Infusing Disability into Coach Education and Development: A Critical Review and Agenda for Change

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Abstract

Background

The training of coaches is considered central to sustaining and improving the quality of sports provision. In Parasport, coaches are recognised at the highest level of international sport policy as performing a central role in achieving important sporting and social outcomes related to disabled people. However, an emerging body of evidence suggests that formal coach education plays only a minor role in Parasport coaches' development. To ensure equitable access and quality experiences and opportunities for disabled people in sport there is an ongoing challenge to theorise and implement the optimal structure for educating coaches.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to address the central theme of disability and coach education reform in sport. The aim is to review critically the emerging literature on coach development in Parasport to provide some clarity and consensus on existing pathways and models for coach development, before outlining some potential ways forward for coach education.

Discussion and Conclusions

Starting with a critical review of existing research on coaches' learning and development in Parasport, we then examine potential approaches to coach education, providing examples from existing research in coaching and the wider field of education. This is followed by some modest suggestions for coach education reform as it pertains to the inclusion of disability.

Key words: Parasport; coaching; coach education; disability.

Introduction

Contemporary awareness of the importance of high-quality sporting opportunities for disabled people is growing. Internationally, a recent strategic focus on influencing cultural perceptions of disability and driving social inclusion through sport was outlined by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC, 2019). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities clearly outlines how organisations responsible for the provision of sport must take appropriate measures to encourage and promote increased participation of disabled people[1]. Furthermore, disability is a priority area in a number of national sports policies (e.g. Sport Canada, Policy on Sport for Persons with a Disability, 2006; Sport England, 2016 Towards an Active Nation Strategy 2016-2021; Sport New Zealand, Disability Plan, 2019), moving disabled people from the margins of sport to the forefront of inclusive practices.

In placing greater emphasis on expanding opportunities for participation and performance, sports organisations must encourage a clear focus on the development of a skilled and confident workforce to deliver on social policy (Hammond, Penney and Jeanes, 2019). As such, it has become increasingly clear that coach education reform has an important role to play in supporting the delivery of Parasport (Huntley *et al.,* 2019). Indeed, sport coaching is positioned in European Union policy as a crucial practice for achieving wider social policy agendas such as inclusion, equality and respect (e.g. European Union, The Work Plan for Sport 2017-2020). For example, coaches are a necessary and regular point of contact for disabled people, providing individualised, personal support to help enhance their opportunities for, access to, and participation in, sport as a matter of human rights. Thus, the delivery of Parasport is predicated on a coaching workforce with the knowledge and understanding of how to create

[1] 'Disabled people' reflects a social model view in which people with impairment are disabled by a normative society.

the necessary conditions for inclusion (Misener and Darcy, 2014; Jeanes *et al.*, 2019; Patatas, De Bosscher and Legg, 2018) and high performance (Townsend, Huntley, Cushion and Fitzgerald, 2018). While research has highlighted coaches' changing attitudes towards the inclusion of disabled athletes (e.g. Hammond, Young and Konjarski, 2014), there is a well-documented paucity of disability-specific coach development and training programmes, meaning that coaches are well-placed yet under-supported to deliver such outcomes. Indeed, a recent EU Expert Group paper on the minimum guidelines for sport coaching competencies acknowledged working with disabled people to be the number one area of concern for coaches' skill development (Expert Group on Skills and Human Resources Development in Sport, 2020).

Despite the proliferation of policies outlining the need to develop skilled, inclusive and competent coaches, there remains little guidance on how to support coaches to facilitate the inclusion and performance of disabled athletes. However, research within Parasport has expanded to provide range of explorations *of*, and recommendations *for* effective coaching practice that might usefully inform coach education. Martin and Whalen (2013) suggested that high-quality coaching involves close collaboration between coaches and athletes creating a level of independence and control around coaching practice. Furthermore, effective Parasport coaching involves establishing appropriate levels of challenge, adopting a 'lens of adaptability' (Taylor, Werthner, Culver and Callary, 2015) and providing opportunities for success, self-confidence and competence (Allan *et al.*, 2018). Importantly, the absence of discrimination and prejudice is commonly associated with effective coaching in Parasport (Alexander, Bloom and Taylor, 2019). Taken together, the literature underlines the need for coaches to demonstrate a level of disability-specific knowledge and awareness in their coaching practice (Culver and Werthner, 2018).

