

EDITED BOOK:

Mentoring in coach education: The importance of role models, context and gender

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CHAPTER 8

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Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to explore the key mentoring experiences of Lois Fidler, a female international youth coach and UEFA Professional Licence (UEFA Pro) holder. In this chapter, we specifically focus upon Lois's mentee experiences in preparing to coach women's international youth football teams, as part of her learning journey. The chapter is divided into three sections. Section one briefly reviews contemporary literature in coach learning, coach education and mentoring in sports coaching. Section two examines Lois's mentoring experiences in practice. Section three outlines future recommendations for mentoring practice.

Review of Literature

Coach learning and coach education

Sports coaches learn in a variety of learning scenarios, including formal coaching courses (e.g. governing body awards), non-formal educational activities (e.g. workshops, conferences, clinics and seminars), and informal daily experiences (e.g. previous experiences as an athlete, practical coaching experience, interactions with peer coaches and athletes, and informal mentoring conversations; Nelson, Cushion & Potrac, 2006; Mallett, Trudel, Lyle & Rynne, 2009). Furthermore, coach learning situations can be characterised as mediated, where the learning material is prescribed to the coach (e.g. coach educator lead coaching certificates) or unmediated, where coaches decide what information they require to support their learning (e.g. personal reflection, coaching biography or seeking new information to solve practice dilemmas; Trudel, Culver & Werthner, 2013).

From an academic perspective, traditional mediated formal coach education courses have been subjected to a number of noteworthy criticisms by sports coaching scholars. For

example, researchers have cautioned against the production of 'paint by numbers' coaches (Jones & Turner, 2006), through programmes that 'train' or 'indoctrinate' coaches into set ways of thinking and practising (Nelson *et al.*, 2006), rather than developing critical and reflective thinkers (Jones & Turner, 2006). In addition, early research exploring formalised coach education programmes has been found to struggle with issues such as decontextualised learning (Cushion, Armour & Jones, 2003), as the programmes contradict candidates' personal experiences (Jones & Allison, 2014), encourages coach-learners to engage in 'studentship' to complete course assessments (Chesterfield, Potrac & Jones, 2010), and lacks impactful reflective practice (Leduc, Culver & Werthner, 2012), in a socio-cultural environment entrenched in gendered issues and authoritarian practices (Cushion, Griffiths & Armour, 2017; Lewis, Roberts & Andrews, 2018; Townsend & Cushion, 2017).

Unsurprisingly, coaches often report that unmediated informal learning situations that encourage social interactions with others are their most preferred and valued way to learn (Nelson, Cushion & Potrac, 2013; Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016; Wright, Trudel & Culver, 2007). Informal unmediated learning situations might include, for example, personal experiences as an athlete, observations of other coaches, self-directed learning utilising a variety of resources (e.g. books, online or social media), situated learning within the coach's own environment, critical discussions with a community of likeminded coaches and mentoring conversations with a more knowledgeable other (Cushion, 2006; Cushion *et al.*, 2003; Cushion & Nelson, 2013; Gilbert & Trudel, 2001; Griffiths, Armour & Cushion, 2018; Nelson & Cushion, 2006; Nelson *et al.*, 2006; Nelson *et al.*, 2013; Potrac, Nelson, Groom & Greenough, 2016; Stoszkowski & Collins, 2014; Wright *et al.*, 2007).

These approaches to generating coach learning form an important part of the 'complex, idiosyncratic mix of learning experiences' which support the traditional mediated formal coach

education pathways (Stodter & Cushion, 2014, p. 63). Indeed, our understanding of the social complexity of coach learning and the numerous theoretical considerations available to underpin coaching practice has significantly increased over the last decade (Allison, Abraham & Cale, 2015; Chambers, 2015, 2018; Jones, 2006; Jones, Potrac, Cushion & Ronglan, 2011; Lyle & Cushion, 2010; Lyle & Cushion, 2017; Nelson, Groom & Potrac, 2016; Potrac, Gilbert & Denison, 2013). Therefore, coach learning programmes require the space for quality interaction within an appropriate social context, for example participation, development or elite domains, aligned to the coach learner's career development stage, and allowing the coach to explore and develop their own biography, identity, philosophy and 'real-world' practice (Cushion *et al.*, 2003; Cushion *et al.*, 2017; Cushion & Nelson, 2013; Griffiths *et al.*, 2018; Jones & Allison, 2014; Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2004; Nelson *et al.*, 2013; Phelan & Griffiths, 2018; Trudel *et al.*, 2013; Watts & Cushion, 2017).

