

Shifting Perspectives: Transitioning from coach centred to athlete centred – Challenges faced by a coach and an athlete

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Abstract

This paper outlines the voices of a practising coach and also athlete who reveal their experiences as they transitioned from the coach centred approach to the athlete centred approach within the Australian swimming culture. Using narrative accounts, their stories of experience are presented. While the benefits that the athlete centred approach to coaching can have for both athletes and coaches have been detailed in numerous research investigations, not as much has been done in relation to challenges faced by the coach and athlete as the transition occurs from coach centred to athlete centred. Inherent challenges in the transition phase from coach centred to athlete centred are important to understand in order to assist coaches and athletes when such a transition occurs. The athlete and coach in this study revealed a number of challenges. Firstly, the extent to which dominant cultural ideologies had permeated their thinking and doing was extensive even though both of them had self-determined the transition. Other issues that arose included disciplinary power and a concern for the approach being untested in terms of competitive performance. From these findings, the authors make a number of suggestions to better support both athletes and coaches during the transition from coach to athlete centred.

Key Words: Coaching; athlete centred; transition; disciplinary power; athlete; coach

Introduction

Much has been written recently about the benefits that an athlete centred approach to coaching can have for both athletes and coaches (Kidman, 2005; Kidman & Lombardo, 2010; McMahon, 2013). These benefits range from ensuring the athlete has agency within the coaching process to enabling athlete learning and growing as a sentient being. From a coaching perspective, it enables the coach to work alongside an athlete, in a socially collaborative manner and more importantly in a humanistic way (Penney & Kidman, 2014). While some challenges have been detailed by Hadfield (2005); Norton (2005) and Smith

(2005) in relation to problems that may result from the athlete centred approach once it has been implemented, not as much has been done in relation to challenges faced by the coach and athlete as they transition from coach centred to athlete centred. Inherent challenges in the transition phase from coach centred to athlete centred are important to understand in order to assist coaches and athletes when such a transition occurs. This paper outlines the voices of a practising coach and also athlete whom reveal their experiences and the challenges they faced when transitioning from the coach centred approach to the athlete centred approach within the Australian swimming culture. It is the authors' intentions to firstly highlight the impetus that caused them to transition and second the challenges they faced as they transitioned from coach to athlete centred. From these findings, suggestions for future investigations may be drawn.

The athlete centred coaching approach is far from being a simple method (Kidman & Lombardo, 2010). It promotes a sense of belonging, as well as giving athletes a role in decision making and a shared approach to learning (Kidman, 2005). The athlete centred approach is about embracing a social constructivist approach by knowing that the athlete has a history -- psychologically, cognitively and physically, and being committed not only to trying to find out what that is, but also come to understand it and with that understanding, explore with the athlete how to best enable them to become self aware and independent, responsible for their own learning and performance (Penney & Kidman, 2014, p. 3).

In contrast, the coach centred approach is described by Kidman (2005) as controlling "athlete behaviour not only throughout training and competition, but also beyond the sport setting. This kind of coach espouses all knowledge to the athletes and actually disempowers the athlete by taking total ownership" (p. 14). Further, Kidman (2005, p. 15) says that coach centred coaches "believe they are expected to win and that successful coaches are (and should be) hard-nosed and discipline orientated."

The coach and athlete at the centre of this investigation were both involved in the Australian swimming culture. In previous research conducted by McMahon and others (McMahon, 2010; McMahon & Dinan Thompson, 2011; McMahon, Penney & Dinan Thompson, 2012), it was revealed that the Australian swimming culture was deeply entrenched with technocentric practices and coaches were typically coach centred in their approaches to coaching. Bain (1990) explains "that within such a technocentric ideology, people are viewed as human resources where attention is focused on the development of an increasingly

