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The role of coaching in police driver training – An IPA study of coaching in a blue light environment.

Abstract

Purpose: The aim of this study was to explore the potential value of coaching as a learning method for driver development within police blue light environments.

Design: An IPA study was undertaken with a sample of participants who had attended a five day coaching skills programme run for the Metropolitan Police Driving School, UK advanced driving instructors and a sample of police driving trainees who had been taught using a coaching approach.

Findings: The results indicate that the instructors who had taken part in the coaching training identified coaching as being of value in their work with developing advanced driving skills, specifically in raising awareness of police drivers and reducing drivers risk taking behaviour. The trainees indicated that they saw coaching as being of value in their learning in areas such as increased flexibility of approach and a focus on the relationship between attitude and driver behaviour.

Research Implications: The study suggested positive benefits based on the experiences of this small sample of police driving instructors and police trainees. As a result of which the UK's Association for Chief Police Officers (ACPO) are reviewing the role of coaching for wider application in driver training and for further research on the wider application of coaching as a learning methodology.

Originality: This is the first empirical study of the application of coaching in a blue light and police driving environment. While further research is required into the impact on safety, the study suggests coaching may be a useful learning approach to police driver training.

Key words: coaching, driver coaching, driver training, IPA, risk taking, decision making, pedagogy.

Introduction

Police driving has come under increasing focus with the UK's Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPPC) reviewing all serious accidents and fatalities involving the police. In 2007/08, there were 17 pursuit related road traffic incidents (RTI's) and a total of 24 deaths in police related RTI's in the UK (IPPC, 2008). Their conclusions, following a study of fatalities and serious injuries (Docking, Bucke, Grace & Dady, 2007) included recommendations for regular driving assessments to identify refresher needs and for police service personnel to ensure that only suitably trained drivers conduct pursuits. More recently (January 2011), the UK's Association of Chief Police Officer's (ACPO) have reviewed pursuit procedures to offer additional guidance to police personnel on best practice.

Alongside this there has been growing interest in how driver development could respond to a continued high level of fatalities. There have been improvements with average road incidents in the UK falling. In the period between 1998 and 2002, the UK witnessed a fall in accidents of 7.5%. However, during the same period, road fatalities remained the same (Road Accidents, 2002). This is despite continued improvements in road layout and improvements to car design. Similar figures are repeated across the European Union. In response, the EU Merit project (2004) reviewed and proposed changes to driver education. The project highlighted the Goals for Driver Education (GDE) matrix, developed by Hatakka et al., (2002), as a method for moving beyond basic car control into higher order skills for driver training. The matrix offered a hierarchy from basic car control through engagement with traffic to high order aspects such as the relationship between attitudes and driver behaviour. These ideas were reviewed by the UK Government driving agency, the Driving Standards Agency in 2008 and led to a recognition that instructors needed to engage more with driver's attitudes and to develop higher order cognitive skills such as risk awareness, hazard perception and decision making (DSA, 2008).

The increasing range of settings in which coaching is found highlights the universality of the application of coaching techniques (Grant et al., 2010) and the potential value that coaching can bring to newer areas such as learning and driver development.

It has been suggested that coaching could play a significant role in helping drivers in the learning process (for example Whitmore, 2008), and specifically in driver development (Passmore, 2010). However no research has been conducted in to coaching's application in this domain, with only one study exploring the application of coaching with novice drivers (Passmore & Mortimer, 2011).

The role of coaching as an intervention in organisations has grown considerably over the past twenty years and there is now growing evidence about its efficacy as an intervention to help learning and development (Grant, Passmore, Cavanagh & Parker, 2010). There is still confusion about what is 'coaching' and how it may apply in a driving context. A wide range of definitions have been offered the most popular define coaching as "coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them" (Whitmore, 2002, p8). Key aspects of coaching include the person

centred approach, the use of open provocative questions to elicit knowledge from the learner, the use of active listening to position the next question at the edge of the learners own knowledge and encourage greater reflection, the use of affirming and positive statements, alongside the use of challenge to encourage critical thinking.

Police driving and driving instruction: Specific issues and requirements

Although the numbers of road traffic accidents are significantly higher in the general population, accidents involving the police, particularly fatal ones, are always high profile and have significant implications for how the police are perceived.

