

**ENHANCING COACHES' EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING THROUGH  
'COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE' (LAVE & WENGER, 1991)**

By

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for the degree of PhD (Sports Coaching).

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## **DECLARATIONS**

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Significant work in the social sciences has argued the nature of learning as a collaborative, social process (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Similarly, research within coaching has positioned interaction and experience within practical coaching contexts as the principal knowledge source of both novice and experienced coaches (Cushion, Armour & Jones, 2006; Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2004; Potrac, Jones & Armour, 2002). Despite such developments, a dearth of research exists examining the complexities inherent in establishing, developing and facilitating such a social learning environment. This is particularly so in terms of exploring the effectiveness of pedagogical frameworks used to develop coaches' experiential knowledge. The aim of this PhD thesis was to explore how, through an action research based study, coaches' experiential learning could be harnessed and better developed within Lave and Wenger's (1991) shared 'communities of practice' (CoPs).

The study involved two groups of coaches; one of elite and the other of developmental football players. Using an action research methodology, data on coaches' learning were gathered both through on-going observations and focus groups interviews over the course of a nine-month season. The data were inductively analysed and presented as a series of unfolding narratives. The plot hinges on my attempts as a facilitator to encourage the respective groups of coaches to engage and develop within their CoPs. Findings revealed that whilst the developmental coaches were generally positive about participating in a 'community of practice' (CoP) and appeared to engage with its processes, the elite coaches were much less cooperative. The results contribute to the body of evidence-based studies that seek to examine, problematise and build credible pedagogies for coach education, whilst bringing to light the issues associated with the messy nature of such research and the constant everyday demands placed on coaches working at a variety of levels.

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## **CONTENTS**

<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Aims	3
1.2 Objectives	3
1.3 Rationale for, and Context of, the Study	4
<b>CHAPTER TWO: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 Psychological Approaches	8
2.1.1 Early Research Directions	8
2.1.2 Complex Cognitive Thought Processes of Coaches	9
2.1.3 Decision Making	12
2.1.4 Coaching Style: Interpersonal Dynamics	15
2.2 Pedagogical Approaches	19
2.3 Sociological Approaches	25
2.3.1 The Importance of Examining Coaching as a Sociological Endeavour	26
2.3.2 Role Theory	27
2.3.3 Interaction in the Coaching Context	29
2.3.4 Coaches' Power	32
2.4 Learning Theory	36
2.4.1 The Product Orientated Approach to Learning	37
2.4.2 The Process Orientated Approach to Learning	39
2.4.3 Cognitivism	40
2.4.4 Constructivism	41
2.4.5 Humanism	43
2.4.6 Social Learning	44

2.4.7 More Recent Approaches	46
2.4.8 Experiential Learning Theory	47
2.5 Coach Education	49
2.5.1 Coach Education Research	54
2.5.2 Recent Research (case examples of how it looks in practice)	55
2.6 Conclusion	57
 <b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY</b>	 <b>59</b>
3.1 Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions	59
3.2 Action Research	62
3.3 The Role and Position of the Researcher	68
3.3.1 Gender Issues Associated With the Role of the Researcher	72
3.4 Data Gathering Instruments	74
3.4.1 Focus Group Interviews	74
3.4.2 Observations	77
3.5 Study Design	80
3.5.1 Participants	80
3.5.2 Procedures	83
3.6 Data Analysis	85
3.6.1 Grounded Theory: A Variation	86
3.6.2 Communities of Practice	89
3.6.3 Presentation of Data	93
3.7 Issues of Triangulation, Validity and Reliability	95
3.8 Ethical Concerns	99
3.9 Methodological Limitations	100

<b>CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS OF AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY</b>	<b>102</b>
4.1 Introduction	102
4.2 Group 1: Developmental Coaches' Community of Practice	103
4.2.1 Setting the Scene	103
4.2.2 Developing Learning through Socially Located, Self-Reflective Practice	112
4.2.2.1 Theory-Injection: Empowerment	115
4.2.2.2 Theory-Injection: Motivational Climate and TARGET Behaviours	123
4.2.2.3 Theory-Injection: Panopticism	132
4.3 Group 2: Elite Coaches' Community of Practice	136
4.3.1 Setting the Scene	136
4.3.2 Developing Learning through Socially Located, Self-Reflective Practice	141
4.3.2.1 Theory-Injection: Empowerment	142
4.3.2.2 Theory-Injection: Motivational Climate and TARGET Behaviours	147
4.3.2.3 Theory-Injection: Panopticism	151
4.4 The Value of Developing Coaches' Knowledge within a Shared Community of Practice	155
4.4.1 Sharing Information	158
4.5 Examining the Role of the Facilitator	162
4.5.1 Issues of Access	163
4.5.2 Dismissals and Withdrawals: Maintaining a Productive CoP	164
4.5.3 Demands of the Job and Needs of the Individual	166
4.5.4 Nurturing the CoP	167
4.5.5 Consistency vs. Intellectual Access	168
4.6 Some Reflections on the Results Section	169

<b>CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION</b>	<b>172</b>
5.1 The Existence of Communities of Practice	172
5.2 Developing Coaches' Learning through Socially Located, Self-Reflective Practice	174
5.3 The Value of Developing Coaches' Knowledge within a Shared Community of Practice	180
5.4 Comparing the Elite and Developmental Communities of Practice	184
5.5 Examining the Role of the Facilitator	189
 <b>CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION</b>	 <b>195</b>
6.1 Introduction	195
6.2 Recapping the Aims and Objectives of the Study	196
6.3 A Summary of the Main Research Findings	197
6.4 Implications (and Limitations) of the Study	201
6.5 Recommendations for Future Research	204
6.6 Final Reflections: My Journey	205
 <b>REFERENCES</b>	 <b>212</b>
 <b>APPENDICES</b>	 <b>238</b>
Appendix 1. Empowerment Handout (Theory-injection)	238
Appendix 2. Motivational Climate Handout (Theory-injection)	239
Appendix 3. Panopticism Handout (Theory-injection)	240



## **LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1. Assumptions underlying positivist, interpretive and critical paradigms

(Sparkes, 1992, p. 21)

61

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

Recent years have witnessed a considerable upsurge in coaching research (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004a) signalling sports coaching's emergence as a legitimate academic discipline worthy of investigation (Lyle, 2002). Studies have been carried out from a number of perspectives rooted in the various sport science disciplines of psychology (Allen & Howe, 1998; Kenow & Williams, 1999), sociology (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Jones, 2000; Jones *et al.*, 2002; 2003; 2004; Potrac, Jones & Cushion, 2007), philosophy (Cassidy, Jones & Potrac, 2009), motor learning (Smoll & Smith, 1993), pedagogy (Abraham & Collins, 1998; Cassidy, Jones & Potrac, 2004; Cushion *et al.*, 2006) and coaching knowledge acquisition (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007; Gilbert, Côté & Mallett, 2006). Similarly, findings have been reported through a range of media including statistical analysis (Bloom, Crumpton & Anderson, 1999; Douge & Hastie, 1993; Lacy & Darst, 1989; Smith, Smoll & Hunt, 1977), through the creation of models of and for coaching (Chelladurai, 1980; Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria & Russell, 1995a; Fairs, 1987) to more critical evaluations of exactly what comprises the activity (Cushion & Jones, 2006). Undoubtedly, such work has gone some way to improve our understanding of coaching and how to do it better.

Despite such developments, evidence suggests that the results of this work are not finding their way into coaches' practice. One of the reasons given has been the rationalistic nature of much of the work carried out (Jones, 2000). In many ways, this is not surprising given psychology's often taken-for-granted position as the most appropriate stance from where to undertake an analysis of coaching. Here, coaching has often been portrayed as a series of unproblematic, sequential stages mirroring the dominant positivistic paradigm employed to analyse it. This and other rationalistic based work, however, has been criticised by coaches and some scholars alike as simplifying a very complex process; a process which is

underpinned by multi-faceted, power based relationships (Jones *et al.*, 2003). The often heard criticism by coaches here relates to the findings being ‘fine in theory’, but divorced from the reality of the messy world they work in (Jones *et al.*, 2004). Subsequently, formalised learning episodes are undervalued in comparison to the day-to-day learning that coaches experience within their respective working environments (Fleurance & Cotteaux, 1999; Jones *et al.*, 2004; Saury & Durand, 1998; Werthner & Trudel, 2006).

Recent work by a growing number of scholars from social-constructivist and social psychological perspectives has attempted to grapple with the aforementioned complexity to some effect. This group has voiced a willingness to engage with the dynamic intricate nature of coaching, stressing the need for research to focus on the social world of individual coaches and how they operate within given guidelines before the holistic nature of the coaching process can be fully understood (Jones, 2000; Potrac & Jones, 1999; Potrac, Brewer, Jones, Armour & Hoff, 2000). They argued that recent investigation has only just begun to acknowledge and explore the nature and dynamics of coaching, which are considered to be sophisticated, multi-faceted and often dictated by context (Armour & Fernández-Balboa, 2000; Jones *et al.*, 2003; Potrac *et al.*, 2002). For example, the variables that comprise a particular coaching scenario i.e., the coach, players and environment, will often differ and thus determine the behaviours and actions within particular situations.

Although welcome strides have been made in this regard, thus developing greater insight into how coaches manage their respective contexts, the effect on practice continues to be scant. Accordingly, coaches’ knowledge continues to be founded on implicit experiential learning as opposed to explicit coach education courses (Cushion, Armour & Jones, 2003). On reflection, this should not be considered unusual or problematic, as it has long been

accepted that humans learn best from experience and subsequent reflection upon it. Perhaps then, a failing in coach education has been not to take greater account of this learning force, instead, trying to impose a set of ideals upon coaches whose circumstances and challenges are always unique. Consequently, perhaps future coach education programmes should focus on learners not as vessels to be filled with given knowledge but as significant and valued data sources, thus being centred on the learner and learning rather than the instructor and instruction (Cassidy, Potrac & McKenzie, 2006).

### 1.1 Aims

The aim of this project was to conduct an action research study as a means through which coaches' experiential learning can be maximised. It sought to develop a model of professional development to assist coaches to better deal with the problematic and complex nature of their work.

### 1.2 Objectives

This gave rise to a number of inter-related objectives:

- To explore the value to coaches of developing their knowledge within a shared 'community of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991).
- To examine if coaches' learning is developed through socially located, self-reflective practice; and if so, how?
- To compare the effectiveness of a 'community of learning' among coaches of developmental and elite athletes.
- To examine the role of an external facilitator in this process.
- To construct a process by which implicit coaching knowledge can be formally developed.

### 1.3 Rationale for, and Context of, the Study

Recent approaches in the social sciences have come to recognise the nature of learning as a collaborative, social process (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Similarly, there is agreement among coaching scholars and practitioners that interactive experience is the principal knowledge source of both neophyte and expert coaches (Cushion *et al.*, 2006; Jones *et al.*, 2004; Potrac *et al.*, 2002). Hence, much of what a new coach learns is through “ongoing interactions with specific individuals within practical coaching contexts” (Cushion *et al.*, 2006, p. 217). Accordingly, recent research suggests that there is merit in providing coaches with formalised opportunities to discuss, debate and share ideas with other coaches about their practice and/or the coaching process (Cassidy *et al.*, 2006). However, just providing coaches with this opportunity is often not enough; it needs to be organised so that participation for all coaches is meaningful. The emphasis needs to be on the facilitation of discussion, interaction, and the negotiation of meaning rather than on the prescription of coaching and theoretical principles, or merely of providing an unfocused forum (Cassidy *et al.*, 2006). Despite this, professional preparation programmes have done little to address the coaching process as a social one and the nature of learning within it (Gilbert & Trudel, 2001). This is particularly so in relation to facilitating experiential learning within coaching communities as a tool for enhancing knowledge, improving practice and resolving contextual issues. The significance of the study then is principally grounded in developing a means by which coaches’ existing knowledge and previous coaching experiences can be better respected, harnessed and developed.

Related to the above point is the issue of existing coach education programmes being criticised as being too rationalistic and episodic (Jones, 2000). Evidence suggests that knowledge delivered on such courses is abstracted from specific coaching contexts and is,

therefore, irrelevant to many. This is of no surprise when the myriad of individual variations associated with each coach, player and club environment is considered (Cushion, 2001). If coaching consists of micro realities, and is a complex dynamic process (Armour & Fernández-Balboa, 2000; Jones *et al.*, 2003; Potrac *et al.*, 2002), it is ambitious to think that any formal coach education programme can, or will by itself, prepare coaches to face the various contextual factors they are likely to come across. The value of this study then also lies in developing a more relevant coach development programme, one that is rooted in practitioners' concerns, perceptions and abilities, thus having the potential to be accepted by coaches as a legitimate and worthwhile educational process.

There has never been a better time to develop a new and radical approach to coach education. The success of Britain's bid to host the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2012 has provided motivation and direction for the entire sports system (The UK Coaching Framework, 2007). The government and its agencies recognise that the recruitment and support of current and future coaches is crucial if we are to create a sporting legacy and reap rich dividends in terms of sporting participation, healthy lifestyles and sporting success (ibid, 2007). Consequently, a Coaching Task Force was recently set up by the government to review the role of coaching, tackle the shortage of both professional and voluntary coaches, and recognise coaching as a profession with accredited qualifications and a real career-development structure (Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2002).

This commitment from the government and the introduction of new coaching initiatives has presented a powerful impetus for change (Nelson & Cushion, 2006). Coach education, as already suggested, is becoming an increasingly popular area of research as coaching is considered central to achieving sporting success. However, if the current rationalistic

emphasis of coach education programmes is not addressed, this welcome initiative could be wasted (Jones & Turner, 2006; Jones & Wallace, 2005). Developing models of professional practice which assist coaches to better deal with the realities of the problematic, complex nature of their work is, therefore, crucial to developing imaginative, dynamic and thoughtful coaches (Cushion *et al.*, 2003).

## **CHAPTER TWO: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The purpose of this section is to examine literature that is relevant to this study, highlighting the value of my research in developing a means by which coaches' existing knowledge and previous experiences can be better regarded, harnessed and cultivated. The section maps out the explorative 'journey' I undertook, addressing previous work on general coaching research, theories of learning and current approaches to coach education. In seeking to create a model of professional development to assist coaches to better deal with the problematic and complex nature of their work, the intention is to pin-point where my work fits. In terms of structure, each individual sub-section will begin with a short introduction explaining the purpose of the discussion that follows, whilst detailing and providing a rationale for the chosen literature. After an outline and critique of coaching research thus far, the later sections comprise a review of learning theory, coach education and finish with a brief conclusion. Some of the work highlighted cannot be cleanly placed under one header. In this respect, I have tried to avoid overlap by going into sufficient detail in the first instance or where it would be most appropriately placed. Then, in the event of it being referred to again, I redirect the reader to previous or subsequent sections.

In the following three sections I attempt to map out coaching research (i.e., research done on coaching). This is organised along disciplinary lines, addressing coaching research from psychological, pedagogical and social perspectives. Some of the work discussed under certain sub-headings could be listed elsewhere. As stated above, I acknowledge there are areas of overlap as one sub-heading cannot be easily dissociated from another; hence, occasionally, work which covers more than one area is listed under both and may appear more than once, but is addressed in light of different topics (Jones, 2005).



## 2.1 Psychological Approaches

Much of the current research surrounding coaching has been located in or around the field of sport psychology (Jones, 2000). Early research generally utilised a quantitative approach to data collection and analysis. This was later accompanied and often complimented by qualitative methodologies (Gratton & Jones, 2004). An attempt is made here to map out the key texts that have taken a psychological approach to examining sports coaching. Topics investigated include early research directions, the knowledge, perceptions and thinking processes of expert coaches, decision making, and interaction between the coach and various stakeholders.

### 2.1.1 Early Research Directions

A number of ontological and epistemological assumptions underpin the wealth of positivistic research into sports coaching; in particular, the dominance of behavioural psychology as the subject's traditional disciplinary guide (Cushion *et al.*, 2006). Psychology's core concept of reductionism provided a mechanistic guide to understanding, and viewing human behaviour as a measurable set of sequential stages (ibid, 2006). Indeed, the late 1970s saw the beginning of an upsurge of research fostering a psychological approach to coaching. Here, Penman, Hastad, and Cords (1974) analysed the degree of correlation between coaching success (male, interscholastic head football and basketball coaches) and authoritarianism (Crust & Lawrence, 2006). Studies that followed took similar approaches to examining the relationship between effective leadership and variables such as decision-making, style and creativity (Hendry, 1969; Pratt & Eitzen, 1989). Foremost among such work was Chelladurai's (1980) study of leadership in sport, resulting in the development of the multidimensional model of coaching. This was followed by several other studies by the same author including Chelladurai and Saleh's

(1980) study of leadership behaviours, and Chelladurai and Carron's (1983) work on athletic maturity and preferred leadership style. This, in turn, spawned further work into the decision making styles of coaches (Chelladurai & Arnott, 1985; Chelladurai, Haggerty, and Baxter, 1989). Other research ensued, taking varying psychological approaches; for example, the systematic observation of coaches (Smith *et al.*, 1977), the interpersonal relationships between coaches and athletes (Smith, Smoll & Curtis, 1979), and the role of the coach in fostering team cohesion (Westre & Weiss, 1991). This eventually led to the importance of specific rather than general theories of leadership being acknowledged (Chelladurai, 1990; Crust & Lawrence, 2006). Whilst some clarity emerged from these early studies, unsurprisingly, no single objective measure of coaching effectiveness appropriate in all coaching situations was identified (Cross, 1999). Similarly, whilst useful information was gathered using this positivist approach, often the findings were generalised and oversimplified in relation to the contextual complexities within which coaches operate. Recently, it has been argued that such an approach undermined the use of more insightful and interpretive investigations into coaches' values, behaviours and context (Cushion *et al.*, 2006; Lyle, 1999).

### 2.1.2 Complex Cognitive Thought Processes of Coaches

The plethora of publications on coaching from a psychological perspective causes difficulty when trying to provide an outline of the work that is insightful, relevant and detailed. A good starting point might be Côté *et al.* (1995a), who produced a theoretical model for explaining which factors were most significant to coaches whilst defining the main components for creating a high performance environment. They argued that despite the increase in coaching research, "no theoretical framework exists for explaining which factors are most important in the coaching process and which relationships among these

factors are most significant” (p. 1). Consequently, in an attempt to unearth some of the complexities of sports coaching, Côté *et al.* (1995a) interviewed seventeen expert Canadian elite gymnastic coaches to explore the structure of their coaching knowledge. Inductive analysis resulted in the discovery of three main components: competition, training and organisation; and three secondary components: the coach’s personal characteristics, the gymnast’s personal characteristics (and the level of development); and finally, contextual factors that impinge upon unique coaching situations. Whilst Côté *et al.*’s (1995a) collection of empirical data recognised the complicated realities of the coaching process and its context; they did not refer to these complexities in sufficient detail in the findings (Cushion *et al.*, 2006). Nevertheless, this was a pioneering study in examining expert coaches, and the start of a series of in-depth qualitative investigations by the same group of researchers (i.e., Côté & Salmela, 1996; Côté, Salmela & Russell, 1995b). These inspired other examinations of expert coaches that addressed different areas of the coaching process.

Côté *et al.* (1995b) used the same methodological framework as the previous study (Côté *et al.*, 1995a) to examine the knowledge used by gymnastic coaches in competition and training, and in the organisation of such activities (Côté & Salmela, 1996). They found that coaches of males and females planned training similarly, except that coaches of female athletes appeared to emphasise aesthetic and nutritional issues to a greater extent, whereas coaches of males were more concerned with the organisation of gymnasts’ physical conditioning. The study highlighted the importance of interaction between the coach, performers, assistants and parents and went some way towards filling a gap in the literature at that time. However, despite their qualitative approaches, the breadth of this study and its predecessor resulted in a lack of depth in the coaches’ responses.

Based on earlier work (i.e., Côté and colleagues; Tharpe & Gallimore, 1976) Bloom *et al.* (1999) used the 'revised coaching behaviour recording form' to systematically observe the teaching behaviours and verbal cues of an expert basketball coach. Unlike the studies of Côté and associates, Bloom *et al.* (1999) used statistical analysis and compared the results from the expert coach to research done on novice coaches. They found that almost one-third of the expert coach's practice behaviours related to phases of play (i.e., attack and defence), differing from the cognitive processes and practice of beginner and intermediate coaches who focused more on teaching fundamental skills and techniques. Similarly, Streat, Senecal, Howlett and Burgess (1997) examined coaches' thinking processes and found that as coaches become more experienced and accomplished, they tended to engage in further critical thinking about strategy than they did as novices. The findings of both Streat *et al.* (1997) and Bloom *et al.* (1999) are unsurprising given that it is now generally acknowledged that coaches develop and learn through experience and critical reflection on that experience. Additionally, it is common for the content focus of coach education programmes to progress from coaching fundamental skills and techniques at foundation levels through to tactics and strategies at more advanced levels, based on the assumption that as coaches move through coach education systems the needs of their athletes also change; i.e., from technical to tactical correction or refinement.

Bloom, Stevens and Wickwire (2003) used focus groups to assess the perceptions of expert coaches about team building and to explore the use of team building strategies specific to elite sport. As with previous studies, Bloom *et al.* (2003) related much of their work to Côté and associates, proposing that the organisational component within high performance coaching is central to team building. Furthermore, they found that coaches were meticulous in planning the timing and type of team building activity to be implemented throughout the

season. Significantly, this study found that coaches acquired team building ideas through many different sources, including interaction with others, and trial and error experiences (Bloom *et al.*, 2003).

Despite making valuable contributions, this body of work can be criticised for being too general to capture the true complexities inherent in the coaching of sports. Saury and Durand (1998) argued against this tendency to rationalise in a paper that examined coaching knowledge from a cognitive ergonomics perspective based on the ‘task activity model’. They stated that the coaching process is neither orderly nor cyclical and cannot be reduced to the application of rules (Cushion *et al.*, 2006). They found that coaching tasks were considered by coaches as a set of interacting constraints, which generate complex, contradictory and ill defined problems. They examined coaches’ operating models which were based on several categories within the two main goals of the task activity model. Firstly, to examine the constraints involved in the coaching task (e.g., the dynamic uncertain nature of the situation) and in the task activity interaction (e.g., cognitive, anticipation on flexible plans); and secondly, to define the characteristic features of coaches’ activity and their means of participation in the task (e.g., involvement in the training situation based on past experience). They argued that practical knowledge of less expert coaches is largely based on earlier coaching encounters, and is considered to be typical of familiarity with the coaching situation and contact with athletes (Saury & Durand, 1998). Experience then, is rendered useless if it is not critically reflected upon as the expert coach would do.

### 2.1.3 Decision Making

Speedy and effective decision making is vital for efficient coaching, not just in

competition, but in training and everyday dealings with athletes. However, this is an area that has received little attention from scholars and coach education (Vergeer & Lyle, 2007). Whilst, the degree to which coaches encourage or approach decision making in athletes has been well documented, studies examining the decision making processes of coaches as themselves have only recently emerged (Gilbert, Trudel, Haughian, 1999). Earlier studies in the area focused on styles of managerial decision making and the behavioural effects of decision making (e.g., Chelladurai & Haggerty, 1978). However, a few studies then took a more cognitive approach to coaches' decision making, either by attempting to unearth the processes of coaches' decision making and/or by specifically examining problematic areas (e.g., Gilbert *et al.*, 1999).

Although, to a degree, these studies have provided a valuable insight into the decision making of sport coaches, most have examined this process partially, addressing only single factors that influence the phenomenon. For example, Jones *et al.* (1997) evaluated the planning processes, the interactive decision making and coaching behaviours of expert and novice coaches. They focused on the influence of player behaviour on the coaches' decision making, and found that generally, both expert and novice coaches used information on athlete characteristics (such as age, gender etc) to inform their planning decisions. Additionally, they found that expert coaches were willing to make decisions and subsequently change their practice quicker than novice coaches. Like Jones and colleagues, Wilcox and Trudel (1998) also focused on a single factor that influenced decision making. They centred their work around the beliefs that guided the decisions of amateur ice hockey coaches during games. Wilcox and Trudel attempted to model the belief system of one of the five coaches initially examined. They conducted an in-depth analysis of this coach over several months. They found that the coach had a complex belief system, but central to

decision making were two main factors: winning and player development. In respect of this apparent contradiction, the authors argued that as coaches progress in their development and levels at which they work, their philosophy and behaviours towards winning and player development changes.

Similar to the above work examining singular aspects that influence decision making, others have examined just one type of decision made by the coach. Duke and Cortlett (1992) examined the types of events that influenced the decision to call a 'time-out' of thirty-five university women's basketball coaches. The findings suggested that the decision to call a 'time-out' was largely based on the physical state of players, and/or as a strategic response to offensive or defensive events during the game. Like that of Jones and colleagues, and Wilcox and Trudel, this study was conducted away from the coaching environment and coaching practices.

A limited number of other scholars have examined coaches' decision making in their respective coaching contexts. For example, Gilbert *et al.* (1999) argued that interactive decision making models that associate coaches' decisions with player performance are inappropriate for studying coaches' decision making during training and competition. "Although player performance is an important factor, other factors such as the habits-history of the player and the context also exert strong influence [over decision making]" (p. 309). In reality, coaches have a catalogue of different decisions to make and factors to consider in making such decisions.

The aforementioned cognitive approaches (e.g., Duke & Cortlett, 1992; Jones *et al.*, 1997) which have largely been studied using quantitative methods (with the exception of Trudel

and colleagues), have been further examined using qualitative measures. Along these lines, Jean Côté and others (see the previous section) proposed a coaching model that provided a framework for identifying and understanding the means coaches use, as well as how and why they make related training and competition decisions. In this respect, it has been argued that the personal knowledge bases created through experience play a central role in decision making (Borrie & Knowles, 2003). Echoing the findings of Côté and colleagues, other work addressing the decision making aspect of coaching was undertaken by Saury and colleagues using an ergonomics approach to coach effectiveness (this is explored in more detail in the subsequent section). In particular, Saury and Durand (1998) found that coaches drew on their experiences as performers as well as previous past coaching experiences to interpret what athletes were experiencing at a given moment and what effect alternative actions would have on training. Nevertheless, further research is required into how coaches learn to make such decisions, and deal with the respective outcomes, which, it may be fair to conclude, is linked to experience and reflection.

#### 2.1.4 Coaching Style: Interpersonal Dynamics

Although interaction is inherently a sociological phenomenon, the studies cited here have examined it from a psychological perspective. The interpersonal aspect of a coach's role is fundamental to the coaching process. It has great bearing on the athlete's training processes, performance outcomes, and also many aspects of their private lives (Fletcher, 2006; Poczwadowski, Barott & Henschen, 2002). Communication, social relationships, interventions, delivery style, decision making, reward, goal management, and leadership have all been identified as elements of interpersonal behaviour, known commonly as 'coaching style' (Lyle, 2002). A 'coaching style' can be influenced by a number of factors, e.g., value systems, personal characteristics, sport specificity and organisational context.



However, traditional models of the coaching process have largely under-played elements such as the social dynamics of coaching and the quality of coach-player relationships or the interplay between coach and support staff (Borrie & Knowles, 2003). Whilst approaches that do examine the interpersonal aspect of the coaches' role may function as a procedural step in answering questions as to 'what is actually happening?' (Brewer & Jones, 2002), it has been suggested that they should be followed up by further interviews or participant observation to determine the why and how of coach interaction (Potrac *et al.*, 2000).

Smith *et al.* (1979) undertook some of the earliest behavioural research into interaction and instruction using the Coaching Behaviour Assessment System (CBAS), previously designed by Smith *et al.* (1977). They modelled and presented youth sport coaches with empirically derived behavioural guidelines, providing behavioural feedback via the CBAS and encouraged self-analysis to enhance self-awareness and compliance with these guidelines. Acknowledging the value of such work, it can still be criticised for tending to over simplify the coaching process by purely examining the technical or instructive component of interaction. Focusing on the training and performance issues and thus the 'basic processes' of coach-athlete relationships (Poczwardowski *et al.*, 2002) provides only a partial depiction of the multitudinous aspects of interaction in the coaching sense. Indeed, coach-athlete relationships are more than just task related, and the interactions between coach and player outside of the technical/instructional component may be deemed just as important (Jowett, 2003).

d'Arrippe-Longueville, Fournier, and Dubois's (1998) work examined the perceived effectiveness of interactions between expert French judo coaches and their athletes, taking a cognitive approach to examining interpersonal behaviour. They examined the coaches'

and athletes' perceptions of their respective interactions. Despite attempting to consider interaction in terms of the complex sporting environment and the related dynamics of the context, the analysis descended into a consideration of leadership styles using Côté *et al.*'s (1995a) model. Nevertheless, d'Arripe-Longueville *et al.* (1998) do focus on a more detailed understanding of coaches' and athletes' personal characteristics and interactions within a given sporting culture (Cushion *et al.*, 2006).