effective and efficient means for achieving goals” (p. 29). As the technocentric ideology was widespread and deeply embedded in practices implemented by coaches and team managers at various levels, these practices were also normalised all in the name of performance. A surprising finding in this previous research was that the swimmers revealed that the technocentric practices that they were exposed to during their adolescence and while they were immersed in the Australian swimming culture were being recycled some 10--30 years later on as adults after they were no longer embedded in the culture. This reveals the extent to which these practices were deeply embodied. These findings resonate with Garrett’s (2004, p. 140) notion that our “bodies are both inscribed with and are vehicles of culture.” Hughes and Coakley (1991) discuss the often repressive systems of social control that occur in sporting cultures and how athletes are taught to uncritically accept what they are being told by their coaches. Athletes internalise these accepted norms and use them as a basis to assess themselves and others as ‘real’ athletes.

In other research conducted by Zehntner and McMahon (2013), it was revealed that within a mentee--mentor coaching relationship in the coach education pathway of Australian swimming that disciplinary techniques occurred which in turn influenced the coaching practice, personal behaviours and beliefs of the mentee coach. The Australian swimming culture and its intermediaries encouraged conformity by mentee coaches (Zehntner & McMahon, 2013). As such, it is important to recognise, particularly in relation to this paper, how deeply entrenched cultural ideologies are within the Australian swimming culture, specifically technocracy and the coach centred approach (as detailed above). Further, there are disciplinary techniques that are at play for both coaches and athletes to ensure conformity to such ideologies occurs.

The athlete and coach who feature in this research take on the dual role of researchers and participants. McMahon (writing from an athlete perspective) was a five time Australian representative who had the same coach for 20 years, having taught her to swim at age three. Her coach over this 20 year period very much adopted the coach centred approach. It was much later in McMahon’s sporting career when there was an impetus to seek out an alternative approach to coaching. Inadvertently she chose a coach who utilised the athlete centred approach, as she felt this approach more conducive to her social and emotional wellbeing. This particular coach was not respected amongst other coaches, classified as ‘having out there’ approaches and often ostracised from the culture. Zehntner (writing from a coach perspective) is an established silver license swimming coach who has had experience coaching amateur through to elite

athletes. Zehntner has been coaching for 22 years. Until recently, he utilised the coach centred approach. Both authors represent encounters within the Australian swimming culture, albeit from the perspective of one athlete and one coach. As such, it must be acknowledged that the findings of this research are confined to one swimmer and one coach who transitioned from the coach centred approach to the athlete centred approach and therefore are not representative of all swimmers or coaches who undergo this transition. Using narrative accounts, the authors (McMahon & Zehntner) present stories of experience in retrospect and also in the present day. Simplistically, narrative can be described as any written or verbal representation (Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 1993). The narratives below are made up of written stories, poems and diary extracts and have been arranged into two sections to allow ease of readership. The first section is entitled 'impetus.' This is the time when the authors first realised that they no longer felt comfortable utilising or being a part of the coach centred approach. The two stories that are included were their experiences that brought about a change, a shift in perspective that enabled them both to transition to new ways of thinking and knowing – that being the athlete centred approach. The authors felt it was important to include the impetus to change to this paper to firstly highlight their intrinsic motivation to change and the internal battles they faced. The second section is entitled 'transitioning' and represents encounters that occurred to both McMahon (athlete) and Zehntner (coach) as they transitioned from the coach centred to the athlete centred approach. Some of the narrative accounts include inner thoughts and feelings. These inner thoughts and feelings provide personal insights as athlete and coach. By including these very personal insights, the authors hope that the readers are able to resonate or even confirm a verisimilitude with their stories as they attempt to immerse themselves in new ways of being – that of the athlete centred approach.

