

More than a brain on legs: an exploration of working with the body in coaching

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Abstract

Coaching typically takes place as a seated conversation aimed at stimulating cognitive reflection. This study explores why some coaches are choosing to combine a physical activity with their coaching rather than working in a more conventional manner. An IPA methodology was used, based on a convenience sample of six coaches. Two key themes emerged, relating to the coaches' perception of using all of themselves in the coaching interaction, including their embodied awareness and intuition, and their experience of its effectiveness.

Keywords: coaching, somatic, embodied, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

Introduction

Coaching is a young discipline whose boundaries, practices and definitions remain ambiguous, resulting in a wide range of different approaches (Sherman and Freas, 2004; Grant, Passmore, Cavanagh and Parker, 2010). Typically, individual coaching is delivered as a seated conversation and aims to stimulate cognition and reflexivity in the client. This focus on cognition stimulated via a verbal interaction between coach and client seems surprising, given that the idea that individuals take in and process information not only via conscious cognitive intelligence but also in a more embodied sense has been accepted for many years in many fields of learning. For example, Gardner's multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993) include bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence, while Kolb's learning styles (Kolb, 1984) emphasise the importance of experiential learning by actively doing.

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in the use of emotional and social intelligences in coaching (e.g. Goleman, and Boyatzis, 2008) but little attention is paid to working directly with physical learning and development that appear to occur outside of the range of conscious cognitive processing. Coaching approaches that do involve some direct work with the body, for example in rehearsal and role play, are generally aimed at increasing understanding and encouraging reflexivity, rather than at working directly with the body to enable implicit learning.

My personal experience, during twenty years of coaching the Japanese martial art of Aikido, is that physical training frequently leads to developmental changes in students that impact all areas of their lives. This seems to involve many factors: an increase in self-confidence and agency; a change in the way they interact with others and deal with conflict; an increased kinaesthetic awareness and capacity to be present in the moment and the ability to access a deep level of embodied awareness. I have also found that in a wider context, many people who work with the body or with physical activities (such as hairdressers, massage therapists and craft teachers) report that these activities frequently give rise to coaching type conversations (relating to the resolution of problems, life choices etc.).

Reviewing the coaching literature indicates that little research has been undertaken in this area and there appears to be little evidence to indicate whether the experiences above are generalisable to coaching. On the other hand, research in disciplines such as outdoor education, team building and various therapeutic approaches suggests that physical activity and embodied intelligences play an important role in change and development. This suggested a need for an exploratory study to investigate the relevance of working with the body to coaching by exploring the experience of coaches who are choosing to combine physical interventions with their coaching rather than working in a more conventional manner.

Since any coaching that takes place with a physical presence of both coach and client will, by its nature, involve some level of physical interaction (for example, the subconscious effects of body language), the following criteria were used to constrain this study:

1. The physical interventions were consciously introduced and were clearly identifiable.
2. Equal weight was given to both the coaching and the physical activity.
3. The coach was experienced in the physical intervention as well as the coaching.

Sports and health coaching, where the focus of the coaching is typically related to a physical goal, were excluded from the scope of this study in order to investigate whether this kind of approach is more generically applicable.

Terminology and definitions

Terminology and definitions are frequently an issue in coaching research. In this paper, I use the term *personal coaching* to refer to executive or life coaching and *conventional coaching* to refer to personal coaching carried out as a seated dyad in a room. I use the term *embodied intelligence* to refer to knowledge that resides in the body but is normally not conscious or explicit (encompassing ideas such as somatic intelligence and bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence, implicit learning, tacit knowledge, intuition etc.) and *physical intervention* to describe a physical activity primarily targeted at using embodied intelligence and working outside of conscious rational cognition.

Literature

Several examples were found in the literature describing the use of minor physical interventions as part of a conventional coaching session. For example: a cognitive-behavioural intervention where the client “snapped” a rubber band on their wrist whenever they became aware of negative self-talk, creating a physical feedback loop to alter their habitual behaviour (Rock and Page, 2009); in gestalt coaching by using role play, creative play (using toy figures to represent characters in the client’s environment) or creating polarities by having the client physically move from one spot to another representing different perspectives (Wright, 2012); and in somatic coaching, changing patterns of walking and posture and breathing to raise somatic awareness, freeing implicit memories and training the body to a new pattern of responses (Blake, 2009). In these examples, the physical intervention is a relatively minor part of the overall coaching interaction (although in the somatic approach, the body is considered an essential source of knowledge and a fundamental part of the process, Kerka, 2002).

