

1 **An investigation into coach developers' theories in practice, learning and development**
2 **on a Continuing Professional Development course**

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12
13 **Abstract**

14 Despite the importance of the coach developer in supporting coach learning, there is a limited
15 understanding of how they develop. In response, this study explored the theories in practice of
16 twenty-three English coach developers who undertook a continuing professional development
17 (CPD) course. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and
18 observations of coach developers’ practice and engagement on the course. The data were
19 analysed using a phronetic-iterative approach, with Argyris and Schön’s ideas on theories in
20 practice, mostly espoused theories and theories-in-use, providing the primary heuristic
21 framework. The findings identified how before the CPD course the coach developers
22 articulated espoused theories but as the course progressed there was a move to theories-in-use.
23 This was due to their (re)constructed understanding of learning and working environment. The
24 findings are discussed in light of how the CPD course, and tutors’ pedagogic approaches,
25 influenced the coach developers’ knowledge and understanding. Based on these findings, it
26 seems there is much to gain from supporting coach developers with a deconstruction and
27 reconstruction of theories in practice.

28
29 **Keywords:** espoused theories, theories-in-use, learning, coach development, coach education,
30 coaching.

38 **Introduction**

39 The coach developer, the umbrella term (e.g., Cushion, Griffiths & Armour, 2019, Stodter &
40 Cushion, 2019) for a number of associated roles such as coach educator, tutor, facilitator and
41 trainer (Trudel, Culver & Werthner, 2013, International Council for Coaching Excellence,
42 2014), is a prominent role in coach learning (Cushion et al., 2019). Many National Governing
43 Bodies (NGBs) have employed coach developers to support coaches' learning and
44 development in formal (i.e., coach education courses) and informal learning contexts (i.e.,
45 interaction with other peer coaches). As these roles have become more established, research
46 interest has also increased, as exemplified by a special issue in the International Journal of
47 Sport Coaching dedicated to the coach developer (Callary & Gearity, 2019). What has become
48 clear from this work is for coach developers to most effectively support coaches, they need a
49 comprehensive knowledge and understanding of learning and pedagogy (e.g., Stodter &
50 Cushion, 2019, Leeder, Russell & Beaumont, 2019).

51 While there are some similarities in the knowledge requirements and function of a
52 coach and coach developer (i.e., sport-specific, pedagogical, interpersonal and contextual
53 knowledge), it's been acknowledged that coach developers require different knowledge and
54 skills compared with coaches if they are to effectively support coach learning (Abraham et al.,
55 2013, Cushion et al., 2019). This is an important point given that many coach developers have
56 transitioned into this role from serving as coaches and so carry with them their coaching
57 biographies (Cushion et al., 2019, Stodter & Cushion, 2019). These biographies have served
58 as powerful determinants of how coaching takes place and are likely do the same for how coach
59 development is implemented. For this reason, the development of the required pedagogical
60 content knowledge and understanding of learning is neither simple nor straightforward (Stodter
61 & Cushion, 2019). To address this, coach developers would appear to need specific training to
62 support them in developing the necessary knowledge and skills for this role.

63 The rise of a coach developer workforce across sports and contexts has seen an increase
64 in professional development opportunities (e.g., UK Coaching’s ‘Training the person in front
65 of you’ and the ‘Post Graduate Certificate in Coach Development’ that the participants of this
66 study undertook). However, little is known about coach developers learning and development
67 on continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities (Stodter & Cushion, 2019). The
68 purpose of this study began as an exploratory investigation into a CPD course that twenty-three
69 English coach developers undertook, and their pedagogical knowledge and its application in
70 working practice. Argyris and Schön’s ideas on theories in practice were then introduced
71 during the data analysis stage, discussed in the theoretical framework, and make a significant
72 contribution in understanding how coach developers use their respective theories of learning
73 in their own coach education delivery and support. This research makes an original contribution
74 by investigating coach developers’ engagement with a formal, longitudinal, professional
75 development programme aimed to increase their knowledge and understanding of learning and
76 its application in their working practice.

77

78 **Methodology**

79 *The Continuing Professional Development programme and participants*

80 As researchers we positioned ourselves as interpretivists, therefore we explored the coach
81 developer’s knowledge and understandings achieved through the multiple, subjective, and
82 socially constructed considerations of their development (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The CPD
83 course was designed by a UK Higher Education University, but in collaboration with a National
84 Governing Body (NGB) with the aim of enhancing coach developers’ understanding of
85 learning and awareness of implementation into working practice. The learning outcomes for
86 the Postgraduate Certificate (PG Cert.) in Coach Development course were: (1) critically
87 examine personal practice and resources to expose uncertainty, generate new insights and ways

88 of working, (2) critically review and refine understanding of formal and informal coach
89 education curriculum to plan, intervene, and support course development and coach learning,
90 and, (3) conduct an extended enquiry in an area of interest and generate knowledge, or a
91 product based on knowledge, that has clear, justifiable value to coach developers. This research
92 focuses on two separate cohorts that enrolled on the CPD course, which in total included
93 twenty-three coach developers (see Table 1). The coach developers on the CPD course studied
94 three modules and came together twelve times for taught sessions and workshops over a period
95 of twelve months delivered by two Higher Education University tutors. Between face-to-face
96 contact time the coach developers were set tasks by the course tutors to complete (e.g., reading
97 journal articles and providing a written interpretation). Each of the modules had assessments
98 that the coach developers had to complete (e.g., a written piece on a topic area that the
99 individual coach developer wanted to explore about their working practice).

