



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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