There are particular challenges associated with police driving that are not present in general driving. Police drivers have to make quick decisions regarding whether to pursue a vehicle or not and these decisions should include balancing the risk to public safety with controlling crime (Docking, Bucke, Grace & Dady, 2007). They also have to assimilate a lot of visual information and therefore need to be able to quickly perceive and respond to a potentially dangerous situation (Crundall, Chapman, & Underwood, 2003). A study by Hoyos (Hoyos, 1988) identified that stress in driving situations is not just dependent on the demands placed on the driver, but also the duration of these demands. This can be applied to police driving where the duration of the pursuit means that the driver is exposed to a greater amount of hazards and therefore mental workload and potential stress. Police drivers also undertake night time pursuits and the study of police road traffic accidents by the IPCC (Docking, Bucke, Grace & Dady, 2007) highlighted that this raises issues concerning the visibility of pedestrians and members of the public being less aware of police vehicles.

A study by Page and colleagues, (Page Perez, Stanock, A & Page, 2008) for the Metropolitan Police Service found that the officers who were the most stressed, performed the worst in multi-tasking when driving. The implications for police drivers' is that the more stress the driver is experiencing, the less well they perform at shifting their attention between tasks. The study concluded that officer perception of stress and the way in which it impacts on events should be a major focus of police driver training. The study also highlighted that driver training can help reduce stress and increases the learner's ability to multi-task, but that the point at which this is reached during the training course varies for individual learners.

Risk taking has been looked at specifically in relation to police pursuit driving by Homant and colleagues (Homant, Kennedy & Howton, 2001). They used measures of risk taking and sensation seeking to determine if there was a relationship between these traits and police officers level of involvement in high speed pursuits. They identified that the police officers in the study did vary in their tendency to get involved in pursuits and these factors were associated with individual differences.

Although the vast majority of police accidents are minor, death and serious accidents involving members of the public are well publicised and lead to a decrease in the public's positive perceptions of police driving capabilities. A qualitative study of police drivers in the UK by Dorn and Brown (2003) found that self serving biases and illusions of invulnerability

do not decrease when people are made aware of hazards, but can give people more resources with which to justify risky courses of action. This was illustrated by the narratives of an officer in the study who, when describing accidents, used rational and detailed descriptions to support their version of events in presenting themselves as being non-blameworthy.

This qualitative evidence is supported by a study in France noted in Sundstrom (2005) which found that 60% of participants rated themselves superior to the average driver and that police drivers in general believe they commit fewer offences than the average driver.

Driving behaviour

As well as studies that have looked at the specific requirements for police driving and the impact of factors such as stress, risk taking, multi-tasking and self serving biases, studies have also been conducted into reviewing how cognitions and behaviours can impact on driving outcomes in the general population. Many of these factors will be relevant to drivers at all levels of experience, but are particularly relevant to police drivers for the reasons identified above.

The Driver Behaviour Research Group's study into influencing driver attitudes and behaviour (Parker & Stradling, 2001) found that inexperienced drivers are more prone to accident involvement, as well as identifying that all drivers can make lapses, errors and violations which can have serious consequences. In relation to numbers of accidents, they concluded that bad attitudes make for bad drivers. This conclusion challenges the conventional wisdom that road traffic accidents are primarily a result of lack of skill.

Other studies, such as Richards and Cuerden (2009), have found that intrinsic safety factors, as well as contributing to the safety of the car's occupants, can also influence the perception of the driver as to the amount of risk that it is acceptable to take. Risk homeostasis or 'danger compensation' states that individuals subconsciously accept a certain amount of risk and that as safety features increase in cars, the amount and severity of accidents does not decrease. Hoyes and colleagues (Hoyes, Dorn, Desmond & Taylor, 1996), in a study into the role of utility and intrinsic risk as possible determinants of behavioural compensation when driving, found that more risks were taken when more stood to be gained. This has important implications for police driving particularly whilst undertaking high speed pursuits where a dynamic risk assessment needs to be undertaken and a fast evaluation made as to the validity or importance of the pursuit.

