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**Industry Experience and Supporting Part-Time Academic Professionals - Professional Sport and Academic Development Parallels**

For many, the route towards teaching within education, and in particular, higher education (HE), does not always follow a straightforward, linear fashion. Indeed, some take unconventional routes, and this is particularly apparent within the context of UK HE given that the requirements of this sector oftentimes specifically ask for significant industry experience. How else to develop this, other than through experience itself? Accruing it, admittedly, is particularly helpful in underpinning and developing the vocational/professional expertise of lecturers (that benefits students), yet to have gained this oftentimes means shifting from one career to another, in this case to HE.

I am an example in that previous to working as an HE lecturer, I played nine seasons of American football as a professional across several European competitions, and was also a part of the first iteration of the NFL's International Player Development Programme (in the 1990s). After this,I leveraged my significant playing experience in sport to work within sport development, youth work, and finally the education sector. This was a transition, from participating within professional sport and accruing a range of coaching roles and knowledge/experience, that needed to rapidly grasp the professional competencies, expectations, and standards for the education field.

Whilst many elements of ‘teaching’ were well covered by my sporting experience (communication, information dissemination, groupwork etc.), my transition was also supported by formal,assessed, and accredited academic development and professional courses I undertook for tertiary (further) education in the first instance. More than anything though, the informality and support I received as a mentee, with more ‘experienced’ mentors, were the most impactful, meaningful developmental episodes I experienced. This was, in many respects, no different to picking up technical knowledge, game awareness, or social understanding of team dynamics, from more experienced coaches or players.

Building on my experiences of transitioning from performance sport to education, a belief that there are considerablelinks between teaching and coaching (Wright et al. 2005) and that supportive mentors can accelerate the development of effective practice, I continue to use these principles today. In my own practice I still seek meaningful professional social contact and advice, and as a line manager for several associate lecturers [ALs] within the University I am based at I continue to espouse a similar philosophy and promote mentoring.

My responsibility to the ALs, who are also full-time professionals (coaches, sport providers, and/or development) in other capacities, includes orientation to, and support of, academic practice. The problem here, is that whilst they start with significant industry experience within sport and ancillary professions, they have not accrued significant experience to demonstrate and reflect upon competencies in the education field. This takes time, and so supporting these ALs to transition to working in HE requires, in my opinion, specific attention and approaches to accelerate proficiency. Here, methods that encompass the *International Journal for Academic Development’s* key tenets of broad, deliberate approaches to supporting professional development, including informal initiatives, and in my case mentoring in a fashion that many will have experienced within sport, has been successful in supporting sport professionals’ transition to working within HE conventions.

Overall then, underpinned by my experiences (including Crisp, 2018) and academic consensus (whereby the use of informal approaches to learning and a range of sources and people are of greatest impact**),** my beliefs and the approach to academic development I continue to espouse, are very much based upon – but not exhaustive to - mentoring support systems, shadowing others, having conversations; incidental learning, and much of the minutiae that underpins learning and development. Actively promoting mentor-mentee roles then, and embracing the notion of informality, highlights and mirrors my own experiences in professional identity and development, both in HE (academic) and sport.

**References**

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