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**Developing a 'letter to my younger self' to learn from the experiences of  
expert coaches**

Keywords: creative analytical practice, coach development, hindsight, scaffold learning,  
composite vignette development

26 **Abstract**

27 This study is focused on how novice sport science practitioners can learn from the hindsight  
28 of more experienced practitioners, and how such information can be effectively disseminated.  
29 Initially, thirteen expert, elite-level, strength and conditioning coaches wrote a reflective  
30 letter to their 'younger selves' offering advice in terms of things they had learnt throughout  
31 their coaching career. Thematically analysed, five themes were generated: willingness to  
32 learn and develop, appreciating the contribution of others, understanding and behaving in line  
33 with values, embracing uncertainty and difficult challenges, and creating and maintaining a  
34 work-life balance. Framed around these themes, the authors employed creative writing  
35 techniques to develop a composite letter with quotes extracted that best represented each  
36 theme, and woven together to create a final, coherent letter. To systematically examine the  
37 efficacy of using such a letter as a scaffolding learning strategy to advise early career  
38 practitioners, the letter was presented to 25 participants who were all on MSc Strength and  
39 Conditioning courses. Five focus groups were conducted to examine the participants'  
40 perceptions of the letter. Thematically analysed, the findings highlight that the letter  
41 resonated with them and encouraged reflection in a number of specific ways (e.g., challenged  
42 their current approach to their coaching role, developed confidence to deal with challenges).  
43 We propose that the composite letter can be used as a pedagogic tool to stimulate reflection  
44 for new practitioners concerning their development, and offer motivation (to work hard in  
45 their own development) in the early stages of their career.

46 **Introduction**

47 Coaching is characterised by an idiosyncratic learning process meaning that there are many  
48 ways to learn and be an effective coach (Callary, Werthner, and Trudel 2012; Werthner and  
49 Trudel 2009). Jarvis (2007, 2009) argues that such learning is a lifelong process and that any  
50 experience is influenced by a person's perceptions of the past and has an influence on future  
51 experiences. As a result, a person could be transformed cognitively, emotionally, and  
52 practically. Stodter and Cushion (2017) further emphasise a focus on coaches' wider, holistic  
53 learning, while Callary et al. (2012) provide a detailed and applied explanation of how  
54 coaches engage in such a learning process. They note that becoming a more experienced  
55 coach is characterised by meaningful personal experiences allowing the coach to engage  
56 through thoughts, feelings, and actions from which the coach is able to learn. These  
57 meaningful experiences enable the coach to subjectively judge how new material of learning  
58 relates to past knowledge gained from previous experiences. This learning process is based  
59 on the coach's perception of environment, goals, motivation, and readiness to learn,  
60 emotions, and abilities (Callary et al. 2012; Gearity, Callary, and Fulmer 2013).

61 To emphasise human development throughout life via personal perceptions of  
62 experience and to encourage the coaches to learn from their experiences, Cushion et al.,  
63 (2010) suggest that coach education should incorporate constructivist strategies that provide a  
64 greater focus on the psychosocial skills of the coach or the 'how to' element of expertise.  
65 These psychosocial skills include interpersonal (e.g., social context, relationships) and  
66 intrapersonal knowledge, which also incorporates coaching philosophy (ICCE et al. 2013). In  
67 particular, research has highlighted that constructivist approaches provide support through  
68 pedagogic facilitation and/or tools to scaffold coach learning (Galatti, Sato dos Santos, and  
69 Korsakas, 2019). Ciampolini, Milistetd, Rynne, Zeilmann Brasil, and Vieira do Nascimento,  
70 (2019) highlight how these constructivist approaches use learner-centred strategies that treat

71 the learner as co-creator, who is responsible for their own learning and decision making  
72 (McCombs 2001), in formal coach education. Numerous researchers have evidenced the  
73 efficacy of informal constructivist strategies, which include reflective practice (e.g., Knowles,  
74 Gilbourne, and Eubank 2006), community of practice (e.g., Cassidy, Potrac, and McKenzie  
75 2006), and mentoring (e.g., Wareham, Burkett, Innes, and Lovell 2018). Whilst reflective  
76 practice and community of practice approaches encourage learning from the coaches'  
77 personal and their peers' experience, mentoring typically includes a process where an expert  
78 coach shares their knowledge, skills and experience to support or scaffold the learning of a  
79 less experienced coach to develop effective coaching practice (Colley, Hodkinson, and  
80 Malcom 2003; Jones, Harris, and Miles 2009). Thus, the mentoring process allows the  
81 mentee to reflect and learn from experiences other than their own (Cushion 2006).

82         Research has highlighted that learning from expert coaches, which Côté and Gilbert  
83 define as a 'coach who has established a track-record of coaching effectiveness over many  
84 years' (2009, 316), can accelerate coach development (e.g., Jones et al. 2009). Yet, the focus  
85 of learning is often limited to technical areas or 'what' the coach should know to enhance  
86 decision making (e.g., Lyle 1999) instead of 'how' expert coaches navigated the coaching  
87 process, which may be quite useful to other coaches in their development. There is growing  
88 awareness amongst researchers concerning the importance of relational and social factors that  
89 have psychosocial effects and implications in the development of coaching practice (e.g.,  
90 Zehntner and McMahon 2014). Armour, Quennerstedt, Chambers, and Makopoulou (2015)  
91 propose that coach developers should utilise instructional strategies that are in line with  
92 psychosocial coaching practices and that innovatively bridge the gap between research,  
93 theory, and practice. Thus, to enhance the psychosocial skills needed for novice coaches to  
94 improve their coaching practice researchers should consider innovative approaches to

95 presenting research findings from expert coaches that coach developers may utilise in  
96 facilitating coach learning.

