Academic Paper

Beyond Techniques: Cultivating Coaching Presence Through Masters' Level UK and Irish Coach Education Programmes

C. Michael Grissom ✉ (Organizational Resources, Asia Pte Ltd., Singapore)
Jenny Gordon (Jenuine Consulting Ltd., Oxford, UK)

Abstract

This study examined how UK and Irish masters' level coach education programmes cultivate learners' coaching presence. A cross-section of coach educators and thought leaders from the UK and Ireland were interviewed regarding instructional approaches employed to cultivate learners' coaching presence. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. The three main themes and nine sub-themes produced from the data analysis suggest that although coaching presence has been proven critical to coaching outcomes, its place in graduate coach education programmes is inconsistent. Recommendations for improving consistency are discussed.

Introduction

Endorsed as the cornerstone of "a well-developed internal landscape" for a coach (McLean, 2019, p. 36), coaching presence is considered vital for coaching effectiveness. The Association for Coaching (AC) and the International Coaching Federation (ICF) consider it a significant coach competence. Significantly for this research, most graduate coach education programmes are affiliated with at least one of the governing bodies and use these competency models to inform their curricula.

Current research on coaching presence falls into one of three groups: "presence of the coach, presence of the client, and presence between coach and client" (Abravanel & Gavin, 2021, p.39). However, this research did not find any studies examining how master's level programmes in coaching or coaching psychology specifically develop coaching presence. The university voice (designers and deliverers of graduate coaching education programs) is absent in the research

literature. It is unclear how academic institutions factor coaching presence into their training, how they address the tension between practice and presence, and whether they emphasize intellectual or cognitive approaches, corporal or body-based ones, or both. The research aimed to address this gap.

The study focused on academic institutions' perspectives on their instructional approaches to help aspiring coaches understand and develop their coaching presence. It asked the question, *"How do UK and Irish masters' level coach education programmes cultivate learners' coaching presence?"* Specific objectives of the research were: (1) to discover the critical theoretical pillars of coach education programs and the impact on their instructional approach to coaching presence; (2) to identify the most common methods used for cultivating coaching presence; and (3) to catalogue instructional recommendations for the future.

The research was limited to masters' level university coach education programs intended to prepare learners with relevant theoretical foundations, critical reflection capabilities, and ethical astuteness whilst leading to coaching accreditation, the hallmarks of in-depth, quality coach training (Bachkirova et al., 2017; Diller et al., 2020). Institutions outside the UK or Ireland and certification, diploma, or non-degree programs were excluded.

Literature Review

The literature search included research on coach education and coaching presence. The research on coach education aimed to understand the characteristics of quality graduate coach development programmes, especially approaches for cultivating coaching presence. The research on coaching presence emphasized evidence-based studies exploring its link to coaching outcomes and techniques to develop it.

Coach Education

Coach education ranges from non-certified short courses to graduate-level university programs. Research has demonstrated that in-depth coach education helps learners build their self-reflection capabilities, serving as a mechanism for self-identity, self-regulation, and higher-quality coaching (Diller et al., 2020). Building on this study, Carden et al. (2022) endorsed self-awareness as an essential coach competency and a pillar for a deep coach-client relationship to ensure an environment where meaningful work could be achieved.

A stated intent of graduate coach education programs is to provide space for critical reflection to build self-awareness as a practitioner. However, there is no widely discussed framework for graduate coach education in the literature (Bachkirova et al., 2017; Gannon & Myers, 2018). Pertinent to this study, no literature exploring how graduate coach training programs build the theory or practice of coaching presence amongst their students was uncovered.

Coaching Presence

A vague and difficult-to-define construct (Noon, 2018), coaching presence is often referenced as "the being mode" (González et al., 2018). Coaches and clients experience it as a coach tapping into, tuning into, or making client connections in the moment (Griffiths & Campbell, 2008). Allied concepts in the literature include flow (Du Toit, 2014), mindfulness (González et al., 2018), collaborative dialogue (Stelter, 2014), and presencing (Scharmer, 2016), among others. The various terms reflect the myriad of diverse perspectives about it.

The helping professions, e.g., counseling, nursing, medicine, and social work, have explored presence as an ingredient for successful treatment (Geller & Greenberg, 2012; Topp, 2006).

Business, education, and organizational development have studied it as a quality of professional success (Peterson, 2011).

Although coaching associations have proposed various definitions of coaching presence, this research embraced a more holistic definition from the therapeutic literature, accenting "a way of being with [the] client that optimizes the doing of [coaching]" (Geller, 2017, p. 4). "[Coaching presence] involves bringing the whole self into the encounter with the client, being completely in the moment on a multiplicity of levels, physically, emotionally, cognitively, and spiritually' (Geller & Greenberg, 2002).

