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An investigation into golf coach education and its ability to meet the needs of student coaches

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate golf coach education within the UK and explore its ability to meet the needs of beginner student golf coaches. Four semi-structured interviews were conducted and data analysed using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach. Results produced 180 emergent themes which gave rise to 18 subordinate and 4 super-ordinate themes. Findings suggest that currently golf coach education may inadequately be meeting the expectations of beginner coaches. Issues such as inappropriate content, insufficient guidance and minimal practical experience were highlighted. Alternative sources of learning are presented for consideration.

Introduction

Within sports coaching literature there appears to be a lack of focus upon the development processes of the coaches themselves. Indeed Nelson and Cushion, (2006:174) described a 'lack of concern of how coaches learn'. Cushion (2011:62) even highlighted that in fact 'only one study has considered the influence of formal learning (education and courses) on the development of coaches' knowledge and understanding and their practice, or considered whether coaching programmes have matched the expectations of the learner'. Authors have also outlined the domain specific nature of sports coaching (Cote *et al.,* 2007) and the 'expert' focus of much of the research to date (Cushion *et al.,* 2010) whose findings are not readily applicable to those outside of such a cohort. Considering each of these factors the purpose of this study was to investigate the experience of novice sports coaches undertaking a formal learning episode. In this instance the qualification was the UKCC Level 1 award in golf coaching. This specific cohort was selected in order to provide a valuable insight into formal coach education whilst also being able to compare and contrast this learning episode with other learning modes experienced through their full time study. The paper will therefore explore the field of coach learning, outlining the various drivers and deterrents recognised by sport educators. It will highlight golf's training pathway and provide details of the sport's specific formal coaching qualifications. The aims and content of the entry level UKCC Level

1 will be described and its utility in meeting the needs of beginner student coaches investigated. The findings will be discussed with observations and recommendations of how to improve the learning process explained.

Coach learning

Education and training have been shown to serve the function of preparing individuals for occupational practice (Lyle, 2002) with a number of formal and informal processes characterising such preparation. Although a comprehensive review of learning theory is outside the remit of this paper (see Cushion *et al.,* 2010 for a more detailed examination of this area) it is useful to explain the most common options available to sports coaches, that is to say, formal, non-formal and informal learning (Mallett *et al.,* 2007).

Merriam *et al.* (2007:28) defined formal learning as 'highly institutionalised, bureaucratic, curriculum driven, and formally recognised with grades, diplomas, or certificates'. In contrast non-formal learning has been classified as 'organised learning opportunities outside the formal educational system' (Merriam *et al.,* 2007: 30). Whilst informal learning is more centred around one's own experience with each of these methods having their own merits and limitations.

Formal learning

Formal learning opportunities have the advantages of being easily packaged, quality assured and able to convey achievement (Mallett *et al.,* 2009). They have the capacity to lead to the development of critical thinking skills (Lyle, 2002 and Mallet *et al.,* 2007), increase perceived coaching efficacy (Malete and Feltz, 2000), better facilitate the social development of athletes (Conroy and Coatsworth, 2006) and decrease the rate of coach burnout by teaching stress management and coping strategies (Frey, 2007).

There are, however, noted issues with adopting this approach to learning. Such learning episodes may be delivered out of context, they may lack coach interaction and be unable to transcribe the complexity of coaching in to a brief course of coaching science (Demers *et al.,* 2006; Cote, 2006). In fact some authors have suggested that formal coach education courses are of little importance in the development of coaching knowledge and expertise (Erickson *et al.,* 2007; Bloom, 2002; Gilbert *et al.,* 2006; Lynch and Mallet, 2006; Nelson *et al.,* 2006). Indeed formal learning's limited scope (Abraham and Collins, 1998), short delivery period (Campbell, 1993), and absence of entry criteria (Lyle, 2007) can all contribute to minimal impact of formal learning (Abraham and Collins, 1998).