Research on coach education has significantly increased over the last decade, and much of this work reiterates that coach education remains a low impact endeavour and is perceived to lack relevance for coaches (Paquette & Trudel, 2018; Piggott, 2015). As a result, coaching knowledge and practices are still being derived overwhelmingly from experiential, informal and non-formal sources (Trudel, Milistetd and Culver, 2020). Findings from coach education research within Parasport coaching echo those of the broader coach learning literature (e.g. Stodter and Cushion, 2017). However, there has been little research considering the curriculum content of coach education specific to Parasport or its impact on practice. Thus, knowledge of the level of change or influence in the structure or content of education programmes for coaches is limited. Furthermore, a gap remains between research and the development of disability-specific coach education programmes. Sport coaching frameworks, such as the International Sport Coaching Framework (ICCE), go some way to bridge this conceptual-applied gap by providing those tasked with developing coach education useful guidelines for improving consistency across developmental opportunities for the coaching workforce. Though well intentioned, generic sport coaching frameworks rarely include reference to disability (cf. DePauw, 1997) and as such the relevance of these to coaches is questionable. A consequence of this is that coach education and coaching frameworks leave the coaching workforce underdeveloped, providing few if any opportunities for disability exposure.

Given the identifiable patterns of support required for effective coaching practice it is necessary to question the extent to which coaches are adequately prepared to coach disabled athletes (e.g. DePauw and Gavron, 2005; Townsend, Cushion and Smith, 2017). A consistent finding across the Parasport literature points to issues about either the availability (e.g. McMaster, Culver and Werthner, 2012) or the effectiveness (e.g. Townsend *et al.*, 2017) of disability-specific education and training support for coaches. Disability is often absent from coach education pathways in either tertiary or sport-specific contexts (Huntley *et al.*, 2019).

Coach education provision remains ‘ad hoc’ at best (Huntley *et al.* 2019) and there remains little consensus or evidence on which to build shared frameworks or interpretive tools that could guide the development of coach education. Not least informed by the policy shifts, coaching practices and theoretical principles evident in Parasport research.

Aims and Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to address the central theme of coach education reform to coaching disabled athletes. The aim is to provide a critical review of the emerging literature on coaching and coach education in Parasport to provide some clarity and consensus on existing pathways and models for coach development, before outlining some potential ways forward. Grant and Booth (2009) suggested that a critical review includes a degree of analysis and conceptual innovation, and as such “presents, analyses and synthesizes material from diverse sources” (p. 93). Similar to other critical reviews related to Parasport (e.g. Townsend *et al.*, 2016) and coach education (Nelson, Cushion and Potrac, 2006) this research seeks to assess conceptual contributions and derive new insights (Grant and Booth, 2009). As such the analysis sought to establish clarity on existing provision and to identify a framework or lens to reconsider coach education while drawing from wider arguments refracted through the fields of education and disability studies.

The Parasport Coaching ‘Context’

Coaching is a practice where situated discourses of disability, disabled athletes, and the knowledge-practices of coaches are enacted (Townsend *et al.*, 2018). There is a small but established body of empirical research outlining the clear distinctions between coaching in ‘mainstream’ and Parasport contexts (e.g. Cregan, Bloom & Reid, 2007; DePauw & Gavron, 1991; Douglas, Vidic, Smith and Stran, 2016; Douglas & Hardin, 2014; Tawse, Bloom,

Sabiston & Reid, 2012). This distinction is reinforced by the fact that Parasport, while still existing within identifiable coaching domains, has historically been provided by separate disability sport organisations. While more recently mainstream sport organisations have also begun to support disabled people by offering inclusive opportunities and disability sport participant pathways (e.g., Kitchin and Howe, 2014), this expansion in provision necessitates greater investment in developing a somewhat 'isolated' coaching workforce.

Research has predominantly focused on coaches working across disability performance pathways and has been valuable in highlighting the organisational constraints associated with this context. These include limited financial support resulting in fewer coaching and support staff, a lack of coaching and training resources and equipment, and a smaller talent pool of athletes (e.g. Tawse *et al.*, 2012; Taylor, Werthner & Culver, 2014). Furthermore, issues of inclusion and access are central to the coaching role in Parasport as coaches may need to communicate with athletes' families, support workers and caregivers, and reflect upon the accessibility of facilities and transportation (Cregan *et al.*, 2007; McMaster *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, impairment impacts directly on the considerations for coaching practice meaning that aside from the structural features of Parasport, coaches require an understanding of potential impairment effects. As Culver and Werthner (2018) highlight, some impairments are static, others episodic, some degenerative and as such have implications for day-to-day training, performance, classification and planning cycles.

