Travelling Together: What does Coaching Offer Creative Writers?

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Abstract

This interpretive study explores what coaching offers to creative writers using the imagery of writers as travellers through a landscape. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with coaches and writers; data analysis used an inductive approach. Findings underlined the importance of the coach-coachee relationship and shed light on the scope for coaching, distinguishing coaching from mentoring, especially in relation to feedback on work in progress. The nature of learning in coaching relationships is discussed, focusing on conversational approaches and reflective practice. Writers most likely to benefit from coaching were seen as those with commitment, self-awareness and objectives for the coaching relationship.

Key words: coaching, creative writers, coach characteristics, coachee characteristics

Introduction

"The great thing is to try and travel with the eyes of the spirit wide open, and not too much factual information. To tune in, without reverence, idly - but with real inward attention. It is to be had for the feeling, that mysterious sense of rapport, of identity with the ground. You can extract the essence of a place once you know how. If you just get as still as a needle you'll be there." (Durrell, 1988, p 162)

One of the endlessly fascinating things about coaching is its flexibility and its scope to be applied in a wide range of contexts, always focussed on the needs of the coachee. As my experience and confidence as an executive coach has grown I have observed this potential opening up. This led me a few years ago to coach some creative writers. The informal evaluative feedback I received from this suggested that coaching filled a niche not met by other forms of support for writers. It also became apparent that, although there are some 'writers' coaches', this is a relatively new field and largely un-researched. The aim of this study, therefore, was to begin to chart the landscape of coaching with creative writers. This research was undertaken as part of an MPhil in Arts, Culture and Education at the University of Cambridge. This article focuses in particular on those aspects relevant to coaching rather than to writers and writing more generally.

Literature Review

In order to provide a conceptual framework for the research, core ideas were explored in relation to creative writers and writing, and coaches and coaching. Taking a broadly developmental view of coaching in this context, these were then related to theories of learning, creativity and reflective practice. This study was specifically concerned with coaching rather than mentoring and the

following definition of coaching sits well with the focus of this study: "a Socratic based future focused dialogue between a facilitator (coach) and a participant (coachee/client), where the facilitator uses open questions, active listening, summarises and reflections which are aimed at stimulating self awareness and personal responsibility of the participant" (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011, p74). While this was the starting point, as there is not consistency in the use of terms (Garvey, Megginson, & Stokes, 2009), it was important to ask participants about their understanding of coaching. The literature was clear, however, that the quality of the coaching relationship is central to the success of the experience (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011, Clutterbuck, 2004; Garvey et al., 2009, Rogers, 2008, Baron & Morin, 2009).

No research was found specifically on coaching creative writers but there is an ever-growing literature on creative writing, including the teaching of it and the psychology of writers, such work sometimes being linked with investigations of creativity more widely. In essence, these texts paint a picture of a writer as an individual, solitary figure who may be vulnerable in terms of self-regard (Hore, 2011; Morley, 2007; Piirto, 2009; Pourjalali, Szrzynecky, & Kaufman, 2009). This is not to type-cast writers but to highlight characteristics of the creative psychology and the nature of the activity which suggest positive scope for coaching creative writers for the value of being listened to, of being less alone and of being able to confront and address specific, individual issues. This is reinforced by the sense of writing, like coaching, being a process of inquiry which enables reflective learning (Bolton, 2010).

The literature on creativity and creative process tends not to refer to coaches. However the value of the engagement with another individual in supportive yet challenging ways is a consistent thread and reinforces the potential for coaching creative individuals. Gardner (1993), for example, identifies the significant impact of others in the field, especially when points of breakthrough are imminent. Abbs (1994) has written extensively on aesthetics in education and argues consistently for learning that is dynamic, fluid and reflective in a way that stimulates and nurtures creative talents and processes. The process of reflection is central to the applicability of coaching to the nature and needs of the creative process. Just as learning and reflective practice are placed by many at the heart of coaching (Askew & Carnell 2011, Brockbank & McGill 2006) so reflection is seen by Burnard (2006) as at the heart of the creative process.

