Dottin (8) has suggested, “the desire to act in a professional way involves applying
pedagogical ability (knowledge and skills) and the *deployment* of that ability (p. 85, our emphasise). Recognising the influence of dispositions on how coaches act and organise new knowledge suggests that educators should focus on creating deliberative learning situations that expose, develop and nurture learning dispositions relevant to a coaches’ practice. This would seem an important step in addressing coaching research that continues to question the impact of formal coach education.
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