



Towards the Development of a Coach Mentorship Training Program in Paraspport

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sciences humaines du Canada

Canada



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Psychology of Sport & Exercise

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/psychsport

Exploring coaches' experiences and perceptions of a virtual parasport coach mentorship program

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Disability sport
Formal mentorship
e-learning
Coaching

ABSTRACT

Partnering with a provincial coaching association in Canada, we explored the experiences and perceptions of 15 mentor and 29 mentee coaches who participated in a formal virtual parasport coach mentorship program. Data were gathered via focus groups and individual interviews and analyzed using a reflexive thematic analysis. Mentor coaches built a virtual relationship through mutual trust and respect and were perceived by their mentees as supportive, motivating, and knowledgeable. Mentee coaches valued conversations with their mentors surrounding disability-specific knowledge that enhanced their coaching efficacy. Coaches highlighted the need for a greater sense of community within parasport and recommended keeping a virtual component of the program to foster accessibility and learning. Findings provide insight into effective mentorship in parasport for researchers, practitioners, and organizations overseeing this important initiative. Our results will contribute to higher quality experiences for Canadian parasport coaches and athletes and work to progress the growth of parasport worldwide.

1. Exploring coaches' experiences and perceptions of a virtual parasport coach mentorship program

Bentzen et al. (2021) conducted a scoping review of academic literature pertaining to parasport coaches. The authors reviewed the literature on parasport coaching from a variety of data bases (e.g., PsycINFO, PubMed) and charted 44 peer-reviewed articles from 1991 to 2019. Among the results, the authors noted that becoming a parasport coach was a commonly discussed topic within the literature (e.g., Cregan et al., 2007; Douglas et al., 2018; Lepage et al., 2020; Wareham et al., 2018). One of the first empirical studies in this domain belongs to Cregan and colleagues (2007), who interviewed six parasport swim coaches and found that they all began their careers coaching able-bodied sport and only began coaching parasport when an athlete with a disability began training at their pool. Douglas and colleagues (2018) also interviewed Paralympic head coaches on their career development. Notably, all of their participants identified as having a disability. Despite also having elite experience as parasport athletes, all the coaches had acquired additional coaching knowledge from other sources, including peers, mentors, and formal education opportunities. Taken together, the pathway to parasport coaching is not always intentional, leaving coaches to acquire disability-specific coaching information in various

ways (e.g., informal or formal coach mentorship).

Sports coach mentorship has received increasing attention over the last 25 years in pursuit of enhancing coach learning and development (Bloom et al., 1998; Chambers, 2015; Jones et al., 2009; Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021; Lefebvre et al., 2020). Much of this research was conceptualized around Kram's (1985) mentor role theory which describes effective mentorship as those who provide career-related (e.g., sponsorship, challenging assignments) and psychosocial (e.g., enhanced competence and confidence) outcomes to their mentees in an informal or formal context. Regarding formal settings, Koh and colleagues (2014) developed, implemented, and evaluated a formal mentoring program for novice basketball coaches in Singapore. Among the results, mentees discussed acquiring technical and psychological coaching skills from their mentors, such as athlete psychology, innovative thinking, and time management. Additionally, Banwell and colleagues (2019) explored the experiences and perceptions of mentor and mentee coaches who participated in the *Female Coach Mentorship Program* that was overseen by the Coaching Association of Canada (CAC). The results revealed that mentee coaches acquired professional (e.g., declarative and procedural knowledge) and personal benefits (e.g., psychosocial support) from their mentors that improved their learning and development.

Gagne (1984) categorized human performance and learning into five



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Introduction

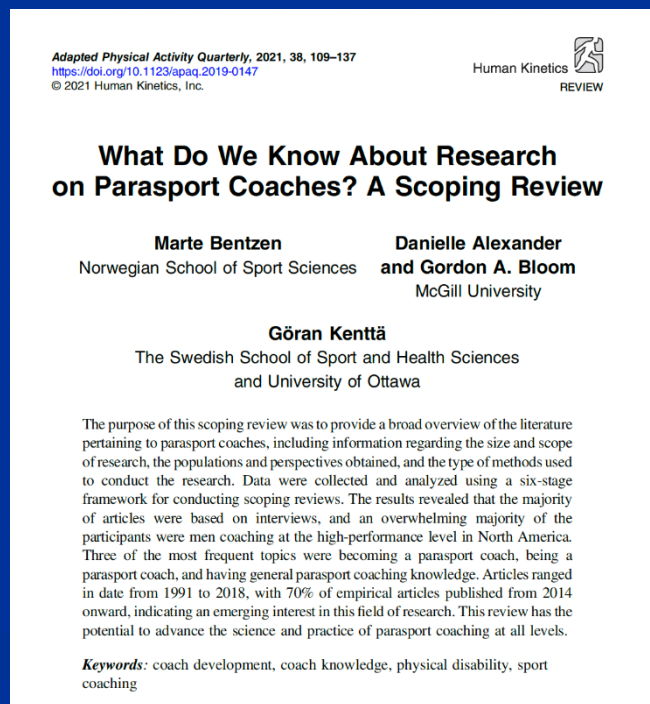
Parasport Coaching Research

- Reid and Prupas (1998) reviewed and analyzed 204 disability sport articles from 1986 to 1996.
 - Only five related to coaching.
- Lee and Poretta (2013) followed up from 2001 to 2011.
 - Found a focus on biomechanical and physiological components of parasport.
 - No increase in coaching articles.