97 In order to learn from expert coaches, we considered different approaches to  
98 presenting our data. One approach is the use of creative analytical practices (CAP), which  
99 present findings using different kinds of writing styles. Such writing can ensure the  
100 complexity of lived experiences is brought to the fore (Richardson 2000) and encourages the  
101 reader to consider personal and social meanings of these experiences (Parry and Johnson  
102 2007). Recently, researchers have used a variety of CAPs to present results. For example,  
103 McMahon, McGannon, and Zehntner (2019) provide an autoethnographic account to explore  
104 one female swimmer's experiences of performance stigma occurring in elite swimming  
105 context and McMahon, Zehnthner, and McGannon (2017) used a docudrama to illuminate  
106 detrimental cultural practices within elite swimming culture. Focusing on the coaching  
107 context, Zehntner and McMahon (2019) provided narratives highlighting the power  
108 relationships present in a coach mentoring programme, whilst Szedlak, Smith, Day, and  
109 Callary (2018) crafted a composite vignette illuminating effective coaching practice within  
110 Strength and Conditioning. In considering the efficacy of using CAPs, Schinke, Blodgett,  
111 McGannon, Ge, Oghene, and Seanor (2017) suggest that utilising a composite vignette might  
112 initiate and encourage coaches' learning and development. Based on interview data of  
113 immigrant athletes' experiences of acculturation into sport, they highlighted how the  
114 composite vignette could facilitate a reflection process on new understanding of various  
115 social and cultural transitions the athletes described. As a result, Schinke and colleagues  
116 proposed that the composite vignette has the potential to provoke critical reflection of the  
117 coach's role in the acculturation process. The above research illuminates the usefulness of  
118 CAP approaches to engage the reader with the social and psychological context of coaching

119 practices within elite sport. Yet, the use of creative analytical writing as a pedagogical tool to  
120 scaffold coach learning in order to develop psychosocial skills needs further exploration.

121 In the current study, we aim to build on the CAP and coaching literature, by asking  
122 expert coaches to look back in hindsight on what and how they have learned from their  
123 coaching experiences. Freeman defines hindsight as 'a process of looking back over the  
124 terrain of the past from the standpoint of the present and either seeing things anew or drawing  
125 connections' (2010, 4). Such a perspective could be beneficial in learning from expert  
126 coaches, as it would allow them to reflect on their career, write about it, and thus, provide a  
127 mechanism for others to learn from their experiences. Indeed, the use of hindsight may be  
128 valuable in appreciating aspects of their coaching development that had limited meaning at  
129 the time (Raab 2017) for example in focusing on relationships, career opportunities, and  
130 personal mental well-being (Kowalski and McCord 2019). In general, formal coach education  
131 focuses on developing the technical aspect of coaching (e.g., Cushion et al., 2010), especially  
132 within S&C (e.g., Szedlak et al., 2018, 2019). Thus, providing an opportunity for the coach to  
133 reflect on psychosocial aspects of coaching (i.e., relationships), could enhance the  
134 appreciation and development of psychosocial coaching practice. In summary, the primary  
135 aim of the current study was to ask expert S&C coaches to write a letter to their younger  
136 selves by reflecting back on key learning experiences in their coaching journey and provide  
137 advice regarding the psychosocial meaning emanating from these experiences. Using a  
138 creative analytical practice, we crafted a written composite vignette from the expert coaches'  
139 letters. A further aim was to explore the use and utility of the composite vignette as a  
140 pedagogical tool to encourage learning in neophyte S&C coaches.

## 141 **Methodology**

### 142 *Design and philosophical assumptions*

143 The study is presented in two stages, first the analysis of written letters, followed by  
144 presentation of a composite letter, and second, focus groups that consider the efficacy of the  
145 letter as a pedagogical tool to encourage learning. This methodological approach is  
146 underpinned by ontological relativism (i.e., reality is multiple, created, and mind-dependant)  
147 and epistemological constructionism (i.e., knowledge is constructed and subjective). The first  
148 stage of the study had two distinct phases. In the first phase of stage one knowledge was  
149 initially created by participants (expert S&C coaches) being asked to write a letter to offer  
150 advice to their 'younger self', resulting from their own key learning experiences. Here, we  
151 adopted what Smith and Sparkes (2006) term the standpoint of a story analyst, one who  
152 places the stories (i.e., the transcribed responses from the focus groups) under analysis,  
153 meaning that the responses of the novice S&C coaches are the object of the study and placed  
154 under scrutiny (Smith 2017). Following on, in the second phase of stage one we considered  
155 how we could use this information to support the learning process of S&C coaches. To  
156 encapsulate/convey the personal and social meanings resulting from the advice given, we  
157 utilised a CAP approach (McMahon 2018). To do this, we crafted one composite 'letter' that  
158 incorporates key advice from the letters written in the first part of the study, and was based  
159 around the key themes identified in the initial analysis. This way of presenting findings was  
160 consistent with the philosophical beliefs and the aims of the study in the following distinct  
161 ways. Ropers-Huilman (1999) suggest that CAP, in particular when used to craft stories, can  
162 communicate the emotional complexity of human experiences (i.e., the coach's key learning  
163 experiences). Thus, CAP enables the researcher to adopt the standpoint of a storyteller, and  
164 analysis happens in and through writing (Smith, 2017). Smith and Sparkes (2009) elaborate  
165 that during the writing process, the co-construction of data, the emotionality of the researcher  
166 is valued (i.e., it includes feelings, hearing, tasting, witnessing), which allows the researcher  
167 to gain insight into human experiences (Richardson 2004).