However, there is a dearth of useful work which explores how female performance coaches navigate their way through the coach education pathway and engage with a variety of knowledge sources, one of which is effective mentoring. The aim of this chapter is to go some way to addressing the dearth of useful work in this area, with a particular focus upon learning through elite female coach mentoring 'in context'. The following section will provide an overview of the field of contemporary mentoring practice.

Mentoring and career development

Mentoring occurs over a period of time and is often a mechanism used to support organisational change (Kram, 1985). Weaver and Chelladurai (2002, p. 25) suggest the process of mentoring is where a 'more experienced person (mentor) serving as a role model, provides guidance and support to a developing novice (protégé), and sponsors that individual's career

progress'. Mentoring has been widely acknowledged as an important educational approach that can play a significant role in an individual's career development and advancement within an organisation (Allen & Eby, 2010; Chambers, 2018; Fletcher & Mullen, 2012; Ragins & Kram, 2007). The role of the mentor is to provide career-related, psychosocial and role model support, and to share knowledge and experience which aims to guide mentee learning in context (Higgins & Kram, 2001).

More recently, there has been an increase in empirical scholarly work examining mentoring within the field of sports coaching (Jones, Harris & Miles, 2009). This is because mentoring has the potential to support coach learning in real-world situations (e.g. Bloom, 2013; Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke & Salmela, 1998; Chambers, 2015, 2018; Cushion, 2006; Griffiths & Armour, 2012; Groom & Sawiuk, 2018; Potrac, 2015; Sawiuk, Taylor & Groom, 2016, 2017). Mentoring within sports coaching assumes informal unmediated discussion, where a coach may seek out the advice of a more experienced mentor to assist with a practice dilemma or as part of a mandatory formal mediated mentoring meeting, often as part of an assessment support activity (Sawiuk *et al.*, 2016, 2017). Within the context of sports coaching, the 'practical wisdom' coaches gain from working *in practice* is often reported as being more popular than coaches' experiences of formal coach education (Stoszowski & Collins, 2016). As a result of working with others, coaches are exposed to contextualised traditions, habits, rules, cultures and practices (Cushion *et al.*, 2003; Merriam, 1983). In many formal coach mentoring programmes, which aim to develop coach learning, mentoring *in practice* often includes in-situ, episodic mentor observations of the mentee. However, even when coaches practise in their own environment, the assessment of the coach is still often aligned to the institutional agenda of the formalised coach education programme and mentoring scheme (Sawiuk *et al.*, 2016). This may include, for example, perceived coaching workforce

demographic needs (e.g. an increase in target populations), qualification targets (e.g. number of coaches holding certain awards), unrealistic assessment requirements (e.g. specific numbers of players involved within sessions, space requirements, systems of play and tactical decision making), notions of coaching effectiveness, prescriptive process models outlining the 'right ways to coach' and uncritical social reproduction (Cushion, 2006; Cushion *et al.*, 2003; Jones *et al.*, 2009; Sawiuk *et al.*, 2016, 2017). Therefore, the need to critically challenge existing formal mentoring programmes, even with in-situ coaching observations and assessments, remains an important issue within coach education to improve the *education* of coaches.