The Goals for Driver Education (GDE) matrix has recognised the importance of higher order skills. The MERIT & HERMES reports (MERIT, 2004 & HERMES, 2010) have suggested that driver training needs to reflect both lower order skills, such as car control, and higher order skills, such as developing greater personal responsibility and awareness of personal values and biases.

Table 1: GDE matrix: Goals for Driver Education

		Essential elements of driver training		
		Knowledge and skills	Risk-increasing factors	Self-evaluation
Hierarchical levels of driver behaviour	4. Personal characteristics, ambitions and competencies	Lifestyle Peer group norms Personal values and norms Etc	Sensation seeking Adapting to social pressure	Impulse control Risky tendencies Personal risky characteristics
	3. Trip-related context and considerations	Choice of route Estimated driving time Estimated urgency of the trip	Physiological condition of driver Social context and company in vehicle	Personal skills with regard to planning Typical risky motives when driving
	2. Mastery of traffic situations	Application of traffic rules Observation and use of signals Anticipation of events	Vulnerable road users Breaking traffic rules/ unpredictable behaviour Information overload Difficult (road) conditions	Strengths and weaknesses regarding driving skills in traffic Personal driving style
	1. Basic vehicle control	Control of direction and position of car Technical aspects of the vehicle	Improper use of seatbelt, headrest, sitting position Under-pressure tyres	Strengths and weaknesses of basic vehicle control

(adapted from Hatakka et al., 2002)

Coaching and driver development

Coaching has been recognised as a possible method which may help individuals move towards high levels of learning (for example Dorn, 2005; Stanton et al., 2007). Previous studies have shown the value of coaching to the police service (Smets & Pauwels, 2010) and the value of coaching for novice drivers in offering an alternative pedagogy to instruction based learning (Passmore & Mortimer, 2011). However, to date, no studies have been published on the application of coaching as a method of driver development for high speed or blue light driving such as that undertaken by the police.

The EU HERMES project (2010) has recently developed training materials for driver coaching skills, which it has made available on the internet (see <http://www.alles-fuehrerschein.at/HERMES/>). The key philosophy behind this approach is to encourage a move from an instructor lead approach' to a learner centred approach and creating a shift in driving instructor's pedagogy

Coaching is seen in HERMES as a tool to develop the 'awareness and responsibility of the person being coached'. The key principles being focused on are summarised in the table 2

Table 2: HERMES key principles

Key principles
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Putting the learner in an active role2. Creating an equal relationship3. Identifying and meeting goals4. Raising awareness, responsibility and self-acceptance5. Raising awareness through senses and emotions6. Addressing internal obstacles7. Building on prior knowledge and experience8. Being convinced of the coaching role9. Authentic, neutral and non-judgemental communication10. Questioning, listening and reflecting back11. Coaching and instruction.

(Source: HERMES, 2007)

Although the HERMES project focused on novice drivers, its findings can also be applied to the application of coaching to experienced or professional drivers such as the police and other blue light services. The study by Stanton et al., (2007) reviewed the use of coaching in an advanced driver development programme. The study looked at the development of the competencies of knowledge, skill and attitude (KSA) and whether an advanced driver coaching programme would improve the KSA of the participants. The results of the study showed that on all aspects of KSA, the coaching group showed greater improvements than the control group in areas such as concentration, hazard assessment, road position and safe progress.

The results are encouraging in terms of the potential value of coaching in developing driver skills and behaviours. Although there is no empirical evidence to link this to reduced learning times, improved learning at assessment stage or reductions in road traffic incidents or deaths. A further challenge is noted by Dorn (2005) who stated that 'drivers know how to drive, but they do not always do what they know'. The lack of focus on behaviours during driving training could therefore be one of the reasons why most existing methods of driver training have not led to a reduction in accidents either in the general public or in specialist fields such as police driving.

Most of the studies previously cited have a common focus on driver behaviours and the impact that they can have on safe driving. As coaching focuses on behavioural change, it has the potential for helping drivers at all levels to make the cognitive shifts that will be needed to drive in a safer manner. Whitmore (2008) notes that coaching should not be regarded as simply an additional tool or conversely as obligatory, but as being the core of

best learning practice, for driving and most other similar activities and that coaching can be seen as enhancing the natural way that we learn.