Non-formal learning

In reaction to these limitations or shortcomings of formal education, coaches are invited or independently chosen to attend conferences, workshops, and or seminars (Brennan, 1997). Non-formal learning situations are comprised of organised educational activities outside the formal system designed to 'provide select types of learning to particular subgroups' (Nelson *et al.,* 2006:252) and not necessarily leading to certification. They are often 'short-term, voluntary and have few if any prerequisites' (Merriam *et al.,* 2007:30).

Informal learning

Informal coach learning situations are self-directed and based on personal experience and activity within the sport environment e.g. learning from previous coaching experience (Erickson *et al.,* 2008). Within sports coaching less formal opportunities such as apprenticeships, mentoring, workshops (Mallet *et al.,* 2008, 2009; Wright *et al.,* 2007) and everyday coaching tasks (Rynne *et al.,* 2008; Lemyre *et al.,* 2007) have rated highly for authenticity, meaning and contextualisation. Less formal opportunities on the other hand may suffer from a lack of quality control, direction, feedback and innovation. In addition to this some coaches may struggle to access some opportunities due to the contested nature of sport (Mallet *et al.,* 2009).

Having defined the alternative sources of learning episodes, it is pertinent here to briefly mention three specific learning methods that have become increasingly popular in the sports coaching domain; learning through experience, mentoring, and communities of practice. Learning through experience has been highlighted by many as a key component of coach development (Cushion *et al.,* 2003; Gould *et al.,* 1990; Lemyre *et al.,* 2007). The process of reflection in and on experience has been identified as central to experience-based learning theories (Trudel and Gilbert, 2006) and has been translated to the coaching literature, being used as a mechanism through which these experiences may produce learning (Gilbert and Trudel, 2001, 2005).

Mentoring has often been cited in the literature as one of the most important ways of facilitating coaches' development (Bloom, 2002; Bloom *et al.,* 1998; Lyle, 2002). Mentoring has been defined by Alleman *et al.* (1984:327) as 'a relationship in which a person of greater rank, experience or expertise teaches, guides and develops a novice in a profession'. An effective mentor can help a coach develop his or her own coaching style and philosophy. Observing other coaches has also been suggested as a primary source of coaching knowledge (Cushion *et al.,* 2003). This is often referred to as an informal apprenticeship of observation (Sage, 1989) and can occur as an athlete or coach. Literature reveals that that both elite performance coaches (Abraham *et al.,* 2006; Irwin *et al.,* 2004; Jones *et al.,* 2003, 2004; Salmela, 1995;

Schempp, 1998) and voluntary youth coaches (Erickson *et al.,* 2008; Lemyre *et al.,* 2007; Wright *et al.,* 2007) have acquired understanding of the coaching role as athletes. Finally Erickson *et al.* (2008) believed that as a middle ground between the individual focus of mentoring and the self-direction of observation lies, interaction with other coaches in communities of practise. Culver and Trudel (2006, 2008) and Trudel and Gilbert (2004) have proposed this as being a particularly fruitful approach to fostering coach learning. Through this sustained interaction coaches can collectively negotiate meaning in order to learn from one another.

Coach learning in golf

Golf education in the UK currently follows the framework prescribed by Sports Coach UK. As such, formal accreditation to the UKCC levels is gained by successfully completing programmes delivered by the sport's recognised coach education body, in this instance the Professional Golfers Association (PGA) (see appendix 1 for UKCC descriptors levels 1-4).

The Professional Golfers Association

Currently the Professional Golfers Association (PGA) is tasked with the delivery of the UKCC for golf. Their aims are to see more people playing golf, more people achieving their potential, more people staying in golf and better performances on a world stage (PGA, 2011). As well as the delivery of the UKCC levels 1-4 the PGA also runs two educational courses in conjunction with the University of Birmingham which offer people the opportunity to become professional golfers (members of the association) and further develop their coaching and general golf industry knowledge.

UKCC Level 1 in Coaching Golf

This entry level coaching qualification in golf aims to provide individuals with the knowledge and competence to assist more qualified coaches, delivering aspects of golf coaching sessions, normally under direct supervision. The content covers both 'how to coach' and 'what to coach' skills. Included within the 'how to coach skills' are; coaching process, coaching styles, safety and learning styles. The 'what to coach' element includes; the basics of putting, chipping, bunker play and full swing (PGA, 2012). The course consists of 5 weeks of home study, a two day practical course with assessments and a 45 minute multiple choice questionnaire. At the end of the course the participants will be able assist more qualified coaches, delivering aspects of coaching sessions.