Outside of high-performance Parasport, the demands of working with athletes with higher support needs are coupled with generally lower levels of resources, training and support. Indeed, Darcy, Lock and Taylor (2017) argued that as the level of participants' support needs increase, greater demands are placed on the knowledge and skills of the coach. Similar to research with trainee physical education teachers, if coaches enter the role without specific

training and support “it is understandable that exposure to an increasingly, wide range of abilities and needs can lead some to feel uncertain and inadequately prepared” (Morley *et al.*, 2005, p. 102). It is unsurprising, therefore, that research has continued to illustrate difficulties recruiting coaches into coaching roles due to a commonly cited ‘fear of the unknown’ (Wareham, Burkett, Innes and Lovell, 2017, 2019). Taken together, the research considering coaching in Parasport contexts provides compelling evidence of the unique demands this domain places on coaches. It also provides a backdrop against which coach learning should be considered in order to establish consensus on ways forward for coach education.

Factors Impacting Coaches’ Learning

Understanding how best to reform coach education necessitates a clear and critical focus on coaches’ learning in Parasport. Research on coaches’ learning and development is an emerging area (e.g. McMaster *et al.*, 2012; Duarte and Culver, 2014; Fairhurst, Bloom and Harvey, 2017). While the picture remains incomplete, we can infer a number of key features of coaches’ learning across Parasport. The socialisation of coaches into Parasport begins with the introduction into and acquisition of accepted practices, discourses and accumulated wisdom. The lack of formal coach education structures for Parasport places a focus on the social aspect of learning (e.g. Duarte, Culver and Paquette, 2020a, 2020b) placing an emphasis on networks and interactions as a basis for knowledge sharing. However, Parasport has a dearth of programmes and competitions which means a much smaller ‘coaching community’ resulting in a lack of peers with whom coaches might interact (McMaster *et al.*, 2012). As a result, coaches’ learning experiences can be characterised by often being ‘dropped in at the deep end’ (Townsend *et al.*, 2017) without much support. Consequently, coaches’ learning becomes anchored entirely in their experiences – a social practice characterised by ‘trial and error’, with a self-referential practice of reflection (Taylor, Werthner, Culver and Callary, 2015). This

results in the recognisable situation where coaches are forced to consolidate, adapt, or 'cherry-pick' coaching approaches to apply to Parasport according to their perceptions of 'what works' in mainstream (able-bodied) sporting contexts (cf. Stodter and Cushion, 2017). Such a situation can reproduce ableist assumptions which can become difficult to displace (Hammond, Jeanes, Penney and Leahy, 2019) and contribute to the exclusion of disabled people from Parasport.

Importantly, disability does not denote a homogenous group, neither in terms of disability classifications nor coaching domains or contexts (Lyle and Cushion, 2017). In addressing coaching knowledge in Parasport it is necessary to differentiate according to coaching domains. For example, for coaches working in the participation domain – where impairment can play a more defining role in sporting participation and performance – a conceptual understanding of inclusion and integration is required (cf. Corbett and Slee, 2000; Cronin, Ryrie, Huntley and Hayton, 2018) to enable the participation of athletes with multiple and severe impairments. This may require coaches to reconsider prescriptive coaching approaches or inherited practice frameworks and expand their adaptive practice repertoires (Cronin *et al.,* 2018; Pinder and Renshaw, 2019). In contrast, in the performance domain, where rather than a focus on inclusion, performance agendas and medal-winning ideologies (Townsend *et al.*, 2018) place emphasis on an outcome-driven framework for coaching practice. In this context, the emphasis is on enhancing performance through coaching interventions designed according to an 'athlete-first' view, which is often based on able bodied high-performance values (Townsend *et al.,* 2018; Cushion, Huntley and Townsend, 2020).

