

# Volunteer Sport Coaches and Their Learning Dispositions in Coach Education

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1 **Volunteer sport coaches and their learning dispositions in coach education**

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17  
18  
19 **ABSTRACT**

20 There is agreement in the literature that dispositions act as mediating factors in directing the  
21 cognitions of individuals. In the context of coach professional development, dispositions  
22 direct and energise individuals' interpretations and actions as they engage in a range of  
23 learning situations. Drawing data from a study that examined the professional development of  
24 19 volunteer coaches and 2 coach educators in one region of the UK, this study sought to  
25 elicit an understanding of coaches' dispositions towards coach learning. Findings indicated  
26 that coaches' dispositions of intentionality (e.g. inquisitiveness, attentiveness and open-  
27 mindedness) and reciprocity (e.g. readiness to engage with others, ask questions, willingness  
28 to accommodate alternative perspectives) arbitrated their engagement with any formal  
29 development activity. There is, therefore, a clear role for coach educators and governing  
30 bodies to consider how materials, pedagogies and assessment tools are developed that serve  
31 to facilitate, confirm or challenge coaches learning dispositions towards professional  
32 development activities.

33  
34 **INTRODUCTION**

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

20

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

24

25 **BACKGROUND**

1 There is agreement in the literature that dispositions (e.g. values, interests, and attitudes)  
2 direct the cognitions of individuals as they engage in any form of interaction (6). Although  
3 debate continues about the precision of the term, theoretically and practically (6, 7), a focus  
4 on individual dispositions is valuable in understanding the inclination of a person to behave  
5 in a particular way, and in a particular context (7). The utility of identifying dispositions in  
6 the learning process is illustrated in teacher education in the USA, where professional  
7 dispositions (e.g. behaviour that creates caring and supportive learning environments)  
8 alongside skills and knowledge, are widely incorporated into the design of teacher education  
9 programmes, and the assessment of teacher candidates (8).

10 In the context of professional development, dispositions direct and energise  
11 individuals' interpretations, understandings and actions as they engage in a range of learning  
12 situations (e.g. formal, informal). Where dispositions are described as "embodied history,  
13 internalised as second nature and so forgotten as – history" (9 p. 56), it could be argued that  
14 research examining the impact of professional learning on the learner needs to acknowledge  
15 personal biography in order to optimise professional development activities for individual  
16 learners. In this paper, we draw on data from a study that examined the professional  
17 development of volunteer coaches in one region of the UK. It has been estimated that over 8  
18 million people in the UK engage in sports activities in their communities each week, under  
19 the guidance of 1.1 million active sports coaches, three quarters of whom are volunteers (10).  
20 In Australia, 1.7 million volunteers contribute to community sport, the vast majority being  
21 coaches (11); in Canada, 2 million volunteer coaches are active in leading community sport  
22 (12). Volunteer coaches are, by any measure, major community assets for the global sporting  
23 landscape.

1           Until recently, the volunteer coaching community, as a site of empirical research, has  
2 been largely ignored, so there is little robust knowledge available on volunteer coaches, their  
3 motivations, aspirations, learning needs and ideal forms of organisational support. A better  
4 understanding of the learning needs of this large and dynamic workforce could result in more  
5 effective, and cost effective, forms of learning support for their activities. This understanding  
6 would also address Jones *et al.* (13) observation that coach education should offer  
7 opportunities for coaches to reflect on role fulfilment and identity in supporting the  
8 development of purposeful, motivated, adaptable and caring practitioners. Yet where the ends  
9 for coach education are acknowledged, the means to achieve such ends have received less  
10 attention. A study, therefore, that examines the learning dispositions of volunteer coaches in  
11 interaction with the learning situation is an important step in understanding how best to  
12 support volunteer coach development. In the first part of this paper, we consider how  
13 Bourdieu's social practice theory might be used in understanding coaches' decisions to  
14 engage (or not) in professional development opportunities. In the second part, the paper  
15 proceeds to report on methods used to collect and analyse data, and present the findings that  
16 were constructed from this process. The paper then considers implications for the  
17 professional development of volunteer coaches.