Literature Review

Parasport Coaching Research

- Bentzen, Alexander, Bloom, & Kenttä (2021) conducted a scoping review of research on parasport coaches from 1991 to 2018.



Literature Review

Parasport Coaching Research

- Bentzen et al.'s (2021) review found 44 peer-reviewed articles from 1991 to 2019 (5 were review papers).
- 70% of the articles were published from 2014 onwards.
- 3 of the most common topics:
 - Being a parasport coach (e.g., Wareham et al., 2017).
 - General coaching knowledge (e.g., Cheon et al., 2015).
 - Becoming a parasport coach (e.g., Cregan et al., 2007).
- Despite being a unique sporting context, scant attention on coach mentoring in parasport.

Literature Review

Coach Learning and Development

- In 2019, Coaches Association of Ontario created the Coach 2 Coach - Parasport Mentorship Program.

Designed to provide incoming or inexperienced parasport coaches with more experienced mentors.



Structured learning opportunities, such as seminars, workshops, networking events.



Due to pandemic, had to be adapted to a virtual context (e.g., online webinars, virtual platforms).

Purpose of the Study

Explore the perceptions and experiences of mentor and mentee coaches following a 10-month pilot parasport formal coach mentorship program.



Method

Participants

- 29 mentee and 15 mentor coaches from a variety of parasports and competitive levels.

Data Collection

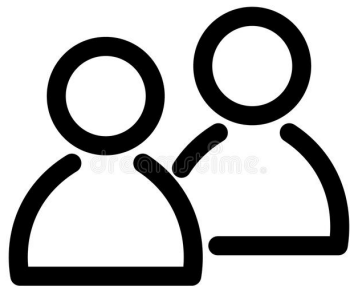
- Two focus groups, one for mentors (N=5) and one for mentees (N=6), at halfway point (Krueger, 2014; Smith & Sparkes, 2016).
- Virtual individual interviews with mentors (N=8) and mentees (N=8) at 12-months (Smith & Sparkes, 2016).

Data Analysis

- Reflexive thematic analysis was used to analyze both focus group and individual interview data (Braun et al., 2016).

Results

Outcomes of
Effective
Mentoring



Disability-Specific
Coaching Knowledge



Virtual Learning
Considerations





Results

Outcomes of Effective Mentoring

- **Mentees** described learning outcomes they derived, including enhanced support and learning.

I think I would have had a lot of problems if I wanted to start [a parasport program prior to this mentorship program]. I wouldn't have known where to start. But going through this whole program, it's really helped me to understand "this is what I need to do" and get the resources needed. I've learned a lot, it's been so good!

(Janet, Mentee, Interview).



Results

Outcomes of Effective Mentoring

- **Mentors** also described feeling an enhanced sense of support and confidence from the program:

I know this gathering [the focus group] is very beneficial to me hearing about what the other coaches are doing. It validates some of the things I think I'm doing right... at least there's that gauge to say, "oh okay I think I'm on the right track" (Bill, Mentor, Interview).



Results

Disability-Specific Coaching Knowledge

- Mentee coaches were particularly interested in topics of disability, including classification, inclusive language, and functional ability:

I learned more about classifications of athletes. I figured if you broke your neck at the shoulder blades, from their downward you will be paralyzed - but that's not true. You could be paralyzed but still have function down your arms so it was a learning curve for me because [my mentor] jumps up and down on his chair like there's no problem.

(Mackenzie, Mentee, Interview).



Results

Virtual Learning Considerations

- Although participants desired a human connection, they highlighted benefits of learning online to maximize the inclusivity of the program.

Nicole: I don't think the mentorship would have been possible without it. I'm from a small community and I don't drive. I have [insert disability] so my only transportation would have been on the train. Had it not been for the pandemic, I probably wouldn't have been included.

Eric: I actually think the online piece is invaluable because it greatly opens up your capacity to meet with people who aren't geographically able to work with you.

Discussion

- Both mentor and mentee coaches benefited professionally and personally from the formal mentorship program (Grant et al., 2020; Koh et al., 2014).
- Mentorship led to increased confidence, yet mentees still desired more contextualized disability-specific coaching knowledge (Alexander & Bloom, 2020; Fairhurst et al., 2017; Lepage et al., 2020).
- In conjunction with in-person opportunities, virtual mentorship is a promising avenue for inclusive coach learning and development (Duarte et al., 2021; Grant et al., 2020).

Conclusions

- Signifies a promising future for mentorship opportunities in parasport coaching and parasport as a whole.
- Need for researchers and community partners to continue working together to create the ideal parasport coach mentorship environment.
- The program fostered connections between coaches in various sports, which has the potential to grow the Canadian parasport landscape.



Questions / Comments

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