The review of literature and the initial coaching undertaken pointed to a prima facie case for a good fit between coaching as a process for supporting and developing creative writers. The tailored nature of the challenge and support offered by coaching seems particularly to lend itself to a creative activity such as writing, in which the individuality of the writer and their work is fundamental. With this as a rationale, the nature of this study was exploratory rather than seeking to test a hypothesis. The central research question was:

- What does coaching offer creative writers?

Sub questions were:
- Where is coaching best focussed in terms of the work, the writer, the process of creativity?
- What might the writer be looking for from a coach?

Methodology

The exploratory nature of this research and the individual nature of writing, pointed to a methodology which could accommodate and respond to multiple realities, acknowledging my own position as professional coach and researcher. This was about drawing out patterns and setting these into the context of relevant literatures to suggest some conclusions, to begin to establish some contours

and features on the landscape; the purpose was not to improve my own practice as a coach or to evaluate the detailed experiences of the coaching process. Rather than measure responses or trends in a way which can pinpoint a definitive answer or statistical probability of a particular effect, this small scale-study used individual responses to build understanding (Charmaz, 2006). The analysis and search for patterns of inherently individualistic accounts and experiences pointed to a broadly interpretivist approach (Schwandt, 2000). It was decided to undertake semi-structured interviews because this enabled some core questions to be explored while retaining the flexibility to introduce or respond to supplementary issues during the interview. The use of imagery, in this case landscape, is fruitful in thinking about the complexities of this field as it helps to add texture to the understanding of what is being presented (Eisner, 1998).

One of the issues seen as a weakness in much coaching research is lack of explicit reflection on the researcher's perspective: coaching articles are often insider accounts, written by people who have a stake in the scheme or the relationship – usually as the coach. This has an advantage of giving insights into the dynamics of the coaching intervention, though it can mean that they do not pay attention to alternative explanations for the phenomena that they observe, and that they tend to emphasise the positive and effective while ignoring data that could be seen as negative" (Garvey et al., 2009 p50).

My role and experience as a professional coach pre-disposed me to a positive view of coaching and its potential to support writers and gave me the insight to frame questions and interpret responses with attention to nuance. My experiences of creative writing also helped my understanding of processes and references described by participants. The aim in developing the methodology was to strike a balance between recognising and using constructively my own knowledge and experience and maintaining sufficient detachment to enable insightful interpretation of data with a good degree of objectivity, placing due weight on the contribution of participants in developing meaning (Crotty, 1998). This is manifest in the interview questions inviting some interpretation of personal experiences on the part of the participant and in providing the opportunity for participants to comment on draft findings. The profile of participants in terms of their maturity and their engagement in such reflective activities as writing and coaching gave confidence in their insights. To underestimate their capacity to reflect would have detracted from the potential richness of the data.

This study operated within two principal ethical frameworks: that of the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011) and The European Mentoring and Coaching Council's (EMCC) Code of Ethics. These two frameworks have a degree of commonality, in particular with reference to the respect and focus on learning, confidentiality, respect for the client and professional integrity in relation to the attribution of work.

Data Collection and Analysis

Following attendance at a workshop in September 2011 on the development of writers, which was run by the National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE)[1] in collaboration with the Arvon Foundation[2], research participants were secured who all had some link to NAWE/Arvon and their continuing initiatives to support writers. All participants were mature and experienced individuals. Six of the seven were practising writers in a variety of genres and several had experience

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[1]   NAWE's mission is to further knowledge, understanding and enjoyment of Creative Writing and to support good practice in its teaching and learning at all levels. (statement accessed from NAWE website 10 July 2012)

[2]   Arvon is a charity which works to ensure that anyone can benefit from the transformative power of writing. (statement accessed from Arvon website 10 July 2012)

of working in some additional capacity related to creative writing, in teaching, publishing or consultancy. Two of the writers interviewed as coachees had also received some coach training and were interested in developing this further. While the common factor of NAWE involvement gives coherence to the study, it may have had an impact on the consistency of responses. A more random group of writers and coaches may have yielded more highly differentiated data.