Gender and mentoring: implications for sports coaching

Within the context of sports coaching, the development journey for a female coach is far from unproblematic and equitable. For example, female coaches experience a lack of coaching opportunities, developmental support, meaningful coach education and guidance from Governing Bodies (GB), as well as experiencing masculine cultural and behavioural norms, within an environment which oppresses gender ideology (Lewis *et al.*, 2018; Norman, 2008, 2010). As a result, female coaches have reported a 'sense of being second best', where they are subjected to structural and practice inequality within the coaching profession (Lewis *et al.*, 2018; Norman, 2008, 2010). Thus, female coaches in positions of power and leadership are scarce and overall there remains an underrepresentation of women in the coaching workforce (Norman, 2008, 2010). Norman (2008) and Lewis *et al.* (2018) explain that the current coaching profession and system of education within the UK are 'failing women coaches' and they demand an 'avenue for change'. In particular, female coaches who aspire to work at the highest level are met with the additional challenges of access to elite coaching environments and the problematic 'sense of isolation' in their coach development journey

(Lewis *et al.*, 2018; Sawiuk & Groom, 2018). In addition, female coaches need to navigate their way through a gendered and racialised discourse in coach education and coaching practice, which positions these 'surviving' female coaches as 'othered.' This subsequently highlights the importance of high profile, visible female coaches and educator role models to aspiring female coaches (Harvey, Voelker, Cope & Dieffenbach, 2018; Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2016; Rankin-Wright, Hylton & Norman, 2017).

Indeed, mentoring as an educational support mechanism is not without its gendered challenges. For example, the early work of Kram (1985) highlighted the complexity of managing cross-gendered mentorships, if the organisation wishes to benefit. Specifically, areas which might need to be considered are the commonalities between the mentee and mentor, shared experience and the manner in which the mentee-mentor relationship is initiated (Ragins, 1997; Scandura & Williams, 2001). Moreover, Acosta and Carpenter (2012) outlined the importance of female role models in leadership and mentor roles for female mentees, which may positively impact female coach career development. Currently, there is a lack of female high-performance coaches in comparison to the influx of male coaches within women's sport (White, Schempp, McCullick, Berger & Elliott, 2017). A contributing factor might be the lack of females in positions of power or leadership who can offer same-sex mentoring, guidance and support (Wickman & Sjodin, 1997). This may play a significant role in the lack of high-performance female coaches within sports coaching contexts. Furthermore, particularly within sports coaching, there is a lack of empirical attention examining the importance of gender in mentee-mentor pairing, and how this may influence the quality, development and outcomes of mentoring relationships (Ragins, 1997). Indeed, the work of Lockwood (2006) highlighted that female mentees acknowledge the desire for more vocational support, psychosocial support and role modelling than males in mentoring relationships. Moreover, within the business context,

Gibson (2004) highlighted the importance for female mentees to have access to female mentors who are role models and are better able to simplify the translation of 'what works for me?', despite the fact that there are fewer women within these roles.

The following section provides an analysis of Lois's coach mentoring experiences as an elite coach, with the aim of illuminating the importance and effectiveness of different types of mentoring support on her learning journey.

Mentoring in Practice: International Youth Football

Mentee biography

Lois Fidler, a UEFA Pro and FA Elite Licence holder, has accumulated a wealth of coaching knowledge and experience over her 25-year coaching career. In addition to this, she has completed a BSc Sport Science degree at the University of Greenwich and an MSc Sports Coaching degree at Brunel University. Her previous roles have included FA Women's National Player Development Centre Manager, FA Women's National Coach for the England U17, Hampshire FA Technical Director, Southampton FC Technical Director, Associate Lecturer in High Performance Coaching at Southampton Solent University and FA Coach Mentor. As the U17s National Head Coach, Lois led the team to their first FIFA World Cup semi-final in 2008. Whilst Lois was working towards her UEFA Advanced Licence (UEFA A), and learning her 'craft' within the elite female pathway at a London-based Centre of Excellence (now Regional Talent Clubs), she was identified by the FA Female Coach Mentoring programme as a 'female coach with potential'. As part of the formal FA mentoring initiative, Lois had regular exposure to international football across all age groups, from the U15s to the England senior team, where her contextualised learning and development were transformational. As a

candidate on the FA Female Coach Mentoring programme, Lois was allocated two male mentors who provided in-situ support at her club.