100 The participant coach developers in this research were employed by one NGB. The
101 coach developers, who held a minimum of a level three coaching qualification had the
102 responsibility of educating and supporting coaches through coaching qualifications that
103 prepared coaches to coach in grassroots sport. As part of a coach developers' role with the
104 NGB, they had the option of undertaking continuing professional development (CPD).
105 Therefore, in addition to their day job supporting coaches, these coach developers chose, as
106 part of their role, to undertake the PG Cert. for their own CPD. All the PG Cert. participants
107 were given information leaflets and asked if they would like to be involved in this research
108 study. All of the coach developers agreed to take part and gave their informed consent. For
109 fifteen of the participants, the PG Cert. was the first and only formally recognised higher
110 education qualification studied (see Table 1). The coach developers who enrolled on this CPD
111 highlighted a mix of reasons for registration including the course being recommended by
112 colleagues and/or they had been requested to do so by senior staff. From the twenty-three

113 coach developers, five of these participants were purposively sampled to investigate further
 114 their experiences of the course and its influence on their working practice. These five
 115 participants were selected as they had all been employed as a coach developer at the NGB for
 116 six months or more and also were deemed to have a clear understanding of their job role. The
 117 purpose of this sampling was also to discover, understand, and gain insight from the
 118 participants deemed most able to inform the research question(s).

119 Although the research project gained ethical approval by a University institution and
 120 could be seen as a static event, it was important to consider ethics throughout as “a continuous
 121 process” (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, pp. 206). Due to the complexities of ethics as a process in
 122 the field it was necessarily to engage in situational ethics (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Therefore,
 123 as researchers we were flexible and open to studying ethical issues from the coach developer’s
 124 perspective. For example, it was important during data collection to check with individual
 125 coach developer’s that they were comfortable with the information provided being included,
 126 especially regarding their employees. To try and protect the coach developer’s identity no
 127 reference to their seniority is included, and pseudonyms replace names.

128

129 Table 1. Coach developer’s biographical information

Participant and cohort	Gender	Years since last formal education	Highest coaching qualification	Highest level of formal education
CD A, Cohort 2	Female	>5 years	Level 3 qualified coach	College
CD B, Cohort 2	Male	>5 years	Level 3 qualified coach	College
CD C, Cohort 2	Female	>5 years	Level 3 qualified coach	College
CD D, Cohort 2	Male	<5 years	Level 4 qualified coach	College
CD E, Cohort 2	Male	<5 years	Level 3 qualified coach	University Postgraduate
CD F, Cohort 2	Male	>5 years	Level 3 qualified coach	College
CD G, Cohort 2	Female	<5 years	Level 3 qualified coach	University Undergraduate
CD H, Cohort 2	Female	>5 years	Level 3 qualified coach	University Undergraduate
CD I, Cohort 2	Male	>5 years	Level 3 qualified coach	College
CD J, Cohort 2	Female	<5 years	Level 3 qualified coach	University Postgraduate
CD K, Cohort 1	Male	>5 years	Level 3 qualified coach	University Undergraduate
CD L, Cohort 1	Male	>5 years	Level 3 qualified coach	College
CD M, Cohort 1	Male	>5 years	Level 3 qualified coach	College
CD N, Cohort 1	Female	<5 years	Level 3 qualified coach	College
CD O, Cohort 1	Male	>5 years	Level 3 qualified coach	College
CD P, Cohort 1	Male	>5 years	Level 3 qualified coach	University Postgraduate

CD Q, Cohort 1	Male	>5 years	Level 3 qualified coach	University Undergraduate
CD R, Cohort 1	Male	>5 years	Level 4 qualified coach	College
CD S, Cohort 1	Male	>5 years	Level 3 qualified coach	School
CD T, Cohort 1	Male	>5 years	Level 3 qualified coach	University Undergraduate
CD U, Cohort 1	Male	>5 years	Level 3 qualified coach	College
CD V, Cohort 1	Male	>5 years	Level 3 qualified coach	College
CD W, Cohort 1	Male	>5 years	Level 3 qualified coach	College

130

131 *Methods and procedures*

132 As interpretivist researchers our intentions were to understand the meanings that the coach
 133 developers attached to their own and other’s interpretations of the CPD course and working
 134 practice. Data were then collected over a 16-month period using multiple methods, which were
 135 focus groups, observations, semi-structured interviews, and a review of relevant documents.
 136 The combination of methods allowed a move “from basic description to analysis at increasingly
 137 abstract levels, concentrating on contexts, conditions and consequences” (Stodter & Cushion,
 138 2014, pp. 67). All twenty-three coach developers took part in the focus groups and five of these
 139 participated in observations and interviews.