An overview of the current literature on coaches' learning in Parasport suggests that there is a great deal of complexity which, in turn, provides an uncertain terrain for the development of coaching knowledge. Another factor to consider is that at the community level the workforce is often predominantly volunteer-based. While there is a clear need to provide

appropriate training and education for coaches, these factors mean that coach developers and their sponsor organisations must seek alternatives to 'standard', formalised coach education programmes as sources of professional development for coaches (e.g. Duarte, Culver and Paquette, 2020a). A commonly cited message is that coaches value opportunities to share knowledge, and to discuss practice and experiences in formal coach education (e.g. Cregan *et al.*, 2007; Tawse *et al.*, 2012). However, the availability of such opportunities is rare, which is exacerbated by a lack of access to mentors and peers (Fairhurst *et al.*, 2017), and fewer resources (i.e., research, books, workshops) for coaches to access (DePauw & Gavron, 2005; McMaster *et al.*, 2012). This means that, as both Hammond *et al.* (2019) and Townsend *et al. (*2018) have shown, coaches risk reproducing oppressive ableist attitudes, values and practices creating, at best, radically uneven experiences for disabled people. Hence there is a need to reflect critically on coach education as a starting point for initiating change. With these issues in mind, in the next section we provide an overview of current approaches to educating coaches in Parasport.

Disability-specific Coach Education

Taking a broader view of the Parasport context illustrates a coaching process situated within a complex and fragmented organisational landscape, "characterised by a wide variety of specialist and non-specialist bodies all competing for attention and funds" (Thomas and Guett, 2014, p. 390). Despite calls for integration and mainstreaming of Parasport structures, the organisation and delivery of many coach development programmes are left to charitable bodies, voluntary organisations, or independent coaching agencies (Townsend *et al.*, 2017). While there is increasing exposure within some higher education coaching programmes, disability-related content is notably absent from formal sport-specific coach education pathways (Huntley *et al.*, 2019). As Bush and Silk (2012) argued, this reflects a

'compartmentalised' approach to educating coaches, there is often a disconnect between coaches' field experiences and the professional development opportunities available to them.

While the intention to upskill and educate coaches is progressive and indicative of a desire to place high-quality coaches in the Parasport pathway, the training that accompanies such initiatives is often based on a series of assumptions that are open to critical scrutiny, most notably, how disability is defined within such models. These assumptions have implications for the way coach education is designed and are embedded in existing conceptions of formal coach education specific to the Parasport context. To draw these out for critical consideration we need to consider literature from coaching as well as the wider fields of education and disability studies. This analysis presents two overarching categories: 'Categorical' approaches to training and 'Inclusion and Infusion' education models. These are now considered in turn.

Categorical approaches

Disability-specific coach education exists as a sub-field of 'mainstream' coach education, and thus reflects the politics of knowledge in coaching. In 'mainstream' sport, coach education has historically relied on the integration of bio-scientific discourses as the principal means of informing coaching practice. It might be reasonably argued that such 'techno-rational' approaches to coach education are replicated in Parasport, and research has shown that the dominant model of disability informing coaching provision and coach education is the medical model (Townsend *et al.*, 2016, 2017). The medical model emphasises a technical language and specialised body of knowledge specific to impairment, reflecting a strong behavioural and positivist orientation to professional practice. As such, the most common approach to educating coaches to work with disabled people is through the dissemination of impairment-specific information to coaches (through resources and training workshops) in order to develop an

initial awareness and exposure to knowledge about different impairments (Townsend *et al.*, 2017).

These approaches to professional development might be usefully described as *categorical* approaches (cf. Brownell *et al.*, 2010), mirroring approaches used initially in special education teacher education (Rice, 2006) where exposure to disability content includes aetiology, methods of classification and strategies for 'dealing with' differences. The logic underpinning this approach holds that if coaches can be exposed to the processes and features of impairment, they are better equipped to remediate with interventions (Townsend *et al.*, 2017). While categorical approaches provide a level of comfort for coaches lacking confidence and a level of technical capacity, they tend to perpetuate an understanding of disability within a functional and medical paradigmatic framework creating prescriptions for 'best practice' based on impairment-specific classifications (Townsend *et al.*, 2017). Such an approach reinforces the notion that disability resides within the individual which can be counter-intuitive to inclusion (e.g. Hammond *et al.*, 2019).