Method

Design

This study uses Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the method of analysis. IPA is a qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin 2009). Its aim is to explore lived experience and how participants themselves make sense of these events. It does not aim to fix the experiences into pre-defined categories and recognises the role of the researcher as themselves shaping and influencing the interpretation of the participant's experience.

As coaching driving research remains at an early stage of development, IPA offers a way to useful methodology for exploring new areas of research (Smith and Osborn 2004), which can be subsequently explored through other methodologies such as randomised control trials.

The analysis involves 'the close, line by line analysis of the experiential claims, concerns and understandings of each participant' (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006).

It is also important for the researcher to be aware of their own influence and to 'bracket' or put to one side their own views as much as possible in order to concentrate on the detailed examination of the particular participants account.

As Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) note sample size within IPA is of less relevance than for quantitative studies, as the focus is on the individual's own experience. A sample of one would be adequate in some instances. As a qualitative study the results cannot be generalised to a wider population, but simply reflect the experiences of this sample at this time.

IPA was selected as the most appropriate methodology given the early nature of research within police driving and the use of coaching. It's aim was to enable an understanding of the individual experiences of the participants and identify what the experience of the attendees of the coaching programme and their trainees was like. It was hoped that that the study would also enable an insight into the potential value of coaching as a teaching and learning tool for driver development and whether further research into behaviour change or safety outcomes would be of value.

Participants

The participants comprised two groups, the first being five instructors from the Metropolitan Police Driving School, based at Hendon, London. The second group comprised five trainees who had attended training courses run by the instructors who had attended the coaching skills course.

The coaching course included core skills in listening, questions and summary alongside technical aspects such as the application of the GDE matrix and use of four coaching models and associated tools and techniques for humanistic, behavioural (GROW), cognitive behavioural and motivational interviewing. It also contained some basic elements about individual differences, such as learning styles and theories about adult learning.

The Metropolitan Police Driving School was selected as it is internationally recognised as a leading centre for driver learning, with its staff training both UK and international police, armed forces and security protection drivers.

The study used both instructor and trainee participants to enable a comparison and analysis across the two groups and provide sights about similarities or differences.

Data gathering

The data was gathered via anonymous, recorded, semi-structured interviews which were designed to last 30 minutes, but in practice lasted for between 15 and 30 minutes conducted by independent researcher. The data from the interviews was transcribed and has been placed in a summary table for ease of analysis.

Informed consent was gained from all participants and the right to withdraw at any time stated clearly.

Analysis of the data

The data analysis method used was taken from the method developed by Smith (2008) and further developed by Smith, Flowers & Larkin, (2009). IPA methodology is not prescriptive '*qualitative analysis is inevitably a personal process, and the analysis itself is the interpretative work which the investigator does at each of the stages*' (Smith, 2008). This method therefore has been followed in outline but the detail amended, where needed, in order to work more effectively with the material.

The analysis was conducted iteratively with the steps undertaken listed below.

- Step 1: Reading and rereading
- Step 2: Initial noting of emerging concepts
- Step 3: Identify and develop emerging themes
- Step 4: Look for connection across themes
- Step 5: Repeat with next interview
- Step 6: Look for patterns across interviews.

Results

Results Part 1 – Instructors

The study identified a range of super-ordinate themes that were specifically raised by the interviewees. As a small number of participants were used the themes are summarised in Table 1 for each participant.

Table 1: Super-ordinate themes from police instructors

Theme	Instructor 1	Instructor 2	Instructor 3	Instructor 4	Instructor 5
1. Self as a developing coach	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2. Benefits of coaching in this environment	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
3. When to use coaching/ balancing it with other methods	Yes	Yes			Yes
4. Organisational change & culture	Yes	Yes			Yes
5. Time constraints	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	

(Adapted from Smith et al, 2009)

Theme 1: Self as a developing coach

This theme was raised by all instructors and focused on the instructor's views of themselves as coaches and how this impacted on their work.

All but one of the instructors identified that the coaching training had helped them to change the way that they thought about teaching and instructing. Instructor 3 commented that

'most of us as experienced instructors already coach to a perfect level for the actual job that we do' (I3, 126)

An alternative view was raised by Instructor 1

'One of the things that interested me about it was the different concept into teaching people...it brought on different things about coaching people and initially when I went on it I thought, not for what I do...I was surprised, almost shocked to find out they actually worked with different candidates' (I1,3-7).

