

# Developing Coach Education Programs in Football: The Integration of a Resilient Coping and Life Skills Development Plan

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## Declaration

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this thesis was to provide a context specific insight into how life skills and resilient coping behaviors could be developed through the medium of football. In study 1, a triangulation of experiences from players, coaches, parents, and teachers was sought through a series of focus groups. The findings highlighted that football can develop a range of life skills that contribute towards developing a resilient person, and emphasized that social interaction with a coach, along with a collaborative approach, were key to adolescents' development of these skills. Building on these findings, Study 2 aimed to design, deliver, and evaluate a coach education intervention program that enabled coaches to integrate life skills development within their coaching sessions. The findings demonstrated an intervention effect on coaches' knowledge of life skills and resilient behavior development. Further, an in-depth social validation process demonstrated that coaches were not only able to retain and apply the new knowledge acquired but that it had transformed their approach to coaching. The final study in this thesis culminated the exploration of the impact of the intervention program by evaluating the effectiveness of a coach in delivering sessions that promote life skills development from the perspective of his/her players. Through a combination of focus groups and the analysis of participants' reflective logs, it emerged that the players had a sound understanding of the importance of life skills, and had been successful in transferring a number of them acquired through football to other environments. Overall, the thesis has provided conceptual and practical implications for coaches and NGB's alike in the understanding, development, and integration of life skill development into coaching practice, training and development. As a result, young people's capacity to thrive in life as well as sport can be enhanced.

# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction and Context of Research**

This chapter will outline the context within which this body of research was conducted and also describe the nature of the project. Key terms will then be defined, following which the aims and objectives of the research will be presented and the structure of the thesis explained. Finally, the epistemological position of the research will be outlined.

This PhD is funded by the Knowledge Economy Skills Scholarship (KESS) programme, the European Convergence program for the Higher Education (HE) sector in Wales. Benefitting from European Social Funds (ESF), KESS supports collaborative research projects with external partners based in the convergence area of Wales (i.e., West Wales and the Valleys). In the case of this research the external partner is the Welsh Football Trust (WFT). Established by the Football Association of Wales (FAW), the WFT is the governing body for grassroots football, player development, and coach education in Wales. More specifically, the WFT's role is to encourage more children in Wales to play football, to develop player and coaching talent and to support the future success of Welsh national teams. KESS is committed to developing the skills of young people within Convergence areas of Wales to enhance their career prospects and develop a better society. Similarly, as part of their vision of 'More Coaches, Better Coaches' and 'More Players, Better Players' the WFT are committed to positive youth development as they understand the importance of developing the person first in order to develop better coaches and players. One approach to positive youth development widely discussed in the literature is that of life skill development where emphasis is placed upon developing

new skills that will enhance a young person's development, and help them become better able to cope with the challenges encountered in everyday life.

## **1.2 Personal Growth through Sport**

Personal growth refers to the development of new skills and/or knowledge acquired through experience and is important because it demonstrates one's learning as a result of the experiences encountered in life. If personal growth is to be realized, practitioners in youth sport must give emphasis to the valuable skills and attitudes learned during sport participation and how young people can apply them to daily life (Papacharisis, Goudas, Danish, & Theodorakis, 2005). These skills and attitudes are referred to as life skills (Danish & Donohue, 1995). Teaching life skills is essential for healthy child and adolescent development and for preparing young people to function more effectively in their changing social circumstances (The World Health Organization, 1999), thus developing more resilient young people. Gould and Carson (2008) advised that failing to develop life skills might lead to the adoption of negative attitudes and behaviors (e.g., maladaptive stress management strategies, and inability to focus on process and performance goals). One issue with the existing life skills research, however, is the fact that life skills and associated terms are not precisely defined (Gould & Carson, 2008). Indeed, within the sport literature, such terms as positive youth development, social-emotional growth and life skills development are used interchangeably with little explanation.

Research into life skills, positive youth development, and resiliency is complimentary as each body of literature focuses on the promotion of positive behaviors in addition to minimizing negative attitudes (Holt, 2008). Positive



behaviors include resisting, recovering, and coping with stress, whilst their negative counterparts include succumbing, often as a result of feeling anxious and having negative thoughts.

### **1.2.1 Positive Youth Development**

Positive youth development (PYD) is the most general term used in the literature for personal growth among young people, focusing on the promotion of desirable skills or outcomes within this population. Such competencies include becoming a caring and ethical individual, developing a general sense of self-worth, having a positive future orientation and learning how to adapt to different educational and working environments (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1995). In sport, PYD includes learning positive health habits (e.g., diet and nutrition) and becoming physically fit. PYD also includes the development of psychological dispositions (e.g., a sense of optimism or hope) and specific skills (e.g., the ability to set goals or manage stress) linked to the qualities of resilient people (Gould & Carson, 2008).

The healthy development of youth is a fundamental focus of society where efforts are made to promote positive personal growth and optimal functioning across almost every social domain including education, religion, the family, media and sport. The importance of supporting youth development is demonstrated in the £98 billion the UK invested in education in 2014 (HM Treasury, 2014). Youth development is a continuous process in which individuals aim to satisfy their basic personal and social needs to feel safe, cared for, valued, and emotionally grounded (Miller, 2003). During this process, particularly during the period of adolescence

young people have the biggest potential for growth but are also at their most vulnerable. The increasing challenges presented from needing to effectively function within a growing set of contexts means that adolescence becomes increasingly complex and difficult to navigate (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Even an adolescent who is very successful at managing these situations and is seemingly well-adjusted needs to learn new skills, cope with stressors, overcome obstacles, and maintain or develop a sense of self (Wylleman & Lavalley, 2004). When left to mature on their own these skills can be difficult to develop, and where support for developing them is not readily available, too often young people display maladaptive, anti-social, and risk taking behaviors (e.g., drug taking, criminal offences).

The negative experiences that young people may encounter through participation in an unsupportive sporting environment have been documented in the literature and include higher levels of stress and social exclusion compared with participants from other organized activities (Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006). Furthermore, an unsupportive sporting environment has previously been associated with increased use of alcohol and performance-enhancing drugs (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Siegenthaler & Gonzalez, 1997). Whilst studies of adolescent behavior have been traditionally dominated by naming, measuring, and predicting problem behaviors (e.g., Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000), there is a growing recognition that the removal of negative behaviors does not necessarily promote positive behaviors. This means that an adolescent without psychological or behavioral problems is not inevitably reflective of a young person fully prepared for adulthood (Lerner et al., 2006). To illustrate this Danish (2002) stressed that, "To be successful in life, it is not enough to know what to avoid; one must know how to succeed" (p.

55).

This change in how young people's development is viewed has led to an approach whereby emphasis is placed upon building strengths and positive behaviors rather than correcting negative behaviors (Larson 2000; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Through this positive psychology approach young people are viewed as resources with potential for personal growth and it is suggested that scholars and practitioners should direct athletes toward the positive outcomes associated with sport participation and away from the potential negatives. The adoption of a positive psychology approach is in essence promoting PYD, defined by Damon (2004) as a perspective that "emphasizes the manifest potentialities rather than the supposed incapacities of young people" (p. 15). Consequently, emphasis has been placed upon identifying what skills and attributes are required for young people to succeed in life and how they can best be supported. Acknowledging this, Bernat and Resnick (2006) defined PYD as "the deliberate processes of providing youth with the support, relationships, experiences, resources, and opportunities needed to become successful and competent adults" (p. 10). To this end, the main goal of PYD is to support young people's capacity to thrive, rather than just cope, within their environment. To embrace the challenges and transitions adolescence presents, young people are required to demonstrate a range of skills and competencies such as the capacity to make responsible decisions, understand their values, form relationships, and communicate with others (Boyd, Herring, & Briers, 1992).

### **1.2.2 Resiliency**

The study of psychological resilience seeks to understand why some individuals are able to withstand – or even thrive on – the pressure they experience in their lives (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014). Numerous definitions of resilience have been proposed in the psychology research literature (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). Most definitions incorporate two main conditions: exposure to adversity or risk; and, the attainment of positive adaptation or competence (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2013). Indeed, Burton, Pakenham, and Brown (2010) suggested that resiliency is the capacity of people to effectively cope with, adjust or recover from stress or adversity. Luthar and Zelazo (2003) argued that resilience is never directly measured but is inferred based on the direct assessment of two distinct dimensions, namely adversity and positive adaptation. Further, resilience researchers have also focused on assessing factors that protect individuals from the stressors they encounter (e.g., Connor & Davidson, 2003). Examples of such qualities include: optimism, perseverance, self-efficacy, adaptability, and perceived social support. Collectively, these definitional perspectives indicate that resilience measures need to consider three pivotal components – adversity, positive adaptation, and protective factors (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2013).

#### **1.2.2.1 Adversity**

Adversity “typically encompasses negative life circumstances that are known to be statistically associated with adjustment difficulties” (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000, p. 858). From a measurement perspective, an incident can only represent an adversity or risk if the problems displayed are greater than those displayed by the

general population (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2013). The resilience literature suggests that young people can experience adversity in sporting and non-sporting life. For example, non-sporting adversity may occur as a result of parental divorce (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003) whilst Arnold and Fletcher (2012) assigned the demands encountered in sporting environments to four categories: leadership and personal issues, cultural and team issues, logistical and environmental issues, and performance and personal issues. Leadership and personal issues consisted of *the coach's behaviors and interactions, the coach's personality and attitudes, external expectations, and performance feedback*. Cultural and team issues comprised *teammates' behaviors and interactions, communication, team atmosphere, teammates' personalities and attitudes, roles, and goals*. Logistical and environmental issues included *selection, structure of training, weather conditions, and physical safety*. Finally, performance and personal issues was made up of *injuries, finances, and career transitions*.

#### **1.2.2.2 Positive Adaptation**

Luthar and Zelazo (2003) defined positive adaptation as “adaptation that is substantially better than what would be expected given exposure to the risk circumstance being studied” (p. 515). In relation to young people, positive adaptation has been considered relative to achieving the social, behavioral, and educational milestones appropriate to their stage of development (Masten, 2001). Consequently, a young person’s ability to positively adapt is assessed on their ability to develop healthy and meaningful relationships with peers, to behave appropriately, and to attain good academic marks (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2013).

### **1.2.2.3 Protective Factors**

Protective factors have been defined as, “influences that modify, ameliorate, or alter a person’s response to some environmental hazard that predisposes to a maladaptive outcome” (Rutter, 1985, p. 600). Protective factors then are characteristics that protect individuals and enable them to adapt to the demands they encounter (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2013). Further, Garmezy (1991) grouped characteristics of young people who thrived while living in difficult circumstances under three themes: dispositional attributes of the individual (i.e., personality); family cohesion and warmth; and, the availability and utilization of social support.

## **1.3 Aims and Objectives of Research**

Another area relevant to the positive development of young people is that of life skills. Further, some life skills have been linked to resilience. The KESS remit is to develop these skill and behaviors in young people across Convergence areas of Wales. As a result the aims and objectives of the research are as follows.

The general aim of this research was to design, implement, and evaluate a life skills and resilient coping development plan for educating coaches within a football coach education program. The first objective, therefore, was to identify gaps in current provision in relation to teaching life skills and developing resilient behaviors in football. Using the information gained, the second objective was to design and integrate a football-related life skills and resiliency training plan into existing UEFA endorsed youth coaching licenses delivered by the WFT. The third objective was to educate coaches to be able to deliver coaching sessions that promote the development of life skills and resilient coping behaviors. Following

delivery of the training program, the fourth and fifth objectives, were to evaluate the effectiveness of the training program (plan) on coaches' ability to deliver practical coaching sessions that promote life skills and resilient coping behaviors; and to evaluate the impact of developing coach knowledge, and delivery skills on the life skills and coping behaviors learned by the participant coaches' players.

## **1.4 Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis will adhere to the following structure. First, in Chapter 2 a review of the literature will be provided. This review will aim to discuss research pertinent to life skills development and its related areas. The review will set the scene with literature specific to each study and is structured consistent with the order that each study is presented in this thesis. Each study will be presented as its own chapter with the introduction to those chapters containing a more specific review of the literature in relation to the specific study. Second, in Chapter 3 a consultation study is presented that examines: (a) how life skills and resilience are defined; (b) the characteristics of resilient people; (c) which life skills are important; (d) which life skills can be developed through football; (e) the learning expectations of parents and players, and, (f) significant people for facilitating the development of life skills in young people. Study two (Chapter 4) then comprises the design, delivery, and evaluation of an intervention focusing on developing football coaches who are able to integrate life skills development within their coaching practice. Following this, in Chapter 5 a third study is presented that focuses upon evaluating the effectiveness of the coach in delivering sessions that promote life skills development from the perspective of his/her players' perceived learning as a result of attending coached

sessions. That is, gaining an insight into to how their life skills have been developed by their coach. A discussion of the key findings from each study will be provided at the end of each study chapter. Finally, Chapter 6 will provide a summary discussion, highlighting practical implications and recommendations for future research in the area of life skills development. The researcher's reflexive thoughts are included throughout but a *reflexive epilogue* will be presented after the discussion as the researcher reflects upon the whole experience of conducting the PhD research, and how this has influenced his practice as a coach. References, which follow APA 6<sup>th</sup> edition format, are presented at the end of the thesis. Tables and figures are numbered in the order that they are presented in the thesis.

## **1.5 Philosophical Position of the Research**

A paradigm consists of the following components: ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods, and every paradigm is based upon its own ontological and epistemological assumptions (Scotland, 2012). These assumptions represent the view of the researcher in relation to reality and knowledge, which will underpin their research approach as reflected in their methodology and methods. The philosophical stance of this thesis is presented here as a way of underpinning the decisions made throughout this program of research with regards to how the aims were both developed and achieved, and thus how each study emerged.

Ontology is the study of being (Crotty, 1998, p. 10). Ontological assumptions are concerned with what constitutes reality, in other words *what is* (Scotland, 2012). Epistemology is concerned with the nature and forms of knowledge (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 7). Epistemological assumptions are concerned with how



knowledge can be created, acquired and communicated, in other words *what it means to know* (Scotland, 2012). Further, Guba and Lincoln (1994) explained that epistemology asks the question, “What is the nature of the relationship between the would-be knower and what can be known?” (p. 108).

A *critical paradigm*, one of historical realism, was the ontological position adopted in this program of research. Historical realism is the view that reality has been shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). Realities are socially constructed entities that are under constant internal influence (Scotland, 2012). Critical epistemology is one of subjectivism where knowledge is both socially constructed and influenced by power relationships from within society, and Cohen et al. (2007) explain that, “What counts as knowledge is determined by the social and positional power of the advocates of that knowledge” (p. 27).

Social constructionism argues that we are born into a world in which meaning has already been made; we are born into culture, “We come to inhabit a pre-existing system and to be inhabited by it” (Crotty, 1998, p. 53). The starting point of critical research is often preconceived, whereby finding out is the means and change is the underlying aim (Scotland, 2012). This involves making people aware of their situation, and then realizing change through repeated action informed by reflection. This research adopted a cyclical process of investigation, action and evaluation that results in a change in practice, known as action research. This research was underpinned by a critical paradigm because it was important to understand the context within which the research was being conducted (e.g., the social realities of the participants selected from a convergence area in Wales). This meant

understanding the people involved, the culture associated with Welsh football, and the power relationships that may exist within grassroots coaching (e.g., coach-athlete) and also coach education delivery (e.g., tutor-coach).

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of Literature**

## 2.1 Introduction

Youth sport involves the participation of children and adolescents in activities organized and/or supervised by adults (Vazou, Ntoumanis, & Duda, 2006). According to the National Standards for Sport Coaches (National Association for Sports and Physical Education, 2006), parents send their children to practices and events with the expectation that adult supervision will bring about positive sport outcomes and maximal learning and development (NASPE, 2006). Indeed, parents want their children to learn life skills through sports participation (Bodey, Schaumleffel, Zakrajsek, & Joseph, 2009). According to Fullinwider (2006) athletes in the youth sport setting learn to cooperate, display courage, play fair, be loyal, develop self-discipline, practice self-control, respect rules, express compassion, foster peace, maintain integrity, be honest and civil, exhibit controlled aggression, become competitive, persevere, subordinate self to group, show leadership, feel empathy, respect the environment, experience the team as a moral community, develop perspective-taking, become caring, exercise critical thinking, and develop greater levels of self-esteem. Such skills are proposed to be developed through an effective environment represented by social engagement with teammates which influences underlying interest in, and the quality of their experiences whilst engaged in, sport (Weiss & Petlichkoff, 1989). Danish, Fazio, Nellen, and Owens (2002) highlighted that the sport environment is an appropriate place to learn life skills because sport skills and life skills are similar. Both are learned through demonstration, modeling, and practice (Danish & Hale, 1981). For example, goal setting, problem solving, and performing under pressure are skills needed in sport, classroom, and workplace environments (Bodey et al., 2009). Indeed, Jaques Rogge, the President of the

International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 2004 stated that, “The world of sport is not separate from the rest of the world. Sport breaks down barriers, promotes self-esteem, and can teach life skills and healthy behavior.” It is apparent then that sport provides an environment in which young people can learn and develop an array of skills and behaviors that can be used in everyday life. How these skills and behaviors are developed is less clear and further research is required to determine this. In addition, a better understanding is required of the efficacy of all sporting environments, sport types and sub-cultures in developing these skills and behaviors and whether the situational variables dictate the development of certain skills.

Some of the qualities outlined by Fullinwider (2006) are consistent with what the relevant literature outlines as the characteristics of resilient behavior (e.g., Jones et al., 2007; Mancini & Bonanno, 2009). Given this, it is apparent that the youth sport environment can develop resilient individuals who exhibit effective life skills. Other alleged benefits of participation in youth sport include the reduction or prevention of health problems, development of peer networks, lower school dropout rate, higher academic achievement, and enhanced occupational outcomes (Conroy & Coatsworth, 2006; Weiss, 2006).

This chapter, divided into two main sections, provides a detailed review of the relevant issues in life skills development research. First, definitional issues surrounding terminology in the literature are clarified. The review then discusses the subsequent operation of these terms with a consideration of the atheoretical standpoints that have been used by researchers and practitioners to explain the life skill and resiliency development process. These include the development of an appropriate learning environment, a model for coaching life skills through sport

(Gould & Carson, 2008), a process for integrating life skills within coaching sessions (Bodey et al., 2009), and the important role reflective practice plays in creating learning and generating knowledge.

## **2.2 Definitional Issues**

Conceptualizing key terms is vital. Without clear definitions no phenomena can be scientifically studied because if the subject being studied is unclear the research will lack trustworthiness (Gould & Carson, 2008). Furthermore, Danish, Taylor, Hodge, and Heke (2004) indicated that having a clear definition of what life skills involve influences the design of successful programs to develop such skills.

Emanating from a variety of sources (e.g., sport and developmental psychology, health and wellness, international policy documents) several definitions of life skills have been developed. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) defined life skills as a large group of psychosocial and interpersonal skills including but not limited to: verbal/nonverbal communication, empathy, respect, goal setting, self-esteem, relaxation techniques which can help people make informed decisions, and develop coping and self-management skills that may help them lead a healthy and productive life (UNICEF, n.d.). Similarly, the World Health Organization (WHO, 1999) defined life skills as the abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Further, the Life Skills Centre defined life skills, simply, as the skills that enable us to succeed in the environments in which we live (Life Skills Center, n.d.). The range of definitions available could allow virtually every skill to be classified as a life skill. However, a distinguishing fact is that a skill must be

transferrable from the learning environment to other life situations to be deemed a life skill (Gould & Carson, 2008). That is, skills may be developed in one environment (e.g., sport) and then be transferred and applied in other areas (e.g., school, work) (Danish & Nellen, 1997).

A definition of life skills from the sports domain, that appears to have some support in the literature, was offered by Danish et al. (2004) who highlighted life skills as, “Those skills that enable individuals to succeed in the different environments in which they live, such as school, home and in their neighborhoods” (p. 40). It is clear from this definition that life skills may help a young person succeed not only in the sport he/she is playing but also in other environments of life in which they are being used successfully. According to Danish et al. (2004) life skills can be behavioral (e.g., communicating effectively with peers and adults) or cognitive (e.g., making effective decisions); and interpersonal (e.g., being assertive) or intrapersonal (e.g., setting goals). In line with this, Jones and Lavalley (2009a) discussed life skills under two themes: interpersonal life skills, and personal life skills. This format will be adopted in this review for consistency and clarity. The degree to which individual life skills have been explored and therefore addressed in the literature varies, and as a result there is an imbalance in the amount of detail given for each life skill in this review. Consequently, it is not the intention of the researcher in this thesis to prioritize individual life skills in any rank order, and the detail to which each life skill is discussed should not be used to assume those with greater discussion are more important than others. Instead, the proceeding discussion aims to set the scene and outline the meaning of each life skill presented in Jones and Lavalley’s (2009a) framework.

### 2.2.1 Interpersonal Life Skills

Four themes including *social skills*, *respect*, *leadership skills*, and *family interaction skills* make up the interpersonal life skills dimension (Jones & Lavallee, 2009a). *Social skills* are paramount in all domains of life as they are fundamental for initiating and building strong relationships. Whether it be making friends at school, interacting with family members, or getting along with teammates, the development of social skills is vital. Indeed, among the most widely recognized life skills by youth sports participants are *communication skills* (Jones & Lavallee, 2009b). Communication skills are essential for young people to learn (Jones, Lavallee, & Tod, 2011), as young people need communication skills to demonstrate refusal, for negotiation, and for collaboration, to demonstrate strategies to prevent, manage, or resolve interpersonal conflicts without harming the self or others (Jones et al., 2011). Finally, young people need communication skills to ask for and offer assistance to enhance the health of self and others (National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2007).

Communication can be conceptualized in cognitive terms as a process of information transfer (Adler & Rodman, 2002), and can be intentional or unintentional, and verbal or nonverbal (Eccles & Tenenbaum, 2004). Intentional communication occurs when the sender intentionally sends a message to one or more recipients. Intentional verbal communication is a flexible method because humans share a natural language with which to encode and decode cognitions (Eccles & Tenenbaum, 2004). Intentional nonverbal communication can be used when it is not possible to communicate verbally. Both of these types of communication can be used in sport to encrypt information to ensure that only the



intended persons can interpret it. For example, a rugby hooker calls a certain line out play to the rest of his teammates using an intentional verbal code unknown to the opposition; a football player taking a corner kick will communicate intended placement of the ball using an intentional nonverbal code (e.g., through raising a hand) unknown to the opposition. Unintentional communication occurs when senders unintentionally send information to recipients, for example, when a football player moves in a certain direction this may send information to a teammate of where to play a pass (Eccles & Tenenbaum, 2004).

*Respect* is currently one of the most publicized issues in sport fuelled by the various campaigns in existence (e.g., FIFA's 11 for Health; The FA's Respect Program; Kick It Out). According to Jones and Lavalley (2009b) young people can show their respect by turning up on time and looking after themselves, making sure they train regularly, and looking after the facilities that are being used.

Fullinwider (2006) suggested that sport provides the opportunity for young people to demonstrate *leadership qualities*. Two life skills can be developed under leadership: leadership skills, and delegation skills. The ability to recognize and utilize the qualities possessed by other team members can be as valuable as demonstrating one's own leadership qualities. This is particularly relevant to coaches and supports the notion of empowering athletes to make decisions. A coach can only have a limited impact on players during a match. Therefore, players need to be able to lead and make decisions whilst on the field of play. To be able to do this, they must experience doing so in a training environment first.

The final interpersonal life skill theme is *family interaction skills*. Appreciation of family is one example of family interaction skills where young people acknowledge

and appreciate everything their parents do for them. One athlete interviewed by Jones and Lavallee (2009a) stated, “You would be a better parent because your parents have sacrificed so much for you” (p. 163). Further, parents impart certain values to their children and more specifically use ‘teachable moments’ to reinforce these values, therefore influencing the acquisition of life skills in relation to sports participation (Holt, Tamminen, Tink, & Black, 2009).

### **2.2.2 Personal Life Skills**

Self-organization skills, discipline, the ability for self-reliance, goal setting, managing performance outcomes, and motivation represent the personal life skills dimension (Jones & Lavallee, 2009a). *Self-organization* consists of punctuality, time management, and planning skills (Jones & Lavallee, 2009a). Scholars and practitioners have identified organizational skills as crucial youth development outcomes (e.g., Jones et al., 2011). Organizational skills are important in that they demonstrate a young person’s ability to plan their work, and manage the various demands placed on them in life (e.g., at school, at home, in sport). Associated with organizational skills, *initiative* has been identified as a crucial positive youth development outcome that would benefit the lives of young people (Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003; Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003; Larson, 2000). Larson (2000) stated *initiative* comprises the ability to be motivated from within, to direct attention and effort toward a challenging goal. Furthermore, Larson discussed *initiative* in relation to the ability to plan personal effort over time and to manage one’s own attention and activities. In addition to being an important quality in its

own right, *initiative* is a core requirement for other components of positive development such as creativity and leadership (Jones et al., 2011).

Abiding by rules set out in their club code of conduct will require young people to be *punctual* for training and matches. Away from sport, being *punctual* is also important in school, work, and for attending appointments. *Time management* and *planning skills* are vital to becoming organized both in and away from sport, particularly to enable young people to manage the commitments of school, home life, and sports participation. Management of commitments also requires some degree of *discipline*, another personal life skill (Jones et al., 2011). Some of the qualities associated with discipline include behavior on and off the field, determination, commitment, persistence, ability to work hard, and being able to manage distractions.

Another personal life skill is *self-reliance*, which refers to the ability to rely on yourself, and is crucial in sport and life. *Self-reliance* is thought to underpin the development of all other personal life skills (Jones & Lavalley, 2009a). One of the major facets of *self-reliance* is overcoming peer pressure. For example, a young person may need to demonstrate his commitment, work ethic, determination, and ability to prioritize to remain focused and sacrifice going out with friends.

*Goal setting* is another personal life skill, consisting of three themes: goal setting skills; ability to achieve goals; and breaking down goals (Jones & Lavalley, 2009a). Jones et al. (2007) described the life skills required to fulfill potential throughout the goal setting process as: having the patience, discipline, and self-control with the required training for each specific developmental stage to allow you to reach your potential. Linked to goal setting is *motivation*. Young people who

develop their ability to set and achieve goals will therefore use goal setting as their motivation for achieving in sport (Jones et al., 2007). Motivational factors include motivation to succeed, empowerment, motivation to improve, and learning the value of effort.

Learning from mistakes, bouncing back, dealing with setbacks, injury, pressure, stress, and fatigue are all characteristics of *managing performance outcomes* and are strongly associated with sport (Jones & Lavalley, 2009b; Jones et al., 2007; Kim & Duda, 2003). During every training session/match players will make mistakes, some of which will be more significant than others. Developing effective coping strategies will help players to cope with and recover after making mistakes. The degree to which players are able to recover to their normal level of functioning represents how resilient they are as an individual (Carver, 1998). Carver (1998) discussed four typical responses to stress (e.g., making a mistake), including give up, put up, bounce up, and step up. Individuals who *give up* succumb to the stressful situation and feel defeated. Individuals who *put up* struggle with the situation and their level of well-being is diminished, meaning it is higher than the well-being of those who *give up* but they fail to return to their normal level of functioning. Individuals who *bounce up* fully recover from the stressful situation back to their prior level of functioning, known as resilience. Resilience enables some individuals to emerge stronger out of adversity with capacities that they may not have otherwise developed (Jackson, Firtko & Edenborough, 2007), including effective coping, a sense of control, achievement and accomplishment, personal growth and well-being (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). Individuals who *step up* do whatever it takes to meet the

challenge and grow to an even higher level of functioning and well-being than previously experienced, known as thriving.

## **2.3 Life Skills Development**

McCallister, Blinde, and Weiss (2000) suggested that a major challenge facing those interested in developing life skills was the prevailing myth held by many that sport automatically teaches young people life skills. In contrast, life skills researchers contend that these skills must be intentionally taught and fostered throughout the sport experience (e.g., Danish, 2002; Gould & Carson, 2008; Papacharisis et al., 2005). Therefore, those involved in providing youth sporting opportunities (e.g., coaches, sports leaders, teachers) must consciously and deliberately focus on life skill development rather than expect development to occur as a natural consequence of participation.

Central to the teaching of essential life skills is the development of an appropriate motivational climate. Motivational climate was introduced as a situation-induced psychological environment directing goals of an action (Ames, 1992). Motivational climate derived from achievement goal orientation whereby Duda and Treasure (2006) referred to it as the perceived structure of the environment. Research in both educational and sport settings indicates that motivational climate is related to a variety of meaningful variables, including achievement goal orientations, intrinsic motivation, enjoyment, beliefs about the meaning of success, persistence in the face of adversity, perceived ability, and emotional responses such as anxiety (Morgan, Sproule, & Kingston, 2005). Ames (1992) recognized two types of motivational climate: mastery/task and

performance/ego. The mastery/task climate is created when effort, improvement, co-operation, and self-referenced goals are at the forefront (Ames, 1992). However, a performance/ego climate develops when the focus is on winning competitions and social comparisons (Ames, 1992). In general, task or mastery-initiating climates are more frequently associated with salutary outcomes including fun and enjoyment, an important process in positive outcomes associated with life skills programs (Hellison & Walsh, 2002). In contrast, ego-initiating climates frequently are linked to negative outcomes, including fear of failure (Smith, Cumming, & Smoll, 2008). The benefits of a task-involving climate are numerous and include higher perceived competence toward the activity, greater effort when engaged in the exercise, and more enjoyment and interest in the activity (Huddleston, Fry & Brown, 2012). A task/mastery climate would be most appropriate for developing resilient behaviors and life skills due to the emphasis placed upon strong work ethic, and persistence, two key variables for developing resilience. Further, a mastery climate promotes the development of intrinsically motivated individuals, and Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte, and Jones (2005) proposed that young people with high intrinsic motivation for sport would be more likely to develop positive life skills.

Another concept related to the learning environment that appears to link with the need to “teach” life skills is the zone of proximal development (ZPD, Vygotsky, 1978). More specifically, ZPD is concerned with the role of a significant adult in children’s learning and development (Rogoff, 1998). The concept of ZPD has been interpreted differently and various applications of it have been generated (Chak, 2001). According to Valsiner and van der Veer (1993) the generation of these various interpretations was partly a result of the lack of elaboration given by

Vygotsky which has led to the concept being “widely used as a metaphor, and its operationalization has been complicated when attempted” (p. 57). The definition of the ZPD may be regarded as composed of three conceptions: the conception of development, the social agent, and problem solving (Chak, 2001). Vygotsky (1978) explained the relationship between learning and development as the interweaving of two lines of development, biological origin and sociocultural origin. He asserted that “learning awakens a variety of internal development processes” such as problem solving and communicating, and that “properly organized learning results in mental development and sets in motion a variety of developmental processes” (p. 90).

Through a cultural-historical perspective, Vygotsky appears to place more significance on culture over the individual. For example, in his conception of ZPD, he noted the importance of the presence of an ideal form, as manifested through an adult or a capable peer, to interact with the child’s fundamental form in fostering his or her development (Chak, 2001). For coaches, this places further emphasis on the need to create an appropriate environment for each player taking into consideration how each player learns and how they are motivated. However, Vygotsky (1978) advocated a dialectical approach to teaching as the basis for experimentation and analysis, therefore revealing that he saw the individual as an active contributor in the dynamic person-environment relationship. This dialectical approach was explained as “while admitting the influence of nature on man... man, in turn, affects nature and creates through his changes in nature new natural conditions for his existence” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 60). Vygotsky further illustrated that “play creates a ZPD of the child” (p. 102). It is crucial then that the more capable other, those in a position of influence (e.g., coaches, sports instructors) understand how to facilitate

play and support children through problem solving interventions to enable them to learn from the experiences that play presents. Relative to dialectical thinking, Wells (1999) proposed a transformative nature of learning in the ZPD and that development has no biologically determined end point or a fixed path. To this end, learning and development extends across one's life span. It is important that coaches understand this and are aware that participants will not be identical in their stage of development, and how they learn. It is important then that coaches take time to get to know their players to enable effective planning of coaching sessions to meet the needs of their players.

The second component of ZPD is the emphasis on social agents, adults and capable peers, in facilitating the process of learning (Chak, 2001). This connects the realms of learning to those beyond the school setting and the social agents of children beyond educators. This is an important consideration for coaches when teaching life skills to young people. Coaches must develop practices that engage participants in their ZPD and recognize how best to support each participant. As the transfer of life skills is crucial and coaches have limited influence over what young people do in other environments away from sport, developing a relationship with those social agents within the player's support network (e.g., parents, extended family, peers) is vital if opportunities to apply life skills elsewhere are to be maximized. The co-constructionist perspective, placing emphasis on the active roles of both adults and children provides a different insight to the role of the social agent. Through this perspective the adult and child jointly negotiate and reconstruct goals, which are not end states but flexible directions towards a desirable process or outcome (Valsiner et al., 1997). This shared responsibility suggests a different



approach to the traditional role of the coach. The coaches' role now becomes one of facilitating and supporting learning opportunities as opposed to directing them. According to the definition of the ZPD, problem solving is the central task of instruction in the adult child-interaction (Chak, 2001). Problem solving skills and strategies conveyed in the process of actualizing the ZPD are intended to help advance the child's capacity for abstract thinking, which is a process of gaining awareness and control over one's thinking. One strategy suggested to support young people in solving problems is 'distancing' that emphasizes the importance of social interaction in the development of thinking competence (Sigel, 2002). In applying Sigel's distancing model coaches should construct the linguistic environment to activate synthesis and organization of representational schemes. For example, coaches create psychological distance for children by drawing their attention to aspects of the problem they may not have considered previously, potentially through asking questions. By placing "a cognitive demand on the child to separate the self mentally from the ongoing present" (Sigel, Stinson, & Flaughter, 1991, p. 126), a spatial and/or psychological distance between the player and the event is created. In practice, coaches should, therefore consider the use of questioning when employing the distancing strategy and ensure that players are given enough opportunity to restructure their own thinking when responding to challenging situations. In accord with Sports Coach UK (2014) open questions that challenge players to think differently appear to be the most appropriate and coaches should refrain from forcing their own perspective on their players.

It is clear from both a motivational climate and a ZPD perspective that the opportunity for players to learn and develop as individuals is important. The

environment that a coach creates is crucial in supporting the development of young sports participants and particular efforts should be made to include individuals in structuring their learning, and allowing group members to support each other's learning, whilst the role of the coach becomes one of facilitation and support for the individual in achieving their desired outcomes.

### **2.3.1 Life Skills Intervention Programs**

To support the development of life skills a number of frameworks have been proposed (e.g., Domains of Developmental Experience and the 5C's). Larson (2000), through the Domains of Developmental Experience (DDE) framework, suggested that through organized activities that promote positive resources and the learning of skills, positive youth development can occur (Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003; Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003; Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006). Larson (2000) argued that activities promoting positive youth development were intrinsically motivating and required attention and challenge over a prolonged period of time. Further, the DDE framework identified positive and negative domains of experience that contribute to youth development. Positive experiences were classified as either intrapersonal (e.g., identity exploration and formation, initiative work, and emotional control) or interpersonal domains (e.g., interpersonal relationships, teamwork and social skills, and adult networks and social capital). Negative domains include stress, negative peer influence, social exclusion, negative group dynamics, and inappropriate adult behavior (Larson, 2000). The 5C's framework was based on a review of the empirical and practice related literature in positive youth development. From this review, five constructs were proposed that capture the

essence of a number of mental, behavioral, and social-relational components that could comprise positive youth development (Lerner et al., 2006). The five constructs are: *competence* in academic, social, and vocational areas; *confidence* or a positive self-identity; *connections* to community, family, and peers; *character* or positive values, integrity, and moral commitment; and *caring* and compassion (Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000). In addition, researchers have argued that when an individual's behavior reflects all 5C's, a sixth C emerges, *contribution*. For example, Lerner (2004) suggested that through enacting behaviors indicative of these C's, a young person is making a positive contribution to one's self, family, and community. Whilst some evaluation studies have provided support for the 5C's framework (e.g., Lerner, Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, Phelps, Gestsdottir, et al., 2005; Jellicic, Bobek, Phelps, Lerner, & Lerner, 2007), indicating its value as a developmental framework, a weakness in its composition lies in its failure to identify the skills and behaviors that participants need to demonstrate in order to achieve competence in the C's of the model. As a result, it is difficult for researchers to assess the contribution of the participants towards their own development and evaluate the impact of their social surroundings.

Based on the concept that life skills need to be taught to young people by adults, several life skills programs aimed at facilitating life skill development have been reported in the literature. Presented in tabular form to allow for comparison, an overview of the emergence of key life skills intervention programs is illustrated in Table 1.

The majority of life skills interventions are grounded in the theoretical foundation provided by the *Life Development Intervention* (LDI, Danish & D'Augelli,

1983). The purpose of the LDI was to prepare people to cope with critical life events through focusing on the following: adjusting to transitions, coping with injuries, coping with non-selection, changing jobs, and retiring from sport/work. Danish and Nellen (1997) stated that the LDI is appropriate for developing life skills through participation in sport because its approach uses sport as a model for promoting personal growth. This statement must be treated with caution as research has shown that whilst sport has the potential to be used as a vehicle for developing life skills, thus promoting personal growth, implying that it can be used as a model suggests that sport automatically develops these life skills and omits the influence of the coach and other significant people (e.g., peers).

**Table 1** Life skills intervention programs

Intervention & Authors	Purpose	Delivery/Method	Key Findings/Evaluation
<b><i>GOAL: Going for the Goal</i></b> <b>(Danish et al. 1992a, 1992b).</b>	Teach a sense of personal control and confidence to make better decisions and become better citizens.	10 x 1hour sessions taught by carefully selected and well-trained high school students to middle- or junior-school students. Life skills learned separately from sport participation.	<p><u>Danish (1997)</u> Participants learned the information the GOAL program taught; were able to achieve the goals they set; found the process easier than expected; thought they had learned quite a bit about how to set goals.</p> <p><u>O’Hearn and Gatz (1999).</u> Participating students gained knowledge about the life skills being taught and were able to achieve the goals they set.</p> <p><u>O’Hearn and Gatz (2002)</u> Participating students gained knowledge about the life skills being taught, were able to achieve the goals they set, and improved their problem solving skills.</p> <p><u>Forner, Danish, and Scott (2007)</u> Adolescents aged between 14-16 years.</p> <p>Impact of GOAL in developing 3 life skills: goal setting, problem solving, and seeking social support.</p> <p>Participants reported learning how to set goals, problem solve, and seek social support.</p>

Intervention & Authors	Purpose	Delivery/Method	Key Findings/Evaluation
<b><i>SUPER: Sport United to Promote Education and Recreation</i></b> <b>(Danish, Fazio, Nellen &amp; Owens, 2002).</b>	Sports-based adaptation of GOAL. Used goal setting as the foundation life skill to teach problem solving and overcoming obstacles to goal achievement.	18 sports clinics with participants involved in three sets of activities: learning the specific skills related to a specific sport; learning the skills related to sport in general; and playing the sport. Young people learn life skills separately from their actual participation in sport.	No empirical evaluation.
<b><i>Abbreviated version of SUPER</i></b> <b>(Papacharisis et al., 2005).</b>	To evaluate an abbreviated version of SUPER.	8-session version of SUPER. Measurements of physical skills, knowledge of the SUPER program, and self-beliefs about ability to set goals, to problem solve, and to think positively.	Improvement measured in physical skills and knowledge of the program.
<b>The First Tee</b>	To impact the lives of young children by providing educational programs that build character, instill life-enhancing values and promote healthy choices through the game of golf.	Golf and life skills taught in an integrated manner using systematic and progressive lessons that address interpersonal, self-management, goal setting, and advanced personal and interpersonal skills. More specifically teaching it's nine core values of respect, responsibility, courtesy, honesty, integrity, sportsmanship, confidence, judgment, and perseverance.	<u>Weiss et al. (2013)</u> Youth (11-17 years), coaches, and parents/guardians.  Constructive strategies learned that facilitate meeting and getting to know people, showing respect to self and others, and handling one's negative thoughts and emotions on and off the golf course. Participants able to transfer life skills to other domains.

<b>Intervention &amp; Authors</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Delivery/Method</b>	<b>Key Findings/Evaluation</b>
<b>Play It Smart (Petitpas, Van Raalte, Cornelius, &amp; Presbury, 2004).</b>	To enhance adolescent athlete's academic, athletic, career, and personal development through a football based after school program.	After school program creating a team environment where young people could learn about themselves and develop like skills including goal setting and positive peer pressure.	Participant grade point averages increased from 2.16 to 2.54, 98% of the seniors graduated from high school on schedule, 83% of the group went on to higher education, participants engaged in a total of 1745 hours of community service activities.
<b>ELITE: Enhancement of Leadership Intercommunication Teamwork and Excellence (Jones, Lavallee, &amp; Tod, 2011).</b>	Increase perceived use of life skills through reflective practice.	8 week intervention implemented across two phases of four 1-hour sessions targeting 1) communication; 2) organization skills.	28-item life skills instrument to evaluate participants' perceived use of communication and organization skills. Social validity interviews conducted post-intervention to evaluate the practical and applied importance of the intervention. ELITE can be used as a method of increasing the perceived use of communication and organization skills.
<b>Strong Girls (Brown &amp; Fry, 2011).</b>	Physical activity	An 8 week long intervention delivered to girls preparing to enter junior high school. Designed to compliment a community summer program 'Smart Girls'. Four key principles stressed throughout delivery: supporting one another; giving full effort in all activities, working to build relationships with others; and maintaining a positive focus. Verbal journals kept by participants and leaders detailing their perceptions of the activities.	Verbal journal entries and feedback suggested the program was a success. Observations supported this finding as the participants constantly arrived enthusiastic and excited, and seemed to get to know one another better, and as a result became more comfortable with one another.

Intervention & Authors	Purpose	Delivery/Method	Key Findings/Evaluation
<b>Coaching for Hope (2005).</b>	Use soccer to empower young people in West and Southern Africa.	Participation in soccer training and tournaments with the aim of increasing confidence and self-esteem, and building valuable life skills.	No empirical evaluation.



Building upon the LDI, scholars have developed specific instructional programs containing educational curricular designed to teach life skills. For example, *Going for the Goal* (GOAL) (Danish, Mash, Howard, Curl, Meyer, & Owens, 1992a; Danish, Mash, Howard, Curl, Meyer, & Owens, 1992b) is a program designed to teach adolescents a sense of personal control. The *Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility* approach (Hellison, 2003) is an instructional life skills program designed to teach individual responsibility through sport and other types of physical activities. Danish et al.'s (2002) *Sports United to Promote Education and Recreation* (SUPER) approach is another popular life skills program, delivered through workshops in the form of sport clinics and include sport-specific skills as well as more general life skills.

The work of Danish et al. (1992a; 1992b; 2002) has no doubt increased our understanding of life skills development. However, all of these findings are limited in that the life skills were taught in isolation and separately from sport. As a result, life skills were being transferred to sport as opposed to being learnt through sport and therefore it is difficult to understand the impact of sport and coaches on developing life skills in the participants. Similar sport-based life skills interventions have been adapted for golf (e.g., The First Tee Program), American Football (e.g., Play it Smart), and Association Football (e.g., Coaching for Hope). First Tee and Play it Smart have successfully achieved their intended outcomes and enhanced the life skill literature through demonstrating how specific sports can be used as a vehicle for developing life skills. Both program were school based with an academic emphasis. Consequently, the findings must be treated with caution, as it is unclear whether it

was the sport or the academic environment that had the greater influence on the participants' learning.

The emergence of intervention studies designed to assess the efficacy of programs aimed at teaching life skills to youth is a promising development in life skills research. Further, it is evident that life skill intervention programs have helped to create a positive learning environment in sport that promotes the personal and social development of the individual through providing positive experiences of sports participation. Whilst studies (e.g., Brunelle, Danish, & Forneris, 2007; Goudas, Dermitzaki, Leondari, & Danish, 2006; Papacharisis et al., 2005) have shown that life skills programs are effective in teaching the skills, evidence of life skill transfer away from sport is currently limited. Therefore, more evaluation research is required to demonstrate their effectiveness in situations outside of sport (Holt & Jones, 2008). In addition, instructors specially trained to teach life skills have delivered existing development programs. These instructional settings are likely to be much different to school or competitive youth sport programs (Gould & Carson, 2008). Therefore, research is also required to establish how young people may learn life skills through regular everyday sport programs because these are the most prevalent and popular types of youth sport involvement (Holt, 2008). Indeed, given that the coach has been highlighted as a significant person of influence for developing life skills (McCallister et al., 2000) future research should focus on developing an intervention program that is delivered by coaches whereby the role of the coach can be assessed in more detail. Finally, the majority of life skills programs have been delivered to participants within the North American education system. Delivery of these programs in other

contexts (e.g., community sport), and in other countries would provide a broader understanding of their utility.

