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Abstract

Coach education and development programmes are central to the professional development experiences of sport coaches. Typically, these programmes are structured, sequenced in a linear pathway, and present an opportunity for certification which can be a pre-requisite to practice and/or employment. Increasingly, as learning becomes viewed as part of a coach's lifeworld, versus simply as a means to an end, education and development provision is beginning to reflect this. This article introduces and explores the Coach Development Institute Programme, part of the Premier League's Elite Coaching Plan, which seeks to improve the quality of football coaching in English boy's/men's football by engaging coaches in a two-year work-based learning opportunity. Built around a core of project-based learning and assessment, coaches are supported as they examine a series of meaningful performance problems in their unique practice environments. Through this work we demonstrate how theories, concepts, and principles from the adult education and assessment *as* learning literature might work as they are applied in a coach education and development context. With such sparsity of case-based examples like this within the peer-reviewed literature, we intend that our contribution could inform, promote dialogue, and raise questions about authentically supporting coaches beyond a minimum standard of practice.

Keywords: coach education, coach learning, work-based learning, lifelong learning, coach assessment

Introduction

The wide-ranging work of sport coaches is both important and valuable to society, yet often highly complex and challenging (International Council for Coaching Excellence, 2013). Recognising this, professional development opportunities for sport coaches are now commonplace (Griffiths et al., 2018). These span from: individual mentoring (e.g., club/organisation based); cross-industry study visits; ad-hoc, often online, workshops (e.g., led by a perceived expert); small cohort-based courses (e.g., on a narrow, specific, subject area); broader, more comprehensive, programmes of study (e.g., led by national governing bodies [NGB] and universities); and immersive, tailored, development programmes (which is where we situate our work). Importantly, coach education and development is no longer exclusively characterised by the formalised, structured, and closed-circle (Piggott, 2012) learning opportunities (Nelson et al., 2006) which have been subject to a litany of criticism in the peer-reviewed literature over the last two decades. For instance, it is argued that these formalised learning opportunities can be superficial/decontextualised (Cushion et al., 2003; Williams & Bush, 2019), fail to meet the needs of coaches (Callary et al., 2018; Schlesinger & Weigelt-Schlesinger, 2012) and are often overly centralised/inflexible (Hertting, 2019). Since football is a sport which receives significant attention from researchers (e.g., it can be well-resourced, holds considerable public interest, is a global game), historically the coach development provision has arguably received a greater volume of this criticism than other sports (e.g., Chesterfield et al., 2010; Hertting, 2019; Watts & Cushion, 2017).

Of all of the professional development provision outlined above, most widely recognised still, is medium- to long-term coach learning programmes which can be organised with the intended outcome of developing coaches from novice to expert (i.e., through levels), improving knowledge and understanding of a specific population (i.e., athletes with additional needs), or improving professional practice in context/domain (i.e., community sport coaching, youth sport coaching, and high performance). Coaches are commonly required to apply, enrol, and attend either a local or centralised venue for a set period of time. Increasingly, coaches are also visited in their coaching

context, with additional remote learning opportunities included (Chapman et al., 2020). In all cases, following some form of ongoing, multi-point, or end-point assessment, the experience typically culminates in certification, qualification, and/or a licence to practice (McCarthy et al., 2021; McCarthy et al., 2022).

Consistent with the lifelong learning movement (Aspin & Chapman, 2000; European Commission, 2020; Gelpi, 1984; Illeris, 2003), increasingly interfacing with a professionalisation[1] agenda in sport coaching (Lara-Bercial et al., 2022; North et al., 2019; Taylor and Garratt, 2010), is the idea that coach education and development opportunities have become progressively spread out through one's career (Bagnall, 1990). Noted in the work of Deek et al. (2013), once viewed as episodic learning opportunities, these programmes are now being situated within the totality of an ongoing coach learning narrative or "a continual state of becoming better coaches" (p. 38). This subtle shift in the sector has drawn more resource, from more places, and greater attention is being paid to many of the recommendations made in the coach education and development research (i.e., to increase authenticity/realism, situatedness, and relevance). One example of this is the Coach Development Institute Programme (CDIP), designed and delivered by the Premier League, validated and awarded by Leeds Beckett University (UK), which will be the focus of this Practical Advances article.

Despite all of the above, surprisingly, concrete examples of contemporary coach education and development programmes are relatively scarce within the peer-reviewed research literature. Where examples are offered they can either be dominated by theory (e.g., Paquette & Trudel, 2018),

[1] Although this Practical Advances article is not seeking to contribute to the discussion about sport coaching and professionalisation, we do recognise that this is the backdrop against which the work is inevitably set. Therefore, we acknowledge the position statement by the International Council for Coaching Excellence (ICCE) (Lara-Bercial et al., 2022) and propose that our work plays a part in the substantial gains being made to coach education, development, and employment pathways. We adopt the view in this, and other (e.g., North et al., 2019) research outputs that professionalisation equates to continuous improvement; yet continuous improvement is contingent on the mobilisation of resource (e.g., personnel, expertise, finance). We contest that the work showcased through this article can be considered as a good example of achieving positive outcomes by doing this in a collective and collaborative manner (noting the partnership between Premier League and Higher Education partner in particular) (Kjær, 2019; Lara-Bercial et al., 2022).