The sequence of questions was varied according to the flow of each interview but was broadly as follows:

1. How would you describe coaching and the role of a coach?
2. What makes coaching successful (or not)?
3. Thinking about creativity, you can talk about the creator, in this case writer, the creative process by which something is produced and the work or product: is coaching particularly suited to any one of those three areas or might it be to any of them?
4. How best does coaching work with writers?
5. What sorts of writers benefit most?
6. What do you think a writer is looking for from a coach?
7. Is there anything I have not asked you that I should have or that you think would be helpful to share?

Interviews were undertaken between March and May 2012 and were recorded. Consistent with the relevant ethical frameworks, prior to each interview participants were provided with a briefing note about the research work which included a consent form. The semi-structured interviews worked well and elicited rich data which amply demonstrated the writerly language skills of interviewees. They enabled the desired scope of the research to be covered without constraining the participants' opportunity to share their thoughts and experiences. Some of the participants in this study remarked how the interview helped them to articulate and understand their own view on coaching for writers. Three of the seven interviews were face to face, the other four were by telephone; duration varied from approximately 30 and 60 minutes. As the researcher, my preference was for face to face interviews, although there was no evidence that the data from the telephone interviews was any less valid or valuable. The added value that observation of body language can bring is, however, illustrated by one telephone interviewee supporting what she had expressed verbally by saying: "….*as I'm talking to you I've got my hands open…*" (Mary).

An inductive approach was used to build from the data to some conclusions (Creswell, 2009), consistent, broadly, with the main phases described by Miles and Huberman (1994) to organise data, generate themes and draw out meaning. The key steps in the process were:

- Interviews were transcribed and checked and key points recorded onto a matrix of responses to questions as an initial process of familiarisation;
- Close analysis of the matrix was used to generate broad themes within which findings could be reported;
- Interview transcripts were re-ordered by theme and sub-themes and key points identified;
- Mind maps were then developed for each theme so that patterns and connections could be observed and clusters of meaning drawn out (Creswell, 2009)
- A draft of the findings was sent to participants but no changes were requested.

Because of the multiple roles held by interviewees, responses of coaches and coachees were not differentiated in the analysis; individual differences were drawn out in reporting and discussing the findings. Throughout this process, as ideas or questions emerged, notes, or 'memos' (Miles &

Huberman, 1994), were made in the research journal and proved valuable in drawing the threads together.

Findings

Developing the theme of landscape, five themes were distilled from the initial matrix analysis: Coaching Writers – the territory; Coach – the travelling companion; Writers and Writing – the creative traveller; Coachee – the inquiring traveller; and Focus for Coaching – the itinerary. The third theme covers the persona of the writer, the nature of the work and related skills and qualities. This is not explored in this article. In quoting directly from the interviews, names have been changed to preserve the anonymity of participants.

Coaching writers – the territory
This theme draws together issues relating to the definition, purpose, context and process of coaching, including the nature of the relationship. A largely goal-orientated model of coaching is presented in the interviews but one that is not formulaic or linear: *"goals aren't just something you set and then work towards doggedly until they happen. They are different approaches to a truth and it may take several goes before you get there……" - Gertrude.* The process of coaching in itself was also seen to help people to turn a generic sense of direction into specific goals: *"I think if someone can communicate the block or problem they are dealing with in a clear way, that is part of the coaching itself isn't it? - that is part of the development of the person to articulate what is that particular block or obstacle or goal" – Ella.*

The purpose of coaching is variously seen as to effect change; to help overcome barriers and obstacles; and to set relevant goals and support their achievement. In addition to addressing these purposes, outcomes or effects included boosting confidence and self-esteem: *"I've been left with more confidence to relax into writing and the interface with my other work more and to just go with the flow" – Rebecca* and supporting the individual's own sustained development: *"it sent me back to my own resources" – Mary.* For coaches, too, the development of skills and experience in coaching had enhanced their skills in teaching, bringing in particular fresh questioning approaches to their interactions with students. It was also suggested that the experience of coaching gave the coachee a lasting benefit in terms of the process, with writers taking back into their practice fresh, reflective approaches to thinking.