Early experiences of mentoring: practice

I was allocated my first mentor, Walt (pseudonym). I didn't particularly enjoy it. I didn't really understand where I was at, which was understandable ... so I would go to meet him. Because of geography and accessibility it became quite difficult because he was based in east London and I was based in west London ... I'm not sure that was really the right fit. I was then allocated my second mentor, David (pseudonym), and I found it pressured, not very organic when you have someone coming into your environment intermittently to watch you and assess you. I found that tricky. He was probably more on my level, more patient, a little bit more less male; I hope I haven't just degenderised David there. He was a better fit for me. When I was working with Walt and David to try and deliver sessions, that are topic based at my club, this is just my opinion, coaching courses, I don't feel capacity built me to understand about coaching philosophy or playing philosophy and about the technical detail that goes with that. It's more the design of the session, so those topics and themes I don't think I truly understood them; 'coach a team to defend deep to counter attack' or something, it's just a title.

Contextual mentoring and the importance of role models: practice

Hayley and Melissa (pseudonyms) were two significant role models to me, but there were bits and pieces I loved, really loved and respected about both of them, love is

probably a strong word but admired, and it took me a while again to fathom that it's not about being the next Melissa or Hayley, it's about finding the best version of me in all of that ... Both Melissa and Hayley had considerably more experience than me. Melissa's emotional intelligence and authenticity as a leader is incredible, her ability to read the group, intuition, technical detail, tactical knowledge, her ability to anticipate challenge, ahhh, just off the scale, just incredible. Hayley's tactical knowledge, her balls, I have to say she's got balls of steel, she protected us a lot for a while, she did a lot for us, in terms of getting us involved and being in that position of power and influence is not easy in an environment which was pretty unforgiving. She's a fantastic coach, knowledgeable, and I respect the fact she believed and invested in me. I got to be exposed to Hayley and Melissa on a regular basis as a national assistant coach, that more informal feedback, regularly ... when I was on the road with the national team I was also learning about ways of playing, a formation, a strategy that made more sense in context of the titles I was given, for example 'defending from the front'. I was learning about defending from the front in the context of the under 19s defending from the front. But I was learning from Melissa and co about the international coaching and playing philosophy that was linked to that and the detail that came with it, and it made more sense to me, and I made mistakes but then I was able to have more time because I was with them 24/7 on the road, to actually sit down and unpick it with Melissa and the tactics board. I felt there was more patience and more opportunity for me to have that one-to-one time, that relationship with Melissa particularly. I didn't feel dumb by asking questions, when sometimes I do ... Melissa and Hayley were present, I spent a huge amount of time with them; because of the opportunities I had, I got to go on the road and spend time with them, in different capacities. It's bigger than just going to a pitch and watching someone emotionlessly

deliver a session, based on a topic. There was no context to it, coaches struggle in my environment to bring the curriculum to life. There is a difference between putting on a session and putting on a session that's for players and the coaches, to paint pictures and see pictures, and make decisions and bits and pieces that will impact. Those people, Melissa and Hayley, I got to see the session, I saw before the session, the problems, the games, the challenges in games, how we were going to solve the problem, the meetings before we went onto the pitch, the discussions, what was delivered on the pitch from a physical point of view. The way our information and feedback was framed, led, the meeting after the session, the detail on players, what next? Post-match briefings and their content.

I want to explore the word context again. The relationship and the context of what we were delivering and the emotions that are attached to it are grounded by that anchor which is 'you've got this group of players of which there are 18 who need to play in these 3 games or we have got 30 players or a broader squad or whatever and we have to take them on a journey to get to a point where we can qualify for this competition to give the players more exposure and give them the best chance of becoming a senior international'. There is that attachment emotionally to something that's bigger than you are, rather than a session in isolation. It also links to the journey you're on, why am I doing this? The what, the why the where and the how. I felt like I was part of something bigger than 'I've got to pass this course by being able to deliver this session'. For me personally I found I benefited from having that attachment; if I can better understand the playing philosophy and the technical detail that I can impart on these players and they can more effectively function as individuals and a team to

provide a performance to give us the best possible chance of achieving whatever it is we want to achieve, then I know I'm heading in the right direction.