### **2.3.2 Coaching Life Skills through Sport**

According to Danish (2002) life skills need to be taught. Given this, the coach plays a significant role in their players' life skills development. Whilst the intervention programs outlined in Table 1 have been successful in promoting personal growth, they provide little insight of the instructors'/researchers' approach to the program delivery. In order to attend to this and provide a framework to inform coaches, Gould and Carson (2008) developed a generic five-component model for understanding the process of coaching life skills through sport. The first component of the model consists of athletes' pre-existing make-up and is divided into internal assets (e.g., existing life skills) and external assets (e.g., parents, peers, socioeconomic status). It is important for coaches to understand athletes' internal and external assets as athletes are not devoid of skills and resources when they enter the realm of sport and their pre-existing make up can greatly influence a coach's ability to coach life skills (Camiré, Trudel, & Forneris, 2012).

The second component of Gould and Carson's (2008) model focuses on the factors critical to the coaching of life skills namely philosophy, relationship skills, competence, and accessibility. A coach's philosophy is said to be of particular importance given that coaches are considered the most influential individuals in sport, and play an essential role in creating motivational climates for athletes (Camiré et al., 2012). A sound philosophy is a significant factor in matching beliefs to actions. As such, philosophy can be defined as beliefs that guide our everyday behavior (Collins, Gould, Lauer, & Chung, 2009). It would seem crucial then that any coach wishing to develop the life skills of young athletes possess values and beliefs associated with positive youth development and athlete centered learning. The

actual strategies used by coaches are also vital in the process of coaching life skills. Gould and Carson (2008) stated that coaches could have direct and indirect strategies that influence the levels (1 to 4) at which life skill development occurs. Indirect strategies include creating an environment to prevent youth from engaging in risky behaviors (level 1); and acting as a role model, displaying positive behaviors and attitudes (level 2). Direct strategies include implementing activities to intentionally coach life skills such as providing opportunities for players to display leadership (level 3); and implementing activities that demonstrate how life skills learnt transfer beyond the sport context (level 4).

The third component of the model focuses on how life skill development occurs and how it influences the development of athletes. Two explanations are offered: (1) the social environment of sport influences the development of life skills in athletes leading to positive outcomes such as identity formation, perceived competence, locus of control, self-worth, and autonomy; and (2) life skills are developed based on their usefulness in a variety of environments, therefore, from a coaching context, it's important to nurture relatedness/engagement with others.

The fourth component of the model examines the positive and negative outcomes of sport participation. The premise behind coaching life skills through sport is that the more life skills youth have, the more likely they are to develop positively (Jones et al., 2011). Positive outcomes associated with sports participation include enhanced health and fitness habits, school achievement, and enhanced psychosocial and emotional attributes such as teamwork, leadership, and optimism (Gould & Carson, 2008). Negative outcomes might include physical injury, burnout, and lower levels of moral functioning (Gould & Carson, 2008). It is important then

that coaches are aware of what can be learnt so that these skills inform the nature of the coaching session and subsequently are promoted within sessions.

The final component of Gould and Carson's (2008) model focuses on the transferability of life skills developed in sport to non-sporting environments. The transfer component of the model is critical because research has shown that general competencies and life skills developed in sport may not automatically transfer to non-sporting settings (Martinek, Schilling, & Johnson, 2001). Factors influencing whether or not life skills are transferred include the similarity of the situation, previous experience of transfer, and the young person's belief that the acquired skills and qualities are valued and appropriate for use in other situations (Gass, 1985). It is therefore important for a coach to work with the athlete to identify how they could transfer. Indeed, coaching of life skills and how they transfer to different domains should not be left to chance; coaches must have strategies in their coaching practice that are used in an intentional and systematic manner to promote the positive development of athletes (Camiré, Forneris, Trudel, & Bernard, 2011).

Using Gould and Carson's (2008) model of coaching life skills through sport, Camiré et al. (2012) examined the philosophies and strategies employed by model high school coaches to coach student-athletes life skills and how to transfer these skills to other life domains. Among the key findings were: coaches recognized the importance of understanding their athletes' pre-existing make-up to coach life skills effectively; and coaches had well established coaching philosophies that were athlete-centered and geared toward using sport as a tool for development. These findings provided support for the use of Gould and Carson's (2008) model and recommended that coaches wishing to coach life skills through sport should start by

developing relationships with their (student) athletes to understand their internal and external assets. Further, these findings were consistent with other research. For example, Camiré, Werthner, and Trudel, (2009a) argued that coaches should develop philosophies based on student-athlete development and align their philosophies with the mandates of their sport associations.

### **2.3.3 Integrating Life Skills into Coaching Practice**

Danish, Petitpas, and Hale (1993) stated that one of the barriers to life skill development might be that athletes are not aware of the skills they have learned. As a result, young people could develop and transfer life skills to other life domains if they increase their awareness of the skills they acquired through sport, increase their awareness of knowledge of how and in what context they learned life skills, and increase their awareness that skills are valued in other life domains (Danish et al., 1993). One means by which coaches can overcome this barrier was offered by Bodey et al. (2009) who proposed a three-step process of *message*, *reinforce*, and *transfer* to implementing life skills during practices. During the *message* phase the coach engages the athletes in a short discussion about the meaning of the life skills in focus (e.g., leadership). This may involve asking questions or prompting the athletes to give examples of leadership in football. The discussion concludes with the coach and athletes collectively conceptualizing leadership. The coach then explains the session to the athletes. An essential aspect of the message is the connection between the notion of the life skill and the specific actions involved in the session (Bodey et al., 2009). Again, the coach engages the athletes in discussion of the practical application of the life skill in the session. As the session is underway, the coach

should offer positive feedback for demonstrating leadership as well as the technical skills of the session as a reward to increase repeatability of behavior. The coach should persuade the athletes to reflect on the experience, before asking questions like, “What are some examples of how we demonstrated leadership?” The objective is for the athletes to analyze and recall the experience. Reinforcing the conceptualization of the life skill can be done through discussing good and poor examples as this contributes to the athletes’ ability to remember the life skill. Once the good and poor examples of the life skill are discussed, the coach assists the athletes to generalize from the specific actions and behaviors in the session to the general ways of acting and behaving in alternative settings. For example, the coach may ask, “How do we practice leadership in school?” Whilst the *message, reinforce,* and *transfer* is a logical and simple approach to delivery, there is a lack of empirical evidence to support its use. Therefore, caution must be taken when utilizing this approach and coaching practitioners must not assume guaranteed success in their athletes’ learning of life skills as a result of adopting this approach. Consequently, additional empirical evidence that seeks to explore the mechanisms that help the facilitation of learning through this approach would add to current understanding of its practical relevance.

#### **2.3.4 The Importance of Reflective Practice**

The ability to transfer learning from one environment to another is crucial to life skill development. Danish et al. (1993) highlighted the importance of young people being aware of the skills they have learned. Further, researchers in sport have identified self-awareness as a crucial developmental outcome for participants



in youth development programs (e.g., Jones et al., 2011; Bodey et al., 2009). One technique reported in the literature that appears to develop self-awareness is *reflective practice*. The reflective practice literature emphasizes the development of learning from experience (Hanton, Cropley, & Lee, 2009). For example, Kolb (1984) viewed reflection as an integral part of a dynamic spiral or loop of experiential learning. In accord with the suggestions of Cropley, Hanton, Miles, and Niven (2010) and Ghaye & Lillyman (2000), three key principles of reflection can be considered: (1) reflective practice is about learning from experience; (2) reflection can improve practice; and (3) reflection involves respecting and working with evidence. As it is based on real-life, reflection can generate practice-based knowledge, which adds to evidence concerning 'how we actually practice' (Driscoll & Teh, 2001). Indeed, people can use reflection to explore why they acted as they did, what was happening in the situation (and why), what they have learned, and how they can use this knowledge in the future (Jones et al., 2011). This learning can be used to apply what they have used in a familiar environment (e.g., football) to an unfamiliar environment (e.g., other sports, school). Consequently, reflection would seem an effective mechanism for supporting life skill transfer. Indeed, research has outlined that many life skills have been developed as a result of reflective practice including: self-awareness, determination, confidence, problem solving, critical thinking, communication, and organization (e.g., Holland, Woodcock, Cumming, & Duda, 2010; Jones, Lavalley, & Tod 2011; Neil, Cropley, Wilson, & Faull, 2013). Similarly, in relation to developing resiliency, Hanton, Cropley, Neil, Mellalieu, and Miles (2007) and Hanton et al. (2009) found that reflection-on-action created learning and generated knowledge, which in turn could be used to enhance the capacity of people

to effectively cope with, adjust to, or recover from stress or adversity. Further, reflective practice is needed to increase participant awareness of the requirements of the sporting context (Jones et al., 2011). Therefore, through engaging in reflective practice both coaches and players can become more aware of and as a result better prepared for understanding how and why they perform/ behave as they do, enabling them to transfer effective behaviors to other environments away from sport including school, work, and at home.

## **2.4 Summary and Future Directions**

The development of life skills through sport participation is directly linked to the philosophy of PYD and as such should be a focus for all coaches and sports instructors in order to enhance the social development of young people. Consequently, this area is of considerable interest among researchers and practitioners alike as both attempt to understand how life skills are developed, and how coaches can best support this development. This review has presented some of the key issues for developing life skills in young people (e.g., creating an appropriate learning environment) to identify gaps in existing knowledge and inform future research in the field of life skill development. Researchers and practitioners should be aware of the important concepts that may promote life skill development in young people to enhance the likelihood of developing effective programs and practices. First, skills only become life skills once competency has been demonstrated to transfer the skill into other life environments from that which the skill was learned (Gould & Carson, 2008). As a result, life skills intervention programs should encourage, and where possible evaluate, the use of life skills developed

through sport in non-sporting contexts. Second, research has demonstrated that sports participation is often associated with positive outcomes (e.g., enhanced self-esteem). However, participation in sport does not necessarily result in life skills being developed. Instead, life skills must be intentionally taught and are not 'caught', that is developed as a natural consequence of participation in sport (Danish, 2002; Papacharisis et al., 2005). Third, coaches must understand the internal and external assets of their players, and align their philosophy appropriately. For example, a grassroots coach whose players' motivation derives from wanting to meet new people and develop friendships should focus upon providing the opportunity for players to learn social skills as opposed to emphasizing and measuring success by the outcome of a match (e.g., winning means success whilst losing means failure). Finally, coaches should use a combination of indirect and direct strategies for coaching life skills in attempts to provide opportunities for players to develop other life skills outside of the primary focus of that session (e.g., when the life skill focus of a session is teamwork, players are given opportunity to develop their communication indirectly).

The available literature indicates that life skill development is complex and influenced by a variety of factors such as cultural influences. Future research should focus on determining those life skills that can be developed in sport specific contexts, how they can be developed, and by whom. The majority of the research in the life skills domain has been conducted in North America and focused upon the North American education system, which is in contrast to convergence areas in the UK and the sporting environment of association football. Whilst Jones and Lavallee (2009a) provided some insight into the life skills required by British adolescents they

generalized their findings from participants across a number of sports. Each sport has a unique culture and in order to develop a program fit for purpose it is vital that the culture surrounding that sport is fully understood. Despite the inherent benefits of developing life skills, the evidence suggests that coaches do not seem to focus on them enough (or at all in some cases) (McCalister et al., 2000). When designing practices coaches typically set coaching objectives for the technical and tactical elements of the session but there seems to be a misconception that the psychological and social objectives are developed naturally during a session. This highlights the lack of education given to coaches surrounding the importance of life skill development, and the significant role a coach as a more capable other can play in supporting players' life skill development through supporting athletes in their ZPD. Gaining a better understanding of those life skills that can be developed in a sport specific environment (e.g., association football), along with a recognition of how these life skills can be developed, and the significant people who influence young players to develop their life skills, would inform the design of a program to develop coaches who are able to integrate life skills development within their coaching practice. Such research is likely to have an impact on coach education programs and coaching practice alike, as it will help to develop a better understanding of how life skill development can be naturalized into existing coaching philosophies and behaviors. As a result, coach education programs can be developed that focus on educating coaches and enhancing the ability of the coach to facilitate athlete learning, thus more effectively fulfilling the role of the more capable other.

The purpose of this thesis, therefore, is to determine whether or not life skills can be developed through football participation in Wales. The thesis will explore

what life skills can be developed, how they are developed, and the role of the coach and other significant people in teaching them. In Chapter 3 this thesis will explore the current grassroots football landscape in relation to coaching life skills and resilient behaviors through consulting with the key stakeholders of grassroots football in Wales. The findings of this consultation will inform the design, development and delivery of a program to educate football coaches. This will be presented in Chapter 4. Following this an evaluation of the program's effectiveness will be presented in Chapter 5.

# **Chapter 3**

## **Study 1**

**Consulting with the key stakeholders to identify gaps in life skills provision**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Sport has long been associated with developing skills and behaviors that allow young people to become competent athletes and people. Indeed, several authors (e.g., Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1992; Smoll & Smith, 2002) have acknowledged that participation in sports may have the potential to enhance personal development (e.g., improve communication, and leadership). Further, sport can promote PYD because it is structured, voluntary, requires effort over time, and includes interpersonal relationships with adults (Bronfenbrenner, 1999; Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003). PYD is a strength-based conception of adolescence emphasizing growth and development as a method of primary prevention in an attempt to avoid treating pathology in later life (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005). Further, Jones and Lavalley (2009b) described positive youth development essentially as lifespan development because young people are being taught life skills, values, and virtues that help them during adolescence that will also help them thrive throughout life.

Much of the life skills research conducted has focused on the development, implementation, and evaluation of after-school programming. For example, Larson, Hansen, and Moneta (2006) surveyed 2280 eleventh-grade U.S. students from 19 diverse high schools about their involvement in different categories of extra-curricular activities. Sports and arts programs stood out as providing more experiences related to development of initiative, although sport was also related to high stress. Similarly, Zarrett et al. (2008) assessed extra-curricular participation profiles of 1112 U.S. children from grades 5 to 7. Youth who were involved in sport plus another type of youth development program had higher positive development

test scores than sport-only and low-engaged youth. More recently, studies have begun to examine the context of high school sport and in particular, athletes' perceptions regarding the development of life skills and values through sport (e.g., Camiré, Trudel, & Forneris, 2009b; Camiré, & Trudel, 2010). Furthermore, some researchers have begun to investigate coaches' perceptions about their role in developing life skills as well as other stakeholders involved in high school sport (Gould et al., 2006; Gould, Carson, Fifer, Lauer, & Benham, 2009). Gould et al. (2006) surveyed 154 North American high school coaches from seven sports on demographics, coaching objectives, the role of sport in character development, problems in sport today, the role of coaches, and coach influences on athletes. The survey comprised 99 items, with most items requiring Likert scale responses. Coaches ranked helping young people develop psychologically and socially as the most important coaching objective, and having a winning team as least important. Coaches' felt that sport teaches many skills and they strongly agreed that teamwork, the value of hard work, time management, and goal setting are developed through sport participation. However, coaches did not agree that sport could teach fairness, accepting defeat gracefully, and not holding grudges after competitions. This view could be challenged as recovery from such negative emotional experiences can be enhanced through developing resilience (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004), a disposition that can be developed through sport and play (Henley, Schweizer, de Gara, & Vetter, 2007).

Resilience comes from the Latin *salire* (to spring up) and *resilire* (spring back), and thus it can be regarded as the capacity to recover or spring back (Davidson et al., 2005). Resilient individuals adopt coping strategies that consist of turning stressful



events into possibilities and opportunities for their personal development as well as that of others around them (Hanton, Neil, & Evans, 2013), and individuals who make better use of coping resources have reported less psychological distress (Monet & Lazarus, 1991). Further, resilient individuals are found to appraise situations as less stressful (Rhodewalt & Zone, 1989). Sport and play activities have the potential to develop resilience as they provide children with the opportunity to negotiate and resolve conflict (Erikson, 1977; McArdle, 2001). Thus, the concept behind psychosocial sport and play activities is that these practices will assist children and adolescents address a myriad of social and psychological challenges (Bell & Suggs, 1998; Henley, 2007). Through sports participation young people may learn to manage conflict, and learn to cope more effectively with potential challenging and stressful situations through viewing the situation as less demanding than what others do. Resiliency behaviors that are more effective responses to stressful situations include: abiding by the rules of the game regardless of the score and/or opponent which demonstrates playing fair, appraising the performance instead of the result which shows acceptance in defeat and focuses effort towards variables under the performer's control, and not holding grudges after being fouled and accepting it as part of the game. As a result it could be argued that in contrast to the views of the coaches in Gould et al.'s (2006) study, fairness, accepting defeat gracefully, and not holding grudges after competitions can be developed through sport if coaches are skilled at developing an environment and structuring sessions that provide opportunities for players to problem solve and cope with challenges both as individuals and a collective group.

A criticism of the aforementioned mentioned research is that it has been largely conducted in North America, which brings into question the validity and transferability of the findings to other cultures and contexts. In an effort to better understand the life skill needs of British adolescent athletes, Jones and Lavallee (2009a) explored how life skills are defined, which life skills British adolescents need, and which life skills are most important. The study was conducted via focus group interviews with male and female athletes, coaches, experts, and graduate students from a range of sports. The findings provided a new participant-centered definition of life skills as “ranges of transferrable skills needed for everyday life, by everybody, that help people thrive” (p. 165). Secondly, varieties of interpersonal (e.g., social skills, respect, leadership) and personal (e.g., discipline, self-reliance, goal setting) life skills were revealed (see Chapter 2 for more detailed review). Finally, social skills such as making friends, and getting along with people, were identified as the most important life skills for British adolescent athletes to develop. This research is significant as it can serve to enhance our understanding of the needs of British adolescents, and inform the design of intervention programs to develop the life skills of this population.

### **3.1.2 Areas of Future Interests: Life Skills**

Research into life skills development is an emerging field with an expanding body of literature, particularly in relation to extra-curricular sport participation. More recently, researchers have begun to consult with coaches and leaders of sports sessions to gain an insight of how they promote life skills development in their role (e.g., Camiré, Trudel, Forneris, & Bernard, 2011; Camiré, Trudel, & Forneris, 2012;

Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2007; Vella, Oades, & Crowe, 2011). This, together with Jones and Lavallee's (2009a) research with British adolescent athletes, provides an initial start point for future research. Further exploration is required that focuses on the potential of specific sports to develop life skills and resilient coping behaviors in young people, providing context specific insight. Context is important as it gives consideration to the culture of the sport and produces findings that can be interpreted and applied more easily by those coaches in that sport. Consequently, it would seem crucial then to gain a specific understanding of the grassroots association football environment across convergence areas of Wales that fall under the KESS remit. Further, little empirical evidence has, to date, established a causal link between sport participation and life skill development (Petitpas, Van Raalte, Cornelius, & Presbrey, 2004). Consequently, Papacharisis, Goudas, Danish, and Theodorakis (2005) cautioned against believing that sport participation alone enhances positive development. Instead, they believed that an individual's experience of sport might be a critical factor in facilitating this development. With this in mind, the aim of this study was to consult with the key stakeholders in grassroots association football in order to gain an insight into the current landscape in relation to the development of life skills and resilient behaviors through football participation. More specifically, five objectives were proposed. First, to explore how life skills and resiliency were defined in this context. Such definitions help inform culturally specific research and the design of successful life skill intervention programs (cf. Danish, Taylor, Hodge, & Heke, 2004). Second, to identify characteristics of resilient people. This will provide an insight into how young players in grassroots football approach and cope with potentially stressful situations.

Consequently, examples of good practice can be used to inform coaching application and effective ways of supporting players can be developed. Third, to identify important life skills for adolescents to learn. This is valuable as it may provide clear direction for the development of life skills programs and for coaches striving to promote life skill development in their coaching sessions. More importantly, it may allow for the development of context specific education in relation to the transferrable skills that can be developed through football for coaches working with young players in convergence areas of Wales. Indeed, in order to develop a successful program it is crucial to decide which life skills are important to include (Gould & Carson, 2008). Fourth, to highlight the roles of different people in supporting the development of life skills. This will provide insight into the role of the coach and help to discover other significant people to engage with, in particular to support transfer of life skills. Finally, to determine player and parent expectations of football participation. This will offer an insight into how coaches can enhance player engagement and motivation for learning. The objectives of this study will serve to identify gaps in current provision in relation to coaching life skills and developing resilient behaviors and as such achieve the first objective of this thesis.

## **3.2 Method**

### **3.2.1 Participants**

Based on Jones and Lavalley's (2009b) suggestion that objectivity in understanding the position of sport in promoting life skill development would be better approximated through a triangulation of multiple perspectives, it was decided that a more thorough understanding of the concept of life skills in association football could be obtained by sampling a range of people involved in the youth sector of the sport. Specifically, this research was grounded in a view that knowledge is socially constructed and may change depending on circumstances (Golafshani, 2003). Therefore, triangulation, defined as "a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126) was appropriate to explore the life skill needs and development of adolescent football players.

A purposeful sampling approach was used, which involved the selection of relatively homogenous samples for whom the research question was relevant (Patton, 2002). The sample was selected in conjunction with the partner organization (WFT) who advised the researcher on the suitability of participants based upon being actively involved in youth grassroots football. Participants were selected from grass roots football clubs, and schools in convergence areas of Wales. Four grass roots football clubs were represented in the study, one of which was a boys only club, one a girls only club, one a boys and girls club, and finally one a black, minority and ethnic, communities (BME) club. Three focus groups were conducted at each club, one with parents, one with players, and one with coaches. Two focus

groups were conducted with teachers, one with primary school teachers, and one with secondary school teachers.

In total, 56 participants volunteered to participate in one of fourteen focus groups. Male and female players ( $n = 16$ ; aged 12-15 years), coaches ( $n = 16$ ; aged 20-56 years), parents ( $n = 16$ ; aged 28-50 years), and teachers ( $n = 8$ ; aged 33-61 years) were sampled to explore life skill identification and development from different perspectives.

### **3.2.2 Focus Groups**

Focus groups are a widely accepted research method employed by researchers interested in exploring various aspects of peoples' everyday engagements with their social and spatial worlds (Hopkins, 2007). The general field of social science research has come to broadly conceptualize this technique as: using a semi-structured group session, moderated by a group leader, held in an informal setting, with the purpose of collecting information on a designated topic (Carey & Smith, 1994). Further, Bedford and Burgess (2001) defined focus groups as "a one-off meeting of between four and eight individuals who are brought together to discuss a particular topic chosen by the researcher(s) who moderate or structure the discussion" (p. 121). The benefits and motivation for conducting focus groups have been discussed in the literature. Among those reported are that focus groups are useful for researchers wishing to orientate themselves to a new field and that they can enhance the role of the research participants in regulating research findings (Longhurst, 2003; Hopkins, 2007).

Focus groups were deemed the most appropriate data collection technique for this study because of their capacity to provide rich data from a variety of perspectives. Indeed, group discussions can facilitate the emergence of the shared perceptions of what life skills and resilience are, how they can be developed, and the role of the coach in developing them.

A semi-structured approach was developed based on a review of life skills, positive youth development, resilience, and focus group literature, and this helped moderate the focus groups through informing the development of a standardized approach to questioning (Patton, 2002). Four focus group guides (see Appendix 1) were developed, one for each group of stakeholders where some differences existed between the questions asked and the terminology used to ensure the appropriateness of the question to participants. Opening, introductory, key, and closing questions constituted the structure of the interview guides. Opening questions sought to break the ice and encourage active participation, for example, 'did you receive the preparation booklet in enough time and have you been able to think about the points raised in the booklet?' Introductory questions were used to introduce the general topic of discussion of life skills development through grass roots football participation, for example, 'what is your current philosophy on coaching football?' Key questions were the main questions that drove the research (Krueger, 1998). Key questions focused the discussion on the life skills needs of adolescent players, the make-up of a resilient player, and how football can facilitate their development. Questions included: 'how important are life skills to a child's development?' 'What life skills are important to learn?' 'Discuss who you think are the most important people to teach life skills?' 'As a coach/teacher, how do you

teach life skills?’ ‘How effective are coach education programs in preparing you to carry out your role as a coach?’ Finally, closing questions were used to bring the discussion to a conclusion, and to ensure participants felt they had had an adequate opportunity to talk about the relevant issues, and participants were given the opportunity to add anything they felt should have been included in the discussion (e.g., ‘Do you have anything else to add, have we failed to discuss any important issues?’ ‘Have you been led or influenced in any way?’).

### **3.2.3 Procedure**

Following the receipt of ethical approval from the Cardiff School of Sport Research and Ethics Committee (CSSREC) all participants were contacted through a club representative, informed of the nature of the study and asked to volunteer to participate. All participants were informed of their right to freely withdraw from the research at any time. Informed consent was gained for all participants (an example can be seen in Appendix 2). Consent for participants under the age of 18 years was gained from a properly empowered proxy with the participant giving informed assent (an example can be seen in Appendix 3).

Four preparation booklets (an example can be seen in Appendix 4) were developed for the study, one for each stakeholder group that comprised two main sections and were sent to all participants at least a week prior to their focus group. This was done to allow the participants to become familiar with the content of the focus group and thus aid the depth of the discussion during the session (cf. Jones et al., 2007). The first section provided an introduction to and an overview of the study. The second section posed some questions to provoke thought and encourage



participants to write responses in preparation for the interview. This preparation would serve to initiate discussion. Following this focus groups were scheduled at the convenience of the participants, and all focus groups were conducted in environments familiar to the participants (e.g., their clubhouse, at the school) to increase the chance that participants would feel comfortable in fully expressing their views (Hopkins, 2007). For all focus groups only the researcher and participants were present, however, parents were on-site throughout the duration of the players' focus groups but were located far enough away so that they didn't listen to discussions. This is an important consideration as the presence of another figure of authority can influence the nature of the discussion (Hopkins, 2007).

A pilot study was conducted with representation from the coaches' focus group population to test and refine the focus group guide and the researcher's facilitation skills. The pilot study was recorded and reviewed by the researcher in the first instance, and then reviewed by two experts with knowledge and vast experience of conducting focus groups. One amendment was made to the coaches' focus group protocol as a result. It was decided that coaches would be asked to share their coaching philosophy in advance of attending a focus group. This decision was taken in an attempt to ensure that each coach's response was a true reflection of their beliefs as a coach, and to negate any possibility of their response being influenced by that of another participant coach in a socially desirable manner, which can be a problem in focus groups (Cropley et al., 2010). Indeed, the researcher learnt the importance of engaging all participants in the discussion particularly in some groups where a dominant figure emerged. This was achieved through giving specific

participants the opportunity to respond to questions first where it was deemed appropriate.

Focus group sessions were conducted face-to-face by the researcher who operated as facilitator to discussions posing the questions and allowing the participants to engage with each other to discuss their views whilst using prompts to guide discussion when necessary. The sessions lasted for approximately 60 minutes each, were audiotape recorded and video recorded for transcription clarity, and subsequently transcribed verbatim yielding 266 pages of text (an example transcript can be seen in Appendix 5). Transcription was conducted immediately after each focus group interview, however in an effort to limit the potential for one focus group to influence another analysis only commenced on completion of all focus group interviews.

#### **3.2.4 Data Analysis**

Inductive content analysis involves discovering patterns, themes, and categories in one's data (Patton, 2002) and was deemed more appropriate to deductive content analysis in the initial analysis in this study to ensure the inclusion of all content relevant to the aims of the research as opposed to controlling what could be discussed. This was important, as analyzing results based upon an existing framework may have neglected some important information related to the specific context in which this research was conducted. The process for analysis of data was: (a) all transcripts were read; (b) transcripts were coded in Microsoft Word using comment boxes to identify quotes that represented meaningful thought; (c) themes were generated through analysis in Microsoft Excel where first order, and second

order themes were established and directed by raw data responses, such as quotes that represented meaningful thought. Consistent with Anderson, Miles, Robinson, and Mahoney (2004), emergent higher order themes were developed by clustering the meaning units according to similar meaning. These clusters were called first order themes and a hierarchical structure was developed by identifying relationships between first order themes to establish the second order theme; (d) all data was re-read and coded to explore missing information in analysis in an inductive and deductive way using the themes generated previously. Re-analyzing the data also ensured rigor by comparing and contrasting quotes across focus groups and ensuring similar quotes had been placed under consistent themes; (e) following recommendations by Miles and Huberman (1994) all themes were checked with three experts in qualitative data analysis; and (f) all themes were deemed appropriate and thus were finalized. Each population (parents, players, coaches, teachers) represented in the study was analyzed individually.

The hierarchical networks were developed to provide a generalized visual representation of the analysis from raw data through to first order themes, some of which represented individual populations (e.g., players, coaches, parents, or teachers) whilst others were representative of more than one population (e.g., parents and coaches).

### **3.2.5 Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated that qualitative research should be judged on the basis of trustworthiness. That is, how well a researcher persuades his or her audience that the findings of an inquiry are worthy of attention. In qualitative inquiry, trustworthiness is commonly judged on four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Patton, 2002).

Credibility is concerned with ensuring that the data reported is a true representation of the participants' thoughts and experiences. In this study, supervisor and peer debriefing sessions, and triangulation of sources were used to enhance the credibility of the data. Three experienced researchers and six peer research students were regularly consulted throughout data analysis to assist the researcher in exploring and critically questioning decisions regarding research design and data analysis. Triangulation of sources involved interviewing a number of coaches, parents, players, and teachers so that the data came from multiple sources. This reduced the potential for bias in the results through considering the perspectives of various people, and also improved the accuracy of the researchers interpretation of what was reported.

Transferability relates to whether the findings of the study can be transferred to other settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Due to the sampling methods used in this study it would be inappropriate for the researcher to make generalizations. Thus, the onus shifts from assessing generalizability to providing enough information about the study so that others can make judgment about the transferability of the findings to their own situation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study has attempted to provide thick description and thus sufficient detail about the participants and context to

allow the reader to judge whether the findings are transferrable to their own context.

Dependability is concerned with the consistency of findings. Consistent with Smith (1997) a reflexive diary was kept to detail the researchers personal experiences, data collection schedule, and methodological logic and decisions. The diary increased the researcher's confidence in the trustworthiness of the process as it provided a constant reminder of procedures and served as point of reference to guide reflection. Consulting with three experienced researchers and a group of peer researchers who regularly challenged decisions helped enhance this confidence further and improved dependability due to verification of analysis. Questioning guides remained the same and the general structure of interviews remained consistent across all focus groups.

Confirmability is concerned with demonstrating that the findings are rooted in the data and not just a figment of the researcher's imagination (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In order to increase confirmability, the data was coded in a way that allowed emergent themes to be tracked back to its original source. Specifically each raw data quotation was detailed and referenced to the exact page number of each transcription. Through a process of member checking one transcription from each of the stakeholder groups was sent back to the participants for verification of the researcher's interpretation of comments made by the participants. All participants consulted confirmed that the scripts were accurately interpreted.

### **3.3 Results**

This section will be presented in five distinct parts in relation to the objectives of the study. First, definitions of life skills and resiliency will be provided to demonstrate what these terms meant for this population within grassroots football. Second, the characteristics of resilient people within this context are then identified. Third, life skills developed within football and those developed outside of football will be presented and explained. The learning expectations of parents and players will then be examined. Finally, the key people for developing life skills in young people will be highlighted. In an attempt to present findings as clearly as possible, the identification of life skills will be offered through hierarchical networks to provide the reader with a visual representation of the findings. Networks will be used for this part of the results alone due to the amount of detail being displayed. Excel spreadsheets that detail the raw data analysis can be found in Appendix 6. Due to the scope of this project a small sample of quotes that best represent the thoughts of many participants have been taken in order to make the findings section manageable.

#### **3.3.1 Life Skills Defined**

In this section the participants' thoughts around definitions, the benefits of developing life skills, and the need for life skills to be transferrable are presented. In relation to participants' understanding of what the term 'life skills' actually means, a common consensus emerged that life skills were 'skills needed all through life'. Specifically, one parent said, "I think it [life skills] gives them [young people] the ability to deal effectively with everyday challenges." A teacher offered, "Life skills are

skills they [young people] are going to need to lead a happy and rewarding life. They become individuals who can face challenges and take knocks.” Another parent added, “If you don’t have that basis of life skills and understanding of right and wrong, and the expectations of what you need to become a good citizen, you’re going to fall down at every hurdle that comes along.” The following is an overall definition of life skills that emerged from the consultation, “Transferrable social, discipline, respect, personal control, organization, and leadership skills vital throughout life, developed in football, and used in another environment.”

Participants felt that life skills are not just the skills needed to be successful in football. Indeed, it was widely reported that life skills are skills that can help in many areas of life. For instance, a coach said, “[Life skills are] skills that are vital for your whole life, so not just important for sport but for school, at home and everywhere.” Support for this view came from a player who commented, “They [life skills] can help you with everything really, whatever you do you have to communicate with people... and teamwork as well, because you’ve got to be able to work as a group, [in] jobs, [in] football... everything.”

A point emphasized by participants was that life skills are transferrable skills. For instance, one coach suggested, “They [life skills] are learned somewhere and used somewhere else.” Furthermore, one of the teachers talked about transferability when defining life skills, “They [life skills] are all the transferrable skills, which can be used away from the school environment and into others like at home, or in sports clubs.” In support of this notion, participants recalled instances where they had witnessed life skill transfer. A parent explained how social skills and

confidence had been developed through football and transferred by her daughter to the school environment:

I think the transition from primary to comprehensive school is a big step and I think [child] in particular, because she [child] came in [to the club] last year just as she was leaving school as well, so having to make new friends here [football club] got her ready and prepared her for when she went into the comprehensive. Because you're in the same situation, you don't know anybody but actually having the confidence to talk to other people and join in, that she learned within the club, helped her when she went into the comprehensive school.

### **3.3.2 Resilience Defined**

Participants were asked what they understood by the term resilience. Common responses included 'overcoming challenges', 'bouncing back', and 'managing stress'. One parent provided the following definition of resilience, "It's [resilience] the ability to withstand pressure, adversity, and difficulties, and the ability to cope and stand up to that [adversity] and not buckle under pressure." Another parent offered an alternative view of resilience based upon an individual's perception of failure, "A resilient person is an individual who can bounce back from what is perceived as failure." Furthermore, the perception of a challenge, and the outcome of that challenge were widely discussed. For example, participants agreed that an individual's perceptions were closely related to resilience with resilient people tending to hold more 'positive perceptions of situations', and as a result a



‘positive approach to challenges’ (e.g., viewing challenges as an opportunity). This was clear in an explanation provided by a teacher:

How to tackle new challenges with a positive attitude; new experiences and a lot of the skills in the curriculum are about dealing with problem solving in real life situations; also developing their perseverance in the face of adversity.

### **3.3.3 Characteristics of Resilient People**

Participants described what resilient people did and what they were good at. Perseverance and determination were discussed in relation to coping with failure. For example, one parent stated, “When they taste defeat or failure, resilient players persevere and become more determined to achieve. They stay focused to make sure they are successful next time.” Further a teacher offered, “It’s perseverance really isn’t it? If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.” According to another teacher resilience is, “Dealing with something you can’t do, in a positive way.” Another parent added:

When I think of resilience I think of [name]. If we concede a goal he never lets his head drop and makes sure the other lads don’t let theirs drop too. He stands strong and encourages everybody else. Not only does he pull himself through but he pulls the team through too.

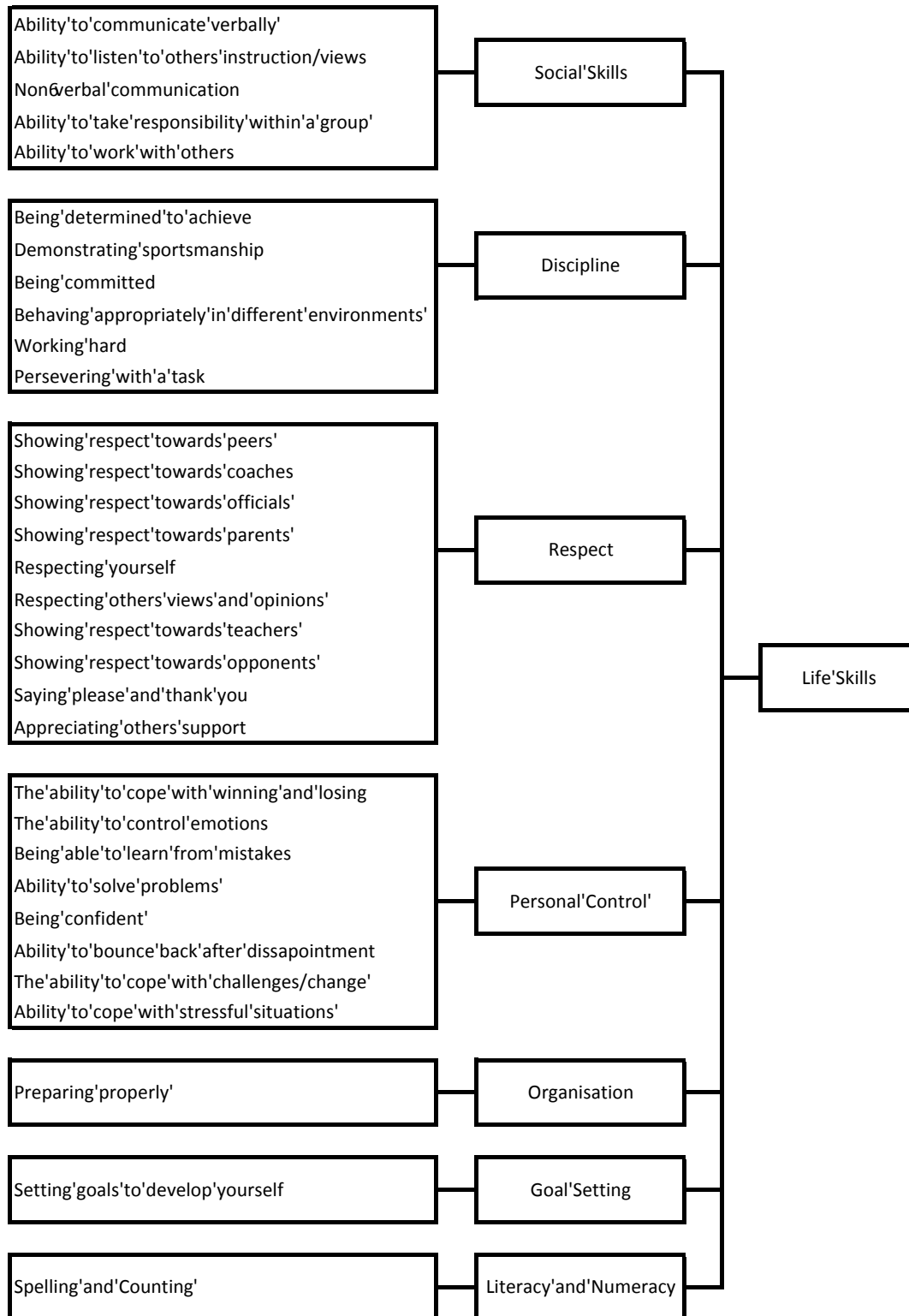
Another perspective offered, that stressed the ability to cope, came from a coach, “Some players can approach any situation without worry. They are always positive.” In agreeing with this, another coach explained:

I can think of one player in particular that never gets fazed by anything. When we play teams a year older than us, we play in cup competitions and tournaments, he's played for the county and district and never worries. He takes it all in his stride. I've given him extra responsibility in training and on match day, like he led a team talk for me which most players his age would find really difficult. But he just stood up and confidently told his peers what he thought they should try to do and you could see his teammates responded to him.

From a player perspective resilience was discussed in relation to making and recovering from mistakes. A player stated, "If you are resilient then making a mistake won't get to you, you just get on with the game." Another player offered an insight to when he/she lacks resilience, "If I make a mistake sometimes it plays on my mind and I can't stop thinking about it. I don't play well then." For another, "I just think well it's done now, I can't change it so get on with it. It works most of the time."

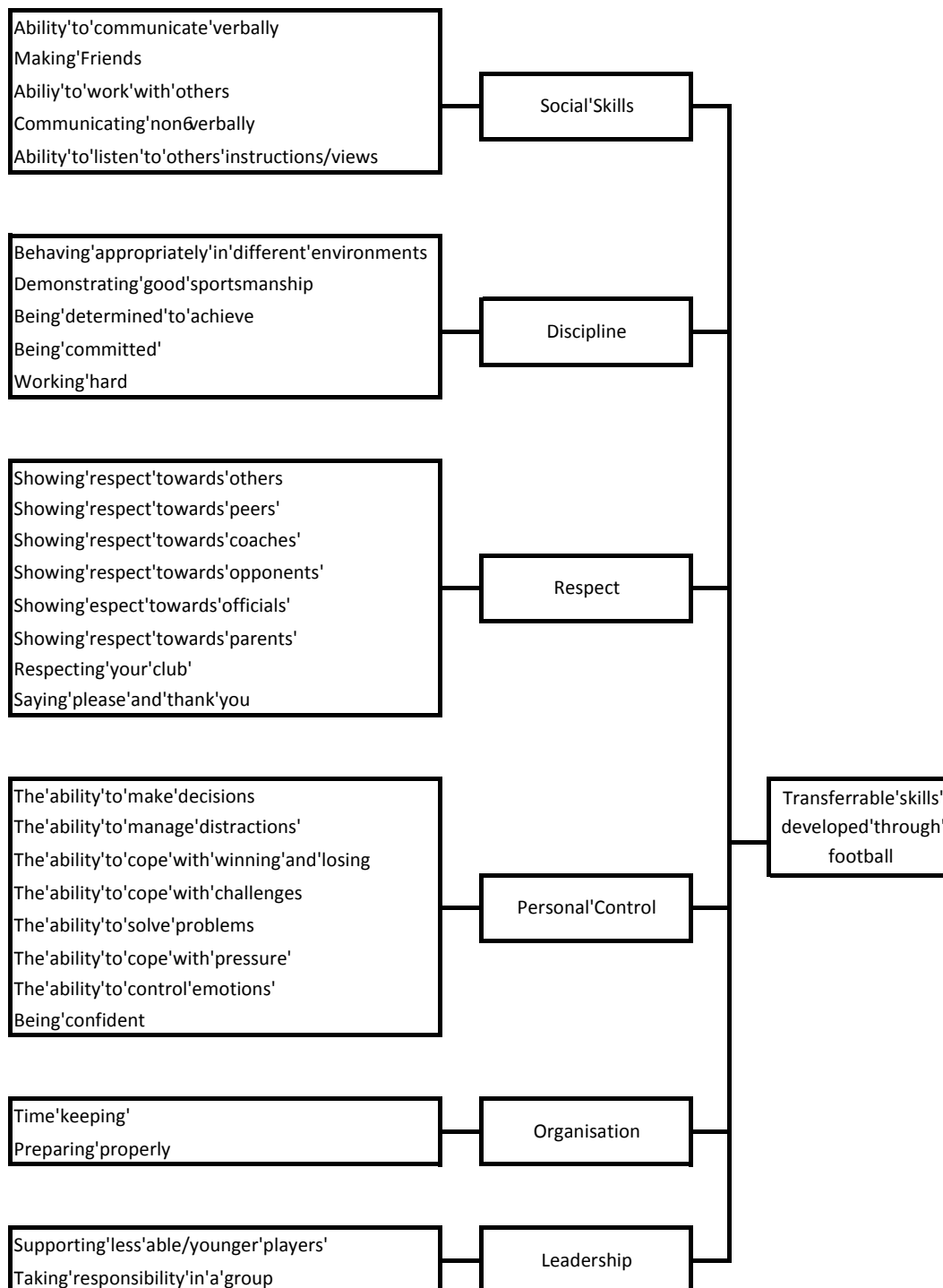
#### **3.3.4 Life Skills Identification**

In attempts to identify a range of life skills, participants were initially asked to identify those life skills they deemed as most important for young people to learn. These life skills were then classified into seven second-order themes including *social skills, discipline, respect, personal control, organization, goal setting, and literacy and numeracy* (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1** Life skills identified.

Participants were then asked to identify life skills that were developed specifically through participation in grass roots football. Six second-order themes including *social skills, respect, discipline, personal control, organization, and leadership* represented the participants' thoughts (see Figure 2). The selection of these life skills was made as a result of what participants had reported in the focus group interviews. The participants were in agreement with the inclusion of all of these within the final results.



**Figure 2** Life skills developed through grassroots football participation.

#### **3.3.4.1 Social Skills**

*Social skills* were discussed in terms of their importance in multiple life domains (e.g., sport, school, home, work), and communication, more specifically verbal communication, was frequently highlighted. For example, one player suggested, “Communication and talking, because if nobody talked in the world, you wouldn’t really know anything at all.” In addition, a teacher offered, “Non-verbal and verbal communication to allow them to get on with people and interact. Speaking and body language.” Another player added, “[You] need to be able to communicate with the coach if you’re in the wrong position or you want to change something.” Listening was also highlighted as being vital to communicating with a coach, as one player stated, “You need to listen to your coach and take on board what he says.” Another player added, “If you don’t listen you’re not really going to learn anything.”

Teamwork and the ability to work with others were mentioned alongside communication. For instance, one parent said, “She’ll learn to work as part of a team and get involved, and interact with the other players.” In support of this, some players talked about the importance of working as a team in football. One player highlighted, “Playing with your team, there’s no point going on the pitch and trying to do everything by yourself.” Another player added, “You’re not going to do well if you don’t have good teamwork in the team, because you have to know each other and everyone’s skills.”