Furthermore, evidence has shown that in categorical training models the construction of knowledge is often dialogical, where coaches share experiences and 'best practice' solutions (Townsend *et al.* 2017). Generating practice theories within a categorical framework emphasises the development of a coaching 'toolbox'; batteries of skills and strategies for managing difference and enabling differentiated practice based often upon hypothetical practical 'scenarios' or generalised understandings of impairment. The issue here is that when coaches encounter difference in their practice it bears little to no resemblance to idealised scenarios, resulting in a 'reality shock' and thus reinforcing coaches' reliance on 'trial and error' (Townsend *et al.*, 2017; Taylor *et al.*, 2015). These experiences, if viewed negatively, as Hammond *et al.* (2014) argue, can lead to the active exclusion of athletes with more severe

impairments. This form of training, while having the appearance of a sound theoretical base and coach educators present as 'authoritative purveyors of technical knowledge' (cf. Brantlinger 2006, p. 67), only superficial understandings of inclusion are identified (Symeonidou, 2017) thus reproducing the very structures that limit disabled people in the first place.

We have already argued that coaches' learning is framed by a powerful socialising process and 'trial and error' practices. This is important as it allows us to question the extent to which these isolated and passive training programmes can be effective. While a focus on single impairment groups can be useful for disseminating specific information to coaches, for sports organisations and coaches serving multiple impairment groups there is a need to shift the emphasis away from the disabled individual and onto the knowledge and practices of the coaches. The analysis builds on related research in physical education teacher education (e.g. Coates, 2012) suggesting that the impact of categorical training models is minimal for practitioners because it is an individualising approach that operates in isolation from other disability discourses. It can be plausibly argued that isolating disability knowledge creates further barriers to acceptance and integration (cf. Northway, 1997; Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling, 2012) where the provision of categorical training courses as the preferred method of coach education "in many ways reinforces the notion that segregation (of knowledge and of individuals with disabilities) is needed, if not preferred" (DePauw and Goc Karp, 1994, p. 6). The situation thus becomes self-perpetuating in that coach education reinforces the belief that categorical training models are necessary and disabled people are further minoritized as the 'absent' other through coach education discourse.

Understandably, for policy makers, governing bodies, national sports organisations and coach developers there remains a question of 'what can be done' within the current restrictions

of the existing coach development system to sufficiently prepare coaches for the complexity of Parasport. Therefore, the level of prescriptiveness underpinning this form of training is mitigated to some extent by the reasonable concern from coaches to understand the specific features of certain impairments as a means of safeguarding athlete welfare. However, the logical progression of this form of coach education is the increase in the number of discrete categorical training programs 'flooding the market', designed to help coaches individualise their practice based on impairment profiles, creating what Thomas (2004) describes as a political economy of disability based "on the generation and distribution of impairment" (p. 46). Simply, it can be argued that the need to educate coaches across Parasport necessitates moving beyond the delivery of impairment-specific information as 'bolt-on' short courses and workshops (cf. Coates, 2012).

Balancing the critique of existing educational models is the clear need to provide coaches with the pedagogical tools and strategies to provide high-quality coaching for individuals with a wide-ranging and complex needs. Given coaches' preferences for impairment-specific information it is clear that these courses can contribute to a disability-specific coach education agenda. However, as Ashby (2012) argued in the context of inclusive teacher education, teaching practices need not be disability-specific and based on categories of difference. If implemented as part of a core element of coach education rather than a specialist topic, such courses can indeed be valuable in enabling coaches to focus on the complex applications of pedagogical knowledge to differentiate their practices. Furthermore, integrating personal experiences of impairment and disability through narratives from disabled people can illustrate the social restrictions that affect their access to and engagement in sport, enhance coaches' communication skills, and introduce specialized intervention strategies for those with severe or multiple impairments based on needs-based approaches (Townsend *et al.*, 2017).

While these suggestions are by no means prescriptive, they represent a 'shift' from an epistemology of disability based on only "a partial or limited view" (Oliver, 1996, p. 128) – that of the medical model. Furthermore, categorical models that connect with health and social care discourses to inform multidisciplinary assessments of individual needs and alternative pedagogical models for practice delivery (cf. DePauw and Goc Karp, 1994) can be valuable. Implementing impairment-specific courses as part of a wider coherent coach education model therefore holds potential for a broader epistemological shift in how we understand disability and conceptualise coaching, providing a wider network of resources that might usefully inform coaches' practice.