140

141 *Focus groups*

142 Focus groups were used so coach developers could collaboratively share feelings and
 143 perceptions of teaching and learning, and the CPD course. The semi-structured focus groups
 144 involved all twenty-three participants but were split into smaller groups of between 4-6 coach
 145 developers. A total of 8 focus groups ranging between 94-127 minutes and totalling 440
 146 minutes took place during the research project.

147

148 *Field note observations*

149 As highlighted by Tsangaridou and O’Sullivan (2003) the only way to determine a participant’s
 150 theories-in-use may be through observations of them in practice. Therefore, the five
 151 purposively sampled coach developers were observed on three separate occasions as they

152 delivered their coach education courses to learning coaches in situ. Observations also took
153 place of the CPD course and the two Higher Education teaching tutors (e.g., CPD tutors)
154 pedagogic approaches on four separate full days of delivery. The purpose here was to
155 understand how the course was conducted and how the CPD tutors interacted with the coach
156 developers.

157

158 *Interviews*

159 Not everything is observable, for example, the theory that determines coach developers'
160 educational practices, such as the feelings, thoughts, and intentions (Patton, 1990). Therefore,
161 one to one semi-structured interviews with coach developers were used to provide an
162 understanding of how they constructed pedagogic strategies to educate coaches, through the
163 development of knowledge and understanding of learning whilst studying on the CPD course,
164 given their individual interests, purposes, and past experiences (Sparkes, 1992). Five of the
165 twenty-three coach developers, the same who were observed delivering coach education, took
166 part in semi-structured interviews ranging between 35-90 minutes and totalling 339 minutes.

167

168 *Documents*

169 The PG Cert. in Coach Development CPD learning resources (e.g., module booklets, key
170 readings, and teaching content) were examined. The learning resources designed and
171 implemented by the coach developers to help support their coach education delivery (e.g.,
172 teaching content and handouts) were also reviewed. The analysis of the CPD documents
173 sensitised the researchers to the course and reviewing the coach developers' resources helped
174 when constructing the semi-structured interview questions (e.g., Why was that learning
175 resource designed in such a way?). The review of learning resources included discussions, in
176 regard to the content and purpose of the course, by the first, second, and third authors.

177

178 *Data collection process*

179 *Stage one:* Review and discussion of the PG Cert. learning resources.

180 *Stage two:* Focus groups with all the coach developers' pre-delivery of the CPD course.

181 *Stage three:* Observation of two whole days including taught sessions delivered by the two
182 Higher Education teaching tutors (e.g., CPD tutors).

183 *Stage four:* Focus groups with all the coach developers' mid-delivery of the CPD course.

184 *Stage five:* Observation of two whole days including taught sessions delivered by the two
185 Higher Education teaching tutors.

186 *Stage six:* Focus groups with all the coach developers' post-delivery of the CPD course.

187 *Stage seven:* Observations of five different coach developers on three full days of their coach
188 education delivery. These five coach developers learning resources were also reviewed.

189 *Stage eight:* Semi-structured interviews with the five coach developers who were observed
190 delivering coach education.

191

192 ***Data Analysis***

193 A phronetic-iterative approach to data collection and analysis was adopted. The research
194 questions for the study were guided by the programme learning outcomes of the CPD course.

195 However, the empirical data were used to drive the process of thematically analysing the data
196 (Tracy, 2018, pp. 65). Member reflections (Smith & McGannon, 2017) were undertaken with

197 participants and across the research team at the end of each round of focus groups and the
198 individual interviews. Here, additional data and insight were generated by acknowledging and

199 exploring with participants the existence of contradictions and differences in the interpretations
200 of different research team members across and within each focus group. During each stage of

201 the data collection process, the research team met regularly as critical friends to offer different

202 perspectives and reflexively acknowledge multiple ‘truths’ (Smith & McGannon, 2017, pp.
203 117), and to consider appropriate theoretical frameworks. This led to agreements and
204 disagreements in deliberation between the research team members which informed an initial
205 descriptive ‘primary cycle coding’ or ‘open coding’ process (Tracy, 2018, pp. 65). The initial
206 basic codes developed through this process included, for example, ‘coach developers
207 articulated theory not matching articulated practice’, ‘the course helping coach developers
208 understand learning theory’, ‘CPD tutors creating a challenging but safe environment’ and
209 ‘important to understand the organisation’ and determined which data were important and how
210 the primary codes were developed in the process of ‘secondary cycling’ (Tracy, 2018, pp. 66).
211 A secondary coding cycle was then conducted. Here, tentative links to a variety of possible
212 theoretical interpretations were debated further (Tracy, 2018) as the research team considered
213 a range of theories related to the findings through an emic and etic reading of the data (Sparkes
214 & Smith, 2014). This iterative process allowed the research team to build in theoretical probes
215 and prompts to inform new lines of inquiry into the second and then subsequent round of focus
216 groups, semi-structured interviews and field note observations at each round of data collection
217 (Tracy, 2018). At this point, readings of the data with more focus on the relevant explanatory
218 frameworks pertaining to Argyris and Schön’s (1974) Theory in Practice were undertaken
219 concurrently between the research team (Tracy, 2018).