Very few studies were found where coaching was combined with a separate physical activity with the intention of enhancing the efficacy of the coaching. Goldman Schuyler (2010) describes an integrated approach including somatic awareness (Feldenkrais bodywork) and intentional mind training (Tibetan Buddhist mindfulness) alongside coaching for leadership development. She presents a case study showing how this approach to embodied learning, combined with coaching, leads to transformational learning in clients and increased capacity to act with awareness rather than resorting to habitual responses. Harding (2006) presents a study where coaches attempted to address

all eight of Gardner's intelligences; those they considered familiar (inter and intra personal, logical-mathematical and linguistic) and those that were less familiar (bodily-kinaesthetic, musical, spatial, and naturalistic). The study found that emphasising these unfamiliar, embodied intelligences helped learners involve both mind and body in the process and aided goal achievement. Harding also comments that coaches found it challenging to retain control of the flow of the session while working with physical activities, particularly when these activities were unfamiliar, suggesting that familiarity with the physical intervention may be an important factor in this way of working.

Other examples of combined interventions include Spence *et al.* (2008), who describe the use of mindfulness training as a method of enhancing the effectiveness of coaching and Aquilina (2011), who mentions a coaching session combining massage with affirmations, aimed at releasing tension and helping the client to be more centred and grounded.

I did not find any literature that explored how much the physical intervention contributes in terms of the overall coaching outcome and it was often unclear where the boundary between physical (embodied) and cognitive (disembodied) intervention lies, or whether such a separation is possible. For example, in the empty chair technique, Rock and Page (2009, p.294) suggest that the physical movement is critically important since "this technique is based on assumptions of holism and necessitates shifting sensations and perceptions" but it is not clear whether the shifting sensations themselves engender the change or if these are just a stimulus to conscious insight.

Combined interventions in other disciplines

Physical activity often plays a part in other developmental approaches such as outdoor learning and team building (Watson and Vasilieva, 2007), although much of the evidence for its effectiveness is anecdotal (Shivers-Blackwell, 2004). The physical activities distract the conscious mind, interrupt habitual cognitive patterns, and take clients out of their comfort zone, allowing the subconscious to generate new creative solutions and making them more open to unusual ideas (Williams *et al.*, 2003). Similar distractions are described for coaching, such as interrupting to break habitual verbal loops (Rogers, 2009).

Studies also suggest that being present in a natural environment can be a key factor in engendering sustainable change (Watson and Vasilieva, 2007). Taylor *et al.* (2010) use integral systems theory to explain this, describing the client as a self-organising, complex system that exchanges energy with the interconnected and interlocked systems of the surrounding environment. Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) suggest that natural environments provide a sense of both vastness and connectedness and also enables individuals to recognise parallels between their concerns and environmental patterns.

Therapeutic interventions which incorporate physical activity are becoming increasingly common: for example, Serlin (1999) describes the use of kinaesthetic imaging (dance therapy) in the treatment of breast cancer which had psychological and physiological effects; horticultural therapy has been used for treating depression (Gonzalez *et al.*, 2010) and for aiding clients with chronic fatigue (Millet, 2009) and laughter therapy has both physiological and emotional effects and has been shown to improve employees' self-efficacy (Beckman *et al.*, 2007).

Learning and development

Coaching approaches are generally grounded in learning and development theories, many of which include a physical component. Gardner (1993) proposed eight intelligences used in learning and change, yet most coaching focuses on cognitive intelligences rather than those that are embodied (Harding, 2006). Other learning approaches make use of a wider range of intelligences. For example, Griss (1994) describes the use of bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence with school children to channel disruptive energy into creative expression.