A literature review on coaching presence produced five key themes.

Vagueness and Scant Evidence-Based Research

The paucity of evidence-based research on coaching presence highlights its nebulousness. Only six studies utilizing coaching presence as a variable were discovered, primarily qualitative dissertations. No empirical studies validating effective coaching competencies, including coaching presence, add to its ambiguity.

Noon (2018) researched coaching presence based on the experience of coaches and clients, proposing a taxonomy and structure of presence reflecting a holistic, tacit way of being, including multiple dimensions, fluctuating and unstable dynamics, learnable conditions, and awareness. Abravanel and Gavin (2021) explored coaching presence from the coach's perspective, theorizing coaching presence as a multidimensional concept that included mindful self-awareness, authentic connection, deep atonement, embodied engagement, holding outcomes, and structural alignment.

Both studies position coaching presence as multidimensional, with conditions promoting or inhibiting coaching presence. Jointly providing solid first efforts into the concept, they are limited by small sample sizes and self-affirmed researcher biases. However, theoretical mileage has yet to be gained from them. Neither has been replicated nor their interconnection tested.

Conflicting Evidence for the Relationship-Outcomes Link

Two quantitative, pretest–posttest studies (Baron & Morin, 2009; Boyce et al., 2010) examined the link between the coach-client working relationship and coaching outcomes, concluding it is a crucial determinant of client satisfaction and outcomes because it is "a prerequisite for coaching effectiveness" (Baron & Morin, 2009, p. 99). However, limited sample sizes, sample diversity, and comparison groups restrict their generalizability.

Three correlational studies investigated the best predictor of coaching outcomes from critical-moment descriptions. They showed a strong relationship between the working alliance and the effectiveness of the coaching from the client's perspective (de Haan et al., 2012; de Haan et al., 2016; de Haan & Nieß, 2012).

Conversely, the results of three studies using the Working Alliance Inventory (WAI) as a criterion reported that the coach-client relationship might not be the critical ingredient of coaching effectiveness (de Haan et al., 2020; Molyn et al., 2021; Williams, 2021). However, a systemic review of sixty-six studies evaluating the WAI challenged its psychometric robustness, advising that its outcomes should be cautiously interpreted (Paap et al., 2022).

No studies were discovered during this research directly measuring the coaching presence–outcomes relationship. Coaching presence lacks the research "holy grail," i.e., rigorously controlled scientific studies utilizing a randomized assigned pretest-posttest comparison groups design with multiple behavioural and performance measures (Boyatzis et al., 2022).

Select Practices May Positively Impact Outcomes

Coaches' way of being connects this group of studies. Four studies catalogue "being behaviours" positively supporting coaching outcomes directly (Noon, 2018; Topp, 2006) or indirectly (Luebbe, 2004; Passmore, 2010) via attributes threaded to coaching presence, e.g., trust, rapport, compassion, etc. These studies, however, are compromised by limited sample size, sample diversity, and design methodology.

Two qualitative studies (McBride, 2013; Wesson, 2010) concluded that flow, like presence, is multidimensional and multifaceted with cognitive, emotional, and physical components. They suggested that achieving and maintaining a state of flow during coaching sessions required trust, intimacy, and presence. Building on these studies, Bradley (2023) recently explored the concept of relational flow, arguing that the presence of both the coach and the client is a prerequisite to flow.

Whilst an alternative view is that flow is forgetting the moment and coaching presence compels complete awareness of it (Cox, 2013), these studies suggest presence is a requirement for flow. Whether flow and presence are the same or interconnected, or if one is a precondition for the other, is unclear. However, they appear to map onto similar experiences for the coach and the client.

Awareness-Building Can Enhance Presence

With an emphasis on being in the present moment, mindfulness has been shown to positively contribute to client outcomes (Braham, 2005; Collard & Walsh, 2008; González et al., 2018; Linger, 2014; Spence et al., 2008). Kennedy (2012) demonstrated that developing the coach's use-of-self impacted several coaching areas, including embodied presence. Focusing on the efficacy of three theatre-based techniques to foster leaders' coaching skills, Ketz (2013) concluded that presence was a primary development area from these techniques and highly relevant for coach education.

Whilst limited, these studies support mindfulness, intentional use-of-self, and select theatre-based techniques as effective approaches to develop coaching presence. Given the myriad of practices on presence in the literature, coaching has the unique opportunity to draw from diverse fields and techniques to build this capability.