In addition to the central quality and chemistry of the relationship, specific success factors of the coaching process included:
- good listening;
- clean, open, incisive questions;
- a supportive yet challenging atmosphere, which sometimes could be uncomfortable in a positive way;
- enabling the coachee to feel empowered;
- flexibility of approach within a well-structured, well-organised programme of sessions;

Clear distinctions were drawn between coaching and mentoring. A central difference between them was that a writer would expect a mentor to give feedback or advice on work in progress whereas a coach would not be expected to comment on work. This distinction is evident in how respondents saw the roles and expertise of coaches and mentors.

Coach – the travelling companion

This theme looks at perceptions of the role, skills and abilities of the coach. Interviewees described the role of a coach in a number of ways which reflect their descriptions of the nature of coaching being both supportive and at times challenging. These included:

- observer
- sounding board
- supporter in the setting and achieving of goals
- encourager
- empowerer and facilitator
- cheerleader
- guide in the sense of guiderail

There is a prevailing flavour of the role being very positive and creating a space, an ambience, which enables the coaching to work to best effect. This is contrasted with a more advisory role expected of a mentor. For Gertrude, "*the simple definition of a coach becomes someone who does enable other people to become the people they are meant to be, or to become more the people they want to be…. your job as a coach might be enabling that person more to explore the terrain*". The sense of travel or movement is also conveyed by Freya: "*I think they are looking for a companion on their journey. I think they want to travel somewhere and for a short time we can accompany them*". The boundaries between the personal and professional were explored by Rebecca: "*I think you need a coach who is not going to chase red herrings, is not going to get involved …, you need someone who is going to be a bit like a friend but who is not a friend….I wanted someone who didn't love me*" and Gertrude*: "like a good poem that takes you somewhere you didn't expect to go but it seems obvious when you get there*".

In summary, the skills and qualities identified for a successful coach included:

- active listening, including the ability to pick up nuances
- empathy
- interpersonal sensitivity and emotional intelligence
- asking incisive questions
- being open-minded and non-judgemental
- reliable

Another thread which emerged was the extent to which a coach was expected to have specific experience and expertise as a writer. Such expertise was clearly expected from a mentor. On balance, there seemed to be a preference for a coach to have at least some knowledge or experience of writing or another creative process or the writing 'industry' as this could enable increased relevance of questioning and a natural empathy. Robert brought together the qualities of being a writer and a coach, quoting the author Zadie Smith who wrote in her introduction to a collection of short stories, The Burned Children of America: "Good writing requires - demands - good being," (Edemariam, 2005). Robert saw this as relevant both to the writer and to the coach: "*When I'm on best terms with myself I'm a much better coach ……. there is a very interesting area there, about the almost unconscious self-coaching that the writing coach does for his or herself and the central importance of 'good being' both for good coaching and for good writing*".

Coachee – the inquiring traveller

This theme looks at the writer as coachee in terms of factors for a successful relationship and the kind of writers who benefit. It was very clear that, in principle, there was no barrier to coaching seen in terms of genre, age or stage of a writer's development. However, readiness for coaching was seen as a need, in terms of a willingness to engage with the process and a view that coaching was most useful when the individual was at a turning point or had specific challenges they wish to address. While in principle this might be at any stage of a writer's development, commitment to writing was important and a reasonable level of self-awareness was valuable. Participants suggested that these factors may limit the benefit for someone at a very early stage of their writing career. This readiness or openness to coaching included a willingness to be honest, even when the conversation becomes deeper and more challenging: *"with all human beings, and maybe particularly with creative people, who are very accomplished at hiding things and boxing things and deciding where to go and creating in their imagination an alternative reality …. - those people are going to be very good at not telling you what they need to tell you" – Rebecca.*