Impetus

Jenny (athlete perspective)

I achieved a lot as a swimmer; Australian representation, gold medals and records. However, never was I given the space to have a voice; make a decision or have input into my training or my body. Throughout my time with my coach, I was always told "if you do not want to listen to me; then go somewhere else." I saw others during this time who did find the courage to speak up, only to be berated in front of the rest of the squad. I feared speaking up; I feared voicing how my body was feeling. Most of all, I feared losing my coach as I truly believed that I could not possibly achieve success without him. I also loved him like a

grandfather – he was special to me. As I approached adulthood, I found myself battling with my inner thoughts and feelings on what was best for my body. I found part of myself wanting to have input to my swimming and the other part so fearful of speaking up and the possibility of losing my coach or even worse failing. Below is an extract written from this conflicting time. The poem represents the precise time, when I realised that my own voice wanted to be heard. It was like my consciousness finally recognised the need for my own athlete voice to emerge. While I silenced it for the moment, it was shortly after when I realised that things needed to change.

I am not with you today...my swimmer body is here...but I am not. I wonder what you have planned...my body is ready...it is YOURS! I see the other swimmers... slim in physique...

You smile approvingly; I don't get the same treat. My body fails MY expectations... YOURS as well... Holding me back from Olympic representation. Here I sit on the side of the pool...waiting...

Ready...for your master critique.

My body is yours...make it win.

I look up to you...following the rest...

I will do what you want...to be the best.

I listen to HIM now not you...one of my voices say. The other conveys...this is not the way.

An internal battle of the voices transpires...momentarily... Before one says...If you fail...you will pay.

Olympic representation I want...he can give me... Not you I say as I will be history.

The struggle continues...momentarily...

Listen to me...NO I say...the coach is the only way!

I ignore YOUR voice...and ready myself for his. He has produced champions in the past...beside me they sit...

Listening to his voice...IT is the key... Succeed I will...without you indeed. His way now...or fail indeed.

I surrender to his voice – coach knows best.

Coach: “If you are serious about making that Olympic team next year, you are going to have to lose weight. You are carrying too much weight.”

Warmness is absent from his voice. It is déjà vu. I have heard these types of comments many times before from him and other coaches on the Australian swimming teams. I want to reply. I bite down on my tongue as I have learnt to silence my voice, because a reply is usually met with disapproval. I bite down hard but I cannot help myself.

Me: “What do you mean? I have been meeting with my dietician on a weekly basis for the past two months. We have made some real progress. I am losing weight each week.” Coach: “You need to lose more weight if you are serious, you can’t swim fast with the weight that you are carrying.”

Me: “But, I have lost 6 kilograms.”

Coach: “It needs to be more; you are carrying too much weight on your bum.”

I try not to let his comments affect me. I have been swimming so strongly, so fast – my coach knows this. Even though I try to remind him, he refuses to listen. I try to focus on that rather than him feeling my bum is too fat to make the Olympic team. I start to question that my coach’s comments might not be the only way, that my voice and opinions might be valid.

(McMahon, 2010; McMahon & Dinan Thompson, 2011)

Chris (coach perspective)

As a beginner coach, I hung on the words of my instructors and mentors within the coach development pathway. I readily embraced the phrase ‘record the recordable – control the controllable’. This phrase and the accompanying rhetoric insinuated that in order to achieve a high performance edge, my athletes, their

training performance and their racing performance must be tightly controlled. This pseudo--scientific approach was palatable to swimmers' parents and created a sense of importance among the swimmer athletes as they felt the value placed on their efforts by coaching staff. I found myself embracing the pseudo--scientific approach, until one day – I had a revelation, a moment that made me reflect on my approach. I outline this moment below.

'Did you see this in the paper?' asked Michael, proffering the crumpled newsprint. 'Someone wrote in to letters to the editor about how you don't let your swimmers take toilet breaks during the session!' His tone was slightly accusatory and I felt a little defensive.

'What, really, they wrote that?' I asked, reaching for the paper.

'Yes, apparently they overheard you saying it to someone during a session'

'Wow, listen to this' I exclaim, reading with a slight nasal tone. 'I was recently swimming laps at my local pool when I overheard the swimming coach say to his swimmers that they were not allowed a bathroom break. I am disgusted that this coach (who was dealing with some young children) would not let his swimmers take a break, is this child abuse?'