#### **3.3.4.2 Discipline**

Participants reported that football develops a young persons' *discipline*, a skill closely related to *respect*. For example, a parent summed up the thoughts of other participants by stating:

One of the life skills they need out there is discipline. They're [the players] kept under control, they're not running wild, they're showing respect to their coaches, because if they don't they're out of the team for Saturday. So they're learning respect through – not fear, that's too strong a word, but they're learning the skills of discipline and respect. If they don't conduct themselves with discipline and don't show respect, they're going to see that they're going to be punished by being dropped to the subs bench. If they're on the football field and they use bad language or something, they'll be withdrawn, so they're learning these life skills through the game of football.

Coaches discussed being “the father figure” for some young players, and as a result felt that “setting boundaries” was vital to ensure young players developed and maintained discipline as a result of attending their sessions.

#### **3.3.4.3 Respect**

Related to teamwork was the theme of *respect*. Participants discussed the need to respect everybody involved in football including themselves, teammates, opposition, coaches, and officials. In relation to teammates one coach commented:

I think uppermost in life as within football is that you respect your team, you try to work hard for yourself and understand you are working hard within a

team, so you have people who rely on you and you need to rely on other people.

*Respect* was discussed in relation to being a two-way process as one player explained (when discussing respect for their coach), “I think it’s [respect] the way they speak to us as well. If they speak to us with respect, we automatically speak back to them with respect.” This view was supported by a number of coaches who stated, “It [respect] works both ways.”

#### **3.3.4.4 Personal Control**

Players, parents, coaches, and teachers reported *personal control* and the need for young people to remain in control of their emotions. For example, one parent said:

It [football] teaches you about control as well, because sometimes when they’re doing things, their emotions get the better of them. Whereas when they play things like this [football], they have to have control and they know if they don’t have control there will be consequences.

Learning to control their [own] emotions was widely discussed in relation to coping with winning and losing, as one player reported, “Being able to accept when you lose a game. You have to know that you can’t always win.” Another player recalled how his coach taught them to behave properly in defeat:

Our coach talks to us about accepting defeat. He says we must make sure we shake hands after every game if we win or lose, and to not blame anybody else for why we lost, like the referee or other teammates.



Remaining focused and managing distractions was another facet of personal control discussed, particularly when recovering from making a mistake. For example, a player commented:

Even though there will be people shouting at you - don't let it get to you, keep your head up, blank them out, play your game, just be the bigger person and ignore the person that's trying to shout at you.

Also in relation to personal control one of the coaches talked about the need for young people to cope under pressure in order to be able to make correct decisions in games, "Being able to channel aggression, remaining calm under pressure and when things are not going well. Keeping a clear head I guess so that they can make good decisions instead of losing control." Teachers discussed framing experiences as challenges where one teacher offered the following:

When someone told me I wasn't good enough I loved being able to prove him wrong. I looked at it as a challenge to me, to go out on the pitch and show what I can do and how good I am.

#### **3.3.4.5 Organization Skills**

Parents and coaches reported that football developed *organization skills* in young people. Specific reference was made to time-management skills, with one parent suggesting, "Time keeping. They have to commit to and turn up on time for training and matches." This view was echoed in the coaches' discussion as one coach added the need to also prepare properly, "Turning up prepared and organizing themselves so they turn up on time and ready to train or play."

#### **3.3.4.6 Leadership**

When referring to leadership one coach explained how young people develop leadership skills through supporting younger players within the club, “We’re really lucky. Players such as [name], last year she came down with the under 14’s. She’d come and do the warm-up and help them out, she’d take the goalkeeping.” Similarly, a teacher explained how the curriculum had become more conducive to developing leadership skills:

There’s more emphasis placed on the pupils being able to lead sessions almost coaching if you like, than what there used to be. It used to be the teacher taking the lesson and telling you what to do and as a youngster you just did what you were told.

Another coach recalled a strategy he had used in training in an attempt to develop the leadership skills of his players, “We’ll team up a good one and a weaker one sometimes and get them to learn from each other. I’ve done that since they’ve been young and you’ll hear them say, no don’t do that, pass it this way.” A player identified, “Showing leadership on the field” and participating parents also believed that football had developed leadership skills in their children. It was agreed in one group that, “They [the players] do become leaders around other kids.” For example, a parent reported:

I think, say about my daughter in particular, as she gets older she’s learning how to bring others under her wing and show them the way, which I think has made her learn things from it as well. Because there were girls above her, who, when she was that age she looked up to, and you lead and follow... people follow, don’t they?

### 3.3.5 Learning Expectations

Players were asked why they played football and what they expected to learn in training, and parents were asked what they expected their child to learn. This was asked as a general question and responses were clustered into themes for representation. The number of responses offered under a given theme was divided by the total number of responses and multiplied by 100 to determine the percentage. Player and parent learning expectations are presented by theme and displayed as a percentage (%) in Table 2. For both players and parents, developing social skills was the greatest expectation of coaching sessions. Whilst parents clearly expected their children to learn discipline, none of the players reported this as an expectation.

**Table 2** Player and Parent Learning Expectations

	Player (%)	Parent (%)
Social skills	62	34
Respect	7.5	12.66
Discipline	0	28
Personal Control	7.5	12.66
Football Skills	23	12.66

### **3.3.6 Significant People in the Development of Life Skills**

Participants discussed developing life skills as being a collective effort and the responsibility of parents, coaches, the person him/herself, teachers, peers, and other family members. For instance, one parent suggested, “Well, it’s a group effort between, parents, teachers, coaches, and everybody who’s around them playing key roles in their life.” In general, parents felt that the development process started with them as they considered themselves to be role models for their children. One parent said, “Parents, always, because you are your child’s role model. Children always look to the parents first and they set the example.” A teacher shared this view by highlighting the impact that parents have on children during their pre-school ages, “Parents, because they have those children from 0 to 4 before they come to school.” This view was further supported as another teacher added, “Definitely. It’s crucial, those early years, before they come to us, and we just try to continue that.”

Teachers were also believed to play a significant role in the development of life skills due to the amount of contact they have with young people, as one parent stated, “They [teachers] have quite a big role, they’re with the children more than we are most of the time, if you think about it, over a full week they spend more time with them.” The participating teachers discussed the nature of their role and how it had evolved as a result of a progressive learning approach widely used in schools. For example, one teacher said:

I think the teacher’s role has changed, hasn’t it, so you’ve got to learn to step back and let them take ownership and that’s teaching them life skills then, isn’t it, rather than the old method of teaching, which was all teacher led.

The role and importance of the coach in developing life skills was also discussed in detail and it was agreed that a coach has many responsibilities including being a role model, guide, mentor, educator/teacher, facilitator, and at times a father figure. In relation to being a role model, coaches discussed promoting positive behaviors through conducting themselves appropriately. For example, one coach said, "I think we're role models, they look up to you, and if you do things right, then that will go with them and they'll start doing things right." Coaches felt that guiding young players and facilitating the learning process through planned sessions was important. This approach was deemed to engage the young people and provide opportunities for them to take ownership and through empowerment develop life skills.

For instance, one coach stated:

I don't think we do teach them [life skills] specifically but the practices we put on develop them naturally. I think the key is creating an atmosphere that the players enjoy, something that puts a smile on their face and makes them want to come back again. If you can create that then the chance of them learning is much better.

Further, statements from two other coaches highlighted the importance of allowing opportunities for the players to experiment, and guiding them through the process of reflection and correcting their own mistakes. One coach stated, "Allowing players to be involved, to make decisions instead of telling them everything." Another coach added, "If they make a mistake and you question them and help them find the solution instead of telling them they'll understand and won't keep making that same mistake."

Despite the limited time spent with players in comparison to other stakeholders (e.g., parents, teachers), coaches were seen to play a crucial role in developing life skills in young people. Central to this belief was the unique relationship between the coach and young person reported by many parent and coach members. For instance, according to one parent, “The coach is more like having an older brother really, they look at them as a fun aspect of life.” The view of having a unique relationship was shared among the coach participants. For example, one coach said:

It’s a different relationship to a teacher and parents for sure. Because of the relationship we have I think it’s easier for us to constructively give feedback. They take it on board better from a coach than they do a parent. I know I did anyway.

Another coach expanded on this view:

The nature of our role and the environment in football allows us to teach the lads without them really knowing it. They just think they are learning football but actually we are teaching more than that. We’ve got a great tool in football to use as the way of teaching things. If it were school, our lads probably wouldn’t put as much effort in and it would be a lot harder to disguise the learning.

Coaches explained how they felt unprepared for teaching life skills because the focus of coach education is on setting up practices. One coach suggested, “They show you how to set up practices but don’t really teach you about coaching.” Another coach shared this view commenting, “You come off the course with some

practices but too much time is spent in the classroom I think.” In relation to life skills specifically, a coach explained:

I don’t think the course I attended even mentioned life skills. The tutor said that we need to consider the social aspect of football for our players but that was about it. There was no information about what skills or how we can coach them and the practical sessions just focused on technical content.

### **3.4 DISCUSSION**

The objectives of this study were to explore how life skills and resilience are defined, the characteristics of resilient people, which life skills are important for young people to learn, which life skills can be developed through engagement in grass roots football, the learning expectations of parents and players, and key people for facilitating the development of life skills in young footballers. These objectives were developed in order to determine the current landscape in relation to life skill development through association football across multiple convergence areas in Wales and therefore provide a more culturally and context specific insight into this phenomenon. This section will offer a discussion of the implications of this research and will be outlined in the same order as presented in the results.

#### **3.4.1 Life Skills Defined**

A participant-definition of life skills provides insight as to the participants understanding of the term. Whilst Jones and Lavalley (2009a) had previously developed a participant-centered definition of life skills, the findings of this study extend the understanding having considered the perceptions of parents and

teachers as well as coaches and athletes in defining life skills. This is important in the context of this study specifically as it provides a more holistic insight. Further, considering their unique relationships with and experience of developing young people both parents and teachers provide critical insight of life skills development. Several definitions of life skills exist in the literature. The problem with existing definitions is that they are researcher driven and might not accurately reflect what adolescents and those working closely with adolescents, understand by the term (Jones & Lavalley, 2009a). Consequently, assumptions are being made of participant understanding and perception that can lead to the delivery of sessions that are not relevant in the intended context. In order to overcome this problem, Jones and Lavalley (2009a) asked adolescent athletes and coaches their perceptions of life skills, and through doing so a participant-centered definition was developed that stated, "Ranges of transferrable skills needed for everyday life, by everybody, that helps people thrive" (p. 165). The participant-centered definition of life skills offered in this study would support the design of life skills development programs for grass roots football in Wales because it is more contextually sound and relevant, meaning that the life skills needs of the intended receiver (the player) can be met. The participants defined life skills as: "Transferrable social, discipline, respect, personal control, organization, and leadership skills vital throughout life, developed in football, and used in another environment." This definition is similar to those in existing sport psychology literature, particularly in relation to the notion of transferability. Indeed, several authors have made reference to the importance of making life skills transferrable across life domains (e.g., Danish, & Nellen, 1997; Gould & Carson, 2008; Mayocchi, & Hanrahan, 2000). The implication of this for



football coaches is that in order to effectively develop life skills in their players, coaches must find a way of facilitating the transfer of the skills learnt in football to other environments. This is potentially challenging for grass roots coaches who typically have little contact with players outside of the football training and match day environment. As a result, coaches are reliant on the support of other significant influencers of young people (e.g., parents).

### **3.4.2 Life Skills Identification and Development**

The results of this study add to the expanding literature in relation to the life skills needs of adolescent athletes through a participant-driven exploration. Six life skills themes were established. These included social skills, discipline, respect, personal control, organization, and goal setting. A previous participant-driven exploration in sport and exercise psychology was conducted by Jones and Lavallee (2009b) who grouped life skills under two higher order themes; interpersonal, and personal life skills. Interpersonal life skills are defined as “Those skills that involve developing social connections to others and learning skills for cultivating these social connections” (Hansen et al., 2003, p. 28). Of the themes identified in this study, *social skills*, and *respect* can be categorized as interpersonal skills. *Organization*, *discipline*, *personal control*, and *goal setting* can be categorized as personal skills defined as, “Those skills and developmental processes that are occurring within the individual” (Hansen et al., 2003, p. 28). Categorizing life skills in this way ensures consistency with the current literature. The current study has corroborated earlier definitions and groupings of life skills through a more rigorous design by consulting with a larger sample and wider stakeholders. For coaching practitioners, clear

categorization of life skills may lead to an enhanced understanding and as a result contribute to the effective design of sessions, as coaches will be better able to link technical practices with life skill focus, and select appropriate strategies for reinforcing key messages. For example, when designing a session to develop social skills coaches need to understand the importance of selecting technical practices that allow players to interact rather than being based on individual based activities.

Gould and Carson (2008) highlighted the need for more research to focus particular attention on sport as much of the literature is focused on positive youth development and extracurricular activities, often delivered in an education setting rather than a community environment. In attempting to address this issue, participants in this study were asked to provide examples of life skills that had been developed through football and transferred elsewhere including verbal and non-verbal communication, working as a team, respect for others, coping with challenges, and accepting and taking responsibility. These examples suggest that the link between learning in football and transfer of skills to other domains is clear. Previously, research has been criticized for not making such links explicit and therefore overlooked a key facet of the notion of life skill development (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993). Consequently, this study has offered evidence to suggest that grass roots football has the potential to facilitate the development of life skills as it would appear that skill development and skill transfer has occurred rather implicitly in some settings. The challenge for coaches then is to make practice more explicit to ensure consistency in development and transfer. Indeed, young people could develop and transfer life skills to other life domains if they increase their awareness of the skills they acquired through sport, increase their awareness of

knowledge of how and in what context they learned life skills, and increase their awareness that skills are valued in other life domains (Danish et al., 1993). Trottier and Robitaille (2014) discovered two strategies used by swimming and basketball coaches to support life skill transfer. The first was using specific discussions, which consisted of explaining to the athletes the non-sport settings where the life skills would be useful or important. The second strategy was asking the athletes to put a life skill into action in another area of life. Although further evaluation of these strategies is required in order to determine their effectiveness, they provide a start point to inform the development of a program for educating coaches to develop their ability to coach life skills through football.

Many of the life skills highlighted in this study are consistent with the findings of other research. More specifically, communication, organization, commitment, personal (self) control, and decision-making were all highlighted in this study, and it was previously suggested that sport was particularly suited to teaching these life skills (e.g., Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993). Indeed, Holt et al. (2008) examined whether athletes learned life skills through their involvement on a high school soccer team over a season. Holt et al. (2008) reported three types of life skills arising from participation on the team: (a) learning to take initiative; (b) respect; and (c) teamwork/leadership. Furthermore, Gould et al. (2006) suggested three areas that youth needed to develop the most, namely: (a) taking personal responsibility for one's self and one's actions; (b) communication and listening skills; and (c) motivation and work ethic. The findings of this study demonstrated that football in the UK has the potential to develop young people across the three areas identified

by Holt et al. (2008) as well as those offered by Gould et al. (2006), adding further support for the potential of football in the UK as a vehicle for developing life skills.

The findings of the present study have helped to further previous work in this field where participants merely identified life skills. This study stressed the major influence of the coach in developing life skills. It must be emphasized that football itself is not the teacher of life skills. Rather, the coach must maximize the potential of football through developing relationships with the players, shaping practices and with it provide players with a variation of learning experiences that reinforce the life skill message. Specifically related to developing relationships is the two-way process of respect stressed by participants. An important message for coaches here is to treat and speak to players on their level, using appropriate language, and to make players feel valued. Given that the coach participants in this study reported feeling unprepared for fulfilling their role as coaches, this highlights a potential need for coach education programs to help coaches in adapting their delivery relative to the players being coached.

### **3.4.3 Resilience Development**

The findings of this study suggest that grassroots football in the UK also has the potential to develop resilient young people. Indeed, resilience is often described as being the outcome of the influence of a number of protective factors in a person's life, the impact of which can change the trajectory of a person's life in a positive direction (e.g., Dumont & Provost, 1999; Garmezy, 1985; Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000; Tiet et al., 1998). Luthar and Cicchetti (2000), more specifically, called these protective-enabling factors – factors that fundamentally enhance healthy

development through buffering the effects of adversity and vulnerability, primarily through positive social influences and sustained social networks that enhance a person's healthy sense of self. The role then of the coach as a significant person of influence along with others within a young person's social support network (e.g., parents) is to facilitate learning opportunities whereby young people develop skills that will help them cope with challenges and in doing so limit the likelihood of encountering adverse situations. Through developing their social skills young players may be better able to: identify and communicate with the key people from within their support network to seek help when required; and work with others to solve problems and overcome difficult situations. Indeed, one identified protective-enabling factor in the resilience literature is the presence of healthy, attached peer relationships thus supporting the development and maintenance of healthy social skills that enable a person to more effectively negotiate his/her social environment (Alvord & Grados, 2005; Boyden & Mann, 2005; Dumont & Provost, 1999; Markstrom, Marshall, & Tyron, 2000; Place, Reynolds, Cousins, & O'Neill, 2002).

Through opportunities to develop personal control the young players may learn to: cope with challenges as they present themselves through holding more positive perceptions of them; understand the challenge and subsequently plan an appropriate approach to overcoming it; recover more effectively after making a mistake to return to their normal level of functioning; and control their emotions and behave appropriately when faced with different situations (e.g., winning and losing). Finally, developing their leadership skills may enhance young players' ability to take responsibility in situations of vulnerability to overcome adversity and lead others through the process of overcoming adversity. Resilience researchers have

identified the presence of warm, healthy attachments between a child and an adult (parent, close family members) as a significant protective-enabling factor. When lacking the presence of a parent or other close family relations, the presence of at least one caring relationship with another unrelated adult has an equally significant healthy impact on a child (Henley, 2010). This unrelated person could include extended family members, respected older friends, teachers, coaches, mentors, pastors, counsellors and community leaders (Werner & Smith, 1982; 1992). This reinforces the need for coaches to understand that the impact of what they do can significantly influence those they coach.

#### **3.4.4 Role of the Coach**

The role of the coach in developing life skills has been widely researched. For example, McCallister et al. (2000) interviewed 22 volunteer youth coaches to understand how they developed life skills in their athletes. Their study found the coach to be the most significant individual in instilling outcomes of positive youth development such as fair play, respect for others, cooperation, decision-making, leadership and moral development, because coaches are in positions of authority and influence. The participants in this study supported these claims as the coach was discussed in relation to being a 'players first boss', and the participating coaches themselves felt they were able to 'teach players without them knowing it' due to the relationship that they could build with their players. The importance of the coach-athlete relationship in respect of the development of life skills has been discussed in other research. Indeed, through interviews with award winning coaches, Gould, Collins, Lauer, and Chung (2005) found that these coaches supported the value of a

continual process of learning that allowed life skills to be developed as opposed to adopting isolated strategies or techniques. Further, along with a philosophical base, and trust, a strong coach-player relationship was reported among the fundamentals guiding a continual process of delivery. Similarly, Petitpas et al. (2005) agreed that developing a strong coach-athlete relationship is one of the most important elements for developing life skills, and central to facilitating a strong coach-athlete relationship is having strong relationship skills, such as communication, empathy, and rapport-building. These crucial components of the coach-athlete relationship, however, are not taught through coach education programs highlighting another deficiency in how coaches are currently educated.

The adult-child relationship was also deemed important in helping young people develop resilience (Henley et al., 2007), where the adult was said to play a key role in teaching values such as teamwork, fair play and ethics, and the social skills that support these values (Boyden & Mann, 2005; Dumont & Provost, 1999; Duncan & Arnston, 2004). Further, it was highlighted that coaches in psychosocial sport programs must have skills beyond solely teaching sport and game activities. Coaches should also be able to facilitate the understanding of emotions and interpersonal communications between children, and help children develop effective coping skills (Henley et al., 2007). Indeed, the protective enabling forms of relationships that players develop with the coach assist in the development of a variety of internal problem solving skills, coping and adaptation strategies that enhance a person's executive functioning processes (Connor & Davidson, 2003). Given that these teaching skills require special training, which will help the coaches to successfully intervene added to the fact that the coaches involved in this study

felt unprepared to teach life skills, there is a clear need for the development of a coach education program to educate and up-skill grass roots football coaches in Wales. This study could provide the start point for the development of an appropriate intervention program because it has identified the life skills that can be developed and how the coach should approach developing these skills. Indeed, the development of some of the life skills identified in this study could contribute to effective employment of some of the problem solving skills and strategies offered by Henley (2010). More specifically, developing *social skills* may improve a young person's ability to function independently but also able to request help when necessary and be curious and have an interest in exploring the environment in order to gain new knowledge. Further, *discipline* (e.g., behaving appropriately in different environments), and personal control (e.g., the ability to cope with challenge/change) may assist with learning to effectively adapt to changes in one's environment. Finally, *leadership* (e.g., supporting less able/younger players) may develop a young person in being able to make contributions that assist others in similar situations.

#### **3.4.1 Applied Implications**

According to Dworkin et al. (2003) adolescents see themselves, as agents of their own development and adults should focus on helping young people to teach themselves. In line with this suggestion adopting a constructivist approach to learning through which the role of the coach becomes one of orchestrating the learning process through stretching players in their ZPD through structured problem solving interventions would seem appropriate (e.g., Chak, 2001). Thus, gaining the perceptions of adolescent players is critical to optimal development as their



motivation to learn is enhanced as a result of being fully engaged. In light of the aim of this study it was important to gain a better understanding of players' motivation for playing football as well as parents' motivation for wanting their child to take part. This would serve to inform the researcher, and in turn coaches, of what players and parents value, and what they expect to learn as a result of participation in grass roots football and as such facilitate the development of a context specific life skills intervention program. Through an awareness of these, it is hoped that coaches will be better able to plan and deliver appropriate sessions relevant to the needs and expectations of their players.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge no other research has considered the learning expectation of parents and players in a community sport environment. Previous research conducted by Forneris, Camiré, and Trudel (2012) examined high school sport stakeholders' awareness of school and regional school sport associations' mission statements along with their expectations and perceived experiences of sport with regard to the development of life skills and values. They reported that all stakeholders expect the context of high school sport to be developing such internal assets as life skills. However, expectations of the skills developed varied among the stakeholders. Athletes held higher expectations that sport should develop their ability to set and attain goals, and the value of sportsmanship in comparison to other key stakeholders (parents, administrators, and coaches), but held lower expectations that sport should develop self-control, compassion, fairness, loyalty, honesty, and respect. In contrast to the findings of Forneris et al. (2012), players' participating in the present study outlined that their biggest motivating factors for participating in grass roots football was to develop

social skills, which was also true for the expectations of their parents. Following social skills, developing their football skills was the second highest expectation of the players whilst some also expected to develop personal control and respect. For parents, their second biggest expectation of grass roots football was for their child to learn discipline, whilst they also reported equal expectations for developing football skills, personal control and respect. These findings highlight a major challenge facing coaches in fulfilling their role as expected by players and parents alike. This challenge was particularly prominent in discussions with coach participants in this study who, as reported previously, felt unprepared for being able to develop life skills because coach education courses did not teach them to. This is not uncommon, coach education courses have often been criticized as being low-impact endeavors that leave coaches unprepared for the complex reality of coaching practice (Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2003). Further, the current state of coach education courses does not give coaches the necessary practical and specific interpersonal competencies and may leave them unprepared to facilitate positive development for young athletes (Vella, Crowe, & Oades, 2013). Indeed, there is a growing recognition that if coaches of any form are to be educated to be able to understand and manage the relative ambiguity associated with the coaching process, the approaches to coach education need to move away from “how to coach” practices (Camiré, Trudel, & Forneris, 2014).

In addition, formal coach education pathways include an insufficient focus on pedagogical and socio-cultural aspects of coaching (Cassidy, Jones, & Potrac, 2004). Therefore, the promotion of a holistic portrayal of the coach that more accurately reflects the reality of coaching is needed (Hussain, Trudel, Patrick, & Rossi, 2012).

Similarly, Gould et al. (2006) reported that coach education programs generally do not discuss how to foster positive youth development (i.e. how to teach life skills and values) through sport. Given the potential sport holds to develop life skills, and the motivations for learning and expectations of both players and parents involved in this study it would seem logical to suggest that life skills development be included in future coach education programs.

Whilst it is clear that the coach plays a significant role in developing life skills, the importance of other significant people should not be underestimated. The findings of this study revealed that, parents, teachers, peers, other family, and the player themselves had an important role to play. It would seem necessary to suggest then a collaborative approach to developing life skills between all significant stakeholders. Coaches must consider how they can initiate this collaborative working in order to facilitate the reinforcement and transfer of life skills away from football and into other life domains. This highlights an opportunity for coach education programs to present some strategies that can be employed by the coach to engage with these significant others who can in turn reinforce key messages communicated by the coach in order to influence young people and support the successful transfer of life skills to other life domains.

### **3.5 Strengths, Limitations and Future Directions**

This study has provided a context specific definition of life skills, and in addition has identified six life skill themes that can be developed by young people through grass roots football participation. In addition, the findings of this study emphasize that whilst the coach can play an important role in developing life skills,

other significant people including parents, teachers, and extended family also have a responsibility. This research can serve to assist football coaches with planning appropriate practices for their players, leading to appropriate person and player development and enjoyment, in the hope of sustained football participation. The results of this study represent the perceptions of key stakeholders (parents, coaches, players, and teachers) to the grass roots game of football in convergence areas in Wales. The results may have been influenced by the context in which they were gathered and, therefore, may not represent the perceptions of all stakeholders involved in grass roots football Worldwide. Therefore, caution should be taken when interpreting this research as it represents a specific cultural context that may differ to that in other countries.

This study has provided context specific insight related to the role of the coach and those life skills that can be developed through football. However, it remains unclear whether these life skills can actually be coached explicitly and consistently, and if so what intervention strategies can be used to achieve such outcomes. Therefore, future research should focus upon using the findings of this study to inform the design of coach education programs to educate coaches in what life skills can be developed and how the coach can integrate life skills development in their coaching practice. Furthermore, the effectiveness of this program should be evaluated according to three outcomes: (1) how the program enhances a coaches knowledge and understanding; (2) the effectiveness of the coach in applying this knowledge; and (3) the impact of the coaches delivery on the development of life skills in young players because the impact upon the end user will provide a better indication of the programs appropriateness as a context specific intervention.

# **Chapter 4**

## **Study 2**

**The Design, Delivery, and Evaluation of a Coach Education  
Program for Life Skills**

## 4.1 Introduction

Life skills intervention programs have been shown to be effective for teaching life skills. Indeed, personal control and confidence (*GOAL*: Danish et al., 1992a, 1992b); goal setting and problem solving (*GOAL*: O'Hearn & Gatz, 1999, 2002); seeking social support (*GOAL*: Forner, Danish, & Scott, 2007); social responsibility, social interest (*SUPER*: Brunelle, Danish, & Forneris, 2007); meeting and getting to know people, showing respect to self and others, and handling thoughts and emotions (*The First Tee*: Weiss, Stuntz, Bhalia, Bolter, & Price, 2013); communication and organization (*ELITE*: Jones, Lavalley, & Tod, 2011) are some of the life skills developed through such programs. Whilst these examples offer a start point for understanding how effective programs are structured and delivered, a number of limitations exist in the current life skills intervention literature. Indeed, *GOAL* was not developed as a sport based program and therefore its application in a sports environment can be questioned given that its design would not have considered the nature and context of sport and the relationships (e.g., coach-athlete, athlete-athlete) that influence learning. In light of this, *SUPER* was developed as a sports-based adaptation of *GOAL* (Danish et al., 2002). Both programs have demonstrated success with *GOAL* reporting significant changes in participants knowledge about life skills and perceptions of their ability to achieve their goals (Danish & Nellen, 1997); and *SUPER* reporting significant developments in social responsibility, emotional intelligence, goal knowledge and social interest, and enhanced knowledge about life skills and higher self beliefs for personal goal setting, problem solving, and positive thinking (Brunelle, Danish, & Fazio, 2002; Papacharisis et al., 2005). However, life skill development workshops in both programs were conducted away from the

sports environment. Through this approach there is a danger of life skill development becoming detached from sport and as a result participants may struggle to understand the program's relevance in the sport domain. In addition, sport coaches very rarely have access to classroom facilities to conduct such workshops, which limits the potential for either program to be delivered by community sports coaches. Furthermore, these programs have never been delivered in the UK. Given what we know about the importance of intervention programs being context specific it is difficult to ascertain the appropriateness of these programs in a grass roots football setting or indeed a community sport environment outside of the demographic, cultural and national context in which they were first delivered.

The findings presented in Chapter 3 of this thesis have provided a better understanding of the meaning of life skills and resilience in the context of grassroots football in Wales. Further, six life skill themes that can be developed through grass roots football have been identified. In addition the expectations of young football players and their parents were outlined. The need for a collaborative approach to life skill development between those in positions of influence over young people was highlighted whereby the role of the coach was deemed significant. Despite this, the coaches felt unprepared for coaching life skills as existing coach education programs failed to teach coaches about life skills development. The extensive understanding gained from these findings provides a platform for the development of a context specific intervention that is needed due to the shortcomings of previous interventions.

Whilst various life skills development programs exist, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, there are no programs specifically designed to educate and develop football coaches who are able to integrate life skill development into their coaching practice. The general aim of this study then was to design, deliver, and evaluate a coach education program that enables coaches to develop life skills and resilient coping behaviors. In line with the wider objective of this thesis and following the obtaining of context specific information regarding life skills in grass roots football the purpose of this study was to design an intervention program that: (a) educates and trains coaches to integrate and coach life skills development in their sessions; (b) fits into an existing NGB's level two coach education program that is endorsed by the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA); and (c) facilitates coaches' understanding of how to encourage life skill transfer. In doing so, this particular study addressed the second, third and fourth objectives of this research project (see Section 1.3).

The focus on developing a coach education program was a conscious effort to create a sustainable model for developing the life skills and resilient coping behaviors of adolescent footballers that would impact upon their development as footballers and young people simultaneously. In doing so this research would fulfill KESS's commitment to enhance the health and wellbeing of people across convergence areas of Wales whilst also supporting the WFT's vision for "More Coaches, Better Coaches." Through educating coaches it would be possible to facilitate a change in approach to the delivery of grass roots football in Wales, building a legacy that would continue to be delivered following completion of the research, something very few intervention programs have done.



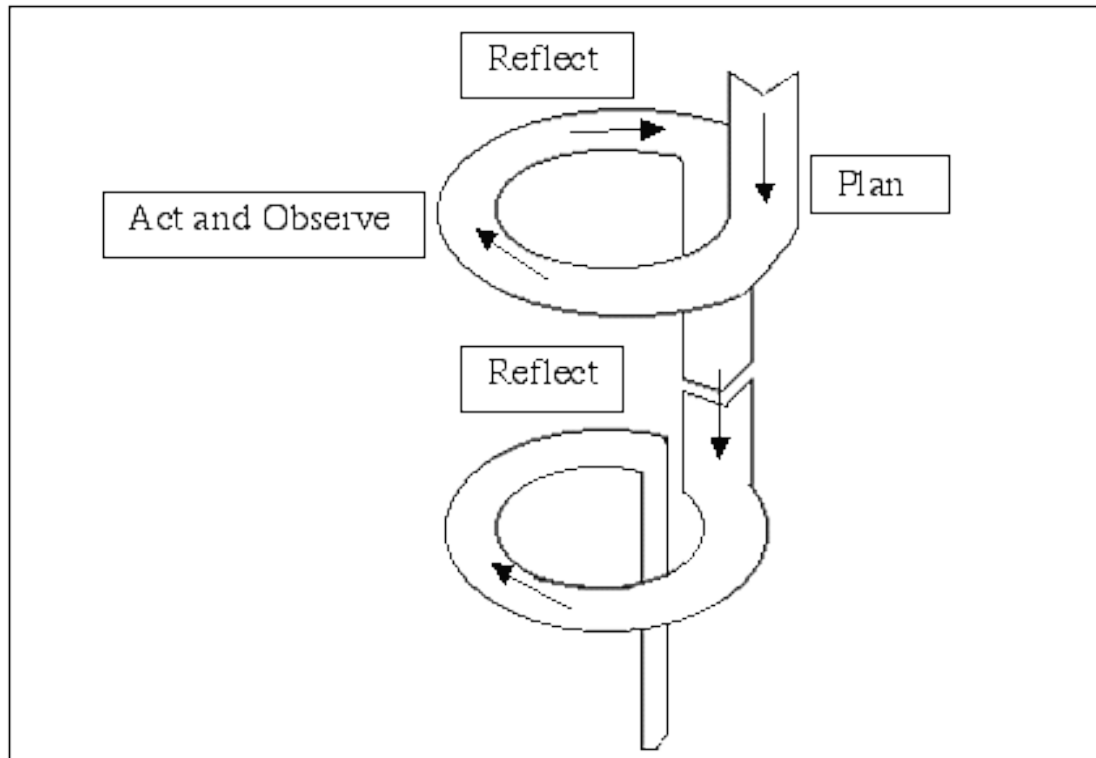
## **4.2 Method**

This section contains four parts related to the program. First, the process of developing the program will be presented. Second, the procedure for the delivery and evaluation of the program to grass roots coaches are explained. Third and fourth, the delivery and evaluation of the program will be presented which involved the use of two different samples across two phases, collecting different data to support the aims of the study. Phase one was focused on determining changes to coach knowledge and understanding as a result of the program and contained a larger sample, whilst phase two was delivered to a smaller sample and was concerned with exploring how this knowledge and understanding informed practical delivery. As a result of the aim of this study and the nature of the context in which it would take place (e.g., in collaboration with a NGB), action research was determined to be the most appropriate methodological approach to this study.

### **4.2.1 Action Research**

Defined primarily by its research design that consists of three recurring stages: inquiry, action, and reflection (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005), action research aims to solve specific problems within a program, organization, or community (Patton, 2002). Through multiple cycles of these stages, improvements to the knowledge and understanding of those involved leads to social action, and reflections-on-action lead to new understanding and open up new areas of inquiry (Greenwood & Levin, 2003). Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) recognized that these stages overlap and merge as learning occurs. Indeed, this iterative process forms the

foundation for continual improvement (Mackenzie, Tan, Hoverman, & Baldwin, 2012) (see Figure 3 for action research cycle).



**Figure 3** Action Research Cycle

In the *inquiry* stage of action research the researcher identifies a practical problem and *plans* the methods to address that problem (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). The design and data collection in action research tend to be less systematic, more informal, and quite specific to the problem, and the researcher is often directly involved in gathering the information and then studying themselves (Patton, 2002). The design is developed based on the best available contextual evidence, and tends to involve the use of research techniques selected based on ‘best-fit’ for responding to the problem identified. Furthermore, employing a range of techniques can enlarge the suite of available options for action (Mackenzie et al., 2012).

In the *action* stage of the cycle a planned and structured intervention is executed, and changes in the situation are closely monitored. The *reflection* stage involves both the observation of the effects of the action and reflection of the results of this action on the situation. It is critical to develop a strategy (prior to the action) for monitoring and evaluating the effects of the action (Mackenzie et al., 2012). Not only should this strategy identify the scope of anticipated changes, but also articulate a robust epistemology against which the validity and salience of new or emergent knowledge can be assessed, such as a systems thinking frame (Ison, 2008). For example, the effectiveness of a coach cannot be assessed solely upon the coach's behaviors. Instead, consideration must be given to the relationship between the coach and athlete in order to be able to better assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of those behaviors.

It is important to understand the distinction between action research and reflective practice (Evans, Fleming, & Hardy, 2000). According to McMahon (1999), action research can be distinguished from reflective practice by a deliberate and planned intent to intervene into one's own practice to bring about improvement. Therefore, action research involves strategic action, a component not integral to a model of reflective practice, though it may occur as a result (McMahon, 1999). Action research, therefore, is more than just good practice, it is being aware and critical of that [practice], and using this critical self-awareness to be open to a process of change and improvement of practice (cf. Evans et al., 2000). Action research was deemed to be the best approach to this study because of the intention, following an initial examination of a specific context (Chapter 3), to acquire new knowledge through continued consultation with stakeholders attached to the

research in order to develop a program to educate coaches. Through this approach the focus was on praxis:

Praxis is informed, committed action that gives rise to knowledge rather than just successful action. It is informed because other people's views are taken into account. It is committed and intentional in terms of values that have been examined and can be argued. It leads to knowledge from and about education (McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 1996, p. 8).

Action research was also appropriate given that the intention of the research was to intervene and examine the resultant effects in a real life situation, and therefore the emphasis was to obtain precise knowledge about a given situation (grass roots football coaching) as opposed to obtaining generalizable scientific knowledge (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).

#### ***4.2.1.1 The Researcher***

The researcher is an integral part to the action research process because of the multiple roles played by this person including program developer, deliverer and evaluator. It is important to understand 'who the researcher is' because their values, beliefs and prejudices will have an impact on the way in which the research is planned, conducted, managed, and interpreted. This is managed through the researcher honestly reporting their engagement through reflexive practice. In this case, the researcher is an aspiring academic and football coach with over 10 years coaching experience with players from under 8's to senior level and from grassroots to professional academy level. The researcher's coaching philosophy is grounded in the belief that in order to develop the player, a coach must first develop the person.

This means that the start of the coaching process involves engaging with players to develop relationships that can lead to the coach determining the player's motivation for playing football, their ambitions, interests, and existing skills set. Knowing this is important for helping the coach to understand his players in order to develop practices that are relevant to both the environment and the players. The researcher also believes in engaging with significant people within the players support network (usually parents/guardians) in order to gain a better understanding of the player as a person (through gaining other perspectives), and also begin to understand the parents and their expectations of the coach what their child should learn. This allows the tailoring of sessions to meet the needs of the players. In relation to learning and acquiring knowledge, the researcher's belief is that knowledge is acquired through engaging in various forms of learning, including reading, discussion, experience of doing, and reflecting. A critical factor in the learning process from the researcher's perspective is that the learner needs to play an active role in the process. For this to happen the learner must assume responsibility and the teacher, coach and/or person of influence must be prepared to share leadership and support as opposed to direct.

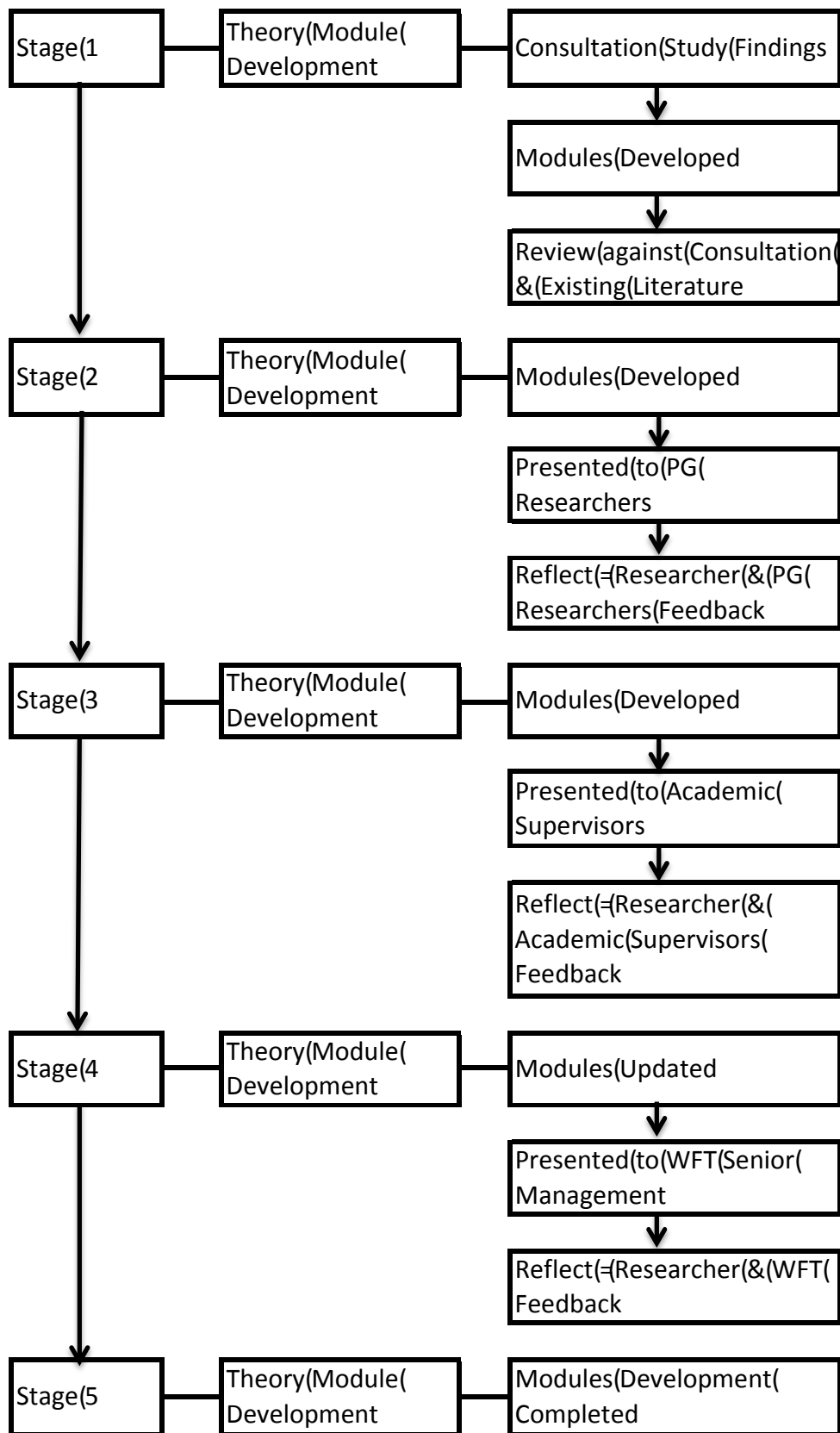
#### **4.2.2 Program Development**

Participant coaches in the consultation study (see Study 1, Chapter 3), as well as previous research (e.g., Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2003; Nelson, Cushion, & Potrac, 2006), declared that coach education fails to prepare coaches for fulfilling their role. One explanation for the limited impact of coach education arguably lies in it having been designed using a "top-down approach" (Côté, 2006). Indeed, it would

appear that coaching practitioners often have limited, if any, input into the design and delivery of the courses that they attend (Nelson, Cushion, & Potrac, 2013). McCullick, Belcher, and Schempp (2005) have suggested that consulting practitioners about the implementation of coach education may help to ensure that provision better serves the developmental needs of coaches. The coach education modules developed in this study followed the recommendations of McCullick et al. (2005) and consulted with coaches as part of the wider consultation study (see Study 1, Chapter 3). Consequently, the principle underpinning the development of the program was to challenge traditional coach education delivery that largely focuses upon developing coaches to be competent at delivering coach-led technical and tactical sessions. Such coach education courses do not generally discuss how to foster PYD (Gould et al., 2006). Therefore, the philosophy underpinning the program's development was to encourage creative coaches who focus on person and player development simultaneously, and in doing so empower players and encourage self-directed learning. This approach was deemed to be in keeping with the WFT's philosophy for coach development that also supported KESS's vision for enhancing the well-being, which life skills development can support, of young people across Wales. Through this approach it was hoped that not only would young players who are capable of taking responsibility for their learning and thinking for themselves be developed, but young people who are more aware and able to make a positive contribution to society.