Early experiences of mentoring: theory

Lois problematised travel/geography, mentor-mentee matching and '*topic based*' in-situ visits, and commented on the nature of the gendered characteristics of the mentor. Importantly, the work of Norman (2008) highlighted the issues surrounding the development of female coaches within the UK (e.g. dominant masculine culture, not being adequately educated or supported, a lack of coaching opportunities, inappropriate female support structures) which contribute towards a gendered and unequal coaching structure. Thus, these environments can isolate the female coach, which creates a lack of confidence and demotivation to continue career development (Norman, 2013). Therefore, the formal mentoring programme can provide female coaches with much needed guidance and support. However, Lois discussed the *dysfunctional* and functional nature of mentee-mentor matching in the formal programme, which at times has largely been linked to availability rather than suitability (Fletcher, 2000). As a result, Lois experienced some *difficulty* during her mentoring relationship with *Walt*, for example, different personalities, work style and accessibility (Scandura & Pellegrini, 2007). Similarly, Ragins and Kram (2007) reported that the most effective mentoring relationships are built on similar interests or demographics, for example, gender, age, experience or commonalities. Therefore, if the mentee-mentor matching process is carefully considered, these mentorships are likely to have a stronger functional starting point within the initiation process. Resultantly, sports governing bodies must consider where the organisational aim coincides with the mentee-coach's personal ambition, which in turn will

inform the allocation of right mentor and appropriate support at the right time in an attempt to satisfy the mentee's needs.

Additionally, Lois outlined how the institutional agenda and promotion of intermittent '*topic based sessions*' contributed to a lack of authenticity, detached from coaching philosophy and contextualised consideration. These findings reflect the work of Sawiuk *et al.* (2016) where the assessment-driven focus of the mentoring in practice had a negative impact on the mentee's bespoke learning and fulfilment.

Contextual mentoring and the importance of role models: theory

As part of the formal mentoring programme Lois was exposed to the international environment. 'Coaches of influence' Hayley and Melissa were described as informal mentors who were important role models. Lois acknowledges the importance of female role models within the international coaching environment and their accompanying attributes, although it took time to find the best version of herself. Additionally, the mentors in the multiple mentor framework possessed different skills which allowed Lois to access different types of knowledge from different mentors, for example Melissa's emotional intelligence and Hayley's tactical knowledge. Lois further discussed the importance of contextualised and authentic exposure to mentor role models. The mentoring relationship Lois had with Melissa and Hayley offered extensive amounts of time, with one-to-one bespoke support, open and honest in nature, built on mutual trust and respect, which Bloom (2013) and Colley, Hodgkinson and Malcolm (2003) state are key components of successful mentoring. In addition, these relationships, within the context of working towards a common goal, encompassed an emotional, caring element. The power of effective mentoring in this case study was learner-centred situated

learning. Chambers, Templin and McCullick (2015) stated 'effective mentoring relationships are reliant on context' (p. 13), although it is important to note that coaches can perhaps become socialised into a methodical culture, unwritten rules and expectations within an environment (Cushion, 2015), which at times can restrict personal coaching pedagogy. Lois highlights the significance of mentoring within the international environment from her role models, and acknowledges her emotional investment in the goal of 'long-term' player and personal development. The mentoring process here allowed Lois the opportunity to frame and re-frame her contextual experiences and develop wisdom-in-action (e.g. during pre-session briefings, practical delivery, post-session briefings and strategy meetings). This provided Lois the opportunity to receive support and guidance through contextualised interactions with her mentors (Cushion, 2015). The mentors were, within context, able to provide appropriate and realistic challenges with guidance and support, which enabled Lois to constantly evaluate her coaching performance. As a result, the articulation of professional knowledge and international coaching experience provided an effective environment for situated learning.