Measurement Methods Are Limited

No validated surveys exclusively designed to measure coaching presence were discovered in this research. Hamurcu (2018) designed and validated a survey for coaches to solicit client feedback based on the ICF's competencies, including coaching presence. The Gestalt Coaching Assessment (GCA, Dennis & Sadloch, 2015), a self-report based on core Gestalt coaching capabilities, has one item asking users to rate the frequency they "stay in the moment with the client." Neither solely measures coaching presence nor attends to its active ingredients.

Topp (2006) developed and tested a 360-degree feedback survey containing subscales associated with presence characteristics and behaviours. Compared with other 360-degree instruments, it measures some distinctive constructs but has yet to be validated.

The absence of validated surveys to measure coaching presence further reflects the concept's elusive nature and mechanisms. Compared with the volumes of clinical research on therapeutic presence and a validated inventory to measure it from both the perspective of the therapist and the client, rigorous scientific studies devoted to understanding and measuring coaching presence are scant.

This study aimed to examine how UK and Irish universities include and train their students in this construct given its perceived importance for effective coaching and yet being so vague and poorly understood.

Methodology

Embracing a social constructionist epistemological stance, this research sought to understand and explore the experience of the participating coach educators. It was based on a descriptive "how" research question to understand precisely what is or is not happening in UK and Irish masters' level coaching programmes to cultivate coaching presence (Rojon & Saunders, 2012).

Design

This one-time, semi-structured interview-based qualitative research design to understand the experience and reality of the sample was exploratory by nature. This research did not discover any previous studies investigating the research question posed above. This position informed both data collection and analysis.

An interview protocol (Appendix A) guided the semi-structured, one-to-one interviews. Relevant probes aimed to clarify or expand the participants' initial responses. After the first two interviews, the protocol was modified to eliminate redundant questions and to sharpen each question's focus.

Interviews were scheduled for one hour via Microsoft Teams and recorded. Eleven participants agreed to have their interviews recorded. Interviews were conducted between July and November 2022.

Participants

Twelve volunteer participants were engaged in this study, meeting the saturation sample size for thematic analysis (Ando et al., 2014). This included ten coach educators, either department chairs or senior lecturers (F=4 M=6) from the UK and Irish masters' level coach education programs, or UK-based thought-leaders (M=2) considered leading practitioners and researchers in coaching psychology. The ten coach educators represented eight universities (Appendix B), six UK and two Irish, as there was redundant participation from two institutions. Gender was the only demographic information captured. It was observed versus self-reported. Further demographic information was determined not to be relevant for this study.

Procedure

Ethics approval for this study was granted by the University of East London's School of Psychology Ethics Committee, ensuring compliance with the British Psychology Society's research code of ethics. There was no intentional engagement in deception, and no reimbursement was provided.

A preferred target list of UK and Irish graduate programs was identified using UEL faculty recommendations, the Graduate School Alliance for Education in Coaching (GSAEC, 2018) member list, and a Google search. Formal invitations to participate in this study were sent directly to each person, along with a description of the study.

Once participants acknowledged their willingness to participate, a consent form was sent, and a one-hour interview was arranged, followed by a Microsoft Teams invitation. The interview protocol was provided to participants approximately one week before the interview.

Data Analysis

The lead researcher conducted, recorded, transcribed, and analysed all the interviews. The data were analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis following Braun's and Clarke's disciplined process for ascertaining, refining, and validity-checking themes (2022) to "impose high standards…

[and] a more comprehensive and demanding kind of thematic analysis" (Howitt & Cramer, 2020, p. 409). This method was chosen because of its discipline, flexibility, and relevance to the subjective realities of interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

A predominately deductive orientation to the data was used as the dataset and meaning-making produced from participants' experiences reflected an intentional theoretical framework embedded in the structure of the interview protocol. Analytical rigor was ensured by precisely adhering to Braun's and Clarke's six-step process throughout the study (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The themes and sub-themes use participants' exact words to provide the participants' voices.

To ensure confidentiality, any potentially identifying information of the participants was redacted from the transcripts and analysis. This research adhered to the British Psychology Society's ethical codes (BPS, 2021a & b) and the University of East London's Code of Practice for Research (UEL, 2021).

Results

Data analysis produced three master themes, with three sub-themes each, reflecting the approaches taken toward coaching presence in graduate coaching education. This section discusses the themes, sub-themes, and illustrative participant quotes.

Theme 1: "A Buffet of Choices"

This first theme captured the theoretical, structural, and contextual foundations informing masters' level coach education programmes and, more importantly, their implications. The linkage among the three sub-themes provides the scaffolding required for coaches to serve their clients.