Shaking my head I quickly explain to Michael who is a past club president that I do allow toilet breaks, just never in the middle of a set. 'I expect them to commit to the session and once they start I expect they will finish what I've set. I live and breathe this stuff Michael, and I expect the same in return from my swimmers. This lady has obviously just heard a snippet and blown it out of proportion, she doesn't understand about commitment. There is no way I would let a swimmer weasel out of the hard stuff, I'm committed to them, I'll support them, besides if I let one of them go there will be a flood of full bladders. You can bet your last dollar the Kieren Perkins doesn't get out mid set!'

Michael nodding throughout my response approves with a curt 'Quite right too'.

I am secretly gutted by this accusation; I don't want to come over as a pushover to my swimmers or to Michael for that matter. Who wants to be remembered as a soft coach? I secretly feel like I am pretending to be the 'hard liner' and it begins to dawn on me that I don't have the stomach for it (Zehntner and McMahon, Under Review).

This excerpt illustrates conflicted thinking surrounding athlete decision making and the degree to which I controlled the athlete training artefact. On the continuum that is my personal coaching philosophy I was yet to realise the benefits of athlete self-determination as described Kidman and Hanrahan (2010). Unfortunately this approach also created an unbalanced meritocracy that differentiated swimmers, by placing value on performance without consideration of social and emotional development (McMahon, Penney & Dinan Thompson, 2012).

Chris (coach perspective)

1 Kieren Perkins is a dual Olympic gold medallist and only the second Australian to defend an individual Olympic championship. He overcame adversity to succeed in one of the most gruelling races on the Olympic program, the 1500 metres freestyle (Gordon, n.d.).

This camp which I have been asked to be a part of will bring together coaches to work with the National Age Squad under the tutelage of the National Age-group coach attendants. I am stoked to be here. I am determined to soak up as much information as possible and spend a lot of my time listening to the conversations of other coaches and watching their interactions with their swimmers and the head coach. This camp, we are told, is to help prepare swimmers and coaches for more advanced squads such as the National Open Squad. At various times throughout the three day camp, the coaches as a group were taken aside by the Head coach and his assistant for lectures and seminars. Towards the end of the camp, the coaches were called into a small room at the aquatic facility that we were using for training. What followed was initially a very informal talk about balancing work – life- coaching pressures and then progressed to a review of the expectations of a coach on the national open team.

Head coach: 'If you are selected as a coach on a national open team there will be a huge expectation that you will deliver quality results for your swimmers and the team. As a part of the process of learning how things happen on the national team, you will be expected to defend your sessions to the other coaches in the team.'

Ok this makes sense, I talk about what I propose to do and the other coaches offer input on the options I have, win-win.

Head coach: 'It is not a very pleasant experience; however, all of us have had to go through this in our time.'

What? Suddenly I am not so sure of what is about to happen.

The Head coach steps purposefully to front row of assembled coaches and glares over our heads towards a coach at the back of the group.

Head coach (in a gruff and snappy business like tone): 'As he is one of the more experienced coaches here I have decided to look at Aaron's work. Firstly, Aaron, could you tell us what you hope to achieve by doing hard fly workouts so soon after a big competition and so close our event?'

The room goes deathly quiet, I feel myself shrink into my chair, and I just know that this is not going to be nice. Aaron tries to stand but the packed nature of the room restricts him, he settles on a semi crouch at the front of his chair. Aaron (who is usually a confident and outspoken coach starts to respond with a detailed justification of the workout):

'I chose a hard fly set because I felt the swimmers in my lane needed ...'

Head coach (interrupting): 'I am not sure that you were looking at the same swimmers that I was, they were struggling physically, their technique was poor, a poor choice.

Have you spoken to their home coaches? Have you determined from the swimmers their mental and physical state? Are you even looking at how they hold themselves in the water?'

Aaron: 'I thought that by reintroducing hard efforts, their bodies would not turn off and begin to relax ...'