168 **Method stage 1**

169 *Participants and procedure*

170 We used criteria based purposive sampling (Sparkes and Smith 2014) to recruit expert S&C  
171 coaches. Formal S&C coach education and accreditation is characterised by a focus on  
172 technical knowledge including physiology, biomechanics, and periodization (e.g., UKSCA  
173 2019). Thus, novice S&C coaches often have had limited opportunity to engage with a more  
174 holistic learning process that includes the development of psychosocial skills (e.g., Szedlak et  
175 al., 2018). Szedlak et al. (2018, 2019) highlighted that some expert S&C coaches have  
176 developed a coaching practice that includes the effective use of psychosocial skills. Thus,  
177 there is merit to considering the perceptions of expert S&C coaches to understand how they  
178 integrate, develop, and apply psychosocial skills in their coaching practice. We identified two  
179 criteria for the selection of participants: i) a minimum of three years' experience coaching  
180 athletes at an elite level, that is working with full-time funded athletes who represent their  
181 country at the highest achievable level; ii) participants needed to be accredited by either the  
182 United Kingdom Strength and Conditioning Association (UKSCA) or the National Strength  
183 and Conditioning Association (NSCA). This specification helped to deselect participants who  
184 are self-declared coaches (a trend common in the fitness context) and allowed us to select  
185 qualified, expert S&C coaches with a significant depth of experiences and proven track  
186 record in developing effective coaching practice at the elite level (Côté and Gilbert 2009).  
187 Thirteen S&C coaches were recruited for this part of the study (ten male and three female).  
188 All participants were currently working with elite level athletes representing: Formula One,  
189 World/European championship, Olympic/Paralympic games, National Hockey League and  
190 County Championship Division One Cricket; covering the following sports: formula one  
191 motor racing (n=7), athletics (n=3), cricket (n=1), ice hockey (n=1), squash and boccia (n=1).  
192 Three S&C coaches resided in the United States of America, two in Finland, one in France

193 and seven in the United Kingdom. All S&C coaches wrote fluently in English. The S&C  
194 coaches had an average age of 30 years ( $SD=3.9$ ) and an average coaching experience of 9.6  
195 years ( $SD=3.2$ ) with 7.5 years at an elite level ( $SD= 2.7$ ).

196 After obtaining institutional ethical approval, the first author used personal contacts to  
197 recruit S&C coaches who met the inclusion criteria. Participants were asked to write 'a letter  
198 to my younger self'. The idea for this came from a website where well-known sporting  
199 figures write a letter to their younger self, passing on information they have learnt from their  
200 career in sport (for an example, see [https://www.theplayertribune.com/global/articles/rio-](https://www.theplayertribune.com/global/articles/rio-ferdinand-letter-to-my-younger-self)  
201 [ferdinand-letter-to-my-younger-self](https://www.theplayertribune.com/global/articles/rio-ferdinand-letter-to-my-younger-self)). Such a method involving reflective writing has  
202 previously been used in research to understand personal experiences in various contexts, for  
203 example, participants writing about long-term injury rehabilitation (Mankad, Gordon, and  
204 Wallman 2009) and sporting stressors experienced (Hudson and Day 2012). A key strength of  
205 reflective writing is that this process enables participants to tell and frame their own stories,  
206 resulting in a more personal account of the participants' experiences (Day, 2017). To support  
207 participants in feeling comfortable with reflecting on their journey as an S&C coach and  
208 writing about experiences (both positive and negative) that shaped their coaching career, we  
209 provided further prompts. The prompts for writing this letter included asking them to  
210 consider how their progress as a coach might have been enhanced, what guidance they might  
211 have wanted themselves in this early stage of their career, and any experiences they wished  
212 they had handled differently. There was a variation in the depth of writing, for example, with  
213 the longest letter being 2211 words and the and the shortest letter being just 314 ( $M =8 90$ ;  
214  $SD = 554$ ). Nevertheless, all participants engaged with the task. The authors reflected on the  
215 content, literacy, and hermeneutics of the letters to establish that the letters represented clear  
216 personal articulation of their experiences including feelings, emotions and emotive content  
217 (Sitch and Day, 2015). As a result of this all manuscripts were deemed suitable for analysis.

218 *Analysis strategy and representation*

219 We thematically analysed the letters following Braun, Clarke, and Weate's (2017) six-phase  
220 procedure. The first author read and re-read the letters and gathered initial codes. Next, we  
221 collapsed the initial codes (e.g., 'be patient') to potential sub-themes (e.g., 'learning is a slow  
222 and steady process') and reviewed them against the entire data set. We combined the sub-  
223 themes into larger main themes (e.g., 'willingness to learn and develop'), which involved  
224 considering the relationship between codes, themes, and levels of themes. Following on, we  
225 reviewed the themes and generated a thematic map (see Table 1).

226 **[Table 1 near here]**

227 Rather than presenting individual stories, where particular themes and experiences are  
228 emphasised and others de-emphasised, we decided to develop a composite letter, which  
229 allowed us to draw together the common and insightful elements of thirteen S&C coaches'  
230 letters and 'weave them into a more powerful, all-encompassing shared account' (Schinke et  
231 al. 2016, 39). Thus, the composite vignette should not be read as a series of quotes or stories  
232 from different S&C coaches, but as a singular account from a single composite character in  
233 relation to advice he/she would give his/her younger self. Sparkes and Smith (2014) support  
234 the use of such creative processes, saying they might be used to present findings in a thought-  
235 provoking way, and allows both the researchers and the audience to analyse and understand  
236 data in different ways. First, we identified five main themes (see Table 1). These were: (1)  
237 willingness to learn and develop, (2) appreciating the contribution of others, (3)  
238 understanding and behaving in line with values, (4) embracing uncertainty and difficult  
239 challenges, and (5) creating and maintaining a work-life balance. We then developed the  
240 composite letter, which was guided by previous research on how to create authentic vignettes  
241 (i.e., Gray, Royall, and Malson 2017; Schinke et al. 2017; Smith, Tomasone, Latimer-  
242 Cheung, and Martin Ginis 2015). The main themes from the thematic analysis provided a

243 skeleton for the composite letter, with the theme headings emphasised in italics in the final  
244 letter. Key sections, either single phrases or small paragraphs, were extracted that best  
245 represented each theme. These extracts were merged through a creative writing process that  
246 involved fitting the extracts together to create one compelling and coherent letter. While  
247 developing the composite letter, direct quotes were maintained as much as possible to  
248 preserve participants' voices. Generally, the letter is presented in a mixture of individual lines  
249 (to emphasise key points) and short paragraphs, which follows the style of the letters in 'the  
250 players' tribune', to reinforce points and be more direct with the recommendations.

