Sports Coaching, Professional Learning and Boundary Crossing

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Objectives

- Explain how we are using the Value Creation Framework (VCF), Landscapes of Practice (LoP) and boundary interactions to better understand coach and learning
- Report the findings from the exploration into a non-formal professional learning programme
- Make recommendations for cross-sport curriculum/programme designers
Boundary encounters as dialogical learning mechanisms
(Akkerman and Bakker, 2011)

I) Identification
* Previous conceptions of distinction being called into question before being renegotiated
* Characteristic processes:
  * Othering, legitimating coexistence

II) Coordination
* Practices within two or more sites remaining distinct but where attempts are made to harmonise efforts for mutual benefit
* Characteristic processes:
  * Communicative connection, efforts of translation, increasing boundary permeability, routinisation

III) Reflection
* The generation of something new by considering alternative perspectives;
* Characteristic processes:
  * Perspective making, perspective taking

IV) Transformation
* Meaningful changes in practice through proactive work, usually between multiple practitioners.
* Characteristic processes:
  * Confrontation, recognising shared problem space, hybridisation, crystallisation, maintaining uniqueness of intersecting practices, continuous joint work at the boundary
## The Programme

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cohort</strong></td>
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<td>20 (7 female, 13 male) High-level talent</td>
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<td>development coaches</td>
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<td>(13 sports)</td>
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<td><strong>Funding, programme design and delivery</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Centrally-funded; Non-governmental organisation</td>
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<td><strong>Recruitment/selection</strong></td>
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<td>NGB support/nomination + interview</td>
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<td><strong>Duration</strong></td>
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<td>18 months</td>
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<td><strong>Format</strong></td>
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<td>7 x 2-day workshops</td>
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<td><strong>Further support</strong></td>
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<td>Mentor</td>
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Individual interviews (35-75 minutes)

14 Coaches
- Seven female; seven male
- Eleven sports
  - gymnastics, swimming, hockey, snow sports, archery, table tennis, golf, taekwondo, badminton, rugby union and sailing

Five-stage thematic coding analysis

Results - four major categories
- Reconceptualising and reframing
- Confidence, openness and authenticity
- Sense making
- Reflection and mentoring

(Robson and McCartan, 2016)
“Being able to relate to other coaches from the programme has been a positive thing. I generally only work with males and there are very few female coaches in [my region], very few sailing coaches. Also, I don’t know any other female coaches that have kids. So being able to speak to other coaches in the programme has been great. There is a group there that I will stay in contact with, and we have also between workshops and been able to challenge one another … Sitting down with another rugby coach who’s a mum of two and hearing the challenges that come with it. I don’t think I’d realised how I feel about it and being able to share those things with her has been really great.”

(Lorna, sailing coach)

Reconceptualising and reframing

“Here I can find people who are solving problems like mine”

Do we give sufficient attention to ‘other’ roles which clearly influence learner’s professional identity and practice?

1. Immediate value
2. Ongoing dialogue
3. Negotiating and re-negotiating multiple roles (and their interaction)
4. Clear understanding of the boundaries involved
Reconceptualising and reframing

“[We, with Silas], both went off and...”

Reconceptualising and reframing. Do we sufficiently extend our learners’ professional networks?

1. Applied and enabling value of cross-sport learning

Transformation: Recognising a shared problem space.
Confidence, openness and authenticity

“Prior to the programme I would have felt confident in certain environments. I would have felt confident working with my athletes. I would have felt reasonably confident working with my athlete in conjunction with a service provider. I struggled being confident working with my peers directly and several other coaches delivering workshops. That confidence began to be questioned somewhat, and even more so when I went to [the programme] and engaged with some of these other coaches working at Olympic level. Yeah, I was quite in awe of that initially. That led to me questioning my purpose. Should I be here? Do I deserve to be here? Do we give sufficient consideration to the complex dynamic of how our learners’ construct their professional identity?

1. Immediate and transformative value
2. Multiple contexts: athletes, peers, service providers, ‘Olympic’ coaches
3. Knowledgeability – complex claim to competence which may be accepted or rejected

Identification: Legitimating coexistence

Do we give sufficient consideration to the complex dynamic of how our learners’ construct their professional identity?
“One of the things that I find with knowledge, is how you take pieces of knowledge and integrate and make it your own. Through this process I was able to take knowledge and think about how to integrate a pyramid of my philosophy with lots of pieces of the knowledge but integrated in a way that made sense for me. It's something that underpinned what I did with my players and my team. I wouldn’t have been able to have that foundation a year previous. I think [the programme] allowed me to bring a lot of stuff together and put it in a shape and a foundational basis to show that I knew the direction I was going, and that’s actually been huge.”

Sabina, hockey coach

Sense making

To what extent do we allow the learners on our programmes to negotiate the bespoke meaning of their interactions?

1. Applied value
2. Making sense of boundary interactions to influence ‘home’ context

Coordination: Efforts of translation
“What Jane [mentor] did for me was show the qualities you have as an individual are exactly what you need to have as a coach, and you can’t separate those. They are massive advantages to you, and your athletes. Don’t shelve them to the floor and use them. That’s just how someone wanted to understand you and your style. It’s just that you as a person through your styles and approaches. It’s probably better than you as a coach so start embracing who you are as a person through your styles and approaches. I was fearful of, and that’s why I brought up that aspect in the reflection yesterday. I was fearful of things that we were hiding, and I knew what I didn’t want to share about my coaching and my approach, and Jane just smashed that wall down. Reluctantly, initially.”

Spencer, golf coach

Reflection and mentoring

Do I want to open myself up to this?

Reflection: Perspective taking and perspective making

1. Transformative value
2. Deeply personal learning support
3. Tackling ‘fearful’ topics / vulnerability

To what extent do we genuinely care about our leaners to offer this level of in-depth, personal, support?
Conclusions

* Theoretical considerations:
  * The LoP framework addresses some of the previous criticisms of the CoP concept (individual learning journeys and recognition of highly politicised environments)
  * The VCF helps us to understand the range of value learner’s perceive from their programme
  * Appreciating the different dialogical learning mechanisms helps us to understand more profoundly each individual’s unique negotiation of competence
Conclusions

* Programme-related thoughts:
  * Coaches perceived value across most cycles of the VCF
    * Immediate, potential and applied most common
    * Transformative most powerful
  * Both cross-sport and intra-sport learning support was shown to be valuable
  * Invested mentoring/support/brokering – through the perspective of individual’s LoP was highly effective
  * Strong interpersonal relationships, openness and trust remain important
Programmes should look to expand their reach to enable learners to access a broader range of stakeholders in their landscape.

Support functions such as mentors should overtly help coaches to build their professional networks (strategic and enabling value).

Longer-term evaluation is required to better understand how such programmes influence the learning of practitioners.

Greater consideration should be given as to how to evidence realised value (both programme design and evaluation).

Programmes should focus less on the content of workshops and more on aiding the learner’s negotiation of meaning.
Thank you!

Any questions?