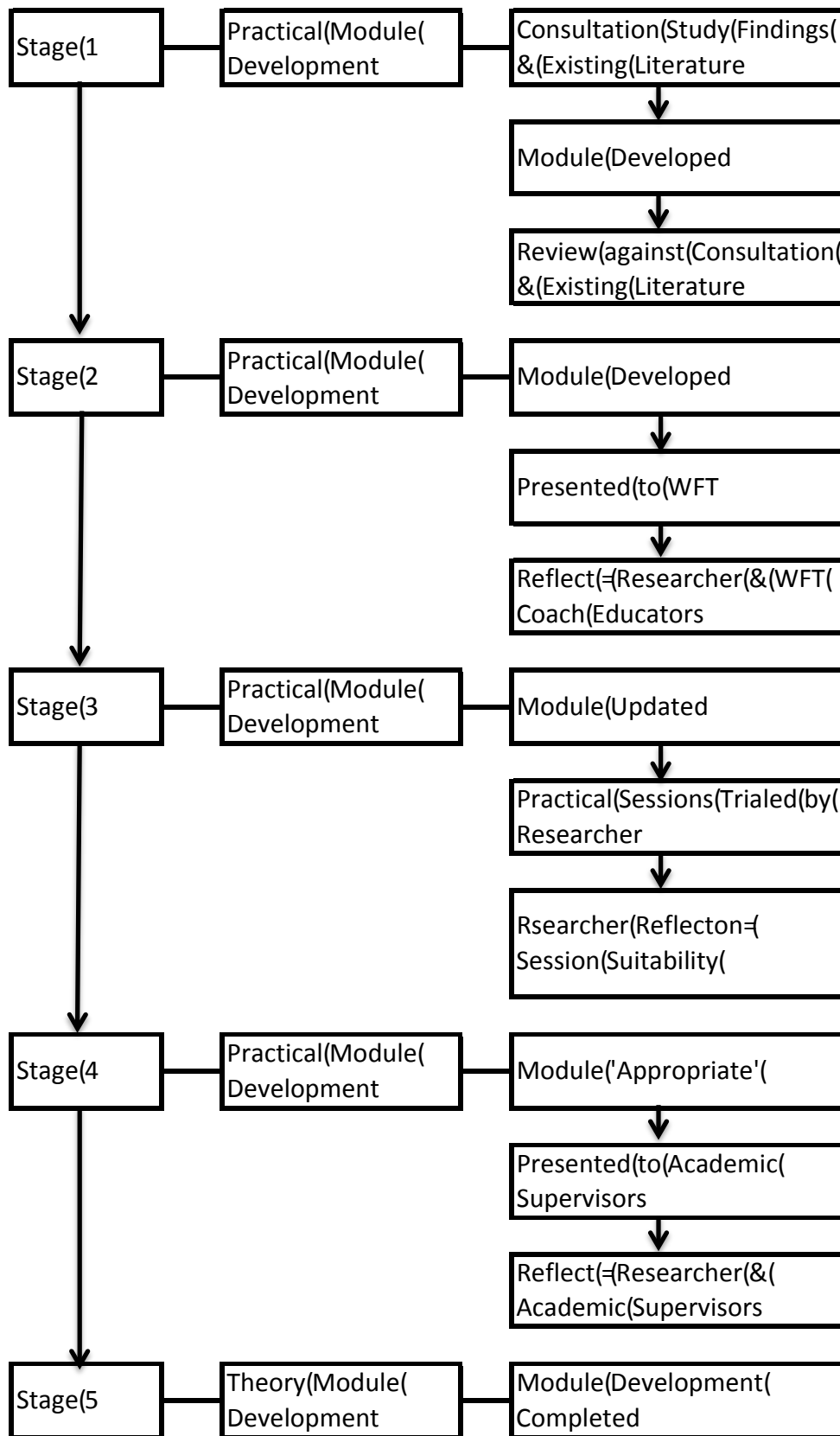
The consultation study findings (see Study 1, Chapter 3) that identified six life skill themes, player and parent expectations, and the role of the coach along with academic theory underpinned the design of the program. The program comprised of

three modules: two theory based, and one practical (containing exemplar practices) that were developed to contain content relevant to the findings from Study 1. Figures 4 and 5 provide visual representations of the process followed throughout the development of the theory and practical modules respectively. The modules emerged as part of a conscious effort to enhance the coaches' underpinning knowledge of the life skill and resilience concepts in addition to improving physical action in the form of practical delivery. This approach was also consistent with how the WFT structured coach education at the time of this research.



**Figure 4** Theory Module Development Procedure





**Figure 5** Practical Module Development Procedure

#### **4.2.2.1 Theory Modules**

The first theory module was structured to focus upon: (a) clearly defining and identifying types of life skills; (b) highlighting the importance of life skills to an adolescents development; (c) providing an outline of the life skills that can be developed through coached football sessions; (d) stressing the role of the coach and highlighting others perceptions of the coach's role; (e) identifying significant others who contribute towards the development of life skills; and (f) emphasizing players' and parents' learning expectations of grass roots football. The specific content was developed in accord with the findings from the previous study (see Chapter 3) and the extant literature (e.g., Gould & Carson, 2008; Jones & Lavalley, 2009b) (see Appendix 6 for copy of the presentation).

The aim of the second module was to introduce and increase candidate knowledge of resilience. To achieve this the module comprised of: (a) defining resilience; (b) identifying the characteristics possessed by resilient people; (c) highlighting a young person's normal level of functioning, and the impact of stress and/or adversity on a young person's level of functioning; (d) identifying problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies; (e) stressing different techniques that encourage active coping; and (f) presenting the ABCDE thinking model (Ellis, 2001) to encourage positive reframing as a strategy to develop active coping (see Appendix 7 for copy of the presentation).

Both theory modules were designed to be delivered through an interactive PowerPoint presentation with group involvement throughout. In order to create an effective learning environment by not overloading those candidates on the program

each theory module was designed to last approximately 90 minutes. These modules were also designed to eventually be delivered by WFT tutors.

#### ***4.2.2.2 Theory Modules: Validation Procedures***

Validation of the appropriateness of the theory modules in relation to criteria set out by UEFA followed a three-step process. First, the modules were presented to postgraduate researchers, all of whom were familiar with life skills research. None of the researchers had any experience or knowledge of the coach education pathway for association football. There were two purposes to this consultation: (1) to evaluate the theoretical content of the modules; and, (2) to evaluate how the modules were delivered. The consultation comprised the delivery of both modules to the postgraduate researchers, a period whereby content could be challenged or questioned, and a two-week period post-presentation for the postgraduate researchers to offer any additional feedback. To assist them with doing so copies of the modules were shared. No amendments were advised.

The second step of the validation process involved consultation with three experts from academia experienced in developing coach education programs to approve the theoretical content. This was deemed an appropriate process to conduct to enhance the methodological rigor and determine whether the tasks and explanations made sense and reflect the intended outcomes of the program (Patton, 2002). The experts were given the opportunity to question and/or challenge all aspects of the modules immediately following the presentation of each module. For the researcher, the process was valuable in ensuring that the content was relevant for delivering the intended message. Minor amendments were made mainly to the

format of some slides (e.g., font size) and terminology used for presenting tasks (e.g., discuss rather than think about).

Consultation with the Senior Management Team (SMT) of the National Governing Body (NGB) partnering the research comprised the final step in the validation process. A presentation was made to highlight the key findings of Study 1 (see Chapter 3) and provide background and context to the research. Following this the two theory modules were presented. In contrast to the previous presentations, each aspect of the modules was discussed immediately slide by slide and task-by-task. This presentation required more detail as context was provided to support each component of the module and the purpose, benefit, and key message from each slide was explained. Following discussion, it was agreed that whilst all six life skill themes would be highlighted, greater emphasis would be given to the development of social skills, personal control, and leadership. This decision was informed by the results of the consultation study with key stakeholders that revealed participants placed a strong emphasis on the importance of developing these skills. Further support for the selection of skills came from other existing governing body initiatives that focus on discipline and respect (e.g., FAW Fair Play, Off the Pitch). A three-week period was agreed for the SMT to provide feedback. No amendments were advised and the theory modules were deemed ready for delivery.

#### **4.2.2.3 Practical Module**

The purpose of the practical module was to provide working examples of best practice to influence and develop coaches' ability to integrate life skills development into practical coaching sessions (Danish & Nellen, 1997). One key message that needed to be stressed to coaches was that life skill development would not replace but instead add value to the technical and tactical development of players. This was important for two reasons: (1) to gain buy-in from coaches who may otherwise have been skeptical if technical development was not recognized; and (2) focusing attention on the holistic development of players. Therefore, practical examples that demonstrated the development of the emphasized life skills were integrated into the module (see appendix 8 for practice examples).

Six intervention strategies (see Table 3) that coaches could adopt in their own coaching practice to develop their players' life skills were designed based on the researcher's experience as a coach, guided by academic coaching literature (e.g., Jones, 2006; Kidman, Thorpe, Jones, & Lewis, 2001), motivational climate (Ames, 1992), and ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). More specifically, emphasis was placed on how coaches could create a mastery climate during sessions to develop mastery-orientated young people who have had a positive experience of football participation. When mastery-orientated, individuals are focused on developing new skills, and/or improving their current level of skill or competence (Ames, 1992). A mastery climate is important for coaching life skills as it promotes individual specific learning informed by the individual needs of the person. Whilst developing a mastery climate the coach facilitates learning through use of problem solving interventions, orchestrating and scaffolding in order to engage participants in their

ZPD thus appropriately challenging them to maximize their learning. More detail relating to the intervention strategies can be found in Appendix 9.

**Table 3** Intervention strategies for developing life skills through coaching

Intervention Strategy	Description
1. Reinforcing the message based on observation of successful application.	The coach identifies correct use of the life skill and asks the player(s) to explain/demonstrate what they did to their teammates.
2. Reinforcing the message with individual players.	The coach questions a player on the action(s) they have just performed and how they could improve the performance of the action further.
3. Reinforcing the message through group work.	Players are separated into groups (of 2 or more players) to discuss their performance in the practice so far, and identify ways to improve their performance further.
4. Reinforcing the message with the whole group of players.	A combination of the above strategies can be used.
5. Reinforcing the message with video footage.	Video demonstrating successful performance of the message can be a powerful tool for painting a clear picture for players
6. Use of challenges.	The coach plans a series of challenges that can be presented to/set for the players. These challenges should encompass specific individual player, small group, unit, and whole group challenges to tailor the approach to suit the development needs of the individual.

A three-step process for life skill development was promoted within the practical module: (1) message; (2) reinforce; and (3) transfer (adapted from Bodey et al., 2009). The *message* is presented by the coach at the start of the session through essentially introducing the life skill focus for the session. Typically, an individual life skill from within one of the six themes (see Chapter 3, Figure 2) becomes the session focus. Once the life skill has been introduced, the players engage in discussion about the importance of that life skill to football, and how it is used. The coach's role is to facilitate the discussion through asking pre-planned questions to the players, whilst also using a series of prepared prompts to support players and guide them towards answering the questions should they be unable to answer the initial question independent of the coach. The purpose of this approach is to initiate the development of social skills and encourage open communication with the coach, facilitating the creation of a learning environment in which players are empowered and potential barriers of communication are removed (e.g., not feeling confident to talk).

Following the introduction of the life skill message, the coach proceeds to continually *reinforce* the *message* throughout the session, using the intervention techniques highlighted in Table 3. Through use of these intervention strategies the coach is effectively the facilitator scaffolding learning with the player an active contributor in the process as advocated through a dialectical approach to ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978).

The final stage of the process involves the *transfer* of the life skill away from football to other environments (e.g., at home, school, in community settings). Whilst the coach has little or no influence over players' development outside of football,

he/she can initiate thoughts of transfer through enhancing the players understanding of the skill learnt and how it relates to experiences in other environments. In doing so, the coach questions players over what has been learnt during the session (e.g., how to communicate), how it was learnt, why the life skill is important to football (reinforcing the message and developing understanding), where else the life skill can be used (e.g., school; developing understanding), and examples of how it can be used (relating football experiences with other life experiences). The three-step process was selected because of its simplistic approach that provides a clear process for coaches.

#### ***4.2.2.4 Practical Module: Validation Procedures***

The first stage of assessing the appropriateness of the practical module involved working collaboratively with the WFT (partnering NGB) principal coach education tutors for the level two coaching certificate. This allowed practices to be agreed that incorporated effective demonstration of the intervention strategies within the existing level two curriculum framework. To provide context, the theory modules, life skill delivery process, and intervention strategies were presented to the tutors. A discussion session followed during which various practices were considered, before a series of practices were selected for delivery. In the interest of ensuring a consistent approach to the integration of life skills to all other practical demonstrations delivered as part of the courses, the group (tutors and researcher) assigned relevant life skills to the existing sessions. Integrating life skills to each practical demonstration would continually reinforce the key principles of the life skills and resiliency theory and practical sessions throughout the course. It would



also serve to provide practical examples of sessions that candidates could apply in their own coaching practice.

Once all practices were agreed, in the second stage of validation the researcher trialed them for the purpose of familiarization and determining suitability for delivery in the intended context. This involved delivering the practices to a number of groups of grassroots players including male and female players. Following this period, it was deemed that no changes to the practice structures were required, as they were considered appropriate to grassroots footballers and successful in delivering the intended life skill outcomes through the football session. Another important aspect of this stage of the practical module validation process was to assure the suitability of the practical sessions and intervention strategies in terms of other WFT tutors being able to deliver them on completion of the research. The final stage of validation involved presenting the practical module to three experts in sport psychology, coaching, and youth development to ensure that life skill development was an integrated part of sessions and that key messages for each practice were clear. No changes were deemed necessary, as all three were happy with the content and structure of the practices.

#### ***4.2.2.5 Pilot study***

A pilot study of the program in full (theory and practical modules) was conducted with ten grass roots coaches, all of whom held an FAW level 1 award in coaching football and were sampled based upon the appropriateness of the program to them with it being the next level of coach qualification (FAW/UEFA level 2). All participants were contacted via their college program director and asked to

volunteer their participation. The purpose of the pilot study was to ensure that the modules covered all the issues that might contribute to developing life skills and resilient coping behaviors, and further enable the researcher to practice and refine their delivery skills. Advice and guidance on program delivery was received from three supervisors who were experienced in delivering coach education. The pilot study was delivered over the course of one day with the two theory modules delivered in the morning and the practical module delivered in the afternoon. As a result of the pilot one practice was removed from the practical module as the researcher felt that focusing on two rather than three practices would represent more effective use of the time, particularly as the aim of practical module was to provide good practice examples of integrating life skills. The theory modules were deemed suitable for delivery to the intended audience with an appropriate blend of information and interactive tasks.

#### **4.2.3 Program Delivery: Phase 1**

The purpose of phase one was to deliver the program to a sample of coaches before conducting an evaluation to determine changes to coach knowledge and understanding as a result of the program and thus examine the efficacy of the theory and practical modules.

##### **4.2.3.1 Participants**

A total of 35 level 1 grassroots coach participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the program. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 56 ( $M = 24.22$ ,  $SD = 7.97$ ) and were randomly sampled from the WFT's coach database. All

participants had been coaching at least two years and coached grass roots football on a regular basis (at least once per week) to adolescent footballers who were members of boys, girls, and/or BME clubs. Three participants were female, and 32 were male. All participants provided written informed consent (see Appendix 1) prior to their participation, with anonymity assured throughout the reporting of the data.

#### **4.2.3.2 Measures**

The coach participants received training in all three modules and completed measures (pre- and post-training) related to the initial evaluation of the program.

##### *4.2.3.2.1 Pre-program questionnaire*

As no measure is available of coaches' understanding of life skills and current practices a self-report open-ended pre-program paper-based questionnaire (see Appendix 10) was developed to provide an initial understanding of the participants' existing knowledge and understanding of life skills development, and determine current practice for coaching life skills because previous research has indicated that coaches experienced considerable difficulty regarding how they taught life skills to their players (McCallister et al., 2000). Participants were requested to respond to three questions/instructions: (1) what do you understand by the term life skills? (2) list as many life skills as possible; and (3) as a coach, do you focus on developing young people's life skills? If so, how? All participants completed the measure immediately prior to the commencement of the program.

#### *4.2.3.2.2 Post-program questionnaire*

As there is currently no appropriate measure available the researcher developed a 10-item life skills development questionnaire (see Appendix 11) to evaluate the program and coaches' perceived learning following participation in the program. This measure was undertaken within a week of completion of the program. Items were created to encourage participants to reflect upon the learning outcomes of the program, including their knowledge and understanding of what constitutes a life skill, the value of developing life skills, and their role in developing their players' life skills through an integrated approach to their coaching practice. Items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 to 5 where 1 represented strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 about 50/50, 4 agree, and 5 strongly agree. The pre-program measure was not repeated post-program as coach participants would not have had any time to apply new knowledge and as a result it is probable that no new information would have been gained in doing so. Essentially, the open-ended questionnaire was used to get in-depth information about current knowledge of life skills development. The post-program measure was then used to evaluate if knowledge was gained in those skills not identified in the pre-program questionnaire.

#### **4.2.3.3 Phase 1: Procedures**

A visual representation of the procedure can be seen in Figure 6. Ethical approval for the research was gained from CSSREC. The program was delivered in full on two separate occasions, two months apart to allow adequate reflection time and subsequent new knowledge obtained from the first delivery to inform the delivery on the second occasion. The first program was delivered to twelve level one coaches

and the second delivery to twenty-three level two candidates. Structuring delivery in this way made delivery to a large cohort more manageable. In addition, delivery across two time points, to two different samples means that if the findings are similar between the two groups then the efficacy of the intervention in bringing about improvements is enhanced. All participants were contacted and asked to participate. Immediately prior to the commencement of program delivery all participants were informed of their right to freely withdraw from the research at any time. Informed consent was then gained for all participants after which the program was delivered (an example can be seen in Appendix 1). The program was delivered in full in one day and the order of delivery on both occasions was consistent: participant completion of pre-program measure, delivery of both theory modules, delivery of practical module, and participant completion of post-program questionnaire. The pre-program measure and post-program questionnaire formed the first stage of evaluation, which provided an initial understanding of knowledge acquired by the coaches as a result of the program.

#### **4.2.4 Program Delivery: Phase 2**

Phase two was delivered to a smaller sample and was concerned with exploring how any new knowledge and understanding informed practical coaching delivery, thus examining the potential impact of the program on facilitating behaviour change in the participants. In addition to the open-ended questionnaire and post-program measure, social validation interviews and observations were conducted and will be explained in more detail throughout the remainder of this section.

#### **4.2.4.1 Participants**

A sample of five coaches (four level 2, one level 3) volunteered to participate in a more in-depth evaluation of the program that also included observations and interviews. All participants had been coaching grassroots football for at least two years and were familiar with planning, delivering, and evaluating coaching sessions. The participants in this phase were different from those in phase one and were again selected randomly from the WFT's coach database.

Coach A was 19 years of age with three years coaching experience and was currently coaching six hours per week. The coach had experience of coaching players from under 6's to under 16's. Coach B was 21 years of age with three years coaching experience and was currently coaching two hours per week. The coach had experienced coaching players from under 6's to under 11's. Coach C was 20 years of age with four years coaching experience. The coach had experience of working with players from under 5's to under 16's and engaged in eight hours delivery each week. Coach D was 21 years of age and had three years coaching experience with players between 9 and 16 years of age. The coach was delivering four hours per week. Coach E was 33 years of age with 10+ years of experience as a coach. The coach was engaged in delivering three hours per week and had experience of coaching players from under 5's to senior level.

#### **4.2.4.2 Measures**

##### *4.2.4.2.1 Pre-program & Post-program questionnaire*

The same measures as detailed in section 4.2.3.2.1 and 4.2.3.2.2 were adopted in this phase of the program delivery.

#### *4.2.4.2.2 Reflective Logs*

As a way of supporting coach development and learning, reflective logs were developed as a prompt and guide (see Appendix 14). Throughout the reflective practice literature, across a range of domains, considerable debate has focused on the potential value of structured approaches to engaging in the reflective process (Neil, Cropley, Wilson & Faull, 2013). Some authors have expressed concerns that structured models constrain the artistry of reflection (e.g., Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998), whilst others have suggested that structured reflective writing promotes the qualities, skills, and motivation required for effective reflective practice (Telfer & Knowles, 2010). The reflective logs in this study employed a similar approach to that successfully adopted in previous research by developing a structured approach to reflection driven by a process of questioning (e.g., Cropley, Miles, Hanton & Anderson, 2007; Gadsby & Cronin, 2012). A structured approach was adopted as it provides a powerful pedagogical resource that supports the development of critically reflective practitioners (cf. Gadsby & Cronin, 2012). Consequently, structuring the process scaffolds learning of the reflective process, nurtures critical thinking, and promotes reflective insight (Neil et al., 2013). This approach also demonstrates an effort to engage coaches in their own ZPD to accelerate learning in line with the aims of the study. Whilst it is recognized that individuals should be given the opportunity to adopt an approach to reflection that allows them to explore their experiences naturally to permit creative thinking, in the beginning stages of introducing reflective practice structuring the process encourages more systematic reflection and reduces the likelihood of individuals simply pondering over their experiences (Knowles et al., 2001).

Example questions used in the reflective log's included:

Did you successfully integrate the life skill? How? If not, why?

Were player challenges met? How? If not, why?

#### *4.2.4.2.3 Post-program interview*

An interview is a conversation that has a structure and a purpose determined by the one party – the interviewer. Kvale (2007) described interviews as a professional interaction, which goes beyond the spontaneous exchange of views as in everyday conversation, and becomes a careful questioning and listening approach with the purpose of obtaining thoroughly tested knowledge. Defined as an interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the desired phenomena (Kvale, 2007), the semi-structured interview was deemed an appropriate form of interview to fulfill the purpose of exploring each coach's experiences and understandings of integrating life skills development within their coaching practice. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken within a week post-intervention and they allowed each coach to describe their activities, experiences, and perceptions, thus providing a unique insight into their coaching practice. This was important for understanding the reality of the coaching environment and appreciating that the experiences of each coach may differ. An interview guide was developed around: (1) the coaching philosophy; (2) definition of life skills; (3) identification and evidence of life skill development; (4) role of the coach (in developing life skills); (5) key learning as a result of the program; (6) coach intentions for integrating life skill development; and (7) any potential barriers/challenges to integration. Three experts in qualitative research assessed the



questions to ensure appropriateness in relation to the research objectives.

Questions asked included:

Please briefly outline your coaching philosophy?

What do you understand by the term life skills?

How will what you have learned influence your coaching practice?

An introductory statement was developed to explain the purpose of the interview, the procedure, and the coach's right to refrain from answering any questions and withdraw from the interview at any time. A concluding statement was developed to thank the coach for their participation and provide an opportunity for the coach to add any relevant information to the interview, and ask any questions (see Appendix 12 for interview guide).

#### *4.2.4.2.4 Social validation interviews*

Social validation interviews took place six weeks and three months post-intervention and were designed for retention effects after the intervention through gaining an insight of the participants' experiences of coaching life skills. More specifically, interview guides focused on three core elements: (1) the participants' experiences of developing life skills; (2) stimulating thought to initiate the transfer to other environments; and (3) how reflective practice had assisted the coach. Questions were developed that were concise and non-leading yet addressed the core areas and encouraged evaluative comments. A number of probing questions were also created to stimulate thought and ensure a smooth transition between each question. The following are example questions:

Can you tell me about your experience of integrating life skills in your coaching?

What challenges or barriers have you faced? How have you overcome these?

Have you managed to initiate the transfer of the life skills developed? How?

Introductory and concluding statements were developed consistent with those detailed in section 4.2.4.2.2 above.

#### *4.2.4.2.5 Coach observations*

Direct, personal contact with and observations of a setting have several advantages, such as developing an appreciation and understanding of the specific context. Coach observations were an important part of the program evaluation as they allowed the researcher to gain an understanding of the participants' behaviors and approach to coaching young players following their participation in the program. Further, observations are in line with Patton (2002) who offered six values of direct observation. First, direct observation allows the researcher to better understand and capture the context within which people interact, in the case of this research, the coaching environment. Second, gaining firsthand experience of the coaching setting and the people in the setting allows the researcher to be open, discovery oriented, and inductive through being less reliant upon prior conceptualizations from written documents or verbal reports. A third value of observations lies in the opportunity for the researcher to see things that may routinely escape awareness of those in the environment. In order to provide information in an interview, the coach must be aware enough to notice key nuances. It was felt that the researcher who was not fully involved in the coaching sessions would be better placed to notice these. A

fourth advantage of observation is the chance to learn things that people may be unwilling to provide information on in an interview (e.g. sensitive topics). A fifth strength of observation lies in the opportunity to explore beyond the selective perceptions of the coach. Whilst the interviews present the understandings of the coach, constituting critical information, observation allows the researcher to make their own perception of the environment and data, thus gaining a more comprehensive view of the setting being studied. Finally, firsthand experience of the environment gained through observation permits the researcher to draw on personal knowledge whilst interpreting and analyzing the data (Patton, 2002).

Regardless of how sensitively observations are made, the possibility always exists that people will behave differently under conditions where an observation is taking place (Patton, 2002). In an attempt to negate this and encourage participants to behave naturally the content of the observation-recording template (see Appendix 13) was not shared, and the researcher observed from a position outside on the side of the training area to avoid any interference with the session. Observations focused upon determining: (1) the life skill coached; (2) the intervention strategies used; and (3) whether or not all elements of the three-step process were covered over the duration of the session.

#### ***4.2.4.3 Phase 2: Procedures***

A visual representation of the procedure can be seen in Figure 6. Ethical approval for the research was gained from CSSREC. Participants were contacted, informed of their right to freely withdraw, and informed consent was taken in the same way as detailed in section 4.2.3.3. The program was delivered in full over the

course of a day, two theory modules in the morning and the practical module in the afternoon. The order of delivery was consistent with previous delivery of the program during phase 1: participant completion of pre-program measure, delivery of both theory modules, delivery of practical module, and participant completion of post-program questionnaire.

Multiple sources of information were sought throughout the second stage of evaluation because no single source of information could be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective of the program. This is because a single source would only provide one perception, which may not reflect the reality of what is happening in the specific environment explored in this study (Patton, 2002). By using a combination of questionnaires, observations, interviews, and coach reflection logs, the researcher was able to triangulate different data sources, to validate and cross check findings. Patton (2002) was an advocate of this approach highlighting that triangulation increases validity as the strengths of one approach can compensate for the weakness of another.

The knowledge produced through interviews is heavily dependent upon the social relationship of the interviewer and interviewee. In an attempt to enhance this social relationship, the researcher agreed to meet each coach in an environment in which they felt comfortable and one that allowed them to speak freely. Whilst it was important to probe and pursue interesting knowledge it was also vital that the researcher demonstrated respect for the integrity of the coach. This was ensured by carefully structuring questions to elicit full responses from the coaches whilst using subtle probes where necessary, and at all times maintaining the focus of the

interview to avoid offending the coach through transgressing a line over which only friends and intimates can cross (Sennett, 2004).

As in phase 1, the pre-program measure and post-program questionnaire formed the first stage of evaluation, which provided an initial understanding of knowledge acquired by the coaches as a result of the program. Within one week of completing the program, a post-program interview was conducted with each of the five participants to gain a better understanding of what they had learned. At the end of the interview coaches were given a Coach Reflection Log to assist their planning and evaluation of sessions they conducted from this point on (an example can be seen in Appendix 14), and were asked to record sessions throughout the evaluation phase (3 months) after which these logs were collected by the researcher.

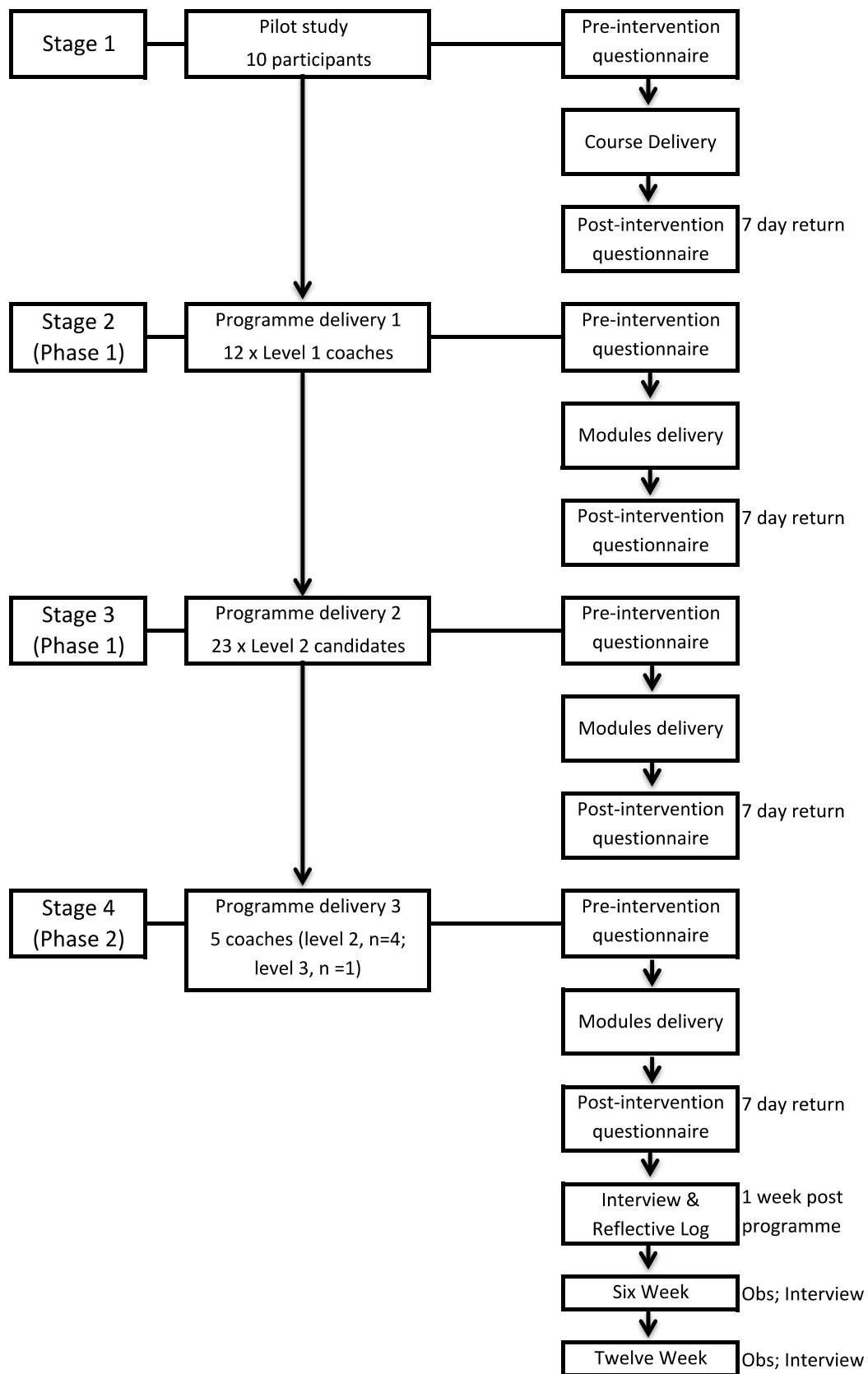
Two follow-up coach observations and two social-validation interviews were conducted with each coach; the first six weeks post-program, and the second twelve weeks post-program to explore: (1) how the participants integrated life skill development in their coaching practice (thus exploring the potential retention of both knowledge and practice); and (2) the participants' experiences of coaching life skills. Observations were conducted at training sessions with the players that the participants' regularly coached in order to provide the most accurate representation of their coaching practice. Interviews were conducted face-to-face. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes each, were audiotape recorded, and subsequently transcribed verbatim yielding 195 pages of text (an example of transcript can be seen in Appendix 15). Transcription was conducted immediately after each interview, with analysis commencing on completion of all interviews to limit the potential for one interview to influence another.

#### **4.2.5 Summary of Phase 1 and 2 Procedures**

Figure 6 provides a visual representation of phase one and two procedures where phase one focused upon exploring changes to participant knowledge and understanding as a result of the program and phase two sought to gain a deeper insight of this change in knowledge and the underlying mechanisms of these changes.

#### **4.2.6 Data Analysis**

Data was analyzed at the end of each stage of the data collection process to allow any necessary changes to be made to the program as required. Therefore, post stage 2, analysis of pre- and post-program measures was completed before the second delivery (23 participants; stage three) commenced. Post stage 3, analysis of pre- and post-program measures was completed prior to stage 4 of program delivery (five participants). Similarly, post stage 4, analysis of the immediate post-program interview was completed prior to the six week follow up observations and interviews which were in turn analyzed prior to commencement of the twelve week follow up observations and interviews.



**Figure 6** Delivery and Evaluation Procedure

#### **4.2.6.1 Pre-program Questionnaire**

Deductive content analysis involves analyzing the data according to an existing framework (Patton, 2002). The pre-program measure data was subject to deductive content analysis whereby participants' responses to each of the three questions/instructions were coded in Microsoft Excel under one of three headings that represented the questions/instructions in the document. That is, *definition*, *life skills*, and *integrated coaching practice*. This provided insight of each participant's existing knowledge and allowed for trends in the data to be identified.

#### **4.2.6.2 Post-program Questionnaire**

Questionnaire responses were manually inputted into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and organized with each question as a column heading, and each row representing an individual participant's responses. Each question response was assigned a number consistent with the Likert scale used in the questionnaire as follows: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = About 50/50; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree. Each respondent's questionnaire was inputted in turn until all detail had been inputted. Once entered, all data, was checked and re-checked until the researcher was happy that it accurately represented the questionnaire responses. In the final stage of analysis the number and percentage of respondents that selected each response were calculated, before visual representation of the results was developed.



#### ***4.2.6.3 Post-program interviews***

An inductive content analysis was conducted with the aims of engaging with the transcripts over time to capture the meaning coaches ascribed key events to and organize the raw data into a coherent and manageable form to evaluate the effectiveness of the coach education program. Analysis was conducted as follows: (a) transcripts were read; (b) transcripts were coded in Microsoft word using comment boxes to identify quotes that represented meaningful thought; (c) transcripts were coded in more detail using Microsoft Excel where first order, second order, and third order themes were established; (d) transcripts were re-read and coded to explore missing information in an inductive and deductive manner using the themes generated in (c); (e) themes were check with three experts in qualitative research; and (f) themes were finalized. For example, understanding of life skills development, program influence on participants perceptions of their role, participant learning as a result of the program, the potential challenges that participants could encounter, and strategies to overcome challenges were the themes that emerged from the interviews immediately post intervention.

#### ***4.2.6.4 Post-program observations***

The content of observation recording templates was coded in Microsoft Excel under the themes of: Life Skill, Intervention Strategy, Detail, and Message-Reinforce-Transfer (MRP). It was then possible to determine the main focus of the session being observed from a life skill perspective, whether any link existed between life skills, the frequency that each intervention type was used and more importantly detail given for each type of intervention. The final stage of analysis involved

identification of trends in coaching practice (e.g., use of certain intervention strategies to develop specific life skills) from the information recorded through the observation template.

#### ***4.2.6.5 Reflection Logs***

The reflection logs were subject to deductive content analysis whereby participants' responses were coded in Microsoft Excel under each heading that represented the questions/instructions in the document. This provided insight of each participant's experiences and allowed for trends in the data to be identified.

#### **4.2.7 Trustworthiness**

To increase the trustworthiness of the research, in line with the recommendations of Lincoln and Guba (1985) the same procedures were taken as in Study 1 (see Chapter 3, Section 3.2.5). Supervisor and peer debriefing sessions, and triangulation of sources were used to enhance the credibility of the data. In relation to transferability, this study has attempted to provide thick description and thus sufficient detail about the participants and context to allow the reader to judge whether the findings are transferrable to their own context. Consulting with three supervisors and a group of peer researchers who regularly challenged decisions relating to data collection and methodological logic enhanced the researcher's confidence in the trustworthiness of the process. In addition, the researcher maintained a reflexive diary throughout the duration of this study. The aim here was to reflect on the way in which the researcher potentially impacted on the design, implementation, and evaluation of intervention and therefore identify any

inconsistencies in the delivery phase across the different samples. Such procedures are thought to enhance the credibility and rigor of action research (cf. Evans et al., 2000). The dependability of the process was further enhanced as the pre-course measure, post-course questionnaire, questioning guides and the general structure of interviews, and observation-recording templates remained consistent across all participants. In order to increase confirmability, the interview data was coded in a way that allowed emergent themes to be tracked back to its original source (see Chapter 3). Verification of the researchers' interpretation of the participants' comments was sought through sending interview transcripts to the participants' to check.

### **4.3 Results**

This section will be presented in two distinct parts. Initially, the first part will provide some insight into the coaches' knowledge and understanding of life skills and their application in coaching practice prior to the intervention being delivered. Following this, evidence of their learning as a result of their participation in the intervention program will be presented. In the second part further evaluation of the program, consisting of five participants, will be presented (e.g., interview, observation, and coach reflection log findings). All data from all participants will be presented together with a sample of quotes from the interviews and reflection logs that best represent the thoughts of the participants have been taken in order to make the findings section manageable. The aim of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention program and not coaching effectiveness therefore no comparison between participants will be made.

#### **4.3.1 Pre-program Questionnaire**

##### ***4.3.1.1 Defining life skills***

To gain an understanding of participants' current knowledge of life skills prior to the intervention, all coaches were asked to define them. This allowed for pre- and post-intervention comparisons to be made and therefore provide some understanding of the potential impact of the intervention. It was found that many coaches had similar perspectives about the definition of a life skill. Responses included: "Skills you need and use in life", "Skills that you learn and develop in life that help you through life", and "A set of basic skills necessary to be able to deal with life and day to day problems." These definitions demonstrate a general understanding of life skills and their importance in sport and everyday life.

In addition to defining life skills some participants articulated the benefits of developing life skills. Emphasis was placed on the importance of life skills for being happy, successful, and productive. One coach's definition read, "Skills that make life easier and/or more enjoyable." Other coaches offered, "Skills that make you successful", and, "The skills you develop through life to help you succeed or become a better person."

##### ***4.3.1.2 Identifying life skills***

Prior to the intervention participants identified a total of 35 life skills. Respondents typically identified an average of four life skills each (with a range of between a low of two and high of eight life skills listed). These life skills along with the number of coaches who listed them can be seen in Table 4. Among the most mentioned life skills were communication, teamwork, confidence, and listening. The

breadth of life skills identified indicated some understanding from the participants prior to the intervention. However, some participants suggested a number of items (e.g., walking, catching) that implied some discrepancy in participant understanding.

**Table 4** Life skills identified by coaches

Life Skill	No. of Coaches
Being Conscientious	1/40
Commitment	1/40
Coping	1/40
Flexibility – Adaptable	1/40
Interpersonal Skills	1/40
Jumping	1/40
Motivation	1/40
Problem Solving	1/40
Reading	1/40
Self-Management	1/40
Self-Nurturing	1/40
Throwing	1/40
Time Management	1/40
Caring	2/40
Catching	2/40
Determination	2/40
Hopping	2/40
Interaction	2/40
Decision Making	3/40
Discipline	3/40
Empathy	3/40
Independence	3/40
Leadership	3/40
Social Skills	3/40
Walking	3/40
Patience	4/40
Respect	4/40
Running	4/40
Organization	5/40
Punctuality	8/40
Writing	8/40
Confidence	9/40
Listening	9/40
Teamwork	12/40
Communication	29/40

#### ***4.3.1.3 Developing life skills as a coach***

Prior to the intervention participants were asked whether they focused on developing young peoples' life skills within their coaching practice, and, if so, how the sessions might be structured. Three levels of responses were obtained: a stated focus on life skill development with no evidence of how; identification of specific life skills developed with no suggestion of how; and a focus on life skill development with some explanation of how these skills were developed.

Some coaches claimed to develop life skills in their players stating, "Yes, skills are not something you are born with and need to be developed." Another added, "You encourage people to use and develop as many different skills as you can, whenever you can." Further responses read, "Coaching the kids the basic skills of the sport", "As a coach you should look to develop young people in all aspects. Focusing on their life skills will make them a better person", and "Yes, if a child has good life skills then it makes it easier to progress to higher levels of skills."

In their responses, some coaches were able to identify specific life skills that they had placed emphasis upon in their coaching practice. For example, one coach responded, "I develop their decision making through different tasks and skill games." Another coach offered, "Working on basic skills for youngsters such as listening, good behavior, how to communicate, and developing co-ordination and basic motor skills", and, "You teach them about communication, and help them develop these skills."

There seemed to be a consensus among some coaches that life skills were caught and not taught, with sport being the teacher of life skills. Suggestions included, "By encouraging them to take part more so that they get to meet new

people and learn the most important life skills needed”, and “By encouraging them to take part in some activity as this will help them build on these skills”, and “By encouraging them to participate in more sport so that it gives them essential life skills at an earlier age. That’s what makes sport crucial.” However, one coach viewed the development of life skills differently suggesting, “Skills are not something you are born with and need to be developed by coaches, parents, and teachers.”

Giving players responsibility was a strategy utilized by two coaches for developing their players’ life skills. One coach explained, “Giving them responsibility within sessions to make their own decisions at a young age and start getting used to it/become natural.” Another coach offered, “Empower players – give responsibility, create problems to be solved, question players, ask about transfer.” This coach was the only one to mention the transfer of skills from the football environment, a vital component of life skills development. This would suggest a sound foundation of knowledge for this coach and a lack of true understanding of the 39 others.

#### **4.3.2 Post-program Questionnaire**

The post-program questionnaire provided feedback concerning the participating coaches’ learning following their engagement with the theory and practical modules. Generally, responses from the participants indicated that as a result of the intervention they were more knowledgeable about, and were better able to facilitate the development of life skills through the medium of football. Specifically, in relation to life skill definition, 97.5% of all participants responded that they were now able to define the term life skills more accurately than during the pre-intervention measure, whilst 92.5% suggested that the program had improved

their understanding of life skills. 72.5% (agree = 30%; strongly agree = 42.5%) of participants in this study agreed that a skill has to be transferred before it can be acknowledged as a life skill. The remaining 27.5% reported as being unsure. This highlights some progress from the pre-intervention period where only one participant demonstrated this understanding.

100% of participants stated that the program had demonstrated the importance of life skills to a young person's development, whilst 95% also reported that the learning expectations of players and parents were important to them as coaches. This appears to indicate that the findings of Study 1 provided powerful messages that may serve to inform the participants' delivery and overall coaching philosophy.

When questioned about their role as a coach, it was obvious that participants felt they could play a significant role in developing the life skills of their players with 97.5% of them agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement. Linked to this, 87.5% of the participants (57.5% = agree; 30% = strongly agree) stated that the program had demonstrated how life skills development could be integrated into their practice. The remaining 12.5% responded 'about 50/50'. Further, 85% of the participants stated that as a result of the intervention they felt better able to plan football sessions integrating life skills development, and 87.5% of coaches reported feeling more comfortable with introducing life skills development in their coaching delivery as a result of the intervention.

Whilst all participants' responses are presented together, findings between the three separate program deliveries (e.g., two in Phase one and one in Phase 2) were similar. This offers some support for the potential impact and efficacy of the



intervention program as the changes reported by participants were similar across cohort samples and across time.

### **4.3.3 Post-program Interviews and Observations (Phase 2 Evaluation)**

#### ***4.3.3.1 Immediate post-program interview***

From analysis of the immediate post-program interviews with Phase 2 participants five key themes emerged, namely: (1) understanding of life skills development; (2) program influence on participants perceptions of their role; (3) participant learning as a result of the program; (4) the potential challenges that participants could encounter; and (5) strategies to overcome challenges.

It was clear from these interviews that as a result of the intervention program the coaches had gained a sound understanding of life skills development and their role as a coach for developing the life skills and resilient coping behaviors of their players. Indeed, participation in the program appeared to have influenced coaches' perceptions of their role and as a result provided a new perspective. A coach explained:

I'm not really sure whether I was integrating life skills until a couple of weeks ago, so now I look at my teaching from a different perspective. I understand now they're communicating well as a group, now they're problem solving, so now, what I've tried to do is integrate life skills.

The coach continued:

I've developed a good understanding of life skills and I've recognized what I'm doing now. Before I started [the program] I thought everything was just football related, technical things. Now I've realized okay, these problem

solving skills, yes, they're football related but they use them on an everyday basis too. I learned how to integrate these different life skills into my practice.

Further, all coaches claimed to have a responsibility to do more than "develop football players." For example, one coach responded, "As coaches we should develop players' life skills because the kids that I coach are there because they want to develop as people, so if we're able to develop them as people as well as players that's definitely something that we need to do." Another coach identified that he and other coaches are influential in developing life skills, "I'm probably one of these key people that they're [players] going to be learning these [life] skills off."

Similarly, when asked what they had learned one participant added, "It's [the program] firstly obviously made me aware of what they [life skills] are, secondly how they are applicable, and then thirdly the impact the footballing side of things could have on the rest of their lives." One coach indicated that they had learnt how to empower players as a result of the program:

Definitely about the way one is going to interact with our players, so it doesn't need to be the coach telling them everything the entire time. What I noticed, it was great to see that a lot of the time the players were able to make decisions.

Summing up his learning another participant stated:

To be quite honest, before [the program], other than the most obvious like communication, I hadn't really ever thought of trying to involve any other ones. I never really saw a link between, so maybe it's all opened my eyes a

little a bit to how you can develop certain life skills - coping with challenges and stress - that maybe you wouldn't normally.

Becoming competent, player and parental perceptions, finding the right balance, understanding when to intervene, and influencing transfer of skills were identified by (Phase 2) participants as potential challenges that they may face when integrating life skills in their coaching practice in future situations. In relation to developing competence one participant explained:

I'm not experienced at all in doing that [integrating life skills], so as I said, it's going to be an initial period of me trying to overcome that, and there might be a few not so good sessions before I start getting the more valuable stuff out.

He continued to highlight the potential challenge of parents not understanding the approach to coaching by suggesting, "Parents may say my kid's here to have football training, not for you to tell him how to do all this different sort of stuff, he's not here for that, he's here to play football." A similar concern was highlighted by one of the other participants along with how his approach would be perceived by his players:

I've got my [under] thirteen's and if something breaks down, keeps breaking, breaking down and I'm saying, well, they've just got to figure it out themselves. If it keeps breaking down there's only a certain amount that players can keep working out, and there's a fine line where players can figure out for themselves, before they look at me and say I actually don't know what I'm doing.