### 251 *Enhancing rigor*

252 We adopted a relativist approach of judging qualitative research, meaning that we drew from  
253 an ongoing list of specific criteria for judging the quality of creative analytical practices  
254 (Smith and McGannon 2018). For example, Smith, McGannon, and Williams suggest that  
255 authors should focus on the expression of reality by asking 'Does the text seem true and a  
256 credible account of a psychological, cultural, and social experience?' (2015, 71). To achieve  
257 this, we considered the coherence of the letter, which involved how we collated the extracts  
258 from the letters of the expert S&C coaches into one composite letter. We asked ourselves:  
259 Does it provide the reader with a readable and meaningful picture of the advice given? Is the  
260 letter plausible and credible in the way it represents the different advice? Furthermore, and in  
261 terms of focusing aesthetic merit and engagement, we contemplated whether the research  
262 invites interpretative responses and engages the reader emotionally and intellectually  
263 (Richardson 2000). Finally, we aimed to tell an evocative story that has the possibility to  
264 provoke the reader to action (Barone and Eisner 2012). Questions that guided the writing  
265 process included: Does the story move me? Does it generate new questions? What might I do  
266 with this research? Readers are invited to approach the composite letter from different  
267 perspectives with such questions in mind.

268 **Results stage 1**

269 We have included the part of the letter representing the first two main themes (i.e.,  
270 'willingness to learn and develop', and 'appreciating the contribution of others') below. The  
271 full letter is available on YouTube ([https://youtu.be/RI\\_luMqtH88](https://youtu.be/RI_luMqtH88)) and can also be requested  
272 from the lead author.

273

274 *The composite letter (to a novice S&C coach)*

275 Dear Younger Self

276

277 Looking back on my own career, I want to offer you some advice: *always be willing to learn*  
278 *and develop*, value and take good care of your relationships, embrace uncertainty and  
279 difficult situations, be true to yourself and committed to your own wellbeing, and always  
280 come back to what is important to you.

281 The way ahead might seem fuzzy but by the time you start looking back, you will have  
282 achieved more than you could ever have imagined and worked at some amazing places.

283 At university, where you start your career as an S&C coach, make sure you enjoy your  
284 degree, always pay attention in class and enjoy learning and building up your knowledge  
285 base. You have to be willing and focused to learn. Everything you do as an S&C coach needs  
286 to be justified as a sound theoretical background, which will allow you to rationalise your  
287 methods when they come under scrutiny from athletes and coaches. Trust me they will  
288 question you. Do not let this slip at the beginning of your career.

289 Never get lazy and complacent.

290 Keep moving forward, never stop learning. Progression may be slow at first, but if it is in the  
291 right direction it is still progress. I know it sounds impossible, but you should believe in

292 yourself more and learn to be encouraged by the positive feedback you will get on the way,  
293 rather than being frustrated because you feel you are not progressing.

294

295 Over the years you will learn to *appreciate the contribution of others*, both good and bad.

296 Learn from others.

297 Be courageous, meet people with open heart.

298 Treat everyone equally and don't be afraid of what other people think of you. Be brave to

299 embrace your weaknesses and be transparent about them, we all have them from F1 world

300 champion to the cleaning lady, it is what makes us human. Help is always on hand, everyone

301 is willing to help. The sooner you learn to seek help and ask for guidance, the better person

302 and S&C coach you will become, and the more meaning you will get out of life.

303 Make time for people.

304 Listen and build a strong network where you provide support, knowledge and inspiration for

305 your family, friends, and colleagues. Your degree will be much more enjoyable if you speak

306 to people from different backgrounds instead of sticking with the ones you know, based on

307 their academic ability or shared passion for S&C.

308 The importance of great mentors cannot be underestimated. You will have the opportunity to

309 work with some great people. Try to learn as much as possible from them. Ask valuable

310 questions, soak up their knowledge, skills and expertise.

311 Work hard to maintain these relationships that you build during internships and other learning

312 opportunities, as it will be those people that will continue to guide and advise you for years to

313 come and could become some of your closest friends. This will be a really valuable time for

314 you and you will really start to understand the need for a holistic, athlete centred approach to

315 coaching. But, be aware of the S&C coaches that will try to impose on you their methods and

316 beliefs. Do not be led by S&C coaches claiming they have 'the way'. Create your own  
317 philosophy.

318 Trust others more.

319 But remember that this will allow you to learn what it will be like when people let you down.

320 You have to take more chances with people, so you can learn that people will let you down

321 and others will fight and stick by you. The days when you coach the best, find the most

322 happiness, and ultimately are the most passionate, are the days when you have surrounded

323 yourself with the right people.

324

325 Sincerely

326

327 Your Future Self

328

## 329 **Method stage 2**

330 Researchers have highlighted the importance of empirically appraising written material as a

331 knowledge dissemination tool (e.g., Schinke et al. 2017; Smith et al. 2015; Szedlak et al.

332 2019) translating applied information to practitioners. Thus, the aim of this second stage of

333 the research process addresses this requirement by systematically examining the utility of the

334 composite vignette as a pedagogical tool to encourage learning in novice coaches.