In a more recent study analysing the temporal and contextual organisation of coach-athlete interactions, d'Arripe-Longueville, Saury, Fournier, and Durand (2001) used a theoretical framework adapted from ergonomics research to describe courses of action, and the way in which these courses of action resulted in an efficient coordinated collective action. They argued "cognition (or action) must be studied *in situ* and that the points of views of actors must be considered" (p. 277). Self-confrontation interviews were used as a tool for eliciting the coaches' rationale for their interactions. Similar to the work of Smith *et al.* (1979), data collection was very much focused on the delivery of technical information with disregard for interaction away from the instructional component. Consequently, a very limited view of interaction within the coaching process emerges.

Further to the above studies, Poczwadowski *et al.* (2002) recently attempted to provide an in-depth description of the intricacies of coach-athlete relations. Similar to the earlier work of Saury and Durand (1998), Poczwadowski *et al.* (2002) supported the notion that the coaching process, rather than being an unsophisticated cyclical one, comprises a set of reciprocal interactions between the athlete, coach and environment (Cushion *et al.*, 2006). Three major components were identified as part of the coach-athlete relationship: i) a technical or instructive component that focuses on the training issues, performance issues

or both, defined as the ‘basic process’ (and that which much of the available literature places sole emphasis upon); ii) a social-psychological component related to the needs, affect, cognition and behavioural content of both parties, termed the ‘psychosocial process’; and iii) a spiritual component that refers to the more subtle realisations and beliefs of the coach and athlete with regard to their mutual connection, called the ‘transpersonal process.’ In a similar way, the importance and relevance of examining interpersonal relationships has been demonstrated by LaVoi (2005) and Jowett and colleagues (e.g., Jowett & Cockerill, 2002; Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004). LaVoi (2005) argued for the use of ‘relational cultural theory’ in examining the coach-athlete relationship (Horn, 2008). Likewise, Jowett *et al.* refer to closeness, commitment and complementarity to address coaches’ and athletes’ emotions and behaviours respectively. Later, a fourth ‘C’ was added to Jowett’s model: co-orientation, i.e., coaches’ and athletes’ interperceptions; the way they perceive each other and the way that they think others perceive them (Taylor & Wilson, 2005).

The work of Poczwadowski and colleagues, along with La Voi, Jowett and colleagues, despite subtle differences, argued the case for a degree of interdependence (between the athletes’ and coaches’ feelings, thoughts and behaviours) in the coach-athlete relationship (Jowett & Cockerill, 2002). A further similarity is the significance their models place on the coach and athlete interpretation of the quality of relationship, and how this is influenced by experience and interpersonal perceptions (Jowett & Lavellee, 2007). This research has taken perhaps the most ‘humanistic’ (albeit, at times this could be perceived as romanticised) approach to examining coach-athlete interaction. Nevertheless, unlike earlier work, the use of deep and pervasive research methods and a theoretically eclectic approach to analysis enabled these authors to delve deeper and beyond the instructional

component of coaching (Cushion *et al.*, 2006).

## 2.2 Pedagogical Approaches

Early attempts to examine sports coaching were carried out using systematic observation instruments such as the CBAS (Smith *et al.*, 1977) and the Arizona State University Observation Instrument (Lacy & Darst, 1989) to name but a few (see also Crossman, 1985; Langsdorf, 1979). According to Borrie and Knowles (2003), the instructional behaviour of the coach has been a major area of investigation over the last 30 years, gathering momentum in the last decade (e.g., Jones *et al.*, 2003; Potrac *et al.*, 2007; Spencer, 2001). Additionally, models for, and of, the coaching process (see Cushion *et al.*, 2006, for a comprehensive review) were produced. To a certain extent, these were a result of this systematic observation (e.g., Fairs, 1987; Franks *et al.*, 1986). The purpose of these models was to provide a framework for observing good and bad practice within the process of coaching (Jones, 2006a). Whilst some have argued that these models do have value in describing the key facets of coaching (Borrie & Knowles, 2003), the conceptual limitations of such studies have been identified as unproblematically representing coaching as a “knowable sequence” (Usher, 1998 p. 26), oversimplifying and not accounting for the interpersonal aspect of coaching. Such an approach then, merely provided a basic and limited view only applicable within specific and often idyllic coaching contexts (Jones, 2006a). Indeed, research suggests that each sport is unique (Lacy & Goldston, 1990), with variations in coaching activity resulting from the respective competition, the coach’s philosophy and many other fluctuating variables (Lacy & Goldston, 1990; Smoll & Smith, 1984; Vangucci, Potrac & Jones, 1997). Thus, instead of underplaying the complexities of the coaching process with oversimplified attempts at modelling (as a result of isolated and systematic data collection methods), scholars have suggested that through adopting an

interpretive approach to enquiry, the true essence of coaching can be captured *in situ* (Cushion *et al.*, 2006).

Consequently, it has been argued that the 'bio-scientific' assumptions on which dominant conceptions of the coaching process lie, as somewhat conceptualised by systematic observation research (Jones, 2000; Jones & Wallace, 2005), have limited potential for either a theoretical understanding of coaching or for guiding practitioners (Jones & Wallace, 2005). Such rationalistic approaches reflect the desire to establish a set of clear cut, uncontroversial, fully attainable and measurable goals (Jones, 2006a). This 'tick the box' approach does not account for the complex and dynamic nature of the coaching context. In reality, sports coaching does not permit such clean treatments (Cassidy *et al.*, 2004). Thus, a complete conceptual understanding is inhibited by this oversimplification of what is a very intricate process.

In recent years, like teaching, there has been a call to move away from a mechanistic view of coaching (Jones, 2000). Despite there being a traditional and perhaps a superfluous divide between teaching and coaching (Jones, 2006a), there are undoubtedly many similarities between the two activities. It has been argued that the parental disciplines of education and sport science are accountable for the division between coaching and teaching (Bergmann Drewe, 2000). Whereas teaching, generally, has been directed towards holistically developing an individual, coaching itself has come to be associated with athletic development and the ability to compete physically, mentally and technically (Jones, 2006a). This divide is further emphasised in the provision of coach education programmes within specific sports' governing bodies. For example, in Wales, an individual can choose to pursue either a Football Level 1 Teacher's Certificate or a Football Leader's

Award which is directed towards coaches. Whilst both focus on delivering football practices to the same level of participants, with no difference in the techniques and skills taught to athletes or students, the suggested methods of delivery of these techniques and skills differ. The teacher's award explicitly seeks to address pedagogic aspects such as planning and evaluating units of work, differentiation and maximising participation, all of which are no doubt fundamental coaching practices, but are covered less explicitly on the Football Leader's Award. This highlights the perception that different skills and knowledge are required for the two occupations (Bergmann Drewe, 2000). Furthermore, the provision for separate awards for both teachers and coaches, and the assumed need for it, is restricted to participatory and recreational levels and is largely absent from so called performance and elite sport (Lyle, 2002).

Despite this separation, emerging research suggests that coaching, like teaching, is a critical pedagogical process (Penney, 2006) and that conceptually, there is little difference between the two (Bergmann Drewe, 2000). Claims such as the one made by Sir Clive Woodward, that "the best coaches are good teachers" (Cain, 2004, p. 19) have been well cited throughout the literature. Furthermore, it has been argued that "coaching practitioners require not only an expansive knowledge of their sport, but also the pedagogical skills of a teacher" (Stratton, Reilly, Williams & Richardson, 2004, p. 155). Indeed, theoretical models from educational research have been used to enhance our knowledge and understanding of coaching (Morgan, 2007a). For example, it has been highlighted that good coaches, like good teachers, engage in critical pedagogical concepts such as reflective practice (Gilbert & Trudel, 2001), evaluation and refinement of planning (Penney, 2006), mentoring, observing and socialisation within cultural 'communities of practice' (CoPs) (Cushion, 2001), and establishing a positive and supportive working climate (Jones,

2006a). Like students, athletes' learning is manifest in almost all aspects of their training and preparation. Nevertheless, little emphasis is placed on the effective use of learning theory to enhance such processes, despite calls for it to play a more central role in coach preparation (Morgan, 2007a). It might be fair to argue then, that coaching is fundamentally about educating athletes and increasing their knowledge and understanding of a variety of aspects related to their sport and performance. However, pedagogical theory is still yet to inform, or be utilised fully, on the majority of coach education courses.

The need to ensure the rounded development of athletes via a more holistic approach to coaching has become increasingly recognised as an essential part of the coaching process (Jones, 2006a). Lee (1988) argued that training and competitive situations can be educational if they are conducted in such a way that it contributes to the total development of a person. For example, competition can promote invaluable skills such as fair play, discipline, sportsmanship, social skills, team work, organisation, responsibility and leadership to name a few (Lee, 1988). These attributes are important for the development of any individual and, in entirety, are rarely provided in any other medium. Bergmann Drewe (2000) concurred, and suggested that “coaches should expand their perspective to move beyond the narrow focus of physical skill acquisition...coaches should view their task as connecting with a wider set of beliefs, ethical as well as metaphysical” (p. 86). Similarly, it has been argued that the supportive pedagogical component in the athlete-coach relationship (e.g., Jowett *et al.*, 2002) is vital in allowing performances of courage, originality and even genius to occur (Corlett, 1996).

Despite attention from theorists, research detailing how coaches' coach holistically is yet to be developed (Cassidy *et al.*, 2004). As a result, more questions have been raised than

answers provided. There is much common ground between coaching and teaching in what is deemed good practice; for example, contributing to the total development of an individual as well as taking an athlete/student centred approach to learning (Kidman, 2005). Perhaps then, the practicalities of coaching holistically may only be unearthed by fostering other educational concepts such as mentoring and socialising within coaching cultures in order to enhance experiential knowledge and share information about explorative attempts (Cushion, 2001). Furthermore, awareness and knowledge of the key concepts of learning may result in a deeper level of reflection and assist coaches in developing a greater understanding of how athletes learn and of the impact their coaching behaviours can have on that learning (Morgan, 2007a).

In the previous section, I have agreed with others' appeals to move away from the rationalistic approaches of traditional coaching research and coach education. Specifically, they have argued that more investigation into the implementation and effect of learning theory into sports coaching is needed. In a recent book (i.e., Jones 2006a), such an endeavour has been made. This work (explored in more detail in the subsequent sections) has attempted to reconceptualise sports coaching as an educational enterprise (ibid, 2006a). Specifically, Jones argued that coaches should be viewed similar to pedagogues with their effectiveness being irrefutably linked to their relationship with athletes (Jones, 2006a). Wikeley and Bullock (2006) build on this groundwork by discussing the nature of such educational relationships, before illustrating how educational theories can inform and enhance the understanding of sports coaching. Subsequently, Penney comparatively highlighted the relevance of viewing the coach as a pedagogue through UK policy and Australian practice at an Aboriginal Sports College. She argued that the link between a teacher and coach's roles and responsibilities is interconnected (Penney, 2006).



These rationales are then elaborated upon in this book so as to make the information and findings more accessible and operational for scholars, coaches and coach educators (Jones, 2006a). Here, in borrowing from the work of Vygotsky (1978), Potrac and Cassidy (2006) argued that an understanding of the role of the coach would be improved if the coach was viewed as ‘a more capable other’. Jones and Wallace (2006) made a claim for considering the coach as an ‘orchestrator’. They argued that a characteristic of orchestration is coaching unobtrusively; allowing players to focus on the exercise and its objectives and encouraging experiential learning to take its course through a somewhat empowering approach (Jones & Wallace, 2005). Subsequently, Jones and Standage (2006) critically examined the trend of empowering athletes and the role of the coach in such so-called athlete-centred pedagogies. Additionally, Galipeau and Trudel (2006) further questioned and explored the coaching role in terms of athletes’ CoPs and the nature of learning that takes place within them (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

In progressing to investigate how pedagogical theories can contribute to more critical and contextual coach education programmes, Culver and Trudel (2006) discussed the value of cultivating coaches’ CoPs and how learning can be “enriched through social co-participation” (p. 112). Additionally, Gilbert and Trudel borrowed from the work of Schön (1987), and argued that coaches should be reflective practitioners in order to further engender knowledge. Additionally, numerous educational scholars were drawn upon by Cushion (2006) in his assertion that critical mentoring should be an integral aspect of coach education. Finally, Schempp, McCullick and Mason examined how expertise is developed in coaching through Berliner’s (1994) four-phase model, which incorporates the stages of beginner, competent, proficient and expert (Schempp *et al.*, 2006). They argued that whilst “not everyone has the ability, desire or opportunity to reach the highest levels of

professional practice...by identifying, formulating and developing the elements of expertise in ones' own professional practice, anyone can become more expert" (Schempp *et al.*, 2006, p. 161).

## 2.3 Sociological Approaches

Giddens (2001) provides one of the most frequently used definitions of sociology, stating that it is "the study of human social life, groups and societies. It is a dazzling and compelling enterprise, having as its subject matter our own behaviour as social beings" (p. 2). From its original purpose as the 'science of society', modern sociology has moved on to incorporate a quest relating to understanding how society works and operates. It seeks to provide insights into the many forms of relationships that exist between people within a range of different contexts (Ritzer, 1979). Such relationships are considered to be the 'fabric of society' (Ross & Van den Haag, 1957). However, it has been argued that it is more appropriate to define sociology as the science of social interactions rather than the science of social relations (Rex, 2003). Here, seeking to explore the connection between one relationship and another, and between the relationship and activities which sustain them, is paramount. Sociology is broad in terms of methodology and subject matter, including a number of theoretical paradigms that offer distinctive perspectives on how society works. Given the scope and range of these paradigms, the intention here is not to provide a superficial outline of associated theories. Rather, I shall highlight those that are considered most useful in light of this study's aims, those that have already been grappled with in previous examinations of the coaching process and the rationales provided for such examinations.

### 2.3.1 The Importance of Examining Coaching as a Sociological Endeavour

Sports coaching is recognisable in social life as an occupational grouping, and is one of the many social structures and processes within sport which has its own series of symbols and social values associated with it (Lyle, 2002). Within the last decade, it has been well documented that coaching is not purely the technical and unproblematic process that it had previously been portrayed (Jones, 2000; Jones *et al.*, 2003; Potrac & Jones, 1999; Potrac *et al.*, 2002). Subsequently, in order to gain a better understanding of coaching, it has been argued that researchers must step outside the confines of bio-scientific enquiry and examine the coaching process with realistic consideration of the contextual social factors which impinge upon it (Potrac & Jones, 1999).

Recent work has used sociological theories and methods to explore and examine sports coaching (e.g., Jones *et al.*, 2002; Potrac & Jones, 2009a; 2009b; Purdy, Potrac & Jones, 2008). Such an approach is based on the assumption that, as in everyday life, obtrusive, ever present and multitudinous social endeavours are central features of sports coaching. This sociological examination has emphasised the problematic and integrative elements of a coach's role, those which have often been defined as intuition, driven by impulse, and hidden under the discursive 'art of coaching' (Woodman, 1993). Empirical research has supported the accusation that previous work has oversimplified its subject matter, acknowledging that coaching is vulnerable to differing social pressures and constraints (Potrac & Jones, 1999). Indeed, Jones *et al.* (2002, p. 35) contend, "coaches are social beings operating in a social environment, so their activities ought to be examined and explained as such." However, despite increasing recognition of the social and cultural variability of the coaching process, there are still claims that this 'invisible ingredient' (Potrac & Jones, 1999), the social element of coaching practice and its "logic in use", has

failed to be recognised (Potrac & Jones, 2009a, p. 223).

A sociological approach to sports coaching recognises the socio-cultural constraints and influencing factors that impact upon society in general which are echoed in this particular occupational grouping. Furthermore, it appreciates the social sphere of the coaching process, acknowledging that each coaching situation consists of varying/unique activities within differing surroundings (Dodge & Hastie, 1993; Schempp, 1988; Woodman, 1993), where an understanding of the practical concerns which have both direct and indirect impact upon athletes lives and careers is necessary (Armour & Jones, 2000). Much of a coach's work involves interacting with a wide range of significant others within a particular social and cultural context, hence a better understanding of the interrelations between each is paramount if there is to be a better understanding and development of coaching itself (Jones *et al.*, 2002). It would be fair to conclude that whilst recent research, in an attempt to grapple with the complex nature of sports coaching, has achieved a sound analysis of the subject area, more by way of examination is needed.

### 2.3.2 Role Theory

Traditionally, role theory has been compared to scripted theatre. For example, the behaviours we exhibit are often dictated by the values, norms and expectations of the organisations or societies we occupy (Deutsch, Coleman & Marcus, 2006). In this respect, a coach may be perceived as manufacturing his or her behaviour to meet the demands of their players and the coaching environment. This concept was explored by Jones *et al.* (2002), who attempted to provide a framework for analysing coaching from a sociological perspective. They used role theory as outlined by Callero (1994) to better understand coaching as a complex social encounter (Cushion & Jones, 2006). They suggested that

coaches are socialised into displaying certain behaviours, via the expectation of their roles. Additionally, they argued that roles need not be perceived as limiting. Accepted roles have the potential to become a vehicle for agency; in this respect, a coach may use roles to his or her advantage in dealing with athletes and other stakeholders (Jones, 2002). The work highlighted the growing quest towards developing a better understanding of the social aspects of coaching.

Building on this earlier work, in a study interviewing elite coaches, similar suggestions were raised by Jones *et al.* (2004). They found that the coaches interviewed used deliberate strategies to manipulate players and situations to their advantage. In particular, the coaches studied engaged in ‘white lies’, the use of humour, and role-playing to make athletes believe in them and their coaching agendas (Potrac & Jones, 2009a). Here, Goffman’s theory of ‘role distance’ can be drawn upon, which is concerned with individuals distancing themselves from the seriousness of their role at times through the use of mockery (Goffman, 1969). Often, a coach may make fun of themselves with irony and sarcasm in a bid to show athletes that they too have a human side, outside the confines of their role. Jones *et al.* (2002) argued that this process allows personality and individuality to emerge, and may distinguish between the inventive and mechanistically average coach.

The notion of ‘self-in-role’ was also explored by Jones *et al.* (2002). Here, the role is worthwhile upholding for the individual, in that it has personal significance, and is not just something that is expected and needs to be complied with. Coaches will then attempt to protect the carefully built up self-images in the face of contextual difficulties. This was explored in a similar study by Potrac *et al.* (2002) who found that coaches deeply feared losing the respect of their athletes. Here, the coach they examined, through his pedagogical

behaviour, consciously attempted to create an idealised image (Goffman, 1959) of himself in the eyes of his players. Indeed, through a skilful use of instruction, demonstration, praise and scold, the coach attempted to create a social bond between himself and his players that was not only based upon their respect for him as a competent and knowledgeable professional, but also as a person. It was argued that the strength of this bond determined the extent to which the coach considered himself to be adequately fulfilling the demands of his role as a top-level football coach (Potrac *et al.*, 2002). Consequently, it was concluded that a coach's behaviour was often a product of both his or her own expectations and their perceptions of the athletes' expectations of the coaching role.

### 2.3.3 Interaction in the Coaching Context

Jones and colleagues (2004) have further drawn upon the work of Erving Goffman, and attempted to use some of his key works to explain and interpret coaching. Within Goffman's (1959) theory of interaction is the notion that individuals are not entirely determined by society because they are able to strategically manipulate social situations and other's impressions of themselves. He utilised a dramaturgical approach to explain how we attempt to provide an impression in accordance with our desired goals (Branhart, 1994). For Goffman, theatre and dramaturgical performances are the perfect metaphor (Salerno, 2004). For Jones and colleagues, such a metaphor helps analyse and explain coaching behaviour and how coaches deliver semi-theatrical performances, attempting to coax out their athletes' and teams' potential (Jones *et al.*, 2002). Furthermore, Jones and colleagues compare these semi-theatrical performances to Goffman's theory of 'front'. They implied that coaches will attempt to convince the audience, by effectively controlling the lines of communication available, in order to uphold a particular image or impression of themselves. Additionally, he or she will attempt to convince the athletes of the

appropriateness of their behaviour in keeping with the coaching role they occupy (Jones *et al.*, 2002). Additional evidence of ‘impression management’ in coaching has been illustrated in findings suggesting that coaches’ behaviours and actions are a result of a perceived occupational demand. Specifically, coaches manage a perceived, expected impression of themselves to avoid losing the respect of players (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Potrac *et al.*, 2002). Furthermore, recent work suggests that newly appointed coaches may make attempts at ‘winning over’ and persuading players to ‘buy into’ their coaching methods using a number of cooperative strategies with the intent of getting players to believe in them and their coaching means (Potrac *et al.*, 2007).

The strategies of ‘impression management’ and maintaining ‘face’ have been exemplified in a recent study depicting a coach’s battle to perform (in the dramaturgical sense suggested earlier) and manage the perceptions of others, including players and other members of staff. Jones (2006b) presented an autoethnographical account (Sparkes, 2002) of himself as a coach in the build up to a game scenario. This article highlights the often overlooked issues and realities of the activity and, through personal commentary, how a coach might deal with those. Jones draws on the work of Goffman (1959; 1963; 1969) and attempted to use his concepts of ‘front’, ‘impression management’ and ‘presentation of self’ as theoretical pointers to help make sense of his story (Jones, 2006b). Like the suggestions of Potrac *et al.* (2007), he argued that “maintaining a desired image while generally managing athletes’ impressions was paramount” (p. 1019). Furthermore, Jones asserts coaches will use coping behaviours such as a fabricated ignorance and self-depreciating humour to complete avoidance in attempts to maintain ‘front’ and convince others. Thus, lines of communication (information about themselves) are controlled and relationships manipulated (Jones, 2006b).

In further developing the notion that maintaining the respect of athletes in interactive coaching contexts can be better explained by drawing on social theory and social frameworks, Potrac and Jones (2009a) recently attempted to make the case for how the adoption of a micropolitical perspective could serve to enhance our understanding of the power ridden nature of sports coaching. They define micropolitics as the political interactions that take place between social actors in different settings. Similar to earlier work (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Jones *et al.*, 2004), they argued that “more explicit investigations of micropolitics would prove fruitful for a more adequate theorisation of coaching” (Potrac & Jones, 2009a, p. 227). Drawing on work in the area that investigated the micropolitical nature of teachers’ dealings and relationships (i.e., Fry, 1997; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a; 2002b), they discovered that coaches, like teachers, are engaged in a process of constantly building and rebuilding alliances with contextually significant others. Additionally, coaching behaviour and approaches were manipulated “simultaneously and instrumentally to serve micropolitical purposes” (Potrac & Jones, 2009a, p. 231). Although this study was not based on empirical work, nor applied to a practical setting, it does present an alternative framework for analysing the power workings of sports coaching. This work was later followed by another paper (i.e., Potrac & Jones, 2009b) based on empirical findings, where the authors further highlight the complexity of coaches’ actions, particularly with regards to issues of power and politics. However, here, they illuminated some of the everyday aspects of sports coaching as related to the strategic and manipulatory actions of coaches that have remained largely furtive and taken-for-granted. Specifically, they explored the micropolitical strategies that a particular coach used in an attempt to persuade the players, the assistant coach, and the chairman at the club in which he worked to ‘buy into’ his coaching programme and methods (Potrac & Jones, 2009b). As with previous work, the argument for such a study is to stimulate further



discussion about coaching and the range of already established social theory that can be used to further comprehend the dynamics of the field.

#### 2.3.4 Coaches' Power

“Power is one of the most widespread, yet most problematic concepts in organisational theory literature” (Slack & Parent, 2006, p. 199). In accordance with the recent upsurge of research addressing the social aspect of sports coaching, the importance of power (i.e., how it is influenced by the constructs of interaction and role) and the need for further investigation and understanding of it, has been emphasised. Indeed, Jones *et al.* (2002) draw upon several working definitions of power, concluding that power is an essential and ever-present component of any social activity. It can be productive as well as repressive (McDonald & Birrell, 1999), operating in hidden ways, unique to each situation and possibly shaping the lives of those who exercise it and those who are subject to it. Consequently, “the way in which power operates in coach-athlete relationships will be affected by the particular demands of the specific institutional context” (Shogan, 2007, p 77). It may also be affected by the race, gender, sexuality and political bearings of those demonstrating the power and those subject to it. In this respect, Potrac *et al.* (2002) emphasised that practitioners must be aware of the various forms of power and resistance expressed within coach-athlete relationships if effective coaching is to be realised. A key feature of this power is that it must involve group compliance, with resistance being eased through gradual change. This compliance is influenced not only by the persuasive tactics people use but also the type and amount of power they are perceived to hold (Hogg & Vaughan, 2008). Thus, power must be examined *in situ* with resistance against it, being considered a further expression of power, supporting the suggestion that power is a complex, two-way process (Jones *et al.*, 2002).

Utilising the ‘basis of social power’ framework (French & Raven, 1959; Raven, 1992), scholars have suggested that, for coaches to be respected and to exercise their influence effectively, they must employ a range of power types i.e., legitimate, informational, expert, reward, coercive and referent (Jones *et al.*, 2004; Potrac *et al.*, 2002). In developing previous work, Potrac *et al.* (2007) interpreted how such behaviours may be related to role theory. Exploring the behaviours of top-level coaches using both quantitative (Potrac *et al.*, 2002) and qualitative approaches (Jones *et al.*, 2004), Potrac and colleagues used Callero’s work on role theory and French and Raven’s typology of power to interpret findings from data collected using the ASUOI. Similar to previous work, Potrac *et al.* (2007) considered the coaches’ high levels of instruction (referred to as ‘informational power’) to be an effort to prove their knowledge. The frequent use of praise or ‘reward power’ was consistent with the findings of previous literature, reinforcing the notion that top-level coaches use more praise than their less experienced counterparts, and that more can be achieved by coaches using positive rather than negative interactions (Potrac *et al.*, 2007). Additionally, in comparison to Bloom *et al.*’s (1999) analysis of an expert basketball coach, Potrac *et al.* (2007) found the use of scold behaviours to be low. This difference may be explained by the period changing ethos of coaching in general and the contextual variations between the studies; for example, the sport in which the data sets were collected. Finally, the low use of scold or ‘coercive power’ in the more recent work was allegedly linked to the fear of overuse and perceived loss of respect from players (Potrac *et al.*, 2002; Potrac *et al.*, 2007). Further studies investigating coaches’ power and the potential benefit of using sociological frameworks to examine it have drawn on the work, theories and terminologies of other well cited social scholars. Cushion and Jones (2006) used Bourdieu’s work to interpret ethnographic data collected over a period of 10 months. Developing Jones *et al.*’s (2004) earlier work, which used several sociological concepts to better understand coaching as a

“complex social encounter” (p. 143), they demonstrated how an authoritarian coaching discourse was established and maintained. Here, they examined how it was shaped and subsequently structured the coaching milieu and how associated behaviours were perceived as legitimate by both coaches and players. Unlike other work (e.g., Cushion *et al.*, 2003; Potrac *et al.*, 2007), Cushion and Jones (2006) examined the coach-athlete relationship in terms of power, structure and communication within the practice environment.

The case for the use of social theory, (such as Bourdieu’s work) in an attempt to make sense of the coaching context and as a tool for an analysis of coaching, has been further explored by other scholars. For example, Purdy, Jones and Cassidy (2009) used the notion of ‘capital’ (goods or resources that are at stake in particular context) in examining elite athletes’ reactions to coaching behaviors, and how such actions contribute to a coaching climate. The aim of their study was to examine how power was given, acquired and used, focusing on the interactions between an athlete and his coaches, in relation to issues of power difference and power maintenance. Using semi-structured interviews and participant observation methods, findings were presented through realist tales. These findings demonstrated how the various aspects of capital were defined, used and negotiated by social actors within the context of elite sport (Purdy *et al.*, 2009). Purdy and colleagues demonstrated how Bourdieu’s notions of ‘capital’, ‘habitus’ (an individuals’ manner, demeanor and how they present themselves) and ‘field’ (a social arena) could be used as tools to investigate social practice. They provided examples of how athletes’ physical capital affects the coaching climate and may become intertwined with the symbolic capital of the coaching programme and those associated with it (Purdy *et al.*, 2009).