Where these identified attributes and conditions are not present, the coaching experience may not be successful, for example: *"where a writer can use coaching to support their procrastination, …. perhaps using coaching to reinforce all their feelings of being stuck and everything; they don't want to move forward and they are, by signing up for coaching, perhaps it makes them feel at least I am doing something" – Freya.* Other examples were given of an individual not being ready for coaching if they are not ready to accept change or, because of the intensity of the process, whose mental health is not sufficiently strong: *"I think it would be useful at any stage but at the stage of complete despair"* or if someone were *"just in a creative mess" – Rebecca.*

One of the things which also emerged is an awareness of specific approaches to coaching which work well with writers. While some executive coaches employ creative techniques and images in working with their clients, there is a ready familiarity and even expectation that such approaches can be drawn on with writers: *"because I am a poet, one of the things I bring to my coaching practice is the ability to work with language and metaphor within the coaching relationship…..as a way of processing ... ...blocks or goals or turning point" – Ella.*

Focus for coaching – the itinerary

This theme reflects directly the interview question about the focus for coaching writers and picks up related issues which emerged from other interview questions, such as the nature of coaching. Topics included blocks to progress with writing and specific issues around the development of the writer's 'career', such as opportunities through competitions and other openings. Goals might be creative, such as the first draft of a manuscript, or more personal, for example around self confidence or time management.

The interview questions, drawing on the creativity literature (Amabile, 1996), included whether coaching was best focussed on any one or all of the creative person, the creative process or the work, the product. This provoked some interesting and seemingly not entirely consistent responses. Initially almost all respondents said that, in principle, it was not possible to separate these three elements, although one said they could be separated intellectually but *"in reality it's holistic when you are sitting at your desk" - Gertrude.*

For some, an explicit coaching goal was established related to the work, such as producing a number of poems in a given timescale. Others also commented that work on the person, for example confidence, or the process, such as a writing routine, had a direct impact on the work, thus illustrating

the integrated nature of these threads. As interviewees voiced their ideas, most here brought in a comparison with mentoring. All seemed clear that detailed discussions on the work were the province of mentoring and that mentoring rarely would address more personal issues while these would regularly arise in coaching. This was linked to comments about the expectations of greater specialist knowledge and expertise of a mentor in comparison to a coach. What was ambiguous, or perhaps ambivalent, was the extent to which the work was properly the domain of coaching, or not. It appears, from this small sample, that the majority of coaching goals agreed start, at least, with issues around the personal or career development of the writer and his or her creative process but that these necessarily lead directly or indirectly to addressing the work.

Discussion: From Territory to Ecology

The issues arising from the findings have been developed under three main headings: the traveller, bringing together the writer's creative persona and as a coachee; the journey through the landscape, highlighting points about the nature and process of coaching; and an evolving ecology which seeks to bring together some key threads and place this work in context. Landscape continues to be used as an organising principle and as a way of enriching the ideas presented, recognising that no metaphor can provide a perfect picture (Steinmetz, 2012).

The traveller

Images in the literature of writing as a process of discovery (Cixous & Suleiman, 1991; Storr, 1972) resonate with the responses which emphasise the need for the coachee to be open to change with its implied sense of adventure.   The ambiguity or ambivalence of the responses about the focus of coaching in respect of the person, the process or the product, reflect the subtleties and difficulties of description and perspective in this area. What emerges is a sense of the holistic nature of the writer and the work and, while it may well be that coaching does not focus specifically on the work, the work will benefit by addressing issues which may be blocking the writer in terms of creative process or personal issues, such as motivation or time management.

It was perhaps surprising that none of the participants mentioned the development of self critical or evaluative skills or approaches as an area for coaching. Several interviewees aired the importance of feedback on their work and this was seen as legitimate territory for mentoring, teaching or workshops but no focus was apparent on the cultivation of self-assessment. This was despite Mary and others feeling they did not know the worth of their own work, "*whether it's sugar water or whether it's honey dew".*

The picture which emerged of the terrain for coaching is a holistic one of the writer as an individual, committed to their work, so that the response to the research question, '*Where is coaching best focussed in terms of the work, the writer, the process of creativity?*' might be that on the basis of this study, the starting point for coaching is the writer, the person who presents themselves. Because of the tailored nature of coaching, the coachee may legitimately present professional, personal or creative issues for coaching. Outcomes or effects included boosting confidence and self-esteem which are fairly typical coaching objectives in any field, implicitly or explicitly (Rogers, 2008) and professional or creative issues may be seen to correlate with more job or career focussed problems which occur in executive coaching. However, it was also clear that the very integrated nature of writing and the writer's life, suggests that wherever the coachee may choose to start, the other aspects will be drawn in, whether by association, consequence or design. Because of this, as Mary said, work on self helps the work on writing and Robert, citing Zadie Smith (Edemariam, 2005), also connected 'good being' and 'good writing'.