Taylor (2001) examined how transformative change can occur on an implicit level, outside the awareness of the individual, and questioned the dependence of learning theory on cognitive critical reflection, while Tsoukas (2003) suggests that tacit knowledge is essentially ineffable and that physical “mimicry” may have an irreplaceable role in learning. Lawrence (2012) proposes that intuition arises from embodied knowledge (hence terms such as ‘gut feeling’) and can be accessed via physical activities such as dance or being in nature. Neuroscience also appears to support the view that mind and body are integrated and that learning can occur at a subconscious or embodied, as well as at an intellectual, cognitive level (Downey, 2010, Weidemann, 2003).

The findings from the literature suggest that embodied intelligences have an important role to play in learning, change and development that is complementary to, but different from, the more conscious cognitive intelligences. Physical interventions can surface retroflected thoughts and feelings (suppressed impulses to take action, Joyce and Sills, 2010) and enable the client to access a deep level of “knowing” or engender change without necessitating conscious understanding (Gendlin, 1982). They can also generate a coaching relationship that involves a “physical mutual engagement, quite different to traditional observing and reflecting” (Wright, 2012).

Methodology

The focus on exploring the experience and meaning making of coaches who choose to combine physical interventions with their coaching suggested that an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach would be an appropriate methodology.

Creswell (1998) suggests a qualitative approach is appropriate where a new topic needs to be explored. The choice of methodology is underpinned by the researcher’s philosophical stance which provides a context for the process (Crotty, 1998). My experience in geophysics research (Long, Matthews and Graham, 1994) and subsequent work with emergent software development (Thomas, 2011), have led me to a belief that reality is, by its nature, complex, synergistic and unknowable (a complex realism ontology). Meaning making is a construction about reality (a constructionist epistemology). These beliefs result in an interpretivist approach, where information gathered is not objective truth but the participants’ interpretation of their experiences and my understanding of this is inevitably influenced by my theoretical perspective and pre-existing beliefs. This position necessitated an ongoing process of reflexivity during the study. Maintaining a research diary encouraged reflexive objectivity (being aware of presuppositions: prejudices and subjectivity, Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009), despite the belief that pure objectivity (freedom from bias) was unobtainable.

Phenomenology aims to describe the “*meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon*” (Creswell, 1998, p.51). Phenomenological methodologies vary depending on the philosophy that informs them. One significant difference to these is their approach to epoché or bracketing, whereby the researcher separates out their preconceptions. Whereas some approaches expect the researcher to be objective and outside of the experience, IPA draws on the Heideggerian approach and considers interpretation to be an active part of the researcher’s role. It involves a double hermeneutic, since “the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world” (Smith and Osborn, 2008, p.53). It also takes an ideographic approach, valuing each case individually rather than seeking to generalise and is concerned with how individuals construct meaning within their personal and social context (symbolic interactionism), which includes the individual’s past experiences (Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2009).

Interviews are the most common way of collecting data for IPA and were chosen for this study since the real time dialogue gives a great deal of flexibility to explore the participants’ experience (Eatough and Smith, 2008). A semi-structured approach was taken, allowing the questions to evolve,

both during each interview, and over the series of interviews. Seidman's (2006) sequence was used to provide a 3-part framework for the interviews, focusing on: life history (putting the participants' experiences in context); details of experience (their direct experience of using this approach) and reflection on the meaning. A pilot interview was conducted and since only minor changes were made following this, it was included as part of the study.

No triangulation was performed despite this sometimes being considered a fundamental characteristic of the qualitative approach (e.g. Bryman, 2008, p.379). Triangulation suggests that there is a single knowable reality that can be correlated from multiple data sources (a positivist rather than interpretivist position) and may result in confusion and conflict if different sources of data are grounded in different epistemological frameworks (Seidmann, 2006).

The focus of IPA is to "analyse in detail how participants perceive and make sense of things which are happening to them" (Smith and Osborn, 2008, p.67). Although Smith (2004) states that there is no "cookbook" of instructions for IPA, data analysis typically involves some kind of thematic analysis and this approach was followed for this study. In accordance with the idiographic nature of IPA, each interview was analysed separately until "some degree of closure or gestalt has been achieved" (Smith, 2004, p.41) before moving on to an analysis of subsequent cases. Analysis was based on iterative data reduction, by first identifying and labelling or coding substantive statements in the data, then grouping these into more generic categories and then describing 'superordinate themes' (Smith, 2004) that summarised the data in these categories. Detailed comments were kept with each label to facilitate a more interpretative analysis, including thoughts about alternative interpretations and possible meanings. Eatough and Smith (2008, p.189) state that one of the roles of the researcher is to attempt to create an "alternative coherent narrative from the messy sense making of the participant".