Other options are available for novice coaches to develop their practice but as yet these are not officially recognized within the coaching framework. These include the World Golf Teachers Federation (WGTF) of Great Britain and Ireland's Diploma, Instinctive Golf 'practitioner', 'master practitioner', and 'golf coach', and various

forms of Higher Education qualifications such as undergraduate and post graduate degrees.

Why coaches engage in learning

Coaches may choose to engage in learning events for a number of reasons such as; formal certification (Cushion *et al.,* 2010), enjoyment gained from engaging in practical coaching (Lyle, 2002), the desire to help others and a desire to give something back to their sport (English Sports Council, 1997; Lyle *et al.*, 1997; Tamura *et al.,* 1993). Research in this area is limited, however, with the exception of studies by Sports Coach UK (2004) and Vargas-Tonsing (2007) who demonstrated that unqualified coaches were motivated to take part in coach education by the locality of courses and the availability of free courses and that youth sport coaches were motivated to attend if attendance was mandatory or if they could be certain that the course content would enhance their ability to coach. Research in other fields such as nursing and adult education, supports these findings (Laszlo and Strettle, 1995; Jarvis, 2004 and Dixon, 1993). These studies do however need to be taken with caution due to their specific areas (Cushion *et al.,* 2010).

Learning deterrents

One must also be mindful that despite considering the motivational factors we must also recognise that not all coaches place the same value upon education and there are a number of reasons that may deter beginner coaches from taking part in education. This is a largely unexplored area, however, work by Cross (1981), Valentine and Darkenwald (1990), Langser (1994), Hughes (1995) and Dixon (1993) identified a number of barriers to participation in education in a number of different contexts, for example; costs e.g. course fees, travel, pre-requisite qualifications or experience, work/sport balance in life re: maintaining relevant practice, and frequency of courses being offered.

Preferred methods of learning

Having outlined the different sources of coach education available it is pertinent to draw the readers' attention to the current preferences of novice/early career coaches. Research by Erickson *et al.* (2008) identified 7 sources of coaching knowledge whilst Lemyre *et al.* (2007), Gould *et al.* (1990) and Trudel and Gilbert (2006) highlighted the importance of learning by doing. Culver and Trudel (2006, 2008) and Trudel and Gilbert (2007) also support the notion of communities of practice as important contexts for learning and knowledge sharing.

However, previous studies on coach development (Erickson *et al.,* 2007; Bloom, 2002; Lynch and Mallet, 2006) have been inconsistent with the previously mentioned findings of Erickson *et al.* (2008). These inconsistencies could be

explained by the characteristics of the coaches sampled. One additional area to consider in relation to preferred methods of learning may be the coach's learning style. However, a person's learning style may alter with context and conditions in life, age and experience, expectations and motivations constituting a sizable area of study which is beyond the scope of this paper to address fully

Methods

Participants

The four participants in the current study were male aged either 18 or 19 (m = 18.25) who had completed 1 year of a foundation degree in golf coaching and the UKCC level 1 course in coaching golf. All participants were enrolled on a foundation degree in golf coaching and had less than 1 years coaching experience (m = 0.8) but had gained recent experience of volunteering coaching a local secondary school. The participants were all competent golfers with a mean handicap of 4.75 and mean experience of roughly 4 years playing golf.

Aspirations of the participants did vary with three of the four participants wishing to coach at an elite level whilst one of the participants stating his desire to coach at club level during the interviewing process. Over the course of the first year the participants partook in various continuing professional development (CPD) activities including; completion of a tri-golf activators course, work experience on the European Tour and attending a number of guest lectures delivered by industry experts. Participation was voluntary and participants were given the option to withdraw from the study at any point. In the analysis and discussion the participants are referred to as subject 1 (S1), subject 2 (S2), subject 3 (S3) and subject 4 (S4).