Other scholars meanwhile have drawn upon the work of Michel Foucault to examine

power from an athletes' point of view and the various ways they are subjected to it (Jones, Glintmeyer & McKenzie, 2005; Shogan, 1999). Additionally, the reasons why athletes consent to coaches exercising power over them, with reference to the privileged position held by coaches within the dominant performance discourse, have been investigated (Cassidy *et al.*, 2004; Cushion & Jones, 2006). Related to the above work, Purdy *et al.* (2008) used an autoethnographic approach to examine power, and resistance against it, from the athletes' perspective. Short stories about 'critical incidents' were used to present the data which were subsequently theorised using the work of Nyberg (1981), which focuses on how power is a two-way process; e.g., a person must consent to power being exercised over them if such power is to have the desired effect. Additionally, they used Giddens' (1984) work on power, agency and the dialectic of control, that is, the resources an individual has at his or her disposal that can be used to change the balance in power from those initially attempting to exercise the power to further examine the phenomenon. For Purdy *et al.*, 'critical incidents' or key events were drawn upon because they "appeared to encapsulate general trends and as such were manifestations of developing emotional undercurrents" (2006, p. 322). In contributing to the developing theorisation of coaching, Purdy and colleagues found that despite the athletes having initial confidence in the coach, their dissatisfaction soon grew as a result of her insensitivity towards their feelings and perceptions. Thus, the athletes found ways to resist and, to a degree, subvert the perceived oppression. In reflecting on why the relationship between the coach and athletes turned 'sour', Purdy *et al.* (2006) suggested that the coach's adoption of a discourteous, disrespectful manner broke what the athletes considered to be the behavioural norms of the context. This dissatisfaction was intensified by the perception of a 'crushed promise'. For example, having bought into the coach's methods, Purdy, as the coxswain (and principle researcher), felt that she "was in a position to be the intermediary between the coach and

the crew, a position of influence; [however] my hopes and aspirations to fulfil such a role, were ignored” (Purdy *et al.*, 2006, p. 333). Upset and disappointed, Purdy reacted by siding with her team-mates in the ensuing power struggle. She wanted to show everyone concerned that she still had some power; that she still mattered (Purdy *et al.*, 2006).

Such interactions as exemplified in Purdy *et al.*’s (2009) work, or the ‘white lies’ referred to earlier in this chapter (Potrac & Jones, 2009a), in an attempt to get athletes to initially ‘buy’ into their coaching agendas, can have detrimental effects if the coach does not consistently live up to their initial assertions. Whether intentional or not, if this coaching ‘front’ is not upheld and impressions effectively managed, athletes may see through the coaches’ ‘mask’, with resentment, loss of respect and power, being the consequence. Here, the theorisation of coaching using the aforementioned concepts of social scholars such as Goffman, Bourdieu, French and Raven, Callero, Giddens and Nyberg is useful. However, eventually it must inform coach education through a credible working praxis, subsequently bettering coaches’ understanding of the knotty social realities of the coaching process.

## 2.4 Learning Theory

The following section will address learning theory beginning with a brief overview of behaviourism, before subsequently tackling cognitivism, constructivism, humanism, and social and experiential learning theory. Here, I attempt to highlight the varying pedagogical movements and critically review significant work related to each of the theoretical approaches. It may be argued that learning is manifest in almost all aspects of every day life, receiving a considerable amount of attention and debate amongst various groups, including academics, practitioners and legislators, yet much remains to be explored (Smith, 1999). Ambiguity and confusion surrounding the subject is still rife and we are still to

establish, or come to agreement on, what learning actually entails, and also, whether or not the terms education, learning and development should be used interchangeably (Mallett, Trudel, Lyle & Rynne, 2009b). Critical theories of learning have only relatively recently begun to feature ardently in education and professional development programmes for teachers and others responsible for learning. Indeed, it had been assumed that learning was unproblematic (Hager, 2004) and could simply be achieved by imparting knowledge from teacher to student. This resulted in a ‘taken for granted’ instructional approach, based on the assumption that learning would occur as long as the teaching and method of acquisition was correct (Smith, 1999). Inevitably, this limited view of the nature of learning led to an impoverishment of education (Halstead & Taylor, 1996). Hence, what passed for education could actually have detracted from well-being (Smith, 1999).

#### 2.4.1 The Product Orientated Approach to Learning

Early definitions of learning were underpinned by a change in behaviour. Learning was considered to be outcome based and could be explicitly identified or observed. Watson (1878–1958), who is generally considered to be a founder of the behaviourist approach, suggested that the inner experiences that were the focus of psychology could not be accurately studied as they could not be observed. Instead, he focused on laboratory experimentation, providing stimuli which developed responses. Several researchers followed suit, for example Thorndike (1874–1949), building upon and refining Watson’s original work in developing the stimulus-response theory of learning. Here, responses or behaviours, are considered strengthened or weakened by the affects of behaviour. Thorndike suggested that “if an act is followed by a satisfying change in the environment, then it is more likely to be repeated in similar situations than an act that is followed by an unfavourable effect” (Thorndike, 1932 cited in Morgan, 2007a, p. 3). Similarly, Skinner

(1973) advocated reinforcing desired behaviour and ignoring or punishing undesirable behaviour; better known as operant conditioning. Pleasant consequences, were known as reinforcers (e.g., praise) and were considered to strengthen behaviour, whereas unpleasant consequences (e.g., scold or criticism), were known as punishers and were considered to weaken it (Slavin, 2003 cited in Morgan, 2007a). These outcome based approaches were largely concerned with activity, repetition, reinforcement and clear objectives (Hartley, 1998), thus a “learning by doing” approach was believed to be in effect (Tennant, 1997, p. 73).

The earlier research of educational psychologists such as Thorndike, Watson and Skinner (also see Hull’s habit, strength, drive and intensity theory and Tolman’s expectancy and cognitive maps theory) has gone some way toward explaining how learning can be translated into behaviour. Given the diversity of these theories however, it has been argued that the nature of learning may never be explained by a single hypothesis (Bolles, 1979). Behaviourism can explain and justify much behaviour adopted within a variety of educational settings; however, applying that theory is rarely a straightforward process. For example, what acts as a reinforcer for one person may be a punisher for someone else. Furthermore, previous experiences with significant others may also play a part in an individual’s response to praise and criticism (Morgan, 2007a).

Whilst these perspectives do emphasise change, a fundamental aspect of learning, it may also be considered a crude definition based on assumptions that learning is an unsophisticated and straightforward process (Staddon, 1983). Consequently, the product orientated view has received considerable criticism by academics who have argued that not all behavior changes resulting from experience involve learning (Smith, 1999).

Furthermore, others have argued that learning should not be summarised as an overt change in behaviour but a change in the ways in which people “understand, or experience, or conceptualise the world around them” (Ramsden, 1992, p. 4). Thus, the product orientated view has been criticised for portraying learning as a trouble-free, sequential, cause-effect response, showing little concern for what actually happens when learning takes place.

#### 2.4.2 The Process Orientated Approach to Learning

More recent work has viewed learning as “a process by which behaviour changes as a result of experience” (Maples & Webster, 1980 cited in Merriam & Caffarella, 1991 p. 124). From this perspective, the question is raised as to how aware the student is of their engagement in learning? If so, does this awareness have any significance on their learning? (Smith, 1999).

Rogers (2003), drawing on the earlier work of Krashen (1982), proposed two contrasting approaches: task-conscious (or acquisition learning) and learning-conscious (or formalised learning). For Rogers, these forms of learning are to be distinguished by their methods of evaluation; i.e., task fulfilment versus measurements of learning (Street & Lefstein, 2008). Task-conscious or acquisition learning (not to be confused with Sfard’s 1998 acquisition learning metaphor) is perceived to be constantly happening. It is “concrete, immediate and confined to a specific activity; it is not concerned with general principles” (Rogers, 2003, p. 18); for example, riding a bike. Thus, this type of learning has been referred to as unconscious or implicit and results in tacit knowledge “that which we know but cannot tell” (Polanyi, 1967, p. 4). According to Eraut (2000), tacit knowledge can be made explicit, and explicit learning can lead to tacit knowledge. Additionally, Rogers (2003)



suggested that tacit knowledge is having a consciousness of the task; whilst the learner may not be conscious of learning, they are usually aware of the task to be completed. Conversely, learning-conscious (or formalised learning) is the result of the process of facilitation. It is 'educative learning' rather than the development of experience. In this respect, there is a consciousness of learning (i.e., students are aware that the task they are engaged in entails learning). "Learning itself is the task. What formalised learning does is to make learning more conscious in order to enhance it" (Rogers, 2003, p. 27). Much of what was originally considered as learning theory in the discipline of psychology i.e., the behaviourist orientation to learning, has been criticised for not addressing these factors (Street & Lefstein, 2008). Consequently, this disregard for the mind as demonstrated by behaviourists, was later considered as only partially explaining how people learn and develop.

#### 2.4.3 Cognitivism

'The Cognitivist Revolution' surfaced in the 1960s and 1970s as the dominant learning paradigm in reaction to the behaviourists' elimination of thinking from accounts of development. Indeed, the cognitivists reinstated the significance of the mind and argued that it played a crucial role in learning (Thomas, 2000). Cognitivists claimed that an appreciation for the 'black box' of the human mind was necessary for understanding how people learn. Mental processes such as thinking, memory, knowing, and problem-solving needed to be examined. Knowledge was perceived as a schema or a symbolic mental construction, thus learning was defined as change in a learner's schemata (Anderson, 1977). Cognitivism claims that, unlike the theories of behaviourism, people are not 'programmed animals' who merely respond to environmental stimuli. Instead, they are rational beings that require active participation in order for learning to occur, and whose

actions are a consequence of thinking (Cunia, 2005). Changes in behaviour are observed, but only as an indication of what is occurring in the learner's head. Cognitivism uses the metaphor of the mind as a computer: information enters the brain, is processed, and then leads to a particular outcome or activity (Quinlan & Dyson, 2008).

Cognitivism is not a specific theory but a variety of theories that propose mental structure and functions as key explanatory features (Hewitt, 2006). As a result of 'The Cognitive Revolution', the dominant explanations of learning over much of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century would be cognitivist proposals. Two of the most popular types were social learning models (sometimes called social-cognition theories) and information-processing models (Thomas, 2000). Thus, Piaget's and Vygotsky's learning proposals, although contrasting, could both qualify as cognitive theories. Probably the most familiar of the cognitive learning theories is constructivism.

#### 2.5.4 Constructivism

As a reaction to the approaches of behaviourism and programmed instruction, constructivism asserted that learning is an active, contextualised process of constructing knowledge rather than acquiring it. There is now a consensus of opinion that learning does not occur by passively receiving and then recalling what we are taught. Instead, learning involves actively constructing meaning linked to what is already known (Morgan, 2007a). Knowledge is constructed based on personal experiences and hypotheses of the environment. Learners continuously test these hypotheses through social negotiation (Lambert, 2002.) Whilst Dewey did not refer to constructivism overtly, his ideas significantly contributed to the development of constructivist theories of learning (Lambert, 2002). Later, developing Dewey's work, Piaget (1896–1980) spent some sixty

years establishing the basis for a constructivist theory of knowing (Von Glasersfeld, 1995). Dissimilar to the behaviourist view of learning, i.e., that the external world solely affects the individual, Piaget's constructivist approach argued that learning takes place in the mind of the person encountering, experiencing and hypothesising about the world as they encounter it, whilst moving through pre-set stages of life (Weiner, Boreman, Ilgen & Klimoski, 2003). Additionally, constructivist learning theory draws heavily on the work of Vygotsky (1896-1934), who like Piaget argued that a process of disequilibrium in the light of new information is required in order for effective learning to take place (Slavin, 2003 cited in Morgan, 2007a). Here, the mind assimilates new information into existing cognitive structures, changing such structures in a continually interactive process (Weiner *et al.*, 2003).

Vygotsky's theory underpins much of modern constructivism. It asserts three major themes; firstly that social interaction is fundamental to the process of cognitive development or learning. In contrast to Piaget's understanding of cognitive development (whereby development necessarily precedes learning), Vygotsky felt social learning precedes development and proposed that children learn through social interaction with adults and more capable peers (Morgan, 2007a). He suggested that every function in the person's cultural development appears twice: initially on the social level, and later, on the individual level; to begin with between people (inter-psychological), and then from within (intra-psychological) (Vygotsky, 1978).

The second aspect of Vygotsky's theory; the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) is key to cognitive development. It refers to anyone who has a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner with respect to a particular task, process or concept. The

learner gradually acquires expertise through interaction with an expert, either an adult or a more advanced peer (Morgan, 2007a). The MKO is generally regarded as being a teacher, coach, or older adult, but could also be a peer or sibling (Corden, 2000).

The final aspect of Vygotsky's theory relates to the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD is the distance between a student's capability to carry out a task with adult supervision and/or with peer collaboration, and the student's ability for solving the problem independently. According to Vygotsky, optimal learning occurs in this zone when students are engaged in tasks that they cannot do alone but can with the assistance of adults or peers; a learning space known as their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky's work deliberated the connections between people and the socio-cultural context in which they act and interact in shared experiences (Crawford, 1996). He argued that people use tools that develop from a culture, such as speech and writing, to mediate their social environments. The internalisation of these tools leads to higher thinking skills (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky's theory promotes learning contexts in which students play an active role in learning. The roles of teacher and learner are therefore shifted; collaboration is encouraged in order to help facilitate learning and becomes a reciprocal experience, but this relationship is still characterised by hierarchy and power.

#### 2.4.5 Humanism

A central assumption of humanism is that people act with intentionality and values (Huitt, 2001). This is in contrast to the behaviourist notion of operant conditioning and the cognitive belief that discovering knowledge or constructing meaning is central to learning. Here, human phenomena under study have their origins or causes in social and cultural forces (Hewitt, 2006). Thus, humanists believe that it is necessary to study people

holistically i.e., as a whole person (mind, matter and emotion) rather than fragmented parts, especially as an individual grows and develops over their lifespan. They argue that feelings and emotions are key to learning, communications and understanding. Similar to cognitivism, humanism focuses on the importance of internal feedback i.e., in this sense, learning occurs as a result of feelings, emotions and kinaesthetic information. Moreover, humanists suggest that in today's stressful society people can easily lose touch with their feelings, which can set the stage for emotional problems and difficulties in learning (Rogers, 1961). One of the main aims of humanism could be described as the development of self-actualised, autonomous people. Affective and cognitive needs are important, and the purpose is to develop self-accomplished people in a cooperative, supportive environment. Theorists such as Sigmund Freud, Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers focused their work along humanistic lines, addressing the individual as a learner. Additionally (whilst also linked to constructivism and social learning), Vygotsky (1978) and Bandura (1986) emphasised the social and cultural context in which the learner exists, and in which, and through which, the learner moves (Hewitt, 2006).

#### 2.4.6 Social Learning

Social learning was regarded as an offshoot of the behavioral view of learning (Bandura, 1986). Although behaviorism gained a great deal of attention, classical and operant conditioning did not explain the behavior of humans sufficiently. Here, the notion that only external reinforcers play a role in the actions of an individual, and the under appreciation for internal aspects such as emotions, beliefs, and thoughts, resulted in a shift away from strict behaviorism toward the concept of social learning theory. Thus, researchers began to recognise that people sometimes demonstrate a behavior without any reinforcement or external reward. In this respect, internal thoughts could be rewarded just as external

behaviors. Social learning theory advocates observational learning or modelling (Bandura, 1986), suggesting that people learn from observing others, with such observations taking place in a social setting (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). Indeed, social learning theorists believed that “from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviours are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action” (Bandura, 1977, p. 22). Bandura (1986) described this modelling process in four stages: attention, retention, motor production and motivation. Practicing a behaviour and remembering it as a possible model then, acting it out to see how it might work in different contexts, has been highlighted as essential aspects of learning through observation (Smith, 1999). In terms of the attention and retention phases, watching others allows people to see the consequences of behaviours, thus gaining an insight into what might happen if they too were to act in such a way. During the rehearsal process (i.e., motor production phase), individuals reflect upon their own behaviour and make comparisons to their cognitive representation of the modelled experience (Hergenhahn, 1988 quoted in Merriam & Caffarella 1991). Finally, without the motivation stage the other phases will not be effective. This involves the learners imitating a model because they believe it will increase their chances of achieving success (Morgan, 2007a).

Another significant notion in social learning theory is self regulation (ibid, 2007b). This refers to when people deliberate their own behaviour, evaluate it in light of their own standards and punish or reinforce themselves appropriately (Bandura, 1977). For this to be achievable, the learner needs to have an expectation of their own performance. Thus, self-regulation involves thought processes and ‘bridges the gap’ between the behavioural and constructivist approaches to learning (Morgan, 2007a).

#### 2.4.7 More Recent Approaches

Similar to the above view of social learning, in that learning it is not simply something individuals do but involves others, Lave and Wenger (1991) proposed that learning is situated, addressing the role of context in the development of knowledge (Tennant, 1997). Rather than perceiving learning as merely the acquisition of knowledge through cognitive processes and conceptual structures, they attributed it to social relationships and situations of co-participation. Here, they gave credence to the social engagements that provide the 'proper' context for learning to take place (Hanks, 1991). According to Lave and Wenger (1991), learners do not so much acquire structures or models to understand the world, but participate in frameworks that have structure and relevance (Smith, 1999). In this respect, they argued that learning can occur through participation in a 'community of practice' (CoP) or "a group of people who share a common concern, set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, p. 4). According to Lave and Wenger (1991), learning occurs initially at the periphery of the community. As competency increases and working relationships develop, participants may move to the centre of the CoP. Therefore, learning is not perceived as the acquisition of knowledge by individual participants, but a process of social participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The mastery of knowledge and skill allows novices to move toward full participation in the socio-cultural practices of a community. 'Legitimate peripheral participation' defines the relationship between neophyte participants and more experienced others. A person's intentions to learn are engaged, and the meaning of learning is constructed through the process of becoming a full participant in a socio-cultural practice. This social process includes the learning of knowledgeable skills (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Situated learning depends on two claims. Firstly, it makes no sense to talk of knowledge that is decontextualised, abstract or general; and secondly, new knowledge and learning are conceived as being located in CoPs (Tennant, 1997). Whilst questions can be raised about these claims, the concept of situated learning does provide significant guidelines for practice. For example, that learning is dependant upon interpersonal relationships and that educators help people to become participants in CoPs; i.e., facilitating and creating the best possible learning environments for the group and individuals. This can be linked to the concept of ‘scaffolding’, a term used by sociocultural theorists who attempted to apply and demonstrate Vygotsky’s theory of ZPD in educational settings. Finally, there is an intimate connection between knowledge and activity (Smith, 1999); for example, problem solving and learning from experience become central to the process of learning (Tennant, 1997). Indeed, learning occurs as a result of reflecting on, and engagement with, experience, as explored in the next section.

#### 2.4.8 Experiential Learning Theory

The traditional views of learning have been questioned by a number of scholars, who have argued that experience is fundamental in developing knowledge. The roots of this approach are generally attributed to the work of Dewey (1859-1952) and Lewin (1890-1947) who believed that education must acknowledge experience as a primary factor in learning and developing knowledge. Indeed, as Tennant (1997) suggested:

Everyday problem solving requires the ability to recognise and define problems; there is often no single correct answer and yet a choice must be made, the information available is incomplete, ambiguous or conflicting; the entire context has to be taken into account, and there is only partial feedback on performance. These circumstances are very different from those that pertain in typical intelligence tests, but they are the conditions under which adults act in workplaces, family and community life (p. 58).

Scholars such as Kolb (1984) have attempted to develop this notion. Enlightened by the earlier work of Dewey, Lewin and Piaget, Kolb provided a comprehensive experiential



learning theory offering the foundation for an approach to education and learning as a lifelong process (Zuber-Skerritt, 1992). The learning process is portrayed in Kolb's simple four stage model, demonstrating how experience is interpreted through reflective practice; a generic term used for those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals explore their experiences and thus, better their understanding and appreciation (Boud, 1985). This cyclical model features concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. Kolb (1984) suggested that the model can be entered at any phase but the learner should go through the cycle in sequence. Others, such as Race (1993), later attempted to adapt Kolb's model using everyday terminology in an attempt to make it more easily interpreted by educators. The 'Ripples' model of learning, as it was termed, consisted of four similar elements to that of Kolb's model, functioning in an integrated reciprocal manner: wanting, doing, feedback and digesting (Martinez-Pons, 2001). Reflective thinking is considered fundamental to the articulation of knowledge of practice (Schön, 1983). The significance of turning experience into learning and knowledge through reflection has been emphasised further by scholars such as Boreham (1987) who argued that "the term 'learning from experience' really means learning from reflection on experience" (p. 89). Additionally, Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985) attempted to modify the earlier work of Dewey and address emotions associated with returning to, attending to and evaluating experience.

Dewey and Lewin influenced other significant work on how individuals develop knowledge experientially. For example, Schön's theory focused on the construction of domain-specific knowledge in the context of professional practice. For Schön, knowledge construction is a process of critical reflection-in and reflection-on-action that is dependent on the element of surprise. For example, reflection-in-action occurs at a point in time when

we can still affect the situation. On the other hand, reflection-on-action is when during a routine action we are confronted with an unexpected result; thus, this reflection-on-action can impact upon our future actions (Schön, 1983). Schön distinguishes between reflection-in-action, and reflection-on-action, arguing that reflection-in-action and experimentation go hand in hand. “When someone reflects-in-action, he becomes a researcher in the practice context. He is not dependant on the categories of established theory and technique but constructs a new theory of the unique case” (Schön, 1983, p. 68).

Schön’s work has received considerable attention with many training and educational bodies attempting to foster and integrate his notions into their respective programmes. However, several academics have stressed caution in treating this work as ‘gospel’ (See Usher, Bryant & Johnston, 1997), based on three main criticisms. Firstly, for being too ambiguous in distinguishing between reflection-in and on-action. Secondly, while there is a focus on action being informed, there is less emphasis on the commitments involved. Here Schön has been accused of coining “a descriptive concept, quite empty of content” (Richardson, 1990, p. 14). Thirdly, the degree to which Schön “neglects the situatedness of practitioner experience” (Usher *et al.*, p. 168) is an issue that has emerged as a result of Lave and Wenger’s (1991) concept of situated learning. Indeed, whilst it may be tempting to place Lave and Wenger’s work in the ‘learning by doing’ and ‘reflection on experience’ camp, it has been argued that their approach is very different from Schön’s, as they address engagement in practice as a full cultural-historical participant i.e., agent, activity and the world are jointly interlinked (Tennant, 1997).

## 2.5 Coach Education

The following section will highlight significant UK governmental initiatives and policies

that have impacted approaches to educating coaches. It addresses how such initiatives have been applied to coach education settings, and coaches' perceptions of this application. It also seeks to address the consequences of these approaches, and how more recent research is beginning to identify alternative methods to develop coaches' learning.

In the last ten years, coach education in the UK has undergone considerable transformation as a result of several governmental initiatives and agendas. Following an upsurge in debate concerning the professionalisation of coaching, UK Sport (the UK Government's organisation responsible for directing the development of sport within England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) strongly recommended that the standards of coaching be elevated to those of "a profession acknowledged as central to the development of sport and the fulfilment of individual potential" (UK Sport, 2001, p. 5). The Government's 'Plan for Sport' (Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2001) ensued the establishment of a Coaching Task Force (CTF), recommending that Sports Coach UK (SCUK), formally the National Coaching Foundation and now the lead agency for sports coaching in the UK, focus on a narrower range of priorities centred on coaching development and education. Consequently, SCUK took responsibility for the development and implementation of the National Coaching Certificate and supported National Governing Bodies (NGBs) in preparing for its implementation (Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2002). The resulting United Kingdom Coaching Certificate (UKCC) is an endorsement framework for sport-specific coach education programmes. Within it, award programmes and their supporting structures are assessed against a set of standardised, UK-wide criteria that reflects the UKCC principles. The UKCC was intended to revitalise the current coach education, training and qualifications system, and forms part of a more strategic effort to professionalise sports coaching (Lyle, 2007).

Many NGB's have identified several key benefits to the endorsement of the UKCC, such as the enhancement of key coaching skills, a raised profile and professionalism of sports coaching through a UK wide recognised qualification, whilst providing a benchmark for employers and deployers of coaches (Sports Coach UK, 2006). However, academics have stressed caution in this generic approach to coach education. Here they argued that "if dynamic, imaginative, and thoughtful coaches are to be developed, those responsible must give careful consideration to content, structure, delivery, and desirable outcomes" (Nelson & Cushion, 2006, p. 175). The danger then lies in providing a 'jazzed up' version of a previous approach to coach education, which has been condemned by academics and coaches alike (Jones *et al.*, 2004). Despite the aforementioned potential benefits, such an initiative, although making welcome steps towards the professionalisation of sports coaching, could result in NGB's producing the same benchmark for coaches across sports. Thus, what is undoubtedly an ever-changing, increasingly demanding athlete population and differing complexities of context, could be largely overlooked.

The prospect of hosting the London 2012 Olympic Games has added further momentum to the recruitment and support of coaches (Sports Coach UK, 2006), bolstering the drive to develop a coaching profession with lasting merits that would continue post London 2012 (Taylor & Garratt, 2010). Indeed, UK Sport has identified coaching as a key element of the high performance sport system in the UK, acknowledging that developing sports coaching and consequently coach education systems, plays a vital role in raising the standards of overall sporting performance (Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2002).

To achieve this, the UK Sport World Class Coaching Strategy was established to deliver targeted and innovative programmes specific to the needs of coaches via three key methods. Firstly, the World Class Coaching Conference, an annual event established in

2001. It aims to equip coaches with the skills and knowledge to make sustainable changes to an athlete's training programme through a multi disciplinary coaching forum. Secondly, 'Elite Coach', launched after the Athens 2004 Olympic Games, is a three-year accelerated coach development programme in which up to ten coaches per year are selected to participate. Elite Coach is a targeted, focused and fully supported programme for coaches who demonstrate the talent, dedication and determination to succeed and produce outstanding performances. Finally, the 'Winning Coaches' programme, consisting of three key elements: a workshop programme, the 'Coaching Team' programme and the 'Podium Coaches' programme. The themes covered here include managing relationships, neuro-linguistic programming, time management, team start up, decision making and communication. Through such programmes, UK Sport aims to produce sixty elite British coaches by 2012 (UK Sport, 2008).

Undoubtedly, such initiatives go some way towards improving the pedagogical and sport scientific knowledge of coaches (Sports Coach UK, 2002). However, coaching scholars assert that such coach education initiatives are falling short, with the primary focus remaining on content knowledge (Cushion *et al.*, 2003; Jones *et al.*, 2004). Cushion *et al.* (2003) argued that to develop a credible, practical, yet thoroughly holistic coach education programme, the complex nature of coaching and coaching knowledge itself must be better understood before examining issues such as what constitutes continuing professional development for coaches and devising ways to incorporate, develop, and improve it. Presenting coaches with a "gold standard" (Abraham & Collins, 1998, p. 71) of coaching competencies, such as the UKCC principles and coach evaluation criteria, would seem to increase coaches' knowledge base but is unlikely to promote an in-depth understanding of coaching practice (Nelson & Cushion, 2006). In further criticising these approaches,

Nelson and Cushion (2006) argued that these awards failed to engage with the unique cultural complexities of coaching contexts and the role of situated learning (as discussed in the previous section). In referring to the work of Schön (1983), they argued that the prescriptive, decontextualised nature of the awards is unlikely to develop ‘professional artistry’, an intuitive knowledge derived from experience. In other words, they will not develop the type of competence coaches sometimes display in unique, ambiguous and conflicting situations; for example, the ability to ‘think on your feet’ (Nelson & Cushion, 2006). With regards to some of the learning theories previously discussed, Nelson and Cushion criticise current offerings and argued that “such coach education programmes are likely to develop two dimensional mechanistic coaches who are ill prepared for the diversity associated with indeterminate zones of practice” (ibid, 2006, p. 181).