Participants

Participants were selected by convenience sampling based on recommendations and enquiries on internet forums and chosen because they seemed potentially rich sources of data. They are not statistically representative of any population. In order to ensure that there was equal weight given to coaching skills and physical activities: participants were experienced in one or more method of working with the body. The sample was deliberately not constrained by the level of coaching qualifications of the participants due to concerns that formal coach training might introduce a bias towards the static dyadic approach. The choice of interview method was left to the participant. Of the six interviews included in the study, three were face to face, one by telephone and two via Skype. All of the interviews were recorded.

Of the six participants, five were professional coaches and one was involved with coaching in his role as a manager. All of the participants had had formal coach training, as well as training in other learning and development approaches such as clean language, MBTI, conflict resolution etc. Four were trained in NLP and three had an interest in a psychotherapeutic approach (e.g. ecopsychology: sychosynthesis). The inner game (Gallwey, 1986) was mentioned by four of the participants as an important influence on their approach.

Two described themselves as somatic coaches and were consciously working with the body in their coaching interventions, considering this a core part of their work. They had studied various somatic approaches, including conscious embodiment (Palmer, 1994) and the work of Strozzi-Heckler (1993). All of the participants were experienced in some kind of physical activity including martial arts (tai chi, aikido or karate), bodywork (massage, Feldenkrais etc.), activities such as dance, yoga or hill walking, individual or team sports, and other activities with a physiological component such as chi gung, meditation or laughter yoga. All six were involved in teaching/training in a

physical activity and four were also providing coach training and/or supervision. Pseudonyms are used for the participants in the following discussion.

Activity/interest	No. (out of 6)	Notes
Formal coach training	6	
Professional coaches	5	<i>Other participant involved in coaching as a manager</i>
NLP training	4	
Influenced by “inner game”	4	
Providing coach training/supervision	4	
Interest in psychotherapeutic approach	3	<i>NLP psychotherapy, ecopsychology: sychosynthesis: sychology etc.)</i>
Experience in a physical activity	6	<i>Martial arts, bodywork, sports, dance, yoga, hill walking, chi gung, meditation or laughter yoga</i>
Teaching physical activity	6	<i>e.g. martial arts, chi gung, hill walking</i>
Working with coaching in parallel with a physical activity (group 1 above)	5	<i>Walking, massage, laughter therapy</i>
Using their experience in physical activities in their conventional coaching (group 2)	5	
Training in embodied approaches	4	<i>e.g. conscious embodiment or the work of Strozzi-Heckler</i>
Somatic coaches (group 3)	2	

Table 1: Summary of activities and interests of participants

Findings

Two superordinate themes emerged from the analysis. These are discussed below:

Superordinate theme	Subtheme	Why use this approach?
1. A matter of identity	More than a philosophy Background and beliefs All of me Not real work?	Because it is who I am Because of what I believe/have discovered <i>The body has a key role to play</i> <i>Everything is connected</i> <i>We are relational beings</i> Because I can use all of myself Because it works for the client, even if I don't know why and it seems too easy/fun
2. A different way in	Working at a different level Sustainable learning Interrupting patterns The bigger picture Demystifying the magic	Because it gives me more ways in Because it is more memorable and sticks Because it is a tool for disrupting habits Because the environment works for me Because it explains why coaching works

Table 1: Summary of superordinate themes and associated rationale

A matter of identity

All participants expressed the belief that working with a physical approach was not simply a choice but a fundamental expression of their identity which enabled them to be more authentic and present to the client, as Martin suggested:

it's not just a belief, I mean that would be I think a core aspect of who I am and what I love and what I am doing in the world [...] this idea of body mind integration, body mind spirit

emotions, to flesh that out that's just absolutely fundamental to who I am and what I am about. (Martin)