### 335 ***Participants, procedure, and analysis strategy***

336 Participants were 25 novice S&C coaches (males=13, female=12) enrolled in MSc S&C

337 courses. The average age of the participants was 21 years (SD=1.3). Whilst the participants'

338 experience of working at elite level was limited (Range= 0.3-1; SD=0.2), all participants

339 were actively involved in S&C coaching at the elite level (i.e., Vitality Netball Superleague,

340 European/World Championships). Five focus groups were conducted with the participants (4-

341 6 participants in each group) lasting on average 65 min (SD = 15). The focus groups started  
342 with the participants reading and making brief notes on their perceptions of the composite  
343 letter, and how it communicated information regarding S&C coaching practice. Prompts for  
344 the first parts of the focus group discussions included asking about the structure and content  
345 of the letter (e.g., 'What particularly stood out?' and 'What were the most pertinent aspects  
346 and why?'), and whether the participants found it relatable and did it resonate with their own  
347 experiences. The second part of the discussion was prompted by questions about what the  
348 participants learnt from the letter (e.g., 'What have you learned from the letter?'; 'Would you  
349 adjust any aspect of your approach to your S&C coaching?' and 'Would you approach  
350 situations any differently after reading the letter?'). We recorded, transcribed, and analysed  
351 the focus-group interviews. The analysis of the data was guided by Braun, Clarke, and  
352 Weate's (2017) six-phase procedure. After gathering initial codes (e.g., 'thinking positive'  
353 and 'coaching will have challenges'), we generated potential sub-themes (e.g., positive and  
354 confident when confronted with challenges') and combined these into main themes (e.g.,  
355 'what advice the letter disseminates'). Considering the relationship between the themes, we  
356 generated a thematic map (see Figure 1). Finally, and as suggested by King (2018), we  
357 produced a realist tale, meaning we carefully selected quotes representing the identified  
358 themes and linked them to relevant theoretical constructs (i.e., knowledge dissemination,  
359 coach learning, coach development).

### 360 *Enhancing rigor*

361 Techniques to enhance the rigor of the methodological approaches throughout the research  
362 process were chosen that aligned with the philosophical underpinning of the study. For  
363 example, the first author is an experienced S&C coach, and the second and third authors both  
364 acted as critical friends to the first author to encourage reflection on the findings. Such a  
365 process allowed a deeper exploration of alternative explanations and interpretations at each

366 stage of the data analysis and presentation (Smith and McGannon 2018). Furthermore, and as  
367 suggested by Smith (2018), to encourage naturalistic generalisation, the letter needed to  
368 resonate with the demographic we aimed to reach (i.e., novice coaches). Thus, we used a pilot  
369 focus group of five novice S&C coaches (separate from the first stage of the study) to gather  
370 initial feedback of whether the letter resonated and how it might be improved. For example,  
371 the coaches perceived the phrase 'be a yes person' as inconsistent, as the letter proceeded to  
372 highlight the importance of saying 'no'. As a result, we amended this sentence to 'Don't be  
373 afraid to try, be a 'yes person'. Here, we aimed to highlight that novice S&C coaches should  
374 take risks to embrace opportunities, yet have the confidence to disagree and prioritise (saying  
375 'no') when necessary (i.e., to promote healthy work-life balance). As suggested by Tracy  
376 (2010) we took the above steps to consider the contribution made by our study. We aimed to  
377 maximise the potential of the letter to support and encourage novice coaches to reflect on  
378 their own journey, and learn something from it.

## 379 **Results stage 2**

380 We identified two main themes: (a) what advice the letter disseminates to the S&C coaches,  
381 and (b) the processes of the letter's utility for coaches' learning. Regarding the first main  
382 theme, there were four subthemes: The participants reflected on new information in light of  
383 their own experiences and current context, and perceived the letter to act as (1) providing  
384 reassurance and encouraging openness, (2) challenging mind-sets about approach to work, (3)  
385 positive and confident when confronted with challenges, and (4) being optimistic about the  
386 future. Regarding the second main theme, we present three subthemes: (1) prompting  
387 reflection, (2) enhancing appreciation, and (2) transferability (see Figure 1).

388 **[Figure 1 near here]**

### 389 *What advice the letter disseminates*

#### 390 *Providing reassurance and encouraging openness*

391 This theme explores how participants were reminded of similar experiences, which  
392 encouraged the participants to reflect upon how the advice from the letter could possibly  
393 influence their development. In this response, the participant elaborates how she felt  
394 reassured in her determination to keep learning:

395         It's more reinforcement that you're going to meet loads of different people with loads  
396         of different views and you're going to pick up those little pieces of information that  
397         are going to help you improve. It reminds me to not shy away, be willing to learn, and  
398         open to criticism. If you are struggling with something, be open and confident to take  
399         advice and learn from it. In actual fact that reminds me of a situation on my  
400         placement, I struggle with the lead coach a little, he can come across quite critical, but  
401         thinking about it now, I actually can see how he really wants to develop me. (P5)

402 Even further, reflecting on the letter encouraged her to critically analyse a current coaching  
403 situation. As a result, she gained a deeper understanding of self, realising that her  
404 defensiveness held her back from a learning opportunity, and appeared to be more open to  
405 positive criticism.

406 *Challenging mind-set about approach to work.*

407 The letter challenged the participants' perceptions of how their coaching practice is  
408 influenced through relationships that they have taken for granted. For example, one  
409 participant was reminded about the value and contributions of others, which at first, he  
410 neglected. In reflection, he contemplated practical changes to positively adjust his work-life  
411 balance in making time for his family and friends.

412         But one thing I took for granted massively, was my family and friends around me. I  
413         just focus on getting a job done, but never on myself, and then I burned out halfway  
414         through the year. It really challenges me to learn from that bad experience. I have  
415         done this quite sporadically, but, I should factor in times to do the simple things.