Head coach (interrupting): 'Turn off? Are you kidding? They will shut down ... That is just ridiculous!'

Aaron: 'I do this in my home programme after some competitions ...'

Head Coach (interrupting): 'I don't care about your home programme! You are dealing with other coaches' swimmers here. These kids are obviously not coping with what you are giving them. Can you see that?'

The questions were rhetorical as each of Aaron's responses no matter the validity was cut short or picked apart in an extremely aggressive tone by the head coach. Ten to fifteen minutes pass and the attack continues, I watched with mounting trepidation as Aaron's answers become weaker and less convincing, his face flushed with colour and his body language at first confident now clearly shows how uncomfortable he is. If he starts on me I am going to bolt out of here ... Yeah but where does that leave you, idiot?... Better to face the music ... What is the bloody point though? This is ridiculous! If I don't do it 'their' way all the time, I will be torn to shreds like Daniel. If I do I am fine. Even though I know 'their' way will avoid such a conflict encounter by the head coach of Australian swimming, some of their ways do not feel right. (Zehntner & McMahon, 2013)

Transition

The below stories are presented by the athlete (McMahon) and coach (Zehntner) as they transition from the coach centred approach to the athlete centred. Both authors indicate that these stories occurred within the first six months of transitioning from coach centred to athlete centred.

Jenny (athlete perspective)

It was shortly after this encounter when I started training with another coach, a coach who adopted an athlete centred approach. Some may say that is all I needed in my swimming career to develop into all that I could have been earlier, however this time was filled with mixed emotions and mixed experiences. I was constantly second guessing myself, second guessing my voice that not so long ago battled to keep suppressed. I truly believed that with my input into my training, that I would fail.

I sit down with my new coach to discuss my goals for the season. It is just him and me. He greets me as I walk into his office. I like that I don't have to share my goals with anybody else but him.

Coach: "Have you thought about what you think you might like to aim for this season?"

Me: "yeh, I have. I don't know if you are going to like it? I don't even know if it is achievable. It is kind of what I want to do though."

Coach: "so, let me know what it is."

Me: "I am kind of sick of pool swimming. I just don't feel like I can achieve in the pool anymore. I know I probably can physically, but I just keep talking myself out of it mentally – you know?"

Coach: "so, what would you like to do?"

Me: "I want to give open water swimming a crack. I like swimming in the ocean and I know I have done lots of background miles in the past to provide a good foundation for me."

Coach: "so, have you looked at what events are coming up? And what distance in particular that you would like to do?"

Me: "The first race is not until April, which is 3 months from now. It is 2 kilometres. I don't think that I would like to go over 2 kilometres in distance."

Coach: "I agree with you that you have a good foundation to do this. I think that doing a race in 3 months is more than achievable. What do you think you need to be doing in your training to get you ready for this?"

I am panicked by this question. Like, I do have ideas about what I should be doing. But I am the athlete, not the coach. I don't want to say my ideas, because what happens if we do them and they don't work? I don't trust myself. As thoughts race through my head, I feel pressured to respond. But, I definitely don't trust my ideas enough to say them so I just shrug.

Coach: "That's ok. Let's meet every week and if you feel like we need to be doing anything extra, let me know. We can talk about them and adjust your training. I think that your mileage is good but we could focus on doing a little more distance at 15 beats below maximum heart rate. How does that sound to you?"

Me: "Cool."

I am glad I did not have to risk trying my ideas – don't want to fail.

Jenny (athlete perspective)

I am in the middle of the main set but my coach stops me. I get frustrated. I don't want him to stop me. I want to keep going. I don't want to miss any laps.

Coach: "How is your technique feeling right now?"

Me: "I don't know to tell you the truth – I wasn't really thinking about it."

Coach: "Ok, I want you to think about it over the next 400 and let me know how you feel?"

400 metres later the coach stops me again.

Coach: "So, how do you feel?"

Me: "Ok, I guess. I am not sure what you mean?"