Inclusion and Infusion approaches

In the previous section we argued that coaches' professional learning and development is underpinned by a medical model perspective, resulting in categorical approaches to training coaches. An alternative approach, based on a social model perspective, focuses on the knowledge, practices, and skills of the coach in the first instance (i.e. social practice; DePauw and Gavron, 1991). This requires a change in how coach education is structured. One approach advocated for in physical education teacher education (PETE) is an *inclusion* approach (DePauw and Goc Karp, 1994).

Inclusion models can be observed in coach development through the provision of 'add-on' inclusion training workshops. These workshops are typically episodic, delivered through specialist disability charities or sports organisations and encourage a clear focus on coaches making adaptations to existing practice structures (Townsend *et al.* 2016) through reflective practice and inclusive frameworks. This is often delivered through the use of hypothetical scenarios, practical problem-based approaches and peer-to-peer coaching. While not wanting to discount the value of practical adaptive frameworks or reflective practice, these approaches

tend to promote a level of instrumentalism framing coaching practice that overlooks the situated realities of coaching. Indeed, as Slee (2010) argued in the context of teacher education:

> "Preparing teachers for inclusive education is not achieved by grafting courses of special education onto the teacher education program" (p. 14).

An alternative in teacher training is known as an *infusion* approach (DePauw and Goc Karp, 1994; Rizzo, Broadhead and Kowalski, 1997; Coates, 2012), whereby disability content, topics, and issues are threaded throughout teacher education curricula. For example, in the field of teacher education the use of authentic and carefully-structured field-based pedagogies is highly-valued by practitioners (Coates, 2012; Morley *et al.,* 2020; Walton and Rusznyak, 2020). A similar approach to coach education would enable coaches to apply pedagogical concepts and strategies, and allow them to theorise from their experience. Such experiences are reported as particularly valuable for enhancing teachers' knowledge and confidence (Vickerman, 2007). Indeed, given the powerful socialising potential of experience, professional development opportunities that harness the power of practical coaching opportunities seem a worthwhile approach to consider in coach education, where coach educators can facilitate reflective practice and introduce relevant theoretical perspectives (cf. Walton and Rusznyak, 2020).

However, while we advocate for structured practical experiences for coaches we urge coach educators also to reflect critically on the use of practical coaching activities *in* coach education, particularly scenario-based learning or simulation exercises. This is partly due to the difficulties in replicating the conditions for coaching disabled athletes, and partly due to concerns about ideological and generalised assumptions that these sorts of pedagogical endeavours can produce (see Townsend *et al.*, 2017; French, 1992). Nonetheless, alongside the relevance of critical theorising and reflective work, *in situ* coach development can be influential in the practice of deconstructing entrenched discourses and examining belief systems about

disability. Such a perspective on coach learning shifts disability away from the individual and instead positions coaching as an active collection of bodies, knowledges, contexts, spaces, routines, activities, and judgements (cf. Latour, 2005).

Foregrounding the knowledge and skills of the coach as the unit of analysis, rather than the disabled individual is a progressive perspective, which, as Slee (2010) argues, positions technical issues as a secondary concern, with primacy given to the cultural and relational dimensions of coaching practice. This includes the critical deconstruction of individual attitudes, motivations, beliefs and practices (Slee, 2010) whereby coaches can be educated to debate and challenge existing conditions, rather than simply implement and reproduce inherited coaching approaches. In proposing this pedagogical approach, we draw on an understanding of disability in the context of social relationships (Townsend *et al.,* 2016).

A theoretical agenda for coach education reform

Shifts in the orientation of coach education programmes requires deep structural change. Over twenty-five years ago within the field of teacher education, DePauw and Goc Karp (1994) called for research to challenge the existing education system, and to reconstruct a new one. Inevitably, discussions about reforming coach education reflect deeper questions related to the ways in which disability is understood and positioned within organisational policy, sports programmes, and in social practice. The issue of whether disability should be addressed in discrete blocks or integrated into mainstream coach education structures remains an issue of considerable debate. While discussions of a similar nature were initiated some time ago within the field of physical education (see, for instance, DePauw & Doll-Tepper, 2000; DePauw & Goc Karp, 1994), this is a debate that is yet to occur in coaching.