focus on a narrow feature of the specific programme such as reflective practice (e.g., Downham & Cushion, 2020; Knowles et al., 2005) or problem-based learning (e.g., Jones and Turner, 2006), or represent more typical/common formal learning opportunities (e.g., Jacobs et al., 2015). Quite simply, there is a paucity of case-based studies which platform, promote, and propose what 'good' looks like in coach education and development programmes. Therefore, the aim of this work is three-fold. First, we intend to share a contextually rich case study describing (what) and explaining (how and why) the Coach Development Institute Programme (CDIP) was developed. Second, three years into delivery, we distil key insight into a practice-focused framework of a project-led approach to integrated learning and assessment in coach development programmes. Lastly, we reflect on the trade-offs and returns in using such an approach (implications), offering recommendations to colleagues who are involved in designing, delivering, and resourcing coach development programmes. On this point, it should be noted, we do not present this account as a gold standard nor suggest that it is adopted blindly without detailed consideration and consultation. Merely, we hope that this stimulates further ideas, dialogue, and evolution. Ultimately, we hope that this encourages other organisations to share similar examples.

Research Context

This case study relates specifically to the education and development of professional coaches in the professional boys'/men's football pathway in England. The interaction and interdependencies amongst the football stakeholders in England is complex. There are six key stakeholders in English professional football; the include The English Football Association (FA) (NGB), the Premier League (top league in England, consisting of 20 Clubs), the English Football League (Championship, League 1, and League 2 - consisting of 72 Clubs), the League Manager's Association (manager's union), the League Coaches Association (coach's union) and the Professional Footballer's Association (player's union). The *combined* efforts within this stakeholder group span grassroots to professional football across the boys/men's, girls/women's, and para-formats of the game. However,

responsibility for (at the time of writing) the girls/women's game rests with the NGB, not the Premier League.

For further context, as a member association of UEFA[2], English Football is required to observe the minimum criteria for coach education and development as set out in the UEFA Coaching Convention (UEFA, 2020). This is an approach designed to align and improve coaching standards across Europe for the benefit of player development, and the development of the game as a whole. UEFA endorses four main levels of coaching licences – UEFA C, UEFA B, UEFA A, and the UEFA Pro-Licence. There are also specialist qualifications such as the UEFA Advanced Youth Award (UEFA AYA). As the national governing body, The FA have the mandate from UEFA to be the deliverer of these coaching licences. In the boy's/men's professional game, holders of certain licences become eligible for specific roles as an acknowledgment that they have reached a minimum standard of coaching practice. For example, in order to become eligible to coach in a boys'/men's football academy the individual needs to possess a UEFA B licence and a UEFA AYA (O'Gorman et al., 2021). In the first-team space, all Premier League Head Coaches/Managers are required to have a UEFA Pro-Licence.

Problem Situation

Although the recognition of a minimum standard of coaching practice across European Football is a noble and commendable approach, the status of UEFA qualifications in the English game was not actively encouraging positive attitudes toward lifelong learning within the coaching population. The UEFA licences were seen as the *end point* of development – something to aspire to in their own right, even though they recognise only a minimum standard of practice. Further, we could argue that they were driving the wrong developmental behaviours in the coaching population because of their part in role eligibility, as gatekeepers to employment (Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2011; Lewis et al., 2018). Coaches were often found to be 'badge collecting' in order to achieve career

[2] The Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) is the governing body of European football and convenes 55 member organisations, of which the English Football Association is one. Part of their role, and broad remit, is to improve the quality of football coaching across the continent. As such they share some responsibility for coach development policy, resource/funding, research, and programmes.

progression and little continuous development and evolution was seemingly occurring in coaching quality following the achievement of UEFA qualifications.

Of course, this is not unique to football and football coaches, the issue of linear pathways which encompass levels and minimum standards, among other sports, has been recognised as problematic for some time. Of large NGBs, specifically, Piggott (2012) highlights the common assumption that "coaches acquire knowledge and status as they graduate from one 'level' to the next on the route to 'enlightenment'" (p. 547). While there is a case to be made for progression through stages of expertise (Lara-Bercial et al., 2017), Turner et al. (2012) note the impact that changes in contextual conditions has on the requirement to revisit, revise, and redevelop areas of expertise. This seems to be particularly important in the "complex and volatile working environments" (Roberts & Kentta, 2019, p. 403) that exist in professional football (e.g., undertaking multiple roles, roles with large remits, employment instability, and high turnover within roles).

In an attempt to address this, the Premier League designed a strategy, the Elite Coaching Plan (ECP), to continually enhance the quality and perception of coaching in the English game. While it is beyond the scope of this Practical Advances article to outline the strategy in full, it represents a five-year plan a to develop a "world-leading coaching development system" in the English professional boys/men's game. The ECP has the following goals: (1) developing excellence at every step of the coaching pathway for the betterment of player development, (2) normalise a diverse and inclusive coaching workforce (e.g., by supporting the transition of people from identified under-represented groups (Black, Asian, mixed heritage, men and women) into full-time role within English football), (3) develop a population of coaches with a high degree of professional expertise, (4) target coaches with high potential and accelerate their non-linear progression, (5) provide the highest quality, most individualised development possible and (6) enhance collaboration across all football stakeholders to align and maximise the support to available to coaches.