"Association Informed"

Each represented university programme acknowledged they are informed by the AC, EMCC, ICF, or Institute for Leadership Management (ILM) with several programmes accredited by two or all of these associations. Five programmes reported being accredited by the AC, four by the EMCC, two by the ICF, and one by the ILM.

The impact of association affiliation and accreditation is reflected in various participant comments.

> *Our programme is AC accredited, but the design of our programme was an amalgamation of AC, ICF, and EMCC competency models because they capture what effective coaches are expected to do. So, we 'mushed' them all together.*

Another participant stated:

> *Our programme is EMCC affiliated and approved at the Master Practitioner level. Many of our assessments are designed around the EMCC's requirements for this level.*

Association accreditation typically informs module content and learner evaluations to support students achieving certification as a coach.

"Diverse Theoretical Underpinnings"

Programmes are not aligned with any one coaching model. *"Our programme is eclectic. We expose our students to diverse coaching styles, approaches, and perspectives"* one participant stated, representing the consensus. An ethos of experimenting with diverse coaching methods *"so that we don't just pump out coaches in a sausage production-line fashion"* was conveyed. While it was

acknowledged that no superior coaching method exists and techniques should not be *"recipe oriented,"* methods and techniques were referenced as *"the scaffolding and something to bank on,"* especially for novice coaches.

Person-centered coaching was a bedrock for each programme and coaching method.

> *Carl Rogers and his core elements of congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathy are crucial grounding for all coaching approaches.*

Otherwise, the norm was to ensure learners experience diverse coaching methodologies to arrive at a personal coaching stance.

"Environment Matters"

Preparing emerging coaches to create the right environment was considered critical. Participants expressed multiple rationales underlying the criticality of the environment in coach education.

The first was the diversity and complexity of clients' issues.

> *We want people to have a range of approaches for clients' diverse needs. We have a lot of discussion about all the stuff in and outside the room as influences on the coaching conversation, the coach approach, and the environment.*

The second is related to client trust.

> *The environment needs to be psychologically safe for clients to build a trusting relationship with the coach. Distractions can undermine the presence of the coach and the client.*

A third rationale was ethics: "*Being conscious about the environment is the coach's ethical obligation."*

> *There are ethical considerations of environment and creating a neutral environment in a digital world is more difficult. Its impact on presence is something we stress considering there are a lot more distractions.*

Although different intents were expressed, the environment was stressed as an essential mediator for coaching presence.

Theme 2: "Work Around Presence"

This second theme and sub-themes capture philosophical and content themes undergirding most instruction.

"A Foundation of Jell-O"

A prevailing theme was the tendency to incorporate coaching presence more implicitly than explicitly into programmes due to a need for more clarity about the definition of coaching presence.

> *Coaching presence is not talked about specifically in our programme. It's implied with a clear idea about its relevance and woven in under other names such as self-awareness, use-of-self, or way of being.*

Intent *"to balance emphasis on the doing and being"* aspects of coaching was conveyed, the challenge being that *"coaching presence is not clearly defined theoretically or behaviourally."* Consequently, *"the whole issue of what it is and how it manifests itself is not well understood."*

Presence was perceived as important but varied definitions and expectations among coaches and clients make it easier to instruct on allied terms.

"No Special Process Instruction"

This research directly inquired about the inclusion of therapeutic pre-, in-, and post-session process practices to stimulate presence. Examples of these practices were provided when necessary. No programme indicated intentionally including these practices. A consistent answer was, *"We do not include any instruction on these practices."* However, the concept stimulated considerable interest.

> *I would be keen for us to consider ways to do better here and see these practices as essential for building self-awareness and presence. It's something for us to consider doing in the future.*

These practices were accepted as valid, structured process features to prepare, regulate, and monitor one's efforts to be fully present with clients.

"Relationship as a Container"

There was consensus that *"Coaching relationship and coaching presence override the coach's approach. Orientation does not define the relationship."* In most programmes, there is great emphasis on the coach-client relationship as *"the frame of reference that holds it all together."* Consequently, significant emphasis is placed on coaching fundamentals throughout each programme's life cycle as imperative for building and maintaining the relationship.

> *Active listening, questioning, summarizing, and paraphrasing, along with being non-judgmental and non-directive, the fundamentals of all effective coaching, are huge components of coaching presence.*

Additionally, the coaching context is considered important.

> *When the coaching is about the nature of being or meaning making, deeper levels of presence are required because there's more vulnerability and disclosure.*

The prevalent inference in this sub-theme is the importance of creating and sustaining the coaching relationship, with presence serving as an attitudinal and active intervention.