Coach: "We are in the final kilometre of a 3 kilometre main set. You are starting to feel fatigued. How does your technique feel? How you are feeling now is how you will be feeling in a race so I want you to be able to counteract any things that you might do with your technique as you become fatigued."

Me: "Oh ok, well, I kind of feel like I am just sludging up and down the pool." What they hell do I actually mean by sludging...I don't even know?

Me (again): "I suppose my body roll doesn't feel that even."

Coach: "what do you think you can do to get a more even body roll?"

Me: "Well, I suppose I can breathe to on both sides?"

Coach: "Great. Work on trying to breathe bilateral when you feel like that it will help you even out your roll on both sides."

I push off and start swimming again. I do what my coach has said....and breathe bilateral. Then I think about that conversation and I start to get worried. I realise that my coach did not actually tell me that I needed to concentrate more on my

body roll, it was me. I am not sure if I even need to concentrate on it. I just tried to come up with something and that was the only thing I could think of. How do I know if it is right? Why can't he just tell me if that is what I need to do or if it is something else? I finish of the final part of the set and am not sure if my technique is actually feeling better. After I finish, my coach asks me again.

Coach: "So, how did it feel when you started breathing bilaterally?"

Me: "Good, I guess."

I get out of the pool, confused and worried. Why can't he just tell me what I am doing wrong – he is the expert after all. How will I ever achieve my goals if he doesn't tell me? Even though I purposely chose to swim with this coach because I knew he gave his swimmers more input, it is not as easy to do as I thought. I am constantly filled with self--doubt and a fear of failing.

Chris (coach perspective)

I was determined that I no longer wanted to be a 'traffic cop coach' shouting instructions and constantly being the centre of attention. I wanted my swimmers to take more responsibility for their performance in the training session. At this particular training session we gained a new member. I asked one of the senior girls to help this chap get started.

The swimmers arrived sporadically to the aquatic centre and in a general way began to complete a short stretch and strengthening routine before assembling in their bathers at the end of the pool. I talked briefly about the aim of the session and as the first swimmer dived in I walked around to the side of the pool to vie the session. At various times throughout the session I spoke with the group, but it was not until the end of the session when we did some race start practice that I interacted more closely with individual swimmers.

At the conclusion of the session as the swimmers were towelling off, I was approached by the mother of our new member, smiling I greeted her.

Point blank she asked how much the sessions were going to cost per week. I explained the breakdown according to the number of sessions a swimmer attended. She then asked;

Mother: “And what do we get for our twenty dollars a week? It looks like they (the swimmers) just do their own thing.”

I was stunned and after a long pause just managed to mumble;

Me: “Well at the moment, I am the only practicing silver licence coach in this town, and we are reigning state--wide club champions.” This felt very hollow as I said it and I knew it was unconvincing. She looked at me a little dubiously and asked how much attention I would give to her son’s technique. I had recovered my shock at this stage and began to explain my philosophy in relation to giving the athletes more space to make decisions, but I could feel her disapproval and at the conclusion of the conversation knew I had not explained myself to her satisfaction.

I dwelt on this mother’s comments for weeks and the incident still gives me a little anxiety years later as I wrestle with her simple question. Have I done a disservice giving greater choice, could they (my swimmers) have been better had I dominated decision making and not allowed them to opt in or out of a particular session? Was this my failing as a coach or something that I could be proud of?

Chris (coach perspective)

Working with adult swimmers has many challenges, including multiple strong personalities, well established patterns of movement and strong expectations of a coach’s role in their swimming experience.

Recently I was working with a small group of swimmers concentrating on body position and balance in the front crawl. Using an athlete centred approach, I was trying to focus the swimmers’ attention on the feedback that they could get from their own body rather than rely on a third party (me) to tell them when it was right or wrong.

Me: “The aim of these activities”, I explained “is to help us maintain a horizontal streamlined and balanced body position using our upper body and head rather than our leg kick”

As we progressed through each skill or drill, I could see one particular chap getting more and more frustrated. I sought his feedback regarding how his body felt in the water and what effect the activity was having on his leg position.