18

### 19 **Conceptualising Professional Development**

20 Research on coach learning (i.e. coaches learning in a mix of different learning situations) has  
21 consistently identified informal situations, such as experience and observation, as key modes  
22 of coach learning (14, 15, 16). At the same time, and reflecting research from the wider  
23 literature, evidence suggests practitioners place comparatively modest value on formal  
24 professional development provision (2). For example, based on their research with physical  
25 education teachers, Armour & Yelling (17) argued that it is ineffective to provide a series of

1 'one shot' professional development activities, undertaken away from the place of work,  
2 without specific follow up and without making links with previous learning. Similarly,  
3 Klinger (18) labelled much existing professional development as 'sit and get', characterised  
4 by stand alone workshops / sessions where relatively passive participants are introduced to  
5 the latest thinking by experts. Yet, although there is a large body of international research on  
6 effective and ineffective forms of professional development, questions remain about the ways  
7 in which this research can be applied to learners at different developmental stages, and about  
8 impact on practice.

9

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

18

19 Bourdieu describes habitus as battery of enduring and adaptable dispositions through  
20 which individuals observe and evaluate social practice (9). In turn, practice shapes habitus,  
21 hence Bourdieu's employment of habitus in capturing the socialised subjectivity (i.e. those  
22 processes that lead to the attainment and communication of organisational  
23 norms, customs and ideologies) of the individual participating in practical activities (19). For  
24 this reason, understanding how learning dispositions influenced an individual's inclination to  
25 engage in learning requires an understanding of both adult cognition theory, and social

1 structures (e.g. learning cultures at the level of the local sports club or the National  
2 Governing Body). In the case of the former, whilst acknowledging coach learning grounded  
3 in past experiences (14), the application of personal domains such as learning dispositions,  
4 internalised schemes and personal knowledge have not always been recognised or embraced  
5 when examining the nature of different learning situations (20, 21). This oversight is  
6 problematic because recognition of the personal constructs of learners underpins an  
7 appreciation of what is perceived as relevant and meaningful when coaches engage with any  
8 form of coach learning. In the case of the latter, it is important to consider how organisational  
9 cultures shape, direct and energise individuals' learning dispositions towards professional  
10 development. Indeed, where habitus embodies the assimilation of certain actions, knowledge  
11 and feelings within a social setting, it is important to acknowledge that volunteer coaches  
12 belong to myriad social settings simultaneously (e.g. occupation, sports club), each one  
13 influencing their coaching habitus.

14  
15 In the context of this study, Bourdieu's examination of the intersection between agency  
16 and structure is valuable in focusing attention to *how* individuals are disposed to learn in a  
17 variety of situations, and *how* learning cultures influence the practices, actions and  
18 dispositions of individuals. In Bourdieu's work, learning cultures are captured by the term  
19 field, which is considered a set of social relations that characterize particular social arenas  
20 (e.g. work, coach education). A field is characterised by a configuration of relations, such as  
21 intellectual property (education), power, and status, and defined by its own logic, structures  
22 and germaneness (9). Within this arena, individuals perceive the field differently, and through  
23 this act of interpretation, construct their habitus through the accumulation of subjective  
24 dispositions (as opposed to shared dispositions e.g. accepted coaching behaviours within a  
25 community). Coaches' engagement with learning opportunities, therefore, is a consequence

1 of their interactions with multiple fields of learning, and hence learning is better understood  
2 as a process where, “dispositions that make up a person’s habitus are confirmed, developed,  
3 challenged or changed” (3, p.39). It is important to make clear that our examination of  
4 learning dispositions conceptualises them, not as something to be obtained, but as a  
5 mediating concept that shapes, affirms and challenges action. In this regard, it is useful to  
6 understand dispositions, “not as a state of possession, but as a state of performance” (7, p.  
7 85).

8  
9 The significance of examining learning dispositions is to understand how an  
10 individual’s biography directs action towards learning engagement. Moreover, it seems  
11 logical to assume that not all dispositions are equally significant in coach learning.  
12 Intuitively, dispositions such as persistence and curiosity would seem important in supporting  
13 coaches’ inclination towards any learning opportunity. Others have also attempted to identify  
14 optimal dispositions for learning. Examples include Carr & Claxton’s (22): resilience,  
15 playfulness (interpreting and reacting to problems) and reciprocity; and Crick & Yu’s (23):  
16 critical curiosity, meaning-making, creativity, strategic awareness, learning relationships and  
17 dependence. Further, in 1990, the American Philosophical Association Delphi panel (24)  
18 examined the concept of critical thinking and identified 19 affective dispositions including  
19 open-mindedness, willingness, diligence and persistence that were associated with the act of  
20 critical thinking. Although these studies are helpful in illustrating facets of an individual’s  
21 agency in the learning process, it may be more valuable to build a stronger understanding of  
22 the source of these learning dispositions, and the conditions that might challenge and shape  
23 their construction and performance. The aim of this study, therefore, was to examine the  
24 impact of coaches’ learning dispositions towards coach learning, and to consider the sources  
25 that mediated their performance.