220

221 **Theoretical Framework: Argyris and Schön’s Theory in Practice**

222 Argyris and Schön’s (1974) Theory in Practice was used as a heuristic device to help further
223 understand the professional development of coach developers attending a formal CPD course.
224 Relatively few empirical studies (c.f. Stodter & Cushion, 2019) in sports coaching have
225 explored coach education or coach developers learning incorporating Argyris and Schön’s
226 ideas. However, their ideas around espoused theories and theories-in-use are particularly useful

227 for analysing how a person understands theory and how it can influence their articulations of
228 learning, but also how it underpins and aligns with their practice. According to Argyris and
229 Schön (1974):

230 “...when someone is asked how he would behave under certain circumstances, the
231 answer he usually gives is his espoused theory of action for that situation. This is
232 the theory of action to which he gives allegiance, and which, upon request, he
233 communicates to others. However, the theory that actually governs his actions is
234 his theory-in-use, which may or may not be compatible with his espoused theory;
235 furthermore, the individual may or may not be aware of the incompatibility of the
236 two theories” (p.7).

237
238 Explicitly understanding and when appropriate separating espoused theories and theories-in-
239 use gives means for maintaining some kinds of consistency of practice within certain
240 boundaries in a particular setting and situation (Argyris & Schön, 1974). For example, Stodter
241 and Cushion (2019) from tracking three coach developers delivering formal coach education,
242 identified an epistemological gap between the espoused theories (i.e., what people say they do)
243 and the theories-in-use (i.e., what they actually do). Similarly, in education, teachers have been
244 identified as having a gap between theory and practice (Houchens & Keedy, 2009). However,
245 some education studies (e.g., Chen & Ennis, 1996, Tsangaridou & O’Sullivan, 2003) suggest
246 a consistent alignment between teachers’ articulated theories and their practices. The purpose
247 of the coach development course under review for this study was to increase the coach
248 developer’s knowledge and understanding of learning and its application into practice; thereby
249 supporting coach developers to move from espoused theories to theories-in-use.

250 As espoused theories are somewhat an image of self, moving to theories-in-use requires
251 an alignment between an individual’s beliefs and what they want to show in practice. While
252 espoused theories are explicit, idealised explanations of the world, theories-in-use are
253 experientially developed and refer to actions in context (Eraut, 2000). Argyris (1990, 1991)
254 identified that the gaps between espoused theories and theories-in-use were caused by
255 inadequate training or organisational control by superiors. This separation between espoused

256 theories and theories-in-use is a problem in any professional practice by potentially limiting
257 learning opportunities, as well as being a source of uncritical acceptance and reproduction of
258 knowledge, understanding, and practice (e.g., Cushion et al., 2019, Leeder et al., 2019, Stodter
259 & Cushion, 2019). A person's espoused theories then may or may not match their observed
260 theories-in-use in practice. Argyris and Schön's (1974) ideas around the importance of
261 understanding the organisations context including the espoused theories and theories-in-use
262 would seem useful when investigating coach developers understanding of learning and
263 alignment to their working practice. The association between articulated theory and practice
264 needs exploring in greater depth, specifically how coach developers learn to underpin their
265 practice in a socially impacted world.

266 It is important to highlight that according to Argyris and Schön (1974):

267 "...theories are theories regardless of their origin: there are practical, common sense
268 theories as well as academic or scientific theories. A theory is not necessarily
269 accepted, good, or true; it is only a set of interconnected propositions that have the
270 same referent- the subject of the theory" (p.5)

271
272 However, theories are mediums for explanation, prediction, or control (Argyris & Schön,
273 1974). Despite theories being a deep set of underlying beliefs, they are still situationally
274 dependent on the specific practice and organisational setting. Argyris and Schön (1974) went
275 on to define "a practice is a sequence of actions undertaken by a person to serve others, who
276 are considered clients" (p.6). All people operate in practice based on a number of different
277 theories and whether conscious of it or not they control their outcomes in various situations.
278 Argyris and Schön (1974) highlight how a theory of practice has interconnected theories of
279 action that specify practice for certain situations. Theories of practice can then help describe
280 coach developers' pedagogical processes and knowledge about learning linked to
281 implementation of behaviour for dealing with different situations and organisational settings.

282 Argyris and Schön (1974) indicate how their ideas could be used to "understand the
283 nature and learning processes of social units larger than one individual" (p.137), in this case,

284 the CPD course the coach developer participants took part in. When looking at learning it is
285 important to recognise and include professional practice, professional institutions and
286 professional learning environments when investigating the development of individuals by
287 comprehending what underpins and guides their practice, as well as their understanding of
288 theory with practice. Argyris and Schön (1974, pp. xi) “defined learning in terms of outcomes
289 and processes”. In which, individuals are ultimately responsible for the impact of the
290 environment because they learn from personally constructed experience, and how people
291 experience the environment depends on how they construct it. Through this constructed
292 learning process, it is important for learners to confront defensiveness when testing theories-
293 in-use, as defensive routines such as “thoughts and actions used to protect individuals’, groups’,
294 and organizations’ usual way of dealing with reality” (Argyris, 1985, pp. 5) are “anti-learning,
295 overprotective, and self-sealing” (Argyris, 1990, pp. 25). In summary we believe that Argyris
296 and Schön’s ideas on Theory in Practice that include espoused theories and theories-in-use,
297 outlined above, have much to offer to the critical examination of coach developer’s learning,
298 understanding of theories on learning, and implementation into practice.