Tentative Solution

In recognising an opportunity to support the professional development of football coaches beyond minimum standards, directly within their role (versus achieving a qualification in order to access a role), and nurture positive attitudes toward lifelong learning, the Premier League created the Coach Development Institute Programme (CDIP). Evolved from earlier coach development interventions, designed in 2020, CDIP represents a collection of cohort-based two-year football coach development experiences where participants are engaged in a unique work-based learning opportunity (Occhino et al., 2013; Rynne et al., 2006) with an English professional football club academy (from the Premier League, or English Football League[3]). Aligned with ambitions in the ECP, cohorts are defined as: Elite Coach Accreditation Scheme (ECAS), for all coaches with high potential; Professional Player to Coach Scheme (PPCS), former professional players with black heritage; and the Coach Inclusion & Diversity Scheme (CIDS), all coaches from under-represented populations – including all coaches that are men with non-white heritage and all women. Coaches are recruited in a coordinated (between the Premier League and club) open-application selection process, accessible to all coaches from the populations previously described who hold a UEFA B qualification. Numbers vary, but typically between 30 and 40 coaches begin the programme each year, starting in August. For the duration of the programme, they are paid a fixed salary as part of their placement in the football club, and all fees associated with the programme are fully funded by the Premier League; there is no immediate cost to bear for the coach.

As a result of the programme, there is an intention that candidates become established as skilled, motivated, and self-directed lifelong learners on a journey to coaching expertise. While central to/underpinning the development programme is a project-led framework which directs coaches' efforts and attention, there is a wraparound series of learning opportunities which are designed to be immersive, high-stretch, and role-relevant. These include three face to face 'content'

[3] This constitutes 92 professional football clubs in England. While 20 participate in the Premier League, England's top division, the remainder participate in the English Football League (EFL) Championship, EFL League One, or EFL League Two. As part of a Premier League funding commitment, they support coaches across all four professional leagues.

workshops, six virtual 'content' workshops, and one industry conference, each year. Alongside these, coaches will engage with bi-monthly support meetings (including key personnel outlined in the next section), cohort-led support meetings (driven by cohort need), and study visits (driven by individual need). We believe that this model for coach development, where both the context (workplace) and coaches (individual resources) are, to a great extent, the curriculum, is positioned on the bleeding edge of early-stage changes to the sector. Working directly with the coach and their performance problems is an andragogical method of coach development which we predict will become increasingly common over time.

Providing some broad parameters, the programme has six intended learning outcomes which are listed in Table 1; these are written to be wide-ranging and enabling. With the aim of recognising and rewarding process and progress relative to the outcomes, while considering their broader portfolio of qualifications and experience, coaches are able to achieve to a Higher Education Diploma (DipHE) in Professional Football Coaching from Leeds Beckett University (UK) as an outcome of the experience; there are some parallels here with the work of Kjær (2019). It is a requirement of the qualification that coaches dedicate more than 600 hours per year to study on the programme, although this is almost always surpassed due to the work-based nature of the learning opportunity. The first author is central to the programme design and ongoing enhancement, while the second author plays a critical role in systems-level design, policy, and stakeholder management.

Table 1

CDIP learning outcomes (LO)

LO	By the end of this experience, it would be expected that each coach:
1	has developed their knowledge and understanding of the game and is able to apply a range of game-related principles to bring about desirable development and performance outcomes with their players and teams.
2	is able to recognise and engage with the wide variety of stakeholders and support functions within a football club to facilitate the delivery of coaching programmes.
3	is able to better understand their practice as a 'role model' coach, and learner, and to identify goals and methods of becoming more effective in both.
4	has increased their strategies to be able to create desirable outcomes when working with players, teams, and colleagues.

5	can identify how bio-psycho-social characteristics does and will allow them to better understand their current and future players and support their football and holistic development.
6	can reflect on learning opportunities to review personal and institutional beliefs and goals about own and player development, to inform progress towards being a visible role model for English coaching during and beyond the programme of study.

Over the duration of the programme, coaches will produce a number of outputs which are intended to have an impact on, and influence in, their immediate coaching environments, club/organisational context, and/or the broader football landscape. Each output provides the coaches with an opportunity to make progress against one or more of the programme learning outcomes, indicated in parentheses below. Adopting a project-led approach to professional development (defined in detail within the next section), informed by the research literature (e.g., Bell, 2010; Papanikolaou & Boubouka, 2010; Sart, 2014), coaches will take the opportunity to immerse themselves within four meaningful and authentic coaching issues over two years. These four projects (LO1 – LO6, Table 1) may be isolated and independent, or connected and a continuation of one another. Nevertheless, each project is instigated through a professional discussion, where relevant colleagues (i.e., from the club, Premier League, and university) convene around the coaches' initial project proposal with the goal of further developing, refining, and deepening project ideas.