416            Maybe go for a cycle ride or have a meal with my family, otherwise I know I will  
417            burn out again. I know that if I take care of relationships, I tend to be happy and if you  
418            are unhappy with your surroundings, you start to question life. That will eventually  
419            translate to your coaching because you're not in the right frame of mind. Negativity  
420            breeds negativity. (P17)

421            Here, the participant highlights the importance of having a support network, which impacts  
422            and encourages a positive coaching approach. Even further, another participant's response  
423            illuminates how he felt challenged to examine his intrapersonal skills that enable him to build  
424            relationships.

425            You know you have the tools to get the job done, this outlines the *how* to get the job  
426            done, it's like a risk assessment for coaching practice. I feel challenged to actually  
427            look a little more at my coaching practice. How do I relate to my athletes, my peers  
428            and my friends? (P24)

429            These responses illustrate how the advice from the letter started to challenge established  
430            mindsets and attitudes of this participant. As a result, the participant reflected on his intention  
431            to develop his intrapersonal skills.

432            *Positive and confident when confronted with challenges*

433            Whilst our results have illustrated that the participants were reassured, reminded, and  
434            challenged when reflecting on the letter, this theme reveals how the participants felt  
435            encouraged to deal with challenges of the role. In particular, the participants' responses  
436            suggest that they were stimulated to focus on mental processes that promote protecting them  
437            from potential negative effects of bad experiences.

438            P1:    You are going to have bad experiences and uncertainty in the job, but it's  
439                       about turning those into the positives. It is great to look back and think, well  
440                       everyone has been there, but it is how we progress and how we handle these

441 situations. A positive mind-set that is how you really move on from that.  
442 There is no point in beating yourself up and putting yourself down when  
443 something goes wrong, you have to pick yourself up, learn from it and move  
444 on.

445 P2 Yes, its building that resilience. You're going to take knocks, you're going to  
446 take beat downs. It's not always going to go your way. Just get back up, roll  
447 with the punches. You've just got to be thick skinned. I mean look at our  
448 situation, there are forty S&C coaches to one decent job, reading through those  
449 guys' experiences, makes you carry on and more determined that you can  
450 succeed.

451 Thus, the S&C coaches develop the strength and determination to keep going (i.e.,  
452 practice what you preach) until they have achieved their goal. Such determination is  
453 not only based on understanding individual coaching philosophies and values, but also  
454 on not allowing circumstances (personal or coaching) to become a negative influence.  
455 The following excerpt illuminates how the letter prompted participants to reflect on  
456 their own practice, and gave them confidence to set clear boundaries in their work  
457 with clients:

458 P9 Don't be a pushover. If you make plans for a session and the athletes change  
459 them that is disrespectful. You have to say no at that point. You can't always  
460 just take it on the chin. Sometimes there are situations where you can [allow  
461 them to change the session] but don't be a pushover. You have got to have set  
462 boundaries.

463 P10 Yes, but that is what we have studied for and reflecting on this gives me  
464 confidence that when I walk into that a new job, I will deliver a cracking  
465 session, the advice here for me is that I can and should be confident, because

466 confidence is not dependent on experience, it comes with understanding  
467 yourself.

468 Here, our results suggest that the reflective process positively influenced participants' self-  
469 esteem as they started to explore and understand their own values.

470 *Being optimistic about the future*

471 This theme illustrates how the discussion about the letter started to motivate, inspire, and  
472 build faith in the participants to approach the future with optimism. The following  
473 conversation suggests how the advice of an experienced S&C coach in the letter stimulated  
474 participants to become more self-aware.

475 P14 I thought it was quite a motivating and inspiring letter. I mean to know that  
476 these are experienced S&C coaches and they have gone through the same  
477 things that we are facing and succeeded, it just motivates you. It's like they are  
478 guiding you through their experiences, and I know, I will face similar  
479 situations. But now, I feel prepared for it and I know that I can get to a higher  
480 level of coaching quicker. Don't get me wrong this is not a shortcut.

481 P15 Yes, I agree, very inspiring in terms of approaching S&C with a bit of  
482 positivity, because we hear so much about the lack of opportunity. This puts  
483 you into the right mind-set of how you can make the most of the lack of  
484 opportunities.

485 P16 The one thing that motivated me is the idea of 'remember it is okay to be  
486 unique'. I am not saying you should go in and rock the boat and try to change  
487 everything, but know that there is a reason why you are there and you should  
488 put a bit of you out in there. It builds faith in me as an individual coach,  
489 something that is so important.

490 P15 I feel like I just want to take more risks, it is inspiring, you feel motivated to  
491 take risks because there is no sting in a bad experiences. It allows you to  
492 dream big without being afraid. Yes, the journey won't be easy, but being  
493 positive, we can learn from.

494 As the above excerpts suggest, reflecting on the letter compelled the participants to invest  
495 effort into a coaching journey. There was evidence that participants felt motivated to become  
496 productive, bold, and visionary about progressing in their profession which can be perceived  
497 as intimidating due to lack of possibilities.

#### 498 *Processes of the letter's utility for coaches' learning*

499 Whilst the first section of the results illustrated how the letter disseminates advice to  
500 the S&C coaches, in this section we explore the potential utility of the letter in an applied  
501 context to encourage learning.

#### 502 *Prompting reflection*

503 This theme reflects how participants suggested that this letter encourages a continuous  
504 process of learning from experiences through the process of reflection. One participant  
505 highlighted that reading this letter at various times throughout the year would allow her to  
506 check that her coaching practice reflects the values of her philosophy.