“The growth of coach education provision has not been matched by a corresponding increase in research on or in coach education” (Cassidy *et al.*, 2006, p. 145). Thus, further research is required before we are to truly understand the effect of current coach education initiatives such as the UKCC. Historically, the relevance of coach education programmes has been questioned by coaches with evidence suggesting that many coaches never accept or practice the recommended behaviours and beliefs taught at such courses; rather, out of necessity, they merely appear to (Cushion, 2001). Here, “formal coach education programs have been shown to make varying but often-limited contributions” (Mallett, Trudel, Lyle & Rynne, 2009a, p. 329). Whilst much useful information is apparent within the content areas provided on coach education courses, participant coaches have been left with the task of linking isolated theory to practice for themselves, which, recent research suggests, they have consistently failed to do (Gilbert & Trudel, 1999; 2001; Hughes, Lee & Chesterfield, 2009; Jones *et al.*, 2004; Saury & Durand, 1998). Subsequently, these prescriptive,

decontextualised (Nelson & Cushion, 2006) and rationalistic courses (Jones, 2000) are undervalued in comparison to the day-to-day learning experiences within respective coaching environments (Fleurance & Cotteaux, 1999; Jones *et al.*, 2004; Saury & Durand, 1998; Werthner & Trudel, 2006). It is argued then, that the managers of coach education should shape learning around practical, contextualised coaching experience and have coaches reflect upon it. Doing so, would assist learners in constructing, implementing and evaluating strategies that attempt to overcome dilemmas specific to their coaching process and practice (Nelson & Cushion, 2006).

### 2.5.1 Coach Education Research

Several scholars have examined the role of various theoretical frameworks in light of coaches' learning and knowledge generation (e.g., Culver & Trudel, 2006), which has provoked further investigation into examining the role of learning theory within coach development. Unsurprisingly, there is still no agreed theoretical framework that can be used to assist those responsible for designing and implementing coach education programmes. However, the importance of reflection (Nelson & Cushion, 2006) and its effect on experiential learning (Gilbert & Trudel, 1999; 2001; 2004a; 2004b; 2005), along with the role of mentoring (Cushion *et al.*, 2003), using stories (Douglas & Carless, 2008), critical thinking (Cassidy *et al.*, 2004), social learning theory (Culver & Trudel, 2006) and more recently, action research as a pedagogy to teach sports coaching (Jones *et al.*, in press), have been suggested as significant areas worthy of further exploration. This work has proposed that there is merit in providing formalised learning venues for coaches that encompass these methods, approaches and their underlying principles of learning. The work of Jones and colleagues in this context make the case that knowledge is constructed through experimenting with new, and modifying existing, information by means of critical

reflection. This is achieved by embarking upon unique practical problems and dilemmas which defy standard solutions, thus providing the foundation of both personal and professional development (Jones & Turner, 2006).

### 2.5.2 Recent Research (case examples of how it looks in practice)

Despite recent appeals from academics attaching considerable value to learning through interaction with other coaches (Cassidy *et al.*, 2006; Jones *et al.*, 2004; Fleurance & Cotteaux, 1999; Saury & Durand, 1998), findings suggested that coaches perceive there to be a lack of (formal and informal) opportunities to discuss the practice and/or the process of coaching with colleagues (Cassidy *et al.*, 2006). Here, it has been argued that “education and training depends on a mix of formal and informal provision, and understanding how learning and preparation is taking place is important in analysing practice” (Lyle, 2002, pp. 275-276). Such suggestions have resulted in a few scholars (e.g., Jones, and colleagues) attempting to tackle this issue. They provide case examples of means through which learning through interaction with others can be optimised, and the practice-theory gap can be reduced (Chen, 1998).

Culver and Trudel (2006) suggested that whilst coaches may form social networks and have dealings with each other on a regular basis within and outside their respective organisations, rarely are “these interactions an occasion to exchange their coaching knowledge” (p. 163). However, earlier work examining how model youth sports coaches learn to coach through experience found that coaches used a reflective conversation approach (Schön, 1983; 1987) to solve coaching issues (Gilbert & Trudel, 2001). This involved advice from others, working together to find solutions as well as observing and modelling what others did. This collaborative engagement (Cassidy *et al.*, 2004) was



explored in detail by Trudel and colleagues with much of their work focusing on how youth sport coaches learn to coach. In terms of methodology, the studies (e.g., Gilbert & Trudel, 2001) mainly used interviews to collect retrospective information. This line of enquiry highlighted the difficulties associated with establishing and providing opportunities for coaches to learn by interacting with others as suggested by Lemyre, Trudel and Durand-Bush (2007):

The possibility for coaches to learn by interacting with others is far from being optimal because of the coaches' tendency to limit their interactions to those with their manager and assistant coaches who in many cases have limited coaching knowledge. We should, however, be cautious before criticising coaches for their lack of knowledge sharing. Our traditional approach to the development of coaches might have contributed to this reality. (p. 205)

Existing trends in coach education reinforce this dilemma because the focus has tended to be on individual coach development and not the negotiation of mutual engagement (Trudel & Gilbert, 2004). Recent work suggests (e.g., Lemyre *et al.*, 2007; Trudel & Gilbert, 2004; Wright, Trudel & Culver, 2007) that approaches to coach development would be more effective if they were redefined using more recent conceptual frameworks of learning (such as those mentioned in the previous chapter).

These findings were echoed in the work of Cassidy *et al.* (2006). They found that coaches perceived there to be value in focusing on the process of coaching and the complexities associated with it as well as thinking about athletes as learners, thus addressing their instruction and athletes' learning preferences. Whilst this was a classroom based coach education programme and to a certain extent could be viewed as restrictive in terms of situated learning, the authors argued it was beneficial because coaches were openly able to discuss and share their experiences drawing on meaningful sport specific examples (Cassidy *et al.*, 2006). In addressing the social aspect of learning, they argued the case for

coach educators to draw upon various bodies of literature (particularly educational psychology) to inform their methods. Scholars have suggested that the facilitator or coordinator is vital to the success of such programmes (Cassidy *et al.*, 2006; Culver & Trudel, 2006).

More recently, in further developing and combining methods of previous pedagogical experimentation (Cassidy *et al.*, 2006; Jones & Turner, 2006), scholars have examined how theory can be integrated into practice through the use of action research (Jones *et al.*, in press). Learning in context with the opportunity for application has emerged as a significant theme throughout much of this research into coach education. Indeed, Jones *et al.* (in press) argued that “coaching knowledge is constructed in context; being both the product of where it takes place, and coaches’ engagement with each situation’s enablers and constraints” (p. 23). Providing coaches with theoretically grounded critical tasks and using pedagogical methods such as action research as a vehicle for learning, has already proved to have positive results in this context (Jones *et al.*, in press; Jones & Turner, 2006). Such findings, along with those of others mentioned, present an incentive for changing or at least revisiting current coach education. In this respect, encompassing interaction and situated problem solving through a process of critical reflection, may increase the perceived value, worth and effectiveness of such programmes for coaches.

## 2.6 Conclusion

The purpose of this review was to present and critique literature relevant to undertaking a study that examines a method for developing coaches’ experiential knowledge. In writing it, some conclusions have been drawn. In particular, whilst much has been written about learning theory, going some way to inform other educational milieus, coach education is

yet to fully embrace the more recent pedagogical frameworks offered (Jones *et al.*, in press). Indeed, in the last decade, most coach education processes that have existed tend to be based on what tutor-coaches believe student-coaches should know, including how they believe the knowledge is best imparted (Borrie & Knowles, 2003). This is not surprising given the dearth of coaching research investigating coaches' learning using alternative pedagogical methods (Nash, 2008).

### **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

As an inquiring coaching researcher, hoping to maximise coaches' experiential learning, how might I resolve the dilemma of deciding what would be the most suitable way of conducting my research? There were and are a wide range of research tools or methodologies available. However, action research was deemed preferable and an appropriate methodology through which I could explore the research aims and objectives. This is because not only is it able to take account of the micro-realities of coaching which are often complex and dynamic, but it can also directly assist coaches to better deal with them (Jones *et al.*, in press). It was anticipated that action research, through formalising the experiential learning process, could harness and hence, better develop knowledge generation in coaches.

In terms of structure, following an explanation of my ontological and epistemological assumptions, the chapter will address action research, the role and position of the researcher within it, and the data gathering instruments used in the project (the focus group interviews, the facilitator in this process, and methods of observation). The study design is then addressed, followed by methods of data analysis, where I discuss the use of Lave and Wenger's (1991) theoretical framework, which has increasing credence within coaching research. Finally, issues of validity, reliability, triangulation, ethical concerns and the methodological limitations of the work are examined.

#### **3.1 Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions**

Before discussing action research, I will briefly describe the ontological and epistemological assumptions which have informed the methodological approach used in this study. The assumptions concerning the nature of existence (Sparkes, 1992), what is

real to us (Long 2007) is referred to as ontology. It is the subject matter to be investigated (Crum, 1996), that which constitutes our social reality. I believe that most coaching situations are novel, dynamic and problematic, dependant upon a series of interrelating variables and pressures. Whilst strong technical knowledge of the sport is crucial, I also believe that there are many other social facets of the coach's role such as the interpersonal aspects that are fundamental to coach effectiveness. Having attended several coach education courses, thus obtaining first hand experience of such programmes, I believe, like others (e.g., Cushion, 2001; Jones, 2000), that accusations of irrelevancy and content being divorced from the reality of practice are fair and accurate. I see these courses as often little more than a manufactured attempt at reproducing idyllic and unrealistic coaching scenarios, stopping short of developing coaching knowledge with prescriptive technical practices. In referring back to my earlier statement, whilst I believe most coaching situations to be novel, I also perceive there to be some similarities between particular coaching contexts, in that they share similar problems and influencing factors. However, these commonalities are far from addressed in the fabricated educational environments currently on offer, while the pedagogical attempts at enhancing coaches' knowledge are not representative of practical coaching contexts. Echoing the work of Chesterfield, Potrac and Jones (in press), learning on such courses is not tailored towards the needs of the individual, their coaching practice and own knowledge and experience. Furthermore, they do not account for the micro-realities that can exist within each individual's coaching circumstance, nor do they allow for the collaborative social processes of learning as identified in the previous chapter.

Such ontological assumptions influence epistemological assumptions: that is, theories and assumptions about knowledge creation, individual learning as well as a theory of 'truth'

(Steffe & Gale, 1995). Drawing on the reflections from my ontology, my epistemology is that learning is enhanced experientially (through contextual interactions with athletes and other stakeholders). This epistemology and way of understanding the world (Sparkes, 1992), will determine the methods used to find things out (Long, 2007). Below, Sparkes (1992) provides an outline for the basic ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions of the three main paradigms:

Assumptions	Paradigm		
	Positivist	Interpretive	Critical
Ontology	External-Realist	Internal-Idealist, Relativist	External-Realist or Internal-Idealist
Epistemology	Objectivist, Dualist	Subjectivist, Interactive	Subjectivist, Interactive
Methodology	Nomothetic, Experimental, Manipulative	Ideographic, Hermeneutical, Dialectical	Ideographic, Participative, Transformative
Interests	Prediction and Control (Technical)	Understanding and Interpretation (Practical)	Emancipation (Criticism and Liberation)

Table 1. Assumptions underlying positivist, interpretive and critical paradigms. (p. 21)

Taking account my ontology, this study is grounded in the constructivist paradigm (an offshoot of the interpretive paradigm). Constructivists claim that “there is no reality other than what we put together in our heads, and that this is based on our social experiences, making it historically and spatially specific” (Long, 2007, p. 197). Unlike the realist perspective of the positivist approach, which only acknowledges objective reality, the relativist perspective of constructivism celebrates subjectivity. Values and biographies cannot be escaped, they mediate enquiry in a way that we have to understand ourselves before we can understand society. In this way, the researcher and the phenomena being studied are entwined so that findings are the result of their interaction (Long, 2007). With

constructivism, these findings or facts rely on some theoretical framework (Guba, 1990), i.e., a distinct epistemology.

As a consequence, reality can only exist in the context of a mental framework (construct) for thinking about it, that is, 'reality' can only be seen through a window of theory, whether implicit or explicit. If this is the case, then it also means that reality can only be seen through a value window which means that all facts are value laden and many constructions are possible. (Sparkes, 1992, p. 26)

Thus, knowledge is believed to be a consequence of human activity, it is a human construction and as a result can never be certified as completely true due to its' problematic and ever-changing nature (Sparkes, 1992). In this study, I assume a relativist ontology (multiple realities, i.e., an appreciation for individuality), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and naturalistic (in the natural world, not in the positivist sense) methodological procedures (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Action researchers frequently assert that their work seeks to reduce the practice-theory gap. In this respect, theory which is not grounded in practice, and practice which is not reflected upon and theorised about, is of little interest. For an action researcher, theory and practice must be integrated. Thus, this method of doing research is far from the conventional scientist in a white laboratory coat who separates him or herself from the phenomenon under study. Instead, the researcher is an insider who changes the social situation by virtue of studying it. Therefore, I also borrow from the participative and transformative methodology as in the critical paradigm.

### 3.2 Action Research

The origins of action research are unclear. Many believe that the concept emerged from America as a form of rational social management and was proposed by the prominent social scientist Kurt Lewin more than sixty years ago (Holter & Schwartz-Barcott, 1993; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Zuber-Skerrit, 1992). Lewin constructed a theory of action

research, describing it as “proceeding in a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of planning, action and the evaluation of the result of action” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1990, p. 8). Lewin argued that in order to “understand and change certain social practices, social scientists have to include practitioners from the real social world in all phases of inquiry” (McKernan, 1991, p. 10). This construction of theory by Lewin made action research a method of acceptable investigation (ibid, 1991, p. 9). As a result, action research has been widely employed within education, nursing and other professions as a means of examining and impacting upon social issues (Hart & Bond, 1996).

There are a number of epistemological and ethical reasons for the rise in participatory forms of investigation such as action research (Frisby, Reid, Miller & Hoeber, 2005). One of which is that the accelerated pace of deep and pervasive social change requires research methods that are dynamic and flexible, capable of capturing the rich complexity and ever shifting ground apparent in the organisations in which we live and work (Tsai, Pan & Chiang, 2004). However, a clear definition and consensus of what action research actually is has become notoriously difficult to establish, and attempts to do so have been characterised by over simplification and superficiality (Evans, Fleming & Hardy, 2000). Indeed, in their earlier work, Carr and Kemmis (1986, p. 162) suggested the following:

Action research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out.

This definition and understanding of action research has appealed to many because it places emphasis on improving practice through self-reflection. However, in reality, action research is a much more sophisticated process. It is a contested terrain that has many different facets which are dependant upon its usage and the context within which it is applied.



The conceptual ambiguity surrounding the method and the difficulty in giving a comprehensive definition is the result of the contextual variations in AR usage. In this respect, attempts at action research are open to criticism and accusations that what is thought to be action research is actually not. Here then, a loose agreement of its defining characteristics may be the best we can hope to achieve. Several scholars have attempted to tackle the explanatory obscurity of action research including Carr and Kemmis (1986, p. 165) who argued that there are several necessary conditions for action research to be in existence:

Firstly, a project takes as its subject matter a social practice, regarding it as a form of strategic action susceptible of improvement; secondly, the project proceeds through a spiral of cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, with each of these activities being systematically and self-critically implemented and interrelated; thirdly, the project involves those responsible for the practice in each of the moments of the activity, widening participation in the project gradually to include others affected by the practice, and maintaining collaborative control of the process.

In comparison, this study involves coaching. Coaching is a social practice that is receptive to improvement; this is possible via the 'plan, act, observe and reflect' spiral of action research. Although undoubtedly coaching is never that simple, there is potential to improve practice if coaches self-critically and systematically grasp how to follow these spirals in a way that is fitting for them (i.e., within their respective coaching milieu whilst appreciating the characteristic variables associated with them), thus further enhancing their coaching armoury. Similarly, action research is fundamentally linked to reflection (Schön, 1991), which is considered good practice for coaches (Borrie & Knowles, 1998). Coaches are also responsible for their own actions and they may, at times, depending on the organisation for whom they work, collaborate with other stakeholders (e.g., assistant coaches, managers, physios and in particular, in the case of this study, players).

It is generally accepted that action research consists of a variety of methodologies, which pursue outcomes of both action (i.e., change) and research (i.e., understanding). Indeed,

McNiff (1988) described action research as improving understanding/performance through change and by encouraging critical awareness of the individual's own practice. With regards to change and understanding, "the primary purpose of action research is as a tool for solving practical problems experienced by people in their professional community or private lives" (Stringer, 1996, p. 11). Thus, the value of action research does not solely lie in the findings and data gained as a consequence of the study, but also in the possible "practical improvements in the problem areas identified" (Zuber-Skerritt, 1992, p. 12). Another significant feature of action research is that the cyclical data collection and evaluation process enables the researcher to develop new theories and/or expand existing ones whilst still in the 'field work' phase of their study (Holter & Schwartz-Barcott, 1993). Furthermore, the data collected and the critical reflection which occurs help produce a "developed, tested and critically-examined rationale" for the practitioner's area of work (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p. 25). Thus, action research enables practitioners to build a valid rationale for their work through 'tried and tested' means. Additionally, it is a collaborative approach to research, summarised by McNiff (1988) as "research WITH, rather than research ON" (p. 4). In this respect, it involves collaboration between researcher and practitioner, and results in the solving of practical problems, a possible change in practice, and practically driven theory development (Holter & Schwartz-Barcott, 1993; Zuber-Skerritt, 1992). This working in partnership approach has the potential to increase the usefulness of research on coaching with practical implications for coaches.

Due to the difficulties in providing definitive statements about what action research is, several attempts have been made to explain the resultant variations of its usage and the types of action research that exist. According to Carr and Kemmis (1986), there are three main types of action research: 'technical, practical and emancipatory'. Firstly, 'technical

action research' occurs when the researcher examines whether a selected intervention, based on a pre-specified theoretical framework, can be applied in a practical setting (Holter & Schwartz-Barcott, 1993). The researcher poses as an external expert whose intentions are to gain the practitioner's interest in the research, and agreement to assist in the implementation of the intervention (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

The second type of action research; 'practical action research', involves the collaboration between practitioner and researcher in order to identify potential problems, underlying causes and possible solutions or interventions (Hatten, Knapp & Salonga, 1997). The researcher facilitates participation in the study and the self-reflection of the practitioner (Holter & Schwartz-Barcott, 1993; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). Unlike 'technical action research', 'practical action research' emphasises that the onus of the management and outcomes of the research is on the practitioners themselves.

Thirdly, 'emancipatory action research' involves all participants equally, with no clear hierarchy existing between the researcher and practitioner (Hatten *et al.*, 1997). "The practitioner group takes joint responsibility for the development of practice, understandings and situations" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 203). The researcher aims to reduce the distance between the challenges identified by the practitioner and the theory used to explain and solve the problems. The researcher also facilitates reflective discussion with the practitioner(s) to identify underlying issues and problems (Hatten *et al.*, 1997). This assists the researcher to become a collaborative member of the group (Holter & Schwartz-Barcott, 1993; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

In my study, there are elements of all three types of action research. In relation to 'technical action research', initially, I acted as an outsider seeking to test whether the

selected intervention/theory, i.e., Lave and Wenger's (1991) 'communities of practice' (CoPs) could be applied in a practical setting. Here, the researcher is often a university academic rather than a practitioner. However, I define myself as an academic and practitioner; a lecturer and coach and whilst I was an outsider to the participant coaches, I also had, over several years, gained considerable coaching experience and thus an insight into their world.

As with 'practical action research', there was collaboration between myself as a researcher, and the practitioners (coaches) under study. These were in relation to the injection of theory (discussed later in this chapter) and the general format/organisation of focus groups through which attempts were made to enhance learning and encourage the sharing of information and experience. In relation to 'emancipatory action research', although initially an outsider, as the study unfolded and my relationships with the participants developed, I became more of an accepted and valued member of the discussion group. As I began to learn more about the group personally and professionally and they learnt more about me, we slowly began to break down the initial hierarchical, social and gender barriers. The participant coaches invited me to share my thoughts and experiences. Furthermore, my opinions were sought after, and I became a collaborative member of the group.

Action research then is a process of longitudinal study in context involving cycles of observation, interpretation (including the integration of theory), action and reflection (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). This enables the continuous development and testing of explanations in practice, leading to improved learning and understanding (Tsai *et al.*, 2004). It can also lead to practice that is contextually valid and correct rather than just good. Action research

employs the imperative of action with the intent on describing, interpreting and explaining events while seeking to change them for the better (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1996). The key argument underpinning the use of action research within coaching is that the relevance and trustworthiness of the data, collected with the aim of improving coaching practice, is enhanced when all actors are involved in the knowledge production process (Bray, Lee, Smith & Yorks, 2000; Frisby *et al.*, 2005). Unlike other more descriptive investigation methods and acquisition-focused existing coach education, action research can provide immediate assistance in the development of coaching practice through reciprocity and mutual learning (Frisby *et al.*, 2005; Greenwood & Levin, 2003; Lather, 1988). Indeed, not only is it able to take account of the micro-realities of sports coaching which are often complex and dynamic, but it can also directly assist coaches to better deal with them.

### 3.3 The Role and Position of the Researcher

The nature and methods used in this study required me to take an unconventional role as a researcher. In keeping with McNiff's (1988) suggestions, my role here needed to be one of active involvement. This was a shift away from the traditional research practice that I was familiar with as an undergraduate and masters' student. I was accustomed to research enquiry that required me to maintain an outsider's perspective, taking a 'step back'. Now, my intentions as a researcher were of much closer engagement in an attempt to promote experiential learning amongst the participants. Furthermore, I wanted the participants to convey their knowledge and experiences, hence, I had to guide discussions centred around the prescribed theories and topics. In light of the collaborative nature of this process, there was potential for the construction of new knowledge. I did not solely want to give them concepts and theories to go away with and attempt to implement. My transformative

intentions were to move away from these traditional coach education methods (generally along didactic lines) to which they were familiar with, and develop a model of professional development which could assist coaches to better deal with the problematic, complex nature of their work (Cushion *et al.*, 2003). Here, my goals were to coax them on a path of self-directed learning (Savin-Baden, 2003; Woods, 1991). As a ‘practical and emancipatory action researcher’ (Carr & Kemmis, 1986), I needed to encourage participation and self reflection whilst putting the onus of managing the outcomes of the study on the participants themselves. Furthermore, I needed to encourage reflective discussion whilst attempting to become a collaborative member of the group; I could only achieve this through slipping into the role of a facilitator. As a coach, I was an active member of the coaching community: albeit as a neophyte. However, one of the challenges for me, was to get the coaches to articulate their knowledge. The (partial) knowledge I had about coaching and what was involved at this level, certainly helped make sense of what was being discussed. However, one of the central problems was that it was often difficult to get coaches to explain in detail the ways in which they used their knowledge (and where this knowledge came from) in the coaching domain. Perhaps this was due to the implicit nature of such knowledge and the lack of previous interventions attempting to unearth such embedded information (Cushion *et al.*, 2003). A major challenge for researchers involved in examining social action of any kind then, involves finding ways to make the invisible visible; that is, to elicit articulations of what those in the ‘field’ take for granted as being blindingly obvious (Gibson, 2006).

My principle aim as a facilitator was to ensure that the groups worked as constructive and cohesive units. In doing this, “the facilitator encourages full participation, promotes mutual understanding and cultivates shared responsibility. By supporting everyone to do their best

thinking, a facilitator enables group members to search for inclusive solutions and build sustainable agreements” (Kaner, 2007 p. 32). Bens (2000) further described the role of the facilitator as “one who contributes structure and process to interactions so groups are able to function effectively and make high-quality decisions: a helper and enabler whose goal is to support others as they achieve exceptional performance” (p. 5). I did this by encouraging group discussion by means of providing theory for debate (grounded in the points raised in the discussions) whilst helping participants articulate their perceptions and experiences.

An important aspect of my role as a facilitator was ‘impression management’ (Goffman, 1959). In order to maximise the research process, particular strategies were used to manage others’ perceptions of me. Such strategies can be classified as selective feedback, pretence, deception and withholding information which were invented and modified in response to the oral and gestural patterns within the interaction (Sarbin, 1995). Such ‘impression management’ is aimed at producing recognisable and convincing performances for others (Williams, 1998) while creating an idealised version of the self (Goffman, 1959; 1963). Whilst it could be assumed that this may be a deceptive, Machiavellian approach, I would defend against this charge and argue that I was, at times, merely presenting an exaggerated image of myself, not committing any sort of deceitfulness. Furthermore, this was not for personal gain, but to assist in breaking down the initial social boundaries. Here, my intentions were to get participant coaches to ‘buy into’ the aims, objectives and methods, as well as myself as facilitator, thus benefiting the study and, for the coaches, increasing the value of their involvement in it.

Scholars have suggested that gender and femininity can have an impact on trust between the researcher and participants. Hence, as a female in a male world, like others, “in an attempt to position myself as non-threatening, as well as to blend in, I decided to mute my

femininity” (Purdy & Jones, manuscript under review, p. 11). Whilst this may sound like an elaboration, I was aware that as an outsider, and in particular a female outsider, I would face some resistance not solely from the participants but also from other members of staff that I would encounter whilst collecting data. Even though they were not directly involved in the study, such staff could make access (and the study) difficult should they not take to me. In keeping with Purdy and Jones (manuscript under review) and endeavoring to ‘stand out’ less, I made sure that I was appropriately dressed and could be clearly identified as someone with coaching interests; for example, wearing clothes with initials (as is typical in most football coaching environments). Unlike most other academics (and I say that lightly), I was accustomed to pulling my socks up, putting my boots on, tying my hair back, and becoming a coach by appearance. This was a role I could slip into with ease.

Interaction and self-presentation were influenced, in part, by my understanding of the need to behave in ways that were expected if the required access was to be granted (Deaux & Major, 1990). Similarly, other strategies such as humoring participants whilst they boasted about their playing and training facilities were used. For example, even though, to me, it was just another pitch and changing room, I made sure I looked suitably impressed when visiting the participants. This conscious effort of appearing impressed could be described as a dramaturgical performance and the use of a ‘front’ (Goffman, 1963). This use of a ‘front’ suggests that individuals are not completely influenced by social forces insofar as they are able to strategically manipulate social situations and others’ impressions of themselves (Branaman, 1997). For me, this ‘impression management’ and use of ‘front’ was perceived as a necessary strategy to gain access, avoid resistance and generally ‘fit in’ with what is essentially an exclusive environment. Ultimately, I wanted to be taken seriously.



The success of a research project partly depends on the degree to which researchers succeed in building a personal and trusting relationship with the informants (Declercq, 2000). In keeping with Jones and Turner (2006), I wanted to avoid potential antipathy from the participants to the study. Thus, every effort was made to make the coaches feel secure about this method of learning and to convince them of the value of participating through an introductory session. The intention of the introductory session was to gain background and demographic information about the participants whilst outlining the aims, objectives, rationale and methods of the study. In addition, it provided them with an insight into my role as a researcher and background as a coach. Scholars such as Taylor (1994) have highlighted that in order for the researcher to gain and maintain the trust of participants, he or she should: i) be aware of the relevant issues that affect the informants; ii) be an active listener; iii) suspend bias and judgment and, iv) be willing to reciprocate. Within a subjective social context this is not always possible. As highlighted earlier in this chapter, the ontological and epistemological assumptions within the interpretive/constructivist paradigm in which I sit predominantly, make suspending bias and judgment difficult. Nevertheless, the first session provided an opportunity to address these points. I also took this opportunity to explore and explain issues of confidentiality and accuracy, and to reassure the coaches that what was revealed in the study would not harm them or their respective positions in any manner (Purdy & Jones, manuscript under review).

### 3.3.1 Gender Issues Associated With the Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher within a 'participatory action research' (PAR) approach is undoubtedly one of active involvement (Bruce Ferguson, 1999). As a female in my mid-twenties, with only seven years coaching experience (considerably less than the participants), I had anticipated that trying to gain this active involvement and entry into

these traditionally male dominated coaching environments would be difficult.

To begin with, sport and its many sub-cultures can clearly be described as male dominated (Hargreaves, 1994). Indeed, the history of sport in modern Britain is a history of men. Sport has always been a male preserve, where building male friendships and sustaining large and small communities of men is a primary purpose (Williams, 2007). Women have been banished to the sidelines both literally and metaphorically (Holt, 1989). Thus, trying to enter or breach these communities was inevitably going to be key task for me. Elite sport and the demands and values associated with it, are perceived to constitute a masculine arena in which women do not play a significant role. This may be a result of overt, structural and/or hegemonic discrimination (Lyle, 2002), with football being no exception. Within football, as a professional sport, an industry, an educational specialism, and research area, women's access at the highest level is limited. In supposedly meritocratic systems, similarities between the sexes, fundamental individualism and equality of opportunity, the cornerstones of liberal feminism in its simplest form, appear to have limited relevance (Williams, 2007).