This same participant was concerned with being perceived as being incompetent by not only his players but parents too, "Then the parents are going to

question me as a coach because they don't think I know what I'm doing." When the participant was asked about specific strategies that could be used to find a balance and directly intervene as necessary, allowing opportunity for players to experiment before intervening through guiding not directing was identified as a possible solution, "If it broke down two, three times, after that then I would have to step in and not tell them but guide them to the answer. I'd say, 'Here's a couple of options. Which one do you think would be better?'"

According to the participants, introducing the concept of life skills development to the parents would be a potential solution to the challenge of parent perceptions of the coach fulfilling their role. One participant commented:

I would say something before I was to start implementing it. I would explain I'm trying to implement these life skills [and] explain to them the benefits of doing it. I'm sure that there wouldn't be any problems, I don't see why there would be but as long as you make them aware of that.

Further benefits to engaging with the parents were highlighted, "You could just have little chats with the parents to see what they think they should be getting out of the sessions as well. Hopefully they will help reinforce the life skills too."

#### ***4.3.2.2 6-week post-program observations and interviews***

Observations at this stage were focused around the participants' use of the three-step process (MRT) to developing life skills, and the use of the six intervention strategies for reinforcing the life skill message as presented during the intervention program. Interviews were conducted following the observation to enhance the interpretation of the observation findings and provide an insight into the

experiences of each participant. Three main themes emerged from this process: (1) positive impact; (2) adaptation of approach to coaching; and (3) life skill transfer.

Table 5 illustrates the amount of times the participants were observed coaching specific life skills in phase two of the intervention and the different intervention strategies used to reinforce the life skill message.

**Table 5** 6-week observation – all coaches.

Life Skill	Intervention Strategy					
	1	2	3	4	5	6*
Communication	3	5	6	13	0	1
Problem Solving	0	5	0	6	0	4
Decision Making	0	1	1	15	0	3
Teamwork	0	0	3	1	0	0
Coping (pressure)	0	0	0	1	0	0
Accepting Responsibility	0	0	0	2	0	0
Taking Responsibility	0	1	0	1	0	0

- *See page 113 for intervention strategies*

#### 4.3.2.2.1 Intervention strategies

It would seem that the intervention had a lasting impact, at least in the short-term, as the intervention strategies modeled in the practical module were utilized by the participants. The most frequently used intervention strategy was reinforcing the message with the whole group. The coaches utilized this strategy to intervene on 39 occasions. Only on three occasions were messages reinforced based on observation of successful application of the life skill. Meanwhile, messages were reinforced with individuals on 12 occasions, and through group work, and use of challenges on 10 occasions each.

#### *4.3.2.2.2 Positive impact*

Participants reported positive and rewarding experiences of integrating life skills development within sessions delivered to their players. One participant offered an insight into his experience and the satisfaction of observing the impact of coaching life skills on his players, “It is nice when you can really see that you are putting something different into a coaching practice and you can see it paying off.” Reflecting on a specific session where leadership was a focus another participant described the impact that sessions were having on his players:

They [the players] all seemed to be very confident towards the end. They were all enjoying it and it was nice at the end of the session we had everyone collecting in everything, everyone putting away everything without any fuss, the first time it has actually happened and it just seemed like it was starting to have a bit of an impact on them which was great.

Through observing the participants’ coaching sessions it became clear that the players in the sessions started to develop and demonstrate other life skills that were not specifically the focus of the session but were related to those that the coach had planned (e.g., teamwork as a result of the session focusing on problem-solving). In relation to this, one participant recognized that this may happen as life skills are linked, “If I got them [players] in their groups of four and asked ‘ok so why is this not working’. Groups chat, therefore that is going to involve communication, team work, problem solving and organization all in that one little simple task.” Understanding that life skills are linked could be important for coaches to enable them to recognize the returns that they get from the tasks and challenges they set.

Specifically, recognizing the other life skills involved will enable coaches to be more specific in their session planning and delivery.

Another coach explained how players had demonstrated competence in demonstrating the life skills learned at training in a match, “Recently players have communicated more effectively and this has helped them when putting pressure on the ball and being able to have a high press. In the two recent games that has been one of our key strengths.” This would again suggest that the intervention has had a lasting impact on the coach, at least in the short-term (6 weeks).

#### *4.3.2.2.3 Adaptation of approach to coaching*

Participants reported a positive change in their approach to coaching as a result of the intervention program. More specifically, participants reported that adopting the 3-step process (message-reinforce-transfer) had provided better structure in their coaching sessions, and that stepping away from the action had provided more opportunities for players to experiment. One participant explained:

I think sometimes I would just start a drill but not mention anything about any skills. Whereas now I find myself making sure I put a lot of emphasis on the very start of a session so it [session and life skill focus] is in their head and then they can go away and use it. I’ve also found I’ve changed the end of sessions. I felt it was important for me to really consolidate what they had learnt. I spend maybe another five minutes and they discuss what they have learned.

For one participant stepping away from the practice has been important to encourage players to take responsibility:

I've stepped back more to limit what I say because essentially sometimes I'm guiding players through it and it's just a game of chess. So I step back, I let them figure out for themselves. I try and let them take responsibility. Ah so yeah there is a definite, definite change in the way I am coaching. But it's a positive one, one of which I want to develop further.

A second participant similarly acknowledged, "They are figuring it [the session] out for themselves now I am not intervening as much in sessions any more."

Finally, participants reported that players welcomed increased silent monitoring by the coach, "A lot of them [players] prefer when I'm not saying that much. They see more time on the ball which is essential now, and I can observe their application of the life skill." Finding a balance between technical instruction and life skill facilitation was identified as a challenge encountered by coaches. For example, one coach commented:

All of my drills were 100% focused on technical skills. I would say the odd thing like try and talk a bit more boys, try and get a bit louder whereas now I'm focusing on the life skills not focusing on the technical quite so much. I guess one of the hard things is finding the balance between the two maybe creating a drill that is going to challenge them technically whilst developing those life skills as well. I haven't really managed to do that consistently yet.

It would seem then that this coach understood the need for an integrated approach to life skill development. As with any new knowledge, an integrated approach to coaching requires focused planning and purposeful reflection to inform practical delivery. When completed thoroughly reflection can lead to identification of areas to



be developed and serve to guide the coach towards adapting their practice accordingly.

#### *4.3.2.2.4 Life skill transfer*

It was evident from observing the participant coaches at this stage (6 weeks post-intervention) that only one participant demonstrated use of the 3-step process (message-reinforce-transfer) fully. The other participants communicated the message and used intervention strategies to reinforce the message with no facilitation of the transfer away from football. During the interviews all of the participants recognized this and acknowledged the need to focus attention on helping their players to transfer life skills to other environments including at school and at home. One participant identified transfer as the priority, “I think that’s definitely the next step. I was just trying to introduce it [life skill development] so players are beginning to understand what these skills are.” Another participant offered, “I think for me it takes time. It takes a period of weeks to get to know your players well and for them to understand the life skills fully.” One participant talked of a strategy for facilitating transfer through engaging the players in reflection:

At the end of the session I’ve been getting them to evaluate their own performance and identify what they want to improve. But maybe I need to see if they can realize how they can take what they learn in a session and put it into a day-to-day life situation.

Explaining a similar strategy another participant stated, “I’ll start asking them are there any situations where this would become useful away from football?”

#### **4.3.2.3 12-week post-program observations and interviews**

During this stage the process conducted during the 6-week observations and interviews was repeated. Again the focus for observations was to examine whether the participants adopted, or continued to adopt, the three-step process, and whether they applied the six intervention strategies for reinforcing messages. Interviews were conducted after the participants' coaching session to provide a clearer understanding of the observation findings and provide an insight into the participants' experiences of coaching life skills. Three themes emerged from this process: (1) intervention strategies; (2) coach experiences; and, (3) life skill transfer. Reflective logs were explicitly sought. Table 6 illustrates the life skill focus of sessions and the intervention strategies applied to reinforce messages related to specific life skills as observed by the researcher.

**Table 6** 12-week observation – all coaches.

Life Skill	Intervention Strategy					
	1	2	3	4	5	6*
Communication	1	7	5	4	0	0
Problem Solving	0	2	7	0	0	0
Decision Making	4	1	3	2	0	2
Teamwork	0	0	0	1	0	0
Coping (pressure)	2	0	2	3	0	1
Coping (challenges)	0	0	0	0	0	1
Accepting Responsibility	0	2	2	1	0	0
Taking Responsibility	3	0	2	1	0	0

\* See page 113 for intervention strategies

#### *4.3.2.3.1 Intervention strategies*

A difference in overall coaching delivery was clear from that previously observed during the 6-week post-intervention period. Coaches appeared to adopt more unobtrusive approaches to coaching, consequently reducing stoppages in play and increasing player contact time with the ball. This was evident in the reduced number of interventions in comparison with 6-week observations (72 to 59), and the type of intervention with a more even distribution across strategies. Players appeared more actively engaged in the decision making process than previously, as the coaches shifted towards a role of “orchestration”.

The most common intervention strategy used was ‘reinforcing the message through group work’, with this strategy used on 21 occasions. Consistent with the 6-week observations, coaches’ reinforced messages with individual players a total of 12 times. The amount of whole group reinforcement reduced considerably from 39 (6-week observations) to 12 in these observations. This provides further evidence of a change in approach adopted by the coaches and illustrates further how the coaches’ role had become ‘facilitator’ as opposed to ‘director of learning.’

The number of instances where messages were reinforced through observation of successful application increased to 10. One possible explanation for this is that players had likely developed their competence over the 6-week period between observations and were better able to apply the life skills in the session. Another explanation lies with the art of ‘noticing’ of the coach, meaning the coaches might have become better at identifying successful application of the life skill as a result of their burgeoning experiences.

An additional intervention strategy, use of *cue words*, emerged from observations, with one coach in particular. In an interview the coach explained this strategy:

I use buzzwords. Cue words. I think cue words is an important one because again when you're asking players to communicate, they need to know what to say, and you know at a young age they're concentrating on so many other things associated with the technical aspect of the sport, that it's quite easy for them to forget that they've got to communicate, so by using cue words that also help them concentrate on the skill, you get them to kill two birds with one stone.

In general, the findings in relation to the use of intervention strategies from the 12-week post-intervention observations and interviews would suggest that the intervention seemed to have an enduring impact on the coaches' practice.

#### *4.3.2.3.2 Coach experience*

During the 12 weeks participants reported having had positive experiences and as result were successful at integrating life skills within their coaching practice. For example, one participant stated:

I love it [coaching life skills]. I absolutely love it. Well, before we started this I think it was a fundamental part of what I did quite naturally, but I think since I've been through the intervention and starting working with you [the researcher], I think I've started to understand more explicitly what I was actually doing to develop these [life] skills in place, and I've probably taken more time and paid more attention now to reinforcing those skills and really

considering how I help the players to develop them in a way that they can integrate into other areas of their life.

Participants felt that they had had an impact on their players' development not only as players but people too and this was demonstrated in their observations of players within session. Particular emphasis was given to how players had developed their communication skills and ability to adapt their communication to suit the context and people they are engaged with. One participant stated:

I've definitely noticed with one group that they've [the players] become far more communicative, they're [the players] willing to communicate, and they seem to know what sorts of things to say. I think with football players it's always the issue. Because when coaches ask players to communicate, we're not just asking them to talk, we're asking them to say the right things, at the right times, in order to help other players perform. So I've noticed a big upsurge in that, and a willingness to engage in those behaviors.

Further support was offered by another participant who suggested, "Players interact better with each other and with me as their coach now. They are more prepared to engage in discussion which has helped to develop their understanding." Additionally, players' ability to solve problems had developed as one participant explained:

Problem solving. I'll give the players opportunities to discuss within their small groups how they're going to be more effective in the team, and they get the opportunity then to figure those things out for themselves and put their plans into action.

These findings further support the efficacy of the intervention and would suggest that the impact on participants was positive and enduring.

#### *4.3.2.3.3 Life skill transfer*

It was observed, and supported through the interviews, that the session debrief was commonly used as an opportunity to discuss the transfer of life skills with the players. A period for the players to reflect to guide transfer was also highlighted. For example, one participant commented, “I think typically it would be afterwards, so they reflect on it, we give them feedback and then they think right, where am I going now? What can I go and do tomorrow?” Another participant supported this approach and offered an example of how he had done this:

Well there were six boys so there was three groups of two, and they just had to come up with the theme of the session [teamwork and communication] and to think about how they could use that in a completely different scenario, away from football. Some good ones that came out were you know, thinking, working together with someone in a class on English work.

‘Following up with players’ to gain an insight of their success in transferring life skills was identified as being an important factor in evaluating the impact of the coaches’ work. For example, one participant explained, “I guess one thing I’ve tried to do is remember what life skills we’d done in the previous week and then questioning them on it at the beginning of the next week.” Through use of questioning and analogies, one participant felt he was able to continuously emphasize the importance of transfer through the session as well as during the debrief:

Through questions, I tended to do it at the end of a session. But I find myself doing it more and more in a session now, and using an analogy. I think that analogy learning is a great way of getting them thinking about their own

practice really. I talked about listening as a skill the other day, and the way in which they might listen to certain things but not others, but how do they know whether they'll get the outcome that they expect, unless they listen in the first place.

Different to the 6-week period, it was clear that coaches were applying all aspects of the 3-step process and had now developed different ways to facilitate and influence transfer of the life skills to other domains.

#### *4.3.2.3.4 Reflective logs*

The reflective logs that participants were asked to complete to support their learning and development during the 12 weeks post-program were described by the coaches as being “massively helpful” in structuring sessions, and setting clear challenges for players:

It's [reflective log] been brilliant actually, because in preparation for my B license as well, it's helped me structure my sessions. It's [reflective log] helped me integrate different elements of particular things within my session and it's nice that I think there's a section where you have to outline challenges for players and then outline if they met these challenges... and I think that's a really, really important bit, because you've got to set them something, there's got to be a target for them within the session. So I've used that to kind of structure my sessions and say, right, this is your challenge at the beginning of the session, at the end of the session can we see this outcome, or similar outcome to this, and then you go from there.

Recording reflections to be reviewed over time was another reported benefit to using the reflective logs. One participant admitted that post-session reflection prior to the intervention and introduction of the log usually consisted of “thinking about the session in the car” but very rarely did it affect planning of future sessions. For example, one participant explained:

That’s probably been the most useful thing just thinking back, because you don’t normally think back on it [last session], you might have a quick think about it but you just get on with your day so if you actually write it down you have a little think for 10 minutes and can use it to help plan future sessions.

Constantly reviewing the reflective log was important to another participant who explained how this had enhanced his understanding of life skills development as a whole:

When I started I didn’t really have a clear idea, and now after the weeks I reflected on in my log book, I understand, you know, what a life skill is, I understand how important life skills are, I understand how you can integrate them into your practice, I understand how you can make your players aware of the transition of life skills from practice to off the field. So it [intervention] has helped me in a huge way, in both me to coach effectively and you know help my players use better life skills off the pitch as well.

It would seem then that the reflective logs had developed the participants’ ability to reflect which in turn enhanced their planning of more structured sessions with deliberate challenges for players. The overall efficacy of the reflective logs would suggest them to be an integral part of the intervention particularly to develop an enduring impact.



#### **4.3.2.4 Researcher's Overall Observations and Reflections**

Throughout the six-week observations it was clear from observing them coaching that the participants had gained an understanding of coaching life skills but had entered a period of familiarization. Certainly for four of the five participants, the approach to coaching was new and this was evident in what the researcher observed. Whilst it was obvious from the way their sessions were structured that these participants were attempting to use the '3-step process' and apply the new knowledge that they had gained from their participation in the coach education intervention program, they had not yet fully grasped the *reinforce* and *transfer* elements of the process. From experience as a coach educator this came as no surprise to the researcher as coaches can struggle to apply newly acquired knowledge. Quite often coaches need time to practice and from his own experience the researcher can relate to this as his approach has tended to focus on applying small elements at any one time as opposed to making drastic changes to his coaching practice. Neither was the dominance of reinforcing messages with the whole group a surprise given the traditional approach to coach development and assessment of coach education qualifications being concentrated on demonstrating technical knowledge often through the adoption of direct approaches where the coach can assume control over the session. One of the five participants appeared more confident and comfortable in his delivery and was able to competently apply the 3-step process. There was also a greater variance in the intervention strategies employed by this participant that allowed him to individualize learning for his players. This approach also limited the disruption to the flow of the session, increasing the players' time on task, and maximizing the opportunity for learning

within the limited time available for the session. It is possible that this participant's coaching philosophy was more conducive to coaching life skills than the other participants' philosophies, whilst being a more experienced coach may also have been a contributory factor.

There was a significant difference in the participants' confidence from the six-week to the twelve-week observations. All participants appeared more comfortable and natural in their delivery and it was clear that they had all practiced using the 3-step process during the period between observations. Despite there being obvious differences in the variation of intervention strategies used between the participants, all were able to apply the 3-step process and importantly focused more upon the transfer of the life skill away from football to other environments. This change in practice observed by the researcher may have come about as a result of: (a) further discussions between the participants and the researcher that may have provided clarity for the participants; (b) a change towards a more conducive coach philosophy; (c) participants familiarization of the process as a result of practice and experience; and/or, (d) the participants' players becoming more familiar with any adaptation to the structure and approach in sessions. For three of the participants observed, the transfer element was facilitated through individual reflection and group discussion. One coach initiated thought about transfer during the introduction to the session, at the same time as when the life skill message was communicated, and the final participant linked learning to transfer throughout the session through the use of reflection tasks.

The entire research process has given the researcher some valuable considerations for future intervention design and delivery. The observations have led

to the researcher questioning how best to model the application of the 3-step process. More specifically, as a result of the way in which four of the five participants approached adopting the model in practice the researcher will consider modeling its application in two parts: (1) focus on message and reinforcement; and, (2) facilitate transfer in addition to (1). This may make learning more manageable for the participants and allow them to be more structured in their approach, which seemed to be what the present participants desired. From experience another common feeling amongst participants who have attended coach education courses resonates to being left to 'sink or swim' after attending a program. With this in mind mentoring post-intervention may be a valuable addition to intervention programs as a support mechanism to assist participants with applying newly acquired knowledge.

As a coaching practitioner this study has highlighted the importance of a coach philosophy to do more than consider a team's formation. Indeed, it has become even more apparent that participant coaches have to value developing the person equally as much as developing the player. The observations have served to inform the researcher's own coaching practice with different approaches to sessions using intervention strategies providing new ideas. Most notably the study has unearthed a new intervention strategy that the researcher had not previously considered, 'use of cue words' but is now actively practicing. The reflective log has also been a valuable addition to the researcher as a coach and is currently being used to plan, deliver, and evaluate sessions in a more coherent and focused manner.

## **4.4. Discussion**

This section will be presented in two parts. First, the process of program development will be discussed. Following this, the discussion will focus on the evaluation of the coach education program's utility to educate and influence coaches' practice.

### **4.4.1 Design and Evaluation of the Program Development**

The main purpose of this study was to design a program of training to be integrated into coach education courses that aimed to educate and influence coaches to enable them to integrate life skills development within their coaching practice. This study extends the research in life skills development by demonstrating how a program can be developed that meets the needs of coaches within a specific context (e.g., grassroots football). The development of this program was informed by a consultation study (see Study 1, Chapter 3) with the key stakeholders in grassroots football. To the best of the researcher's knowledge no other life skills development program has been developed according to the specific needs of the participants for whom it is intended. Understanding the needs of the participants is important to the design and consequent success of an intervention in the same way that understanding the needs of the players has been stressed as an important component of coaching (e.g., Gould & Carson, 2008). In addition, this study provides detail of a stringent process that can be used to develop life skill intervention programs to suit any participant and context. More specifically, consulting with experts from the NGB and academia alike, over a number of thought out stages,

enhanced the methodological rigor of the research and demonstrated the added value of multi-agency collaboration.

#### **4.4.2 Evaluation of the Program**

The intervention program was delivered to grassroots coaches, following which an evaluation of the utility of the program to educate coaches and influence their coaching practice was conducted. To assess the utility of the program all participants completed a pre-program baseline measure to assess existing knowledge and understanding of life skill development, and a post-program questionnaire focusing on participant learning as a result of the intervention. A further evaluation, consisting of observations and interviews were conducted with a smaller sample of participants to assess the utility of the program to influence the participants' coaching practice (Phase 2 of the methods).

Despite demonstrating some understanding of life skills development and valuing their development, participants were unable to explain how they coached life skills during the pre-intervention phase. This finding was consistent with previous research that suggested youth coaches experienced considerable difficulty regarding how they taught life skills to their players, and they assumed that life skills would be an automatic by-product of participation (McCallister et al., 2000). This may have been a direct result of how coaches were educated in traditional coach education programs, and this ignorance (towards teaching life skills) further emphasized the need for coach education to focus on life skill development.

The results of this study indicate that the program was effective in enhancing coaches' knowledge about life skills. More specifically, participants reported that the

program had improved their knowledge of life skills whilst also highlighting the importance of life skills to a young person's development. Furthermore, participants viewed player and parent expectations as being important to them as coaches. This finding is particularly interesting given the discussion the researcher had with the participants during the program. The participants admitted that they had never asked players or parents why they attended football sessions, and thus demonstrates the impact and value of the learning expectations section (Theory module 1) and would suggest that the intervention may have influenced coaches' beliefs of what is important, and encouraged them to consult with the players and put them at the heart of everything when planning, delivering and evaluating sessions, thus altering the coaches philosophies. The data presented in the learning expectations section derives from the consultation study with key stakeholders of grassroots football (see Study 1, Chapter 3), and had also been powerful in stressing the importance of life skills development when presenting to the senior management of the partner organization (WFT). For example, candidates and staff of the partner organization alike were surprised that there was a greater expectation for players to develop life skills (e.g., social skills) than football skills.

After the intervention program participants believed that they played an important role as coaches in developing the life skills of their players, a view shared throughout the life skills literature. Indeed, coaches, through demonstration, modeling, and practice, play an influential role in coaching youth how life skills can be transferred to other domains (Gould & Carson, 2008). Additionally, Côte and Gilbert (2009) demonstrated that effective coaching required coaches to integrate multiple sources of knowledge (i.e., professional, interpersonal, intrapersonal), have

a clear understanding of the context in which they operate, and have a philosophy based on promoting the development of athletes. Professional knowledge focuses on content information from the sport sciences, pedagogical information and sport-specific information (Gould, 2013). Interpersonal knowledge focuses on the coach's skills in interacting with the individuals and groups with whom he or she works, while intrapersonal knowledge focuses on how well a coach understands him or herself (Gould, 2013). Further, Côte and Gilbert (2009) identified four target outcomes of coaching: (a) improving competence relative to the physical and mental skills needed for athletic performance; (b) confidence to execute those skills; (c) connection through communicating and fostering good coach-athlete relationships; and (d) character in the form of psychosocial skills and attributes, such as the ability to set and foster goals, and teamwork or moral values that may be developed through participation in the sport, such as fair play (Gould, 2013). This along with the findings of this study would suggest that coaches' need to be able to develop an appropriate learning environment and understand each person in order to connect with them before they can coach life skills, and continually reflect upon their practice to better understand themselves. In order to be able to effectively do this the coach must understand the context in which one is coaching, which could include athletes' age, goals, and stage of development as well as their motivation for playing (Gould, 2013). The intervention program in this study offered a context specific insight to participants (based upon Study 1 findings) whilst also encouraging them to further explore the context relating to their players. It would appear that in doing so the intervention program gave participant's vital information to inform their coaching practice such as the importance of planning sessions based on the

needs and wants of the young people, thus further strengthening the utility of the program. Further, Trottier and Robitaille (2014) reported that coaches who successfully developed their athletes' life skills seemed to promote life skills primarily on the needs of the athletes, in both their sport and their personal lives. Carefully selecting life skills in this way would potentially help athletes with understanding the transfer element as the importance in each domain would be clearer to the athlete.

Understanding the needs of athletes was central to the conceptual framework for life skills developed by Hodge, Danish, and Martin (2012). The model adds to the Life Development Intervention model by integrating aspects of Basic Psychological Need Theory, most notably the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness, and the notion of a need-supportive motivational climate (Danish & D'Augelli, 1983; Deci & Ryan, 2000), developed through an autonomy-supportive coaching style (Amorose & Anderson-Butcher, 2007). An autonomy-supportive coaching style where athletes are given greater independence can result in greater feelings of autonomy for athletes and enhanced self-determined behaviors such as effort and persistence (Amorose & Anderson-Butcher, 2007). Indeed, when basic psychological needs are satisfied, people experience positive psychological development and optimal psychological well-being (Hodge et al., 2012).

One of the key objectives of the program delivery in this study was to demonstrate to the participants how life skill development could be integrated into their coaching practice. Participants reported becoming more confident in their ability to teach life skills as a result of their participation in the program. It would



seem, therefore, that the program had a positive impact on coaches' ability to integrate life skill development into their sessions and as such addresses a number of issues previously highlighted as hindering coaches. For example, youth sport coaches have minimal coach training/knowledge (Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte, & Jones, 2005), are largely left to themselves to define their coaching philosophy (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004), and generally do not include specific strategies in their coaching plan to coach life skills (McCallister et al., 2000). The program in this study, therefore, appeared to be effective as it not only influenced the participants' coaching behaviors but also their coaching philosophy. As a result, behaviors became more enduring and consistent (McGladrey, Murray, & Hannon, 2010). Further, Trottier and Robitaille (2014) identified two main categories that determined a coach's motivation for coaching life skills, namely, the needs of the adolescents and the coach's own values. Consequently, through enhancing the participants' understanding of the coach's role, increasing their confidence to fulfill this role, and informing them of player expectations the program in this study seemed to motivate participants to want to develop their players' life skills.

In addition to providing a theoretically underpinned program, this research contributes a detailed advancement of the three-step process (cf. Bodey et al., 2009) for integrating life skills within coaching practice. The introduction and application of this model was important for two reasons. First, when properly applied, life skills development did not become detached from the sport. Second, the emphasis placed upon integration ensured coach buy-in particularly because it enabled the technical and tactical aspects of football to also be delivered.

Traditional coach education courses promote structured practices and require trainee coaches to demonstrate knowledge and competence in order to be accredited. As a result, in an effort to remain in control of the session coaches tend to adopt direct methods of delivery (Adams, Cropley, & Mullen, in press, 2016). This may explain the tendency that participants had to intervene with all players each time during the 6-week follow up stage, which may reduce the relevance of the information given to some players, thus restricting learning and development. Further, Hellison (1995) described how the pervasive professional model of sport and its emphasis on outcomes make it difficult to teach life skills, and coaches feel strain between the educational values of sport and the need to win games and develop athletic talent (Collins, Gould, Lauer, & Chung, 2009). It is possible then that the participants in this study felt torn between preparing their players to win games and developing them as people and players. Indeed, consistent with previous research, participants reported feeling this conflict particularly in relation to the values and expectations of parents. For example, Camiré, Trudel, and Bernard (2013) reported how some parents were more concerned with their child's career progression than the life skills and values players developed through being coached. Given the importance of parents to a child's development it would seem crucial for coaches to develop not only the coach-athlete but the coach-parent relationship too. The coach-parent-athlete triad has been referred to as the "athletic triangle" (Smith, Smoll, & Smith, 1989). The nature of the interactions between the members of this triangle can have significant consequences for the psychological development of the child (Davis & Jowett, 2010; Weiss, 2003). Indeed, coaches are in a position to channel parents' genuine concerns and good intentions in a way that heightens the

value of athletes' sport experiences (Smoll, Cumming, & Smith 2011). Further, parents can influence the quality of the dyadic coach-athlete relationship, as defined by feelings of closeness, commitment, and complementarity (Jowett & Timpson-Katchis, 2005). Smoll et al. (2011) recommended holding a pre-season coach-parent meeting to initiate open, healthy communication with them, improve parents' understanding of youth sports and gain cooperation and support for the approach taken by the coach for developing young athletes. Given the concerns reported by the participants in this study, this would seem a valuable approach to take to engaging parents to gain their trust in a philosophy grounded in coaching life skills, and support for reinforcing key messages.

Over 15 different strategies have been reported to be used to coach life skills. Whilst the existing literature provides a starting point for intervening the strategies reported are quite vague and offer little guidance for coaches on how to specifically apply these strategies. Therefore, the findings of this study, particularly those from the twelve-week observations and interviews, extend and enrich existing knowledge through offering specific direct intervention strategies that coaches can employ to reinforce life skill messages when coaching life skills. For example, (a) reinforcing the message based on observation of successful application; (b) reinforcing the message with individuals; (c) reinforcing the message through group work; (d) reinforcing the message with the whole group; (e) reinforcing the message with video footage; and, (f) using challenges. The emphasis placed on utilizing intervention strategies that reinforce messages is a unique approach to coaching life skills and one that ensures that life skills are taught as opposed to caught as a result of participating. This is consistent with some of the intervention strategies reported in the existing literature

(e.g., developing self-awareness, creating practice opportunities, and using teamwork; Trottier & Robitaille, 2014).

All coaches in this study were able to articulate how they used the intervention strategies to coach life skills and were able to provide concrete examples. Similar findings were reported by Gould et al. (2007) and Trottier and Robitaille (2014). This demonstrated a clear understanding of life skill development and of the coaches' ability to coach life skills, providing further evidence of the program's utility. The findings revealed that some intervention strategies (e.g., reinforcing the message through group work) were used more than others, whilst one (reinforcing the message with video footage) was not used at all. The coaching context is likely to be the main reason to explain this disparity as coaches responded to the needs of their players and selected the appropriate strategy in any given situation. Other contributory factors specifically related to the intervention strategy not used were: (1) not having consent of parents for using video footage; and, (2) coaches not having access to equipment to record and play footage.

The findings on the transfer strategies used by the participants in this study promote the use of reflective practice to facilitate life skill transfer away from the football environment and into other life domains. Researchers have suggested that athletes who are aware of their life skills and are self-confident would find it easier to apply life skills in other domains (e.g., Danish 2000; Gould & Carson, 2008; Mayocchi & Hanrahan, 2000; Petitpas et al., 2005). Through deliberately engaging players in reflective practice to develop their self-awareness participants of this study could help their players transfer their acquired life skills to other environments (e.g., at home, school). The participants in this study reported following up with

players in the next session as one way of assessing successful transfer of life skills. However, a coach can only do so much to facilitate the process of transfer and given the focus of this study was on the coaches' perspectives, without being with the players outside of the football environment it was not possible to examine whether or not the players were able to apply the learned life skill away from football. This has been a problem in previous life skills development research and draws further attention to the notion that life skill transfer is not a standardized or automatic process (Danish et al., 2004; Martinek et al., 2001) but can be influenced by many factors including: (a) the perceived value of the skill; (b) confidence in the ability to transfer; (c) comprehension of transfer; and, (d) support of transfer (Gould & Carson, 2008). It would seem that coaches would benefit from the support of parents in helping their children transfer life skills and report back to the coach on success of doing so. This again stresses the importance of the "athletic triangle" and the value of building strong coach-parent relationships. Reflection was shown to be valuable to the coaches too. From the researcher's experience the barriers to reflection reported by grassroots coaches often include time, knowing what to reflect on, and reflection being viewed as an onerous task. Further, because of the deeply ingrained nature of our behavioral patterns, it is sometimes difficult to develop a critical perspective on our own behavior (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). The relationship between reflective practice and self-awareness is a common theme emanating from the applied sport psychology literature where it has been reported that reflections have helped to increase self-awareness and evaluate the strengths and weakness arising from practice (Telfer & Knwoles, 2013). Further, the potential value of structured approaches to engaging in the reflective process has been discussed in

some detail (Neil, Cropley, Wilson, & Faull, 2013) where it has been suggested that structured reflective writing promotes the qualities, skills, and motivation required for effective reflective practices (Telfer & Knowles, 2010). Subsequently, a structured approach to reflection can help to identify key issues in delivery with a view to making improvements to future practice. It would seem that this was the case in this study, with relatively novice reflective practitioners. Use of the reflection logs influenced the way that coaches' structured sessions and the planning element of the logs provided the basis for reflection that informed future session planning and led to a more systematic approach in delivery with a greater emphasis placed on life skill development (cf. Knowles, Gilbourne, Borrie, & Neville, 2001). Continued engagement in this structured reflection would allow coaches to continue refining their practice and in doing so increase the likelihood of long term enduring impact as a result of this study's intervention program.

#### **4.5 Strengths, Limitations and Future Directions**

Coach education modules to educate coaches in what life skills can be developed and how the coach can integrate life skill development in their coaching practice have been developed, informed by the findings of the consultation study (see Study 1, Chapter 3). The program evaluation findings demonstrate that the intervention program was effective in enhancing participants' knowledge and understanding, and developing coaches that were able to competently apply this knowledge to coach life skills. However, it must be remembered that the intervention program was developed to meet the needs of association football coaches practicing within a specific context. As a result, caution must be taken when

attempting to apply this program with coaches outside of the intended context. In addition, one observer carried out all observations and therefore the reliability of observations may be questioned. Different pre- and post-intervention measures were used in this study, which may be another limitation. Despite not being able to rule out other influences on the participants' development and state for certain that the intervention was the cause of the improvement in delivery, the fact that the intervention was delivered on three separate occasions (twice in Phase 1 and once in Phase 2) and the findings from each were consistent suggests that the intervention did have a significant impact. Furthermore, despite demonstrating competence in their delivery of the three-step process for coaching life skills within sessions, the impact of this delivery on the players was not evaluated. Therefore, future research should focus upon evaluating the effectiveness of a coach (who is competent in coaching life skills) in developing the life skills of young players.

## **4.6 Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to design, deliver, and evaluate the effectiveness of a coach education intervention program for youth football coaches. The findings of this study contribute to the literature in the following ways. First, a program for educating youth coaches about the importance of life skills development (theory modules) and how to coach life skills (practical module) has been developed and can provide a framework for developing other programs. Second, the study has demonstrated effective intervention strategies for reinforcing life skill messages. These strategies have also shown to positively affect coaches' approach to coaching. Evaluation of these strategies and the three-step process revealed that life skills

development can be integrated within coaching practice. Finally, this study has demonstrated how resources (e.g., reflective logs) can be used to facilitate learning resulting in more self-aware coaches, leading to the development of sessions that are planned and delivered according to the needs of the players. In doing so, coaches' design sessions whereby the content is selected based upon player wants and needs, and delivered in a way that enhances player learning as opposed to coaches delivering content that they like in a way that suits their own delivery style. In essence, coaches that coach for the players and not themselves are developed. In summary, this study can serve to inform coaching practice with a focus on an integrated approach that develops players holistically rather than isolating technical, tactical and psychosocial development.



# **Chapter 5**

## **Study 3**

### **Coaching Life Skills: The Players' Perspectives**

## 5.1 Introduction

The healthy development of youth is a fundamental focus of society where efforts are made to promote positive personal growth and optimal functioning across almost every social domain including education, the family, and sport. Despite there being a number of programs developed that emphasize the promotion of positive outcomes associated with sport, there appears to be a shortage of research that has looked at the impact of such programs from a young person's perspective. Larson (2000) advised that youth reports on their experiences are a central component to the growth of developmental assets, where greater positive experiences are considered to be associated with the promotion of developmental assets. Consequently, the potential for a context (e.g., sport) to promote positive youth development is dependent on the experiences it provides.

Following an evaluation (from coaches' perspectives) of coaching practice assessing the application of an intervention program (Chapter 4) focused upon promoting life skill development it would seem necessary to now evaluate the effectiveness of this coaching practice from a player learning perspective to gain a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of the intervention program. The aim of this study, therefore, was to explore young players' experiences of grassroots football whilst attending sessions delivered by a coach who had been educated in coaching life skills (from Phase 2 of the intervention program in Chapter 4). In doing so this study will address the fifth objective of this thesis. In addition, this research will contribute to the field through providing a novel insight of the appropriateness of integrating life skills development within coaching practice in grassroots

association football, and the effectiveness of the intervention program for preparing coaches to successfully fulfill their duties as grassroots coaches.

## **5.2 Method**

### **5.2.1 Participants**

It was decided that a more thorough insight into the effectiveness of a coach to develop players' life skills could be gained through consulting with the players that participated in the coached sessions. A purposeful sampling approach was therefore used, which involved the selection of a relatively homogenous sample for whom the question was relevant (Patton, 2002). The sample was selected in conjunction with the coach (a participant in Study 2 of this thesis), with all participants being active members of the coach's squad. Four male players aged between 14-16 years of age volunteered to participate in a focus group to explore the appropriateness of the coach's delivery in coaching life skills, and the players' life skill development as a result. All participants were contacted via their grassroots club secretary and asked to participate.

### **5.2.2 Reflective Diary**

Reflective diaries were given to the participants immediately after the intervention (Chapter 4) had been completed. The purpose of the diary was to encourage them to reflect upon their learning from training sessions and match days. More specifically players were asked to identify what life skill(s) they had learned, how they had learned them, and where they intend to attempt to transfer the learning. Furthermore, opportunity was given for them to detail where and how

they have successfully transferred a life skill, and they were required to gain a witness statement from a significant other to testify their claim. As in Chapter 4, a structured approach to reflection was deemed most appropriate because the participants were new to the notion of reflection and this approach has been advocated in the literature (e.g., Telfer & Knowles, 2010). The reflective diary template can be seen in Appendix 16.

### **5.2.3 Focus Group**

As in Study 1 (chapter 3), focus groups were the most appropriate data collection technique because of their capacity to provide rich data from a variety of perspectives, and given the age of the participants allow a less intimidating environment to be created that would likely encourage participants to talk. Group discussions facilitated the emergence of the shared perceptions of what life skills are, whether the coach delivers sessions that develop players life skills, how these sessions are delivered, and if/how players have been able to transfer the learning from football to other life domains. A semi-structured questioning route was developed to help moderate the focus groups. Opening, introductory, key, and closing questions provided structure to the interviews. Opening questions sought to break the ice and encourage active participation. Introductory questions were used to introduce the general topic of discussion of life skills development through grass roots football participation. Key questions were the main questions that drove the research (Krueger, 1998). Key questions focused the discussion on the sessions experienced by the players, and the learning that had occurred as a result. Finally, closing questions were used to bring the discussion to a conclusion, and to ensure

participants felt they had had an adequate opportunity to talk about the relevant issues. Participants were also given the opportunity to add anything they felt should have been included in the discussion. The questioning route was checked and approved by two experienced researchers, and can be seen in Appendix 17.

#### **5.2.4 Procedure**

Following ethical approval for the research through CSSREC, participants were selected from a grassroots football club from a convergence area of Wales. The focus group was conducted 10 weeks after players had received the reflective diaries, and 11 weeks post-intervention (Study 2, Chapter 4). As all participants were under the age of 18 years, consent was gained from a properly empowered proxy with the participant giving informed assent (an example can be seen in Appendix 3).

A preparation booklet was developed for the study that comprised two main sections. The first section provided an introduction to the study and an overview of the study. The second section posed some questions to provoke thought and encourage participants to write responses in preparation for the interview. This preparation would serve to initiate discussion (Jones et al., 2007). Preparation booklets were sent to all participants at least a week prior to the focus group interview.

The focus group session was conducted face-to-face in a neutral setting to aid the flow of conversation and to avoid any environmental bias. The parents of the players were present in the room throughout, however were positioned out of earshot as to not interfere with the focus group. The session lasted for approximately 60 minutes, was audiotape recorded, and subsequently transcribed

verbatim yielding 24 pages of text. Transcription was conducted immediately after the focus group, following which analysis commenced.

#### **5.2.5 Data Analysis**

Inductive content analysis of data was conducted as follows: (a) reading transcript for familiarization; (b) coding transcripts in Microsoft Word using comment boxes to identify quotes that represented meaningful thought; (c) more detailed coding in Microsoft Excel leading to the generation of themes; (d) re-reading and coding the transcript in an inductive and deductive manner using the themes already generated; (e) checking themes with three supervisors who were experts in qualitative research (Miles & Huberman, 1994); and, (f) finalizing themes. The participants' reflection logs were subject to deductive content analysis whereby responses were coded in Microsoft Excel. This provided insight of each participant's experiences and allowed for trends in the data to be identified. The two points of data collection (focus group, reflection logs) were done in isolation.

#### **5.2.6 Trustworthiness**

The same procedures as those adopted in Study 1 (chapter 3) were used to enhance the trustworthiness of the research based on four criteria: credibility - supervisor and peer debriefing sessions; transferability – provide sufficient detail about the participants and context to allow the reader to judge whether the findings are transferrable to their own context; dependability – reflexive diary, consultation with three experienced researchers and a group of peer researchers; questioning routes and structure of focus groups remained consistent; confirmability – coding

data in a way that allowed emergent themes to be tracked back to its original source. Member checking to verify the accuracy of the transcript was conducted through sending the transcript to a selection of the participants.

## **5.3 Results**

This section is presented in four parts. First, the players' perceptions of whether or not their coach teaches them life skills will be presented along with examples of the life skills taught and the strategies used by the coach. Second, examples of successful transfer of life skills away from football to other environments are offered. Following this, the role(s) of significant people in supporting transfer is explained. Finally, evidence to demonstrate engagement in reflective practice and use of the reflective log is given.

### **5.3.1 Understanding Life Skills**

In relation to players' understanding of the term life skills, a general consensus implied that the players valued and understood the importance of learning them. Specifically, one player said, "Life skills are really important for our development as people, and [name: the coach] always tells us that being good people comes first." Another player added, "Our coach explained to us that we would be working to learn life skills as well as football skills because life skills will help us when we play other sports, at school, home and everywhere really." Furthermore, it was discussed how better people become better players, as one player explained:

[Name: the coach] talked to us about being good people and how we can become better people to help us improve as players. He told us that if we start to communicate properly, and solve problems then we will make better decisions when we play and the best players make the best decisions.

### **5.3.2 Life Skills Taught**

Players were asked to recall experiences of sessions and the specific life skills taught by their coach in these sessions. Communication, teamwork, problem solving, coping with challenges, and leadership were all identified. Participants discussed how communication had become the focus of a large proportion of the sessions. For example, one player stated, “We’ve done a lot of work on communication to help us on the pitch.” Another player offered further support for this, “We are quite quiet on the pitch and [name: the coach] wants us to talk more because it will make things easier for us and we can help each other when we are on the pitch.” Players recalled three strategies that the coach had used to develop their communication skills. “He [the coach] sets a condition that we have to give a message with every pass we play,” offered one participant. “He [the coach] tells us to be clear and specific with our message, like, play it to my right foot,” added another. ‘No talking’ was another strategy discussed by the players when explaining how the coach encouraged non-verbal communication:

The coach sets a condition where we are not allowed to talk for 2 minutes when we are playing a game. We have to find other ways to communicate, so we start clapping. Then, he [the coach] tells us we can’t make any noise at all so we have to find ways of signaling where we want the ball. It helps us to



find more ways to communicating with our teammates. It's really hard when you can't talk and can't make a noise and we have to keep thinking.

The players recalled how the coach had used blindfolds in a session. One player explained, "We did this really fun session and some players were blindfolded. We were doing team shape and we had to talk to the players who were playing next to us to make sure they knew where to move to." Another player elaborated:

It was when we were learning to play 4-2-3-1. The coach give a blindfold to every other player and the players who were not blindfolded had to guide them by talking to them. We had to be clear and specific to make sure that we helped our teammates to get into the proper position. We had to tell them which way to run and how far to run.

In relation to problem solving and teamwork, the players expressed how they were set scenarios and then had to work together to develop a strategy:

Our team were told we were winning 2-0 after the first leg but had just had a player sent off. We had to decide together what strategy we would use to win the game. The other team had to decide their strategy too. Then we played against them for 25 minutes. We decided to defend deep and play on the counter attack – we won 3-1.

Another example was also offered, "We play lots of attack vs. defense games and we have to work out a strategy to score or defend. We get back together [in our team] and reflect on the last period of play and change our strategy if we need to." Setting challenges were reported as another way in which the coach developed the players problem solving and teamwork skills:

[Name: the coach] gives us challenges in sessions like only playing with our weaker foot, have to make a set number of passes before we score, only allowed a maximum of two touches, allowed a maximum number of passes before we have to play forward. This means we have to solve problems ourselves but also as a team because if I have the ball and I can only play forward my teammates have to make sure they can receive a forward pass.

One player commented that sessions 'can be really tough' but they agreed that they were 'always fun' and made them better at decision making, problem solving, communicating, and working together as a team.

In relation to leadership, players reported two main ways that their coach helped them to develop these skills. The first example given was in relation to the coach giving players responsibility for kit and equipment:

We have a rota for training and matches so we all have jobs to do. Someone has to look after the footballs, someone the cones, someone the bibs. We all help them after the session to collect everything in but they are in charge of it.

Another player added that they were also assigned responsibility on match day, "Two of us have to put the kit out before the game and make sure it's all in the bag after it."