Bandura's (1976, 1986) social learning theory suggests that modelling might consist of the psychological matching of cognitive skills, attitudes, actions and patterns of behaviour between a person and an observing individual. With this in mind, Lois described her mentors Hayley and Melissa as '*significant role models*', which is considered an important element of the identification phase of mentoring. Role models within organisations can contribute to career success and individuals achieving their goals (Gibson, 2004, p. 268), although little research exists that explores the concept of role models and their contribution to personal development within mentoring relationships. Gibson (2004) defined role model as a cognitive construction based on the attributes of people in social roles that an individual perceives to be similar to

himself or herself to some extent and desires to increase their perceived similarity by emulating those attributes (p. 134).

Lois describes the attributes of both role models, Melissa and Hayley, whom she *'really loved'* due to the quality of developmental support provided, and of the learning and self-actualisation (Higgins & Kram, 2001). Bandura's (1976, 1986) work outlined the importance of modelling in learning. In the international coaching environment. Lois specifically identified the importance of seeing the actions of others (e.g. *'I got to see the session, I saw before the session, the problems, the games, the challenges in games'*), rules of behaviour (e.g. *'emotional intelligence and authenticity as a leader is incredible, her ability to read the group, intuition, technical detail, tactical knowledge, her ability to anticipate challenge'*), and guidelines (e.g. *'ways of playing, a formation, a strategy, playing philosophy and the technical detail'*). Thus, this exposure and insight provided Lois with the confidence she was *'heading in the right direction'* on her coaching journey.

Recommendations for Mentoring in Practice

This chapter concludes with a number of considerations for effective and contextualised mentoring in practice, although it is important to acknowledge that every coach's development journey within a high-performance environment is shaped by a unique, personal experience (Mallett, Rynne & Dickens, 2013):

- This chapter illustrates the disadvantage of intermittent and decontextualised mentoring for the learning experience of a coach mentee. Lois highlighted a number of issues, which included assessment-driven mentoring and a lack of contextual understanding. They failed to take into account the coach/club philosophy and thus lacked meaningful

impact upon coach development. Therefore, GBs deploying formal mentoring programmes must consider how they can provide access for female coaches to high-performance coaching environments. This might, for example, include opportunities for shadowing senior coaches, acting as an assistant coach, study visits to high-performance clubs and national teams, and increasing the number of female coaches that are able to access international training camps.

- GBs should consider how to overcome some of the current challenges female coaches face within coach mentoring programmes and initiate a strategic workforce drive to increase the number of qualified female coaches, female mentors and female coach educators. This chapter highlights the importance of female role models to Lois's learning, motivation, inspiration and process of discovering self-concept (Gibson, 2004), framed within the role of an international youth performance coach. Therefore, formal mentoring programmes must provide access to different types of mentors who can positively impact the mentee's ability to engage with the self-actualisation process and learning, and provide inspiration. This recommendation follows the guidance of Gunderman and Houk (2017) who suggest female role models allow other females to 'imagine themselves there', which can open career opportunities (p. 231).
- GBs should carefully consider the process of mentee-mentor matching within formalised programmes. Perhaps the construction of informal 'meet and greets' would provide a space where powerful mentorships are formed on a foundation of mutual identification and value (Armour, 2015). Furthermore, mentoring relationships *in practice* are most effective when they are sensitive to individual and contextualised factors such as gender (Darling, Bogat, Cavell, Murphy & Sánchez, 2006).

- Finally, this chapter highlights the importance of effective mentoring relationships which encompass high levels of psychosocial-career support, where mentors use idiosyncratic mentoring pedagogy (Chandler, Kram & Yip, 2011). Therefore, within the context of sports coaching the mentor must consider the wider club or organisational philosophy, strategy and tactical focus, which will aid the mentee to draw meaningful contextual conclusions for their own practice.

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