Strong emotions were in evidence with phrases such as 'sparked interest', 'passionate' and 'raising our consciousness' being used to highlight the value they could see in coaching.

The instructors talked about developing their own skills in confidently using coaching skills with their trainees. However, several interviewees highlighted that they still had a lot to learn.

'I don't feel I'm doing it very successfully at the moment... at some times it seems to be just happening which might indicate that I am doing it but I am not sure exactly how I'm implementing it' (I4, 60-64).

Theme 2: Benefits of coaching in this environment

There was a strong sense of belief in coaching as an approach and a willingness to engage with some challenging areas with their trainees that the instructors may not have addressed or recognised when using the instructor lead approach. This is particularly important given the area that police driving instructors work in and how police trainees are perceived by their instructors as:

'burly, hard people who won't talk about their emotions or fear' (I1, 68).

Instructors identified that coaching gave them a way of being able to address emotional issues and the confidence to do to explore high order aspects of the GDE matrix such as emotion, values and beliefs.

'What I started to look more for is the emotional side of things in that, you can tell somebody that they need to do something until they're blue in the face but if there is some inbuilt fear or inhibitor then they might not do it' (I4, 51-53).

Recognising that emotions play a large part in driving skills development seems to have been a revelation with Instructor 1 saying that

....'I've had seasoned traf pols (traffic officers) turn round to me and say they're actually afraid of it, they fear doing this because their emotions are holding them back which was quite interesting, quite an interesting concept to find that that actually exists' (I1, 70-72).

Theme 3: When to use coaching/ balancing it with other methods

This was area that a number of the instructors appeared to wrestle with as it was not always easy for them identify how to balance coaching and instructing to ensure that they got the balance right.

Instructor 2 saw that coaching could:

'...possibly use to assist me in my current role as a driving instructor and if you like, extra tools for me to have in my toolbox. I saw something that could co-exist with the things that I do already rather than totally replace' (I2, 10-12).

The issue of balancing coaching and instructing was also raised in relation to moving away from the view that there was one best way to achieve the end result and a recognition that creating 'a mini clone of myself' (I5, 62) was not the best way to develop trainees who had ownership of their learning.

'what the course has enabled me to identify now is actually there are many different ways to success and that actually the individuality and the autonomy often is at a qualitative level far better because it's what the individual is going to do when they leave the training environment that's important' (I5, 63-65).

In addition, Instructor 3 commented that this approach was more suitable to new trainers and that what he had learned

'hasn't improved my assessment, I don't think of what I already knew before' (I3, 68)

Theme 4: Organisational change & culture

This theme was not explicitly discussed by all of the instructors but was implicit throughout all of the interviews.

The issue of driving change was strongly voiced by two of the instructors who made references to issues around the pace of change as well as the challenges with implementing it. Instructor 2 said that the organisation is

'...like a big ship that takes a lot of time to turn...it doesn't turn quickly. It is a gradual process where the sort of thing is that we've been brought to our attention and we've been raising our consciousness... at the moment it's a drip feeding effect rather than a, evolution rather than revolution' (I2, 27-31).

Another issue was measuring results and how outcomes would need to be measured differently if the true benefits of coaching were going to be seen.

'they are used to getting results using their instructional methods...it might be harder for them to see the value that isn't measured in those quantifiable results...for them to actually take steps back...its very hard, very brave that way in order to move on' (I2,131-135).

Instructor 3 felt that there was a value in the coaching qualification for the credibility that it would give but that

'I don't think they would notice any difference' (I3, 36) and that the value to the organisation and to others would be that *'it reinforces what they already should be doing and should know' (I3, 39)*

Instructor 4 talked about coaching being

'relevant to policing generally and my own policing experience' (14,142)

but in addition focused his comments more on his own growth and development than that of the organisation.

Theme 5: Time Constraints

One of the biggest practical constraints expressed regarding the implementation of coaching was time. There was a perception that coaching takes more time. There was also reflection how coaching could be integrated into their existing training schedules.