Swimmer: “I feel like a bloody idiot wallowing around like this, what’s the bloody point! Can’t you just tell me how to fix my freestyle?”

Stumped, I explained how it would be more advantageous if he could develop an awareness of what his body was doing in the water and then he could self-correct his stroke. Grumbling to himself he pushed off for the next lap, but as soon as he got to the other end of the pool he ducked under the lane rope and into the adjoining lane where a group was completing a set of short repeats in freestyle.

I was exasperated, yes I could have just said; press your head and chest deeper into the water, make sure your eyes are looking directly down. How many times am I going to have to say that though?

Why can’t he feel what I want him to feel? Did I not describe the drill clearly enough?

Frustration and self-doubt creeps in as I realise my total failure to connect with this swimmer. I wonder secretly if the remaining swimmers are just humouring their beloved coach and really just want the token technical feedback that I have offered in the past. I know in my heart that it would be easier for me to offer the correction mid-session, but time and time again I watch as the next 5 strokes alter, closer to a more proficient technique only to fade back to a more familiar pattern of movement.

The club directive was for a greater focus on specific stroke correction instruction I say to the president as he comes up to me at the end of the session to discuss my new approaches.

Me: “well what I am doing is smart stroke correction! I need them to be patient, this is not something that can be fixed like that” I say, clicking my fingers.

I secretly hope I am not losing respect from the president and the swimmers with my new approach.

Discussion

Within the Australian swimming culture, the coach centred coaching approach was a deeply embedded practice where swimmers were viewed by coaches as instruments and object for manipulation (McMahon & Dinan

Thompson, 2008; McMahon & Dinan Thompson, 2011). The notion that the coach is the bearer of all knowledge in order to achieve success was a dominant ideology that permeated not only coaches' thinking but also athletes' thinking and provided the foundation of all overarching practices (McMahon, 2010). This was evident in McMahon and Zehntner's initial stories where they both continued to live and play out the culturally dominant norm (coach centred approach). Both participants after a 20 year period, had encounters which they identified as the impetus to transition from a coach centred approach to an athlete centred approach. It is important to acknowledge the extent to which culturally dominant ideologies such as the coach centred approach (accepted practice) continued to permeate their practice, behaviour, conversation and being as can be seen in the narrative accounts detailed by McMahon and Zehntner. Particularly as those who did not conform to the culturally accepted way of practice (coach centred) were disciplined (as mentioned by McMahon) or ostracised from the culture.

The second challenge that McMahon and Zehntner had to overcome was that they both had achieved competitive performance with the coach centred approach. Although their impetus for change was due to the coach centred approach 'not sitting right with them,' they both had doubts in regard to the new athlete centred approach as it was unfounded in terms of competitive performance and deviated from the cultural norm. McMahon embodied the notion that she could not be successful without coach decision making. Even though she had committed to try the new athlete centred approach, she still displayed characteristics of a coach centred trained athlete.

Kidman and Davis (2006) say that a coach centred trained athlete would lack confidence and competence in regard to making any decisions and is dependent on the coach. Her uncertainty stemmed from her fear of failing and not trusting her own voice and opinions in regards to her training. Further, she felt her voice could not be a voice of authority that would achieve success. The deeply embedded ideology that the coach is the bearer of all knowledge in order to achieve competitive success was realised when analysing her inner dialogue.

I am panicked by this question. Like, I do have ideas about what I should be doing. But I am the athlete, not the coach. I don't want to say my ideas, because what happens if he does them and they don't work? I don't trust myself. As thoughts race in my head, I feel pressured to respond. But, I definitely don't trust my ideas enough to say them so I just shrug.

A third challenge that occurred specifically for Zehntner was the hierarchical power structures that existed for him as a coach in his employment situation; within a mentee-mentor relationship and within the culture. In Zehntner's narrative, the club president expressed his concerns on behalf of the club in regard to a lack of specific stroke technique directions. This in turn created doubt in relation to the approach as so many people were unhappy with it.