At the end of each year coaches will produce a written reflective account (LO3, LO6, Table 1) describing, explaining, and making sense of a series of critical incidents/moments of surprise. This activity is both informed and framed by the vast body of research literature concerned with practitioner reflection (e.g., Fisher, 2003; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Schön, 2001; Stoszkowski & Collins, 2014a; Vangrunderbeek et al., 2022). Also, at the end of each year, coaches will share a summary of findings from both projects undertaken in that year (LO2, Table 1), with an appropriate audience, to be determined by the coach. The intention here is that coaches generate interest in their work, extend their influence, and clearly articulate their contribution.

Underpinning all of the above is a project-led approach to coach development which, while becoming increasingly popular, is still relatively un-explored in our field. Notwithstanding contributions from Hay et al. (2012), McCarthy et al. (2021) McCarthy et al. (2022), and McCarthy (2022) there is also scarcity literature focused on coach assessment. Through this work we extend knowledge and understanding on both fronts. First, we offer a framework for designing and delivering authentic and embedded project-led coach development experiences (see Figure 1). Second, we demonstrate how a broad and inclusive assessment *as* learning (McCarthy, in press) strategy can be adopted as a feature of coach development work. By doing so, we intend to raise an awareness of alternative futures, and invite colleagues from across the sector to adopt and extend these ideas in their coach development work.

A Project-led Framework for Coach Development

Responding to the problem situation outlined in the previous section, a review of the literature was undertaken to identify features of 'good' professional development for sport coaches. While it is not the goal here, in this Practical Advances article, to describe the search strategy, we were guided by a number of key concerns. First, we became familiar with common criticisms of coach education and development programmes and explored the recommendations. Second, due to the nature of our task, we examined the adult education (andragogy) literature. Third, we explored the broader educational research to gain a greater understanding of assessment, recognising that there is little available in the coach education and development domain specifically. Table 2 captures and organises some of the many ideas with which we moved forward to begin the design and delivery of CDIP; these are not exhaustive but do point to many of the underpinning concepts.

Table 2

Concepts underpinning the design and development of CDIP and a short description of how they were used.

Concept	Description
Meaningfulness (Knowles, 1980; Knowles et al., 2020)	It is expected that coaches are most interested in learning about things that are immediately

	meaningful; for example, aid them in overcoming a specific, urgent, performance problem.
Embeddedness (Carless, 2007)	Smoothing out the journey, promoting equal distribution of effort across a programme, increases the learners' likelihood of establishing connections between new ideas and their practice.
Self-directedness (Stoszkowski & McCarthy, 2018)	Adult learners are capable of formulating goals, directing effort and attention appropriately, and determining their own priorities, to some degree.
Situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 2001)	Learning and participation in the social world are inseparable. We learn in and through authentic experiences, with others.
Collaboration/networks of support (Boud, 2000; McCarthy, 2022; North et al., 2020; Stoszkowski & Collins, 2014b)	Coaches regularly express a desire to learn from, and with, others in mediated or un-mediated experiences. Also, we recognise that, as development programmes become increasingly sophisticated, working with others is even more important.
Lifelong learning (Aspin & Chapman, 2020; Bagnall, 1990; Duarte & Culver, 2014)	The present learning opportunity should prepare coaches for future experiences; it should make an important contribution to a coach's lifeworld.
Student as producer (see: https://studentasproducer.lincoln.ac.uk/project-proposal/)	Acknowledging the nature of learning in and through experience (Muir & North, 2023), along with the variety of information sources readily available to the coaches, our focus was on what the coach could produce; in short, this was less about programme inputs and much more about coach outputs.
Assessment *as* learning (Carless, 2015; Hargreaves, 1997; McCarthy, 2022)	Assessment has 'double duty'; it serves to *both* measure and certify, *and* contribute to, coach learning. The latter has received scant attention in the coach education and development research. However, within the broader education literature there is valuable guidance for reframing assessment *as* learning.

With these raw materials, directed by the intended learning outcomes set out earlier in the article, we developed a series of integrated learning and assessment activities which, when deliberately sequenced in a specific way, combine to form CDIP (see Figure 1).

Professional discussion

From the outset of the two-year programme, coaches are supported to identify meaningful issues in their environment, related to their professional practice or the practice of others, that they'd like to explore over time through project-focused work. They will complete four professional discussions in total, instigating each of the four applied coaching projects. Within the broad parameters of the six programme learning outcomes, coaches might focus on an intrapersonal (e.g., LO1) or interpersonal (e.g., LO4) issue, or take a higher-level view by noticing organisational (e.g., LO2) or broader sociocultural (e.g., LO6) issues. While 'issues' might invoke a sense of searching for problems, coaches are equally encouraged to focus on moments of surprise (e.g., why something worked so well) and/or areas where they are quite simply curious (e.g., would like to know more about). For example, issues which have been considered in professional discussions, and subsequently projects, include more effectively preparing players for transition into first team environments, enhancing parent engagement with an academy coaching programme, and better targeting and achieving individual player outcomes within whole-team practices.