Procedure

Data was collected from 4 semi-structured interviews with the participants. Participants were selected from beginner coaches who had completed the UKCC level 1 in coaching golf. Interviews were carried out at the author's place of work these were recorded and then transcribed *ad verbatim*. Semi-structured interviews were used in an attempt to gain a more fluid and in depth narrative from the participant (Smith, 2008). An interview schedule was designed to give the interviews structure but still allow for exploration of any interesting matters that may have arisen (Andrews *et al.*, 2005).

Interview design

The interview schedule was designed to give direction and focus to the interview process (see appendix 2). The schedule was centered around four main areas:

1. Why the participants wanted to coach.

2. Their aspirations.
3. Perceptions of UKCC Level 1.
4. Comparison of the level one with foundation degree.

Common probes (enquiry topics) were utilised to illicit more detail from the participants (see appendix 2).

Data analysis

The study used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the method of analysis. IPA is a qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences (Smith *et al.*, 2009; Smith, 2008). Its aim is to explore the lived experience and how participants make sense of these events. It does not aim to fix the experiences into pre-defined categories (Passmore and Mortimer, 2011). This form of analysis involves 'the close, line by line analysis of the experiential claims, concerns and understandings of each participant' (Larkin *et al.*, 2006). Passmore and Mortimer (2011) also suggest that in this process it is important for the researcher to be aware of their own influence and to 'bracket' or put to one side their own views as much as possible in order to concentrate on the detailed examination of the particular participant's account. One of the advantages of IPA is that the process acknowledges the influence of the researcher on the process. As Smith (2008) states 'qualitative analysis is inevitably a personal process, and the analysis itself is the interpretative work which the investigator does at each of the stages'. This has been further described by Smith (2011) as being 'double hermeneutic' whereby the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant's report of their actions whilst the researcher is also trying to make sense of what is happening to them at a conceptual level.

IPA is an appropriate method of analysis for this study because it permits a detailed interpretive examination of interview data from a small number of participants. The analysis of the data was then conducted along guidelines identified by Smith (2010) To be considered 'acceptable' Smith (2011) suggests that an IPA paper should meet the following four criteria: clearly subscribes to the theoretical principles of IPA, is sufficiently transparent so the reader can see what has been done, coherent, plausible and interesting analysis and a sufficient sampling corpus to show density of evidence for each theme (in this case extracts from at least 3 participants for each theme).

Ethical consideration

The personal data collected was anonymised removing all reference to real names and geographical localities. All participants were given the right to withdraw at any time and also to have their data withdrawn at a later date, in accordance with the informed consent agreement for this study.

Reflexivity

Passmore and Mortimer (2011) suggest that the nature of qualitative research dictates that there is a great deal of subjectivity both on the part of the participant and the researcher. However, Parker (2005) believes that this allows a more personal phenomenological approach to investigation over quantitative research. Therefore, the findings of this research reflect the interpretation of the data by the author.

Results

Table 1 presents the major themes that were revealed. In total there were 180 emergent themes grouped in to 18 sub-ordinate themes and 4 super-ordinate themes. Namely these were; reasons for wanting to coach, aspirations, relevance of learning experience and quality of learning experience. For this study to meet the criteria for being 'acceptable' as outlined by Smith (2011), only themes which have been discussed by at least three participants can be considered.

Table 1. Categories and Themes

Super-Ordinate Theme	Sub-Ordinate Theme	Emerging Themes
Reason for wanting to coach	Intrinsic Reward	10
	Not good enough to play	8
	Previous Involvement in Other Sports	6
Aspirations	Short, Medium and Long Term Goals	8
	Lifestyle Improvement	7
	Working with specific populations	4
	Enjoyment	1
Relevance of learning experience	UKCC Level 1	26
	Foundation Degree	13
	Formal vs Informal	10
	Application of Theory to Practise	9
	Learning from Mistakes	8
	Increased perceived competency/self-efficacy	3
	Formation of a Method	2
Quality of learning experience	UKCC Level 1	25
	Learning from Experience	20
	Foundation Degree	14
	Learning from others	7

The purpose of this study was to investigate formal golf coach education within the UK and explore its ability to meet the needs of beginner golf coaches. This gave rise to the super-ordinate themes; quality of learning experience and relevance of learning experience, where participants discussed the perceived quality and relevance of education they had undertaken.