# 1 **METHODS**

## 2 **Overview**

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

22

## 23 **Characteristics of the participants**

24 The coaches in this study came from a range of sports (Rugby Union (n=1), Soccer (n=2),  
25 Tennis (n=4), Athletics (n=2) and Field Hockey (n=10)). Participants were volunteer coaches  
26 in the South East region of the UK who had achieved a range of coaching qualifications (1-3)

1 from the UK's National Coaching Qualification Framework. Thirteen men (mean age: 33  
2 years) and six women (mean age: 30 years) participated in this study. Two coach educators  
3 were selected because of their professional role in supporting the learning of coaches in this  
4 particular region. In reporting data, participants are anonymised and are distinguished by their  
5 level of coaching qualification.

6

## 7 **Data Analysis**

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

16

17 Transcribed interviews were read and a process of labelling or coding events and  
18 actions in the text was applied. The coding stages used in this study included open, focused  
19 and theoretical coding (26). First, a line by line/ word by word coding process was conducted  
20 in which open codes were applied to capture meaning. Through this process, 101 open codes  
21 were constructed. Examples included: experiencing disappointment; growing awareness;  
22 recognising quality; assessing content as lacking relevance; recognising strengths; and  
23 improving knowingness. Secondly, and building on this first activity, a more focused phase in  
24 which the most frequent codes were synthesised, gathered, consumed under category  
25 headings that not only began to identify significant concepts within data, but began to create a

1 sense of what was happening. Focused coding required us to make decisions about which  
2 codes gave us the analytical sense to best capture the meaning of a segment of data. Both  
3 open and focused activities were characterised by an iterative process of constant comparison  
4 (28), and involved us constantly moving between data and coding. As a result of this process,  
5 3 core categories were constructed (conditions of coach learning; negotiated boundaries;  
6 barriers to engagement). The final process of data analysis involved considering plausible  
7 relationships between categories; a process termed theoretical coding (26). By considering  
8 how categories conceptually related to each other helped us begin to construct a theoretical  
9 direction to our understanding of dispositions and coach learning, while attempting to “weave  
10 the fractured story back together” (26, p. 63). Through this process we identified 2 theoretical  
11 codes (intentionality and reciprocity) and these are discussed more fully in the findings  
12 section. Throughout the data analysis process, the primary researcher undertook the initial  
13 coding, with the secondary researcher acting as an independent advisor on the consistency of  
14 the coding process and calibration of code meanings.

15

## 16 **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

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

21

### 22 **Intentionality – an outcome of meaning making**

23 Intentionality captured a host of learning dispositions that coaches identified in their  
24 reflections on professional development. Characteristics of the dispositions for intentionality  
25 included, inquisitiveness, awareness of support opportunities, self-efficacy, attentiveness and

1 open-mindedness. Under this umbrella term, coaches acknowledged that their commitment  
2 to pursue, or abstain, from any professional development activities were mediated by their  
3 rendered reflections of practice. That is, intentionality described the process of meaning-  
4 making coaches attached to their professional development, and as a consequence, their  
5 perception of the relevance of future development activities. For instance, Alan, a level 3  
6 hockey coach, recalled his previous experiences of coach education. It captures a sense that  
7 his interpretations of practice were confronted with doubt, and in this instance, an  
8 inquisitiveness to seek out;

9

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

15

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

21

22 In our own club it made sense for me to take on a mentoring role. They are  
23 very useful sessions because the coaches start to talk about not just what  
24 they are doing, but what are the other teams doing, "did you see how well  
25 they could hit the ball"? "How did they get them to do that"? And suddenly

1           they are thinking themselves, “How can I get my lot to do it like that”? And  
2           that’s where I think the learning comes in as well because you are analysing  
3           a situation and saying” we can’t do that”, and that’s the whole learning thing  
4           isn’t it?