Having taken part in the sport from an early age, I was not naïve to these issues or restrictions, as I had first hand experience of most of them. In this respect, they were anticipated, which helped me to some extent deal with and attempt to resolve them in the research context. The intention here is not to jump on the feminist 'band wagon', nor revisit areas that have already received considerable attention in the literature (Hargreaves, 1994; Scranton 2001; Williams, 2007), as no doubt it could be argued that age difference and social divisions may have had just as much impact on the research process. Rather, it is

to highlight some of the complexities associated with gaining and maintaining access in light of real social constraints.

### 3.4 Data Gathering Instruments

There is a tendency for some researchers to believe that only quantitative research can be rigorous, albeit this is a dated view. Indeed, Patton (2002) advocated its potential (quantitative methods) in measuring the reactions and opinions of large numbers of people to a limited set of highly structured questions, facilitating comparison and statistical aggregation of data. On the other hand, qualitative research enables the researcher to provide a 'holistic' overview of the context under study: its logic, its arrangements, its explicit and implicit functions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) agreed that qualitative research can penetrate situations that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis. Qualitative research puts together information gathered from ethnographic, interview and observational techniques (among others) to form explanations grounded in details, evidence and example. The individuals' understanding of their world and their adaptation or assimilation to their culture enables the researcher to piece together and then interpret the findings. In this action research study then, multiple methods of data collection were used; mainly focus group interviews and observations.

#### 3.4.1 Focus Group Interviews

In light of the collaborative requirements of the study and the tenets of action research identified in the previous section, focus group interviews were used to enable an interpretation of events, and to increase understanding and critical awareness of theory and practice. Such interviews were chosen to unearth and clarify detailed information that the researcher could not directly observe; for example, feelings, thoughts, intentions, previous

behaviours and situations that excluded the presence of the observer. The issue was not whether observational data is more or less desirable, valid or meaningful than self report data (Patton, 2002), but that the latter enables the researcher to access historical and personal information.

The purpose of the interviews was to enable me to enter the world of the coaches, and ask questions about their practice. Indeed, “interviewing provides a way of generating empirical data about the social world, by asking people to talk about their lives” (Silverman, 1997 p. 117). According to Gratton and Jones (2004), interviews can collect data concerned with concepts that are difficult or inappropriate to simply measure. They allow the researcher to ask questions such as ‘why’ and ‘how’ to gain a deeper insight into the social world. Several scholars have highlighted the value of utilising in-depth interpretive interviews to explore the ‘life worlds’ of coaches and athletes (e.g., Côté *et al.*, 1995b; Potrac *et al.*, 2000; Streat, 1998). Specifically, they argued that the acquisition and interpretation of rich qualitative data from such means not only allows researchers to generate a detailed insight into the social, experiential, and contextual factors which influence, and impinge upon, the coaching process, but also the production of theory that more accurately reflects the everyday complexities of sports coaching.

To gain the required insight, I chose to use semi-structured, open-ended focus group interviews (Patton, 2002) as one of the principle methods of data collection. This method would enable the identification of issues and themes as they emerged in the coaches’ interpretations of events. It is important to note here that the focus group interviews were not the only method of drawing out information from the participants. Additionally, several shorter, less formal discussions took place at the coaching venues. These were often a very

relaxed chat, usually over lunch or a coffee break. The purpose here was to verify, and often revisit issues/topics that were borne out of the observations (elaborated upon in the next section) and/or the group interviews. Additionally, these informal discussions helped build a personal and trusting relationship with the coaches (Declercq, 2000).

The focus group interviews were reflexive in nature, in that the respondent coaches were invited to explore certain themes with me, the interviewer, and with each other. In this way, the coaches' perspectives remained at the heart of the interviews, with the respondents' reasons, meanings and interpretations for engaging in certain coaching practices deemed significant (Patton, 2002). Open-ended questions were utilised to explore the factors which the coaches perceived to influence and shape their coaching practice. As the interviews were largely semi-structured in nature, an interview guide provided the themes to be explored, but any new ones that materialised during the course of the discussions were also investigated. The interview schedule was informed by the objectives of the study which included an attention to participants' concerns. This approach not only permitted the full and systematic collection of information from coaches, but also allowed looseness in the sequencing of questions and in the amount of time and attention allocated to the different topics covered (Robson, 1995). In reflecting upon the exploratory needs of the study, I felt that this would be the most appropriate interviewing technique to retrieve relevant data.

It is impractical for an action researcher who claims to operate from an emancipatory perspective to act as anything other than an insider, as in order to extract the information being sought, a degree of empathy and trust is required (Bruce Ferguson, 1999). Aside from obtaining trust, other strategies used to draw out information included the use of

prompts, probes and checks. When I felt they could contribute or offer more information, I would use prompting behaviours and gestures such as nodding or repeating the last few words spoken by the subject to encourage them to continue. When I wanted to delve deeper into a topic rather than let the discussion flow onto the next point, I would use probes (Denscombe, 2007) such as asking for an example, some clarification, more details and also referring to the pre-planned probes on my interview guide. I also used checking methods to confirm that I and the other participants had understood what was being said correctly or if there was some degree of confusion. These were also used strategically during the focus groups to conclude discussions on certain aspects (ibid, 2007).

### 3.4.2 Observations

Much attention is drawn to the importance of a researcher not becoming ‘personally involved’, by means of maintaining both a personal and a social distance from the study’s participants (Robson, 2002). This is particularly so in systematic observation methods and other structured (almost rigid) forms of observation. These involve the researcher using a specific and clearly stated set of items to be observed, such as categorisation schemes, and observational checklists, enabling observed instances to be recorded systematically (Berkeley Thomas, 2004). On the other hand, less rigid forms of observation tend to be favoured by ethnographers to produce rich detailed information, entering the field with as few presuppositions as possible and few coding strategies. Additionally, the varying degrees to which a researcher may position him or herself (in terms of relationship distancing) in relation to those being observed has been well documented, with some scholars attempting to distinguish between the types of observation using a continuum to pin point the differences between complete participant to being completely detached (Glesne, 1999; Patton, 1990; Robson, 2002). Non-participant observation has been

described as the simplest form of observation, where the researcher observes with no engagement with either the activity or the subjects (Gratton & Jones, 2004). Participant observation, however, can be described as a form of subjective sociology (Hammersly & Atkins, 1983), not because researchers aim to force their beliefs on the respondents but because the aim is to comprehend the social world from the subjects' point-of-view (Becker, 1958). This type of observation involves 'getting to know' those being studied by entering their world and participating either openly or covertly (Ruane, 2005). In this respect, the researcher puts themselves 'in the shoes' of the people they are studying, to experience events in the way they experience them (Stratti, 1999). A danger here is that of 'going native'. In these cases, the task of analysis may be abandoned in favour of the joys of participation. Furthermore, even when it is retained, inaccuracies can arise from 'over rapport' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). A method of avoiding this would be to maintain some distance from those being studied, however, in doing so the researcher risks accessibility (Flick, 2009). A balance then, must be struck.

I used overt participant observation which involves the researcher being 'open' with the participants they are studying. Here, before doing the research the researcher is likely to inform the participants about such things as the purpose of the research, its scope, duration and so forth. However, some would argue that in the real world, such approaches to observation are grey at the edges, whilst overt and covert methods will, to a certain extent, merge (Clarke, 1996). For example, although claiming to be overt, observers will at times only be open with key individuals involved in the study (whether intentionally or not). Other less involved participants i.e., those not necessarily comprising the focus of the study but still an active part in the processes being observed, will be overlooked (Stephens & Leach, 1998). In this respect, this research was done with the formal permission and co-

operation of all key respondents i.e., the coaches, and informally with any other participants that were not necessarily being observed directly but were part of the ‘make up’ of the setting being observed.

The degree to which I could be a participant whilst purporting overtness would raise questions with some scholars particularly those concerned with ethnography. I could never participate as a ‘fully fledged’ member of the group (and my intentions were not to do so), as well as endeavoring to be open and effective with my research agenda. However, whilst I did not take part in any coaching activity, I did immerse myself in discussions (focus groups and other less formal conversations with coaches and others) not only as a researcher. My coaching background enabled me to offer coaching insights and offer contributions based on my own practical experiences where needed (Cushion & Jones, 2006). This allowed me to engage and contribute in the experiential sense with the subjects, more so, than just as an outsider; I did so, whilst keeping a research ‘hat’ on. Furthermore, scholars have argued that all research of this nature involves some sort of participation, since we cannot study the world without being part of it (Adler & Adler, 1994). Additionally, I believe my collaborative involvement as an action researcher gave me enough of a role within the groups being studied to gain first-hand exposure to the setting, so that I was able to experience the events, demands and processes which occurred (Berkeley Thomas, 2004).

Participant observation can potentially involve the use of an assortment of methods of inquiry, including documentary analysis, interviews, and focus groups (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983) to gain understanding of research settings from the perspective of those involved in them. Along with the interviews, participant observation was used as a method



for collecting data in this study, forming a major part of the research process. I observed and recorded (audio and video) participants whilst they were coaching and also observed (without recording but through field notes and/or reflective accounts) other ‘critical incidents’ (Measor, 1985) that I deemed important and relevant to the study. For example, incidents and conversations at lunch and away from practical coaching sessions. I used Spradley’s (1980) three phases of participant observation, which entails initial descriptive observations, i.e., non specific descriptions to grasp the complexity of the field. This included contextual information such as the location, those present, social interactions; who was involved in them and what happened (Cushion & Jones, 2006). Then, more focused observations, i.e., taking a narrower perspective, when incidents were specifically related to my research aims. Lastly, selective observations at the end of the data collection phase, by reviewing recordings to look for further evidence and examples of processes found in the focused observation phase (Spradley, 1980).

### 3.5 Study Design

With this study, my combined use of semi-structured focus group interviews, participant observation, less formal discussions and reflective notes (all part of the wider observational work) with individual coaches provided me with a broad yet cohesive picture of the coaches’ ‘worlds’ in which they operated and an understanding of why they acted in the ways that they did. The following section details the participants, the procedures used, as well as the practicalities involved within the action research framework.

#### 3.5.1 Participants

Using network and purposive techniques (Patton, 2002), the sample included two groups of football coaches. All had obtained the Union des Associations Européennes de Football

(UEFA) advanced coaching licence or equivalent, either through the Football Association of Wales (FAW) or the Football Association of England (FA). UEFA is the governing body of football for Europe, thus the coaching pathways of both the FAW and FA are similar in so far as they provide five distinctive coaching levels all accredited by UEFA. Specifically, the FAW Leaders Award or FA Level 1, the FAW C Certificate or FA Level 2, the FAW B License or FA Level 3, the FAW A License and FA Level 4, and finally the FAW/FA Professional License.

The participant coaches were split into two groups. This was a conscious divide in order to meet one of the aims of the study. The first group consisted of coaches of semi elite/developmental players and was made up of four coaches in total (initially five, see methodological limitations). The second group consisted of coaches of elite players and was made up of two coaches in total (initially four, see methodological limitations). The coaches who comprised group 1 were all male, and at the time coached at either a Coca Cola Championship or League One football club junior academy and/or college academy. These were defined as coaches of semi elite/developmental players because the players they worked with were not part of a full-time programme. Similarly, the coaches' employment did not lie solely with that club. The group 2 coaches were also male and all from the same Barclays Premiership football club, working with senior academy players (many of whom had made 1<sup>st</sup> team appearances). These coaches were defined as coaches of elite players because the players they worked with were all full-time 'academy scholars'.

Conscious of the messy nature of this type of research, it became obvious from the start that there would be several unavoidable issues and difficulties related to the data collection phase. Firstly, with regards to gaining access to participants, it took approximately two

months to organise and secure the participant coaches for the two intended groups. Secondly, there were also problems in conducting the actual research (which will be discussed in later sections). My own experiences and credibility as a coach made it initially easy to identify possible candidates for participation through previous networking. I was fortunate that I had previously worked alongside some of the coaches in group 1, in one way or another. My rapport with these coaches opened up doors to other coaches that I had not previously had any contact with, resulting in a 'snow ball or chain' method of purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990). However, actually persuading these coaches to take part and make the emotional investments (as is necessary for a CoP within an action research study to work) was a different story. To a certain extent, I relied heavily on the coaches who I had a good relationship with to persuade others to take part. This was a relatively straightforward process in comparison to gaining access to coaches that met the requirements of group 2. Whilst I had previous dealings with coaches of this standard (coaches of elite athletes working at clubs, academies and in national development structures) in and around the area that I worked, there were many difficulties in obtaining access on a research level. However, I was able to make contact through a former coach, and later colleague who was a respected member of the footballing community. This key informant put me in touch with the coaches' who came to comprise group 2 having already done the ground work in explaining the nature of this study. Another contributing factor was that all of these (group 2) coaches were from the same club and the Academy Director (also one of the participants) was influential, using his position to encourage others to participate. He was keen for his coaches to take part and initially embraced the potential benefits a CoP had to offer. Undoubtedly, my gender, age and status as an outsider would have otherwise prevented me from gaining access directly at this level.

### 3.5.2 Procedures

At first, it was intended that both group 1 and group 2 interviews, and subsequent observations, would run parallel to each other. This, however, was not possible due to the time constraints and other commitments of the coaches. It was anticipated that each interview and subsequent observations would be evenly spread throughout the football season in question; specifically, at the beginning of the season (September), mid season (November, January and March), and then finally at the close of the season (May). The principle reason for this is that coaching behaviour will alter throughout the course of a season due to a team's successes or failures (Lacy & Darst, 1985; Potrac, Jones & Armour, 1997). In order to develop a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the coaches' experiences and developments, within the time constraints and limitations of the coaches, both groups' interviews were spread as evenly as possible during the early, mid, and late season phases, giving a total of five focus group interviews with each group and four observations per coach.

The data collection phase involved followed the general cyclic patterns of action research (i.e., interview-observations-reflect/evaluate-interview-observations...). Although directed by the study's aims (as agreed in collaboration with the participant coaches), the semi-structured interviews were reflective and exploratory, based on themes drawn from prior interviews and observations. Discussions in the first interview featured power and empowerment and led to this theme being used as a theoretical thread throughout the subsequent cycles of action research. However, the interviews were also flexible enough so that additional areas which arose in the conversations could also be explored (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Each formal focus group interview ranged in duration from approximately forty-five to ninety minutes. Interviews were audio and video taped,

transcribed, with participants being given copies to confirm accuracy at the earliest possible opportunity or next interview.

Participant observation was used as a source of data to assist in the coaches' development and their self reflective practice. Participant coaches were observed soon after each focus group so that points raised and theory discussed was still fairly 'fresh' in their minds. Here, I attended the training ground, observed and video taped the coaches' activity before, during and after training sessions. With the group 2 coaches, I was also granted access to players' physical conditioning sessions and the dining room. This was not applicable to group 1 coaches as the players were only at the training ground for the duration of the training session (e.g., not at meal times).

My intentions for video recording each interview and observation session was to ensure that as much information as possible was obtained, with the intent of capturing an insider's view of the setting, thus addressing the issue of accuracy. This also served as a useful tool and 'refresher' when later revisiting the data for analytical and verification purposes. I also took notes whilst filming, and when needed, I would leave the recording device running, with a panoramic view, so that I could record in my own words particular incidents of interest and goings-on. With regards to note-taking, this was done short-hand in both the interviews and observations. As soon as practically possible, I re-read these notes and wrote them up in full, adding points of context and further details from memory. This process enabled me to think about what I had heard and plan my next set of questions or points to observe (O'Reilly, 2005). In keeping with the constructivist paradigm, in which this work sits, rather than just collecting 'facts' the notes taken helped to inform and develop post observation reflective logs (Purdy *et al.*, 2009). Thus, I was able to "rethink,

undo, and shape the ongoing research process and products” (Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul, 1997, p. 18). Less formal interviews and conversations with the participant coaches also took place around the training sessions. Here, the intention was to confirm the accuracy of my observations, whilst attempting to draw out further information about the day’s events and other significant issues related to the study. While the formal interviews were audio and video taped, details of these supplementary discussions were again recorded through short-hand note-taking.

The data collection methods followed the cyclic process outlined by Sparkes (2000), in that interview data were transcribed before the next interview took place. This process was replicated for data obtained through observations. Upon completion of each data collection phase, field notes were transcribed, coded and analysed (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In doing so, I was able to identify issues and themes that were evident in the field in relation to ‘power’ (which the coaches had identified as a pressing issue). I then reflected upon these notes before, and during subsequent interviews, providing content for discussion with the participant coaches, thus keeping with the ‘plan, act, observe and reflect’ spiral of action research (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Here, I didn’t just collect data, but instead, and in keeping with the nature of the action research, I worked alongside these coaches over the duration of the study.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

Qualitative research is generally described as “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17). Quantitative researchers search for causal determination and prediction where qualitative researchers seek instead, enlightenment, understanding and

correlation to similar situations (Hoepfl, 1997). Qualitative analysis produces a different type of knowledge than quantitative inquiry. It (i.e., qualitative analysis) is the search for general statements about relationships among categories of data. “In qualitative studies, data collection and analysis typically go hand in hand to build a coherent interpretation of the data. The researcher is guided by initial concepts and developing understandings, but shifts and modifies them as he/she collects or analyses the data” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 151). Traditionally, quantitative and qualitative research designs usually depend on a literature review leading to the formation of a hypothesis. This hypothesis is then investigated through experimentation in the real world (Moghaddam, 2006). Alternatively, grounded theory developed by Glaser and Strauss in the early 1960’s as a methodology for inductively generating theory (Patton, 1990), is said to investigate the actualities in the real world and analyses the data with no preconceived hypothesis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Moghaddam, 2006).

### 3.6.1 Grounded Theory: A Variation

Bryman (2004) outlined two central features of grounded theory. Firstly, it is concerned with the development of theory out of data; and secondly, data collection and analysis proceed in tandem, repeatedly referring back to each other. It can be described as a ‘bottom up’ method of data collection, involving the search for patterns grounded in the data; in Patton’s own words: “Grounded theory emphasises becoming immersed in the data: being grounded, so that embedded meanings and relationships can emerge...the analyst becomes implanted in the data” (2002, p. 454). The distinctive advantage of grounded theory is that it commences from specific naturalistic situations, with the intent of understanding the nature and rationale of observed interactions and processes (Douglas, 2003).

Grounded theory was used as a general strategy of analysis. However, the emphasis on the researcher having no preconceived ideas when collecting and analysing data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was clearly not possible. It would have been impossible to attempt to investigate the use of CoPs (Lave & Wenger, 1991, discussed in the subsequent section in more detail) in enhancing coaches' experiential knowledge without some reference to specific issues that facilitate this learning. Additionally, the questions asked in subsequent interviews were informed by previous interviews as well as the study's aims. That said, Glaser (2002) later emphasised that this (i.e., notion of not having preconceived ideas) was not what Glaser and Strauss meant, and what they were actually referring to was preconceived bias, dogma, and mental baggage which in this case may be taken to be the researcher's preconceived ideas about working practices. With this in mind, a variation of grounded theory was advocated and employed. Whilst the data were analysed in terms of the procedures used by Lave and Wenger (1991), in relation to the analysis, it involved development of theory out of data. Theoretical comparisons were then made to the relevant literature and not vice versa.

Silverman (2000) identifies three main stages in grounded theory: i) an initial attempt to develop categories which illuminate the data; ii) an attempt to 'saturate' these categories with many appropriate cases in order to demonstrate their relevance, and iii) developing these categories into more general analytic frameworks with relevance outside the setting. In this respect, data retrieved from interview transcripts, observations, field notes and memos were reduced and organised into conceptual categories depending on their relevance to the study's aims. In keeping with Miles and Huberman's (1994) suggestions, my intentions here were to use the research questions as a defence against potential data overload. Patton, (2002) described this process of content analysis as "qualitative data



reduction and a sense making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (p. 453). Furthermore, “unlike quantitative data analysis, clear-cut rules about how qualitative data analysis should be carried out have not been developed” (Bryman, 2004, p. 398). According to Bryman (2004), coding as a tool is a central process in grounded theory whereby data are broken down into component parts, which are given names. Here, I adopted Miles and Huberman’s (1994) three-stage qualitative data analysis procedure: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/ verification. The same data analysis procedure was used for all sources: video and audio recordings, interview transcripts and the less obtrusive data collection methods of reviewing documents and related literature. Data were initially treated in sequence and with rigour, then cross checking methods were used to check validity and for complimentary reasons.

To overcome the dilemmas of data retrieval there was a need to develop some manageable classification or coding system as a first step to analysis. This entailed trying to avoid data overload by extracting information, without sacrificing depth and content and searching the text for recurring words and themes. I used coding as a method of analysis; to organise the raw data collected, then as a tool for inductive analysis i.e., the discovery of patterns, themes, and categories in one’s data (Patton, 2002). The type of coding practice used could be described as open coding, which Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 61) define as “the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising and categorising data”. It can then be later grouped and turned into categories or clusters (Bryman, 2004). Following this step, the analysis proceeded to a higher level of interpretation, which consisted of comparing codes and organising them into clusters. This step of the analysis was similar to the creation of codes except that it was done at a more abstract level. Like

those mentioned above, Charmaz (2006) outlined a number of analytic stages; including initial and focused coding and provided an overview of axial and theoretical coding to be considered for potential use in the study. Essentially, the data and emerging analysis determines the next step in the analysis as opposed to following a set of pre-determined steps. In the early stages of analysis, line-by-line coding was conducted (Keane, 2006). This entailed a close examination of the data and coding took the form of naming a section or line of data, using, where possible, words reflecting action (Glaser, 1978; Keane, 2006). This was done in order to focus on the processes inherent in the data instead of regular nouns, which may lead to premature “conceptual leaps” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 48). Throughout this inductive process, analytical memos were used to integrate theory into the analysis (Charmaz, 2006).

Although coding is a principal process of analysing text there are potential problems associated with it. For example, there is a risk of losing the content of what is said when removing chunks of text out of the context within which they appear, such as a particular interview transcript (Bryman, 2004). This danger of decontextualising text, means that the data can become fragmented, and the narrative fluidity of what people say is lost. Considering this potential problem, I constantly referred back to the original text so that context would not be lost in the process.

### 3.6.2 Communities of Practice

Although the analysis was predominantly inductive in nature, the data collected were analysed using Lave and Wenger’s (1991) ‘communities of practice’ (CoPs) theoretical framework, which has increasing credence within coaching research (Cassidy *et al.*, 2004; Culver & Trudel, 2006; 2008; Jones *et al.*, 2004). The following section provides an

outline of this framework, how it is structured and designed, and its potential as a tool for analysis.

Many of the ways we have of talking about learning and education are based on the assumption that learning is something individuals do (Lave, 1993; Wenger, 1998). However, Lave and Wenger (1991) developed a concept of situated learning based on anthropological studies of apprentices in a range of societies and occupational contexts. They proposed that learning involves a process of engagement in a CoP. The notion of a CoP is pivotal to Lave and Wenger's (1991) work, who claim that its activities provide learners with a framework for making sense of a particular sphere of life. The way in which these communities are structured, in terms of social relationships, and conditions for legitimacy define possibilities for learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Supporters of the notion of situated learning have highlighted the difficulties in defining exactly what a CoP is (Culver & Trudel, 2006). Indeed, early definitions provided by Lave and Wenger were vague and broad, stating that:

A community of practice is a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice. A community of practice is an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge, not least because it provides the interpretive support necessary for making sense of its heritage. (1991, p. 98)

Consequently, scholars have referred to the subsequent work of Wenger (2002, p. 4) for greater clarity, who has defined a CoP as “a group of people who share a common concern, set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis”. In this respect and as suggested in the previous chapter, interaction with others plays a major role in learning (Cushion *et al.*,

2006; Jones *et al.*, 2004; Potrac *et al.*, 2002), although it is not synonymous with a CoP (Culver & Trudel, 2006).

In terms of structure, a CoP may vary in relation to size, life span, physical boundaries and the way in which they are recognised in organisations (Wenger, 1998). However, all CoPs are typified by three structural components, i.e., domain, community and practice. Domain ranges from ordinary know-how to more specialised professional expertise. Community refers to the environment in which people learn and interact. Practice is the set of framework, ideas, tools, skills and information shared by the community (Wenger *et al.*, 2002). Additionally, practice is considered to be in a constant state of flux because “activity and the participation of individuals involved in it, their knowledge, and their perspectives are mutually constitutive, change is a fundamental property of CoPs and their activities” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 117). In this respect, everyone can to a certain extent, be deemed a novice to the future of a changing community (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

In terms of the design of a CoP, several principles have been outlined by Wenger *et al.* (2002). Firstly, evolution, in that the idea is not to impose a fixed structure, but to allow the community the flexibility to grow. Secondly, encourage discussion about inside and outside perspectives so that the strategic potential of the CoP is sharpened. Thirdly, provide opportunities for different levels of participation so that all participants have a role to play based on their interests and commitment. Fourth, develop both public and private spaces; i.e., official events organised for all as well as one-to-one interaction amongst participants. Fifth, focus on value so that the community is pertinent to the organisation for its duration. Sixth, is to combine familiarity with excitement, i.e., encourage frank discussion as well as providing activities that are novel and invoke spontaneity among

members. Seventh, ensure the pace of activities are both challenging and attainable for participants (Wenger *et al.*, 2002).

The importance of differentiating between learning within CoPs and from other interactions such as informal knowledge networks or networks of practice has been outlined by Culver and Trudel (2006). They suggested that a CoP is not merely an informal relationship between two or more people where they exchange information, nor is it a mode of communication where members contribute and help each other out regularly; for example, an internet forum or discussion board. Rather, it is a formalised mutual engagement, which involves joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire of communal resources (Culver & Trudel, 2006). “It is the on-going interactions that permit the negotiation of meaning within a CoP, and which differentiates the CoPs from other ways through which people learn by interacting with each other” (Culver & Trudel, 2008a, p. 7).

As previously suggested, interaction among coaches is a valuable learning tool and coaches’ knowledge continues to be founded on implicit experiential learning as opposed to explicit coach education courses (Cushion, 2001; Cushion *et al.*, 2003; Gilbert & Trudel 2001; Gould, Gianinni, Krane & Hodge, 1990; Jones *et al.*, 2004; Salmela, 1996). Humans learn best from interacting with others, experience and subsequent reflection upon that experience. The use of CoPs focuses on learners not as vessels to be filled with given knowledge but as significant and valued data sources, thus, this educational process is centered on the learner and learning rather than the instructor and instruction (Cassidy *et al.*, 2006). Culver and Trudel (2006) suggested that working closely with a restricted group of people to develop a ‘coaching community of practice’ is an important step forward in attempting to enhance coaching knowledge and understand how coaches learn. However,

at present, there is little evidence to confirm this notion and only a handful of studies provide clear, pragmatic examples of how a CoP can work in a coach education context. Nevertheless, if this (development of coaches' CoPs) is to be the case, coaches must set aside the time, and commit to this process which is not always as easy as it seems. Indeed, the "potential for this model of learning for coaches should be tempered by the knowledge that there can be extreme difficulties in establishing and maintaining fully functioning communities that fulfill the conditions of being a CoP" (Rynne, 2008, p. 13).

### 3.6.3 Presentation of Data

In terms of presenting the data, I have used what may lightly be termed evocative narratives and a blend of realist and confessional tales in an attempt to demystify the messy reality and, at times, vagueness of my findings. In realist tales, the researcher will enter the field, collect data and then report what the participants have said, thought and done (Van Maanen, 1988). There are several features of a realist tale (Purdy *et al.*, 2009). Initially, the researcher strives to 'paint a picture' of the participants and context under study. Then, in writing up the data, the researcher tries to present the 'native's' point of view (Malinowski, 1967), with the author evacuated; scenes and events are described as they were witnessed (Van Maanen, 1988). Finally, the interpretation of the situation observed is assumed and taken for granted as being the correct one (Schofield Clark, 1999).