Quality of learning experience

The quality of the learning experience offered by the UKCC level 1 was discussed on 25 occasions by all participants who felt that the course did not meet their needs. When subject 1 was asked to reflect upon his experiences at level 1, he felt that it would only help to 'run a bit of a session' and that it was most beneficial for making sure of safety when coaching children. He felt that the teaching was very basic and did not go in to enough depth and that as a result he did not learn anything from the course. The focus upon safety was a common topic of discussion. Subject 2 felt the course was 'a lot about safety' and that it was 'all about how to plan a session, how to create a session for a group of kids or a child and to make it as safe as possible'. Subject 3 felt that the assessments and the course in general was 'maybe a bit easy' and felt that the teaching methods varied greatly from those experienced on the foundation degree. He felt the teaching on the level 1 course was instructor led whereas on the foundation degree tutors used more guided learning which he found to be more beneficial to his development.

The subjects also criticised the use of their peer group for assessments, much preferring the use of 'real life' participants. This is supported by previous research from Cushion *et al.* (2003), Gould *et al.* (1990) and Lemyre *et al.* (2007) who found that learning through experience is a key component of coach development. The coaches felt that 'real life' practical experience would allow them to apply theory to practise and have the added bonus of increasing perceived coaching competency and self-efficacy.

Subject 4 summarised the feelings of the participants believing that the quality of the course would be more applicable to people who had little to no knowledge of golf. The quality of the learning experience offered by the participant's foundation degree was considered much better than the UKCC level 1 by all participants. Subject 1 felt that the chance to do practical coaching sessions combined with having lectures helped to link theory to practice. Practical coaching experiences also had the positive effect of causing the participants beginning to reflect in and on experience (Trudel and Gilbert, 2006). This process has been identified as central to experience-based learning theories and is a mechanism through which coaching experiences produce learning (Gilbert and Trudel 2001, 2005).

Subject 2 felt that the range of modules on the foundation degree course had 'opened his eyes' to other areas of the coaching industry such as fitness and nutrition, motivation and the importance of reflection. Conversely, the quality of teaching was highlighted as a weakness on the UKCC level 1 course. Subject 3 also felt that the quality of the teaching on the foundation degree added to the overall golfing curriculum stating in feedback from a practical lesson:

> It's not like oh, you can't do it, it's more like, here is what you could have done and that would be better than doing it this way. What you did wasn't wrong but it wasn't the best for that situation.

Two of the participants in the study mentioned directly the process of shadowing whilst one participant alluded to its potential in helping them to learn and develop. They believed that one of the modules which required them to observe other coaches had allowed them to witness the coaching environment as an active and working area of learning, indicating how theory may translate to practice. This also provided students with the opportunity to observe and then ask questions of the coach they had just been watching.

Subject 2 highlighted that having a number of different coaches to observe and interact with, led to informal mentoring taking place whereby he could go to any member of staff and seek advice on his own coaching practice; receiving advice and guidance in an informal but effective manner.

Relevance of learning experience

As with the quality of learning experience the UKCC level 1 course was the most discussed learning experience in regard to its relevance to the participants. However, unlike the quality of experience some of the participants saw some relevance in the learning experience but the scope of this is limited.

Reflections from participants support the notion that the current content of the UKCC coach education awards is more applicable to a sports-developmental context (Erickson *et al.,* 2008), not necessarily one of personal development. This was due to the focus being mostly upon health and safety or what Coaching Matters (1991) and Campbell (1993) describe as management/vocational skills and teaching / coaching methodology whilst not covering sports-specific knowledge, ethics and philosophy, performance-related knowledge and practical coaching experience.

The feeling amongst participants is best summarised by subject 2 who believed, 'the course was a lot about safety and it was all about how to plan a session, how to create a session for a group of kids or a child and to make it as safe as possible'. The participants felt the relevance of the UKCC level 1 course was limited to simply being a 'stepping stone' in their careers. As a certification programme it was simply a means to evidence to themselves and potential employers what they were qualified to do. Essentially the participants felt they already had the skills and the knowledge required to carry out the role of a level 1 coach (to assist in the delivery of coaching sessions) but did not have the formal certification to prove this.