'We have some longer courses where coaching fits a little bit better and some very, very short one day effectively with a very defined outcome where it doesn't sit in so well' (12,36-38).

Instructor 3 commented that, whilst valuing the coaching approach, that

'coaching in its purest sense fits beautifully into what we do if there were no time constraints...I haven't got time to ask them questions, I sometimes have to give them definite and positive instruction' (13, 98-103)

Part 2 – Trainees

Four super-ordinate themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews with the trainees. These were; learning, safety, the value of coaching and changes in systems and procedures. The results from each trainee are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Super-ordinate themes from trainees

Theme	Trainee 1	Trainee 2	Trainee 3	Trainee 4	Trainee 5
1. Learning	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
2. Safety	Yes	Yes		Yes	
3. Value of coaching	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
4. Change – system & procedures	Yes	Yes		Yes	

Theme 1: Learning

This highlighted that the trainees attending the driving school did not want to be seen as passive participants in a one way instructional process. There was a recognition that individualized learning and being able to make their own mistakes was valuable.

However, the trainees did not always differentiate the style of teaching on this course from others that they had attended with several trainees additionally commenting that the length of time since completing previous driving courses had added to the challenge of learning.

Specific comments relating to the coaching approach included

'I think he allows you to make your own mistakes, um, to an extent... which is a far better way of learning than to do it this way because I don't think you learn and that's with anything. I found throughout my life that if someone tells you to do something and you just go and do it, that's generally worse than if you talk them through it whilst its going on' (T1, 36).

This was echoed by Trainee 5 who said that

'...they're trying to draw out of you, for you almost to answer the questions for yourself, steer you in the right direction' (T5, 88).

Theme 2: Safety

This theme was mentioned explicitly by three of the trainees and was implicit in the comments made by the other trainees. It was clear that all the trainees were aware that safety was critical both in the driving training and when putting what they had learned into practice.

'I don't particularly like being told, you will do it this way. I prefer to have the option, as long as it's safe, to do it the way I feel it should be done' (T2, 74).

Safety is foremost but there is a recognition that being safe is not always about doing things in particular ways. The trainee went on

'...it (coaching) makes it a lot easier to learn because it's one less thing that you're having to think about...if I'm doing it (driving) in this way and it's still safe...it makes it a lot more relaxed and easier' (T1,76-78).

The link between safety and attitude was implicit in many of the comments where there was a recognition that it was important for trainees to be able to make their own decisions and to be able to focus more of their attention on

'....the mental aspects of their attitude towards driving...and when you look at a lot of accidents etc, they're caused by people's attitudes towards driving, not because they can't press a brake pedal' (T1, 215).

This was summed up by Trainee 1 who said that if the trainees do not buy into what the instructor is saying they

'...then revert back to how they drove before, the attitude you haven't changed. So, they're the ones who the chances are they're going to have an accident' (T1, 271-273).

Theme 3: Value of Coaching

When asked how the training would benefit the learners if coaching was added as a teaching method, Trainee 2 was very positive

'I think coaching is a way forward because you are talking to a person on the same level. You are allowing them to make the mistakes providing it is safe and then you're giving them feedback on that...by coaching, I think you're giving more over to the student and you're letting them say, right, will try it that way...and I think you'll probably get a better pupil instructor relationship if it is done on coaching' (T2, 195-202).

This links to the issues around attitude and was summed up by Trainee 1 who said

'I think being a good driver, especially being a good police driver is 90% attitude and 10% skill. So, you've got to work on improving or um, focusing on someone's attitude towards driving...so if coaching allows that to be focused more on the attitude of the driver or the pupil, the obviously that's better' (T1, 211-220).

There was also a recognition that many aspects of the course were similar to other courses that they had attended in terms of intensity and a focus on getting the skills right but that in addition, the element of subjectivity could be challenging

'it's quite subjective and sometimes you're debriefed on stuff that sometimes you don't agree with the instructors point of view' (T5, 51) *and that* 'theres a lot of grey areas that I don't know if that's kind of the nature of it' (T5, 59)

Discussion

This study sought to explore the felt experience of using coaching as a learning method for police driver learning by both trainers and learners. It has been hypothesised that this approach could help with developing the self awareness and personal responsibility of drivers and through this the safety of drivers in blue light environments.