As a result, the springboard, or start line, for the coaches' programme experience is usually a 'wicked problem' (Rittel & Webber, 1973). 'Wicked problems' are, by nature, nebulous and very loosely (if at all) defined. They differ from what Hamm (2009) calls 'tame problems' in that there is often little agreement on what the problem is, each attempt to solve the problem likely changes it, and there is no optimal (in an objective sense) solution; instead, we can only ever hope to make the situation slightly better. This type of problem is most common in open systems, such as a football academy, where there is dynamism, some level of unpredictability, and a vast amount of people who each bring individual goals, perspectives, and resources. In these scenarios, the rule-based solutions, and technical laws, consistent with what Schön (2001) called 'the major professions' (e.g.,

economics, engineering, and legal) do not apply. This is articulated concisely by Rittel and Webber (1973), who suggest: “the social professions were misled somewhere along the line into assuming they could be applied scientists - that they could solve problems in the ways scientists can solve their sorts of problems. The error has been a serious one” (p. 160).

Since both formulating the problem, and identifying ways in which it might be improved, require high-levels of stakeholder engagement (Hamm, 2009), coaches are required to carefully curate a group of colleagues to attend a professional discussion. In doing so, the coach is compelled to consider ‘who knows what?’ and ‘who can help me and how?’, which forms a small and subtle part of developing coaches’ metacognitive skills (assessment as learning) (McCarthy, 2022). In planning for this opportunity, coaches will prepare to describe the perceived issue, offer a justification for why this is the case, draw on the work of others as they provide an analysis of potential solutions, and invite colleagues to further shape and influence the process. This is undertaken in a short ~30-minute window of time, deliberately done so to maintain focus, and the desired outcome is a less hazy, more precise, and shared articulation of an issue which then provides the start point for a detailed inquiry.

Applied coaching project

With a place to begin, and a degree of stakeholder collaboration, coaches will now set about examining their coaching issue through the medium of an applied project. At an operational level, project-based integrated learning and assessment requires a systematic approach and can be methodical in nature. Markham et al. (2003) suggest a multi-step process to enact a project-based strategy. These steps include ensuring clarity of end point, establishing driving questions for inquiry (ones which spark learners’ interest), mapping out the project (planning), and managing the (ongoing) process. Coaches are supplied with a task brief and set of success criteria (i.e., ‘what does good look like?’) at the very start of the programme. Each coach has access to one project support tutor, who, in lay language, supervises the process; more accurately, they collaborate with the coach on a professional basis around this piece of work (see ‘planning’, above). Typically, this person is

both an experienced academic and practitioner. Regarding broader issues of navigating the learning opportunity, each coach has access to a single core mentor (external to the club, employed by the Premier League) who carefully facilitates more general progress toward desirable goals (i.e., is the project aiding the coach in improving their professional practice and becoming more employable?). Finally, overseeing the whole process is the programme lead (see 'managing the ongoing process' above). While Sart (2014) advocates this type of 'mass customisation' within programmes, it is worth noting the resource-intensive nature of such an individualised and tailored learning opportunity. This will be explored at the very end of the article.

According to Bell (2010) meaningful and authentic project work enables those who engage to deepen their learning, which might be particularly useful for full-time professional football coaches working in demanding and busy environments. Without the impetus to pause on, and explore, issues in detail, through projects, they might otherwise 'wash over' the coach slowing the potential advancement of knowledge, understanding, and ultimately professional practice. Beyond issue setting and justification, coaches will undertake initial research/review existing knowledge, collect further information from appropriate sources, evidence informed trial and error as they seek to resolve the issue (i.e., design, implement, and review the efficacy of a particular intervention), and offer a tentative solution (recognising that more questions may have arisen as a result!).

Within this, peers can act as a significant instructional resource (Black & Wiliam, 2009). Specifically, projects can be developed through sharing, testing, and adjusting ideas with others (Van den Bergh et al., 2006). This is most important in complex and sophisticated learning opportunities, like CDIP, where success is even less likely achieved in isolation from others (Boud, 2000). For this reason, purposeful opportunities are created for all coaches within, and between, cohorts to come together and share their project work[4]. Consistent with the recommendations of McCarthy et al.

[4] While we did not explicitly design the learning opportunity with the concept of communities of practice (COP) (Wenger, 1998) in mind, we acknowledge some of the similarities here. For instance, there exists a community (cohort) of coaches, a shared interest in problematising practice/addressing common concerns, and a knowledge domain/tools with which to do this work (Culver & Trudel, 2006). However, in our development work we have been influenced by the broader base of research concerned with (coach) learning

(2022), these opportunities are frequent, sustained, and designed to stimulate facilitated dialogue largely around processes and quality. Influencing these deliberate choices is the research literature on the dialogic use of exemplars in supporting learners to internalise quality standards and move toward them. According to Carless and Chan (2007): “One of the most promising ways of developing student understanding of the nature of quality is through discussing exemplars of student work” (p. 930). Exemplars, in particular, make tacit knowledge accessible.