Theme 3: "Self-Awareness and Techniques Are Required"

This third theme conveys current perceived best performance and mindset practices for cultivating learners' coaching presence.

"It's an Identity"

A strong professional identity as a coach is considered important for effectiveness as a practitioner. *"Coaching is not just a job. It is an identity."* It was even suggested that *"Some people see coaching presence as a 'cool' part of their identity."* Thus, most programmes allow considerable instructional time for learners to explore their purpose, who they are as a coach, and what they bring to an engagement because "the *coach's identity walks into the room with the client."* Gaining clarity on one's identity as a coach was considered to require great self-awareness. Thus, *"It is imperative to be present to yourself first in order to be present to others."* The implication was the importance of coaches understanding themselves and their identity as a coach.

> *Coaches can't turn up in a room with a client and embody coaching presence or grasp their impact on the client, especially when the situation requires a high level of coaching presence,*

without a clear understanding of their own identity as a coach.

The message was the perceived clear linkage between identity and coaching presence.

"Mindfulness is Branded"

Participants consistently identified mindfulness as a best practice.

> *[Mindfulness is] one of the best practices for developing coaching presence because there are no complexities in mindfulness. It is quite simple, but there are principles.*

The widespread use of mindfulness was also related to its potential to raise *"in-the-moment awareness, which is essential for presence"* and *"it's grounding, which requires a level of presence."* Additionally, diverse techniques within the mindfulness space were noted, allowing for variations depending on context and one's state.

"Not a Focus"

Other practices often used in the therapeutic community were reported to receive limited use in graduate coaching programmes. A wide array of somatic, creative arts, and sports psychology practices were stated to be included in various programmes, but there is no consistency in their usage across programmes. The use of these practices is based mainly on personal attitudes about them.

> *Anything that seems to be 'way out there' risks undermining support for what we are doing so we don't do it.*

> *I'm not good with expressive arts so I don't engage with those techniques or teach them.*

> *We don't include things from sports psychology because I assume it is quite performance oriented and our approach is more developmental oriented.*

Included practices are often linked to personal capability.

> *I'm trained in thought field therapy and demonstrate it as means to get back into presence somatically.*

> *I personally practice some sports psychology techniques, which are massive areas for coaching presence, such as visualization and the use of music to shift the environment so I bring them into my instruction.*

Unequivocally, the alternative practices included were considered to help learners build a relationship with self as a precursor to self-management (physical, mental, and emotional) and the presence it creates with the client.

Discussion

This research aimed to investigate the approaches used by UK and Irish masters' level coach education programmes to help learners develop their coaching presence by exploring the experience of department heads, senior lecturers, and thought leaders who design, deliver, and shape program content. There are three notable findings about the intersection between coaching presence and graduate coach education from the present research.

First, graduate programmes consider their role to be providing a broad theoretical and practical background that (a) is aligned with accrediting association coach competency models; (b) guides learners to develop a personal coaching philosophy and approach; and (c) leads to coach accreditation with one of the coaching associations. This result is consistent with other literature related to coach education (Bachkirova et al., 2017; Gannon & Myers, 2018).

These findings imply that (a) coaching requires rigorous, coherent, and expert study commensurate with its complexity and (b) developing knowledge, personal attributes, and behaviours is required. These stances set graduate coach education apart from other coach training options.

At the same time, participants raised several questions about the current state of coach education.

> *Do we properly understand the coach's development journey, the best way to prepare them for this journey, and the best way to measure progress?*

> *What are other professional disciplines such as counselling, acting, and athletics doing that is transferable to coaching so that coaching can be more psychologically, scientifically, and interdisciplinary based?*

> *Are our current evaluation methods for assessing progress and skills effective? Perhaps we need to look at and try some new ways of evaluating our learners.*

There is still no widely discussed framework for coach education in the literature (Gannon & Myers, 2018), including how to educate and help learners develop their "being" capabilities.

This first finding indicated that all programmes embrace diverse theoretical instruction to provide learners "the scaffolding" to develop their coaching philosophy. Despite this level of instructional range and adult learner orientation, the basic tenets of person-centered coaching were perceived unanimously as essential grounding for coaches, regardless of orientation. They were embraced as fundamental to coach education and coaching presence. Finally, this study emphasizes the university's voice on the environment and its importance for coaching presence, especially in our complex, digital world. The criticality of the environment was not represented in previous literature considered for this study. This study uniquely adds to the literature since it is the first known effort to investigate the voice of university and thought leaders regarding coaching presence.