Subject 3 believed doing the course had been worthwhile, however, still held a number of reservations about the relevance of the course and some of its content. He reflected that the course wasn't what he expected which was due to the content, which he perceived to be basic and not sufficiently skills focused, stating,

> It was just the content, I didn't expect it to be so much health and safety but I suppose you have to make sure everything is safe, I think it was good in terms of that.

He felt that the course would only be relevant to his future progression if it was coupled with attaining a degree and gaining practical experience.

All the participants felt that the content of the foundation degree was relevant to their career progression, however, they identified some differing reasons for this. The participants felt that the range of modules covered on the foundation degree gave them an understanding of the areas of coaching not covered by the UKCC level 1. The data and reflection from the coaches suggests that the foundation degree is helping to develop 'imaginative, dynamic and thoughtful coaches' (Cushion *et al.*, 2003:216) who are better equipped to engage in the complex nature of coaching (Cassidy *et al.*, 2004) through their delivery of more sports-specific knowledge, such as philosophy, psychology and golf-specific fitness. This is evidenced in the following from subject 2:

> Through [the module] introduction to sports science I've developed a liking for fitness and nutrition, through introduction to golf coaching I've learnt a lot about climates and motivating performers, being able to implement a session and reflect on things. The reflection has had a big impact on my coaching and also doing practical coaching…….through golf coaching methods I've learnt a lot about the industry and what sort of different things and places there are to work and the skills you are going to need.

Subject 1 felt that the foundation course would 'play a major role' due to its focus on technique and the holistic approach used in teaching as opposed to being orientated towards safety. He also believed,

> Doing the course will help me to have a good range of knowledge and skills to learn and show me the level I have to be at to become a good coach.

Subject 2 believed the course had helped him to develop but also he had realised 'I can coach well'. He also felt that the focus on the performer in the foundation degree modules was more relevant than the content covered in the UKCC level 1.

Subject 3 shared some of the sentiments of subject 1 and 2 believing the mixture of theory and practical was relevant to his development. He also identified that doing research and having to go away and find out theories was more beneficial than simply just being given the information. Small class sizes and interaction with staff were also useful as well as relating theory to case studies and practical coaching experiences. Subject 4 felt that the course was going to be relevant in helping him to reach his goals and that he had enjoyed the course more than other learning experiences because 'it is more academic and interesting' – stimulating and engaging.

Summary and recommendations

The purpose of this study was to investigate formal golf coach education within the UK and to explore its ability to meet the needs of student beginner golf coaches. Our results suggest that currently the structure of formal golf coach education within the UK is not fully meeting the needs of student beginner coaches due to the poor quality of the learning experience, i.e. its lack of relevance. Specifically issues were highlighted with the UKCC level 1, whilst items of good practise from alternative learning episodes were highlighted by the participants.

This study also highlights a number of areas in which formal golf coach education in the UK might improve in order to better meet the needs of student beginner golf coaches. Firstly we note that more practical coaching experiences situated in 'real life' (i.e. coaching 'real' people as opposed to peer groups) is required. This would add greater quality to beginner coaches' learning experiences and would also prevent the 'reality shock' (Jones and Turner, 2006) of assuming an actual coaching position after undertaking formal training. Secondly the PGA as the organisation which delivers the UKCC on behalf of golf may need to review how their tutors deliver their course as this is impacting upon the quality of the learning experience for beginner coaches. For improvement, adopting a more guided learning approach would better allow coaches to reflect on their own experiences and current practise.

The content of the UKCC level 1 may also require some attention. Research suggests that procedural knowledge would be better developed later on the coach pathway and that there should be a greater focus placed upon declarative knowledge and philosophy at lower levels of the coaching pathway (Abraham and Collins, 2011). Coupled with this the suggestion is that level 1 coaches will likely be working with children yet there is no specific content for this other than the focus upon child safety. It is our suggestion that it would be better to include more pedagogical and child development knowledge at level 1 rather than leaving it until level 2/3 (or never delivering it at all).