It can reasonably be argued that, currently, coach education and professional development is characterised by separatist thinking and practices where the response to socially assigned categories of identity is to create separate educational structures. This categorical approach currently dominates coach education in Parasport, similar to special education teacher education in the 1970s (Brownell *et al.,* 2010). Unlike the field of Parasport, however, this was abandoned in the early 1980s when the relevance of disability categories to broader pedagogical skills such as effective planning, instruction, and behaviour management were seriously questioned (Brownell *et al*. 2010), and teacher education began to prepare teachers with a shared commitment to inclusion and equity for all (Ashby, 2012).

In considering an overhaul of existing coach education structures it is necessary to question critically to what extent current approaches, in isolation, are relevant and progressive for developing coaches. While categorical and inclusion models of coach education can provide useful ideas for coaches to use in their practice, the evidence suggests that coaches reproduce a medicalised gaze that focuses on intervention, perpetuating generalised or superficial understandings of impairment (e.g. Townsend *et al.,* 2017). More research is needed to illustrate the impact various forms of inclusion and disability-specific training programmes have on the learning and development of coaches as well as how best to optimise the powerful role of 'trial and error' experience alongside self-sourced disciplinary applications in coaching (Huntley *et al.,* 2019).

In proposing a way forward, we need to reconcile the theoretical principles associated with coaches' learning and professional development, with an epistemological approach informed by a disability studies framework (cf. Ashby, 2012). Recent attempts to build disability-specific learning communities informed by social learning theory (e.g. Duarte *et al.,* 2020a, 2020b) offer a fruitful line of inquiry. However, what is required is an orienting

framework based first and foremost on disability studies providing direction on both the structure and content of disability-specific coach education. The social-relational model of disability provides a unique epistemological framework to provide direction and support for coach education (cf. Thomas, 1999). The social-relational model of disability encompasses four interrelated concepts to explain the experience of disability, each of which has relevance for coaches (cf. Allan *et al.,* 2019). First, *impairment effects*—the direct physical (e.g., pain, fatigue) and social impacts that impairment has on an individual's social functioning. Second, *relational practices* that constitute disability, such as the social behaviours that are enacted between coaches and athletes in sport (cf. Thomas, 2004). This focuses specifically on how the personal, relational and institutional practices which disadvantage disabled people (i.e. ableism) can manifest in subtle and nuanced ways. For instance, coaches' discourses, assumptions and pedagogic practices can favour particular abilities and devalue non-normative bodies (e.g. Townsend *et al.,* 2018). Ableist attitudes and practices reduce opportunities for disabled people, "placing limits on what they can do and what they can become" (Haslett, Fitzpatrick and Breslin, 2017, p. 63). Third, recognition of *structural barriers* such as inaccessible facilities or lack of available coaching opportunities. Finally, the model has a *psycho-emotional* dimension, recognising that these social factors and behaviours can and do have a direct impact on an individual's psycho-social wellbeing, where disability is internalised and can engender negative feelings of self-worth or a lack of confidence to participate.

The central purpose of integrating the social-relational model into coach education discourse is to expose the "the social imposition of restrictions of activity on people with impairments *and* the socially engendered undermining of their psycho-emotional well-being" (Thomas, 2007, p. 73). The social-relational model builds on the transformational and emancipatory purpose of the social model, encouraging critical reflection on disability as an orienting concept in which there is a conceptual split between 'impairment' and 'disability'.

Doing so provides a heuristic that encourages critically reflective questions on different aspects of the coaching process, shifting the emphasis away from disabled people to the roles that coaches can play in facilitating high-quality experiences across coaching domains. However, its point of departure with the social model is the recognition that impairment can and does play a (highly individual and shifting) role in disabled peoples' lives (Culver and Werthner, 2018), and this without viewing the impaired body in isolation from the contexts in which it is situated.

In practice, the social-relational model orients coaching towards an "active and reflective process of altering the environment" (Ashby, 2012, p. 96) through encouraging considered and individualised approaches to differentiating practice, rather than expecting athletes to have to adapt or fit into a pre-existing coaching intervention or environment. Furthermore, this model promotes the importance of a dialogical relationship between coach and athlete (Allan *et al.*, 2019; Culver and Werthner, 2018), while recognising the potential for coaches to integrate information from parents and professionals from health and social care (Vickerman, 2007) into their planning and practice. Finally, the social-relational model emphasises the impacts of impairment on both social function and also individual psychology. For coaches, this means drawing on disciplinary expertise and social support (e.g. parents) in collaboration with athletes in all phases of planning and process to understand in what ways impairment can and does impact on sporting participation. This emphasis on shared knowledge is foundational to an understanding of disability as socially embedded, and not fixed or inevitable.