A second finding from this research was that an implicit, not explicit, instructional approach to coaching presence prevails. Although coaching presence was considered extremely important for successful coaching outcomes, graduate programmes primarily work around it, emphasizing various allied concepts. This reflects the cognitive and behavioural vagueness of the construct.

The imprecision of the concept was evident in different perspectives about what defines coaching presence, ranging from *"serene and calm energy"* to *"dynamic, robust, and even edgy with a sense of vitality to match the client."* Consequently, most programmes emphasise constructs perceived as better understood and less *"mushy."*

This second finding is consistent with research noting no universally accepted definition of coaching presence (Abravanel & Gavin, 2021; Noon, 2018); no studies validating any of the accrediting associations' competency models (Boyatzis et al., 2022); significant emphasis is assigned to the coaching relationship as a condition for coaching effectiveness (Baron & Morin, 2009; Boyce et al., 2010; de Haan & Nieß, 2012; de Haan et al., 2016); and a dearth of evidence-based research utilizing coaching presence as a variable. In its infancy, coaching presence research needs a consensual theory to launch research into its mechanisms and relation to coaching outcomes.

A unique feature of this second finding was exploring whether the structural practices informing clinical training to ensure presence was included in coach training. While all participants acknowledged it was not explicitly part of their instruction, they did express interest in it as a valid structural technique worthy of consideration for the future. Coaching process is considered fundamental, essential while not recipe-oriented, to good coaching. Incorporating such an approach into coach training was positioned as a pre-session means for the coach to get centered, grounded, and in the moment by disengaging from any personal distractions such as anxiety or bias; to manage in-session self-chatter or other apprehensions; and to intentionally reflect post-session on the conversation and relationship, including how they showed up as a coach.

The third finding from this research was that the best instructional techniques currently used in graduate coach education programmes combine self-reflection and experiential practices. Most programs intensely focus on learners deepening their insights as practitioners so they can show up with clarity about their identity as a coach, a prerequisite for coaching presence. This requires a profound understanding of what drives their practice, i.e., the theories, models, philosophies, and assumptions, as well as their personality characteristics and values. It requires being conscious of the views they have adopted, how they approach the world, and how they think about people and relationships. All participants considered attitudinal factors primarily invisible, but an aspect of coaching presence that impacts the quality of the interaction.

Experientially, mindfulness and mindfulness practices are universally incorporated for graduate-level coach education. Mindfulness is considered to have mainstream acceptance and a solid empirical evidence base, giving it validity. Instructional time is devoted to understanding mindfulness, its benefits according to research, and techniques to help people center, reflect, and build self-awareness. Beyond mindfulness, a limited range of somatic, creative arts, or sports psychology practices have gained instructional acceptance for presence-building among coach educators. Those practices that have found their way into coach education programs have typically passed a personal attitude and capability check.

The present research is consistent with the findings of numerous authors (Braham, 2005; Collard & Walsh, 2008; González et al., 2018; Linger, 2014; Spence et al., 2008) whose research supports mindfulness as contributing to enhanced self-awareness and coaching presence. There is consistency with the research findings on the criticality of building the self-awareness competence of the coach as an antecedent to self-identity and coaching presence. These actions suggested an inherent belief that this "Jell-O" can be moulded even if coaching presence remains imprecise and illusive.

The finding in this research indicating the limited, inconsistent application of somatic and creative arts techniques to cultivate coaching presence is consistent with their exclusion from the coaching literature and the paucity of research using either as a variable. Coaching education leans more toward cognitive than somatic and embodied approaches. While coach educators are curious about and express the potential value in both, their use depends mainly on familiarity and safety. Familiarity is partly a factor of the safety rationale, although safety goes beyond familiarity. It is also an ethical issue.

> *I will be curious and use guided discovery to work with what the client puts on the table, e.g., drawing, meditation, free writing, etc., but I do not prescribe. It could be the wrong exercise and harm the client.*

Limitations

There are three fundamental limitations of this study. One limitation pertains to potential researcher bias. As a deductive reflective thematic analysis, pre-existing theory informed the interview protocol. It potentially impacted the researcher's ability to question participants objectively or to

avoid solidifying affirmative evidence too quickly. A rigorous data analysis approach was taken to mitigate this issue, including maintaining a reflexive journal audit trail to help systemize, relate, and cross-reference data.

Secondly, the sample for this study consisted of volunteer participants. There is a high probability they determined the study to be significant and valuable, potentially introducing subject and response bias into the data and, subsequently, the study findings. The research attempted to minimize this issue via an interview template, which allowed a fluid, follow-the-flow-of-the-comments discussion rather than a rigid inquiry.