507 It reminds you of your underlying philosophy and whether you are true to yourself. It  
508 makes me think more critically about the *how* of coaching. I can see myself using this  
509 letter at different times of the year to give me insights into whether I have developed  
510 my philosophy and if I can add anything. It makes you question, which is so essential  
511 if you want to change anything. I mean, when you start as a coach you always think  
512 about the what: what exercises, what repetitions, what rest period, but this makes you  
513 think about the how and why am I doing this? P(22)

514 Notably, this participant felt encouraged to look beyond her current context and was  
515 reminded that developing coaching practice, which includes inter- and intrapersonal skills as  
516 highlighted within the letter, requires a lifelong learning approach.

517 *Enhancing appreciation*

518 In this theme, participants highlight how they felt appreciative of the opportunity to receive  
519 advice from their experienced peers. The following quote illuminates how this participant  
520 values the advice of the letter because the S&C coaches have already achieved a career goal  
521 that young S&C coaches aspire to (i.e., working as an S&C coach with elite athletes). Thus,  
522 this participant felt admiration and considered the S&C coaches who contributed to the letter  
523 as role models.

524         You cannot ignore what the letter suggests, whether you agree or disagree. It's very  
525         applicable because it is from elite, expert S&C coaches. These are the coaches that  
526         you want to be around, take an hour here and there and learn from. These S&C  
527         coaches we admire, they have been through these stages, step by step, to get to that  
528         level. That means this is real, and potentially we will have to go through all of these  
529         steps as well. I feel very privileged to get such great advice at this stage of my career.

530         (P7)

531 Participants perceived the life advice as applicable, authentic and relatable, as it represented  
532 views of S&C coaches they look up to. The above quote highlights the value the participants  
533 placed on the letter connecting to advice on actual learning from good and bad life  
534 experiences of other S&C coaches. Thus, participants felt privileged that expert S&C coaches  
535 would share their learning experiences to prepare them for possible pitfalls on their journey  
536 ahead.

537 *Transferability*

538 This last theme highlights how the letter may be applied to different contexts. This  
539 participant's response suggests that due to the focus on inter- and intrapersonal skills, the  
540 letter could be used to develop practitioners from various different contexts. The latter is  
541 illuminated in the following quote:

542 This is life advice. This could be used for any industry like physiotherapy, physiology  
543 or even business management. For me this letter highlights that no matter what job  
544 you have, your journey will follow a similar path than what is described in the letter.  
545 You always have to interact with people, build relationships, take care of your health,  
546 and, so important, make time for your family and friends. (P20)

547 Here, the participant describes that independent of context, applied practitioners might  
548 encounter similar situations. Thus, the advice from the letter could be generalisable as it  
549 focuses on commonalities of the contexts (i.e., building relationships) and the development of  
550 personal attributes (i.e., reflection, taking risks, and building confidence). However, we  
551 should be aware that other applied practitioners might not derive the same value from the  
552 letter as coaches working in S&C.

### 553 **Discussion**

554 The study explored an innovative process of how CAP could be used to disseminate advice  
555 from expert S&C coaches to novice S&C coaches using hindsight in the form of a 'letter to  
556 my younger self'. Our findings extend the research into CAP by providing initial evidence of  
557 how such an approach of presenting results could be utilised as a pedagogical tool to support  
558 the coaches' learning process. Additionally, our findings contribute to the coach development  
559 literature. Coach education has utilised constructivist approaches, which include reflective  
560 practice and mentoring, to enable coaches to learn from their own and their peer's  
561 experiences (e.g., Ciampolini et al. 2019; Jones et al. 2007). Novel to constructivist strategies  
562 used within coach development, our findings highlight how the CAP approach enabled S&C

563 coaches to engage with aspects of their psychosocial coaching practice and reflect upon and  
564 learn from experiences of experts. Some S&C coaches critically reflected, meaning they  
565 evaluated their coaching philosophy and values (i.e., felt reassured), and reworked their own  
566 views and ideas (i.e., challenging mind-sets). The S&C coaches considered inter- and  
567 intrapersonal coaching skills which are fundamental to an holistic or athlete-centred coaching  
568 approach (ICCE et al. 2013). Thus, we answer part of Wareham et al.'s (2018) call to provide  
569 more opportunities for peer or mentoring support. We suggest that the reflection process  
570 encouraged through the letter to my younger self could be perceived as an indirect form of  
571 mentoring due to the letter being used as a pedagogical tool that can initiate scaffold learning  
572 of novice S&C coaches from expert S&C coaches' advice.

573           More specifically, our findings illuminate how the letter encouraged two unique  
574 processes that engaged the S&C coach in the reflection process. The findings provided  
575 evidence that participants were inspired by reading the letter, which created positive feelings  
576 about moving forwards in their career as an S&C coach. Research suggests that inspiration is  
577 a motivational state, which can move individuals from the mundane to the extraordinary  
578 (Thrash, Moldovan, Oleynick, and Maruskin 2014). Thrash and Elliott (2003) proposed a  
579 tripartite conceptualisation of inspiration, highlighting how inspiration is evoked by  
580 something or someone outside themselves, individuals becoming aware of greater  
581 possibilities for themselves (transcendence), and finally, a person is energised and directed to  
582 act to realise such possibilities (approach motivation). The results of the current study support  
583 this conceptualisation, suggesting how the ideas of the expert S&C coaches (brought together  
584 as a composite letter) evoke inspiration in the novice S&C coaches reading the letters.  
585 Previous research (e.g., Thrash, Elliott, Maruskin, and Cassidy 2010; Figgins, Smith, Sellars,  
586 Greenlees, and Knight 2016) has provided evidence that high-performing role models can be  
587 an evocative source of inspiration, and the experienced S&C coaches appeared to act as

588 inspiration. Our results also suggested how participants became aware of greater possibilities,  
589 such as the opportunities they might have in the coaching domain, or the path to getting to  
590 higher levels of coaching as one participant highlighted, 'there is no sting in a bad  
591 experience. It allows you to dream big without being afraid'.