The coaching service provided through NAWE defines coaching as: "all about helping a person get to where they want to be in their professional or personal life. The writer/client is in control – they decide what they want to focus on." (NAWE, 2010). Given all the interviewees were associated with NAWE and its coaching programme, and were mature and experienced, it is not surprising that they demonstrate a consistent stance. Several interviewees also mentioned their use of coaching approaches in their work as teachers of creative writing. It is clear, then, that coaching has real potential as a way of working with writers in a number of contexts.

The findings about the importance of the preparedness of the writer for coaching reflect well with the notion of 'coachability', which includes commitment and inner resourcefulness as positive factors and psychological problems as a negative indicator (Bluckert, 2006). These expectations of the coachee need to be complemented by appropriate skills and qualities in the coach. In addressing the sub-question, *'What might the writer be looking for from a coach?'* emphasis in these findings is placed on the individual skills and qualities of the coach and how they used these to create a conducive environment and draw out awareness and ways forward for the coachee. This includes helping the coachee-writer to see the landscape with fresh eyes, drawing attention to features and possible routes but not leading, thus encouraging reflection. Whilst there was, on balance, a preference among interviewees for a coach to have at least some knowledge or experience of writing or other creative process, the ambivalence displayed in relation to this suggests there is scope for further research on identities within the relationship.

The journey through the landscape
The importance placed on the quality of the relationship between writer and coach puts this as central to success in coaching and reflects the findings of the literature review. The detail of the coaching process, in terms of tools and techniques, was not explored in this study. The nature of coaching, the experience, was described at a more generic level and fits with the definitions in the coaching literature which focus on developing potential through addressing particular goals or challenges and the use of Socratic dialogue as an approach (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011; Rogers, 2008). In terms of the journey through the landscape, the travellers need to retain a sense of direction but not be so focussed on a fixed point that they fail to notice features and opportunities along the way, to pause and reflect, so that the path taken is not necessarily linear or the shortest and the destination may be fluid. There is no detailed itinerary.

Only one or two referred to coaching as a learning process and there was little use also of the terms 'reflective' and 'reflexivity' as they appear in the coaching literature and creativity. The apparent synergy of process between the art of writing and the reflective, exploratory approach of coaching was implicit, but cannot be fully or clearly evidenced from this study. An important question for this set of data, then, in teasing out what coaching offers to writers, is: are reflective learning processes being described, even though they are not being so named?

Robert talked explicitly about learning "*the coach's role is to enable that self-directed learning on behalf of the coachee and the coachee is always in charge of the content. The coach is responsible for creating the framework, creating the right ambience and the right environment, a rich self-directed learning environment ....*" Robin also saw particularly the value of coaching for those who wish to be reflective. This links into theories of learning which focus on the experiential and reflective (Brockbank & McGill, 2006; Kolb, 1984). There is also clear resonance with transformative learning (Mezirow, 2009), as picked up by Gray (Gray, 2006). Emerging models of learning in coaching seem to focus on an organisational or larger service context. While there is not enough evidence in this study to substantiate or refute a single model of learning in this more individualised coaching, it does support rather than contradict developing theories around the impact of conversational learning. This

is evidenced in the focus on the quality of the relationship and the expectations of the coach in terms of listening and facilitating the exploration or progress of the writer which suggests a process of reflection and reflexivity. It may or may not involve 'critical reflection' in the terms described by Mezirow: "questioning the integrity of deeply held assumptions and beliefs based on prior experience" (Mezirow, 2009, p7). It does suggest the quality of the 'living dialogic space' articulated by Chappell and Craft (2011) but there is no indication of a link to the wider socio-political agenda promoted by both Mezirow and Chappell and Craft.