A third limitation is geographic scope, which was limited to UK and Irish universities. Widening the geographic scope might broaden the philosophical lens, the participant diversity, and the transferability of the findings beyond the UK and Ireland. The researchers see the potential for representational generalizability (Braun & Clarke, 2022) as readers, especially in Western-context countries, e.g., Australia, Canada, and the USA, might recognize similarities between these findings and their experiences.

Ethical Dilemmas

No known ethical issues were encountered during this research. The likelihood of risks was determined to be low during the ethics application process, with a mitigation plan determined for each identified risk.

Conclusion

This research explored the instructional methods used by UK and Irish masters' coach education programmes to cultivate learners' coaching presence. The findings suggest these programmes are characterized by (a) diverse theoretical, structural, and contextual foundations informed by professional coaching association competency models; (b) greater focus on coaching relationship or allied concepts given the perception of coaching presence as abstract and vague; and (c) leveraging self-reflection and mindfulness to build a professional identity and presence-enhancing skills with inconsistent utilization of proven somatic, creative arts, or sports psychology techniques.

Implications

Despite the limitations of this research, these results have several theoretical and practical implications. This study addressed a gap in the sparse coach education literature by providing a first-ever qualitative study of the approaches taken by UK and Irish graduate coach education programmes. It informs coach educators about the current state of coaching presence within graduate coach education programmes with the immediate practical implication that coach educators could reflect on the extent to which coaching presence is included in their curricula and consciously focus on it as a concept more formally.

Further, this study offers additional practices for cultivating coaching presence (Appendix C). Standing on the shoulders of previous researchers, it provides the impetus for additional research into coaching education and the way coaching presence is included or excluded. Recommendations for such research are outlined below.

Finally, a bold implication is reconceptualizing the philosophy and sequence of coach education. Like theatre arts and sports, employing a lived "be-the-coach" experience rather than a conceptual "do-coaching" at the start of the coach education journey could profoundly impact the ethos of coaching. Following on the lived experience with the introduction of the coaching process and methodology would genuinely provide the scaffolding for coaching.

Future Research

There are several recommendations for future research. Replication or extension studies to enhance the current research would be a starting point. For example, expanding the geographic and diversity lens with equivalent programmes outside the UK and Ireland would offer greater philosophical, cultural, and ethnic diversity, and opportunities for regional comparisons. Incorporating a quantitative component to augment the qualitative approach in this study could explore multiple quantitative variables, e.g., attitudinal characteristics or select practices, potentially deepening insights into the qualitative results.

More ground-breaking and future-building for coaching and coach education would be research to develop a consistent, universal construct definition of coaching presence, defining its cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and spiritual elements. Properly defining the presence construct would allow for a common language and foundation for all things related to coaching presence, including curriculum, development methods, and a valid, reliable measure of coaching presence.

More ambitiously would be research to determine an inclusive, unifying theory among coaching relationship, self-awareness, coaching presence, and working alliance. This research could determine if simplifying the experience into one or a few of these areas based on their independence or interdependence is possible; if each serves a unique purpose vital to different coaching contexts, e.g., performance coaching versus meaning-oriented coaching or individual versus team coaching; and if coaching outcomes are more impacted by any one of these or if they are all required.

Finally, the Therapeutic Presence Inventory, noted earlier, could be validated for coaches and coachees. Such an inventory would provide a feedback measure of both the process and the experience. Further, it would offer a validated measure for academic institutions to incorporate into their instruction. As a research instrument, it could better illuminate the active ingredients of the process and the experience from both sides of the relationship.

Summary

Ultimately, the findings of this research suggest that coaching presence, a key competency in coach competency models by both the AC and ICF, has a highly varied place in UK and Irish graduate coach education programmes, although it is universally agreed to be important. The path forward regarding cultivating a learner's coaching presence in masters' level coaching education programmes requires a foundation built on a valid construct theory; understanding its relationship with allied coaching relationship mechanisms; and introducing bolder, experiential instruction.

Ethics

This submission received the approval of the University of East London (UEL) Ethics Committee and fully followed APA and BPS ethical guidelines.

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About the authors

Mike Grissom is a Managing Partner at CM Organizational Resources – Asia with 40 years of leadership development and coaching experience. Along with an M.A. in Counselling and an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership, he is a University of East London MAPPCP graduate.

Jenny Gordon is the Founder of Jenuine Consulting Ltd. based in Oxfordshire, UK, and a University of East London (UEL) Research Supervisor.

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

1. Background / Theoretical Orientation

- Is your program built on a specific theoretical or applied model?
- How does this stance impact the program's instructional approach?
- Is your program informed by any coaching accreditation bodies?
- How does this stance impact the program's instructional approach?
- Is coaching presence embedded implicitly or explicitly in your program?