Given public concern this is an important area to review. Police related road traffic accidents are considered unacceptably high with pursuit related incidents accounting for the greatest number of accidents (IPPC, 2008).

Previous studies looking specifically at police driving have focused more on the reasons for accidents and have looked at areas such as perception (Crundall, Chapman & Underwood, 2003), stress (Hoyos, 1998) and attention (Page, Perez, Stanock & Page, 2008). The

findings from these studies have, in some instances, such as the study by Page and colleagues have made recommendations for additions to the whole process of driver training such as conducting pre-training assessments. There has however, been no published research to date which has looked at coaching as a method for driver development within the police.

This study has drawn out some interesting areas in relation to the implementation of coaching as a learning method. It identified a number of themes from both instructors and trainees. These suggest that coaching was perceived to offer value to the learning process for police drivers. This was most prevalent when instructors were able to offer coaching alongside existing instructional approaches. A similar theme of using a blended approach, combining instruction with coaching emerged in a study of using coaching with novice driver's (Passmore & Mortimer, 2011). In this context the approved driving instructors who were interviewed for the study saw instruction as a fail-safe method to be used either at the start of the process to explain basic safety features or at safety critical moment during the learning process. One instructor however, whilst valuing the coaching approach, felt strongly that it was not so different from what they were already doing and that there would not be an observable difference in his teaching style.

Another of the key themes that emerged was the recognition that personal and organisational change was needed in order to enable the implementation of this new approach and how the existing culture could be a barrier to the speed of change. This was highlighted by the use of metaphors, likening the organisation to a large ship that was slow to turn. Some individuals expressed a sense of frustration that change was not happening quickly enough for some of the instructors. However, despite these frustrations, there was a clear shared view about the potential contribution coaching as a teaching and learning method could make in a blue light environment even where it was commented that this was an approach that was already being used by experienced trainers.

This theme was also raised by the trainees and was linked explicitly to issues of safety. The work conducted by the HERMES and MERIT projects on the use of coaching in driving instruction has also identified that one of the limitations of current driver training is that there is too much focus on driving technique and rational thinking and not enough on beliefs, values and emotions. However, research has indicated that both the driver's emotional state, and their attitude, have a considerable impact on driver performance (Hoyos, 1988; Dorn and Brown, 2003). The police driver trainees articulated that one of the benefits of being coached was that they were encouraged to think for themselves, progress at a pace that was right for them and helped to focus on their attitudes and emotions, and how these factors influenced their driving behaviour.

A number of comments from the instructors reflected the personal change that they have experienced as a result of the coaching training, not only in the development of new skills, but in reflecting on how they achieve the necessary outcomes in driving instruction and the importance of understanding more about the individual. The extent of personal change articulated by the instructors varied from talking about the influence on them in all aspects of their lives to the training confirming what the instructor felt they were doing anyway.

The focus on the individual, which is a key part of a coaching approach, was identified as having measurable benefits such as being able to build confidence in specific areas and in removing fear in order to help the trainees to learn more effectively. This is supported by previous research (Dorn, 2005) which highlighted the vulnerability of professional drivers to human factors related collisions.

This issue of moving from the broad to the specific, from seeing their learners as a group to put through the 'sausage factory' (I3,108) to seeing them as individuals with different needs, hopes and fears runs through many of the accounts and is a significant shift from the more traditional instructional approach of one size fits all to a learner centred coaching approach. This fits with definitions of coaching where the focus is on the coach adapting their style to meet the needs of the learner, whilst still using a Socratic learning as opposed to a didactic learning style (Passmore, 2007). It also helps the individual in applying the skills that they have learned in a wide range of situations. As one of the trainees said '*you can't give a prescription for teaching, everything has to be taken on its own merit*'. These comments suggest that instructors and the trainees recognise the importance of adopting a flexible approach with learners and that coaching could be blended with existing learning methods. Again, as with many of the areas raised in the interviews, these issues were specifically linked by the trainees to their development as safe and competent drivers. However, it is not clear that this focus on talking about safety and the importance of attitude is being replicated when the drivers are back in the workplace, as they return to previous habits and behaviours. This requires further research to explore the impact of coaching approaches compared with instructional approaches. A longitudinal study is currently underway on this topic, tracking police accident rates conducted by the authors.