Instruction is balanced with both independent and collaborative inquiry, where the responsibility for learning and development tilts fully toward the learner (Kokotsaki et al., 2016). Aside from knowledge of the object of inquiry (for instance, knowing more about transition into, and out of, English football academy talent development pathways), there is a secondary, but equally important, outcome of developing the metacognitive skills which are the basis for lifelong learning (Cornford, 2002). For example, through project-based assessment, it is possible to develop skills such as self-monitoring and self-regulation (English & Kitsantas, 2013), which is desirable according to McCarthy et al. (2022). While the project is a constant throughout the period of study, and directs coaches’ effort and attention (Van den Bergh et al., 2006), the outcome of project-based assessment is always the production of a tangible product for sharing. This might include a new club policy document, a workshop for other coaches, or a set of resources for parents of players (Tynjälä et al., 2003). It is this contribution to individuals, the club, and/or the broader game, which is so valuable and is likely to increase coaches’ quality of professional practice, cultural capital, and employability.

Presentation of findings

Following a sustained period of inquiry, coaches will organise an opportunity to share the findings of their work with an appropriate professional audience, inclusive of the programme lead, core mentor, and project support tutor. Through this learning opportunity, coaches are encouraged

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as a participatory, social, and relational activity (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Taylor & Hamdy, 2013). Specifically, we have focused on what this means for coach assessment (e.g., Adams, 2006; Shepard, 2006). Ultimately this led us to prioritise ideas within the project-based assessment literature (e.g., Bell, 2010), many of which promote the notion of learning with and from one another (McCarthy, 2022, McCarthy et al., 2021; McCarthy et al., 2022).

to find routes to achieving maximum influence and impact. Full consideration is given to who might find most practical value in the ideas shared; for instance, this might take place in a regular club meeting (i.e., coaches meeting, multidisciplinary team meeting), at a stakeholder event (i.e., parent education day), or at a relevant conference. Coaches will typically introduce themselves, their context, and describe the issue-setting process. They will proceed to describe how they sought to resolve the issue (i.e., through data collection and/or reviewing existing literature) and offer a series of partial findings. Lastly, they will share further questions that have emerged through their work, along with general reflections on the process. As with each of the other activities, coaches are provided with an activity brief, success criteria, exemplars, and frequent and sustained interactions with their designated project support tutor.

Carless (2015) argued that ‘on display assessments’, like this one, have considerable learning potential and cited task design as one of the three key elements of learning-oriented assessment. Like the professional discussion and project that follows, the presentation of findings (Figure 1) is intended to be a meaningful, embedded, and authentic opportunity to develop knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes, and behaviours in context. As Hargreaves (1997) notes, it is naive to suspect that assessment measures learning without influencing it, therefore through CDIP we strive to positively influence coaches’ learning processes. By refining self-monitoring skills in the preparatory phase, sharing work for critical review, and developing succinct and convincing arguments in professional company, we believe that coaches gain a great deal more from this opportunity than simply a final grade.

Reflective account

At the end of each of the two years, coaches are encouraged to individually author a written reflection which serves to advance their knowledge, understanding, and professional practice. Coaches will explore (breadth) and examine (depth) their own learning and development journey with the intention of engaging in sense-making processes (i.e., theorising, criticality). Done well, coaches will be better equipped to undertake their role as a result, and contribute to a developing

personal epistemology of professional practice (i.e., what works for me, with whom, in what context, how, and why) (Schön, 2001). This is particularly important for practitioners who are deeply invested in their work at, what Schön (2001) calls, the foot of the mountain in the swampy lowlands.

Since rule-based, technical, law-like, solutions do not apply here, as they do on the high hard ground, coaches must work hard to discern the outcome of their experiments, intuition, and general muddling through, to make more informed choices in the future. Therefore, the opportunity for coaches to examine their underlying beliefs, values, and assumptions, explore a wide(r) range of competing perspectives, and take a new, alternate, position on old issues, is an important one. Stoszkowski and Collins (2014a) label reflection as a key tool for elevating standards of practice, a view shared by Gilbert and Trudel (2006). Nevertheless, reflection as a feature of coach education and development work has been the subject of critique over the last two decades. Recently, work by Downham and Cushion (2020; 2022), describes how, while essential and even taken for granted, reflective exercises can lack appropriate structure, support, and are often over-simplified.

Nevertheless, examples do exist within the research literature that offer a more optimistic view of how practitioners might become more critically reflective as a result of engaging with well-considered professional development programmes. For example, the work of Vangrunderbeek et al. (2022) showcases how, in Belgium, gymnastics coaches were able to develop skills for reflection through a well-supported series of learning opportunities over time. Influenced by this, and other cases, within and outside of the field (e.g., Fisher, 2003; Hatton & Smith, 1995), CDIP represents a multi-year opportunity for coaches to undertake inquiry, produce outputs, share those for critical discussion, and be supported to reflect on their processes. This support is offered by their core mentor and project support tutor, in an ongoing and organic manner throughout the duration of the programme. Capability for critical reflection is developed with reference to the task brief and success criteria, both of which guide these opportunities for development. Of course, this is deeply integrated within an authentic practice environment, which presents the coaching issues or surprising moments on which to base all of the above. Features of ‘good’ critical reflection, which

are shared and openly discussed with coaches on a frequent and sustained basis, are listed below in Table 3.