592         Research shows that inspiration is associated with performance-related variables that  
593 include efficiency and productivity (Thrash, Maruskin, Cassidy, Fryer, and Ryan 2010),  
594 improved well-being (Thrash, Elliot et al. 2010), and positive emotions (Thrash and Elliot  
595 2003). Our findings provide initial evidence of the positive effect of inspiration on  
596 considering specific aspects of the coaching journey. In particular, our findings highlight how  
597 S&C coaches felt inspired and motivated to devote extra effort to accomplish their goals.  
598 Furthermore, our result illuminate how S&C coaches showed initial signs of becoming more  
599 resilient, which Fletcher and Sarkar define as 'the role of mental processes and behaviours in  
600 promoting personal assets and protecting an individual from potential negative effects of  
601 stressors' (2012, 675). Such enhancements in motivation and resilience have been linked with  
602 positives influences on emotional well-being (e.g., Gagne, Ryan, and Bargmann 2003), which  
603 is an essential part of the holistic development of the coach (ICCE, et al. 2013). Finally,  
604 whilst there are indications in the findings that participants are energised to consider different  
605 possibilities and strategies in their current and future coaching career, further longitudinal  
606 research is needed to investigate whether the letter results in tangible actions towards the  
607 development of effective coaching practice.

608         Regarding the methodological contribution, we propose the findings of the current  
609 study contribute to the concept of generalisability in two specific ways. First, we propose the  
610 current study enhanced naturalistic generalisability, which refers to the findings resonating  
611 with the reader's personal experiences, that they will recognise similarities and differences  
612 with the results in terms of being familiar with such situations (Smith, 2018). Our findings

613 highlight how the novice S&C coaches appreciated and valued this advice available to them.  
614 Research on the reminiscence bump, defined as enhanced memory or recall of experiences  
615 between approximately the years of 10-30 by people over 30 years old (Bertsen and Rubin  
616 2002), could possibly explain the appreciation of the novice S&C coaches. Thomsen,  
617 Pillemer, and Ivcevic (2011) suggest that pivotal life events are most likely to occur between  
618 the ages of 10-30, thus, reflective activities (such as reading the composite letter) might be  
619 particularly valuable for novice coaches in this key developmental period. Furthermore,  
620 Kowalski and McCord (2019) provide evidence that advice given to one's younger self  
621 specifically focuses on events in relationships, education, and mental well-being during early  
622 adulthood. As a result, our novice S&C coaches could identify with the advice provided in the  
623 composite letter because they were in this life stage, and the hindsight provided by the more  
624 experienced S&C coaches was highly applicable and resonated strongly. In addition, Tracey  
625 (2010) highlights that research that is written so that it is accessible to an applied audience is  
626 likely to facilitate transferability or inferential generalisability (Lewis, Ritchie, Ormston, and  
627 Morrell 2014). This type of generalisability refers to the extent to which the reader adopts  
628 specific elements of the results to their own setting. Our results highlight that the letter has the  
629 potential to be transferable to different contexts including for sport psychologists,  
630 nutritionists, and general practitioners working in health and wellbeing. Thus, the use of  
631 expert coaches' hindsight could provide a possible mechanism to support novice coaches in  
632 addressing common problems they might face in applied practice (e.g., overcoming  
633 challenges, work-life balance). As our sample comprised exclusively of novice S&C coaches,  
634 further research is needed to explore whether our letter would support and encourage learning  
635 with other novice practitioners within exercise, sport, and health.

636 This study is not without its limitations. Using a CAP approach requires an adequate  
637 level of literacy skills to fully express feeling and emotions of lived experiences (McMahon

638 2017). Although we initially reflected on the individual letters from the expert coaches  
639 regarding the depth of descriptions and decided to include all of them, we found differences in  
640 the depth of description and the length of the letters. Our reflections on the letters resonate  
641 with Thomson and Holland (2005) who reported that great variations may exist in the depth  
642 and amount that participants choose to write, citing difficulties with literacy and a feeling that  
643 participants had nothing important to write about. Thus, future research could incorporate an  
644 initial writing task included in the sampling criteria assess that required literacy skills and  
645 level of reflection are being met. Furthermore, recent research has suggested that the written  
646 format of disseminating knowledge has its limitations and that coaches also value the video  
647 and audio format (Szedkak et al. 2019). As Phoenix and Rich (2016) suggest that future  
648 research could use visual methods to support the coach's learning process of novice coaches.  
649 From an applied standpoint the letter could be utilised to make novice coaches aware of  
650 common pitfalls within the elite sporting context (e.g., maintaining work/life balance). Thus,  
651 the letter has the potential to help reduce the risk of coach burnout and enhance the  
652 development of psychosocial coaching skills (Fletcher and Scott 2010; Goodger, Gorely, and  
653 Lavellee 2007). However, we should be cautious to suggest that the letter in itself scaffolds  
654 the learning process as our results are limited to intentions and motivation to change  
655 behaviour and no actual behaviour change has been evidenced.

## 656 **Conclusions**

657 Our study provides an original account of an innovative instructional strategy using expert  
658 coaches' hindsight to disseminate advice and support the learning process of novice S&C  
659 coaches. Our findings suggest that the advice based on hindsight in the composite 'letter to  
660 my younger self' enhanced naturalistic generalisation and transferability. Our findings  
661 illuminate how novice S&C coaches critically reflected upon the advice, thus encouraging a  
662 lifelong learning process as suggested by the International Sport Coaching Framework (ICCE,

663 et al. 2013). In particular, our results indicate that the use of 'letters to my younger self'  
664 encourage novice coaches to relate to experiences of expert coaches, which prompts  
665 reflection, and inspires confidence and resilience in the novice coaches to continue learning  
666 and developing their psychosocial coaching approaches.

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668

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