299

300 **Results and Discussion**

301 The purpose of this study was to investigate the CPD of two National Governing Body coach
302 developer cohorts who undertook a PG Cert. in Coach Development and to also understand
303 their pedagogical knowledge and application to practice in their associated roles. The three
304 themes identified from the iterative analysis of the data and theorisation are now presented.
305 The three themes were (a) the coach developers recognising and understanding what theories
306 of learning did and did not actually inform their working practice, (b) the CPD tutors pedagogic
307 approaches supported and challenged the coach developers, and (c) the importance of
308 understanding the organisation and working environment of the coach developers to influence

309 learning and practice. Each theme is explained to demonstrate how the coach developer's
310 involvement in the CPD course connected to their understanding of learning and coach
311 education delivery.

312

313 *Coach developers understanding their espoused theories and moving to a theories-in-use*

314 The majority of coach developers on the CPD course seemed to recognise, with tutor support,
315 how their initial espoused theories did not align with their theories-in-use. However, as coach
316 developers worked through the course, they seemed to develop a more advanced understanding
317 of learning theories, and thus moved towards better aligning espoused theories and theories-
318 in-use.

319 "So, has it altered your practice?" (Interviewer)

320 "It's made me more aware of the depths you could go to, definitely... I feel I have a
321 grasp on what learning is" (CD O, Cohort 1, focus group interview)

322

323 "I feel the course has certainly allowed me to recognise what I do when delivering
324 [coach education courses]. I understand why I do what I do" (CD R, Cohort 1, focus
325 group interview)

326

327 "I suppose we used the term constructivism before the course without real good
328 knowledge on the matter and how it transfers" (CD A, Cohort 2, focus group
329 interview)

330

331 This alignment between theoretical understanding and practice gave the coach developers
332 perceived increased confidence in their coach education delivery. For example, at the end of
333 the CPD course, CD E and CD G highlighted that they now understood learning in more depth,
334 and it supported how they taught on their coach education courses:

335 "Challenge our thinking" (CD E).

336 "OK. So, challenge your thinking, in what way?" (Interviewer)

337 "Questioning why we do what we do" (CD E)

338 "I think we're all quite comfortable with our view on what learning is and how our
339 thinking now applies. We've all been practitioners in our own field for a long time.
340 Not just defining what you do and maybe get a consolidation of what you do, but also
341 maybe improving your practice as well. Certainly, the course, has helped my
342 understanding of learning and how that applies to my delivery [coach education]"
343 (CD G, Cohort 2, focus group interview)

344

345 After the coach developers on cohort one had completed their CPD course they communicated
346 how they felt at the beginning they were “reflecting at a surface level” (CD P, Cohort 1, focus
347 group interview) which moved to a more “critical level” (CD L, Cohort 2, focus group
348 interview). According to Argyris and Schön (1974), spending time thinking about, and
349 describing theories-in-use is a necessary step in developing these.

350 Coach developers started to reconstruct their theories-in-use through “specifically
351 designed tasks, open discussions and challenging questions” (Cohort 1 CPD course,
352 observation field note). As part of this exercise, coach developers recalled pseudoscientific
353 theories that have shown to negatively interfere with their coach education practice (Bailey,
354 Madigan, Cope & Nicholls, 2018, Stodter & Cushion, 2019). These ideas had been developed
355 through uncritical acceptance of information, ideas, and practice methods coach developers
356 had observed, or had been imposed on them from a particular sports club, the NGB, or well-
357 respected individuals in the field:

358 “Before this course my delivery on courses was based on what I have seen. What I
359 have taken part in” (CD N, Cohort 1, interview)

360
361 “I have been delivering courses with experienced coach developers and liked the
362 questions they ask and then used them. I also implement what and how they [National
363 Governing Body] want” (CD N, Cohort 1, interview)

364
365 “I suppose before this [CPD course] I haven’t actual thought in detail about what
366 guides how I deliver. In the past I just picked up on stuff and I used that. I thought it
367 linked but looking back I am clearer now” (CD H, Cohort 2, interview)

368
369 The tasks coach developers were engaged in, as highlighted above also enabled them to bring
370 their tacit knowledge to a greater level of consciousness. Tacit knowledge is what is displayed
371 in practice but cannot be put into words (Nash & Collins, 2006). Linking to theories-in-use
372 about learning, coach developers were practicing in a particular way but could not clearly
373 articulate their practice. When the coach developers formulated their theories-in-use, on the
374 CPD course, by making explicit their tacit knowledge they were able to follow through in
375 practice clearly what they wanted to, underpinned by their own and the organisations theories-

376 in-use. Having opportunities to explicitly understand and state their theories-in-use allowed
377 “conscious criticism” (Argyris & Schön, 1974, pp. 14). Understanding theories-in-use and
378 being able to reflect and compare alternative practices associated with this understanding,
379 suitable for a specific organisation and situation, was expressed as being important for their
380 development.