Despite this lack of clarity about the nature of learning in coaching writers, there is a sense of developmental impact in relation to such issues as confidence, self-awareness, re-balancing priorities, and stimulating productivity and resourcefulness. This is summed up by a number of interviewees as being about change, whether this relates to specific goals in terms of the process and output of work, or the more reflective, inner focus around personal growth. This brings us back to the Socratic principle of the 'elenchus' discussed by Abbs (1994) coupled with the cultivation of reflective practice common to both creative and coaching practice (Brockbank & McGill, 2006, Burnard, 2006). Those coaches who described using coaching techniques in their teaching as a result of their experience, as well as what Robert referred to as 'self-coaching', can also be described as displaying reflective practice, evidence of learning on the part of the coach as well as the coachee.

An evolving ecology

The central research question was: *What does coaching offer creative writers?* At one level, the answer to this is straightforward. On the evidence of this study, consistent with the literature, coaching offers writers a conversational (or dialogic) process of inquiry to pursue personal, professional or creative issues raised by the coachee, consistent with the definition and boundaries of coaching. However, this statement needs to be set in context.

The use of 'ecology' in relation to 'writer support' as introduced by Robert suggests principles such as diversity, balance and relationships based on partnership (Capra, 2002) and places coaching among many other forms of support which fall outside the scope of this study. These range from assessed degree programmes through workshops to mentoring schemes and on-line writers' groups. If coaching can be seen as a landscape, it is not one that is fenced off from other forms of support such as workshops, mentoring and writers' support groups; "The landscape is an anonymous sculptural form always already fashioned by human agency, never completed, and constantly being added to, and the relationship between people and it is a constant dialectic and process of structuration: the landscape is both medium *for* and outcome *of* action and previous histories of action." (Tilley, 1994, p23).

As the quality of the coaching relationship is central to the success of coaching, and the coachee needs to bring a pre-disposition to change and, by implication, development, this is an interaction which is more than just a transactional exchange or functional dialogue; both parties bring experiences and perceptions. These multiple dimensions recall the 'seven-eyed model' of coaching supervision (Hawkins, 2006) as it takes account of wider influences. This resonates with this notion of landscape or ecology for coaching writers. Chappell and Craft's 'ecological placing' of creative learning conversations offer a model in which the individual and personal are situated within concentric circles which radiate through different levels of interaction or system to convey the layers within which creative learning conversations function (Chappell & Craft, 2011). It is clear that there is scope for more exploration of the ecology of writer support.

Conclusion and Future Research

This small-scale study offers clear evidence of the worth of coaching as a means of developmental support for writers. It sits within a wider context of different forms of learning and support and the boundaries between these are not fixed or static. The review of literature argued that there is a natural 'fit' in coaching for writers. This is supported by the comments of participants with some features and criteria for the effectiveness of such interactions being identified. Coaching provides an opportunity for writers to address in a holistic fashion, challenges which may have a professional, creative or personal focus and because of the integrated nature of writers' lives, there is a potential benefit for the writing. This then offers a way to foster reflective practice.

This research has raised further questions about the nature and potential of coaching for writers. Possible areas for future research include:

Perspectives on the coaching relationship and each person's sense of identity within that
- Processes for coaching, including effective tools and techniques
- Models of development, learning and reflective practice in coaching writers
- Comparison with other forms of support, developing the idea of writer support ecology exploring the differentiation between approaches.

I started and I finish this research passionate about coaching, about writing and about learning. The reference to landscape as a metaphor emerged naturally at an early stage of articulating the purpose of the interviews and while it should not be over-worked, it has proved a useful device to deepen and challenge reflection and to convey the scope and purpose of the research. It was very pleasing to be able to include in the findings and discussion, not just my own landscape imagery but also the rich images offered by the interviewees, including the notion of writer support ecology which brought another, wider dimension.

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