"A starting point in any research project is when the researcher acknowledges that all research is storied, and that all researchers tell tales, but differ in the extent to which they are explicit about their role in the stories" (Markula & Denison, 2005, p. 167). In this respect, although a realist tale traditionally requires the author to be absent (Sparkes, 2002), it has been questioned whether this is possible given the nature of qualitative work and the

tensions associated with such evacuation (Sparkes, 1995). Indeed, Purdy *et al.* (2009) argued that this stance may be considered a textual illusion because authors are ever present throughout articles and accounts as writers, and are inevitably responsible for selecting the quotations and shaping the story that is presented (Sparkes, 2002). Purdy *et al.* (2009) proposed that whilst there are a set of key principles that frame realist tales, this frame need not be resistant (Sparkes, 2002). Realist tales can be adapted to include different narrative styles, for example, evocative writing and a more confessional approach with the author writing themselves into the text (Sparkes, 1995; 2002). Here then, it has been acknowledged that it is not only the participants' story that the reader gets, but the writers' interpretation of it (Purdy *et al.*, 2009). This raises the issue of whose story is really being told (Richardson, 1999). It has been argued then, that the responsibility for the text lies with the researcher(s). Here, he or she must embrace the value of interpretation and sociological insight (Hastrup, 1992; Richardson 1990) presenting a modified realist tale which is able to serve a critical agenda (Sparkes, 2002).

Echoing the work of Purdy, Jones and colleagues, the narratives and events portrayed in this project were based upon 'critical incidents' (i.e., significant issues and/or key events during the fieldwork). Such incidents were harvested from the induction of the data, a process which also helped in the organisation of the large amounts generated by the interviews and observations. Whilst there were many critical incidents over the duration of the study, the ones presented in the following chapter provide a vehicle through which a detailed understanding of the study's aims can be attained (Purdy *et al.*, 2009). Where similar events/issues occurred repeatedly, these narratives (outlining the critical incidents) served as a summary and tool to avoid unnecessary replication in the presentation of results.

### 3.7 Issues of Triangulation, Validity and Reliability

“Good research requires that one attempts to check out the justifiability of one’s claims by referring to possibly disconfirming evidence” (Bruce Ferguson, 1999, p. 52). Within social science research triangulation is commonly used towards such ends. Instead of relying on a single source of evidence or viewpoint as the basis for findings, multiple forms of diverse and redundant types of evidence are used to check the validity and reliability of findings (Maxwell, 1996; O’Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996; Silverman, 2000). Over-dependency on any one form of data may influence the validity of the findings.

Two of Denzin’s (1978) descriptions of this principle (i.e., triangulation) are of relevance to this study. They are data triangulation (the use of a variety of data sources in a study) and theory triangulation (the use of multiple perspectives to interpret a single set of data) (Bruce Ferguson, 1999; Janesick, 1994). The value of this approach lies in increasing the accuracy of the findings along with painting a ‘truer’ picture of the investigation and its results. In this study, the use of focus group interviews, observations and reflective note taking (part of the observations) are examples of the previous (i.e., data triangulation) and the use of Lave and Wenger’s work (the predominant theoretical framework), and current coaching and action research writings (e.g., Culver & Trudel, 2008a; Jones *et al.*, in press), examples of the latter (i.e., theory triangulation).

A multi method approach using observation and semi-structured focus group interviews allowed the primary findings to be cross checked to achieve as balanced a study as possible (Gill & Johnson, 1991). Some researchers believe that triangulation “strengthens a study by combining methods” (Patton, 2002, p. 247). Thus, using different data collection methods can enhance validity, but must be done reasonably and practically. Patton (2002,) supports this by suggesting that studies that use only one method are more vulnerable to errors



linked to that particular method unlike studies that use multiple methods where different types of data can allow for cross-data validity checks.

There is, however, potential for triangulation to weaken the credibility of the research as much as strengthen it, and could cause problems if not anticipated and identified in a pilot study. The temptation to move from one data set to another when problems arise in analysing one set of material, may lead to the partial analysis of data. As with any method, poorly thought out triangulation can increase error rather than reduce it. Although, as stated, multiple methods are often applied in the hope that they will reveal the whole picture, Silverman (2000, p. 98) believes that “this whole picture can be an illusion that speedily leads to scrappy research”. In this study, my intentions were not to simply aggregate data in order to arrive at an overall ‘truth’, but alternatively consider triangulation as an opportunity for data complementarity. Aware of the dangers expressed by Silverman, I kept my data collection and analysis methods simple and treated each piece of datum meticulously and in sequence, always conscious of Silverman’s claims. It is this pursuit of rigour that leads to the shortest path to validity (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; see Denzin, 1997, for a fuller response to Silverman’s criticisms).

In summary, methodological triangulation was carried out so that comparisons could be drawn and inconsistencies identified within the data obtained. As Patton (2002, p. 248) suggested “finding such inconsistencies ought not to be viewed as weakening the credibility of results, but rather as offering opportunities for deeper insight into the relationship between enquiry approach and the phenomenon under study”. By collating observational with interview data, the researcher is able to describe, understand and interpret the setting observed, the activities that take place in that context, and the people

that participate. This use of multiple sources of evidence, demonstrates the amalgamation of data from all sources and assists in establishing the trustworthiness of research findings (Burns, 1994).

Grounded theory procedures imply that validation is part of the research process, with continual credibility checks of the collected data (Côté *et al.*, 1995a). In terms of validity and reliability, academics have argued that these methods of judgement are neither directly applicable nor 'fitting' for qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Sparkes, 1998). Indeed, they are 'clean' assumptions, traditional positivist notions that can not be transferred to qualitative, postmodern methodologies (Newman, 1999). Postmodernism significantly disrupts the traditional, especially positivist, way of seeing the world (Bruce Ferguson, 1999). "It is the *doubt* that any method or theory, discourse or genre, tradition or novelty, has a universal and general claim as the 'right' or the privileged form of authoritative knowledge" (Richardson, 2000 p. 928). Traditional notions of validity, therefore, are problematic (Lather, 1986; Lincoln & Denzin, 1994; Richardson, 1994). Whilst much of the rhetoric concerning validity more comfortably sits within quantitative research designs, scholars have argued that validity is the 'touchstone' for all research (Cohen *et al.*, 2000). Resistance within academic writings against such a view of validity is rife, with some qualitative researchers rejecting such a stance, arguing that the basic realist assumptions (i.e., that there is a reality external to our perception of it) makes no sense within the interpretive paradigm.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) proposed alternative criteria for judging the soundness of qualitative research. They proposed a trustworthiness criterion, suggesting that that "terms such as credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability replace the usual positivist criteria of internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity." (Guba &

Lincoln, 1994, p. 14). They also proposed an authenticity criterion, which included terms such as fairness, enrichment, education, stimulation to action and empowerment (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This approach to quality is based on three new commitments; to developing relations with respondents, to a set of standpoints, and to a vision of research that enables and encourages justice (Creswell, 1998).

The above proposal of Guba and colleagues has been the subject of considerable debate (Sparkes, 1998) with accusations that it is a mere re-labelling of quantitative criteria in order to ensure greater legitimacy for qualitative research. Others have suggested that correct interpretation of the quantitative criteria would demonstrate that they are not restricted to the positivist paradigm. Perhaps a broad reading and reworking of the traditional quantitative criteria might make them applicable to qualitative studies also (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). However, historically, the conventional quantitative criteria have been described almost exclusively in terms of quantitative research. Despite this, it appears that there is yet to be a thorough attempt at translating how these positivist criteria might hold relevance in the realm of qualitative research.

More recently, attempts to reconceptualise validity in relation to various forms of qualitative enquiry have been called for (Sparkes, 1998). For example, McTaggart (1997) argues that validity in action research needs to be reconceptualised in terms of the effectiveness of the approach in changing practice. Thus, validity in action research might involve some evaluation of the research process (Sparkes, 2002), and/or whether it lives up to its assertions of resulting in change and understanding (Jones *et al.*, in press). In this respect, I believe it is necessary to judge my work in a similar way, although not exclusively. Scholars have argued that with regards to data representation, there must also

be ways of judging what ‘good’ and ‘bad’ research writing is (Markula & Denison, 2005). For me, validity and reliability can be regarded as a fit between what I have recorded as data and what actually occurred in the natural setting (Cohen *et al.*, 2000). Here, my attempts to avoid misrepresentation and misunderstanding through triangulation, striving to present a “substantial body of uncontestable description” (Stake, 1995, p. 110), should be considered. Furthermore, the study should be judged by the degree of preciseness of the procedures used, the effectiveness of my checking with participants that their views have been appropriately represented (in terms of meaning not words), and the consistency between the various sources utilised in seeking elaboration as opposed to a test of truth (Bruce Ferguson, 1999).

### 3.8 Ethical Concerns

Writers of research ethics adopt different stances with regards to the issues that arise in connection with relationships between researchers and research participants (Bryman, 2004). According to Patton (2002), discussions about ethical principles in social research tend to centre around certain issues that recur in different guises and can be very prominent. Here, the interpretive nature of most qualitative enquiry, where researchers attempt to gain an insider’s perspective thus exploring and uncovering explanations, results in personal, power relations where consequent ethical issues must be considered.

The research undertaken was not deceptive, covert, did not involve biomedical or clinical intervention, nor did it involve vulnerable populations. Thus, no such approval related to these issues was required. However, in accordance with the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff’s research ethics, principles and procedures there were several issues and protocols that I felt important to address. Generally, in terms of confidentiality, qualitative researchers must go to great lengths not to discuss anything that might lead to recognition.

However, for interpretation to be grounded in the data this requires considerable detail of information and actual quotes from participants so that the reader can interpret the data for themselves. Additionally, context is important in this particular study, thus I felt it necessary to provide detailed information about the participants' respective roles within their national governing body. These factors combined, may result in a report consisting of great detail, thus, there is a risk that an individual may be recognised despite the use of pseudonyms. However, every attempt was made to avoid identification through the fabrication of participants' names and club names. Permission to perform the study was freely given and informed consent from the participants obtained. The aims and nature of the study were fully explained to the participants, and the degree to which they would be afforded anonymity and confidentiality explained. The researcher gave an accurate dissemination of the risks to all participants involved and appropriate negotiations of how the research would be used (in terms of dissemination) was agreed between the researcher, her Director of Studies and the participant coaches.

### 3.9 Methodological Limitations

Several problems and issues were encountered and identified with regards to the data collection. Firstly, securing access to coaches and then gaining their consent to take part in the study proved difficult and more time consuming than anticipated. This is discussed in previous sections and highlighted in subsequent chapters in more detail.

Secondly, there were risks involved with working with coaches at the highest level of football. The modern game is notoriously 'cut throat' and coaching at this level can be short-lived. This proved problematic when two of the coaches from group 2 were dismissed from their posts. One, before the first interview and the other mid-way through the study because the club had to cut costs. As a result, the number of participants in group

2 reduced and the dynamics of this group changed dramatically. Additionally, the two remaining participants were unfortunate in having to take on the extra workload of their former colleagues, reducing their time and commitment available. I made attempts to find replacements but these were quashed when the potential new coaches found employment at clubs that were not accessible for geographical reasons and time constraints. Whilst I could have delayed the data collection with this group, and made further attempts to recruit other coaches, I was wary that if the club was making changes to its coaching infrastructure, then there was also the risk that it would seek to make changes to its management i.e., the 1<sup>st</sup> team manager. If this happened, I could have faced further access difficulties if his replacement was less supportive of the time his academy coaches were allocating to my research. Additionally, a further coach withdrew from group 1 in the early stages of the study due to a change of roles and promotion at his club which limited his availability. Such changes are typical of the fast moving, uncertain world of top-level coaching.

Thirdly, the messy nature of this type of research and the demands placed on those involved working at the highest level of football had bearing on the procedures of the study. My intentions for the data collection process were not always in sync with the participants' availability. Ideally, both groups would have run parallel to one another. However, the reality of working with such coaches at this level of performance is that I was on *their* time and had to fit around *their* availability. Nevertheless, the same number of interviews and observations for both groups was adhered to.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS OF AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY**

### 4.1 Introduction

In the following chapter, I sketch out my action research study and present the findings from the interview data and observations as a series of unfolding narratives. These are inclusive of revised extracts from personal reflective accounts, field notes and interview data. The plot hinges on my attempts to encourage the respective groups of coaches to engage and develop within CoPs. In order to frame the action research approach and map out the evidence obtained in line with the overall aims of the study, this chapter is split into two main sections which run parallel to each other. One attends to the developmental coaches' group, while the other attends to the elite coaches' group and their engagement with learning (or lack of it) in their respective CoPs.

In terms of structure, I firstly set the scenes (for both developmental and elite groups) and give an introduction to the coaches, the environments within which they work and the initial issues associated with obtaining access. This brief introduction is followed by sections outlining my attempts at examining whether and how coaches' learning could be developed through socially located, self-reflective practice in keeping with the study's objectives. In this respect, and in line with the tenets of action research, data from the interviews and observations which centred on prescribed topics are presented under the respective subsections (i.e., empowerment, motivational climate and panopticism). Finally, two further sections address the value and the effectiveness of developing coaches' knowledge within a shared CoP (among coaches of developmental and elite athletes), and my role as an external facilitator in this process. In terms of style, I shift between commentaries inclusive of interview data, then, with regards to observational data, what

may lightly be termed evocative narratives and a blend of realist and confessional tales<sup>1</sup> are used. In doing so, I attempt to demystify the messy reality and at times vagueness of my fieldwork and findings.

#### 4.2 Group 1: Developmental Coaches' Community of Practice

The intentions of this section are to firstly outline the developmental coaches' backgrounds, beliefs, coaching practice and how these were developed prior to the study. Secondly, it is to lightly frame my role as a female researcher in the early stages of her career and the negotiations associated with developing relationships with the participants (i.e., the coaches of developmental players). Additionally, I highlight the difficulties inherent in examining coaching at this level, where each situation is unique, and the potential for the application of theory into practice varies depending upon the group and organisation within which coaches work. I then endeavour to expose the difficulties inherent in sustaining a productive CoP, where commitment to its conditions depend on personal circumstances, institutional structures and resources which, in turn, are constantly changing. Subsequently, in attempting to explore whether coaches' learning is developed through socially located, self-reflective practice, I present the findings as a series of realist tales (inclusive of reflective accounts) highlighting the coaches' responses to my attempts at theory-injection.

##### 4.2.1 Setting the Scene

###### Personal Reflections [10<sup>th</sup> September]

Having finished training I make my way back to the car. Eager to get home, as every minute away eats into my study time and need to recruit suitable and willing participants. Like an old cart horse I lug the equipment across the pitch. I struggle to

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<sup>1</sup> Raw extracts from field data to reveal the dramas and encounters I was exposed to and experienced in the field. These support the realist tales.



squeeze through the astro-turf gate, adamant not to take the bags off my back for fear of not being able to pick them up again. I gather momentum as unknowingly, behind me, Amie gives a helpful shove. She grins as I stumble through. My jacket pocket starts to vibrate: *great, no free hand!* I manage to answer my phone relieved that it doesn't divert to voicemail.

"Hello?"

"Hi Kerry, Bill Davies here, how are you?"

My tone quickly lightens: "Hey Bill! I'm good thanks, and you?"

"Great thanks Ker, just returning your call. You sound out of breath, you busy? Shall I call back later?"

"No, its okay I've just finished coaching that's all. I'm fine, but give me a minute while I just get in the car."

Bill doesn't give me a minute: "Okay, how are they? How are you getting on this season?"

"The usual, still the same pain in the backsides as always!" I mumble, gripping my keys in my mouth as I attempt to free myself from the restraints of the kit bags. We continue to catch up; I haven't spoken to Bill since working for him some years ago.

"Listen, I got your email Ker, and I'd love to help you out. I have a few other names you might want to consider; good guys, they'll be keen I'm sure. I'll have a word if you like; test the water before you call them?"

"Brilliant Bill, thanks! I owe you one."

"Well, you can return the favour; I'll see you at the next coaches' recruitment day yeah?"

*Great, I thought I'd got out of that one; no such luck.* Slightly hesitant, I agree. "Well you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours and all that!"

My liaisons with Bill significantly influenced the recruitment of other suitable and willing participants. Bill was highly thought of as a coach on a regional and national level. Having been involved in coaching for several years under many guises, he had developed a wealth of contacts. In this respect, Bill was able to provide several referrals and assisted in the 'snow ball' sampling technique of the study. Two of the coaches were initially recruited by Bill and agreed to take part in the study.

The aim of the first interview was to familiarise the coaches with the intentions of the project and for myself, as facilitator, to gain valuable background information about them and their coaching worlds. I attempted to get the coaches to disclose their current coaching beliefs, their perceptions of roles and how these had been learnt or influenced. At the same time (and critically), the interview served as a tool to identify potential areas for the injection of theory in line with the action research approach. In short, this first interview was explanatory based, also helping unearth the topics the coaches wanted to explore and that would be later developed in attempting to address the ‘change in practice’ aspect of action research. Four of the coaches had all worked at the same club but in varying capacities and with different age groups. In terms of group dynamics, Tony, Bill and John were all of similar ages (between fifty and sixty years old) and knew each other well. The following extracts highlight their development as coaches in their own words:

I’ve been involved in youth development over a number of years now. So it’s become a way of life and until recently I was at City coaching; I was involved there for seven years. Now I am at Wanderers, albeit in a part-time role at the moment. I started coaching while I was actually playing. I was asked to get involved with the youth team and then thought I’d give it a try; I got more interested in the youth team than actually in playing. I was in my thirties at the time and was probably coming to the end of it [playing career] so it was just a natural progression then to carry on. (Tony)

All my football involvement has been on a part-time basis and started off when I was a lot younger. I got involved in coaching football because I’d always enjoyed my teenage years playing at a particular club so I went back to the club in a voluntary capacity as a coach. I thought if I’m going to get into football I need to do a bit more about it. I went on the FA courses where Bill was an instructor at that time. I took my A License and went from there. (John)

I’ve been involved with football for what seems like forever! I was very fortunate when I was at County that there was a manager who introduced me to coaching, so I got my prelim badge at nineteen; my intermediate at twenty-three. I was the youngest person ever to get the full badge up in Lilleshall. After that I worked at the FAW as a staff coach with John and several other people. I’ve worked with City and that’s been a wonderful experience with the academy boys for the last eight years; working with the under sixteens with Tony for four years which was great and then with the eights, nines and tens. I’m also head coach at a university and we play in the BUSA league and that’s a pretty good standard, so I’ve kept my finger in senior football. I was so pleased that I went into it at a young age because as you get older it becomes harder. (Bill)

Whilst Dan had also worked at the same club as the others, he did not share the same level of familiarity as they did with one another. He was much younger and wasn't as acquainted with the older coaches as he was with Steve who he worked alongside on a regular basis at a college academy. Steve was the youngest member of the group. All of the coaches were employed in a part-time capacity. However, for Dan and Steve, coaching was a full-time job as they juggled coaching college academy players with commitments to professional club academies.

For about the last eight or nine years, I have been working hard at trying to get into youth development on the football side of things. Just recently I started at City, I coach their under fourteens and have been doing the odd session with the eighteens and going with them on match days. I also work with Steve at the college. I find it very enjoyable. I've been doing that for about six years now. It's really good to see how that academy has progressed over the years. I have just recently finished a coaching degree. I started coaching when I was playing in Germany. When I first went over there it was a totally different coaching experience to what I had when I played over in the UK. When I came back to the UK, I went to City for a trial, but things didn't work out. I wanted to stay involved in football, so I thought the best way I could do it was to go for my coaching licenses. (Dan)

I am currently working with Dan at the college; like him I finished my coaching degree about a year and a half ago. I now coach the under nineteens and the under eighteens who play in the ESFA [English Schools Football Association] on a Wednesday, South West County on a Saturday and train about three or four times a week; I find it thoroughly enjoyable. I also work for Rovers, mainly the under twelves. I was very young when I started coaching; about sixteen or seventeen, still playing youth football myself. I got involved and enjoyed it. I volunteered to take the youth team and went from there; worked through the licenses and gained experience. (Steve)

To begin with, the coaches were asked about their coaching philosophies; specifically in terms of their beliefs, values and attitudes towards coaching. Tony opened the debate by arguing that his philosophy was largely influenced by the particular ethos of the employing organisation or club he worked for.

Your philosophy is towards the 1<sup>st</sup> team and you're looking at the people in that 1<sup>st</sup> team. Sometimes you have to change your philosophy to match that of the people above you; sometimes there has to be a bit of a compromise. You come into it with your own ideas and then you've got to go with what the general consensus of opinion is from the 1<sup>st</sup> team downwards. (Tony)

Bill agreed with Tony but implied that he was less influenced by external forces. His philosophy remained very “player centred”; his actions were driven by his values and beliefs in player development as opposed to club policy.

The greatest motivation that we have as coaches is to improve players. To make players better as individuals and better as a team, you can have no more satisfaction. I keep strongly to my beliefs in how important that is; coaching a young team and seeing them become better, and the satisfaction I get. That’s why I’ve coached since I was nineteen. I’m sixty now and I want to carry on for another sixty years if I can! (Bill)

John agreed with Bill and Tony but vaguely suggested that a major part of his philosophy was about building a mutual partnership with players; that is, ‘practicing what he preached’.

I think there are certain rules you have to agree to and get them [the players] to accept, but the person who’s got to be the most disciplined has to be the coach. If you’re going to set ground rules it’s particularly important that you abide by them. Things like being there on time, and acting professionally. (John)

Dan added that in the last few months since he had been working at City, his coaching philosophy and, as a result, methods were required to constantly change. These were not only dependant upon the club’s ethos like Tony suggested, but also the priorities of the age group that he was working with.

I work with two age groups, fourteens and eighteens. With the fourteens my methods and my philosophy can come out a lot more because it’s very developmental. For example, getting them to express themselves and so on. However, with the eighteens, it’s about what they do now and there has got to be an end product which determines whether the club keeps them on or not. I have to adapt and change my methods to make sure that we get that end product, to get that player through to a contract or something similar. You have to put a little bit more effort and time into one or two individuals who are the ones you think are going to progress on to get a scholarship

In response to Dan’s statements, I asked whether, despite having to change his approach due to the pressures associated with expectations, if he had a set of criterion that he adhered to in keeping within his coaching philosophy. Dan responded:

Maybe not a set of philosophies but you can have boundaries within which you might

work, because it's just constantly changing. You need to adapt your philosophy to get the best out of your players; it's not getting the players to adapt to my philosophy.

Bill agreed.

You've got to be very flexible. Even though I think you have to have rules and regulations I do think you have to be very adaptable because one group will differ from another. Whether they are younger or older, immature or mature, good or poor, you've got to accommodate them.

After further debate, all agreed that although flexibility was a must, individually, they had a philosophical framework within which they worked. Consequently, they had to 'chop and change' within that framework depending on the needs of the players they were working with. Tony summarised the discussion adding a final point on his philosophy and commitment to players.

You've got to make sure that you've given that player 100%. If you don't, he will come back and bite your bum because it will be your fault that he's not got a scholarship. You've got to be able to look yourself in the mirror and that player in the eyes and say, "I've given you the best that I can give you. If you've failed it's because of you, not me."

Linked to their coaching philosophies, the discussion moved to the coaches' perceptions of their roles. Initially, the responses were quite generic, idealistic statements as evidenced below.

I would say that I'm a coach to help make players improve as individuals and help the team develop into a good team. If not, why am I coaching? (Bill)

Tony agreed:

There's an old saying that if you produce good individual players you'll collectively produce a good team performance. There is a fine line in youth development. When does it become about winning and losing?

Bill continued to explain how he attempted to fulfil players' expectations of his role in an effort to obtain respect. He believed that through careful 'impression management', as a role model, he could inspire his players to exhibit what he believed to be similar positive behaviours.

You as an individual have a huge influence over the kids; the people you're working with. I think that you have to gain respect from the players you're coaching. People say to me, how do you gain respect? Well, you firstly have to look like a coach, sound like a coach and coach like a coach. The influence you have on them is massive. You do have an influence on how they develop, how they manage themselves, how they treat themselves, how they treat you. You try to create a positive learning environment so kids are prepared to, and want to do well for you. (Bill)

Tony added that for him, honesty and consistency were important in preserving his role as a coach. He argued that without them, players would "suss him out" immediately. Additionally, Dan suggested that his role included being an educator; helping develop other coaches.

One of my roles is to mentor my assistant; one of the A License coaches at the club. I try to pair people up to develop coaches, so not just developing players but obviously the coaching staff too.

When asked what their main coaching influences were, Dan stated that he had learnt a lot from reading about other coaches and coaching, at all levels of the game. He was the only member of the group to place any significant emphasis on this. However, they all agreed that their philosophies, behaviours and coaching methods had been primarily influenced by the observation of other coaches but argued that maintaining their individualism was also important.

You're gaining knowledge all of the time, but at the end of the day you've got to be yourself. Little bits of everything; we've played for loads of coaches over the years and have picked up bits from each. (Tony)

Dan added that it wasn't just football coaches that he had learnt from, but also coaches from other sports.

I look at coaches who work in basketball, hockey, things like that; just for ideas and to take the bits out which are applicable. For example, I might take something from basketball, apply it to my methods with the under eighteens but not under fourteens. (Dan)

Bill agreed, adding that

Whoever you are and whatever standard you are, you never, ever, stop learning. So

whether I go and watch someone, or I read something, or whether I've been coaching for fifty years or five years, I still pick new things up. Anybody who says to me they've got their license and they've done this and that and know it all, it's absolute rubbish because you never in this game, stop learning.

For Bill, this was one of the main reasons for agreeing to take part in the study. He, like the others, had completed all of the coaching licences available. The only qualification higher than that which all the coaches had already obtained was the UEFA Professional Licence which was an 'invite-only' course, largely exclusive to ex-professional players and those already working at the highest level of football. In this respect, and in light of his beliefs in the previous extract, the prospect to discuss, debate and share knowledge and experiences with other coaches was an opportunity Bill could not decline. Steve shared a similar view and believed that discussions with others was imperative in his development as a coach, and also an incentive for taking part in the study.

The thing for me, especially being a relatively young coach, is making contacts, like tonight; discussing other people's views and ideas. I've worked with Dan for the last two years, gained new ideas from him but also knowing that there's a number of others who I can pick up the phone to and ask "How would you do this?" or "This situation's happened, I've dealt with it this way, how would you have dealt with it; what are your views on it?" So I think, especially for me, the older I get, the more contacts I get, the more sources of information I can use. (Steve)

The following extracts from the first set of observations outline my initial impressions of the coaches. Additionally, I attempt to 'marry up' their claims from the first interview in terms of their approaches to players and the demands of the groups and environments within which they worked.

*Field Notes [6<sup>th</sup> November]*

*"I want one touch over there, there, there and there, and two floaters" Bill instructs. The player nods and passes the information on to his team mates. Whilst doing so, Bill makes finishing touches to the playing area. He then makes his way over to the side of the pitch.*

*"Okay, when you're ready then, quick as we can and in we come!" Bill calls to the players. Most of them eagerly run over and gather around Bill. However, a few linger behind, preoccupied with a game of 'keepy-ups'. One of the players towering over Bill at his side, impatiently shouts over to the late comers "Come on lads, any time*



*today!” They unhurriedly make their way over. “LADS! Do you want to join us!” Bill then barks. Their stroll turns into a sprint.*

*The focus and requirements of the session are explained. Some of the players chat amongst themselves whilst Bill is talking. He sends the main culprit over to the far side of the pitch. “Don’t move!” he confidently instructs and proceeds to ‘ping’ a perfectly weighted pass over to him. As it travels, the players’ eyes and heads follow the ball as it moves in the air. The ball drops at the player’s feet. “That’s the quality I want!” Bill grins. The players are silenced.*

*The session starts. Bill paces through the middle of the pitch as they play. He shouts instructions, praises and stops the practice when necessary, animatedly giving coaching points.*

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#### *Field Notes [11<sup>th</sup> November]*

*John and his assistant pace through the indoor barn as the players warm up. The players go through some stretches and chat whilst doing so, immaculate mini replicas of the coaches; shirts neatly tucked in and socks pulled up. As the players get closer John instructs: “Think of something different; I want to see a new stretch.” The little boys show off to each other as they experiment with different movements. “In we come lads, quickly!” John summons them.*

*“Every one nice and sharp?” John asks.*

*“Yeah!” The boys mumble as they muster together.*

*“Are you sure?” He asks again.*

*“YEAH!” They reply louder and more enthusiastically.*

*“Great! Right spread out in a line facing me. Arms’ length apart.” The nine and ten year old boys [with corresponding behaviours and attention spans] push and shove each other, eager to get closest to John. John waits patiently as they continue to jostle.*

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#### *Field Notes [13<sup>th</sup> November]*

*It’s a dark winter’s evening. Steve meticulously places each cone as he sets up the playing area on the flood-lit, boggy pitch. The players go through some exercises. “Quads to finish off then fellas, then back in two lines, heel flicks out to the cone and jog back.” The warm up continues whilst Steve leaves them to place poles as markers on the pitch.*

*“Okay, we are just going to work on some crossing and finishing.” Steve gets his notes out of his pocket and directs the players to different areas on the pitch. “Tomo*



*on that pole, Mackenzie on that one...” The session starts. There continues to be little interaction between Steve and the players other than occasional instructions and praise. The session ends and Steve calls the players in. “What’s that Steve? What’s that!” one of the players taunts as he pats Steve’s chest where the microphone is. Steve brushes him off, “That’ll be a back hander!” Trying to keep a ‘straight face’. The player continues to tease Steve. Some of the other players join in. “Don’t push your luck Curtis!” Steve retorts sternly. The tormenting eases and Steve regains their focus. He summarises the session. “Okay, so there’s just a few ideas for Saturday...” His expression remains serious, ignoring the occasional outbursts of banter between the players.*

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#### *Field Notes [14<sup>th</sup> November]*

*Dan stands quietly as the players get themselves ready, tying their laces and adjusting their kit. They start to jump, stretch and sprint, emphasising their readiness to take part. Dan instructs them that they must complete floor exercises correctly before they can start. The players apathetically comply with his request. He strolls through them as they complete the activities. Occasionally stopping and looking over them with scrutiny. He says nothing; hands clasped behind his back with his chest out. His body language exudes confidence and authority. “Okay fellas, now go and get a quick drink and we’ll start.” The players return to the pitch and gather around Dan. He waits a few moments for them to settle. They silently stare at him. He begins.*

#### 4.2.2 Developing Learning through Socially Located, Self-Reflective Practice

In an attempt to examine if the coaches’ knowledge could be developed through interaction and contextual reflection, the second interview began with a request for the coaches to highlight something that they had learnt since the last interview.