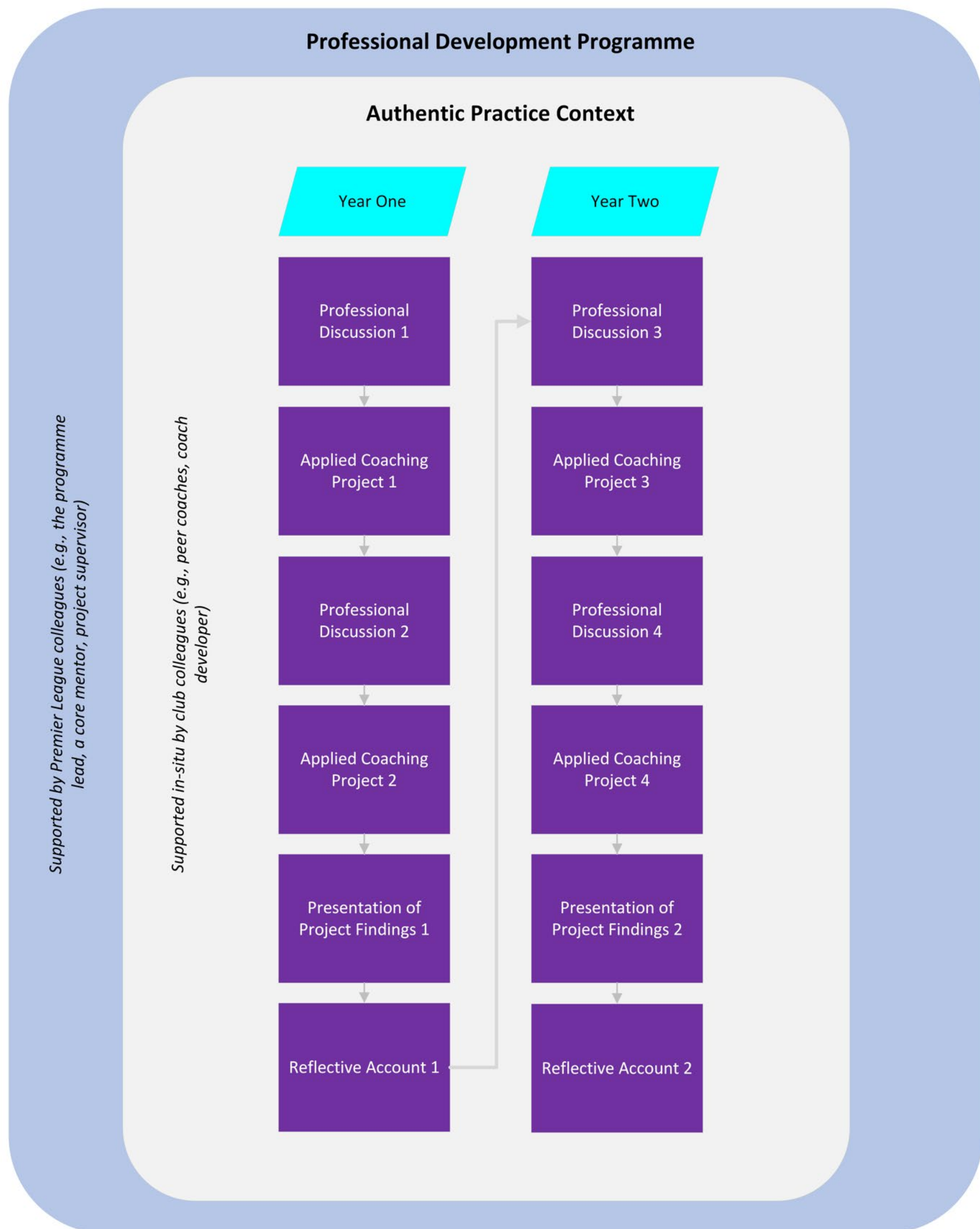
Table 3

Features of 'good' critical reflection used on CDIP

Feature	Description
Describe (what) *and* explain (how and why)	Beyond simply diarising and documenting stories and anecdotes, coaches should become deeply invested in some informed speculation about how and why events occurred in a specific way (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2014a).
Interrogate underlying beliefs, values, and assumptions	Actions and outcomes are the sedimentation of beliefs, values, and assumptions. To alter the former, we should at the very least review the latter (Nash, 2016). This shares sentiment with double loop learning (Argyris, 1991).
Weigh up competing claims and viewpoints	Appraising a wide range of perspectives, particularly those that conflict with the present position on a subject, is important if the coach is to find ways forward (i.e., go beyond existing knowledge and understanding) (Hatton & Smith, 1995).
Consider the coaching role, relative to others and the structures around the coach	Recognition of the layered ecology which characterises sport coaching (North, 2017); in particular, taking account of the broader historical, social, and/or political contexts (Vangrunderbeek et al., 2022). By doing this, it becomes possible to understanding the constraining and enabling factors which impinge on professional practice. Due consideration should be given to interpersonal relationships, hierarchy, capital, and power.
Developmental	Reflective writing should be purposeful and intended to further knowledge, understanding, and professional practice beyond the existing level. It is unlikely that this can be achieved through describing events alone (see feature one).