381 A consequence of focussing time identifying theories-in-use in turn led to a raised
382 awareness of “constructivism” and constructivist approaches to teaching and learning, as
383 observed:

384 Two CPD tutors and twelve coach developers are sat on chairs in a circle taking turns
385 to discuss the question ‘what is learning?’ which is written on the whiteboard at the
386 front of the room (Cohort 2 CPD course, observation field note)

387

388 “I couldn't answer this is my view of learning. I can give you some sort of waffle
389 and spiel about it, but I wouldn't have a finalised view of it.

390 Whereas now I could probably start to talk about making people curious about the
391 topic for them to go and explore more, and then as a, link it to my role as a coach
392 developer is then how do I spark individuals’ curiosity to go, how does it fit to you,
393 what’s your rationale, why are you doing it? Why are you doing this and not doing
394 this for that particular team, person, whatever it is?” (CD H, Cohort 2, interview)

395

396 After “constructivism” (Cohort 2, observation field note) and a “constructivist approach”

397 (Cohort 2, observation field note) were discussed by the coach developers, time was given by

398 the CPD tutors to interrogate this topic in more detail and generate better understandings that

399 had been developed previously:

400 “It was all about papers and learning theories and stuff in discussions. That taught us
401 much more about how, with us all working in the organisation for so long and
402 different times and frames... I’ve been in it for a while, now, and I’m trying to get
403 away from using that word, ‘brainwashing’. I’m not, it’s not brainwashing, but I’ve
404 potentially just gone along with stuff without knowing the full extent as to why,
405 previously, whereas this has now given me a thing to look at and go. Okay, I agree
406 with that for x, y, and z reasons, and I disagree with that, now. So, just that
407 underpinning of learning and how that’s done as the organisation and how I deliver
408 it as a tutor” (CD G, Cohort 2, observation and interview)

409

410 Coach developers suggested this developed their ability to adopt pedagogy underpinned by

411 ‘constructivism’. The coach developers who had completed the CPD course expressed how they

412 delivered coach education in a particular way (e.g., naïve constructivism [Cushion, 2013]) but
413 until now did not understand or appreciate the theoretical underpinning to their pedagogy:

414 “It is constantly being challenged to have an opinion, and back it up and weigh things
415 up. Don’t take stuff on surface value. I have equated it to being a detective, trying
416 to seek out the truth if you like. So, if there was one consistent message that was
417 coming back throughout the whole course, that was it” (CD I, Cohort 2, Focus Group
418 Interview)

419
420 Once the coach developers better understood their theories-in-use, they expressed how it
421 allowed them to follow through in practice more clearly and with greater confidence. Also,
422 when the coach developers were questioned by learners on their coach education courses, they
423 could give clearer explanations on specific topics (e.g., learning theory) than they felt they could
424 at the beginning of their CPD course:

425 “It really helps understanding where it has come from, I feel now more confident if
426 asked any questions about the information we have to deliver” CD N, Cohort 1,
427 interview)

428
429 By developing a deeper understanding of learning theories and academic concepts (e.g.,
430 behaviourism and constructivism), the coach developers suggested an increase in their
431 willingness to adopt and try different approaches when educating adult learner coaches:

432 “This course has given us a lot of different, extra knowledge, if you like, of the
433 benefits and trade-offs of different types of learning.” (CD M, Cohort 1, interview).

434
435 “You alter your style based on the content you’re delivering, the learners that are in
436 front of you, but I’ve been fixed to one style.” (CD N, Cohort 2, focus group
437 interview).

438
439 The alignment of the coach developers practice theories and clarity of their developed
440 theories-in-use was articulated as beneficial to their coach education delivery and when
441 supporting individual learners on their courses. As a consequence of the CPD course, coach
442 developers expressed feeling more competent in supporting and developing coach learning.
443 As Argyris and Schön (1974) suggest “to be effective, a person must be able to act according
444 to his theories-in-use clearly and decisively, especially under stress” (p.27).

445

446 *Pedagogy to identify practice theory: Understanding the ‘how’ and ‘why’*

447 The CPD tutors were an integral part in helping coach developers articulate their espoused
448 theories and align these closer to theories-in-use. This happened through tutors challenging but
449 also supporting coach developer’s pedagogic intentions, as observed through field notes:

450 Six coach developers and one of the CPD tutors are sat around in a circle. They take
451 it turns to discuss about how they create a learning environment suitable for their
452 coach education learners. The CPD tutor asks questions such as: “What do you
453 mean?” and “How do you that”. One of coach developer is asked a question they time
454 to think and then respond (Cohort 2, field note observation)

455
456 For Argyris and Schön (1974) it is important for a learning environment to produce ‘valid
457 information’ about each participant’s espoused theories, theories-in-use, and any
458 inconsistencies within each theory that guides practice. Continual confrontation could be seen
459 as risky, but on this CPD course it was transformative with coach developers recognising their
460 espoused theories and then developing their theories-in-use. This finding relates to the recent
461 work of Stodter, Cope and Townsend (2021), who identified the integral role a tutor plays in
462 enabling theory to be connected to practice. A shift towards a collaborative approach to
463 education was beneficial to the development of the coach developers’ knowledge and their
464 understanding and alignment with practice (Cope, Cushion, Harvey & Partington, 2020). The
465 independent nature of tasks and assessments encouraged freedom and autonomy of thought,
466 but support from CPD tutors was provided when dealing with uncertainty, and a somewhat
467 “fear of failure”.

