

#CoachMate Connectors: Exploring different approaches to coach learning

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Introduction –

One of the most prominent themes in the current Coaching Plan for England is the aspiration to diversify the coaching workforce and reduce the real and perceived barriers to learning and development. This has created an incentive to develop alternative solutions to learning that provide opportunities for those who may not have been previously encouraged to develop their potential as a coach. One such approach is the development and delivery of a #CoachMate programme supported by StreetGames.

#CoachMate is aimed at supporting the development of young coaches aged 16-25 who live and coach in areas of recognised deprivation. The presentation will outline the influence the programme has had on a sample drawn from current participating coaches. The #CoachMate programme has evolved out of an earlier pilot developed and delivered in 2017 and 2018 within the West Midlands (Smith and Leflay, 2018).

Method

At present the #CoachMate programme engages with over 20 coaches located across England and Wales. Each coach is provided with a bespoke learning programme which involves a combination of:

- Peer mentoring.
- Access to local courses and CPD opportunities.
- Team teaching.
- Formal coaching qualifications.

The mix of learning opportunities depends on the purpose and outcomes that each coach wishes to achieve. Each coach is supported by a CoachMate. These carefully selected individuals undertake a diverse peer mentoring role. This can include regular meetings with each coach, accompanying coaches to CPD events and coaching qualifications, delivering coaching sessions with and alongside the coach and supporting each coach via digital communications.

The experience of each coach is captured via an online based questionnaire platform. Coaches complete an initial questionnaire and then each time they undertake a learning experience or interaction with their CoachMate this is recorded using a further questionnaire. For example, when a coach meets their CoachMate it is the CoachMate who provides a summary of the outcomes of the experience or meeting. The questionnaires also contain questions that measure improvements in each coaches' confidence, competence, character, connection and creativity. Drawing on the data collected to date five case studies have been developed. These case studies are narratively based and describe the experience of the coach. The case study for each coach has been developed by analysing the data supplied by the CoachMate and collected through the online questionnaire.

Results

The influence of the #CoachMate programme can be illustrated through the experiences of Kallam, one of the five case studies.

Kallam comes from a family serially involved in criminal activity. After building a relationship with Kallam he disclosed to his CoachMate that he wanted to change his own future and become a coach and role model in his community. Over a 10 month period Kallam has engaged in over 40 hours of support. This 40 hours has mostly comprised of peer mentoring by his CoachMate that was undertaken both digitally and in a face-to-face environment. He also undertook a Level 1 coaching qualification in football and a Level 2 in Multi-sports, as

well as safeguarding and first aid qualifications. He is now a qualified and paid Community Coach working with other hard to reach young people, he was recently recognised by West Midlands Police as a community role model. The #CoachMate programme has been instrumental in enabling Kallam to him to change his life and influence the lives of others.

Evidence from the questionnaire data indicated that Kallam self-reported a rise in his own confidence and competence as a coach. In his own words being on the #CoachMate programme has enabled him to realise that “I never knew this could be a job, and although many people wanted me to fail, being rewarded and recognised for making a difference is something I’m really proud of.”

Implications for Coaching

Analysis of the data captured so far suggests several implications for coach learning and development. These are:

- Coach learning and development can be enhanced through a mixture of different activities that are constructed around the needs of each coach.
- Formal coaching qualifications by themselves are often insufficient to initiate significant change in coaching practice and need to be concurrently supplemented by other forms of support and opportunities.
- The skills and expertise of the CoachMate is significant, and more resource needs to be invested into their learning and development.

The #CoachMate programme is continuing to grow and evolve. As it does more lessons will be learnt, and as more data is captured further analysis will support the identification of aspects that are most beneficial. #CoachMate is striving to make a difference to the lives of those of are most disadvantaged. This means developing a sensitive and flexible approach to coach learning and development, an approach that is tailored to each individual.

References

Smith, R. and Leflay, K. (2018) Evaluation of the Coach Mate Connectors Programme. *Applied Coaching Research Journal*. Volume 2, pp. 10-17, UK Coaching, Leeds.