President: The club directive was for a greater focus on specific stroke correction instruction.

Chris: "They asked for stroke correction, well what I am doing is smart stroke correction. I need them to be patient, this is not something that can be fixed like that" I say, clicking my fingers. I secretly hope I am not losing respect from the president and the swimmers with my new approach.

Even though Zehntner had explained his new way of doing things to the club president and committee which was in turn was communicated to the swimmers, the narrative reveals that the swimmers struggled with the new approach, particularly in regard to the questioning and self analysis of their own technique. They were more accustomed to listening to the coach's directives and the coach making the decisions. This is indicative of a coach centred athlete (Kidman & Davis, 2006).

Zehntner, as a mentee coach operated within a power relationship—that being the mentor-mentee coaching relationship and was expected to conform to a certain way of doing things by his mentors otherwise he could not progress along the coach education pathway of Australian swimming. Even though some practices did not 'feel right' for Zehntner, if he did not implement them he could experience disciplinary action, and place at jeopardy, his position within the hierarchy of the Australian swimming culture. The narrative revealed that the mentee-mentor relationship that the head coach, Daniel and Zehntner became engaged in could be viewed as a site where disciplinary actions were taken out. Even though Zehntner's interactions with the head coach were brief but intense, they housed most of the rich experiential learning that in turn informed his coaching practice. The sport's governing body as a collective of practitioners, subscribe to a set of attitudes and behaviours that are key indicators of coaching ability.

Conclusion

The athlete and coach in this study revealed how during the transition from the coach centred to the athlete centred approach that a number of challenges occurred. Firstly, the extent to which dominant cultural ideologies had permeated their thinking and doing was extensive even though both of them had self--determined the transition from the coach to the athlete centred approach. Other issues that arose included the disciplinary power which occurred for Zehntner as a mentee coach within a mentor-mentee coaching relationship. Even though the impetus was there to adopt the athlete centred approach, mentors (senior coaches) expected him as a mentee (junior coaches) to conform to their way of doing things which has been found in previous research to be technocentric and coach centred (McMahon, 2010; McMahon & Dinan Thompson, 2011; McMahon, Penney & Dinan Thompson, 2012; Zehntner & McMahon, 2013). Disciplinary issues in Zehntner's place of employment arose when a number of swimmers did not respond in a positive way to the athlete centred way of doing things. While the workplace as a site of disciplinary power is a difficult obstacle to overcome, dominant cultural ideologies may be somewhat easier to address. A small scale research project conducted by McMahon (2013) with ten Australian swimming coaches investigated the use of narrative, where coaches were able to engage with swimmers' lived experiences. These lived experiences in particular were events that actually occurred to the swimmers during their involvement in the Australian swimming culture. Coaches were presented with a number of swimmers' stories. These stories initiated self reflection for the coaches to occur. They were an educational tool that was effective in providing coaches with space to cast the beam of consciousness over their own practice. As a consequence, self reflection was initiated, as was empathy and more of a holistic and athlete centred approach to coaching. While this research conducted by McMahon, 2013 was only done with a small number of coaches, the findings are promising particularly in relation to moving coaches beyond dominant ideologies and practices to a more holistic, empathetic, athlete centred way of practice. Further research could be conducted using McMahon's (2013) approach and applying it to coaches and athletes as they transition from the coach centred approach to the athlete centred approach, to see (if at all) how it might assist them. While McMahon's study (2013) was conducted with coaches, the same approach could be applied to swimmers, where they could engage with other swimmers' stories who have transitioned from the coach centred approach to the athlete centred approach. Athletes engaging with other athletes' narratives may offer some space for them to resonate and understand the obstacles others faced as they transitioned from coach to athlete centred. This could also be another avenue for

future research could better support athletes as they transition from coach to athlete centred.

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