Further supporting the notion of focussing on philosophy at earlier stages of the pathway, Kang and Wallace, (2005) noted that practitioner values will remain the same and that practice built on these values will be constant regardless of cohort stage or ability. Therefore there is a need to expose coaches at this formative stage to the importance of developing a sound philosophy of coaching rather than waiting until later on in the UKCC award scheme when it may be too late to make any meaningful change (Grecic and Collins, 2012).

The structure of formal qualifications in golf linked to the UKCC still follows a linear path. This is due to the PGA's interpretation of the pathway. Currently coach education in the UK recommends the offering of bespoke development pathways which recognise the different environments in which coaches operate and also catering to coaches with different aspirations. If the PGA were to offer different pathways for coaches they would be better able to meet the needs of aspiring golf coaches and make the qualifications more relevant and rewarding.

Conclusion

Finally, based on the results from this study the PGA may need to recognise the students' preferences for alternative sources of learning and make more effort to embrace these within formal golf coach education programmes. Although shadowing could be classed as an informal learning experience, including this within formal coach education would allow coaches to witness first-hand the coaching environment, coaching skills in practice, the value of professional training and potential career options. Job shadowing might also allow coaches to increase career awareness, help to model coaches' behaviour through examples and reinforce the link between formal learning and the broader requirements of a coaching role.

A further informal learning opportunity which could be integrated in to formal golf coach education is mentoring. Mentoring has often been cited in the literature as one of the most important ways of facilitating coaches' development (Bloom, 2002; Bloom *et al.*, 1998; Lyle, 2002). In this study subject 2 felt that having access to a number of different staff to question about his practise acted as an informal mentoring system which aided his development. An effective mentor can help a coach to develop his or her own coaching style and philosophy but also could provide guidance with sports-specific knowledge and performance-related knowledge which may be outside the scope of some formal learning opportunities which spend the majority of their time focussed upon safety of participants and basic 'what to coach' skills.

In closing this study has found that the entry level formal golf coaching award currently on offer is limited in its scope and content and requires a more coach-centred focus. Combining informal learning opportunities within its formal education programme could improve some of the shortcomings alluded to in this study and potentially provide a more 'fit for purpose' qualification for golf coaching.

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Appendix 1- UKCC Descriptors and Information

Coach Education Qualifications
The PGA, on behalf of the sport of golf, leads on the development of coach education and training. A full review of the existing coach education structure, following guidance from the quality standards of the UK Coaching Certificate, has led to the establishment of a new, coach-centered education system that meets the needs of coaches and, ultimately, players. The finished pathway (which is still somewhat under development) will include a range of qualifications to support novice to expert coaches based on the following descriptors:

What the qualified coach will be able to do:

Level 1
Assist more qualified coaches, delivering aspects of coaching sessions, normally under direct supervision.

Level 2
Prepare for, deliver and review coaching session(s).

Level 3
Plan, implement, analyse and revise annual coaching programmes.

Level 4
Design, implement and evaluate the process and outcome of long-term/specialist coaching programmes.

The Level 1 qualification is a basic introduction to coaching that enables volunteers or Assistant Professionals to help a more qualified coach (e.g. a Head Professional) deliver sessions to beginners. For example assisting in the delivery of a series of junior sessions in which the senior coach needs assistance due to large numbers in a group.

The qualifications at Levels 3 and Level 4 are aimed at ambitious coaches looking to expand their skills and knowledge on their development journey towards becoming an expert coach within their chosen field. A coach at Level 3 will be expected to be able to produce, deliver and evaluate holistic annual, periodised coaching plans for individual golfers. These plans will consider all aspects of that players' game, including the science behind golfing performance. The Level 4 qualification, (the pinnacle of the coach education pathway), will require coaches to adopt a critical approach to coaching and apply postgraduate research methods and thinking to their performance and behaviour as a coach.

Appendix 2 – Interview guide

1. **Why do you want to coach?**

Question	Probe	Aim – what are we interested in?
Why do you want to be a coach?	• Influence of a coach. • Current level of playing ability. • Significant experiences- critical incidents. • Meaning of the role of the coach to them. • How they see the game of golf.	Why they want to coach. Who has influenced them. What has influenced them.