Participants considered their approach to originate from their personal background and experience, typically including a lifelong interest in embodiment, experiences of physicality contributing to their own personal development, and disillusionment with the educational focus on cognitive knowledge and learning. From this arose three key beliefs:

1. *The body has an important role to play.* It is the primal means through which we express ourselves and connect to the rest of the world, and our fundamental level of knowing and learning. *“And you know we do live - all our experiences come through our body, you know all our life is through, is lived through our body.” (Peter)*

2. *Everything is connected.* Mind, body and emotion are integrally connected and we need to work holistically with them. Participants working with coaching and walking also emphasised the connection between the individual and the wider environment in which they were embedded. Owen explains:

It seems to me that there are two really fundamental splits that we are not dealing with very well in society. One is individually, this split between the head, and the rest of us. So we value, [...] logic and rationality and all of this kind of stuff [...] Irrationality and emotions and intuition and stuff is all a bit, sort of, dodgy or stuff that we know in our body. So there is this sense that within ourselves we split off a lot of our knowing and our wisdom. But then at a bigger scale, we have also done the same thing between ourselves and the earth. (Owen)

3. *We are relational beings.* We are designed to connect to and be influenced by others and our wider environment via the body.

As human beings we are kind of open loop emotionally. So we kind of...we almost naturally lock on to other people and engage with them emotionally...you know. Whereas cognitively, stuff can go on in our heads on its own, emotionally we are essentially relational beings. (Owen)

All the participants considered one of the key roles of coaching was to resolve the apparent disconnections in these systems. They also considered that working through the body, and particularly activities such as walking or massage were more conducive to big picture, emergent issues rather than task based or goal orientated activities.

Participants valued their approaches because they allowed them to use all of themselves in the coaching interaction and they considered that this openness was an important factor in deepening the rapport with the client.

I think the advantage is that I model...that I can connect to things that drive and motivate to me, the passions and gives permission for them to discover what's driving them, Yes what's motivating them - that either they are not connected to or ignoring or frightened of or whatever, are conflicted in some way. (Nick)

It also enabled them to work with their own body, as well as the client's, which they considered provided them with additional sources of information perceived as a felt sense, intuition or physical impulse to take action. This was something that they found themselves doing easily, although they found it difficult to describe how this information arose or how they translated this into action, considering this an innate ability which they naturally and instinctively used rather than a learned skill.

It's like, how do you know what to say when you have a coffee with a friend? How do you know, what dance moves to do while doing a tango with someone? There's a sense of kind of resonance in the body - there's a sense of kind of what wants to happen in terms of what I relax into and what causes tension in myself. (Martin)

As well as the ability to read others or to “take on their colours” (Owen), the participants considered that the coach needed additional abilities to work with embodied practices. They need to have the expertise to manage the physical intervention without this distracting them from the coaching; they need some additional coaching skills to enable them to work comfortably at an emergent level and the physical activity should be an integral part of the coach's identity rather than a learnt tool or trick. The participants considered this created a kind of “synergy” (Nick) which made the intervention something more than, for example, just going for a walk with your coach.

...there are coaches who go on [...] weekend courses about embodiment, and they could learn some tricks. And that could be useful and they might get a shift in the perspective that could be good, .but I think without a real grounding in an embodied practice, and I don't fetishise aikido, I think it could be dance or yoga or even acting actually .it could be something else - drumming, you know - .but something, but something physical: preferably, something relational as well [...] then they wouldn't really have the kind of depth to live it and that's quite apparent. (Martin)

One issue that arose from working in a way that allows coaches to use all of themselves and comes naturally and enables them to indulge their passions, is that it can seem too easy and occasion a sense of guilt and raise concerns that it might not be perceived as “real work”. This was exacerbated by their perception of what others expect of a professional coach, an image that was reinforced by coach training and coaching organisations.

A different way in

The participants considered the physical interventions provided them with additional ways of engaging with the client and opportunities for accessing issues that resisted other approaches. In Steve's view:

sometimes it's easier for the body to influence the mind, than the mind to influence the mind. Or it's easier for the body, for the mind to influence the body - it's like it's a team, we've got a lot of different access points here. (Peter)

Having a connection at a physical level also allowed the coach to be more adaptable and to include periods of silence and introspection rather than relying on verbal interaction.