5  
6           Reflexivity was therefore an outcome of individual interpretation (e.g. coaching  
7           experience and the observation of other coaches), and shaped by the field (e.g. sports club).  
8           Whether through an isolated incident at practice, attendance at a coaching course or  
9           workshop, or a casual conversation with another coach at the club, reflexivity was an  
10          outcome of reflection *on* rather than *of* practice, and was the initial stage for any conceptual  
11          change

12  
13          In Bourdieu’s theory of practice, reflexivity arises from disturbance between habitus  
14          and field. Illustrative, data from the study suggested that coaches’ perceptions of  
15          professional development were grounded at the intersection where coaches’ perceived roles  
16          and functions (habitus) were confronted by uncertainty of practice (field). Such discord  
17          served the purpose of raising questions from which coaches might then be disposed to seek  
18          out supporting and development opportunities. For example, Tom reflected on his  
19          experience of a level 1 qualification, observing that, “You come away from the course  
20          thinking I enjoyed that but all it really taught me was that I know nothing. It gave me the  
21          appetite to go learn more I think”. Conversely, reflections also influenced decisions not to  
22          participate in coach learning opportunities; for instance, Matt’s (Level 1) observation that,  
23          “if I could see that the kids just weren’t getting it; I might consider asking someone for help.  
24          At the moment I don’t run into that”. Similarly, another coach demonstrated a degree of self-  
25          confidence in their capabilities, “There is nobody that I feel I need to speak too to get advice

1 on...but maybe that's wrong because you're always learning and I think you should always  
2 be learning as a coach to get better" (Julie, Level 1).

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

8

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

14

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

1 but I seriously don't remember it at all. I must have done but I don't remember it" (Ali: Level  
2 2).

3

4 The disposition intentionality is used because it captures the agency of volunteer  
5 coaches, in terms of tendency and proclivity, to seek out (or not) new knowledge.

6 Intentionality therefore captured the professional judgement of coaches in interpreting and

7 then choosing to act upon perceptions of their developmental position. In considering the

8 relational interdependence between coach and social learning situation available to them, it is

9 useful to reflect on Bourdieu's concept of habitus as detailed earlier, because it offers a way

10 of analysing the subjective experiences of volunteer coaches in relation to the objective

11 structures and contexts in which coach learning operates. Data from volunteer coaches

12 highlighted the conscious coordination of their learning dispositions towards coach

13 development; in other words, decisions of engagement were characterised by conscious

14 organisation involving individual negotiation, compromise, and arrangement. As one coach

15 described;

16

17 I suppose if I wanted to be the National Under 16 coach, I would want to do

18 courses. At the moment, I don't think I need to go any more courses. That

19 sounds awful. I am very creative and I come from a huge range of

20 backgrounds like teambuilding, outdoor pursuits, motivational type thing

21 and chucking that into hockey. I think that I have a bigger bag of tricks than

22 most coaches (Sarah, Level 3).

23

24 The implication for coach educators is that coaches' conceptualisations of learning are

25 shaped by individual interpretation, and located within wider fields' of social practice such as

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

16

### 17 **Reciprocity – a sense of mutual exchange**

18 Earlier in this paper we described learning as a continuous process occurring in and through  
19 interaction with the social world; hence the learner is a social individual (3). In this study,  
20 and in the context of professional development, reciprocity captured the importance of  
21 cooperation and mutual exchange between individual and context. Characteristics of the  
22 dispositions for reciprocity included: a readiness to engage with others, to ask questions, and  
23 a willingness to accommodate alternative points of view. Data in this study suggested that  
24 coaches demonstrated socio-centric tendencies in conceptualising and actioning coach  
25 learning. For instance, when asked to describe the attributes of effective professional



1 development, coaches framed development as offering opportunities to “socialise”, “discuss”,  
2 “probe”, “compare”, and “question” other coaches. Volunteering, in a coaching context, can  
3 be an isolated activity, and therefore opportunities to engage in coaching conversations with  
4 other practitioners were warmly welcomed. As Alan described, the opportunity to talk with  
5 other coaches offered reassurance through the realisation that others were going through  
6 similar experiences;

7

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

11

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

16

17 All that I want to do is to go on a course, let’s say it’s about coaching 10-  
18 12 year olds, and what I want that person [coach educator] to do is to tell  
19 me the best way that I can coach 10-12 year olds.

20

21 Level 1 coach’s typically conceived learning interaction as a means of knowledge  
22 acquisition. In contrast level 2 and 3 coaches described interactions differently. For these  
23 coaches, learning interactions needed to be rich in social context where knowledge  
24 construction was an outcome of deeper cognitive coaching exchanges (e.g. mentoring,  
25 problem based learning). As Paul (Level 3) illustrated when describing a previous experience

1 that involved observing and then talking with a more experienced coach; “ it was quite good  
2 to sort of go along with and say "what are you doing" and "how are you delivering It”, and  
3 “why are you delivering it”. For the more experienced volunteer coaches in the study,  
4 evidence suggested that learning through social participation represented greater  
5 opportunities for developing meta cognition (learning to observe and critically examine one’s  
6 own practices), or what King & Kitchner (30) have called, developing “reflective judgement”  
7 (p.5).