The second example discussed relating to leadership was how the coach alternated the captain in training and on match days. For example, "When we work together in training, say to develop strategies, the coach will say [name] is captain. Then he has to lead the talk in his group." It was added that, "The coach changes the captain then so that everybody gets chance to lead a group." Discussion around

leadership on match day included how players have started to lead team talks, “We change captains every game too. We all get chance to be captain of the team which is good. I like that because before it was always the same person but now we all get chance.” When questioned about the role of the captain, a player stated, “Lead the team, set the example, and encourage teammates.” One player commented, “The last couple of weeks we’ve been doing this thing where the captain gives the team talk before the game so when you are going to be captain you have to plan what to say to the boys before the game.” For one player this was an enjoyable experience, “I thought it would be quite hard but I really enjoyed it. I’d never been captain before but it really made me play better because I knew I had to set the example so I put extra effort in.” Another player agreed stating, “Yeah, it made me feel good that all the boys listened to me before the game.” Players also discussed how the coach had started giving them responsibility at half time, “The last three games [name: the coach] has said to us we have the first 5 minutes of half time to say what we think we did well and what we should do in the second half.” A second player contributed, “[Name: the coach] only says something if we don’t think of it. Last week he didn’t say anything at half time because he thought we were right.” Players were asked how they managed this as players, one explained, “Well, we [the players] decided the captain should speak first and then he picks the next player to talk, then that player picks the next one, and we just go on like that.”

### **5.3.3 Life Skill Transfer**

Table 7 illustrates how participants used the reflective log to plan for and record successful transfer of life skills learnt through football. When discussing life skill transfer one participant explained how he tried to use the life skill from training in another environment, “If we learn say communication then we try to use that at school or at home that week and tell [name: the coach] if we have done it.” Another participant explained, “We also use our log books to record what we’ve learned and then plan how we will try and use it, and we get somebody like our parents or teacher to write proving we’ve done it.”

**Table 7**

## Reflective Log: Planning for and evidence of transfer

	<b>Did you learn a new life skill? What life skill? How?</b>	<b>Where will you try and use this life skill next?</b>	<b>If you used the life skill in another environment explain how here...</b>	<b>Evidence of life skill transfer...</b>
Player A	Yes. I learnt leadership skills by being captain of our team and leading my teammates when we were playing and also leading group discussions.	I will try and use my leadership skills in school when we do group work in class. I will lead discussions with my friends.	I used my leadership skills in Maths class today. We were solving some really tough equations and no one knew what to do so I suggested something we could try. All the group started suggesting stuff so I took the lead and made sure everybody had chance to explain their idea. We managed to work them all out.	I was really impressed with the way [Name] used his initiative today and led his group. He was mature in his approach and ensured each member of the groups' input was listened to and valued. His leadership brought structure to the groups work and it was obvious that the group responded well to his leadership. Well done!
Player B	In the session tonight we learned about communication and how important it is in football and life. We worked on it through giving simple messages when we pass the ball and signalling where we want the ball to be played.	I'm going to be better at communicating in school with my friends and the teachers.	In English today we had to read a poem and then share with the rest of the class what we thought the meaning behind it was. I was confident when I was speaking and I think I was really good at explaining what the poet meant and what he was expressing.	[Name] articulated his thoughts and feelings about today's poem really well. He was clear in his explanation and brought his thoughts to life with the way he described and explained the meaning.

The players described how the coach helped facilitate the transfer of life skills. Indeed, one participant commented, “Well he [the coach] asks us to try and use the life skill that we have learned in training somewhere else like in school.”

Another player explained in more detail:

Our coach tells us what life skill we are going to learn today and asks us why we think this is important in football. Then he [the coach] asks us to think about other places where we can use it. Then, at the end of the session he [the coach] asks us what we have learnt and gets us to think about where we are going to try and use the life skill. Before we leave the session we go up and tell him where we are going to try to use it.

Another example informed how the coach introduced the life skill prior to the session to allow opportunity for the players to think about the life skill prior to attending training sessions, “Sometimes [name: the coach] will tell us what we are going to work on a Saturday after the game. He asks us to think about it before we come training.” Supporting this, another player added how they liked to know what they’d be doing before training, “I like it when he [the coach] tells us on a Saturday because I like to know what we are doing so I can think about the session and plan it in my head.”

#### **5.3.4 Significant People Supporting Transfer**

Parents were identified as the most significant people for supporting the participants’ life skills away from football. One player stated, “It’s our parent that see us the majority of the time so they are important.” Another player continued, “I think our parents are our role models and they really influence us.” It was explained

how the coach had met with the parents to gain their support for reinforcing messages to assist the transfer of life skills:

[Name: the coach] held a parent's evening and explained to us [players], and our parents that he was going to try and develop us as people as well as players. He [the coach] told us about life skills, what they were and why they were important and then explained that we would be working to develop them in every session from now on. He asked our parents to support what he was going to do because he doesn't see us outside of football. That's when we got the reflective logs to record everything in.

The players themselves had a responsibility to ensure that their parents were aware of the life skill focus for that week. The coach had explained this to them, "He [the coach] asked us to tell our parents what we were working on each week to help them know what skill we were trying to use." For this player, the teacher was an important person as they had provided witness statements in his reflective log:

Quite a lot of my witness statements for when I have transferred life skills have come from my teachers. I explained to them what we were doing in football and now some of them ask me what life skill I'm focusing on before the lesson starts.

## 5.4 Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to explore young players' experiences of grassroots football whilst attending sessions delivered by a coach who had been educated in coaching life skills. Findings demonstrated how the players had a sound understanding of the importance of life skills to their development and repeatedly stated the importance of them developing as people before players. The players reported how the coach had explained this to them. This would suggest that the coach recognized the importance of his role in developing life skills and made a conscious effort to teach life skills to his players. Support for this approach can be found through one of the key findings of Camiré, Forneris, Trudel, and Bernard's (2011) study that explored strategies for helping coaches' facilitate positive youth development through sport. Camiré et al. (2011) reported that coaches made efforts to educate their athletes on basic fundamental concepts such as: (a) What is a life skill?; (b) What are examples of life skills?; and, (c) Why are life skills important? Through outlining to the players that the primary focus of sessions would be to develop them as people, the coach was outlining his philosophy that was aligned to the club's recently developed mission statement. Research in high school sport has shown that the awareness of mission statements varied significantly across the different groups of stakeholders with administrators having the greatest level of awareness followed by the coaches, parents, and finally athletes (Forneris, Camiré, and Trudel, 2012). The differences in awareness across stakeholder groups can be problematic as mission statements are tools used to communicate an organization's uniqueness, purpose, and objectives (Bart & Tabone, 1999; Camiré, Trudel, & Forneris, 2009a). In relation to life skills, the variation in awareness would impact



upon a player's ability not only to learn a life skill but also to transfer it away from football. It was obvious from the focus group that the coach was clear in his approach and subsequently able to influence players. The players had bought into the idea of developing life skills and their enthusiasm in the focus group suggested that they were motivated to do so. Communicating his intentions from the outset was fundamental to persuading players that this approach would benefit them both as people and players. It is critical that any coach that intends to develop the life skills of their players shares their intentions and the benefits with the players for two reasons. First, failure to do so may lead to a lack of player engagement, and as a result commitment to learning. Second, how can a player be expected to learn if they are unaware of what they are learning? Without being aware players cannot understand, and without understanding they cannot apply or indeed transfer learning from one environment to another (cf. Danish & Nellen, 1997).

Perceptions of the approach adopted by the coach represented a player centered coaching philosophy. This is consistent with other studies, for example, Camiré, Trudel, and Forneris' (2012) findings indicated that the coach did not just set out to coach his players the technical and tactical aspects of football. Rather, his philosophy was well established and geared towards using football as a development tool to holistically develop players. Further, these findings support those of Collins et al. (2009) who found that high school football coaches have well-established coaching philosophies that recognize the importance of coaching life skills. These results also support the second component in Gould and Carson's (2008) model and indicate that a well-articulated philosophy is a crucial element of a coach's repertoire (Camiré et al., 2012). Given that the intervention program (see chapter 4)

encouraged principles to promote a player centered approach to coaching, teaching social skills, personal control, and leadership were a fundamental focus of the program it would seem that the program had influenced the development of the coach's philosophy. Another important element in the second component of Gould and Carson's (2008) model consists of the strategies used by coaches to teach life skills. Youth sports coaches often struggle to articulate the strategies they use in their coaching practice to coach life skills (Lacroix, Camiré, & Trudel, 2008; McCallister et al., 2000). However, Camiré et al. (2012) reported that coaches in their study were able to provide several examples of strategies they used in their coaching practices designed to coach life skills. Specifically, coaches used strategies such as key words, peer evaluations, taking advantage of teachable moments, and volunteer work. Players in the present study recalled how the coach created an environment with conditioned practices that required the players to practice the life skill. For example, through blindfolding some players it became crucial for their teammates to communicate with them.

A second strategy recalled required players to work in small groups to develop strategies in relation to a challenge presented in a scenario set by the coach. Finally the coach assigned specific responsibilities to players to maximize the opportunity for them to develop life skills. These are all strategies modeled as part of the practical module (Chapter 4) and would suggest that the intervention program had had an enduring impact on the coach. Further evidence of the intervention programs impact comes as a result of discussion of how the coach facilitated the transfer of life skills. It would seem that the coach intentionally set out to facilitate the transfer of life skills through utilizing a systematic approach to life skills. More

specifically, the participants reported that thoughts about the transfer of the life skill began in the introduction to the session when participants were asked to consider the importance of the life skill to football and how it may be used in other domains. Then, during the session debrief participants were asked to inform the coach specifically where and how they intend to transfer the life skill over the forthcoming week, reporting back to the coach at the next session. These findings extend the work of Gould et al. (2007) and Camiré et al. (2012) highlighting new strategies used by coaches, adding to our understanding of a successful approach to coaching life skills and the transfer of life skills.

In addition to extending past research, the strength of this study lies in giving the players a voice by documenting their perspectives on the intentional coaching of life skills. In doing so, this study builds upon the previous evaluation from the perspective of the coaches of the effectiveness of the intervention program to develop coaches who were able to integrate life skills coaching within their practice (see Chapter 4) and thus provides further support for the efficacy of the intervention program. The participants' validated the strategies used by the coach and were able to articulate how these helped them learn life skills such as communication, teamwork, problem solving, and leadership that are useful in football as well as other environments, most notably at school. These findings, therefore, support the third and fourth components of Gould and Carson's (2008) model by demonstrating that coaches implement strategies to coach life skills because of their value and importance in other areas of life outside sport.

Previous research has contended that some youth have difficulty in transferring life skills away from sport (e.g., Camiré et al., 2012; Martinek, Schilling,

& Johnson, 2001). Indeed, a number of coaches and student-athletes have suggested that transfer might only occur for student-athletes who had attained a certain level of maturity, and for some student-athletes transfer might only occur at later stages in their lives (Camiré et al., 2012). Furthermore, existing literature on youth development through sport has proposed the notion that life skill transfer is not a standardized and automatic process (Camiré et al., 2012; Danish et al., 2004; Martinek et al., 2001). The fifth component of Gould and Carson's (2008) model highlighted that many factors influenced life skill transfer such as: the person's perceived value of the skill; confidence in their ability to transfer; understanding of transfer; and, support for transfer. This study has demonstrated the importance of the coach, the influential role they play, and how they can promote the transferability of life skills from a footballing context to other life domains. The coach (in this study) had been successful in developing the players' understanding of transfer, demonstrated in the way the players were able to articulate successful transfer of life skills. Through recognizing parents as significant people to support the players with transferring life skills, the coach communicated his intentions to them, asked for their help, and explained how they could support their children through consistently reinforcing key messages delivered by the coach.

These results contribute to the literature and demonstrate the central role parents and coaches play in supporting youth participation in sport (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009). Consequently, through engaging with the parents the coach was successful in applying the fifth component of Gould and Carson's (2008) model and as a result was able to facilitate the transfer of the life skills that participants had been coached. These findings are of value to coaches as they can be used to inform

the means by which they can develop meaningful relationships with both their players and parents. Such an approach will result in a consistent and collaborative development of life skill development, maximizing the opportunity and enhancing the possibility of success.

Various authors have advocated that athletes who are aware of their life skills would find it easier to apply these life skills in other situations (e.g., Danish, 2000; Gould & Carson, 2008; Mayocchi & Hanrahan, 2000; Petitpas et al., 2005; Trottier & Robitaille, 2014). The reflective diary was given in an effort to develop the players' self-awareness and promote the value of planning for transfer. Previous research has advocated the use of diaries/journals when teaching life skills because journals are a catalyst that makes young people aware of things and provides an alternative approach for kids to express themselves than the usual verbal means (Camiré et al., 2013). Further, the diary used in this study enhanced the participants competence to transfer through encouraging them to reflect upon their learning from the session in order to plan where they might apply the life skill, and how they intend doing so.

#### **5.4.1 Practical Applications**

Having received training through the intervention program (Chapter 4), the coach was made aware of players' expectations and motivation for playing football. This is in line with Gould and Carson's (2008) model that highlighted the need for coaches to be aware of their players pre-existing make up to develop philosophies and strategies designed to coach life skills that meet the needs of the players. The players discussed how the strategies employed by the coach led to numerous

positive outcomes (e.g., opportunity to develop leadership skills) and enabled them to transfer life skills learned in football to other domains such as at school. From these findings, a number of practical recommendations can be made. First, coaches should be guided to develop philosophies based on developing people before players. Second, coaches must communicate their intentions to their players if they are to fully engage them, and enhance their awareness of what they are learning, why it is important, and how it relates to football and life. Third, life skills must be intentionally taught and coaches must have strategies to be used in their coaching practice to promote positive development of players. Finally, coaches must facilitate the process of life skill transfer, and connect with the players' parents to enable them to support the transfer in other domains outside football.

## **5.5 Strengths, Limitations and Future Directions**

The findings of this study represent the perspectives of the players in relation to how their coach used football as a vehicle for teaching them life skills. This study provides further support for the efficacy of the intervention program. First, it would seem that the coach successfully integrated life skill development into their coaching, as players were able to articulate how the coach had facilitated the development of specific life skills. Second, this study has shown evidence of the players' competence in transferring life skills away from football, supported by a witness statement from a significant person within the player's support network (e.g., parents, teachers).

It is also important to recognize the limitations of the study. First, the players were recruited by their coach, which may have led to a selection bias and it cannot

be assumed that all players within the squad shared the perceptions of those who participated in this study. Second, the coach had received training via an intervention program specifically designed to develop coaches who were able to integrate life skill development within their coaching practice. The findings of this study only represent the practice of one coach. Therefore, it should not be inferred that all coaches that have been educated through the intervention program in Chapter 4 share the same philosophy, coach in the same way, and achieve the same results. Third, participants were not examined before and after the 10 week coaching sessions and therefore it cannot be guaranteed that it is the coach's influence that has had the overall impact. Furthermore, an interesting insight could be obtained through a comparison of players' perspectives between those being coached by coaches who have received the intervention program training and those who have not. This would provide a better insight into the impact of coaching life skills and the utility of the intervention program for influencing coaching practice.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

Despite its limitations, this study offers unique findings and contributes to the emerging literature on life skill development through sport. In summary, findings from this study revealed how the coach understood his players' expectations and motivations, had a well-developed philosophy, communicated his intentions for their learning to the players, used strategies to coach life skills and facilitate the transfer of life skills, and engaged the parents in their children's learning to enable them to support the transfer of life skills. It is important that youth coaches realize the importance of: (a) understanding their players' expectations and motivation; (b)

having a philosophy that fulfills these expectations; (c) having strategies for coaching and transferring life skills; and, (d) knowing the key people to support life skill transfer. Coaches who invest their time in developing people before players can have a lasting influence on their players' development. Players will remember coaches for how they made a difference to their lives more than their football.



# **Chapter 6**

## **General Discussion**

## **6.1 Introduction**

The research presented in this thesis was funded by the Knowledge Economy Skills Scholarship (KESS) program. KESS is a major European Convergence program for the Higher Education (HE) sector in Wales that supports collaborative research projects with external partners based in the convergence area of Wales (West Wales and the Valleys). This research was conducted in collaboration with the Welsh Football Trust (WFT), the governing body for grassroots football, player development, and coach education in Wales.

The aim of this research was to design, implement, and evaluate a life skills and resilient coping development plan for educating coaches within a football coach education program. Five objectives were set to structure the research and contribute towards effectively delivering the aim. Specifically the objectives of the research were: (1) to identify gaps in current provision in relation to teaching life skills and developing resilient behaviors; (2) using the information gained, to design and integrate a football-related life skills and resiliency training plan into existing UEFA endorsed youth coaching licenses delivered by the WFT; (3) to educate coaches to be able to deliver coaching sessions that promote the development of life skills and resilient coping behaviors; (4) to evaluate the effectiveness of the training program on coaches' ability to deliver practical coaching sessions that promote life skills and resilient coping behaviors; and, (5) to evaluate the impact of developing coach knowledge, and delivery skills on the life skills and resilient behaviors learned by the participant coaches' players.

The first step towards achieving the thesis' aim was to address the issues surrounding the conceptualization of life skills and resilience, including their

definition and operation through a review of the existing literature. Following the literature review the aim of Study 1 then was to consult with the key stakeholders of grass roots football in Wales in order to identify gaps in current provision by football coaches in relation to the teaching of life skills and the development of resilient coping behaviors in adolescents. More specifically, the research set out to: explore context specific definitions of life skills and resilience; highlight the characteristics of resilient people; identify which life skills are important to a young person's development and which life skills can be developed through engagement in grass roots football; gain an understanding of the learning expectations of parents and players; and, determine the significant people for facilitating the development of life skills in young footballers.

Study 1 provided a context specific definition of life skills and identified six life skill themes that could be developed by young people through grass roots football participation. Developing social skills was highlighted as a major motivating factor for young people who play football, even more so than learning football skills. Finally, the findings of this study emphasized that whilst the coach was an important person of influence over young people when developing life skills, a collaborative approach was needed with other significant influencers including parents, peers, and extended family. These findings could serve to better prepare football coaches in Wales for the reality of coaching in grass roots football through the development and delivery of coach education modules that enhance theoretical understanding and practical application of life skills and resilient behavior development.

Informed by the findings of Study 1 the aim of Study 2 was to design, deliver, and evaluate the effectiveness of a coach education intervention program for youth

football coaches. The key findings of this study were as follows. First, a program for educating youth coaches about the importance of life skills development (theory modules) and how to coach life skills (practical module) was developed. Second, effective intervention strategies for reinforcing life skill messages were demonstrated, which were also shown to positively affect coaches' approach to coaching. Third, evaluation of these strategies and the three-step process for coaching life skills revealed that life skills development could be integrated within coaching practice. Finally, this study has demonstrated how resources (i.e., reflective logs) can be used to facilitate learning resulting in more self-aware coaches, leading to the development of sessions that are planned and delivered according to the needs of the players. The findings from this study can serve to inform coaching practice with a focus on an integrated approach that develops players holistically rather than isolating technical, tactical and psychosocial development.

Whilst Study 2 demonstrated the impact of an intervention program on coaches' knowledge and practical application, the next logical step was to evaluate the impact of the coaches post-program. Consequently, the aim of Study 3 was to examine the impact of coaching life skills from the perspective of the players participating in sessions delivered by a coach who had graduated from the intervention program. Findings demonstrated that the players had a sound understanding of the importance of life skills to their development and repeatedly stated the importance of developing as people before players. This understanding was a result of the coach knowing their players' expectations and motivation, having a philosophy that was conducive to coaching life skills and fulfilling his role in relation to player expectations, having strategies for coaching and transferring life

skills, and knowing and involving the key people to support life skill transfer (e.g., parents).

## **6.2 Discussion**

The following section will discuss the findings of this thesis in relation the existing theory and previous research, focusing on the contribution that they make within the area of life skill development. A model for coaching life skills will then be presented in Figure 7 that can be used to inform and shape coaching practice. This chapter then concludes with the discussion of the practical applications born from the thesis findings, the thesis limitations, and directions for future research into the area of life skill development.

The perspective adopted in this thesis was that, within the context of sport, youth can learn life skills and values that enhance their development and their ability to succeed in future endeavors (Danish, Forneris, Hodge, & Heke, 2004; Forneris, Camiré, & Trudel, 2012; Holt, 2008). An addition to this perspective was the recognition that sport, in and of itself, does not produce positive developmental outcomes (Petitpas et al., 2005). Instead, sport is a vehicle for developing life skills. A further important consideration to this perspective is that to be classified as a life skill, the skill must be transferrable to other life domains (Camiré et al., 2012). Coaches, through demonstration, modeling, and practice, play an influential role in coaching youth how such skills can be transferred to other areas of life (Gould & Carson, 2008). The highlights of this thesis relate to three key findings: (a) the need to educate coaches; (b) approaches to encouraging transfer; and, (c) the importance of developing context specific programs.

### **6.2.1 The need to educate coaches**

The role of a youth sport coach is complex and will likely vary according to a myriad of contextual factors (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004). Unlike practitioners in other fields, youth sport coaches do not have extensive formal training or highly structured work environments that would provide clear examples of how they should frame their role (Gilbert & Trudel, 1999). Furthermore, existing coach education programs are deemed by many as being 'fine in theory' but divorced from the thorny reality of practice (Jones, 2007). The findings of this thesis support this claim, as coaches felt unprepared for carrying out their role as coach education courses had given them practices that can be used as opposed to showing them how to coach. Consequently, youth sport coaches are left largely on their own to construct their approach to coaching (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004). This is problematic because the role of the coach is seen as going beyond teaching physical skills. Indeed, the views of the role of coaches in youth sports include affective and cognitive consequences, ethical issues, and the goal of developing autonomous learners (Bergmann-Drewe, 2000; McCallister, Blinde, & Weiss, 2000; Thompson, 1995).

Further, positive youth development is seen as a key component of youth sports participation and it is widely acknowledged that youth sports coaches are key people for developing young people's life skills (Gould & Carson, 2008). If sport really is a vehicle for developing life skills and life skill development should be a fundamental part of youth sport, there is a clear need to educate coaches rather than take for granted that coaches do this naturally. It is also important that coaches are supported to reflect on their practice (e.g., using reflective logs) to continue their development.

The findings of this thesis provided support for the notion that coaches needed to teach athletes in order for them to gain positive benefits (Danish et al., 1993; Gould et al., 2005), and offers a more comprehensive outlook of the role of the coach. Specifically, previous life skill intervention research has consisted of programs being delivered by researchers (e.g., Danish, 2002; Papacharisis et al., 2005). This thesis educated coaches who then were able to demonstrate that coaches can effectively integrate life skill development in their coaching practice.

Finally, previous research has explored how life skills are coached only from the coaches' perspective (Collins et al., 2009; Gould et al., 2006, 2007). In contrast, this thesis considered the researchers observations in addition to coach perceptions of their delivery and the perspectives of the players being coached. The multiple perspectives studied add to the credibility of the findings and allow for a stronger case to be presented of how life skills can be coached therefore informing the design of coach education programs.

### **6.2.2 Approaches to encouraging transfer**

The importance of transfer in life skill development is not new. In fact, it is widely reported in the literature that a skill must be transferrable from one environment to other life situations to be considered a life skill (Danish & Nellen, 1997; Gould & Carson, 2008). Due to their limited influence over young people outside of the sports environment, the transfer element of life skill development is a major challenge for a coach that requires interaction with others (e.g., parents).

Whilst previous research has begun to assess how coaches teach life skills, and have considered athletes' perspectives (e.g., Holt et al., 2009; McCallister et al.,

2000), to the best of the author's knowledge, this body of investigation was the first to have considered a more comprehensive outlook of life skills development by acknowledging the need for a collaborative approach amongst those in a position of influence over young people. More specifically, this thesis has demonstrated the importance of working with key stakeholders including parents and teachers to enhance young people's development. Coaches and parents comprise separate, but related parts of a triangle formed with a young athlete (Horn, 2011) and share some roles in the facilitation of an optimal youth-sport environment (Keegan, Harwood, Spray, & Lavalley, 2009; Keegan, Spray, Harwood, & Lavalley, 2010). Parents can serve as the interpreters of their children's experiences (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). This means that parents should be cognitively and emotionally prepared to help their children view their sport experiences in relation to positive competence and a sense of fun (Horn, 2011). This thesis has extended current life skill development literature by demonstrating how a coach might engage with parents. This allows coaches to inform them of ways in which key messages from coaching sessions can be reinforced at home and how parents can support their children in making positive, rather than negative attributions for their successes and failures when reflecting upon their experiences in football and life (Henderson & Lepper, 2002; Schunk, 1995).

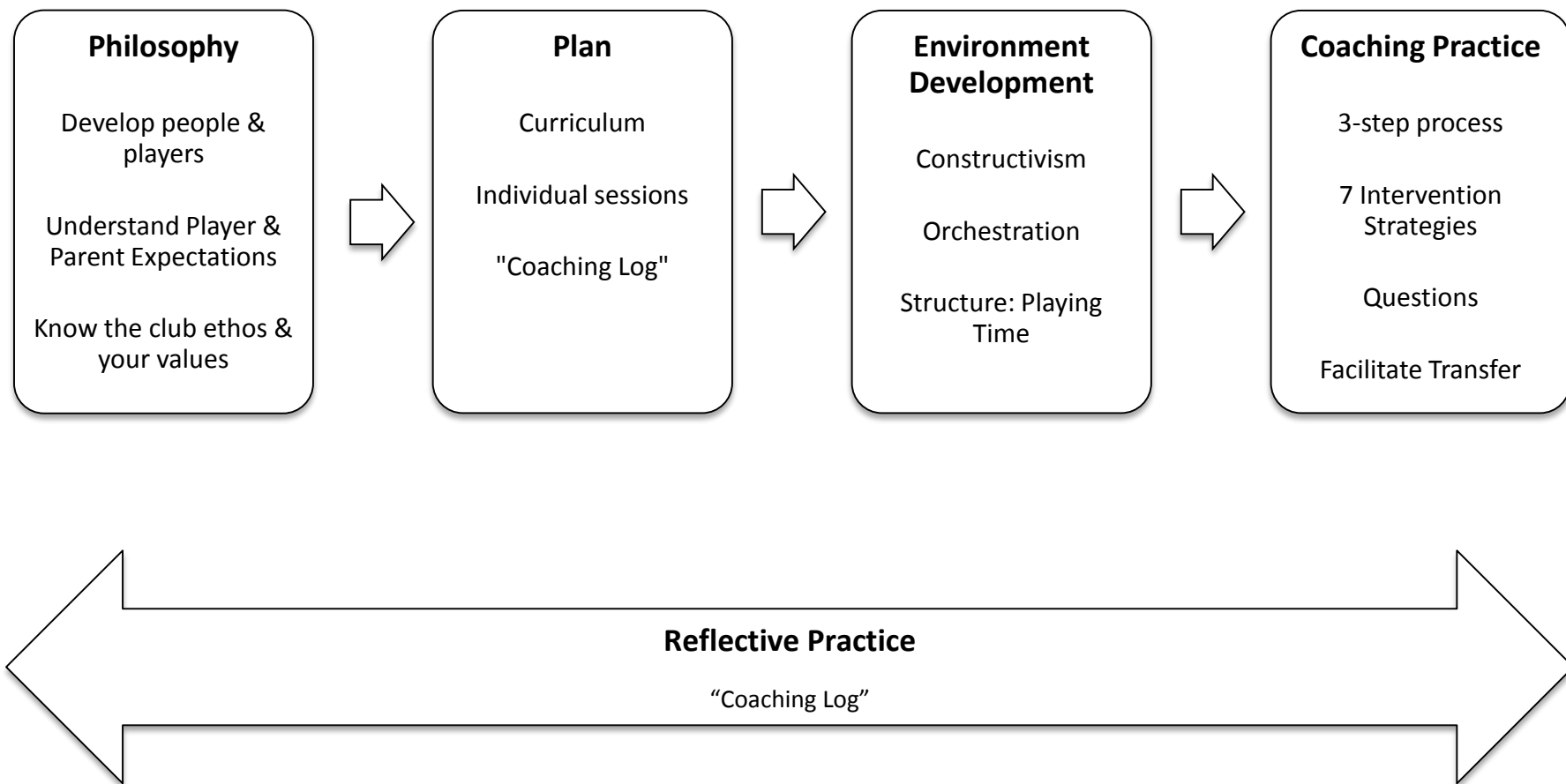
### **6.2.3 The importance of developing context specific programs**

Coaching contexts are the unique settings in which coaches endeavor to improve athlete outcomes, and having an appreciation of these settings is critical to understanding effective coaching (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Lyle (2002) recognized a



classification of three specific coaching contexts: recreational sport, developmental sport and elite sport. Lyle also identified two distinct forms of coaching based on the competitive level of the athletes: participation coaching and performance coaching. In participation coaching performance is not emphasized and objectives are characterized by short-term goals, enjoyment, and health-related outcomes. Performance coaching, on the other hand, entails a more intensive commitment to a preparation program for competition and a planned attempt to influence performance variables (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). The importance of understanding context has also been discussed in the life skills literature where recognizing the needs of the learner is of particular significance for coaches (e.g., Gould & Carson, 2008). A thorough understanding of the grass roots football environment was sought in this thesis and a specific intervention program developed that seemed to prepare coaches appropriately for practicing in this context. The findings of this thesis, therefore, support previous research (e.g., Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Gould & Carson, 2008; Lyle, 2002) and advocate the design of context specific sport programs for developing people and players.

To help with structuring context specific coaching practice a model for coaching life skills is presented in Figure 7 and contains five key elements that emerged from this research and are supported from the findings presented in this study: *philosophy; plan; environment development; coaching practice; and, reflection.*



**Figure 7** Model for coaching life skills

### **6.2.3.1 Philosophy**

Given that coaches are considered the most influential individuals in sport, a coach's philosophy is said to be of great importance for developing young people's life skills (Camiré et al., 2012). The findings of this thesis (Study 2) indicated how, following completion of the coach education intervention program, coaches did not just set out to coach their players the technical and tactical aspects of football. Rather, they had developed philosophies that set out to use football as a tool to develop both people and players. These findings support the results of Camiré et al. (2012), and the second component of Gould and Carson's (2008) model that a well-articulated coaching philosophy is a crucial element in a coach's repertoire. To elaborate, a well-conceived coaching philosophy provides the foundation upon which coaches and athletes can learn in a consistent and coherent manner without becoming too situation specific, or too reactive (Cassidy, Jones, & Potrac, 2009). Indeed, a coaching philosophy "will remove uncertainty about training rules, style of play, discipline, codes of conduct, competitive outlook, short- and long-term objectives, and many other facets of coaching" (Martens, 2004, p. 5). Furthermore, the findings of this thesis are consistent with Collins et al. (2009) who found that model high school football coaches have well-established coaching philosophies that recognize the importance of coaching life skills. In doing so, coaches hold the "person" at the heart of their practice through developing an athlete-centered philosophy, the importance of which is clear given the number of youth involved in organized sport today (McGladrey et al., 2010). Athlete-centered coaching is a concept and a process where:

The values, programs, policies, resource allocation and priorities of sport organizations and agencies place primary emphasis on consideration of athletes' needs in a holistic sense and performance goals within that context. Those responsible for leadership and decision-making in sport must include the athlete in both defining the needs and goals and in determining how to meet them; i.e. the athlete should be the active subject in, not the object of, sporting programs (Athletes CAN, 1994, p. 3).

A starting point for developing an athlete-centered philosophy stressed in Gould and Carson's (2008) model related to the importance of recognizing young people's pre-existing make up. Indeed, the coaches in Camiré et al.'s (2012) study also highlighted the importance of understanding their athletes' make up to enable them to coach life skills effectively. Despite the importance of knowing a person's established skill set when implementing a philosophy, coach education courses rarely provide guidance towards doing so. This is potentially problematic as: (1) coaches may struggle to recognize their players needs if they haven't been taught how to do so; (2) it takes time to identify the pre-existing make up of players and offers little direction for coaches when preparing initial sessions with new players; and, (3) determining the pre-existing make up is open to interpretation by the coach. As a result coaches are more likely to be seen sticking with 'safer', 'tried and tested' traditional methods that prove their knowledge and expertise (Potrac, Jones, & Armour, 2002; Cushion, 2009). The consequence of such action is that athletes are, in turn, increasingly socialized into expecting instructional behaviors from coaches and thus resist other coaching methods (Potrac, Jones, & Cushion, 2007, p. 40). If coaches are serious about developing the whole person and coaching life skills they

must be brave to go against tradition and coach according to their own values and beliefs. In addition, ensuring that a philosophy is athlete-centered requires that these values are not comprised for the purpose of increasing the chances of winning or as in the case of this thesis the perceptions parents (Hammermesiter, 2010). In an effort to overcome this, the approach taken in this thesis was to determine what player's and their parent's expected from sessions with the coach. Subsequently, an intervention program informed by a number of sources was developed. As a result, coaches were able to plan and deliver sessions that provided opportunities for self-directed enquiry and exploration, and the "freedom of movement and the power to judge, evaluate, select and carry through" (Dewey, 1997, p. 64). Through adopting a constructivist approach, student-centered inquiry encourages them to arrive at answers and solutions with the support of a coach who provides an appropriate learning environment and facilitates the problem solving process (Light & Wallian, 2008). The coaches in this thesis often facilitated sessions through posing appropriate challenges and questions to players that optimized the time spent working in their ZPD.

#### **6.2.3.2 Plan**

It is important to know where you want your students to finish and what you want them to learn in order provide focus to coaching delivery (Reece & Walker, 2007). Once this has been determined it is important that coaches plan their players' learning through the development of a curriculum. When designing the curriculum, coaches should consider the following phases.

First, think through the season aims and objectives – this can be determined through the development of a philosophy that considers the expectations of players and their parents, the coach's own values, and what life skills need to be taught. Taking into consideration the expectations of the players is important as Knight and Trowler (2001) argued that if students are given a real stake in their own learning, they will learn better and will be more motivated and enthusiastic about what they are learning.

Second, think about how to structure the content (Reece & Walker, 2007). That is, which life skills fit with which football practices to ensure an integrated approach to coaching? Emerging from this research was the idea that some life skills are linked (e.g., communication and teamwork). Therefore, structuring the curriculum in a way that linked life skills follow one another is important as this allows for already coached life skills to be consolidated whilst learning a new one as opposed to jumping back and forth. For example, the focus of the initial sessions may be upon developing communication skills. Once communication skills have been learnt, the main emphasis of sessions may be on developing teamwork skills. To learn to work as a team, players will then be able to apply the learned communication skills.

Finally, think about coaching and learning. Good teaching and learning stems from a range of complex interactions between the students, teacher, setting and learning activities (Maher, 2004). In Study 2 participants were given a coaching log to plan individual sessions whereby emphasis was placed upon motivating players through posing challenges and questions, along with deciding which intervention strategies would be most applicable for creating and maximizing learning

opportunities. Through this approach it was deemed that a framework for a session could be planned that was flexible to allow the coach to react to the players engagement and comprehension, and adjust the session as required (Hussey & Smith, 2002). This was important as it allowed the coach to teach unplanned outcomes that emerged from the session. These unplanned outcomes or 'learning moments' are extremely important in the educational process and can encourage deep learning in students (Maher, 2004). The ability to recognize these 'learning moments' depends upon the skill and experience of the coach. In this thesis coaches were able to recognize these moments through 'stepping away from the practice' to observe the session and see the bigger picture which then enabled them to act accordingly using the intervention strategies learnt.

#### ***6.2.3.3 Environment Development***

This component of the model focuses on the experience of playing football itself, with a particular emphasis on the learning environment created. The development of an appropriate environment emerged from the research in this thesis, and is an important factor because coaches are highly involved in creating motivational climates that influence the way athletes evaluate themselves (Ntoumanis & Biddle, 1999) as well as environments that are conducive to learning and positive youth development (Chak, 2001). Founded on the explanations of coaches (Study 2), players (Study 3) and the researchers' observations, a constructivist approach to learning is advocated.

The term constructivism covers a diverse range of theories about human learning commonly seen as falling into the two camps of cognitive/psychological and

sociocultural constructivism (Davis & Sumara, 2003; Fosnot, 1996). From a cognitive constructivism perspective, learning is seen as a process through which the individual draws on past experience and knowledge to actively construct ways of knowing by restoring a state of cognitive equilibrium to their world of personal experience following a disturbance, or “perturbation,” in a process of adaptation to change (Cobb, 1996, p. 38). For example, through learning life skills in training a young player is able to draw upon this experience in order to effectively apply the learned life skill in another environment (e.g., at school). Sociocultural constructivism, arising from the work of Vygotsky (1978), views learning as being culturally and socially situated. A sociocultural constructivism viewpoint typically focuses on learning as part of a broader activity system and participation in culturally organized practices (Light & Wallian, 2008). For example, life skills can be developed through interaction with teammates or the coach. Both constructivism approaches emphasize whole-person experience and activity, but there are differences between them over whether thinking occurs in the mind, the whole person, or is socially distributed (Davis & Sumara, 2003), resulting in a perceived contradiction between the two approaches.

A theoretically pragmatic approach (Cobb, 1996) is taken in this thesis whereby the interplay between the two approaches is considered (Fosnot, 1996). A theoretically pragmatic approach allows for a view of learning as both a process of self-organization and “a process of enculturation that occurs while participating in cultural practices, frequently while interacting with others” (Cobb, 1996, p. 45). Coaches demonstrated use of both approaches when coaching life skills with the situation being the determining factor. Essentially, players were coached as



individuals with specific interventions applied to personalize their learning whilst almost every practice involved interaction and collaboration with their peers.

In using a constructivist approach the role of the coach can be viewed as one of orchestration. The concept of orchestration derived from Wallace and Pocklington's (2002) theory about the management of educational change. When applied to coaching, Jones and Wallace (2006) defined orchestration as:

Coordinated activity within set parameters expressed by coaches to instigate, plan, organize, monitor, and respond to evolving circumstances in order to bring about improvement in the individual and collective performance of those being coached (p. 61).

Orchestration implies steering as opposed to controlling, a dynamic interactive process involving much 'behind the scenes string pulling' towards desired objectives; constant analysis, evaluation, and scrutiny to keep things going; maintaining detailed oversight of minutiae of each coaching situation (Jones & Wallace, 2006). The coach's work is then viewed as being much more outside the limelight, as unobtrusively arranging, guiding, and generally scaffolding the resultant players public performance (Jones, Bailey, & Thompson, 2013).

The coaches in Study 2 were aware of the change in their approach that shifted towards "stepping away" from the action to allow players time and opportunity to practice applying the life skill. This would suggest that as a result of the knowledge gained from the intervention program and the coaches' subsequent experience of applying this knowledge, their philosophy altered towards a more conducive philosophy for developing life skills where players are given more freedom and ownership of their learning in sessions guided by the coach. Indeed,

the coaches seemed to model sessions whereby the players were on task for the majority of the time with minimal interruption from the coach who instead coached unobtrusively. That is, intervening with individuals and groups of players in a way as to not stop practices and disrupt the flow of the session.

#### **6.2.3.4 Coaching Practice**

The process used to structure coaching practice in this thesis was Message-Reinforce-Transfer (Bodey et al., 2009). The findings of this research extend current understanding through demonstrating the successful application of this three-step process in grassroots football coaching. Through the application of this approach coaches communicated the life skill *message* to the players at the beginning of the session before engaging in discussion about the importance of the life skill firstly to football, and then, importantly, in other areas of life. During the *Reinforce* phase coaches would use intervention strategies to reinforce the key life skill message (for full description see Study 2). The initial six intervention strategies became seven following effective use of cue words by one of the coaches in Study 2. Finally, during the *transfer* phase coaches encouraged players to reflect on their learning from within the session on their own and then with peers, before being asked to identify a different context in which they would attempt to apply the life skill learnt. This is an effective process for structuring coaching practice because in its application coaches' provide opportunities for players to build up knowledge, rather than the coach being the dispenser of knowledge (Patton, Parker, & Pratt, 2013). In applying this process the role of the coach is to find ways to encourage players to explore their world, discover knowledge, set and solve problems, and to reflect and think critically

(Brooks & Brooks, 1993). Consequently, learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). This approach, therefore, encourages players to take ownership and make sense of their own learning through interaction with their surroundings and in doing so develop a stronger awareness of self which can help facilitate the transfer of life skills (Fosnot, 2005).

When considering how best to convey information to individual athletes and groups it is important to consider their specific 'learning styles', that is, the style in which information is best conceptualised (Hawk & Shah, 2007). Learning styles relate to the wider concept of personality, and include utilising factors such as human nature, dispositional traits and characteristic adaptations of individuals (Atkinson, 2013). Adapting the transfer of information in the individuals' preferred learning styles, allows for more effective internalisation of concepts taught (McAdams & Pals, 2006). Advocates of the learning style's approach (Claxton & Murrell, 1987; Coffield, Moseley, Hall, & Ecclestone, 2004a, 2004b) postulate that people learn in different ways and should be taught through a variety of methods that best suit their learning style. The seven intervention strategies advocated in this thesis are appropriate for coaching and supplement the three-step process for structuring sessions. Specifically, they enable learning to be orientated according to the preferred method of each player in accordance with Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory that posits that there are four modes that people may engage in any given experience, namely, concrete experience (feeling the experience), reflective observation (watching), abstract conceptualization (thinking about the activity), and active experimentation (doing).

Kolb (1984) combined his modes of learning to create four types of learners: *diverger* (reflective observation – concrete experience), *assimilator* (reflective observation – abstract conceptualization), *converger* (active experimentation – abstract conceptualization), and *accommodator* (active experimentation – concrete experience). More specifically, the three-step process and seven intervention strategies used in this thesis relate to Kolb's (1984) types of learner in the following ways. Conducive to the *assimilator* learner the message element of the process was geared around identifying life skills, discussing their value and importance, and generating thought around how the life skill would look in practice. Following the message element all players were given the opportunity to try applying the life skill which when linked to the message element would support the *converger* learner. For the *diverger* watching and feeling is important. To enhance the learning of these players a number of intervention strategies used in this thesis are effective including reinforcing the message based on observation of successful performance whereby the *diverger* learner is able to watch another player applying the life skill and then replicate the action. Reinforcing the message with an individual is also an effective strategy for supporting the *diverger* and can also be a useful strategy for the *accommodator* learner. In using this strategy the coach uses questioning to guide the player towards becoming more aware of how the experience felt. The seven strategies can be used in isolation or together depending on the situation and the learner.

In addition to the intervention strategies used by the coaches in this thesis, reflective logs are a valuable asset for consolidating learning and helping players think about the experience before using what they have learnt to plan for similar

experiences in the future. The reflective logs were also effective for engaging significant others (e.g., parents, teachers) in the players' learning.

#### ***6.2.3.5 Reflection***

A large proportion of coaching knowledge and practice comes from personal interpretations of previous experiences (Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2003; Gilbert & Trudel, 2001). A process found at the heart of all experience-based learning theories is reflective practice (Kolb, 1984). Research has shown that coaches learn through reflective practice (Trudel & Gilbert, 2006). Further, Nelson and Cushion (2006) suggested that reflection could provide a bridge linking knowledge gained from professional practice, observations, coaching theory, and education. Indeed, the coaches in this thesis engaged in reflective practice as a way of applying knowledge gained from the intervention program, and discovering new knowledge as a result of their coaching practice. Through engaging in reflective practice coaches can assess their practice in line with their coaching philosophy. This will benefit coaches in the following ways: (1) determining how their practice aligns with their philosophy (i.e., do they live what they believe in?) (2) exploring the appropriateness of their philosophy for coaching their players; and, (3) informing the continued evolvement of their philosophy to ensure it represents their own values and beliefs whilst also being conducive to coaching according to the players needs and expectations. Indeed, through reflection one participant coach in this thesis discovered a new intervention strategy that had been effective for reinforcing life skill messages.

In addition to being beneficial to coaches, the importance of reflective practice for athletes has been discussed in the literature (e.g., Hanton et al., 2007;

Hanton et al., 2009). Ghaye and Lillyman (2004) suggested that reflective practice helps us make sense of our thoughts and actions, leading to improvements in practice and should not be solely afforded to negative situations. In line with this, the approach to reflective practice adopted by the players in this thesis (see Chapter 5) was very much a focus upon using the positive learning discovered from football to inform future experiences. Such a reflective focus should help athletes to better understand how to maintain or improve performance in the future (Hanton et al., 2009). The literature suggests that problem-based learning approaches can be a useful means of provoking critical thought (Jones & Turner, 2006). Problem-based learning typically presents students with a problem, with the goal of devising a solution. This is in contrast to traditional methods of formal education, where knowledge is presented systematically and students are told how this knowledge applies (Driska & Gould, 2014). Problem-solving approaches may be most useful in helping students to understand ill-structured domains; settings that are disorderly, unpredictable, or do not follow conventions (Spiro & DeSchryver, 2007). Both sport and life skills can be viewed in this way because very rarely will a situation arise in exactly the same way as previously experienced. In life skill development this is particularly the case because the domain in which the life skill is learned differs to that in which it is transferred (e.g., football to school).

Players in this thesis were encouraged to reflect during sessions both individually and collectively, through the intervention strategies employed by the coaches, and also following sessions through use of a reflective journal. The reflective journal can be viewed as a problem solving approach as players were asked to reflect upon their learning in football to then plan how they might apply

that learning in a different environment, and then reflect upon the experience of transferring the learning from football to another environment. This approach to facilitating life skill transfer supports the consensus that reflective practice enhances life skill development (Jones et al., 2011), through overcoming one major barrier identified - that athletes are not aware of what they have learned (Danish et al., 1993). Young people could develop and transfer life skills to other domains if they increase their awareness of the skills they acquired through sport, increase their awareness of knowledge of how and in what context they learned life skills, and increase their awareness that skills are valued in other life domains (Danish et al., 1993).