I think you can have bigger pauses in it, because there is something else happening. So I think you can stop for a while, on both sides, because there is a continuing interaction. It is maintaining a connection between you...because I think within a coaching session if you both stopped for a bit, just staring out the window...or whatever...it would be a bit strange. (Steve)

It also changed how the client approached the coaching. For example, with massage and coaching, the expectation of opening up on a physical level made it easier for the client to be receptive at other levels.

Participants suggested that the use of physical interventions resulted in sustainable learning that was more persistent, deeper and quicker and easier to achieve. The body was considered key to this, since if the change/learning was embodied then it became an integral part of the person.

shift really needs to be at the level of who someone is, so that's what we could call the ontological level and that's embodied...there's a linguistic element to it as well...you

know...the story needs to fit...but the body is really key to that stickiness or else we are just looking at tricks and that's not so lasting. (Martin)

Participants who offered coaching and walking as well as conventional coaching, found that new ideas seemed to become integrated during the coaching walk but were often lost after sessions in the office.

if they are having a great insight or a change of perspective...something notable has happened to them whilst walking on in this way and involving their body...they seem to have found somewhere to put that thought. Whereas where we sit stationary in an office room, for instance, I notice that sometimes people find somewhere to put that thought and sometimes they don't know what to do with it...and it just hangs around. And I also notice when that happens it is usually still hanging around the next time we meet and hasn't really gone anywhere, impactful...Nick

The participants all considered that the client's embodied state was a useful source of information for the coach and an opportunity for experiential learning for the client. Embodied states were seen to reveal psychosomatic patterns that were reflected in the client's general approach to life. "*People's embodied state becomes very invisible to them - they get used to it, like always say like an old pair of shoes, you get used to them, habituated to them*" (Martin). Working at a physical level allowed the coach to give the client a physiological experience of these patterns in a way that made them obvious and undeniable.

One of the most important uses of the physical interventions that the participants identified was as an interruption to habitual patterns of thought or behaviour. Key to this was choosing a physical activity that was gentle enough that it allowed conversation and cognitive thought but which also provided the coach with the capacity to vary the pace and intensity, both to reflect the rhythm of the current coaching conversation but also to instigate changes. The participants who worked with coaching and walking commented that they often used the pace and terrain as a way of reflecting or altering the conversation.

I will adjust the walk through [...] to provide contrast to what they are saying, a lot of the time. So I don't [...] sometimes I will try and mirror it, sometimes I try to contrast it. I definitely use the environment. (Nick)

Participants working with activities such as coaching and walking commented that they used the connection to the surrounding environment as their physical intervention as much as the physical action of walking. The environment was also an important component in other approaches such as coaching and massage, where coming into the massage room automatically began the process of opening up and softening for the client. The opposite effect was seen in the office where the environment seemed to constrain clients to take on their corporate cultural expectations and present their working persona rather than responding authentically.

I think that when we are in the kind of created environment, you know kind of square boxes and so forth that makes up offices and so forth ... we more easily take on all the sort of social culturalisations, and norms and [...] all of that stuff that makes up being a member of society and conforming to that. (Owen)

Being out in the wider environment provided a sense of spaciousness and opportunity which were reflected by an expansion of the client's internal sense of space and possibility.

it feels like there's a, there's a bigger physical space. I mean it's kind of physical, emotional, mental...possibly spiritual, I'm not quite sure what I mean by that, but certainly the body-feeling-mind level...it's all three of those are more expanded on the hills. I think, two things to happen in an office in the city, the awareness ...sort of

narrows towards the cognitive, and secondly it narrows in to include not very much in that cognitive space. (Owen)

The participants also described a more metaphorical use of the landscape, which enabled the client to recognise parallels between events in the environment and in their life.

we were just talking about, you know [laughs], just things that happen in life, and about acceptance and things like this, and then this huge heron went straight over our heads. And the client looked up and went "Oh, wow, that's just about said it all!" So, for him, that moment was just reinforcing what he was learning. (Chris)

Physical motion through the environment and changing perspective were also important tools. For example, the sense of "rising above" by ascending into the mountains and the opening up of views provided a trigger to see the "big picture" and to rise above current problems.