468 “One of the assignments that we did we've identified that we wanted to improve on,
469 so I suppose that's where that came from. We did quite a few self-assessments looking
470 at our own understanding of learning. It was good that it was about me and my role,
471 what I do. It meant something and had a purpose” (CD O, Cohort 1, focus group
472 interview)

473
474 The CPD tutors were viewed by the coach developers as being ‘effective’ when encouraging
475 the cohorts self-learning and development using reflective tools and portfolios linked to
476 practice in a relaxed and flexible environment through appropriate and individualised

477 assessment methods. For example, one of the modules on the CPD course gave the coach
478 developer workforce opportunity to develop learning platforms to support themselves. The
479 learning platforms developed were perceived to enhance the ability of workforce members to
480 effectively engage with and educate their adult learners on coach education courses:

481 “We did quite a few self-assessments looking at different personality traits and that
482 sort of thing and that's where the Johari window came from. I just thought I'd try and
483 get a little bit of 360 feedback from some of the people. And I guess when it came in
484 with some of the words, and my role as a mentor, and especially they mentioned
485 adults forced to talk a lot around being empathetic, building the core, being
486 approachable, so I suppose when some of those words didn't come back, that was
487 probably a bit of a reality check for me in terms of what the mentoring stuff was
488 probably about. I think everybody comes into these mentoring jobs as coaches, and
489 we get very little support in terms of what is actually mentoring and what does
490 mentoring look like, so that's where that Johari window came from, off the back of
491 that, I suppose it was just about me making a more conscious effort when I was out
492 with mentors and working with them, that it wasn't just totally work driven” (CD N,
493 Cohort 2, observation and interview).

494
495 The way the CPD course was delivered, and the assessments designed for the individual meant
496 the coach developers could “maximise free and informed choice... the more an individual is
497 aware of the values of the variables relevant to his decision, the more likely he is to make an
498 informed choice” (Argyris & Schön, 1974, pp. 88). The freedom given to coach developers’
499 learning, alongside challenging and supporting pedagogy helped their understanding and
500 development of theories in practice. As Argyris and Schön (1974) discuss “we try to
501 compartmentalize- to keep our espoused theory in one place and our theory-in-use in another,
502 never allowing them to meet” (p.33). During the CPD course, coach developers were pushed
503 into an uncomfortable place to reflect and deconstruct their espoused theories and reconstruct
504 theories-in-use:

505 The course tutors are really probing with questions about the theories that underpin
506 their specific behaviours in practice. The course tutors are probing CD X about why
507 he asks questions. What is his purpose? Why does he use that method? (Cohort 2
508 CPD course, field note observation).

509
510 Discussing directly observable categories and using valid information enabled the coach
511 developers to confront inconsistencies in their theories-in-use and incongruities between

512 theories-in-use and espoused theories. As Argyris and Schön (1974) highlight “this creates a
513 predisposition toward inquiry and learning” (p.91).

514 “We as people [coach developers] have started to unpick why we do what we do.
515 Delve a bit deeper into how much of an impact we have on learners or candidates or
516 people that we touch or work with throughout our day to day” (CD F, Cohort 2, focus
517 group interview).

518
519 These discussions, in a safe environment with working colleagues and the CPD tutors allowed
520 alignment of articulated understandings about learning and what coach developers actually
521 implemented in practice. However, it is important to note here that if only the espoused theories
522 are reviewed the theories-in-use will stay the same, so both together need critical consideration.
523 The identification of espoused theories and the (re)construction of theories-in-use in a learning
524 environment that includes collaboration, challenge, inquiry, and trust has the potential for more
525 ‘effective’ working practice (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

526 CPD tutors’ practices also created an environment that allowed an ‘openness’ and
527 feeling of being comfortable sharing insecurities with colleagues to flourish. This reduced
528 coach developer’s defensiveness, which means there was a tendency to help others, have more
529 open discussions, exhibit reciprocity, and feel free to explore different views and express risky
530 ideas. In the course of helping individuals unfreeze their defensive reasoning they learn to think
531 more rigorously and productively (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Also, authenticity, autonomy, and
532 internal commitment will tend to increase in an open and comfortable learning environment
533 (Argyris, 1971). Linking back to the sports coaching literature, poor self-awareness,
534 epistemological gaps, and folk pedagogy identified in empirical research (e.g., Partington &
535 Cushion, 2013, Stodter & Cushion, 2019), and in this research implicit espoused theories
536 regarding learning, could reduce, then pave the way for an opportunity to (re)construct
537 theories-in-use that clearly support practice. To support this process, nurturing relationships of
538 trust, collaboration, experimentation, and risk taking between the coach developers and also
539 the CPD tutors meant the CPD course became a learning environment of inquiry, rather than a

540 target of change. Therefore, the CPD course had the capacity for the coach developers to
541 achieve a greater understanding of their theories in practice (Houchens & Keedy, 2009). As
542 similarly identified in this research, to support learner’s development it is important to help
543 “individuals gain insight into the conditions under which their defences as well as their
544 theories-in-use inhibit and facilitate their growth” (Argyris & Schön, 1974, pp. 39). The way
545 the CPD tutors challenged coach developers to understand more deeply their implicit theories
546 and then to create opportunity to develop an understanding of theoretical frameworks, all based
547 on critiqued day-to-day experiences, was seen as effective CPD (Abraham et al., 2013).