While the social-relational model provides focused questions and content for inclusion in disability-specific coach education, more evidence as to its application and impact is required. Importantly, coach education informed by disability studies reconfigures traditional

'top down' power relationships and locates the lived experiences of disability at the centre of the educational process. The implications for coach development and training curricula and resources are transformative in that they require a shift towards co-production, in partnership with disabled athletes and communities. The notion of developing 'collaborative' approaches and solutions with disabled people has been a central debate within wider disability studies (e.g. Stone and Priestley, 1996) and Parasport (e.g. Macbeth, 2010) research, yet is silent in coaching research.

The absence of research that provides space and agency for disabled people – with the key exceptions of Culver and Werthner (2018), Alexander *et al.* (2019), and Allan *et al.* (2019) – positioning them as active and central in informing and shaping learning opportunities for coaches is a glaring omission in the disability coaching literature. Insights from people with impairments are much needed to provide direction into the development of progressive coach education opportunities, with insights not into techniques or 'what works' but how to provide opportunities for meaningful participation. Encouraging people with impairments and disabled athletes into coach development roles can provide insight into, and awareness of, different conditions while highlighting the importance of equal relationships with coaches, where each can learn from the other (cf. Shakespeare, Iezzoni and Groce, 2009). The distinction is in learning *from* the individual, not *about* them. After all, if coach education does not facilitate the development of progressive coaching practice aimed at improving the lives of disabled people, by involving those very same groups, then it becomes redundant and removed from its purpose.

Concluding Thoughts

Critical to the success of sport in realising wider social inclusion objectives are the practices adopted by organisations responsible for coach development (DePauw and Doll-Tepper, 2000;

Townsend *et al.*, 2017). Despite this, coaches face huge variation in the accessibility and levels of support and training available across the Parasport sector. Compounding this issue is the limited empirical evidence of coaches' experiences of disability-specific educational structures, and given the relatively narrow evidence base, it is clear that there is a significant and ongoing challenge to theorise and implement the optimal structures for developing the Parasport coaching workforce. What is clear, however, is that the lack of coherent training and education (Bush and Silk, 2012; McMaster *et al.*,, 2012) has serious repercussions for the quality of coaching available, as research over several decades routinely highlights the lack of knowledgeable, competent and confident coaches across Parasport (e.g. DePauw & Gavron, 2005; Townsend *et al.*, 2017; Wareham *et al.*,, 2019). More concerningly, neglecting the coaching workforce may negatively impact the inclusion of disabled people in sport, restricting opportunities for social participation in both competitive sporting structures and limiting their ability to meet physical activity goals. These patterns of exclusion for disabled people are an indirect form of disablism impacting the full inclusion of disabled people in social life, as well as going directly against Article 30 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

It should be noted that the ideas suggested for coach education reform are far from radical. As the field reshapes itself to both meet the challenges of contemporary coaching contexts and to establish the professional status of coaches, (see North *et al.*, 2019) it is not always clear how these changes account for coaching in Parasport contexts. Nevertheless, there are barriers that will need to be overcome. By badging coach development and coach education as 'disability' there comes an assumption that this provides a common ground and language across Parasport for coaches to share and provides the illusion of an overarching and distinct coaching context. But, as we have argued thus far, Parasport exacerbates domain differences and even within domains, Parasport and therefore coaching, is not homogenous. Consider this

alongside the relatively enduring and conservative tradition evident in coach education, it is difficult to build a shared framework for coach education that accounts for the complexity and variation in Parasport.

What is required is more research evidencing coaches' learning and development in Parasport, in particular exposing the minoritizing discourses in coach education that tend to limit coaches to a "narrow, specific, relatively fixed population" or context (Erevelles, 2000, p. 26). In reviewing the literature, we have provided some clarity and order to a disparate field with a view to informing progressive changes in coach education. Ultimately, the practical and theoretical dilemmas presented by the aspiration for an overhaul of the existing coach education system are, in the first instance, political and cultural. But, if we consider these discussions as a starting point for initiating change and avoiding dependence on the current categorical approaches commonly found in Parasport, such a shift, it can be argued, is long overdue.

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