## **6.3 Practical Implications**

A number of practical implications emerged from this program of research that may be of use to NGB's, coaches, parents, and youth sport providers. These implications relate to the education of coaches, and the expectations and roles of parents and other significant stakeholders.

### **6.3.1 The education of coaches**

Study 1 highlighted the importance of coaches effectively understanding the benefits of life skills development, and those life skills that can be developed through football. This thesis has identified six life skill themes representing a range of individual life skills that should be developed through football. This provides the foundation from which the session planning of coaches could be informed. Session planning is an important aspect of coaching (Hatfield, 2012), yet explicit planning

prior to delivery may be avoided due to a lack of time, and not all plans are used in lessons as teachers need to frequently depart from these to respond to the unfolding events of the session (Shambaugh & Magliaro, 2006).

The Coaching Log's designed and used in this thesis allow coaches to develop key questions and challenges for their players without having to dedicate masses of time to planning. Through planning specific questions and challenges for players the coaching of life skills becomes an intentional act resulting in more explicit life skill development. This will ensure that players are aware of what life skills they have learnt and are better able to transfer them from football to other aspects of life (Danish & Nellen, 1997). In addition to supporting coaches with planning sessions, the coaching log provides a time efficient framework to support coaches with structured reflection upon sessions. This approach was developed from the comments of Knowles et al. (2001) who acknowledged that structured methods of reflection allow practitioners to examine their experiences in detail rather than simply mulling them over. It is suggested therefore, that coaches, at the start of their professional training, adopt such a structured approach to reflection in order for them to become familiar with the process, understand different forms of reflective questioning, and access the necessary information required to reflect effectively on their initial coaching experiences. In order for this to happen NGB's need to fully integrate training for coaches to focus on these life skill development modules (as in Study 2) into their coach education programs.



### **6.3.2 The roles of parents and other significant stakeholders**

Study 1 identified a number of significant stakeholders with influence over young people's learning including coaches, parents, teachers and extended family. Whilst this thesis has demonstrated the impact that a coach can have on a young person's development, it has also stressed the need for a collaborative approach between everyone in a position of influence over the young person. Therefore, since all stakeholders are interacting social agents that combine to influence an individual's sporting life they must take responsibility and accept accountability for teaching young people life skills (Holt et al., 2009).

The findings of Study 3 suggested that engaging with these significant people from within the players support network in the initial stages of coaching to outline the philosophy and purpose of sessions, and explain their role in supporting life skills development is an effective mechanism for supporting the transfer of life skills away from football. A coach adopting this approach is better utilizing the players support network making them a part of, rather than apart from, the process. The engagement of support networks to assist transfer is advocated by other researchers in the life skills field (e.g., Trottier & Robitaille, 2014). Study 3 of this thesis provides a detailed account of how coaches can involve parents and extended family in the players' learning. This study also demonstrates how reflective diaries for players can be used not only for supporting players with transferring life skills but as an effective communication mechanism to keep key stakeholders informed and maintain support network engagement in the child's learning.

### **6.3.3 Wider impact on grassroots football**

The impact of this research on the grassroots game is already being realized. Following the system presented in this thesis, coaches are currently being educated by the WFT whose coach education is endorsed by UEFA. The WFT have fully integrated all modules into their coach education programs at level 2 and 3 (UEFA C & B Licenses). To date, including participants in this thesis, 712 coaches have been educated in this way that have the potential to influence a minimum of 11,392 players. With the system now fully integrated within these coach education programs for level 2 and 3 coaches it is hoped that similar numbers to those presented above will continue to be educated and influenced each season. As a result the development of future of welsh football players, and society seems assured.

### **6.4 Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions**

One of the main strengths of this thesis is the large sample of participants that were consulted with in Study 1, and who received the program in Study 2. Further, the variation within the sample in Study 1 provided a more comprehensive outlook of the phenomenon. The second strength of this research lies in the multi-method approach that allowed the researcher to use different data sources to validate and crosscheck findings. Using a combination of data types, triangulation increases validity as the strengths of one approach can compensate for the weaknesses of another approach (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Linked to triangulation of methods, another major strength of this research is that each observation was followed by an interview to determine retention effects, something

that has rarely happened in sport psychology research containing interventions. The interviews were also important as they brought structure, understanding and a unified picture of the phenomena that resulted from a complex reality (Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria & Russell, 1993; Poczwadowski, Barott & Jowett, 2006).

Whilst this thesis has contributed further knowledge toward the understanding of how life skills are developed and the role of the coach in coaching life skills, the findings possess limitations that are related to some of the detail given during the focus groups in Study 1, the different measures used pre- and post-intervention in study 2, and the sample size of Study 3. Specifically, whilst participants were able to identify different types of life skills, some of the responses offered were very vague and lacking detail. For example, teamwork was identified with no explanation of what it looked like in different contexts. These findings may highlight the lack of understanding of what some specific life skills are and how they are developed, supporting previous research conducted by McCallister et al. (2000) that suggested coaches struggled to articulate how life skills were developed. Whilst Study 3 provided an insight to the coaching of life skills from a player perspective (training and match day) the sample size might limit how representative the findings are of the experiences of players who are coached life skills. The sample of 4 players were able to articulate how they learned and transferred life skills, but further research is required to explore the experiences of more players across sessions with more coaches who have received the training (as in Study 2). Another interesting line of enquiry would be to determine in more depth if and how life skills are coached during competition, and the degree of consistency between coaching life skills during training and competition.

The current thesis explored the life skills needs and development of adolescent athletes (footballers). It is unclear whether the life skills needs of athletes are different from non-athletes or whether athletes generally possess different life skills to non-athletes. Future research should address this limitation by investigating the life skill differences between athletes and non-athletes. Similarly, as the study explored adolescent footballers, it is unclear whether footballers possess different life skills to those athletes involved in other sports. Further assessment should therefore be carried out to differentiate between sports. Exploring differences between individual and team sports may provide interesting results particularly when considering the personalities and skill sets of those who generally participate in each, and the differences in the nature of interactions and relationships involved.

Lifespan development models suggest that different life skills are needed across life stages (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Therefore, further assessment that differentiates between developmental stage should also be carried out to increase our understanding of the life skills needs of adolescent players and how needs change throughout adolescence. Specifically, future investigations need to explore whether there are differences in life skills needs across life stages (i.e., childhood, early adolescence, middle adolescence, late adolescence, and young adulthood). Such results would allow for coach education programs to provide more specific education to coaches working with players throughout the stages of adolescence.

## 6.5 Conclusion

The findings of this thesis are thought to initiate an evidence base that: (a) confirms that sport is a vehicle for developing life skills; (b) confirms the coach as a person of significant importance for developing young people's life skills; (c) advocates the use of a constructivist approach to learning whereby the coach supports and guides players through a series of problem solving experiences; (d) exemplifies the need for coaches and players to engage in reflective practice training; (e) supports the notion that reflection enhances a player's ability to transfer life skills; and, (f) illustrates the need for a collaborative approach to teaching life skills. Additionally, this thesis provides an insight into some of the challenges associated with coaching life skills, as well as a detailed support for the application of a model for coaching life skills, which is thought to inform purposeful and intentional practice for coaching life skills. Finally, the author believes that this thesis has contributed to the empirical investigation of life skill development in football. The thesis has therefore provided conceptual and practical implications for coaches and NGB's alike in the understanding, development, and integration of life skill development into coaching practice, training and development.

# **Reflective Epilogue**

## Epilogue

This narrative summarizes a learning journey of three and a half years that has been focused on my development on two fronts, as a coaching practitioner and as a researcher. On the whole, the experience of conducting this research project has been both challenging and rewarding in equal measure. Indeed, the nature of the research has exposed me to a variety of environments that have honed my skills in the various roles I have practiced including coach, researcher, and educator. Overall, this journey has contributed significantly to the way that I have developed as a person first and foremost, but also as a coach and an academic.

The following account considers my journey and more specifically my current situation, knowledge, values, and beliefs that have developed throughout the course of this Ph.D. program of research. Engaging in such self-narrative forms of writing is not proposed to be a narcissistic endeavor but is thought to provide the reader with a greater insight into factors that have been important to my development (cf. Gilbourne, 2002). Indeed, it has been acknowledged that by drawing upon the highly personalized accounts of the experiences of the researcher we are able to extend our knowledge and understanding of specific phenomena (Sparkes, 2000). Thus, the narrative is written to encourage discussion and allow readers to consider for themselves the transferability of my experiences to their own practice situations.

Being introduced to life skill development and invited to engage in an extended period of investigation of the concept together with engaging in reflective practice has been pivotal to my personal and professional development and has encouraged me to seek out opportunities, and reflect on my experiences in order to acquire new knowledge through experiential learning. Reflection is about learning

from experience (cf. Ghaye & Lillyman, 2000), and is a dedication to life-long learning and development. This concept is supported through the cyclical conceptualizations of experiential learning and reflective practice (e.g., Kolb, 1984) that represent action, experience, reflection and learning. With action research being the underlying method of Study 2 the importance of reflection hit home. After witnessing the impact of engaging in structured planning and reflection upon the coaches in this thesis my own approach to each has altered largely through use of the same reflection logs as used with my participants. In doing so, I have been able to become more critical of my delivery and subsequently develop in a number of ways as a coach. For example, the development of an awareness of myself allowed me to uncover specific weaknesses (e.g., communicating concise messages), which eventually made me stronger, and certain strengths (e.g., football knowledge) that gave me confidence to be innovative in my approach backed by this understanding of what I was particularly good at and the motivation to improve those factors that may have limited my delivery. I believe my own planning and reflection of coaching sessions has become more effective with a clear link between the reflection from the most recent session and the planning for the next session. In addition, these reflections have become more purposeful and now lead to an action that informs my future practice where as previously I had been guilty of drawing conclusions with the influence on practice sporadic.

My view of coaching and the role of the coach have also altered as a result of this research. I had always been of the belief that the coach had a duty of care for players that extends beyond developing their technical and tactical abilities. This journey has reaffirmed this whilst highlighting the shortcomings in my own and



others' coaching as psychological and social development of players is often left to chance. It seems as though it is generally accepted that players automatically develop psychologically and socially but the research and this thesis would suggest that this is not the case and coaches need to make learning in these areas more explicit. Indeed, this has been a focus of mine and one in which I feel I have developed my practice significantly with a conscious effort still being made to further refine my approach.

As I became more comfortable as a researcher and had begun to understand the research project, I began to embrace other ways to engage in reflective practice including collaborative reflections with my supervisors and other postgraduate researchers. These approaches were particularly beneficial as I was able to access other opinions, knowledge, and ways of thinking, and thus new ways of understanding and learning from my experiences. This approach to reflection subsequently transferred to my reflection on coaching practice. I have since sought to gain feedback from players, parents, other coaches, and colleagues at the FA. Prior to starting this journey, I would never have been as open to feedback for fear of what could be highlighted. However, in doing this I have become more aware of the impact of my practice on the players and the process has opened my eyes to things that I had not previously considered. For example, in one particular session I was using mannequins when coaching patterns of play and the emphasis was on making movements away from the ball to create space. I became quite frustrated when I felt the players were not committing enough effort to their movement off the ball. A colleague was observing my practice at the time and noticed my frustration. After the session, we discussed the situation and he asked a simple question – why

would they move more than what they need to? I quickly realized that my players were not at fault, I was. What I had asked them to do was unrealistic because the mannequin could not move, so they were creating enough space to play against the mannequin. Indeed, when I delivered a similar session to the same players but this time added opposition, the movement of the attacking players replicated what I was asking in the first session. This taught me a valuable lesson in relation to understanding the returns and trade-offs of a practice and making sure that your practice provides realistic opportunities for what you are asking players to do. In planning, I now find myself repeatedly asking the question 'why'. As a result of this experience and the impact it has had on me, I now make sure I engage in a combination of reflective practices as often as possible to enhance the quality of the process.

It is important to consider the nature of working with an external organization and the impact that this had on the research. Whilst the experience has undoubtedly been a fulfilling one for me that has not only developed me as a person but as a coach too most notably through embarking on an ongoing journey towards becoming a UEFA A licensed coach, the experience has also presented a number of challenges that have equally developed me personally and academically. Most notably I quickly realized that whilst this research was the most important thing to me, for the external partner it was one of a number of projects that they were engaged in and most certainly was not their number one priority. As a result, a number of delays were experienced particularly relating to data collection where approval was required from the WFT before commencement. This has taught me the value of contingency planning and being flexible in my approach. Following the

experiences of conducting Study 1, I developed a number of plans to suit the various possibilities of the following studies. The experience also taught me to be organized and plan ahead in order to make the most of the time available with the partner organization so that clearance for future studies could be sought in advance.

What is most pleasing for me is that through my experience and the research conducted as part of this Ph.D. I have been able to generate evidence that has the potential to facilitate change in the way that coaches are educated and consequently how they coach. This, therefore, has the potential to influence the next generation of football players but perhaps importantly society in general. Indeed, with the coach education modules that formed part of the intervention study already being integrated within the WFT's coach education programs for level 2 and 3 coaches this change has already been initiated. To date (June, 2015) 712 coaches have been educated, and thus experienced the intervention program developed in this research project, who that have the potential to influence a minimum of 11,392 young people (based on each coach delivering to a squad of 16 players).

The culmination of this period of research and coaching practice is an encouraging one and I feel fortunate to have been offered the opportunities that I have and gained such experience in both roles (researcher, and coach). I also feel that I have been dedicated and worked hard to maximize the learning from these opportunities. The journey has been a difficult one particularly from initial meetings with supervisors where I often felt anxious and quickly discovered that I had a lot to learn but equally a rewarding one as I look back proudly upon what has been achieved.

I do not see this as the end of the journey; I see this as the beginning. The research, development, and training have resulted in a wealth of knowledge, skills, and experience that can make a real difference to how coaches are developed. It can be used to continue to help NGB's develop their training programs to embrace educating coaches in how to develop life skills and resilient coping behaviors in practice to explicitly develop the often neglected components of player development, namely, psychological and social. Finally, it can be used to continue to develop my practice as a coach, to enhance the effectiveness of my delivery, and as a researcher, to ensure that continued research within the area of life skill development adds to our existing knowledge base to help the field of coaching grow as a profession. I will continue to advocate coaching life skills to young players in grassroots football, and remain committed to advancing my philosophy through reflecting on my experiences whilst maintaining an equal focus on developing the 'person', and 'player'.

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# **APPENDIX 1**

## **Study 1 - Questions/themes for Interviews**

### **All – Opening**

Thank you all for giving your time to participate.

Did you all receive the Preparation Booklet in enough time and have you been able to think about the points raised in the booklet?

Can I remind you that your participation is not compulsory and you are free to leave at any stage should you wish.

I also ask that you respect other participants' views and opinions whether they are similar or different to your own whilst encouraging open discussion.

### **All - Closing**

Do you have anything else to add, have we failed to discuss any important issues?

Have you been led or influenced in any way?

Have you been able to provide your own opinion/story?

## Parents

1. What do you expect your child to learn through playing football?

*Prompts: Why do you send them to play?*

*What skills/qualities do you expect them to learn?*

2. How important do you think life skills are to a child's development?

*Prompts: What skills? Why?*

*Which life skills have been most important in your life?*

3. What do you understand by the term resilient and what represents a resilient individual?

4. How do you think your child currently develops life skills through football participation?

*Prompts: How?*

*Examples of life skills learned*

*Transfer of life skills*

5. Who do you think are the most important people to teach life skills to young people?

*Prompts: How? Explain each person's role*

6. What are the coaches' roles in developing life skills?

7. What do coaches need to do to develop the life skills of your children?

## Coaches

1. What is your current philosophy on coaching football?

*Prompts: What/Who influenced the development of your philosophy?*

2. How do you view your role as a coach?

*Prompts: What do you aim to do?*

*Player development - priorities?*

*What do you hope young people learn?*

3. What do you understand by the term life skills?

4. How important are life skills to a young person's development?

*Prompts: What skills? Why?*

*Which life skills have been most important in your life? Why?*

5. What do you understand by the term resilience and what represents a resilient individual?

6. As a coach, how do you teach life skills?

*Prompts: How? What skills?*

*Why don't you?*

*Can a coach play an important role?*

7. How effective are coach education programs in preparing you to carry out your role as a coach?

*Prompts: Level 1 & 2 courses – preparation for novice coaches?*

*Level 3 & 4 courses – continuing development?*

*Prepare you to teach life skills?*

*What would you like to see programs/educators doing more?*



## Players

1. Why do you play football?

*Prompts: What do you want to get from it?*

*What do you hope to learn?*

*What do you enjoy most?*

2. How important is it to learn life skills? Why?

*Prompts: Future sport participation*

*Career, family, school*

3. Whose responsibility is it that you develop strong life skills?

*Prompts: Personal responsibility*

*Other influencing people*

4. Which life skills are most important to learn?

*Prompts: examples, why?*

*Sport, school, community, family life*

5. Where do you currently learn life skills?

6. How does football allow you to learn life skills?

*Prompts: What ones?*

*How?*

*Does the coach teach you life skills? How?*

*Should there be more emphasis on developing life skills?*

## Teachers

1. What is your/the schools philosophy for teaching and learning?

*Prompts: Mission Statement, Vision,*

2. Explain the importance of life skills to a young person's development?

*Prompts: What skills? Why?*

*Which life skills have been most important in your life? Why?*

3. What do you understand by the term resilient and what represents a resilient individual?

4. As a teacher, how do you teach life skills?

*Prompts: How? What skills?*

*Why don't you?*

*Can a teacher play an important role?*

5. How does the PE curriculum promote the development of life skills?

*Prompts: How? Examples?*

*If not, should there be more focus on it?*

6. Who do you think are the most important people for developing life skills in young people?

*Prompts: How? Explain each person's role*

7. What can be done better?

*Prompts: School?*

*Curriculum?*

*By who?*

*(If we can learn from the education system it may give us ideas about developing coaches)*

## **APPENDIX 2**

# PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

UWIC Ethics Reference Number:

Participant name or Study ID Number:

Title of Project: *A Life skill and Resiliency Development Plan for Coach Education*

Name of Researcher: *Ceri Bowley*

---

**Participant to complete this section: Please initial each box.**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 20/08/09 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, without my relationship with UWIC, or my legal rights, being affected.
3. I understand that relevant sections of any of research notes and data collected during the study may be looked at by responsible individuals from UWIC for monitoring purposes, where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my records.
- 4 I agree to take part in the above study.

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date

---

Name of person taking consent

---

Date

---

# **APPENDIX 3**

## PARTICIPANT ASSENT FORM

### Participants under 18

UWIC Ethics Reference Number:

Participant name or Study ID Number:

Title of Project: *A Life skill and Resiliency Development Plan for Coach Education*

Name of Researcher: *Ceri Bowley*

---

**Participant to complete this section: Please initial each box.**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 20/08/09 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, without my relationship with UWIC, or my legal rights, being affected.

3. I understand that relevant sections of any of research notes and data collected during the study may be looked at by responsible individuals from UWIC for monitoring purposes, where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my records.

4 I agree to take part in the above study.

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date

---

Signature of Parent/Guardian

---

Date

---

Name of person taking consent

---

Date

---

## **APPENDIX 4**

## **Life Skills and Resiliency**

### **Focus Group Preparation Booklet**

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the focus group that I will be conducting to gather data for a Ph.D. study.

This booklet will introduce you to the topics that you will be asked to discuss in the focus group, which will consist of yourself and three other coach educators. This booklet is also intended to help you start to think about your practices so that you can be prepared to discuss your experiences and any thoughts that you have concerning issues related to the study.

#### **Background to the Research**

A growing body of research in the sport psychology literature has focused on the development of life skills. Currently, a number of published papers examine the development of life skills as well as the relevance of sport as a learning environment to facilitate this development. A number of models for the development of life skills have been presented, however, the understanding and definition of life skills has varied from paper to paper.

For the purpose of the study the following definition is presented:

*“Life skills are those skills that enable an individual to succeed in the different environments in which they live, such as school, home, and in their neighborhoods”*

(Danish, Taylor, Hodge, & Heke, 2004).

It is clear from the above definition that life skills can help a young person succeed not only in the sport he/she is playing but also in other environments in life in which they are being used successfully. Life skills can be behavioral, physical, or cognitive. The all important factor in determining a life skill is that in order for a skill to be referred to as a life skill, it must have been utilized in another environment away from the one in which it was learnt (i.e. a skill learnt in sport being used at home).

Life skills facilitate the development of the psychological skills that are required to deal with the demands and challenges of everyday life. One sport psychology construct that lends itself to developing life skills and has shown to promote positive behaviors is resilience. Resiliency is the capacity of people to effectively cope with, adjust or recover from stress or adversity (Burton, Pakenham, & Brown, 2010). Resilience consists of three dimensions: resistance, recovery, and reconfiguration.



### **Focus Group Format**

During the focus group you will be asked to discuss a number of issues relating to **children's participation in sport, and life skills**. In preparation for this I would like you to think about the following points (*please feel free to make notes under any point*):

- Why do you think young people participate in sport?
  
- How would you define the term life skills?
  
- How would you describe a resilient individual?
  
- How do adolescent players learn life skills?
  
- How do adolescent players learn to become resilient?

It is important that you draw upon all your knowledge and experience as parents. This is so we are better able to understand reasons behind young people's involvement in football, and what they hope to experience through their involvement.

Not only does the focus group environment provide the opportunity for all participants to share their experiences and views, but specifically generates a forum for discussion of these experiences and issues that are pertinent to the study. This discussion will be integral to the generation of information that will allow the in-depth examination of coaching methods and life skill development in grass roots football.

I appreciate you taking your time to not only participate but to also prepare for the study. This will make the focus group process quicker, easier, and more fruitful. Thank you once again,

Ceri Bowley

## **APPENDIX 5**

## Example Focus Group Transcript

### FOCUS GROUP JOHNSTOWN JFC PARENTS

*Interviewer: Thank you for taking the time to take part in this focus group. I really appreciate your participation. I can see that you have received the preparation booklet etc. May I remind you that participation is not compulsory, so if at any point, you do wish to leave, you are free to do so. I would also ask you to respect the views of other participants, but at the same time, obviously, express your own views, even if they are different from what anyone else around the table expresses, because that's what generates discussion. My first discussion point is: What do you expect your child to learn through playing football?*

*Dad:* First of all how to play in a team and develop confidence, social skills and by working in a team it just builds your character. You think of others.

*Mum:* About the same thing really. It is character-building, you make new friends. Obviously you learn to play football.

*Mum:* They learn discipline and sportsmanship as well.

*Dad:* And they keep to a program, they have to want to get to work, they have to turn up for training and for the matches.

*Mum:* So it teaches them life skills in that respect, because they have to turn up and be responsible.

*Dad:* Even when they don't want to.

*Dad:* That's a very good point.

*Mum:* If they put their names down they can't let people down.

*Mum:* They learn to be responsible for their decisions and what they do. If they put their names to something, they have to commit to it and carry it through.

*Mum:* So they learn commitment, sportsmanship and discipline.

*Q:* *How important do you think life skills are to a child's development and when you give a skill can you explain why that's important?*

*Mum:* Well, everything's important, it's what we just said really, it's confidence and life skills and ...

*Q:* *Why is confidence important?*

*Mum:* Because all the way through life it's good to be confident, whatever you do – go for jobs, university, everything it's good to be confident.

*Mum:* It teaches you communication skills as well, playing within a team. If you are skilled within a team you could end up getting a job where you're working within a team environment, so that would help you.

*Dad:* It also teaches you a lot of other things. It teaches you how to deal with disappointment as well. That's another life skill you have to get used to!

*Dad:* I think that's an excellent point. I think that sometimes you get left on the bench and it teaches you to deal with disappointment and the feelings you feel – you know, you feel worthless, but then others would encourage you, so it builds strength of character, doesn't it?

*Mum:* When you think about it, competitiveness would help you with a job interview, if you look at it from that point of view, because there's only one winner when you go for a job interview. So either you'll be let down, because if you bring it back to your football game you'd lose or you'd be on the bench; or if you're the winner, you've got the job.

*Mum:* Then there's respect. It teaches them respect, which through school, university, everything, you need respect. For their coaches....

*Mum:* If you respect them they respect you, don't they?

*Dad:* Self-control, because they learn about boundaries. Sometimes when the frustration builds, as it does in life, and you have to curb those feelings. Sometimes, maybe someone's from a dysfunctional background, where they're used to just exploding, whereas with a team you have to learn to curb it and discipline yourself and control yourself, so I think that's a good one.

*Mum:* Winning or losing, they have to learn control.

*Q:* *What do you understand by the term "resilient" and what represents a resilient individual?*

*Dad:* When they have a game, if they're losing, they don't drop their heads. They just say "Well, there's only 20 minutes left so we can still win." If you have resilience you have to take that attitude if you're two or three goals down. You don't lose until the end of the game. A lot of players give up if they're two or three goals down, but if you have resilience you'll never have lost until the actual final whistle. That's the same as everything else in life.

*Dad:* It's the ability to withstand pressure and adversity and difficulties and the ability to cope and stand up to that and not buckle under that pressure.

*Q:* *Can you think of anyone really who strikes you as a resilient sort of person? In sport or outside sport, or anywhere you can think of?*

*Mum:* XXXX XXXXXX! He could have given up; I would have given up I'm sure. (More over-talk)

*Mum:* XXXXX XXXXXXXX. He carries on playing professional snooker with his father so ill, dying, so you could say he's been resilient.

*Q: How do you think your child currently develops life skills through football participation?*

*Mum:* They're dealing with adults, with coaches, so he learns respect for the coaches and with all the different children he meets from different schools, different backgrounds etc. I definitely think through making different friends, coping with different adults that they haven't seen before.

*Dad:* I think about some of the things you guys have already said, communication, discipline, team-building, all these things come into play. Time-keeping and self-control, they're all relevant to life; dealing with disappointment or frustration; getting injured and feeling left out. That's a huge thing to deal with, feeling rejected and left out when you're not in the team. And to have the encouragement of others, all these things are very good.

*Q: Would you say that you can pinpoint a life skill that you've noticed in your child that they've acquired through football participation? Something they may have developed through football that you've noticed outside football. Is there anything you could pinpoint?*

*Mum:* Definitely they've been more outgoing.

*Mum:* Yes, it really gives them confidence, doesn't it? I think that's one, confidence to speak up because of the way the coaches train them on the pitch to speak to each other and call to each other and things like that. I think that makes them more confident. Then there's communication, because they have to communicate in the team.

*Mum:* Yes and communicating with more adults as well, not only children but with different coaches and things.

*Mum:* And their general behavior, how to conduct themselves in an environment where they're not around their parents, with accepted behavior.

*Dad:* For XXXX, he's not the best player in the team by any means and there was a season where he was substituted a lot, and it just made him develop a determination. He felt really worthless, but I said to him "Just keep going" and he showed his determination, so that's a quality which had really grown in him.

*Mum:* Yes, taking that away, you could also say that a child learns that he can't be good at everything, because you'll probably get some children coming to a football team and they can't get in. So they might think "OK, maybe football isn't my thing then. Maybe I'm not going to be a footballer" and they go off to do something else then, more successfully than they were with football. So it can work by bringing a positive out of that negative; you could say that it works both ways, because it could also lead them onto doing something they are better at than they are at football. The glass is half-full.

*Q: Who do you think are the most important people for teaching life skills to young people?*

*Mum:* Well, it's a group effort between parents, teachers, coaches and everybody who's around them playing key roles in their life. That's why we say it's a group effort, in the same way that we say that a child's education is a team effort between their parents and the

teachers, isn't it. It's not just the teacher, the school isn't there to educate your child, it starts with the parents. You can't rely on just the teacher to educate your child.

*Q: How much of a role would you say the coaches have in developing your children's life skills? Are there specific life skills where they would have more of a role in developing?*

*Mum:* With different things, definitely. They look at a coach differently from their parents. You can't say ...

*Mum:* They get them from a teacher as well, you'd have to ask a child that, but they get it from their parents differently from what they get from their teachers or coaches. So it's somewhere in the middle. The coach is probably more like having a big brother really, they look at them as a fun aspect of life, whereas the teacher is looked at more like "Ooh! Here's the teacher!"

*Q: And are there specific life skills that you think a coach should have more of a role in developing in young people, because of that relationship that they might have?*

*Mum:* It just comes back to confidence again – if you have a good coach they'll give the child confidence.

*Dad:* I think a coach is your first boss, really. When you're a coach you play for the coach and you get better things in the team. It's the same as it would be when you go to work, if you go to the boss you get on, whereas if you start playing up and you're unpopular, you won't get on.

*Mum:* Yes, that's probably a good way of putting it, really. He probably really is your first boss, your coach. Because you have to do everything you have to do in work for a coach: turn up on time; listen; follow orders – which are all the things a boss would have you do, isn't it really. So it's probably right, a good way to look at it.

*Q: Does the way a coach conducts himself assist with developing life skills in young people?*

*Mum:* It depends on whether he's a good or a bad coach! Some coaches aren't very nice.

*Dad:* I think it's a very good influence.

*Mum:* I think the stricter the coaches, the better the kids like them. The more disciplined they are, the better the kids love it. Within reason – I don't mean frog-marching them up and down. I just mean no messing about, getting on with the job and doing it right, not being late, not turning up only half-organized, things like that. I think it's leading by example, isn't it?

*Dad:* I agree with you 100% on that, but I think he does need more strings to his bow than that. Some people can be disciplined and harsh, but a lot of kids respond to encouragement, and I think having the discipline and having the firmness, having those boundaries in place, but having a really encouraging spirit as well. I think this is a key area. You can have all the other things that you try to achieve, but if you don't get the right coach ... He hasn't got to be an expert coach, but if he's a great person with a great emotional balance, a people person who genuinely loves the kids. I'd like to think that person could

draw out some of the treasure and the potential that's in the kids, by being firm, but also by encouraging them, even when they make mistakes, rather than exposing them as failures.

*Mum:* They need to correspond with their expertise though, I do believe they need to have some knowledge, because I have a son in the U13s and there are men there who aren't as experienced and he can't get on with them, he can't respect them, because he knows they're not knowledgeable. Whereas the people who are there coaching him, whom he knows are knowledgeable, he really respects and thinks the world of. But he finds it difficult then, you have to have somebody who has a certain amount of knowledge. It would be no different from a boss not knowing anything and telling you what to do, it's the same principle isn't it? Relating it back to the work environment, it's the same principle. You need to have somebody with experience telling somebody else what to do; and I think sometimes people take coaching badges or whatever, but they need to have far more experience, they need to have been looking at football for the while of their life really, or involved in football, whether it be watching it as a keen supporter, or whatever, but to have some background in and knowledge of football, rather than just "Oh, XXXX decided to play football, I'll help." Which is a noble thing to do, but if you haven't any experience, you're not really giving the children anything on the pitch. Whereas if you have somebody who has dedicated their whole life to supporting football, they naturally have the gift and their enthusiasm then is passed on to the children.

*Mum:* Yes, I agree, but coaches do do it for no money ... I'm not saying that they're a bad coach who knows nothing but ...

*Mum:* You need somebody with experience.... When to praise, when to encourage....

*Mum:* They could not know everything about football but have other skills. Or they could know everything about football but not much about man management, then they're not going to be....

*Dad:* It would be lovely to think you could have all these skills in .....

*Mum:* I'd say that the coaches out there that have that skill. I don't think there are many who haven't. I think that most of them have, because they're enthusiastic and keen they do it, because they want to do it and they love the kids and they want to do it for the kids. Those men out there now, they don't do it because they're going to gain anything from it. They do it because they love doing it, because they like to see the kids get on. Which is great for us, because it helps our children, doesn't it?

*Dad:* Just a quick example, my oldest, who's nearly 18 now, he was playing for Johnstown for years and they won loads of titles. There was one coach, and he probably wasn't the best-trained coach, although he was knowledgeable and he had a real passion for football, but the kids loved him and he got the best out of the kids, but he wasn't the most expert coach. It was just that the kids loved playing for him, they loved him.

*Mum:* You've got to be a likeable person and maybe not have loads and loads of football knowledge, but ...

*Dad:* Yes, you can destroy a kid by just saying the wrong word. Don't get me wrong, you need to put people in their place, you need to be firm and they need to be disciplined, but it's got to come from the right spirit.

*Q: What about their actual conduct or their behaviors as coaches? Do those also assist in life skills?*

*Mum:* Well, it's leading by example. A coach has to lead by example – and so should the parents, mind you, I think.

*Q: Are there any key life skills that jump out at you in terms of the coach's conduct?*

*Dad:* Respect. I think respect for everybody and self-control.

*Mum:* But saying that, I do think the parents need to respect the coaches as well. My boys have been playing since they were six years of age and I've seen some things, and personally it works both ways, it's not just about the coach giving respect to everybody else. A lot of parents need to respect the coaches and not interfere, but let the coaches coach the team; because that's what they are there for. No matter how professional their Dad may be, if they have said that their son is committing to that team, it's down to the coach of that team to coach his son. The coach should coach the son, not the parents tell the son.

*Mum:* A lot of coaches do right by that son.

*Mum:* No, because then if the parents have a problem, they should go to the coach. They shouldn't be shouting at their son on the pitch or shouting at him that he should be doing different. But at the end of the day if a parent decides their son is going to play for that team, when he's here he's under the coach and he does as the coach says, not as Dad says down at the corner of the pitch. That's not fair on the coach. Yes, I'm not saying that you can't as parents say "For God's sake wake up!" We know our boys better than anybody, and if they look as if they're half-asleep or they're not playing as well as they should be, but you shouldn't interfere with the flow of play.

*Q: The more encouragement ...*

*Mum:* Yes

*Mum:* I feel sorry for the coaches, I think it's a horrible job. I wouldn't want to do it.

*Dad:* I've seen examples, exceptional examples of coaches where, maybe their teams aren't the best, but I've been honestly amazed at how they encourage everything. It's great encouragement coming to the players, so they keep going, they keep working, but unfortunately I've also seen a couple of examples where coaches, just by the words they use, can change the whole dynamic of the game. The spirit can change, the players react to the coach and it can become an unsafe environment, all through the coach's words, so the influence they have is massive.

*Q: Can you give me an example of words used?*

*Dad:* Yes, I've seen coaches who would swear, and that alone is inflammatory and would create an unsafe environment, because all of a sudden these kids, who have a safe environment, who feel they have boundaries and there's a referee and everything, there's rules, all of a sudden when a coach says something like that, everybody feels insecure. I



can't emphasize it enough. They don't realize it, some of these guys, but they're emotionally dysfunctional, some of the coaches, dangerous.

*Q: I know a lot of it has been touched on in our discussion so far, but what do coaches need to do to develop the life skills in your children?*

*Mum:* Leave more parents in their cars on match day!

(Loud laughter)

*Dad:* Create a safe environment, create communication, so that the kids all feel safe and they know where they are. They know what to expect and I think those are vital: consistency, clarity and a safe environment.

*Mum:* Don't treat any boy any differently from the next boy. If somebody's done something wrong, just because he's a star player doesn't mean he can get away with it, or he's flavor of the week, or whatever, he's got to be disciplined along with other boys. Be fair and encourage the worst players as much as you would the good players, if not more really, I suppose, to give them that extra confidence then. And gag all the parents!

*Q: Does anyone have anything else to add or are there any important issues we've failed to discuss?*

*Dad:* Maybe just one quick thing; I'm really impressed with what these clubs are doing and the work of the Football Association etc. and I think it's one thing to put on a piece of paper what should be done or what would be a good idea to implement, but it's another thing to build a culture, and I think maybe more encouragement for clubs to build a culture. When you were mentioning parents shouting at the kids, it's one thing to say this is a rule and we need that, but also more of an emphasis on building a culture in a club, so even if it's an unspoken "We know we're not supposed to do this." So it's not just something on paper, but it's emphasized.

*Mum:* Yes, but there is a Parents' Code of Conduct isn't there? In the same way that there's a Players' Code of Conduct, but the thing is, and nobody will tell me any different, that nobody is ever reprimanded. If we stood on the side of the pitch and they were playing and, for instance, two of us started shouting, either at the coach or at the players, nobody would come along and say "Back to the car!" But there are supposed to be Child Protection Officers here, aren't there? They're supposed to be at all matches. Isn't there supposed to be one per club?

*Mum:* Yes, but they can't be at every match, every team ...

*Mum:* Yes, Welfare Officers ....

*Mum:* But No they should be able to be contacted over these things though shouldn't they?

*Mum:* I think that advert on TV with that chap explains it. Have you seen the one with that chap playing, it shows him shouting and then in the end he's shouting at nobody, because there's nobody there to shout at – the advert? There is a football advert.

*Mum:* For me, you know, yes, I get frustrated and yes, sometimes I think "Oh, the ref was wrong!" but at the end of the day, he's refereeing the game, the coach is coaching the team,

you've just got to bite your tongue and I think that as adults and as parents, you should lead by example. We all get frustrated and we all get wound up and we all want our kids to do well. BUT ... they should reprimand people, they'd only have to do it once or twice and I know of matches where there have been parents, (Mums actually, not me) sent back to their cars by the referee. It only ever happens once. It doesn't happen again, because they think "Oh, I don't want to miss the boy playing." "Back in the car or I'm stopping the match." And she doesn't want to be the baddie, does she, so she goes back to the car. You'd only have to do it once or twice with parents, because at the end of the day, it's not helping the coaches. Arguing parents on the sideline isn't great. You're asking what the parents need to do to give the kids life skills etc.; there should be another meeting for the parents, what the parents need to do! Because some parents just don't care. It's not a good example is it, men arguing on the sideline? That's not good.

*Q: So in terms of the culture, should it be educational, raising awareness workshops for coaches and for parents who join the club?*

*Mum:* I don't think the coaches can do anything about it, I think it's down to the referee.

*Mum:* Yes, but some of the coaches are clean off (*their heads?*) as well. I've met a couple, football and rugby, rugby worst.

*Q: So maybe an educational workshop raising awareness for parents coming into the club?*

*Dad:* I think it would be ...nothing's ... it all adds ...

*Mum:* And I think the referee should be able to send parents to the car.

*Q: Should it be the referee's responsibility?*

*Mum:* I think so, if he's getting abuse.

*Dad:* I would say primarily the club, in terms of the long-term culture setting, but, as you were saying, on the day the referee needs to have the authority....

*Mum:* He's in charge, so I think he should .... And if you did a ruling that the ref could send coaches or any adult who stood on the sideline ... and as XXXX just said, there are coaches out there who go mad and ballistic, well, at the end of the day they can be sent off too. When they get sent, you're affecting the whole team, aren't you? They do it in the premiership, so in children's football, can the ref do that to coaches, but not to parents?

*Mum:* If this becomes a great idea ....we want to reserve the rights!

*Dad:* I've never witnessed it with a parent and even supporters at Welsh League level, I've never witnessed that. It's always been someone at the club who's had to deal with it, rather than the referee. Obviously he has a lot to concentrate on, on the pitch ...

*Mum:* Yes and if he stops the game, you've humiliated somebody, because at the end of the day we're sitting here deciding or trying to help you decide what the coaches should be doing, but as parents we have some responsibility on the way that the parents conduct themselves on the sidelines.

*Q: Have you been led or influenced in any way by anything I've said?*

*Dad:* No. You've provoked discussion and it's been very interesting. I think it's been really helpful and interesting.

*Q: Have you been able to provide your own opinions?*

*All:* Yes.

## **APPENDIX 6**



# FAW C Certificate

Developing Life Skills Module - Youth



# Aims

- ✍ To introduce life skills, and resilience
- ✍ Explain their importance to youth development
- ✍ Identify how life skills can be developed through your football coaching sessions



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# Rationale

✍️ A grass roots footballer has a 0.0017% chance of playing in the Premier League

However,

✍️ A grass roots footballer has a 100% chance of being a better person

**GIVE THEM THE BEST CHANCE!**



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# What are life skills?

In pairs:

w h a t i s y o u r  
understanding of life  
skills, and provide some  
examples of them.





# Life Skills - definition

“The abilities for **adaptive** and **positive** behaviour, that enable individuals to **deal** effectively with the **demands** of every day life”

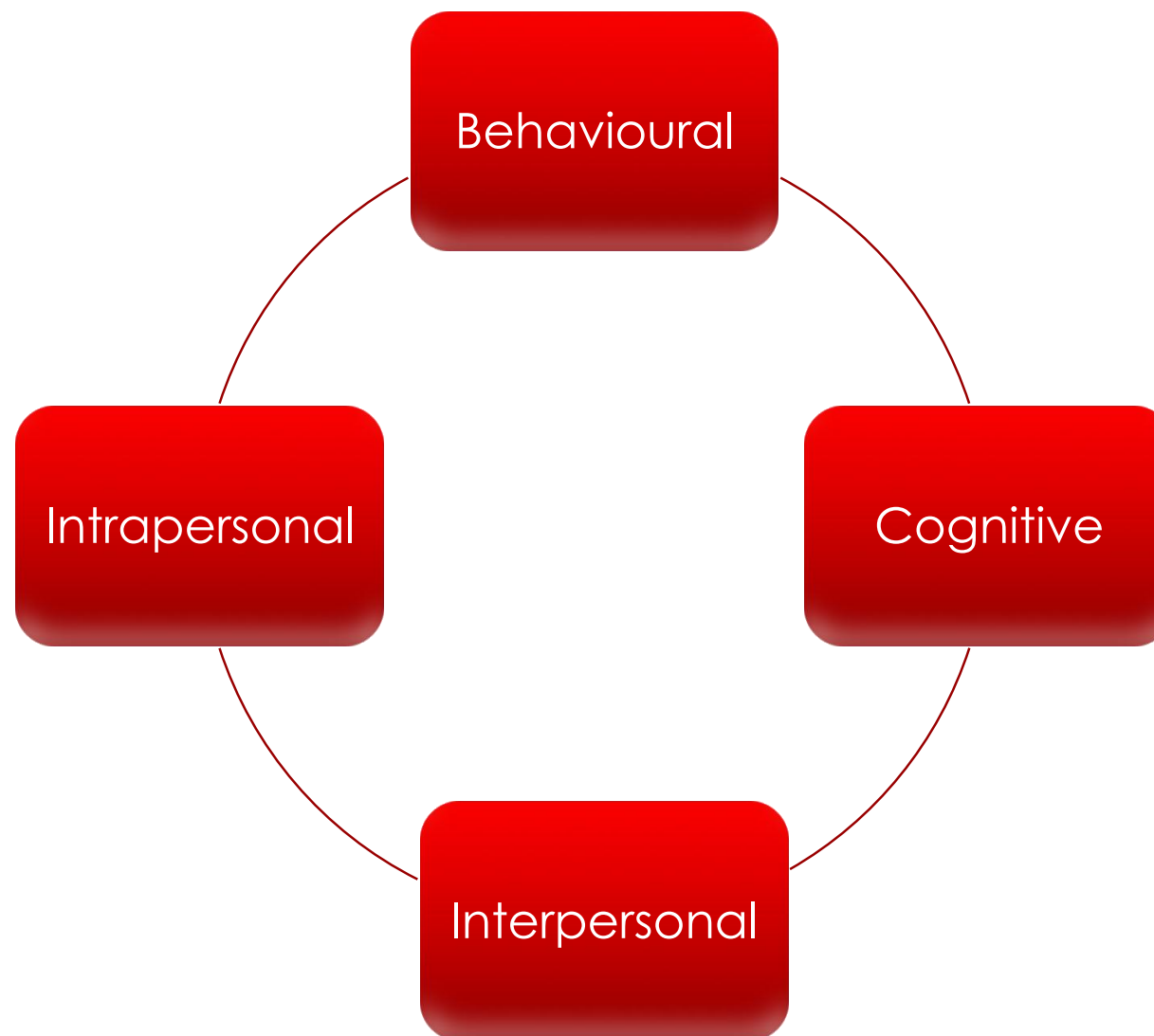
*(World Health Organisation, 1999)*



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# Life Skills – Types



[www.welshfootballtrust.org.uk](http://www.welshfootballtrust.org.uk)



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# Life skills – Key Consideration

“For something to qualify as a life skill, efforts need to be made to have the competency **transfer** to other life situations”

*(Gould & Carson, 2008)*



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# Life Skills – What's been found..

✍ Social skills

✍ Respect

✍ Leadership

✍ Family Interaction Skills

✍ Self-organisation

✍ Discipline

✍ Self-reliance

✍ Goal Setting

✍ Managing performance outcomes

✍ Leadership

[www.welshfootballtrust.org.uk](http://www.welshfootballtrust.org.uk)



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# Life Skills – What we found..