548

549 *Understanding the organisational context*

550 The CPD tutors had experience of working for and with the coach developer’s NGB
551 organisation and understood the job demands of the coach education delivery workforce. This
552 understanding allowed the CPD tutors to shape academic content and assessments to day-to-
553 day practices of coach developers. It also enabled a “positive working relationship” and
554 “respect” to create a learning environment where knowledge was accepted:

555 “They get it... they know what we can do on courses. That helps” (CD N, Cohort 1,
556 interview)

557

558 “I think it’s really important that [the CPD tutors] know the [organisation] but also
559 that they are not directly apart. We have great chats about what we can and cannot
560 do. It’s a great place to discuss openly” (CD N, Cohort 1, interview)

561

562 The CPD tutors also seemed to keep up to date with NGB policy changes and senior
563 management decisions regarding coach education in the organisation. It is important that “the
564 interaction of theory-in-use and the behavioural world has a political as well as an experimental
565 dimension” (Argyris & Schön, 1974, pp. 27). Due to the CPD tutor’s understanding of the
566 organisation and workplace, alignment between the individual coach developer’s theories-in-
567 use with other colleagues and most importantly the hierarchy (e.g., National and/or Regional

568 Coach Development Managers) around them was possible, and these discussions took place on
569 the course:

570 “If everyone is singing off the same hymn sheet it helps to implement what you want
571 now it has been confirmed [on the CPD course]” (CD N, Cohort 1, interview).

572
573 The CPD course had brought coach developers together to discuss and better understand
574 organisational policy. In this way, this course may have gone some way in responding to
575 Dempsey, Cope, Richardson, Littlewood, and Cronin’s (2020) calls for a consideration of how
576 policy is cascaded down and filtered through an organisation.

577 One of these policies, as the coach developers understood it, was centred on the
578 underpinning of coach education with constructivist principles of learning. Coach developers
579 suggested a clear articulation of “academic concepts” (e.g., theories-in-use), in particular
580 learning theories, enhanced the coach education provision they delivered for their adult
581 learners (e.g., knowing how to learn by understanding the theory):

582 “I’ve done it and then we, learnt about learning and different learning theories and
583 you go, oh, I do that, but then taking it to another level” (CD M, cohort 1, interview)

584
585 “They [coach developer’s organisation] use constructivism. The thing for me is,
586 actually, now I have a better understanding of what constructivism is. Some of the
587 stuff I’ve read is around how education’s taking it. It’s probably not, kind of, how it
588 actually was initially with us at the front delivering and the learners just copying. So
589 that helps me understand a little better about what I’ve been doing and why some
590 candidates might be getting a little bit confused” (CD C, Cohort 2, interview)

591
592 It was important for the coach developer to become aware of both espoused theories and the
593 tacit knowledge of the organisation that govern their behaviour to then (re)construct their
594 understanding aligning their theories-in-use with those of the organisation. Being able to align
595 the theory, learning, and practice within coach education helps garner this learner centred
596 approach to understanding which advocates and allows for meaningful engagement with their
597 learning experiences and supports their professional development (Paquette and Trudel,
598 2018a). Such careful consideration must be acknowledged in relation to coach education
599 programmes, their focus and strategies to impact learning and empower coaches with

600 autonomy (Paquette and Trudel, 2018b) whilst obtaining perceptions and experiences needed
601 to continue to refine, shape, and also construct delivery for coach developers (Paquette, Trudel,
602 Duarte and Cundari, 2019). As Argyris and Schön (1974) suggest “understanding how we
603 diagnose and construct our experience, take action, and monitor our behaviour while
604 simultaneously achieving our goals is crucial to understanding and enhancing effectiveness”
605 (p.xxxii). Therefore, creating opportunities for coach developers to take time to deconstruct
606 their espoused theories, the organisation they work for and also practice is an important process
607 to undertake (Dempsey et al., 2020). From here, coach developers can (re)construct theories-
608 in-use that align with practice and the organisation.

609

610 **Conclusion**

611 This study aimed to understand how twenty-three coach developers reconsidered their practice
612 theories on a formal CPD course. Challenging and understanding coach developers practice
613 theories, how they are constructed through experience, and then understanding theories-in-use
614 associated with learning perceived to help them in their workplace. The CPD tutors
615 understanding of the coach developer’s job and their workplace proved valuable in supporting
616 their development. This occurred first, by recognising the espoused theories and then, second,
617 understanding theories about learning that they wanted to underpin their practices. In this
618 research, although complex, active, and individualised, the pedagogic approach taken by the
619 CPD tutors helped coach developers understand learning and gain the confidence needed to
620 carry this into their delivery of coach education. Moving forwards, it is important that coach
621 developers periodically examine and critique their theories-in-use and consider how these drive
622 their interactions with coaches. This continued intentional self-reflection and analysis of
623 assumptions about coaching practice, coach education, and their organisation will support the
624 coach developers understanding and implementation in future working practice.

625

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