2. **Goals in coaching.**

Question	Probe	Aim – what are we interested in?
What would you like to achieve within coaching in the short, medium and long term?	• Knowledge • Qualifications • Employment • Development • Recognition • Students	Where they see themselves in the future. How they plan to get there. What role coach education is going to play.

3. **How they intend to achieve these goals.**

Question	Probe	Aim – what are we interested in?
How do you intend to achieve these goals?	• Education. • Coaching awards. • Experience. • Formal vs informal education.	What do they believe will help them to achieve their goals? What significance do they attach to different types of learning/education available?

4. Opinions on coach education vs practical experience to date and its effectiveness in achieving coaching goals.

Question	**Probe**	**Aim – what are we interested in?**
Can you give me a history of your golf coaching career to date? Including any significant experiences and qualifications. Do you feel any of these have been more significant to your development than others? If so which one/s and why?	• Experience prior to Myerscough. • Experiences at Myerscough. • Qualifications eg level 1, tri-golf etc. • What was the most beneficial to you? • Which was the least beneficial?	What qualifications have been taken. What experience has been gained. The significance attached to these.
What aspect of your course of study have you most enjoyed? The practical or the theory and why?	• Individual modules. • Science or arts? • Preferred style of learning. • Formal vs informal. • Practical 'on the job' vs classroom based.	What they enjoy most. What they believe is most useful to them.

JQRSS: Acknowledgement Footnote

1. *Author's reflective comment*: This paper is developed from my dissertation submitted for a MA in Sports Coaching. The rationale for the study came from both my current job role and personal experience of coach education. I would like to thank David Grecic for his supervision of my dissertation and also for his guidance in writing and editing this paper. I feel that going through this process has increased my skill set as an academic and would encourage all students, both undergraduate and postgraduate to endeavour to have their work published.

2. *Author profile*: Tom is currently course leader for the Foundation Degree in Golf Coaching at Myerscough College. He is a PGA golf professional and graduated from UCLan in 2012 with an MA Sports Coaching and is currently a PhD student at UCLAN in the School of Sports Tourism and the Outdoors.

3. *Dear reader*, if this article has stimulated your thoughts and you wish to find out more about this topic, the authors can be contacted on: tdavies@myerscough.ac.uk or dgrecic1@uclan.ac.uk .

Reviewer's comments:
An interesting study with a good level of primary research activity undertaken which is visibly demonstrated in the paper. Some useful discussion on aspects of learning establishes a base in pedagogical theory for the practical field research that followed. The appendices are useful and informative also, although more data in the text might help to demonstrate a stronger phenomenological approach to the work. It is there, but could be stronger and more evident; towards being data led and theory emergent to generate new meaning from the data.

The reporting is on a comparison between learning experiences in governing body sport; golf and in formal education; a foundation degree, both in and around the topic of golf. The disparity between the two is always a healthy area for discussion and researching contentious issues. On the basis of this comparison some criticisms and recommendations are offered to improve the learning experience on the UKCC governing body award in the light of learning experiences on the college based foundation degree. A criticism of the study may be that the learning outcomes and purposes of a governing body course in sport are probably not the same as those of a degree course in education. That is, the foundation course uses the *vehicle of golf* to meet educational aims. A governing body qualification indicates a competency to take responsibility for others in practical settings, appendix one clearly states this, whilst the college course may indicate a level of intelligence to study golf, including the coaching of it. For example, it is feasible that a student might achieve a good degree classification in the study of golf coaching, but in actuality be quite a poor golf coach in terms of winners to his name. The products of these courses are critically different and may help the recipient to judge what counts as success in each domain. The comments in the data about the UKCC course being focused upon 'basic safety' and 'aimed at coaching children' may be appropriate for UKCC and also highlight these differences.

That said, there are clearly lessons that one course might learn from the other to improve the learning experience in golf and many other sports. This is a clear message from the paper and the intent of the authors seems to be one of improving that learning experience around golf coaching.