Figure 1

A project-led framework for coach development



Implications and Recommendations

As this Practical Advances article concludes, we offer some reflections on what this might mean for coach education and development broadly, while acknowledging some of the constraints and complexities involved. As McCarthy (2022) makes clear "no single set of ideas can be applied in

the purest sense, and there will always be novelty at the point of application" (p. 269). Initial experiences of using this project-led framework for coach development, with ~80 coaches over the last three years, have revealed a series of issues that are worthy of further consideration. As such, the remainder of this section will discuss those issues, mostly pertaining to the human, structural, and financial resource available to organisations, along with coaches' personal resource as programme participants.

Resourcing a programme, based on a novel project-led approach to professional development, is not easy nor inexpensive. In a sector which, on the whole, is relatively under-resourced (North et al., 2019) and has to consistently case-build, high quality coach development (an important feature of professionalisation, see footnote one) which is where we position this work, is complex to deliver. Indeed, finding experienced and credible practitioners with the right skillsets and levels of expertise to support the delivery of CDIP is a challenge. Due to the individualised, agile, and bespoke, nature of this development programme and the high levels of support required to facilitate coaches' relatively unique journeys, it would not be a viable framework for all organisations. Nevertheless, we contend that the principles on which it is built have value for everybody; how they are adopted and operationalised is then a matter of doing what is possible with the resources available.

Supporting practitioners toward a more refined epistemology of professional practice, by prompting reflective writing, can be met with obstinacy. Schön (2001) reports on practitioners' resistance to change, suggesting that it is all too easy to become locked into a view of oneself as a technical expert, treat uncertainty as a threat, and offer selective and uniform treatment to troublesome scenarios. In the culture of professional football coaching in England, this might be particularly true where technical information has dominated coach education programmes (Hertting, 2019; Piggott, 2012; Vella et al., 2013) and technical expertise is a mechanism for leveraging power and status within a hierarchy. This is explainable, since gaining and sustaining a role within boy's/men's professional game is challenging; this is perhaps also true of many high-

performance coaching roles (Purdy & Potrac, 2014). Potrac and colleagues (2012) note that the world in which this work is situated can be, at times, competitive and calculated/micropolitical, in some cases leaving less room for curiosity. Further, O'Gorman and colleagues (2021) identified levels of performativity and fabrication which, they suggest, have become normalised in this setting as a result of work intensification and workplace surveillance.

While the skills for critical reflection might be a limiting factor in coaches' engagement with aspects of CDIP, metacognitive skills (more broadly) appear important for engagement with CDIP in its entirety. While project work, like that which coaches undertake on the programme, will no doubt develop skills such as self-regulation (including goal-orientation) and self-monitoring (Baeten et al., 2008; Bell, 2010), they also appear to be a pre-requisite for successful early engagement (Stoszkowski & McCarthy, 2018). This presents a conundrum which must be carefully worked with, from recruitment to the programme (e.g., seeking a good match between participants and the programme demands), to individual support within the programme (e.g., deliberately designing activities to support the development of specific metacognitive skills), and assessment *as* learning throughout the programme. On the latter, for example, to communicate the importance of these metacognitive skills to coaches, they featured heavily within the success criteria for each of the programme outputs.

Nevertheless, despite these considerations, we believe that this project-led framework for coach development work offers some insight into alternate realities for the sector. Inspired by Vanderven (2009), we argue that by drawing on all, or aspects of, this framework, there is an opportunity to influence practitioner's working models, challenge their pre-existing and underlying assumptions, and "through an ongoing process of reflection and meaning making, encourage change and ongoing emergence of more complex thinking" (p. 209). Not only does use of the framework provide an entry point into the moments where theory and practice meld, for coaches, it also results in the production of meaningful outputs which can have influence and impact on the world around them. Alongside advancing knowledge, understanding, and professional practice, coaches begin, in

our experience, to develop a healthy relationship with, and attitude toward, learning as part of their lifeworld. They become more competent at making quality judgements about their practice, and the practice of others, as they collaborate and network-build. All of which appear to be characteristics of what might be perceived to be good (i.e., effective and ethical[5]) coaching (North, 2017).

[5] While not seeking to unpack the ethical dimension of sport coaching here, we take the position that it is central to/underpins good coaching. If effective coaching is goal-oriented (North, 2017; Lyle 2021), the ethical dimension is to consider the appropriateness of those goals. Throughout the development programme, professional discussions, projects, and reflective accounts in particular, allow for dialogue around ethical moments in coaching. Finally, we draw alignment between the work undertaken through this coach development programme and the ICCE position statement on professionalisation (Lara-Bercial, 2022) which demands the protection of safe and ethical conditions for athletes, supported by high quality professional development opportunities for coaches. The statement notes that reference to this was lacking in the previous (2011) version.

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