A study conducted with parents, players, coaches, and teachers across convergence areas of Wales identified six life skill themes:

 Social Skills

 Discipline

 Respect

 Personal Control

 Organisation

 Leadership

[www.welshfootballtrust.org.uk](http://www.welshfootballtrust.org.uk)



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# Social Skills

- ✍ Verbal communication
- ✍ Non-verbal communication
- ✍ Listening skills
- ✍ Teamwork



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# Discipline

- ✍ Demonstrating sportsmanship
- ✍ Being committed
- ✍ Behaving appropriately in different environments
- ✍ Working hard
- ✍ Perseverance
- ✍ Determination



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# Respect

- ✍ Towards peers
- ✍ Towards coaches
- ✍ Towards officials
- ✍ Towards opponents
- ✍ Towards parents
- ✍ For your club
- ✍ Self-respect
- ✍ Demonstrating good manners
- ✍ Appreciation for others

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# Personal Control

- ✍ Coping with winning and losing
- ✍ Decision Making
- ✍ Managing distractions
- ✍ Problem Solving
- ✍ Coping with challenges
- ✍ Coping/managing stress
- ✍ Demonstrating Confidence
- ✍ Controlling Emotions



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# Organisation

✍ Time keeping

✍ Preparing properly

✍ Kit

✍ Boots

✍ Fluids



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# Leadership

- ✍ Taking responsibility
- ✍ Accepting responsibility
- ✍ Supporting other players within the group



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# The Power of Sport/Football

✍ Sport has been described as a **vehicle** for the development of life skills (*Petitpas et al., 2004*)

However,

✍ Participation **doesn't** automatically develop life skills

✍ Life skills need to be **taught** and **fostered** through the experience of football



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# Power of Football

“The nature of our role and the environment allows us to teach the lads without them really knowing it. They just think they are learning football but actually we are teaching more than that. We’ve got a great tool in football as the way of teaching things”

*(Coach, PhD study, 2012)*



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# Life Skill Development – Key People

Who would you consider to be the key people to support the development of life skills?

Why are they important?

How do they develop life skills?



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# Life Skills Development - Key People

 Coaches

 'Player'

 Peers

 Parents

 Teachers

 Other family members

*(PhD Study, 2012)*

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# Life Skills Development – Group Task

How does your role as a coach help to develop life skills in your players?

Consider:

✍ Knowledge

✍ Consequences

✍ Are you the best person?

✍ Barriers

[www.welshfootballtrust.org.uk](http://www.welshfootballtrust.org.uk)





# Life Skills Development - Role of the Coach

- ✍ Role Model
- ✍ Create a positive learning environment
- ✍ Plan appropriate practices
- ✍ Adopt a variety of coaching styles
- ✍ Reflective Practitioner



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*(PhD Study, 2012)*

[www.welshfootballtrust.org.uk](http://www.welshfootballtrust.org.uk)

# Life Skills Development - Role of the Coach

“The **coach** is probably more like having a big **brother** really, they look at them as a **fun** aspect of life” *[Parent, PhD Study, 2012]*

“He probably really is your first **boss**, your coach. Because you have to do everything you have to do in work for a coach: turn up on time; listen; follow orders – which are all the things a boss would have you do, isn't it really” *[Parent, PhD Study, 2012]*



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# Parent (%) & Player (%) Learning Expectations

 Social Skills

 Respect

 Discipline

 Personal Control

 Football Skills

*(PhD Study, 2012)*

[www.welshfootballtrust.org.uk](http://www.welshfootballtrust.org.uk)



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# Parent (%) & Player (%) Learning Expectations

✍ Social Skills 34% 62%

✍ Respect 12.66% 7.5%

✍ Discipline 28% 0%

✍ Personal Control 12.66% 7.5%

✍ Football Skills 12.66% 23%

*(PhD Study, 2012)*

[www.welshfootballtrust.org.uk](http://www.welshfootballtrust.org.uk)



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“When a coach works with **people** he must **understand** what makes them work – without this you will never get the **individual** to be **productive**”

A Wenger



# Youth Coach - Considerations

- ✍ Player learning styles
- ✍ Coaching methods/styles
- ✍ Development needs of the player
- ✍ Learning Expectations of Players and Parents



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# Take Home Messages

- **Youth coaching** is about more than **developing** the **player**, you are expected to **develop** the **person** too.
- **Life skills** are **vital** to a young person's **development** as a person in all aspects of life – **you** can have a **major impact** on a young **person's development**.
- **Knowing** and **understanding** your **players** as young people is **important** in order for you to be able to identify their needs.



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# FAW C Certificate





## **APPENDIX 7**



# FAW C Certificate

Developing Resiliency - Coping - Youth



# Resilience - Definition

“Resilience is the capacity of people to **cope** with, **adjust**, or **recover** from **stress** or **adversity**”

*(Burton, Pakenham, & Brown, 2010)*



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# Resilience

What constitutes a resilient person?



# Resilient People - Characteristics

✍ Confident

✍ Positive minded

✍ Perseverance

✍ Belief

✍ Takes control/responsibility

✍ Focus

✍ Able to control emotions

✍ Sets goals

✍ Cope/manage stress

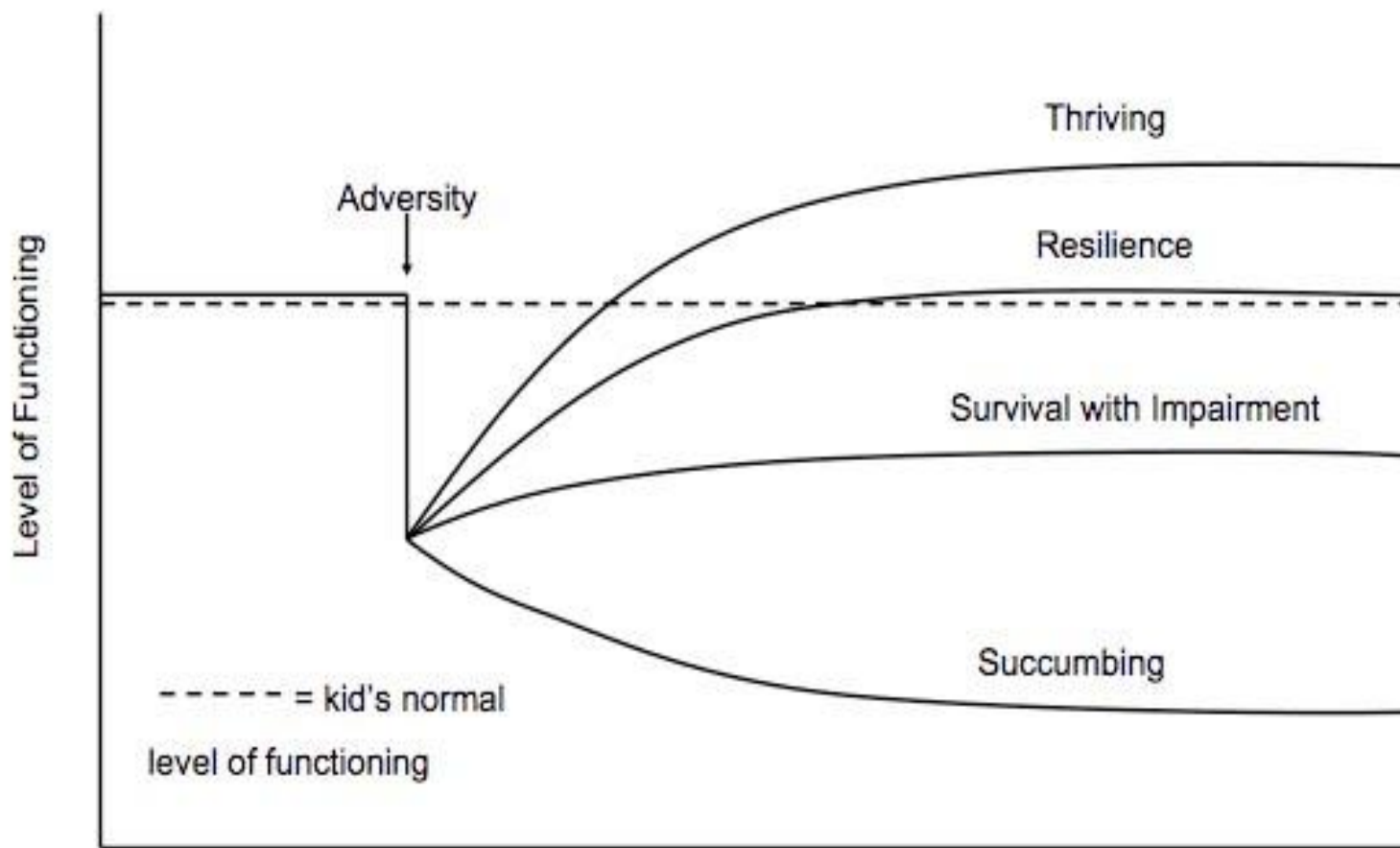
## Mentally Tough

*(PhD Study, 2012)*



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The Resilience Model (Carver, 1998)



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# Resilience – Coping Strategies

How do people cope with stressful situations/ disappointment?

What strategies have you used/ seen others use?



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# Resilience – Coping Strategies

Coping strategies are individuals' behavioural and cognitive responses to stressful situations.

Two general coping strategies:

✍ Problem-focused

✍ Emotion-focused

Strategy adopted is usually dependent on:

✍ Personal style

✍ Type of event

[www.welshfootballtrust.org.uk](http://www.welshfootballtrust.org.uk)



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# Problem-focused strategy

✍ Efforts to do something active to alleviate stress

Types of strategies:

✍ Active Coping

✍ Planning

✍ Positive Reframing

✍ Social Support



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# Active Coping

- ✍ Taking action to overcome stress
- ✍ Applying more effort

Example:

- ✍ Possession lost through trying difficult pass
- ✍ Player works even harder to regain possession
- ✍ Wins ball back and makes a simple pass



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# Planning

✍ Thinking about how to cope with the stress

Example:

✍ A defender has been beaten in a 1 v 1 situation by the opposing striker

✍ Defender asks him self why and how he was beaten (e.g. marking the wrong side)

✍ Plans a way to avoid being beaten again (e.g. mark on the strikers other shoulder)



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# Positive Reframing

✍ Viewing a challenge as an opportunity as opposed to a threat

Example:

✍ Playing against opposition/player(s) who are better than you

✍ Turning any negative thoughts and fears into positive ones

✍ An opportunity to show how good you are

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# Social Support

✍ Seeking advice, support, and/or information

Example:

✍ A young player having difficulty learning a new skill

✍ Instead of giving up they ask for more help from the coach, parents, peers, older players



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# Emotional-focused strategy

✍ Efforts to reduce the negative responses of stress such as fear, anxiety, and frustration

Types of strategies:

✍ Behavioural disengagement

✍ Denial

✍ Venting



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# Behavioural disengagement

- ✍ Reducing the amount of effort

- ✍ Giving up on goals

Example:

- ✍ Striker misses a shot at goal

- ✍ He then hides and doesn't want the ball – fear

- ✍ Confidence and motivation reduces



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# Denial

✍ Avoiding the stressor

Example:

- ✍ After a poor performance a player looks for distractions
- ✍ Listens to music, watches TV to avoid thinking about the game
- ✍ Avoids the problem and hopes it disappears



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# Venting

✍ Expressing frustrations to other people

✍ Letting off steam!



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# Encouraging active coping

- ✍ Breathing techniques to reduce anxiety and gain control of one's actions
- ✍ Create an environment whereby effort is rewarded
- ✍ Provide leadership opportunities in sessions to encourage player's to take control/responsibility
- ✍ Use of 'ABCDE thinking model' (Ellis, 2001) to develop positive reframing



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# Ellis' ABCDE Thinking Model

- A** - Activating event/stressor
- B** - Belief (Negative Thoughts)
- C** - Consequence (players' thoughts and feelings)
- D** - Disputing (Creating Positive Thoughts),  
Distracting
- E** - Energy available



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# Take Home Messages

- **Youth coaching** is about more than **developing** the **player**, you are expected to **develop** the **person** too.
- **Life skills** are **vital** to a young person's **development** as a person in all aspects of life – **you** can have a **major impact** on a young **person's development**.
- **Knowing** and **understanding** your **players** as young people is **important** in order for you to be able to identify their needs.



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# FAW C Certificate



## **APPENDIX 8**



# FAW C Certificate

Developing Life Skills and Resilience - Practical



# Passing – Technical Practice 1

## Diamond Passing Drill

2 diamonds are marked out with cones - one inside the other.

Diamond 1 cones are 15 - 20 meters apart.

Diamond 2 cones are 8 - 10 meters apart.

1 team (Reds) passes and follows around the big diamond

1 team (blues) passes and follows around the small diamond.

### Key Points

Can the passes be played outside the cones?

Can the players use the cones as a guide to move off as the pass is going to be made?

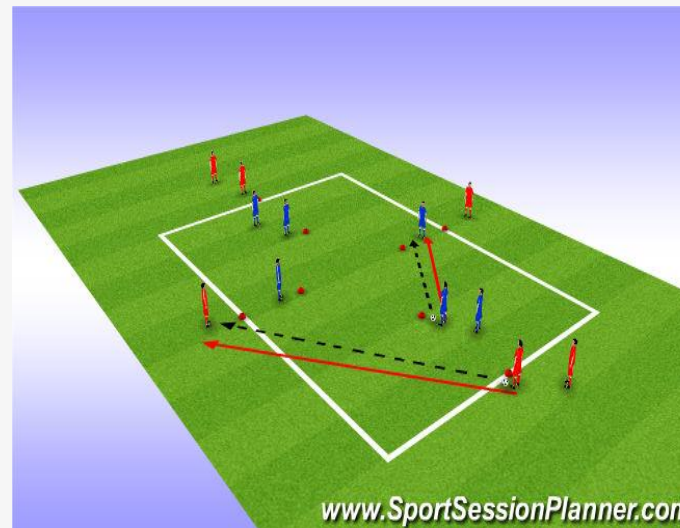
Can the players passes be made to the far foot of the receiving player?

Can the receiving player play on the half turn?

### Progression

Can the receiving player create opposite movement to receive a pass?

The receiving player sets back to the passing player and receives a 1 - 2 around the cone.



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# Passing – Technical Practice 2

## Circle Practice

Players work in 3s - 1 ball between 3.

Receive in the circle, and pass out to a teammate.

### Key Points

Can passes be varied? Driven? Lofted?

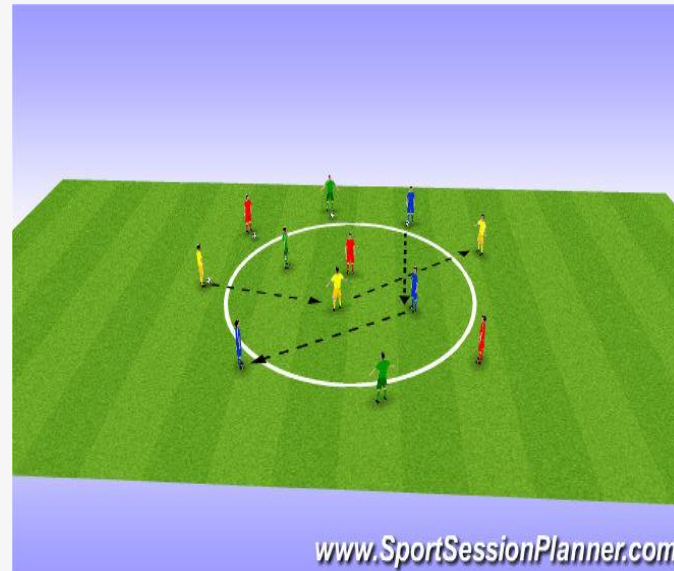
Can the middle player receive between players?

Body position of middle player to see the outside player to pass out.

### Progressions

Can the the outside players move?

Can the outside players move inside to combine and drive out?



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# Passing – Game Related Practice

## 3 v 3 + 3 Possession

Area is 40m x 30m approx.

Players play 3 v 3 inside the area with 6 players on the outside.

Rotate inside and outside players after 3 or 4 mins.

Teams score by passing to one of their target players on the ends.

Each team can also use their wide player for support if needed.

Players can combine on the floor or play lofted passes to go over the top to achieve a pass to the target player.

The target players can move the width of the target zone but are unopposed.

### Key Points

Can the players use a variety of passes to combine or score?

### Progression

When a pass is played to a target player, the passing player swaps with the target player who drives into the middle.

This rule can also apply to the wide player.



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# Process for Developing Life Skills....



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# Interventions

- ✍ Reinforcing message based on observation of successful application
- ✍ Reinforcing message with individuals
- ✍ Reinforcing message through group work
- ✍ Reinforcing message with the whole group of players
- ✍ Reinforcing the message with video footage
- ✍ Use of challenges



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# FAW C Certificate

Developing Life Skills and Resilience - Practical



## **APPENDIX 9**

### **Intervention Strategies: Examples**

*Reinforcing the message based on observation of successful application.* The coach identifies correct use of the life skill and asks the player(s) to explain/demonstrate what they did to their teammates. Other players are then given time to attempt to apply what was explained/demonstrated. Football related example: Teamwork – in a dribbling scenario, one attacking player dribbles toward a defender and works with another attacker to get past the defender.

*Reinforcing the message with individual players.* The coach questions a player on the action(s) they have just performed and how they could improve the performance of the action further. This is an attempt to develop a player's understanding of what they did and why they did it, therefore initiating reflection and enhancing self-awareness. Football related example: Communication - player has to receive pass played behind him when there was space in front – what can you do to help the player passing the ball? Tell him (verbal communication) and show him (non-verbal communication) where I want the ball.

*Reinforcing the message through group work.* Players are separated into groups (of 2 or more players) to discuss their performance in the practice so far, and identify ways to improve their performance further. Again, the purpose here is to initiate the reflection process to enhance self-awareness. The most meaningful aspects of competitive youth sport clearly related to participants' interaction with peers (Holt et al., 2009). Therefore, in addition to encouraging reflective practice group work allows young people to interact and expand their social networks exposing them to people with whom they would not otherwise engage (Dworkin et al., 2003; Holt et al., 2008a, 2008b). This intervention develops a number of life skills (including but not limited to: verbal communication, non-verbal communication, teamwork, listening skills, taking responsibility, coping with challenges). Football related example: Communication – in a passing practice the group agreed that they have talked well

(verbal communication) but could improve their performance if they signaled to show the passer where they wanted the ball played (non-verbal communication).

*Reinforcing the message with the whole group of players.* A combination of the interventions highlighted above would be used to reinforce the message with the whole group.

*Reinforcing the message with video footage.* Video demonstrating successful performance of the message can be a powerful tool for painting a clear picture for players, particularly when professional players are used as young players relate especially well to them. Video footage of the players themselves in training and matches can also be very powerful, and is also an effective way to increase the motivation of players when successful performance is observed. Football related example: players watch short clips of the key message being demonstrated (e.g., a player showing leadership after the team concede a goal) in training/match. The players then practice replicating what they have observed.

*Use of challenges.* The coach plans a series of challenges that can be presented to/set for the players. It is vital that these challenges encompass specific individual player, small group, unit, and whole group challenges to tailor the approach to suit the development needs of the individual, whilst also enhancing their understanding of and ability to work as part of a team, and independently. Football related example: In a passing and receiving practice, a defender is introduced. Key challenges would include – determining: how to adapt in order to effectively receive the ball; how to turn on receiving the ball to play forward; the role of team mates in assisting the player receiving the ball.



# **APPENDIX 10**

# Life Skills Development



Coach Name: % % % % %

What do you understand by the term 'life skills'?  
%

List as many life skills as possible...  
%

As a coach, do you focus on developing young people's life skills? If so, how?  
%

%  
%



# **APPENDIX 11**

## Life Skills Development: Post-Workshop Questionnaire

This questionnaire is anonymous. Please do not write your name or any identifying information on this questionnaire.

Please answer each question as accurately as possible through circling the response that applies. If you feel that you cannot answer accurately or you do not want to answer a question please skip to the next question.

Thank You.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	About 50/50	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Following my participation in the workshop I am now able to define the term life skills	1	2	3	4	5
2. My participation in the workshop has improved my understanding of life skills	1	2	3	4	5
3. The workshop has taught me how to identify what constitutes a life skill	1	2	3	4	5
4. A skill has to be transferred in order to be acknowledged as a life skill	1	2	3	4	5
5. The workshop highlighted the importance of life skills to a young person's development	1	2	3	4	5
6. Players and parents expectations of my sessions are important to me as a coach	1	2	3	4	5
7. As a coach I can play a significant role in developing the life skills of my players	1	2	3	4	5
8. The workshop demonstrated how life skills development can be integrated into coaching	1	2	3	4	5
9. After the workshop, I am able to plan football sessions integrating life skills development	1	2	3	4	5
10. After the workshop, I feel comfortable with introducing life skills development in my delivery	1	2	3	4	5

# **APPENDIX 12**

## **Social Validation Interview Guide**

### **Opening**

Thank you for giving your time to participate.

Did you receive the Preparation Booklet in enough time and have you been able to think about the points raised in the booklet?

Can I remind you that your participation is not compulsory and you are free to leave at any stage should you wish.

### **Closing**

Do you have anything else to add, have we failed to discuss any important issues?

Have you been led or influenced in any way?

Have you been able to provide your own opinion/story?

1. Tell me about your experience of integrating life skills in your coaching?

*Prompts: What life skills?*

*How?*

2. Have you faced any challenges/barriers?

*Prompts: What challenges/barriers?*

*How have you overcome these challenges/barriers?*

3. Have you managed to initiate the transfer of the life skills developed? How?

*Prompts: What strategies have you used?*

*How were players supported?*

## **APPENDIX 13**



## **Life Skills Coaching Practice Observation**

### Intervention strategies

- 1** - Reinforcing the message based on observation of successful application.
- 2** - Reinforcing the message with individuals.
- 3** - Reinforcing the message through group work.
- 4** - Reinforcing the message with the whole group.
- 5** - Reinforcing the message with video footage.
- 6** - Use of challenges.

### Life Skills Coaching Practice Observation

Coach: \_\_\_\_\_ Life Skill Focus: \_\_\_\_\_

Life Skill	Intervention Strategy						Detail
	1	2	3	4	5	6	<i>Instruction, feedback, questioning</i>

Message	Reinforce	Transfer

## **APPENDIX 14**

# Coaching Log



## Planning & Reflection



Ceri Bowley – PhD Research - 2013

# Life Skills

“The abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour, that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands of every day life”

*(World Health Organisation, 1999)*

Bowley (2012; Phd Research) identified the following life skill themes:

- Social Skills
- Respect
- Discipline
- Personal Control
- Leadership
- Organisation

# Resilience

“Resilience is the capacity of people to cope with, adjust, or recover from stress or adversity”

*(Burton, Pakenham, & Brown, 2010)*

Ellis (2001) ABCDE Thinking Model for Active Coping:

- A** - Activating event/stressor
- B** - Belief (negative thoughts)
- C** - Consequence (players thoughts & feelings)
- D** - Disputing (creating positive thoughts), Distracting
- E** - Energy available

## Process,for,developing,Life,Skills:,



**Message:** Introduce the Life Skill (e.g. communication). Question players around the importance of communication in football, where it's used, different types of communication. *Note: Players may/may not be able to answer these questions. Be prepared to provide prompts to guide players to the answer. Try not to answer for them.*

**Reinforce:** Reinforce the message throughout the session. *See intervention section.*

!

**Transfer:** Discuss transfer during de-brief. Ask players what they have learnt (e.g. how to communicate), why the life skill is important in football (reinforcing the message), where else the life skill can be used (e.g. in school, at home), and examples of how it can be used.,

## Interven; ons,

,

1. **Reinforcing, message, based, on, observa; on, of, successful, applica; on:** , identify correct use of the life skill and ask players to explain/demonstrate what they did to other players in the group. Other players then attempt to apply what was explained/demonstrated.

*Example: Team-work – in a dribbling scenario, one attacking player dribbles toward a defender and works with another attacker to get past the defender.*

2. **Reinforcing, message, with, individuals:** Question players on the action they just performed and how they could improve what they did further.

*Example: player has to receive pass played behind him when there was space in front – what can you do to help the player passing the ball? Tell him (verbal communication) and show him (non-verbal communication) where I want the ball.*

!

3. **Reinforcing, message, through, group, work:** in their groups players discuss their performance in the practice so far, and how they can improve.

*Example: Communication in a passing practice - group agree that they have talked well (verbal communication) but could improve by signaling where they want the ball played (non-verbal communication).*

,

## Interventions

4. **Reinforcing the message with the whole group of players:** a combination of 2 & 3 (highlighted previously) can be used.

5. **Reinforcing the message with video footage:** Video of successful performance of the message can be powerful to paint a picture for players. Video footage of professional players can be used. Video footage of the team's own performance in matches/training is an excellent way to also increase the motivation of your players.

*Example: players watch short clips of the key message being demonstrated (e.g. a player showing leadership after the team concede a goal) in games/training. The players then practice replicating/creating what they observed.*

6. **Use of challenges:** have a range of challenges ready to give players – individual, small group/unit, whole group.

*Example: passing & receiving whilst marked – how does this change how a player receives/ what does the player need to do to be able to turn on receiving/what can his team mates do to help?*

## Questioning (Examples):

1. How well did you *communicate with...*? (communication)
2. How successful did you *work as a team*? (teamwork)
3. How could you improve *your teamwork*? (teamwork)
4. What might you try next time? (decision making/problem solving)
5. How might you help your team mate? (decision making)
6. What would happen if *a defender marked you*? (decision making/problem solving)
7. What might you need to do if *you were being marked*? (problem solving)
8. How can you *be a leader for your team*? (leadership)
9. How are the opposition affecting us? (reflection, identifying problem)
10. What might we do to overcome..... (coping)
11. What strategy can you use to *defend when you are outnumbered*? (problem solving, coping with challenges)
12. What strategy can you use to attack? (problem solving, teamwork, communication)
13. What strategy can you use to defend? (problem solving, teamwork, communication)
14. What can you do to make it easier for you to *receive a pass*? (decision making)
15. What might have been a better option then? (reflection, decision making, problem solving)



# Session,1, Plan,

**Title:**\_\_\_\_\_

Intended outcomes (Four Corners)

Technical	Psychological
Physical	Social

**Life Skill(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

Key coaching points:

Challenges for players (Life Skill):

Questions for players (Life Skill):

## Evaluate; on,

General thoughts on the session....)

)

Did you successfully integrate the Life Skill? How? If not, why?)

)

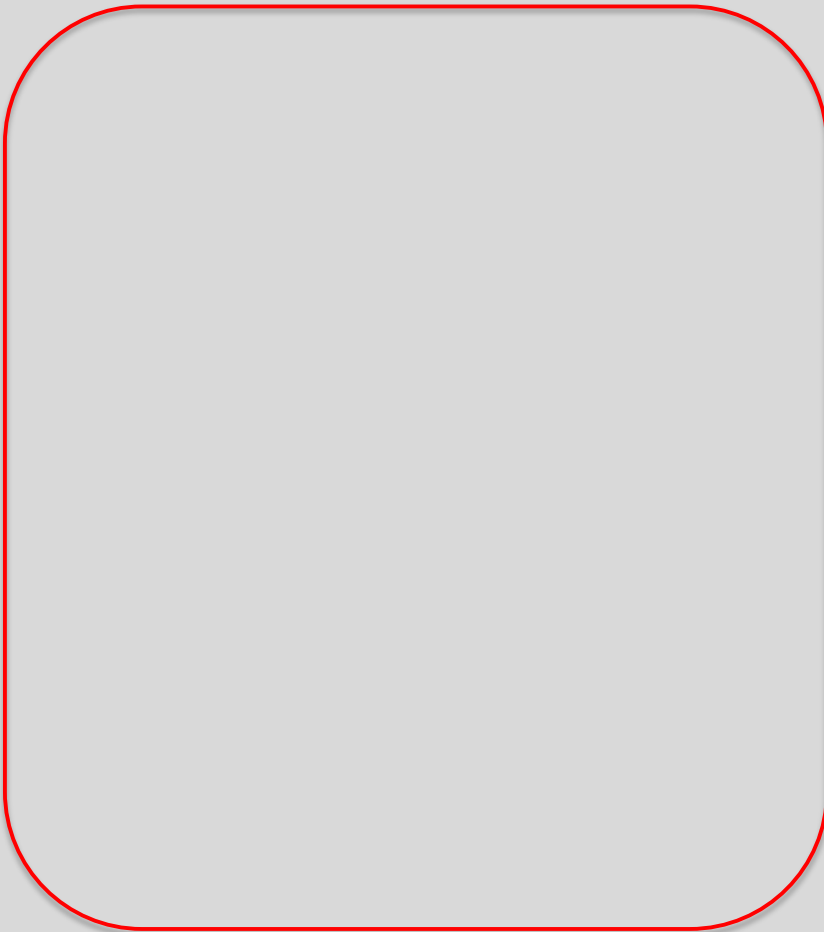
Were player challenges met? How? If not, why?)

)

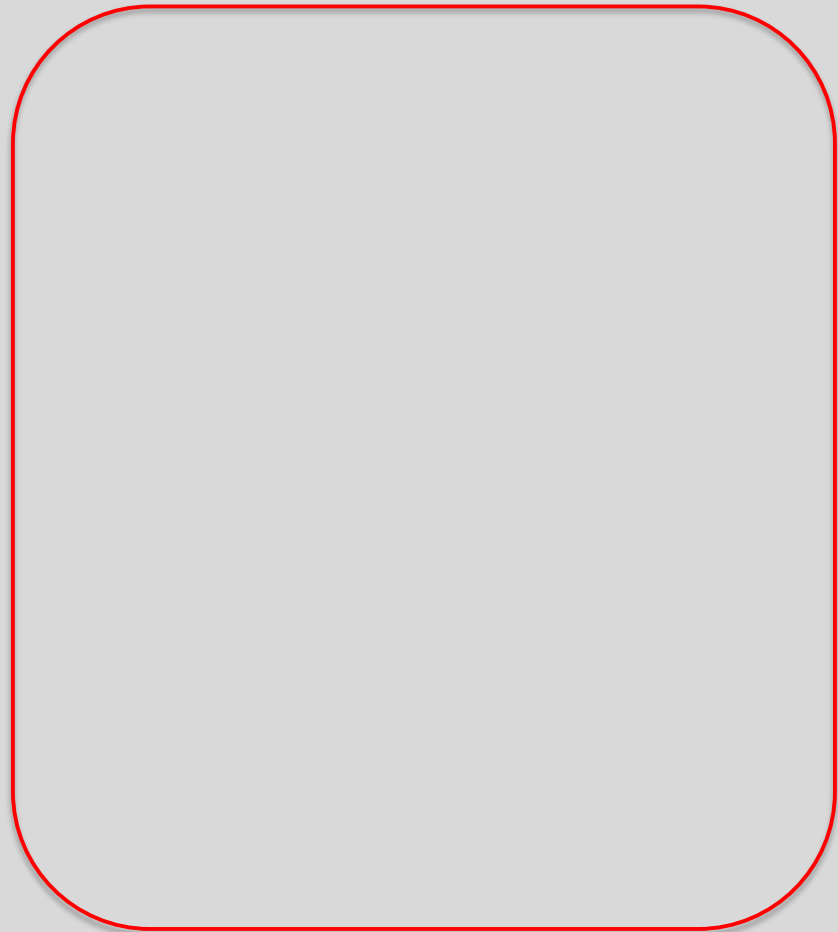
Were relevant questions asked? Give examples!

Use of 'ABCDE' Resilience Model!

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# **APPENDIX 15**

### Example Social Validation Interview Transcript

Interviewer: Can you talk me through your experiences of integrating life skills?

Respondent: I love it I do. I absolutely love it. Well, before we started this I think it was a fundamental part of what I did quite naturally, but I think since I've had, since I've been through the intervention and starting working with you, I think I've started to understand more explicitly what I was actually doing to develop these skills in place, and I've probably taken more time and paid more attention now to reinforcing those skills and really considering how I help the players to develop them in a way that they can integrate into other areas of their life, so I suppose my experience with them is that they've always been a fundamental part of what I do, just because of my background as a coach, but they've become a more explicit part of what I do now and they probably take over as the most important things that we're developing during the session.

I: Can you, have you noticed a difference in your players, through the integration, through the way that you've delivered sessions?

R: I think that I've definitely noticed with one group that they've become far more communicative, they're willing to communicate, they seem to know what sorts of things to say. I think with football players it's always the issue. Because when coaches ask players to communicate, we're not just asking them to talk, we're asking them to say the right things, at the right times, in order to help other players perform. So I've noticed a big upsurge in that, and a willingness to engage in those behaviors. And the other big one I suppose is problem solving. I'll give the players opportunities to discuss within their small groups how they're going to be more effective in the team, and they get the opportunity then to figure those things out for themselves and put their plans into action. I probably could spend a little bit more time on reviewing those plans, but generally they seem to again be really willing to engage in those behaviors, and when questioned, they're able to give me some answers in terms of you know what they think the issues are and what they think they need to do. And maybe the thing, the main life skill underpinning all of those things is confidence, because if they didn't have that confidence, or they didn't feel as though they're in an environment that allowed them to have their own thoughts and opinions, they wouldn't do, they wouldn't engage in those activities, so.

I: You mentioned the group work for developing problem solving. Are there any specific strategies that you've used in order to develop communication.

R: I use buzzwords. Cue words. I think cue words is an important one because again when you're asking players to communicate, they need to know what to say, and you know at a young age they're concentrating on so many other things associated with the technical aspect of the sport, that it's quite easy for them to forget that they've got to communicate, so by using cue words that also help them concentrate on the skill, you get them to kill two birds with one stone, so that's one thing that I've used, so, for example, if we're looking at a transition from defense to attack, the cue words might be split and compact, so when they haven't got the ball we're looking for compactness, when they have got it we're looking for split. And those things have assisted that aspect of their life skills I suppose. They had a

little group work for problem solving, that's always a good one, and just giving players the opportunity to make their own decisions, so providing a target for them, and then allowing them to understand individually how they might use their own strengths to hit that target, so it might be a one on one situation and one player might be really quick, and therefore the player's got to make a decision about how he uses that, whereas another player might be quite skillful or have a good shot, and he's got to think about how he creates opportunities to get that away. So, again just general things that we do in practice, but placing more emphasis on the life skill.

I: How easy has it been to facilitate that if different players are working towards the same sort of target, but in different ways?

R: I think differentiation is always quite a hard, it's a hard skill to be able to master as a coach. But I just think it's an aspect of good coaching and I think if you're working with young people, you need individual approaches to developing players, and you need to understand your players on an individual basis, and allow them to explore the skills and that that you're looking to develop, based on what they can and can't do, and in that sense, I suppose it links into certain learning theories like the zone of proximal development and that sort of stuff where, you're just looking to assist players in the bits that they don't know, or they can't do, but also provide the opportunity for them explore their own knowledge and skills. So yeah, it is a little difficult but at the same time, you have to kind of think outside of the box, and innovatively about how you are going to manage that.

I: Any challenges or barriers that you've faced to delivery?

R: No, none really. I always try and do a review at the end, and sometimes that's quite challenging because the players are still quite buzzed about playing and finishing the session, and then you're asking them to think quite critically about how they're going to transfer those skills or what those skills might look like in other walks of life. And at the minute, it's quite a test to really get the right sorts of questions, particularly for an under 10s group who might struggle to conceptualize those things. But just having the conversations I think is helping to develop the relationship with the players, that will hopefully in the future, help me to do that a little bit better.

I: I know you mentioned a little bit about transfer there, but has there been any sort of strategy or any way that you've tried to initiate thought around the transfer of skills?

R: Yeah, questions. I tended to do it at the end of a session, but I find myself doing it more and more in a session now, and using an analogy, so I think they help, but obviously it's getting the right analogy for the age group and I suppose the skill is to be able to put yourself in their position and understand culturally what turns them on and what flicks their switch, if you like. I think that analogy learning is a great way of getting them thinking about their own practice really. I've talked about listening as a skill the other day, and the way in which they might listen to certain things but not others, but how do they know whether they'll get the outcome that they expect, unless they listen in the first place. And I think those things have a little bit of meaning and the story in and around the message will

probably get remembered more than the message, so as long as they're remembering something.

I: It kind of generates the understanding?

R: Yeah.

I: Okay, brilliant. Is there anything else that you'd like to add or any other experiences that you'd like to share?

R: No. It would be good if we could measure whether this was actually helping, or whether their life skills are actually developing, you know, we have anecdotes, we often see things in the field, but it would be nice to know that as a direct result of them engaging in 48 weeks, not 48 weeks, what am I on about, 32 weeks of training, that they've developed as a person outside as well. How you would measure that, I'm not too sure whether it's. It's tough to ask the kids but it might be worth asking the parents to see if they've made any changes, but it's hard then to distinguish whether that's as a direct result of football or just maturation or school or whatever, but I suppose that's the next challenge for research.

I: Thank you very much.

**End of transcript**

# **APPENDIX 16**



# Reflection(Log(



## Life(Skill(Development(

Name:(\_\_\_\_\_)



Ceri(Bowley(—(PhD(Research(?(2013(

# Life Skills

During training and matches we will focus on developing the following life skills:

- Social Skills
- Respect
- Discipline
- Personal Control
- Leadership
- Organisation

## Process for developing Life Skills:



**Message:** Your coach will introduce the life skill focus before the session.!

!

**Reinforce:** There will be a focus on this life skill throughout the session and you will have the opportunity to practice and develop the skill in a variety of ways including working alone and/or in groups.!

!

**Transfer:** At the end of the session we will discuss what you have learnt and where else you can use the skill (e.g. at home, school). Your challenge then is to use this skill in another environment and use this log to record when and how you did that.

## How to use this reflection log.....

1. The first section is for recording your learning during training. Section 2 is for matches.
2. The four corners box is for listing the skills involved in the session. If you are unsure where to put a skill ask your coach.
3. What did you learn/develop today?  
!Pick 3 skills to list here. These can be new skills or ones already learned that you practiced.
4. Did you learn a new life skill?  
!This is the life skill introduced at the start of the session. Simply list the skill and explain how you learned/developed it.
5. Where will you try and use the skill next?  
This will be the new environment that you think you can use the skill (as discussed in transfer).
6. Explain how you used the life skill in a new environment....
7. Evidence of life skill transfer....  
This is for a parent/guardian, teacher or coach to fill in.

**SECTION 1:**  
**Training Reflection**

**Date:**      /      /

Session'Title:' \_\_\_\_\_

## Session focus (Four Corners)

Technical	Psychological
Physical	Social

## What did you learn/develop today?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

### 3.

Did you learn a new life skill? What Skill? How?

Where will you try and use this life skill next? (

Evidence of life skill transfer.... (

If you used the life skill in another environment explain how here.... (

**SECTION 1:**  
**Match Reflection**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Opposition:** ( ( ( ( ( ( (

**Challenge:** \_\_\_\_\_

( What did you do well today? (

(  
1. \_\_\_\_\_ (

(  
2. \_\_\_\_\_ (

(  
3. \_\_\_\_\_ (

What will you try and improve? (

(  
1. \_\_\_\_\_ (

(  
2. \_\_\_\_\_ (

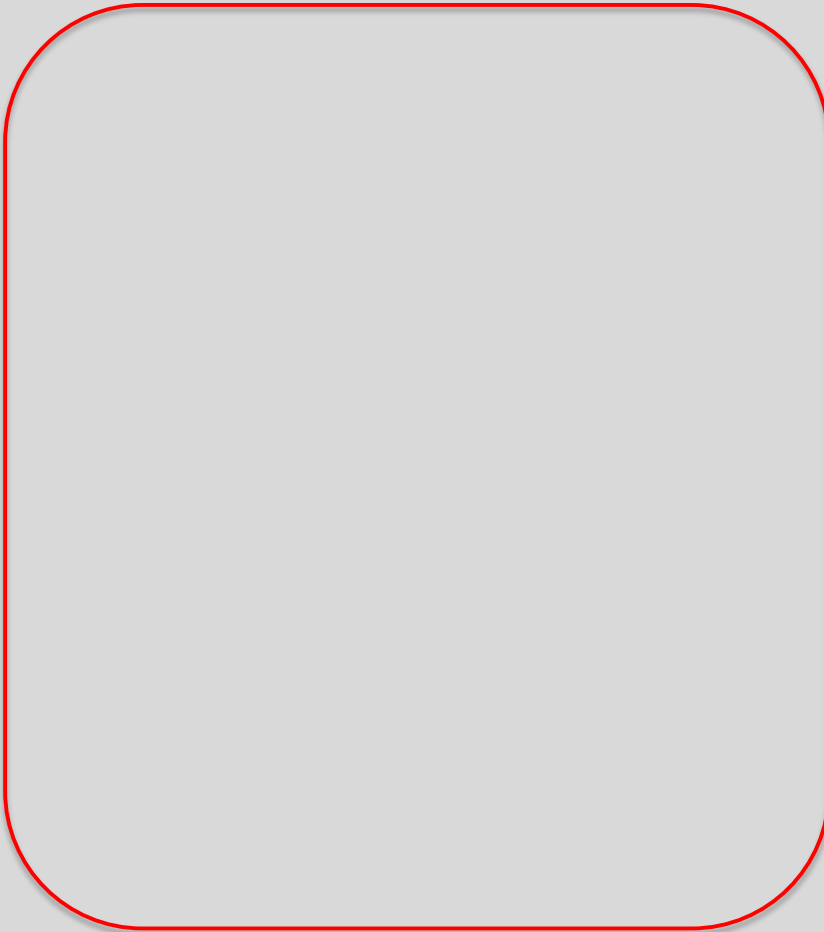
(  
3. \_\_\_\_\_ (

What life skills did you use? How? (

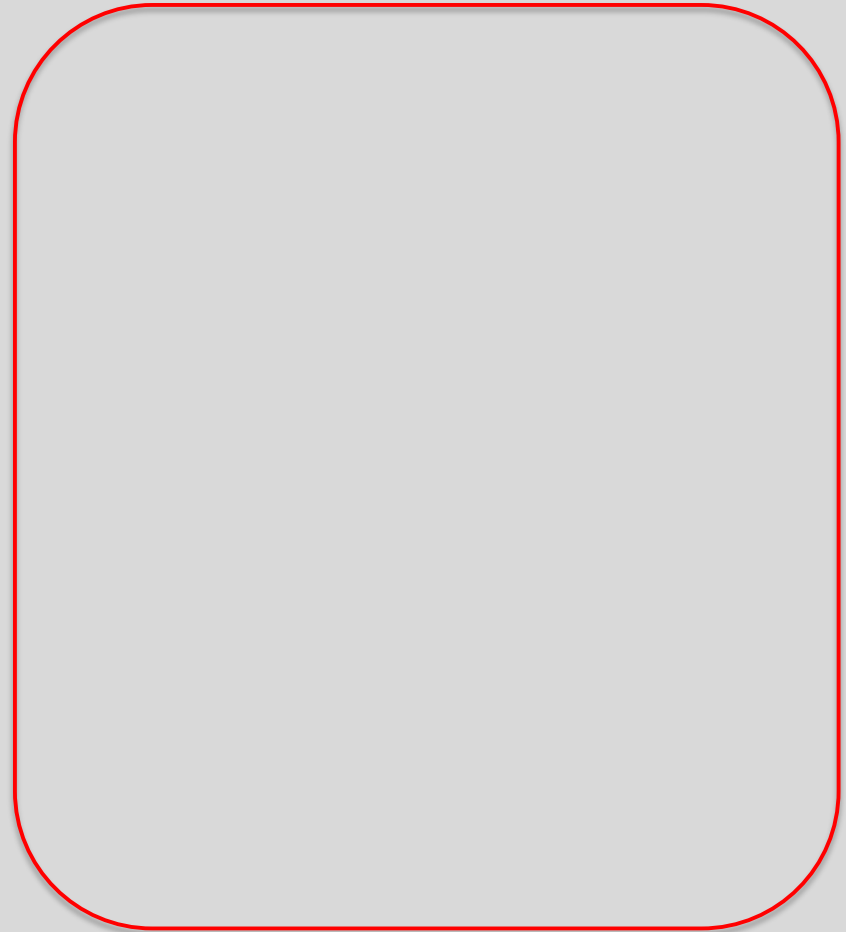
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## **APPENDIX 17**

### **Study 3 Interview Guide**

#### **All – Opening**

Thank you all for giving your time to participate.

Did you all receive the Preparation Booklet in enough time and have you been able to think about the points raised in the booklet?

Can I remind you that your participation is not compulsory and you are free to leave at any stage should you wish.

I also ask that you respect other participants' views and opinions whether they be similar or different to your own whilst encouraging open discussion.

#### **All - Closing**

Do you have anything else to add, have we failed to discuss any important issues?

Have you been led or influenced in any way?

Have you been able to provide your own opinion/story?

1. What do you understand by the term life skill?

2. Have you developed life skills through playing football?

*Prompts: What skills?*

*How?*

3. Can you recall any instances when your coach has taught you life skills?

*Prompts: What skills?*

*How?*

*What strategies have they used?*

4. Have you been able to use the life skills you've learnt to other areas of life outside football?

*Prompts: What skills?*

*How?*

*Transfer of life skills*

5. Have you had help from other people to transfer life skills?

*Prompts: Who?*

*How? Explain each person's role*