2. Critical Understandings and Insights

A. Process: What is it that coaches most need to understand about the coaching process and coaching presence? How is it embedded in your program?

B. Technique/Behaviors: What is it that coaches most need to understand about coaching technique/behaviors and coaching presence? How is it embedded in your program?

C. Mindset: What is it that coaches most need to understand about a coaching mindset and coaching presence? How is it embedded in your program?

D. Environment: What is it that coaches most need to understand about the coaching environment and coaching presence? How is it embedded in your program?

3. Instructional Approach and Challenges

A. To what extent does your program include instruction in self-management practices to exhibit and maintain coaching presence:

- **Life-style practices**. Cultivating presence in one's life through self-assessment, reflection, mindfulness, yoga, or other practices: (1) to provide self-care; (2) to create the conditions for presence to be accessed in coaching sessions; and (3) to provide personal renewal.
- **Pre-session practices**. Setting a conscious intention for coaching presence prior to starting a coaching session.
- **In-session practices**. Using conscious methods for inwardly attending, receptivity, and being with and for the client to recognize barriers or distractions to presence in the moment and self-correct.
- **Post-session practices**. Deliberately reflecting and taking stock of one's level of in-session presence for personal learning and growth.

B. To what extent does your program include experiential techniques and practices to support the cultivation of coaching presence such as:

- **Somatic practices**. Paying attention to one's experience, physical sensations, movement, and inner sensory world in the present moment. Examples: grounding techniques, centering exercises, and body scanning.
- **Expressive arts practices**. Using the arts as a means of self-expression and connecting with others. Examples: rehearsals, improvisation, rhythmic drumming, and mimicking exercises.
- **Mindfulness practices**. Putting time aside daily to pause, look inward, and bolster the neural muscles that support returning to the present moment. Examples: daily mindfulness practice, diaphragmatic breathing, or special mindfulness practices, e.g., self-compassion or loving kindness meditations.
- **Sports psychology practices**. Using sports and athletics techniques that are explicitly intended for self-management such as *visualization* (e.g., receptive space visualization and mindful photography visualization); *self-talk* (e.g., instructional, or motivational self-talk); and *environmental shifts* (e.g., the use of music for mood management).

4. Instructional Outcomes

- In your experience, what are best practices for cultivating coaching presence?
- What are the greatest challenges in cultivating these qualities?
- Are there any consequences of not receiving training in coaching presence?

5. Conclusion

- Are there any other areas of your program focused on cultivating coaching presence that we have not discussed so far?
- How can future coaches/coaching psychologists best be trained in coaching presence to improve coaching outcomes?
- Are there people in your network that you would recommend for me to contact?

Appendix B: List of Participating Institutions

- Academy of Executive Coaching (UK)
- Cambridge Coaching Psychology Group (UK)
- Henley Business School (UK)
- Royal College of Surgeons Ireland (Ireland)
- Oxford Brooks Business School (UK – 2 participants)
- Sheffield Hallam University (UK)
- University College Cork (Ireland – 2 participants)
- University of East London (UK)
- University of South Wales (UK/Wales)
- University of Warwick (UK)

Appendix C: Catalogue of Experiential Practices Referenced

Category	Practice
Self-Awareness	Journaling
	Free Writing
	Reflective Practice (All Levels of Schon's Model)
	Self-Reflection
	Storytelling (Narrative Meaning Making)
Mindfulness	3-Step Breathing
	Body Scanning
	Compassion & Self-Compassion
	Deep Breathing (Practice for Physical/Pulmonary Issues)
	Grounding Techniques (Various)
	Mindfulness Meditation
	Rapid Breathing (Practice for Panic Attack)
	Reflective Practice (Schon's Model: Mindfulness is One Level)
	Storytelling (Form of Grounding)
Somatic	Mirroring Exercises
	NLP's Anchoring Concept
	Posing (Body Awareness)
	Russian Dolls/Buttons (Physical Awareness)
	Thought Field Therapy (Tapping)
	Walking & Talking/Walks in Nature
Sports Psychology	Environmental Shifting (e.g., Listening to Music)
	Miracle Question (A Type of Visualization)
	Self-Talk (General)
	Self-Talk (Top-Dog/Under-Dog)
	Visualization (General)
	Visualization (When I Am at My Best)
Theater/Creative Arts	Drawing
	Haiku (Creating a)
	Posing (Creative Physical Awareness/Illustration)
	Russian Dolls/Buttons (Relationship Dynamics)