8  
9 The findings from this study and the wider literature support and validate the potential  
10 of communities in the learning and sharing of coaching knowledge (23). A community of  
11 coaches, and the social practices within, has an identity that shapes the identities of its  
12 members. As a community, they have a way of talking about coaching and through this  
13 process coach learning is defined as worth pursuing and participation recognised as a way of  
14 developing competence. Billett (4), for instance, argues that personal dispositions towards  
15 learning are sourced and transformed by engagement in different, and overlapping, social  
16 practices, such as occupation, home and social networks. In this study, learning dispositions  
17 appeared to shape a coaching identity that influenced perceptions of relevance. For example,  
18 John (level 2) illustrated how professional identity compounded to underpin his perceived  
19 obligatory attendance in coach education, “I’m a PE teacher, so I found there was a quite a lot  
20 of duplication. It was useful in that you got to get together with other hockey players and  
21 coaches. But, this sounds quite arrogant, but I felt that I was a bit above it”. In another  
22 example, Jake, a coach educator, described how his experience of quality control in his  
23 professional occupation influenced his approach to coach education, “as an electronics  
24 engineer I would go into the mechanical engineering and ask fundamental questions about  
25 practice and challenge practice which has been going on for years”. As a result, coach

1 education should, “challenge coaches to examine their practice”. Finally, Steve (coach  
2 educator) described his partners influence;

3

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

8

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

16

## 17 **CONCLUSION**

18 In this study, we identified learning dispositions that contribute to volunteer coaches’  
19 engagement (or not) in professional development, acknowledging that their performance is an  
20 outcome of coaches’ engagement in the practices of multiple fields. Further, the conceptual  
21 themes intentionality (meaning-making) and reciprocity (socio-centric tendencies) were  
22 identified in mediating coaches’ engagement with formal professional development activities.  
23 Whilst the application of Bourdieu’s social theory brought into focus the significance of the  
24 interaction between habitus (dispositions), field (social structures), there is a need for both  
25 coach educators and researchers to acknowledge the conscious organisation of a coaches

1 habitus towards coach learning. Volunteer coaches interact and belong to multiple social  
2 settings, each one culturally constituted, and impacting on coaches' perceptions, behaviours,  
3 dispositions and actions towards new learning. It could be argued that coach learning is  
4 constrained and/or liberated by the movement of volunteer coaches between fields, and such  
5 movement is characterised by cognitive processes such as filtering, selecting and rejecting.  
6 These processes then had the power to constrain or extend the opportunities afforded by  
7 learning structures, and thereby acted as legacies and sources of volunteer coaches' learning  
8 dispositions towards coach development activities.

9  
10 We acknowledge that our study offers a narrow window from which to view volunteer  
11 coaches' motivation towards professional development. We were unable, for example, to  
12 examine a possible hierarchy of dispositions towards coach learning (4), or the trajectory of  
13 their construction between levels of coach (e.g. learning life phases of  
14 volunteer/professional). The study does, however, begin to illustrate the profound influence  
15 of dispositions on learning and the sources of their constant remaking. Moreover, the  
16 employment of habitus and field is valuable in framing and illuminating how culturally  
17 configured practices impact upon subjective learning dispositions. In turn, such a framework  
18 offers a valuable way in considering the pedagogical processes in supporting volunteer  
19 coaches in education, training and professional development activities (e.g. pre-course  
20 preparation, on-course pedagogy, post-course follow up). The contribution of this paper,  
21 therefore, is that we have begun to identify key characteristics of 'learning coaches' in an  
22 attempt to capture an emerging understanding of learning dispositions that allow us to  
23 identify the building blocks of engagement in professional learning. The value of  
24 acknowledging dispositions is to inform knowledge about the purpose of coach education. As  
25 Dottin (8) has suggested, "the *desire* to act in a professional way involves applying

1 pedagogical ability (knowledge and skills) and the *deployment* of that ability (p. 85, our  
2 emphasise). Recognising the influence of dispositions on how coaches act and organise new  
3 knowledge suggests that educators should focus on creating deliberative learning situations  
4 that expose, develop and nurture learning dispositions relevant to a coaches' practice. This  
5 would seem an important step in addressing coaching research that continues to question the  
6 impact of formal coach education.

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