A further theme was the aspect of time and scheduling coaching into the process. Instructors held the view that coaching took longer than instruction and some comments demonstrated that coaching was still being seen as something to use only when there was enough time available. While this is often the perception, in the novice driver study (Passmore & Mortimer, 2011) approved driving instructors working with novice drivers noted that after use the actual learning time reduced. In this study many of the police instructors were new to coaching and additional time may be needed at this stage as they develop their coaching skills and build their confidence. Further research on learning times is required and is currently subject to a study by the authors working with the British Army.

Although coaching was generally seen to be positive by both instructors and trainees, some instructors felt that it could not be fully implemented unless there were specific changes at the organisational level, including organisational commitment to changing practice for all and changing assessment methods.

What has emerged from the research with the instructors is that predominantly there is an appetite for growth and development and a willingness to explore the application of new methods that could enhance their teaching. The instructor who was least positive about the process was not against the concept of coaching but felt that he was already experienced and knowledgeable about the subject and that it was not so different from current approaches. There was a strong sense throughout the interviews of wanting to do a good

job and to utilise methods that they could see would help them in their role. Articulating their own awareness of their current limitations and the responsibility that they have for continuing to develop their skills as coaches is a positive indicator that this approach will continue to be beneficial. This also links with studies into self assessment of driver competence (Sundstrom, 2005) and findings that the ability to accurately self assess strengths and weaknesses is a valuable part of learning in areas such as driving.

The trainees also demonstrated a thoughtful and evaluative approach to their experiences of being coached and appeared to have a good understanding of the differences between coaching and instruction and how coaching could benefit their learning. Their articulation of safety issues and their recognition that attitude plays a big part in ensuring safe driving highlights the potential contribution that coaching may play in supporting reflection and the link between behaviour and attitude, further reinforcing behaviour change. This perspective also suggests that the trainees attending the courses were not passive recipients but were active participants in their own learning and development. This is positive when considered in relation to findings from previous studies such as Dorn and Brown (2003).

The focus on wanting to continue to learn and develop was summed up by Instructor 5 who said *'I'm a better instructor undoubtedly having gone through the course because I've got an understanding about the individual and I'm not sure I had that depth of understanding before then'*. This comment about understanding the individual echoes the comments throughout the interviews and reflects the development of a more learner centred approach resulting from the coach training. However, it should also be noted that the trainees were also pragmatic about the need to learn in whichever way will help them to pass their assessments, whether through instruction or coaching.

This initial study has given some insight into the perceived value of coaching as a learning method for driver development from the perspective of the instructors and their trainees. The use of IPA as a research method has enabled a greater understanding of the participants own experiences and how undertaking coaching training benefited the instructors in terms of their own development and their ability to further develop their trainees. It has helped to gain further understanding of, not only the individual meanings for each participant, but of the convergent themes that emerged from both the instructors and the trainees.

The study has a number of limitations. The use of IPA provides a unique insight into this sample of trainers and learners, but provides no evidence on learning outcomes such as whether the standards achieved are comparable, whether the time taken would allow for a more extensive use of coaching, whether instructor behaviours were changed (such as through a greater use of GDE behaviours) or whether learners would experience few incidents as a result of a coaching learning methodology. As a result further work is required. This could involve alternative qualitative methodologies, such as a grounded theory, with a view to building a theoretical framework of learning through coaching. In addition research to explore driver instructor behaviours (pre and post training) and to

assess driver safety within a police conduct, would add further insights to the value of coaching in police driving learning.

The research team are already engaged in a number of other studies including reviewing the efficient and effectiveness of driver training within the army and a study to review police instructor behaviour change following training.

In conclusion, this study has identified some positive benefits to the use of coaching as a method of driver development within blue light environments. Whilst recognising the current organisational constraints that may need to be addressed to enable coaching to be more fully integrated into police driving school, the interviewees were positive about the benefits of coaching. If the use of coaching can be shown to reduce accidents within blue light environments, it will be a valuable learning method both in this area and in other areas of driver development.

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