Participants also believed that the physical, embodied interaction at a non-cognitive level could explain some of the apparent mystery of coaching "*things that we normally think are magic and vague - actually there's a very kind of somatic physical sense to them*" (Martin). They considered that openly working at a physical level made the coaching process more visible and understandable to the client.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore the experience of coaches working with physical interventions to discover why they were choosing to work this way rather than in a more conventional manner. Motivating this question was a desire to understand whether these approaches had a relevance to the coaching profession and what they might add to the conventional seated dyadic approach to coaching.

The experiences of the participants suggest that using the body offers the coach a range of additional tools for working with the client even where the issue cannot be clearly stated. It also enables coaches to be authentic and to use all their knowledge and skills, rather than being limited to expected coaching behaviours. Sharing their passions can create a closer bond with the client and is also more enjoyable and rewarding for the coach.

The coach needs additional skills in order to work with the physical intervention in combination with coaching and these skills need to be embodied. Coaches need to have extensive experience in the physical activity to be able to manage this as the coaching progresses. They also need a sense of their own embodiment and be able to work with, and trust, their own intuition and felt sense. These are not skills that can be easily taught but are usually based on long experience. This suggests that this way of working may not be appropriate for all coaches and needs to be grounded in an in-depth embodied understanding of the physical activity, as well as fluency in working with the kind of emergent coaching issues that tend to arise.

Similarly, the participants were aware that these approaches might not be suitable for all clients and would be very dependent on the coach's relationship with the client: particularly in terms of trust and openness. They were aware that businesses are may not be interested in embodiment but in results, and often marketed their approach in terms that were relevant to business objectives. Although this at first seemed incongruous given their focus on expression of identity and authenticity, this reframing was aimed at making the approach accessible to people who would not otherwise have been able to accept it and they became more open about their approach as the relationship developed.

The experiences of the participants show similarities to those described in the literature review of similar disciplines. The participants' descriptions of working with a tacit, intuitive sense of what needs to happen is similar to the approach of trainers in outdoor education described by Williams *et al.* (2003 p49). Although this may be as valuable as their explicit knowledge, it creates a challenge in trying to evaluate the performance of coaches and of these approaches. The importance of the environment and resolving the split between self and the wider world echo those of Taylor *et al.* (2010, p.77) who describe an integral systems approach to outdoor education: “*all living systems maintain their integrity as a result of exchanging energy with the environment*”. It is also possible that some of the benefits of the coaching and walking experience may be due to the longer sessions, which allow the coach to include periods of silence or to give the client time to themselves. It provides time for the kind of subconscious reflective feedback proposed by Moon (2004).

The participants were aware of the dearth of coaching related research on the use of embodied intelligence and concerned that the lack of research evidence in the coaching literature might lead to these approaches being side-lined with the drive for professionalisation of coaching. The participants suggested that one reason for this may be the focus of coaching research (and research funding) on executive coaching in corporate settings (Grant, 2010), where a cognitive conversational approach is the norm; partially perhaps because coaches often come from a Human Resources, counselling or consultancy background and are comfortable with this kind of approach. They considered that there was a lot of research that could be drawn from other disciplines that could be used to provide an evidence base for these approaches and also emphasised the importance of anecdotal or experiential evidence (“common knowledge”) to support these approaches, which they suggested is plentiful, despite the lack of published academic research.

The findings from this study suggest that coaches work in an embodied way because of who they are and because they experience its effectiveness. This connection to identity and passion suggests that coaches will continue to work this way irrespective of the availability of academic research or of the approval of coaching organisations. One risk of the evidence based approach to the professionalisation of coaching is that the lack of research on embodied intelligence in coaching, and the bias of research funding towards conventional executive/business coaching, may lead to a narrow definition of coaching, which could result in the kind of approaches in this study being side-lined. This risks the alienation of practitioners who see this way of working as fundamental to their identity, as well as losing the opportunities that these alternative ways of working can offer. For a more extensive description of this study, see Matthews (2012).

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