Steve initiated the discussion, describing a recent change of practice in implementing a new “tool to enhance player development and player understanding”. It involved players completing a reflective log and combined performance evaluation after every session. His next point was in reference to a recent change of ‘system of play’. I wasn’t particularly convinced that this was really Steve learning or whether it was more about the knowledge development of his players.

We’ve changed shape in the way that we play with the college and at the club at youth level. Both have gone 4-3-3 [a system of play], so, in terms of movement patterns

we've probably gained a bit more this month through watching training sessions and fixtures and seeing how people react to certain situations, both the opposition and our own team. (Steve)

Finally, Steve added a point on communication. At the club where Steve coached, a senior 1<sup>st</sup> team player had been recently assisting him in coaching the youth players.

I've always thought that the important thing about communication is getting the information across. It's similar to coaching, but on the pitch it's important that it's loud and clear and it's said in a way that forces someone to do it. I found that it's important that different types of information are said in different ways.

My initial concern was that the coaches were not distinguishing between their learning and the learning of their players. However, Dan's points were evidently more self-reflective. He described a recent incident where he believed that his 'out of character' disposition had influenced his players' in a negative way. In Dan's own words:

I keep notes on how I do everything. I have this routine for how I prepare teams for matches which works really well. It's organised in four sections. They go out forty-five minutes early, work with the other coach and I stay in the dressing rooms out of the way. It's vice versa with the City under eighteens if I assist on a Saturday, I'll take them out initially and it gives the other coach a chance to get focussed on what they want to say. The second section is that the players come in and we brief them on certain aspects of the game. The third section is that they go back out and we put them into a possession game to get them totally switched on to what they've got to do. The fourth section is just players' time, they do their own thing for five minutes and motivate each other for the game and all that. This is something we've used for a few years and it's worked very well for us. However, we went up to play Birmingham City under fourteens a few weeks ago and I felt very relaxed so I thought I'd try something different. It had an immediate effect on them, they were very sluggish and mentally they were very off their game. I had a chat with them and the main thing I picked up on was that I let my standards slip because I was very relaxed in myself and this may have impacted on the players, in that my mentality affected them. Whether it was that I didn't do the same routine, or it was just my persona, or both, it was something I made a note of and it's in the back of my mind all of the time.

Even though Dan stated that he was not a "very loud" coach, he claimed that he is usually very enthusiastic in terms of how he gives information to players. He likes to use the warm up to "set the tone for the game" and on this occasion he did not. He had prepared as usual, but just wasn't his regular self. He couldn't identify exactly where he went wrong, but was convinced that the players' lack of form was influenced by his change of behaviour on that

day. When asked how such knowledge would effect future practice, Dan responded:

It will always be in the back of my mind now; not to let standards slip, especially with that particular age group, because it obviously had an effect. There is no proof of course but I won't take that risk again!

I could empathise with Dan, having experienced similar problems myself, but chose not to intervene at this stage, as I was sure that the others would have had similar experiences at some stage in their coaching career. John asked for further details about the age group that Dan was working with (a group of under fourteens), and attempted to counsel him.

I feel that it's dependant on their age Dan. Most of us are 'creatures of habit' and if something struck them as being not what they expected that could have been a problem. I think it's a good thing to pick up because what happens to the group if you can't be there for a while? Somebody else comes in and adopts a different manner; what will they do then? Who will they blame? (John)

Dan agreed, adding that whilst this was a valid point, the problem lay in the warm up; he didn't 'switch his players on' mentally. Drawing on Steve's earlier point about communication, Dan suggested that this may have had an influence, indicating that through these discussions there was beginning to be some synthesis of new and existing information. I wasn't entirely sure whether Dan believed that this was the actual reason for the players' failure to perform, or whether he was 'clutching at straws' in order to find a quick fix, aware that I would be listening for some resolution. In his own words:

Perhaps I spoke to them in a too relaxed manner so I think it came over as "This is something I'd like you to do today" not "This is something you need to do today".

John empathised, stating that he, like Steve and Dan, had faced similar issues and believed he had learnt through reflection and being critical of his own coaching performance.

I am not saying I take a tremendous number of notes but I think about it going home in the car or whenever. I don't think I've ever done a session that I feel I couldn't have improved upon. Something will have happened in the session where I think, "I'm not over the moon that has happened" and I think about how I could have overcome that. I think that's very important. Whatever you see, even if you are not involved, there is something that can be of use to you. I'm not saying it's necessarily something new, but it's something which perhaps gives you a different 'slant' on things. (John)

The very fact that John, Dan and Steve were sharing ideas, alternatives and solutions to each others' coaching issues suggested that a process of situated learning in its simplest form (i.e., a social process whereby knowledge is co-constructed through an immersion in the context) was underway.

#### 4.2.2.1 Theory-Injection: Empowerment

Other than explicitly asking what the coaches had learnt in their own time, other discussions in and around the interviews demonstrated the initial effectiveness of the action research approach. Following suggestions from the coaches in the first interview and subsequent observations, a research theme was decided upon by myself for the second interview. Specifically, the ever-shifting balance of power was highlighted as a key feature in the coaches' discussions and practice. Consequently, the examination and application of power in practice, was employed as a theoretical thread throughout the study cycles, beginning with empowerment in the latter half of the second interview. Dan initiated the discussion when he claimed that he believed he was very empowering to his players.

I get them involved from the very first minute in terms of getting them to buy in to how I'm going to coach them, how we're going to work. One of the very first things I do with players every year and continuously throughout the year, is performance profiling. They identify the weaknesses that they want to work on and then throughout the year we have constant questioning and answering within my sessions. I work in fifteen minute blocks. In one of the fifteen minute blocks I don't coach at all, the players will coach each other as they play. I might stop it and say, "Curtis, what do you think?" Then Curtis will tell the other players what they should have done in that situation. (Dan)

In addressing empowerment, the coaches were provided with handouts prepared by myself, as facilitator. These theoretically outlined the concept, some implementation strategies as well as potential outcomes of its (i.e., empowerment) use. The coaches were then asked to express their current views towards empowerment, in light of the theory presented to them on the handout and whether they felt that they already used it as part of their coaching

armoury. Initially, after a quick scan over the notes provided, all of the coaches claimed that they did. The following discussion unfolded when the question as to whether they thought their roles had changed from 'leading from the front to ushering from the back' was posed.

Yes, as the season has gone on I'm coaching less and less, that's definitely one thing I've started to notice. In my first month with them I give a lot of information. Now, as we progress, only if someone has made a mistake and made it a few times, I will go in there. Now that I know where they are I condition my practices more, rather than just going in. They are at a level now where they've got the knowledge. That process will start again soon though, because we are going to work on a new shape at the end of this month. For the first few weeks I'll get in there and impart the information, but again, I really believe in player empowerment and getting them to do things themselves. (Dan)

John, vague as to the 'nuts and bolts' of empowerment, implied that he believed he was empowering because every time he stopped the session he would always ask a question. However, this was as far as his efforts went.

I think that it gives them a better understanding although it can mean that the stop goes on a bit longer. Let's say that you've got a defender who's under a bit of pressure and he knocks it wrongly. I will stop it and say: "Nothing wrong with that, but where would you have liked to have passed the ball to?"

In attempting to clarify the notion of empowerment, I argued that there was more to it than just question and answer. Whilst it was clear that John was attempting to divest prescriptive power through such questions, the nature and extent to which he 'quizzed' players needed to be considered. For example, in referring back to the above extract, if there wasn't anything wrong with the defender's actions why would John follow the action up with a question? Whilst the following may be deemed oversimplified, appreciating that the literature suggests that empowerment is much more than the rudimentary suggestion I am about to provide, it could be argued, that with a truly empowering approach, John would have left the player to his own devices, regardless of whether he believed that the player's actions were incorrect or not. The discussion progressed with Dan drawing attention to other issues associated with attempts to implement player empowerment. He

suggested that the approach was dependant upon the characteristics of the players in the group.

You could have variance within the squad; fifteen players who are great with it and one who is not. I've got one or two who have difficulty coping with it but you've just got to adapt to them and coach them differently. I'm a really firm believer in it, but, at the same time, I do understand that it doesn't work with everyone. It's not for lack of trying; it's just that they are never going to be able to play without someone giving them information. (Dan)

In elaborating on Dan's point, John added that along with the individual differences of players, the amount of time available was also an issue.

It can be difficult because it depends upon how much time you've got with them. These things are only workable if you know your players. Nobody is going to answer a question if they think they are going to get a rollicking if they give the wrong answer. The questions have also got to be open; it's no good giving them questions that can be answered with a yes or no, and that requires time to allow the information to come out.

John seemed a little cynical of the practicalities of empowering a group of players such as the ones that he coached, in short periods of time (he only had contact with his players twice a week aside from matches). Steve shared this view but argued that with practice, an empowering approach could actually save time.

Constraint on time is a fair point. At the college, at the start of the season we do empower them a fair bit, giving them lots of responsibility. This year particularly we've been fortunate that they are disciplining each other and reminding each other of the standards we've set. For example, if a full back plays to a winger and someone is really tight, if he tries a silly turn he will get told by the full back, "You should have sent it back." Because we've set those really high standards for them the ambitious lads won't accept anything less and the weaker lads are brought along quicker in terms of trying to concentrate more and doing the right things more often. Sometimes it can mean working for longer periods, at other times we are more or less redundant and it's just a matter of sitting back for fifteen minutes and they will do the job for us. (Steve)

Perhaps assuming that his players will "just get on with it" was a little naïve. Nevertheless, Steve believed that in most attempts, this empowering approach was effective and for him and did serve its purpose. Similarly, Dan suggested that he would attempt to save time by carefully constructing questions to help the "less bright players give a quick response". He

claimed that he would ask a straight forward question that would ensure an immediate answer. However, with the “more intelligent players” he would ask more complex questions in the hope that he would get more detailed answers. He also believed that this constant questioning had become routine practice for him.

Whenever I shout information from the side lines it's always a question, even on match days. It's such a habit now that it's, “Where should you be now?” “What should you be doing?” Not, “You should be wide!” (Dan)

Steve interrupted, adding that in his view this wasn't truly empowering players and was more of an illusion. He believed that empowerment was “not a case of just giving something to another”. For him, it was about players making their own choices. In this respect, he argued that such questions didn't encourage this; players were merely responding with prescribed information given to them by their coaches. For him it was trickery.

In many ways, we convince them into feeling that it's them who have decided what we are doing. It's a contradiction in a way, we force it on them on the very first day at pre-season. With the college lads it's, “This is the situation, you have to take responsibility for your performance, yes, there is a code of conduct for you to follow, but you've got to do this all through the season”. Generally, towards the end of the season, we back off a bit and find that they've got used to it and it's grown into them. (Steve)

Nevertheless Steve believed that this process; loosely labelled empowerment, was fundamental to his team's success. As long as his players believed that they were being empowered and could appreciate the benefits of the approach, then it was of value. Dan agreed.

The key is in how we sell it to them. I say, “What happens if you go from us to a trial somewhere and you are used to us telling you what to do all of the time? All of a sudden we are not there and you're going to freeze.” That's how we sell it to them, like Steve said, we do it because we want them to be creative thinkers. The other thing I would say is they are more confident because they've got the knowledge, they play with less fear, you can see it, there's a sort of arrogance in some of them. (Dan)

Following the interview, the coaches were encouraged to go away, think about the empowerment theory provided, the issues raised in the brief debate surrounding it and



whether they could, or really do, implement such a notion into their practice. Handouts<sup>2</sup> were provided summarising the points raised in the interview about empowerment, in order to assist the hoped for change in practice. My initial feelings were that the coaches had an oversimplified grasp of empowerment. I wasn't sure whether I would see much more than a few examples of questioning and answer or whether they would really, in this first attempt at injecting theory, make comprehensive efforts at doing so. The following accounts from later observations illustrate their attempts at empowering players.

*Field Notes [8<sup>th</sup> January]*

*It's a sunny but cold evening. Steve seems a little more relaxed than in my last observation and occasionally engages in banter with the boys. "There's a fair few pairs of cycling shorts out tonight; FAIRIES!"*

*Midway through Steve's session it starts to get dark and cold; he calls the boys over. "We are going to finish with three different games with different objectives and conditions. Right, for the first practice you will stay in your own third. It will be three versus three in the end thirds and two versus two in the middle third with a common player." Steve gives bibs to the players and puts them into positions. He reemphasises the rules of the game and the initial set up. Most of them are happy and wander over to their position. One of the players hangs back to ask Steve a question. "I'll tell you in a minute" Steve retorts. The player asks again. "Get down there and I'll tell you in a minute!" Steve fractiously commands.*

*The game begins and Steve shouts instructions from the side line: "Switch it!"... "Get his head down and get him inside!" Steve finishes the practice and instructs the players to get a drink and come in for a debrief. The players sit and quietly listen as Steve waves his arms and barks instructions, making demands for the next practice, they don't question. Finishing the debrief, Steve dictates: "That's what I want and that's how you are going to do it." This sentiment is carried into the second and third practices.*

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*Field Notes [13<sup>th</sup> January]*

*John crouches down to speak to one of the players. "What's the matter Sam?" "Nothing" Sam responds as he scowls with his arms crossed. "So why are you sulking?" Still pouting, the player explains that he is unhappy because his team are losing and believes it's down to one player. "He's not doing what he is supposed to and won't pass to me!" John attempts to resolve the issue by coaxing the player into a*

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<sup>2</sup> Handouts were provided for both groups of coaches and used to support the theory-injection throughout the interviews.



better 'frame of mind'. "Well maybe you could help him? What do you think he needs to do?" "I dunno" the player replies. "Come on I think you do! If you encourage him instead of shouting at him all game and try and help him out by telling him he has time or a 'man-on' then maybe that will help." John calls the other player over. "Right, I want you two to have a chat and decide what you need to do, think of a game plan and then try and put it into practice. You've only got five minutes so you need to think quick, work together and then tell the rest of the lads." The boys sit together for a few minutes, neither are talking or paying any real interest in the other. They pick bits from the artificial grass and flick it at each other, giggling whilst doing so. John strolls over. They start to talk and seem to attempt to resolve the task John has set. He interrupts "That's a good point Marnie! Now you and Sam go and make sure the others understand. Tell them what they need to do and how you are going to do it." Both players eagerly scamper over to the others.

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Field Notes [16<sup>th</sup> January]

"Danny come on, switch on!" Dan calls the goal keepers over and sends one of the players to get the balls. Whilst waiting, Dan and the players chat casually. "Okay slight change to our shape tomorrow, we're going to play a 4-2-3-1 in an attempt to deal with their shape a little bit better. It's more or less the same as a 4-4-2 the only difference is the two centre midfielders sit and one pushes on which allows who to go forward more?" Dan asks. "Wingers?", "Strikers?", "Fullbacks?" The players reply intermittently. "Yeah not so much the wingers but the fullbacks, because we've got two who sit in, it allows both full backs to go forward at times because we've got what?" Dan adds. The players mumble and look at each other; no response. Seconds later Dan answers for them: "Yeah four defensive players and a keeper, so five, but don't abuse that! Right we'll start with just some crossing and finishing. You will come up with your own patterns it's up to you what you do as long as they are realistic to the game and involve no more than five passes before a cross on goal."

Dan begins to organise the players into teams. "Okay back four just defend the cross. Miller, as a three man midfield just keep rotating, you manage that for me." The practice begins, Dan observes from the half way line. Moments later Dan blows his whistle and commands the players' attention "Fellas if you're coming up with the patterns make sure it's done properly and everything with quality!" The practice continues.

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Field Notes [22<sup>nd</sup> January]

"Freeze!" Bill yells. The majority of players halt, others slow down to a jog, then continue to walk. "I said FREEZE lads! Just back track to where you were please." The players do so. "Yellows, great! Non-bibs, not so great. We can't string more than two passes together! We're missing the basics!" Bill walks to one of the non-bibs, his head tilts as he stares towards the floor. "Now I'm not saying what you just did was wrong, just sloppy. You have a man there and there, both easy passes but we do that and give the ball away. It's fine in the final third to take risks and be creative but not in your own half!" the player nods. Still addressing the same player Bill's tone softens. "You're not the only one doing it, but we can't afford to give the ball away in

*here. I want you to make the shout now, get them to keep it or gamble and go forward. You decide. We'll play off your call and your decision." The player adjusts his socks; anything to avoid making eye contact with Bill. "Okay?" Bill asks, his persistence forcing the player to respond. He looks up at Bill, "Yeah". The whistle blows and they continue with the game.*

The above examples could be assumed as intentional efforts to empower players. In recent years, empowerment has become a haphazard 'buzzword' within sports coaching. It has been criticised as being underdeveloped and perhaps under examined in light of relevancy, appropriateness and usage at different levels (Jones, 2001). Furthermore, the degree to which coaches actually grant players power, encouraging them to take ownership of their knowledge, development and decision making in a bid to support them in becoming independent, creative thinkers is subject to considerable debate (as is evident in the above excerpts). Additionally, and with reference to the above illustrations, the exclusion of empowering methods was notable. For example, despite earlier claims, there was little evidence of a shared vision of goals and means of achieving these in Steve's session. One of the intentions of the third interview was to examine the practicalities and possibilities of the inclusion of empowerment in more detail. The following extracts (from the first half of the third interview) revisit empowerment after the initial discussion (in the second interview), time for further consideration and an opportunity to experiment with the empowerment theory in practice. Additionally, Bill's return (he was absent from the second interview) encouraged further collaborative learning. Like the others, he was asked whether he felt that he empowered players.

I think that I have, in some ways. My coaching style has certainly changed over the years, the way in which I do it, the manner in which I do it, so I think that I've probably changed quite a bit in the way that I conduct my sessions. I certainly allow more involvement from the players. The level of coaching I do is dependant on the level of the players. If they are good players, my level of input is much less than I would do if I was working with an inferior side. (Bill)

Dan added:

I think what Bill was getting at is that sometimes, when you are working on something new, for their [players'] decision making to develop they need to get the understanding and you need to lead them and give them the information. (Dan)

In expanding upon Dan and Bill's points, John explained how he thought that empowerment was a learnt skill for coaches and, like players, it required practice to implement effectively. Notably, the biggest change in behaviour (from the first and second observation) was evident in John's practice (as expressed verbally here).

There is a way that you can coach through the players without it seeming to come from the coach. I'm not saying that the old sessions weren't very good Bill, because they were, but they were prescriptive, they were coach run. If you give the players a challenge and say, "Make up your own shooting practice" and there are things that don't come out that you would like to come out, you can call one player aside and give them the suggestion "Try that" and send him back in. He goes back in and tells them. It depends on what age group you've got; there are a couple of problems at the different levels.

Like the others, Bill argued that there were limitations and potential problems associated with such an approach.

The age I am working with is a big issue for me. My planning of the sessions has stayed the same but I find that I am doing less coaching with the older boys, simply because I don't need to. I will change things, but, for the reasons you've just mentioned, I don't do it anywhere near as much as if I was coaching the nines or tens.

To summarise, Steve was asked about his session and the observed lack of empowerment within it. He agreed that his sessions were more autocratic than the other coaches' sessions, but insisted that although he did not always employ empowering methods in practical sessions, he would do the "ground work" at the start of the season (e.g., encourage players to take ownership of knowledge, development and decision making). He was asked if he thought this was effective. He responded:

Thinking about it, if I'm not acting that way and the lads don't see me passing it [power] over and as a result don't feel like I'm empowering them then it can't be. I guess you have to at least look and sound like you're trying to empower, otherwise what's the point in nailing it down with them in the first place.

Steve implied that in this respect, his actions (such as those observed at the last session)

could be contradictory to the empowering methods that he had previously encouraged. He believed that if he was attempting to make players feel empowered, this illusion of empowerment that he was attempting to provide had to be consistent and explicit. Satisfied that the coaches' appreciation and understanding of empowerment had progressed, this action research cycle was concluded.

#### 4.2.2.2 Theory-Injection: Motivational Climate and TARGET Behaviours

Whilst much of the literature addressing motivational climate is rooted in educational psychology, I felt that this was a worthy area for discussion. Moving the action research theme of power forward, given its links with empowerment and the coaches' insistence (albeit, using their own terms of reference) that they practiced certain TARGET behaviours (see Ames, 1992), the subject of motivational climate was introduced. Here, it was explained how a mastery or ego-related learning climate can be encouraged by manipulating sessions in light of task, authority, recognition, grouping, evaluation, and time structures (TARGET) (ibid, 1992). In order to promote a mastery teaching environment players should decide their own personal goals, work on a range of inclusive tasks, depending on their own level of ability, and take on decision making and leadership roles (Morgan, 2007b). Furthermore, they should be privately and individually recognised and appraised for their effort and progress (ibid, 2007b). Additionally, they should be grouped into heterogeneous and co-operative groups and allowed flexible time for improvement (Ames, 1992). Such a mastery learning environment has been found to enhance motivation and learning (Morgan, 2007b). On the other hand an ego climate would emphasise uni-dimensional competitive tasks, coach authority, normatively based public recognition and evaluation, ability groups, and inflexible time to practice (ibid, 2007b).

Specifically, the coaches claimed to encourage participants to make decisions, take on leadership roles and thus, promote shared leadership (akin with the tenets of promoting a mastery motivational climate). In the latter half of the third interview, the coaches were provided with a further handout, prepared by myself, outlining the concept of motivational climate and TARGET behaviours. To open the discussion, the coaches were asked how they would attempt to motivate players. Dan eagerly replied:

I use a variety of things; some of them are in this handout. It's not just on game days, it's not just about the game. Like Bill said, it's easy to motivate them for that. It's getting them motivated for the training sessions throughout the week before the game, that's the difficulty and that's what gets them ready and prepared for the game. One thing that works for me is to make sure it's always varied. I might do the same topics each week, I might be focussing on the same areas, but how I do it is always different, unless there are one or two particular practices that they do like.

The others continued to read over the theory provided, occasionally muttering as they went through the individual constructs related to promoting a motivational climate via TARGET behaviours. John was the first to question.

You mentioned here friendship groups, what do you mean by that? Does it mean putting all the friends in the same groups?

I confirmed this and added that in order to promote a mastery climate, the research suggests that mixed ability and cooperative groups work best. Players should be free to select their own group. Groups should not be selected based on ability. John responded:

I wouldn't put friends together, I'd put them with players they don't know that well so it encourages them to build new friendships. Also, I would have thought that at certain levels you are not going to have an A-Z of ability are you?

The others agreed, adding that mixed ability and friendship groups may be disruptive and could potentially frustrate players.

There are some things where I can put them in mixed abilities, say if we are going to play in a game situation; I've got to put them in mixed abilities, because I can't have one team completely overrunning the other team. However, if I'm working on certain patterns of play, I could have three or four players who are way ahead and they would get frustrated if they are doing the right things but the others in their group aren't. There are situations, like when I work on certain patterns of play, where I have to tweak it so that, if I've got certain players like Curtis who is a key player, I'll make

sure that I pick other good players around him so that he benefits as much as they do.  
(Dan)

Dan argued that he needed to challenge the better players in the group or it could be debilitating to their performance. Competition in his opinion, was very motivational. We continued to discuss the other TARGET behaviours, moving onto 'authority', specifically in encouraging participants to make decisions and take on leadership roles. Naturally, we revisited some of the points raised in the previous discussions about empowerment. For example, Dan said:

At the start of the season, they will help me decide on the areas they want to improve and I integrate that into the yearly programme. That's one way to do it. In terms of sessions, if it's something that's just broken down and they've got the knowledge I often stop the session and ask a particular player, "What should so and so have done there?" and I let them coach through it, especially my goal keepers. I tend to teach my goal keepers as coaches because I want them to coach on the pitch. I always pull them in after a fifteen minute block and get their points of view on what they could have done differently or better.

Dan had strong views about the psychological side of coaching; he believed it was his speciality. As a result, he would often dominate the discussion. I was keen to get the other coaches' input, so the same question was directed at Bill and John.

I think that there should be some input from the players into what sessions you do and the easiest way to do that in most groups is to talk about the game. (John)

Bill confirmed John's claims referring to an occasion when he had listened in on John as part of a peer observation activity whilst he (John) was coaching. He remembered John asking the players things like "How do you feel we played on Sunday? What do you think we should do tonight?" John added he still did this quite a lot, as he believed it gave him a better picture of how his players had seen the game. However, Bill wasn't as comfortable with allowing his players to make such decisions. In this respect, he believed that as the coach, the preservation of power and responsibility for making decisions was important to him.

I personally couldn't let it go. The work that I do with the university boys is the

reverse. I wouldn't ask them things like that. What I've got to do is to look very seriously at the game and then say to them, "As a result of our performance, I know what to work on, how do you feel about that?"

John clarified his approach.

I don't think that it's as straightforward as actually saying, "You've got to choose." You've got to ask them about the game. They will perhaps come up with two or three points then you say, "Well are you all in agreement that we do this one?" That will get them on board.

In revisiting empowerment through the 'authority' construct of TARGET behaviours, the question of whether the coaches were merely allowing players to be involved in the decision making process in an attempt to strengthen the illusion of player power was asked.

You can only hold the illusion for so long. They have to actually believe that they've got input and the only way they can do that is by seeing the results of it. At the end of last month, they told me that they didn't like these types of sessions, so I changed them, took them out, did them differently and they were happier with them. We had a chat last week about whether they were happy. In that way, you are still controlling and pointing them in the direction that you want them to go but they still believe that they are getting the input. (Dan)

Bill pragmatically added:

What Dan has said is very interesting, but I think that he is in a lovely position because he has these kids every day of the week. I see my boys once a week on a Monday evening for ninety minutes to two hours and they've also got to fit their fitness into that. So I've only really got them for an hour or so to actually get over one or two issues that may have resulted from a bad performance on the previous Wednesday. I can understand Dan using them on a day to day basis, but there's a huge difference and it's largely to do with time.

In reference to the 'recognition' (i.e., recognise individual effort and improvement in private if possible) and 'evaluation' constructs (i.e., focus on self referenced evaluation, getting participants to reflect on their individual goals, and attempting to distribute feedback equally between the participants, avoiding ability comparisons) of the TARGET behaviours, the following points were raised.

I think the one thing we do really well here is that every player has got a log book which they fill in. This is the first time I've worked with players who have had one. I think that next year I might introduce it to the other academy players and coaches. The players have got to fill in everything over the week in terms of training, how they felt, what they've learnt, how things went, and the game and so on. We put our



feedback in it as well at the end of the week. (Dan)

I asked what would happen if the players were inaccurate in their evaluation or there were inconsistencies between their perception of performance and the coaches' i.e., who has the 'last word'? Bill quickly argued that his say was final.

