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## Exploring coach developer expertise

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The term ‘coach developer’ has become a proxy for a range of roles that support the development of coaches, and what underpins someone’s expertise in this field is a challenging question. Here we use an analogy and a model to shed some light on a possible answer.

### The chef analogy: tools, techniques and ingredients

Like chefs, coach developers are constantly making decisions and are continually judging the appropriate tools, techniques and ingredients to be used in their work. Kirschner and Neelen (2018) also draw on this analogy in the context of teaching and we will adapt their ideas to coach developers. What then are the tools, techniques and ingredients used by coach developers?

*The tools:* these are the media and technologies that a coach developer can use, such as a video camera, a voice recorder, a notebook, a digital interactive whiteboard, books, an e-reader, a tablet, apps and coaching analysis software.

*The techniques:* these are the instructional methods and techniques that are required by a coach developer to optimise various types of learning. Consider group discussions, reflection, collaboration, lectures/seminars, feedback techniques, assessment of practice, and designing learning tasks.

*The ingredients:* these are the specific things that can be used to facilitate, enrich, and deepen learning (Kirschner and Neelen, 2018). For instance, the different types of questions, cues and hints, examples, illustrations, simulations that coach developers might use. Add to these ingredients the context specific items that make, for example, a recreational youth team environment very different to an elite triathlon group.

Therefore, a coach developer needs to know when, how, and why tools, techniques, and ingredients should be used and implemented into a learning situation the right way. Highly skilled coach developers are akin to a master chef in applying the right approach at the right time. If the coach developer has expertise, they are able to design, develop, and facilitate effective learning experiences and adapt these for the varied coaches they work with.

### Ideas from previous research

In a model developed by Abraham (2016) making sound professional judgements and decisions is highlighted as a constant feature of the expertise demonstrated by coach developers. He suggests this is underpinned by knowledge accumulated across six domains:

1. Understanding the context (i.e. culture, strategy and politics) and adapting behaviour
2. Understanding the coach(es)’s motivations, needs and wants
3. Understanding adult learning environments
4. Understanding the coaching curriculum
5. Understanding the process and practice of coach development.
6. Understanding of self

The author recognises that it is unlikely individual coach developers will possess all the skills and knowledge identified, the model is ‘aspirational’ in nature (Abraham, 2016, p. 63) and designed as a

benchmark for mapping the role demands of coach developers. Nevertheless, it is an important and welcome insight into the expertise of coach developers.

Drawing on education research can provide more clues to expertise. When John Hattie (2003) analysed the difference between expert and 'ordinary' teachers in education he found three aspects that particularly distinguished the expert teacher. It is worth considering how these might apply to coach developers. Expert teachers and perhaps expert coach developers:

- set stretching goals and give their learners difficult tasks to challenge them;
- have a deep conceptual knowledge of the learning context, evidence-based teaching, and how learning occurs. As a consequence, their ideas are better organised, and they are more likely to explain the connections between knowledge;
- are better at monitoring their learners and providing them with more appropriate and meaningful feedback.

Another characteristic of an expert teacher is that they are **authentic**. This is very subjective and difficult to measure. Bruyckere and Kirschner (2016) have investigated what authenticity, as perceived by learners, is. They claim that being perceived as authentic encompasses four features; passion, competence, distance and uniqueness. In Figure 1 these four features have been adapted and applied to the expertise of coach developers.

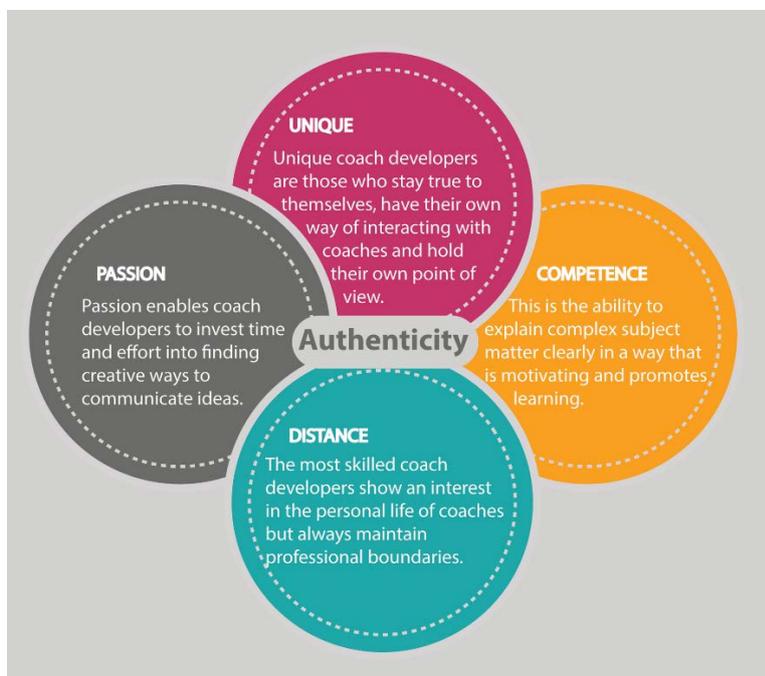


Figure 1 Authenticity in coach developers is arguably a combination of passion, competence, distance and uniqueness (adapted from Bruyckere and Kirschner, 2016).

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By way of summary Abraham (2016) emphasised professional judgement and decision-making; Hattie (2003) emphasised three things expert teachers do (stretching goals, deep knowledge, excellent monitoring) whilst authenticity in education may also be a useful concept (Bruyckere and Kirschner, 2016).

### Summary

What underpins the expertise of a coach developer? Arguably it's an authentic master of their field who makes effective judgements using the tools, techniques, and ingredients to facilitate, enrich, and deepen learning to improve coaching practice which then enhances the experience of the people being coached.

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