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The educational journey of paddlesport coaches

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Formal coach education programmes, driven by the national governing bodies of individual sports, have for many years been regarded as essential in the development of competent, qualified coaches. However, more recent opinion suggests that such coach education is actually “low impact” in comparison to the hours individual aspirant coach’s spend coaching, being coached or participating (Rossi & Cassidy, 1999: *Learning and teaching in physical education*. London: Falmer). It appears the literature is, in part, implying that experiential learning has greater significance over formal education programmes. The aim of this study was to investigate the educational journey of a sample of paddlesport coaches by addressing why coaches chose to enter formal coach education programmes.

With approval from the university’s ethics committee, seven paddlesport coaches participated in individual semi-structured interviews having provided written, informed consent. Each interview explored two general areas: (1) the initiators of entry into formal coach education and (2) the ongoing nature of their educational journey as a coach. Each interview was transcribed verbatim and the data was analysed using the principles of constant comparative analysis as described by Cote’ et al. (1993: *The Sport Psychologist*, 7, 127 – 137).

The findings indicated that the coaches identified two key factors which initiated their entry into formal coach education: (a) desire to develop their coaching skills and (b) seeking professional certification. The most commonly attributed initiator was that of seeking professional certification. The findings also confirmed that all the coaches highlighted the dominant impact post-course experiential learning played in the overall development of their coaching competencies.

The findings support previous assertions that experiential learning plays a crucial contribution within the developmental journeys of coaches. The findings indicated that the extrinsic relevance that certification could lead to future employment opportunities formed a more common incentive for entering formal coach education, in contrast to the intrinsic relevance of developing personal coaching knowledge and skills.

The findings offer significant concerns for the future development of coach education programmes, suggesting if coaches do not perceive the course as an effective pathway to developing their coaching competencies the ultimate success of such educational programme could be compromised. Future research exploring the development of credible and truly holistic approaches to coach education must explore cultural constraints that surround coach’s initiation into coach education programmes.