I don't think that I could allow the power to be taken away from me personally as a coach. They've got power but I think, from a recognition and respect point of view, I couldn't allow it to go. (Bill)

John agreed;

I think that you are 100% right, but I don't see it as power. The objective is to improve every player to the best of their ability. If they're putting something down that you don't agree with you've got to speak to them about that. It's important that the right relationship is there because what you don't want is attitude. What you are saying is, "How can we improve your game? We've got to get you to be the best player we can." You have to be careful about what they write down in the books. As Bill said, if somebody is way out, you have to have a chat with them.

Dan continued;

It's a difficult one at times, especially with evaluations, because ultimately we do hold the power in terms of whether that player 'makes' it. What I will do is to think about what they have written down because there have been a very few occasions in the past when I've sat back and I've thought that maybe they've got a point and I've changed my thoughts on what I do with that player. If you don't allow yourself to step back and look at it you are in danger of 'stepping on a banana skin'. Ultimately though, a decision has to be made and the player can't say whether he is going to get a scholarship.

In reference to the logbooks that Dan and John used, Bill explained that this method wouldn't work for him with his players. He chose to take a more personal approach by talking to players face-to-face, feeling that his players respected him for doing so.

I'm totally opposite to that, three or four of the boys I deal with have been with clubs and they've come into the educational system. I couldn't do anything like completing a log book with them. My recognition of players is speaking to them on an individual basis or, collectively if I need to. If I need to speak to a player I pull him out and talk to him about issues, problems or what have you. It's got to be one-to-one and we're going back to the respect they've got for you and your authority and how you handle the situation. I'm pretty direct with individuals and I'm not afraid to tell them if their performance is not up to standard. I think that as coaches, talking to people is something we have to be strong enough to do. (Bill)

In response to Bill, John and Dan suggested that such an approach (recognition) was



dependant upon the time available, the characteristics of players and the dynamics of the group they were working with. Dan went on to question the call to avoid ability comparisons, in relation to 'recognition' and 'evaluation', in order to promote a mastery motivational climate.

I do it a lot with mine, not in terms of with each other, but to compare themselves to the players who are already scholars. This year, every time we had an FA youth game, all of the Academy players came to watch. Before each session I said to my players, "Watch the player in your position because he's a scholarship player. Look at the things they do well and look at how they play the game because that's where you've got to try to get". Then I will have a quiet word with a couple of them individually. I've found that that's been a good motivational aspect for them because, especially after the Arsenal game, a couple of them have looked at it and thought, "If I work on this and that I will be playing at places like that, playing players of that level." (Dan)

As with the previous cycle of action research the coaches were asked, where possible, to implement the TARGET behaviours into their practice (the third set of observations). Whilst I felt that Dan had grasped the theory, I wasn't so sure about the other developmental coaches. This was confirmed when John later called me before I was due to observe him. He was seeking clarity regarding a few of the TARGET behaviours; which I attempted to provide. Additionally, he drew reference to the points and suggestions Dan had made and asked "So you want me to do it like that then?" This troubled me slightly, as, just as I did not want to force my opinions on the coaches (rather, when requested, I wanted to help them define their own practice-related problems and discuss possible actions in relation to solutions), I also didn't want them to duplicate what a dominant member of the group was saying or doing (in this case Dan). I wanted the injection of theory process to be based around their own informed interpretation of the concepts, as opposed to being prescribed by a lead voice (whether that be mine or someone else's). I was more concerned with the process as opposed to the outcome; if John was merely going to replicate Dan's (or anyone else's practice), how would this be any different to the traditional methods of coach education that they were used to? The following extracts

illustrate some obvious and also some inconspicuous attempts at implementing TARGET behaviours by John and the other coaches.

*Field Notes [21<sup>st</sup> February]*

*The players leave the changing room and walk over to the pitch. John quickly catches up with two of the players who are carrying a kit bag for him. They drag the bag across the floor; their arms not long or strong enough to keep it raised. John jokes with them "We could fit both of you in there, couldn't we?" The boys look up and smile "No!" The players put their drinks down and John calls them in. "Right, there's three grids over their, see them?" he points. "We should have fourteen players here, how many times does three go into fourteen?" "Four remainder two!" one of the players shouts. "Top man! Yeah okay so I want a group of five with bibs on, another group of five with different colour bibs on and a group of four without. Go and sort yourselves out." John waits patiently as the boys arrange themselves into teams, he checks his watch. "Five of you in yellow, five of you in red, I can see six yellows! Elliot that's seven yellows now!" Moments pass and John starts to lose his patience "Right, how is this a group of five when we have got seven with bibs on?" He rolls his eyes. "Right, in your groups go and stand in a grid; one colour to a grid and start your stretches." The players do as they are asked. John strolls over and suggests different movements. He then allocates group leaders and attempts to get them to engage in different tasks "Rhodri, you set something up in this grid which encourages a lot of movement...Mitch, you lead it in there, make them do what you were doing, you set them up...Tom, you make them follow you, you lead this group, show them what you want them to do! Just make sure it's a movement you are likely to do in a match." John calls the leaders over one at a time. "Hey that's great, now what else could we do?" he quietly utters to each. The session continues and his actions are repeated throughout.*

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*Field Notes [13<sup>th</sup> February]*

*The players gather around Dan on the half way line. He gets a sheet of paper and explains the session format. He sets small groups of players different tasks based on their playing positions. The players look carefully at Dan's notes and listen to his instructions. "Miller, Jammo and Smithy in yellow bibs, against Marcus, Will and Tomo. Set yourselves up over there both teams working as a rotational three, up to you what you focus on, run it for a few minutes then change it if needed. Set yourselves a target and review it before you take it forward again. Off you go, start when your ready." One of the players picks up the bibs, another the cones and the six of them make their way over to the side of the pitch where Dan has asked them to set up. No questions asked. Moments later the next group does the same and the next and so on.*

*The sessions are all underway and the groups are working independently. Dan meanders around the pitch occasionally stopping at a group and observing the players whilst they work. Every now and then he steps in to address the players and give advice. He then leaves the area and they continue to play.*

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*Field Notes [13<sup>th</sup> February]*

*“1-2, 1-2, 1-2...” Bill points to each player as he allocates them a team. “Right lads, yellows you’re up that end, oranges down there. First team to three!” The players wander over to their positions and Bill makes his way to the middle of the pitch. “Come on then lads, let’s get going we only have forty minutes!” A few of the players shout orders at the others in a bid to get organised and underway. The session starts. Bill marches through the pitch as the players move and pass the ball around him. Bill is his usual vivacious, enthusiastic self. He instructs, points, claps and waves his arms about as the game progresses shouting words of encouragement and praise. Other than occasionally recognising individuals’ efforts in passing comments, there is little evidence of attempts to promote a mastery climate in light of TARGET behaviours. Nevertheless, like Bill, the players are enthusiastic, appear full of energy and highly motivated.*

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*Field Notes [19<sup>th</sup> February]*

*The players are doing floor exercises. A new younger player has joined the group on a trial session. “Tom just copy Dave over there, Dave knows what he is doing he’ll show you” Steve instructs. Tom sits down next to Dave and replicates what the others are doing. Steve leaves the players and continues to set up the playing area. He strolls back over and teases one of the players who seems to be struggling “Too many pies Jamo!” Jamo pats his stomach and smiles. Steve turns to the new player “Alright Tomo, got you a small ball for a small lad!” He doesn’t reply. A few moments later Steve returns his attention to Tomo “Good well done, that technique is spot on” he utters quietly in passing. In his next breath “Jamo come on, get them done properly don’t cheat!” Steve yells. The boys complete speed work, moving on to some small sided passing games. As the session progresses Steve’s feedback is constant, ranging from general group and individual praise and encouragement, to lightly scolding players in private and in public.*

The observations were followed up in the fourth interview, in specifically asking the respective coaches to elaborate upon the points highlighted from their sessions. This began with John, who, following his noticeable attempts at putting into practice the motivational climate theory, was asked to explain his stance on the ‘grouping’ and ‘authority’ structures of the TARGET behaviors.

You’ve got to get to know your players. Although I said, “you three put that out, you five put those bits out”, you are actually conscious of who is in the group because, to make it successful you need someone who is a good leader. You’ve got to use that leader. It’s not manipulating them; it’s to make things work. The purpose is to get them thinking and not just reacting. (John)

Bill was asked why he felt that the approach was difficult for him to implement specifically with regards to getting his players to make decisions and take on leadership roles.

I think that it depends on the group. In an ideal world you'd love to encourage all participants and players to take on leadership roles and make their own decisions but I've been involved in groups where that wasn't possible. Unfortunately, you sometimes have to be a bit of a 'dictator'. It might happen in time, but it's based on the amount of contact you have, the characters and abilities within the group and their stage of learning. (Bill)

After observing Steve's attempts at incorporating the 'recognition' and 'evaluation' structures of TARGET behaviours, I asked him to expand upon these in light of the theory and his experience of its implementation. Additionally, his range of feedback methods, his demonstration of positive and negative reinforcement, and scolding was also questioned.

The recognition and evaluation are of massive importance. The amount of praise and encouragement given out in a session is an important part of motivation and speeding up the learning process. A balance between both private individual recognition and group feedback is ideal for me. You need to distribute feedback equally, but there are some players who need more positive or negative feedback. Certain individuals respond to lots of praise and encouragement, and others respond to negative feedback in terms of motivation. (Steve)

In an effort to move the discussion forward, I encouraged Dan to explain his session and share his experiences in the hope that the others may be able to gain some clarity as to how a mastery approach to motivational climate might work on a micro level (i.e., a one off session). In this respect, his session was used as model practice. Dan elaborated upon my observation.

For example, the midfielders go away and work on three versus three. I've told them roughly the areas I want them to develop so they can work on protecting the ball if they like or condition themselves to work on their touch. I don't mind as long as it's specific to their position, they all know where they are weak and what they want to work on. It's the same with the full backs and the wingers. As I say, they know the structure and how to set the actual drill up, but it's up to them how they condition it.

Still unconvinced that this approach would work for him, John said;

I like that sort of thing, but as you said, you are working with older players. You have to look at the group you are dealing with, and you are at a stage with the fourteens, fifteens and sixteens where there is what I would call, a bit of personal sense coming

into it. At the younger ages there isn't the personal sense is there?

In attempting to convince John that such an approach was manageable and can be applied to most age groups, Dan was asked how he coordinated the session and to discuss the difficulty of doing so.

I think a lot of patience is needed. You'd like to go in all of the time but you can't, you have to leave them to it to a degree. I just sort of float around between all of the stations and have a look to see how they are doing. I have an idea in my head, maybe this week I want to watch the midfielders a little bit more but that's it. To be fair, I've had a couple of them for about two years and they're of the mentality now where I could get them to do that and walk off and sit in the changing rooms for an hour. (Dan)

Bill was familiar with the organisation that Dan had used, having recently attended a national governing body workshop addressing empowerment. Until now though, for him, these were just abstract notions; "plenty of theory, but not much to go by way of practice".

That would be one thing I would be looking at if I was doing that, seeing how they respond to that responsibility. I guess you would then go around and just tweak things? Although it was suggested on a course I attended last year, I've not actually seen it working, but obviously for you Dan, it seems to be successful. (Bill)

#### 4.2.2.3 Theory-Injection: Panopticism

The principle of power was further developed in the next action research cycle with reference to the work of Michael Foucault, based on Jeremy Bentham's idea of panopticism. Foucault argued, that the panopticon induces a "state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (1977, p. 201). I felt that this lent itself to the way that I had observed some of the coaches in the developmental group operating. The coach (who could be deemed the central tower within the panopticon structure) observes the players without them being able to tell whether they are being watched or not. The proposal of how panopticism may encourage a sentiment of 'invisible omniscience' and may be applied to the coaching environment was examined. The same process was followed as in previous cycles, in that participants were provided handouts outlining the concept as a focal point for discussion. I was uncertain as to whether the

coaches would relate to the theory of panopticism and see its practical relevance. However, John drew a loose, but fairly accurate comparison to other organisations, arguing that this approach is used to encourage transparency.

A lot of this principle was talked about when they went into planning offices, about opening it up. If they feel part of a team they are more inclined to share information, if they've got a problem they can talk and can watch one another. The big thing for me, I think, is that it's very important that the coach has to be particularly careful that he treats all players the same, this sort of principle supports that doesn't it? It's actually that they can see each other, that's important. They don't think there is something going on in another room where someone is getting better treatment than them. It supports team spirit and encourages them to be prepared to do something. (John)

Bill agreed with John's comparison and continued to elaborate on the points he raised, adding that it may be used to control the use of individuals' time and space hour by hour.

Yes, the Supervisor has generally got a window, he's there but the impression is that he is not always looking over their [players/workers] shoulders. When you've got little groups of two or three in these teams in open plan offices everybody can see what is going on, there is nothing secretive about it. (Bill)

In attempting to get the coaches to relate panopticism to their practice, they were asked if it was present or could actually work in their own coaching.

Yes, it's a tough one isn't it, getting them to think that you are not actually observing them, because they all know that is what you are there for. I can think of situations where it might be like that, but most of them tend to be when they've been sent out to do their own warm up. Things like if we are staying overnight in hotels, where although they are with the team, there is an element of freedom, they get on with it and generally don't take the piss. They are aware that we are around somewhere if they attempt to step out of line. (Dan)

Steve attempted to illustrate where he believed it could be argued that the features of panopticism were in effect.

We had a good example where, prior to the session, we explained what we wanted the players to achieve within it and we let them lead it. So, the objectives were for example, to work on set plays, "These are the objectives; this is what we want to achieve, go out and get it done." We were there, watching the session in parts but in other parts we weren't watching and getting on with other things. They may not have been aware of whether we were watching or not, but every time we turned around it was all being done to the highest standard. (Steve)

Dan argued that such an approach was not truly dependant upon the internal discipline of

players. He believed that this discipline had been enforced at an earlier time and, as a result, players were now less likely to misbehave for fear of previous punishments. Not solely because they were unsure as to whether they were being watched or not, but more so, that they feared the repercussions of not completing the tasks as required.

At the beginning of the season with some of the newer players we did stuff like that with them and they'd run amok. They would do the session but it would be done poorly. They know the standards and what we require now, they know that if we do turn around and catch them we will come down on them. I think that it is the fact that they can get on with it and they've got full control of it, but they also understand that it is control within those working boundaries. (Dan)

Steve implied that he would occasionally intervene in order to reinforce the internal discipline of his players by way of demonstrating his own legitimate power. In his experience, the submissive behaviours of his players would only last for so long.

I will give them activities I want them to do, they go and set them up and get on with it. I can leave them to do that and I will just wander around setting up the next session. Every four to five weeks I find that I have to go back over and remind them about quality and standards because they ease off a little, but the first three or four weeks are brilliant, they are doing it to the best of their ability. I think that once they start thinking that they are not being watched, or that they can possibly get away with things, that's when I need to step in and reemphasise my authority. (Steve)

The subsequent observations took place at the end of the season. John and Bill's players were winding down and Steve and Dan's preparing for a cup final. All the coaches voiced concern over trying to strategically manipulate their sessions to implement the notion of panopticism into their practice. They argued that there was a danger that their players wouldn't respond positively to a change in practice such as this, and as a result, Steve and Dan did not want to take the risk of "wasting a session" and valuable time. They suggested that it wasn't that they couldn't or weren't prepared to apply this theory into their practice, but more so that the timing was an issue. Whilst I tried to explain that panopticism may benefit the coaches at this stage of the season, because they would encourage a sentiment that they are watching every move the players make (even if they are not), the coaches were still wary. Understandably, as this was a theory that they were not entirely familiar



with and were not sure quite how to implement, or of the effect it might have on them and their players' performance, there was a sentiment of rejection from the coaches. Nevertheless, the observations took place. Whilst it appeared that none of them deliberately stage-managed their sessions taking a panoptic approach, there were minor elements within each of the coach's sessions (albeit, few of any real significance to be presented here) where it could be argued panopticism was in effect; for example:

*Field Notes [8<sup>th</sup> May]*

*The pitch is set up, Dan outlines the objective of the game; its conditions and its rules. The game begins. Dan and Steve stand and chat at the side of the pitch whilst the boys play. They discuss the forthcoming cup final; preparation for it and individual players' performances. Minutes pass, the boys continue to play and Steve and Dan's discussion moves on to their plans for the evening once they get home from training. Only on a few occasions the players break the rules of the game, but they are not penalised by the coaches for doing so. Moments later the same rule is breached. "Orange ball! You didn't call your name when you went to press him Mikey!" Dan shouts. He then turns to continue his conversation with Steve.*

However, whether this example was a conscious effort of inducing a state of 'invisible omniscience' within players was debateable. Having suggested to them that this may have been the case, and also witnessed the coaches' surprise, implied to me that these were merely habitual activities that they engaged in, which, based on my own interpretations, could be labelled panopticism. The coaches certainly were not aware of the significance of their actions in relation to Foucault's theory, and there were no explicit attempts at incorporating it into their practice. In this respect, I doubted their understanding of the theory. The above practical example of Dan and Steve coaching was used to explain to the coaches how the notion was in existence and could be developed in their practice. This observation and the coaches' perceived difficulties with implementing panopticism were then discussed. In the fourth interview I felt that Dan 'hit the nail on the head' when he proposed that such an approach required time and patience. He believed that it was a gradual process of implementation.



I was reading your hand-outs and thinking the theories almost work in stages. When I've got new players or when I'm trying something different, I have to sell it to the players first and foremost, it's the same with the empowerment approach. You want them to understand how you work and I find that once they've got that understanding of the way you work, you can move onto other methods like the motivation climate stuff and guess you finish up with the panopticism. I find that it has to work in stages, you have to lay the foundations and not run before you can walk.

However, I still wasn't entirely sure that the developmental coaches really understood panopticism. Perhaps the ambiguity surrounding their comprehension and the sentiment that they struggled to grasp it was largely due to me being too ambitious with the choice of theory.

#### 4.3 Group 2: Elite Coaches' Community of Practice

As with the previous section, the intentions here are to firstly outline the elite coaches' backgrounds, beliefs, coaching practice and how these were developed prior to the study, whilst attempting to frame my role and the evolving relationship with them. Additionally, I highlight the difficulties in obtaining and maintaining access at this level, particularly in terms of appreciating the tensions between the demands of the group, and the needs of individuals, all housed within a particular cultural context. I then expose the difficulties inherent in establishing a productive CoP at the elite coaches level, where jobs are dependent on managerial opinions and resources which, in turn, exist in a constant state of flux. Subsequently, in attempting to explore whether coaches' learning is developed through socially located, self-reflective practice, I again present the findings as a series of realist tales (inclusive of reflective accounts) highlighting the coaches' current views and responses to my attempts at theory-injection.

##### 4.3.1 Setting the Scene

Personal Reflections [15<sup>th</sup> December]

It's a bitter winter's morning; I can barely feel my fingers as I frantically shuffle

through the mountain of paperwork on my desk. My office is like a bombsite; I pass the blame and curse Kevin who unofficially shares it with me. The phone rings, “not now” I groan, answering reluctantly and hoping that it’s a quick call. I scramble for the phone, dropping it, swearing profusely under my breath. The receptionist on the front desk smirks; I grimace.

“Kerry?”

I recognise the voice: “Hi Robyn!”

“You’re still alive then!” he sarcastically taunts. I apologise and explain why I haven’t been in touch. Juggling three jobs and a PhD is backbreaking; the loss on Wednesday adds further weight.

“All set for tomorrow?”

Whilst I feel excited, I also have a feeling of doubt, like a ‘lamb to the slaughter’. I attempt to hide any misgivings with light hearted banter. If only he could see my face, I feel like I’ve aged ten years since this project began! We continue to discuss logistics and minor details.

“What should I wear?” I ask coyly, feeling silly for posing such a question. I want them to take me seriously, not just see me as another academic solely with motives of empirical extraction, a twenty-something female and a waste of their time. I want to look slick but not in the ‘white collar’ sense. More so as a reputable ‘prac-academic’ who fits the coaching mould. We agree on a branded club tracksuit, complete with initials; typical coaching attire. The conversation dwindles, “Okay, so all sorted?” I assure him that I am, despite knowing that it is going to be a long night, riddled with monotonous administrative tasks as well as rehearsing and learning my interview guide. Worse, a very early start!

Empty paper cups and Haribo packets cover the car floor; sand and grass are embedded in the upholstery. The Magic Tree New Car Scent irritates my nose; a desperate ploy to conceal the rancid wet-dog smell from my coaching equipment exacerbated by faulty heaters. The voice on the car park intercom confirms my appointment and lets me through the gate. I’ve arrived. Taking a deep breath, I spend a few moments reading over my interview guide and double checking I have everything. Camera, tripod, dictaphone, pen, paper...nothing forgotten. As I walk to the entrance, I rehearse my introductions. I’m momentarily distracted as I pass a window, hesitating again to check my appearance and that I look the part (or maybe just for reasons of vanity). Greeting the receptionist, I’m asked to take a seat and wait. I sit and fidget.

I scan the foyer unobtrusively, once more examining my interview guide. I don’t want to seem unprepared. The door swings open. *This must be him!* (Bob the Academy Director). I stand quickly, fumbling so I have a free hand to shake. “Hello Kerry, nice to finally meet you.” He ushers me upstairs to the Board Room, opening each of the many doors before me. I awkwardly thank him each time. The other two coaches greet me with nods and handshakes. All three are identically dressed in immaculate coaching apparel. I notice their body language, suggesting that this is the last thing

they wanted to be doing late on a Friday afternoon. It was the club's Christmas party the night before. Jokingly I ask "Heavy night?" despite noticing the dark shadows under their eyes and fuzzy chins. I'm disappointed and concerned that I don't get their full attention. Whilst checking the equipment I overhear joking about the episodes the night before. There's an obvious hierarchy within the group, with the two older coaches (Bob and Matt) mocking the other (Carl). I wait patiently for the conversation to stop. No response. I turn; take a deep breath and turn back again giving a ready smile. The teasing halts on Bob's raised brow and nod. Phones are switched off and an air of focus and attention pervades the room. Moments later, I notice Carl discreetly checking his watch for the third time since my entry. The interview commences.

The aim of this introductory session with the elite group, was the same as with the developmental group; I wanted to familiarise them with the intentions of the research project and gain background information about them and the environments within which they worked. I tried to get them to articulate their current coaching beliefs and practice (and what had influenced these), whilst determining potential areas for theory-injection. All of the coaches worked at the same club. Two of the coaches had played professionally but injury had prematurely terminated their playing careers. They initially pursued other occupations outside football before gaining their coaching qualifications. In their own words:

I played for United as a pro for three years, got injured quite badly and went into the RAF as a PT Instructor, ending up as a parachute instructor... Gradually came back to football through coaching. I got my coaching A License in 1992 then slowly went up the ladder through non league clubs. I got interested in schoolboy football about ten years ago, when I ran advanced academies for district councils and things like that. I came down to Rovers to look after Development Centres with several staff and gradually built up to Academy Director. (Bob)

I left school, did an apprenticeship for three years and then worked twenty years in the city, working for four and a half years in USA and Asia. I did my coaching badges when I came back from the States, joined the Academy some years ago part-time and went full time in August...After leaving full time football, I played semi pro for a few years, then had two very serious injuries. That time was null and void. I worked with non league at the start then had a chance to come to the Academy and work with the scholars. (Matt)

Both shared similar professional development pathways. Carl however, had other motives

for making the transition from player to coach:

I stopped playing when I was around twenty-two years old. I disagreed with a lot of the Managers; I had my own opinions. I decided to get into the coaching of young lads. I ran a team of under fourteens where every boy was at a pro club... Whilst I was doing that, the manager at the time, invited me down to the Centre of Excellence, as it was called at the time, to have a look. He'd obviously heard great things about me. I turned up on my first night just to have a look and he threw me straight in, he made me do a session on the spot; it just went from there really. I came in, worked part-time, got offered a job twelve years ago and just worked my way up through the Academy. Now I work with Dave with the under eighteens. I'm in charge of the nines to sixteens, all the young kids coming through and have been for the past ten years.

As the interview progressed, discussions started to centre on the coaches' perception of their roles:

You look after everything really. At times you're there for them to talk to you, not just technically but about other things as well... You're there for anything they need... there might be problems at home, a number of things. So, I think it's not just about football. (Carl)

Carl suggested that his broad role was due to the time spent with players; resulting in a closeness of relationship with them. He implied that, at times, he had become very attached to the players. Bob interrupted, arguing that the club had expert support personnel to deal with the many different facets of a player's performance and social well being. Whilst he agreed that in the past their roles were more generalised, and as a result could be portrayed as a "Jack of all trades", he suggested now that things were more specific.

We have the skills coach for the really young ones, and we have a psychologist to support the sports scientist with all the fitness testing, as well as top medical people we can refer them to... I think really that our role, especially for me, is to be managers and bring it all together.

Matt shared this opinion, adding that his coaching role had changed considerably over the last few seasons.

Before, it would have been just the Youth Team Coach doing every one of those jobs from fitness right through to technical. As Bob said, we've got full time staff to do all of that, so it's just a case of sending them in the right direction and keeping an eye on them.

This initial fragmented method (i.e., where groups and the coaches worked in isolation)

before apparent convergence was also incorporated into pitch sessions according to Bob.

We've recently split so that I take the defenders, Matt will take care of the midfield players and Carl will take care of the forwards. We might come together and work from mid-field to front and back, so all the time we've got specific accountables to look after.

In referring to this specialised approach, Bob argued that the players benefited from such expertise because their learning was maximised. In particular, it was essential to get the very best out of who they considered to be the better players; those who would be of most value to the club in future years.

It may seem a cruel thing, but we are there for business, the elite business of our best players, really looking after them and with all due respect, they are there to play through and get into the 1<sup>st</sup> team. They are the ones we can maximise and take care of. We always take care of all of our players, but our job is really to realise who the best ones are and make them better and better. (Bob)

When asked about what had influenced and shaped their coaching practice, all three shared similar views. Matt explained that his experience as a player had considerable bearing on his coaching behaviour.

For me, the biggest influence was the first manager I played under, who was very successful in Scotland. I thought he was the most ignorant, arrogant person I have ever come across. It was a case of vowing that I would never be like that. He treated everyone the same and his philosophies were everything that I would not stand for, so he really helped me in his way. (Matt)

Bob empathised with Matt, adding that he too had also been the subject of unpleasant coaching practice. Recalling an experience as a player, under a manager he “dreaded playing for”, Bob explained that he had learnt just as much from a coach that “made our lives a misery on the pitch, then ran us until we were sick”, as from those who used more positive methods. He could identify with players who had received such negative treatment.

I looked at some of those things and thought that if I ever became a coach I won't do that, I'll definitely not do that. I know how I felt!”

Additionally, all three asserted that observations of other coaches had significantly

influenced their practice. In Matt's own words:

For me it's watching people. Courses are fine and I've gone on them and found them thoroughly enjoyable; you know what you like and what you don't like. It's taking bits and pieces from a variety of people. I wouldn't say it's just one specific area or specific person, it's a combination from different sources and you are constantly looking to add to that.

Bob added that more recently, in an attempt to "move with the times", they had invited high profile British and European coaches to deliver exemplar sessions; an opportunity to "pinch and exchange ideas". This, in his opinion, was invaluable. Furthermore, he explained that he and the other coaches were hoping to visit overseas clubs to observe and learn more about different styles of coaching in different countries. It was hoped, indeed assumed, that this would enhance his knowledge, the knowledge of his staff, and as a knock-on effect, the players.

#### 4.3.2 Developing Learning through Socially Located, Self-Reflective Practice

Like the developmental coaches' group, in endeavouring to examine if the coaches' learning had been enhanced through socially located, self-reflective practice, the second interview began with a request for the coaches to highlight something that they had learnt since the last interview.

The thing that struck me when I went abroad recently is that the players are more competent technically. The biggest thing was the amount of contact time they had and what they did with it. Imagine us working with our players and getting three times the amount of work done on technique. This year our boys are taken out each morning on what we call a 'breakfast club', where they do fifty or maybe one-hundred repetitions of something and it has really brought on the technical side of their game. (Bob)

Matt explained:

Going on from that, for me, it is different attitudes. Bob went to Holland and I've been there a few times and it's the attitude of the players. Maybe it's their society or upbringing. As Bob said, you watch the Dutch players repeat their drills for an hour without question. You watch our breakfast club and after ten minutes you've lost some of the players. You may say that it's not their fault; it's possibly to do with the way we bring our kids up over here. In that respect, I think you have to start with the younger ones and address these problems much earlier so that it's how they learn.

In referring further to the characteristic differences of players, Matt highlighted some issues related to the evaluation of players.

After talking with the sports psychologist here, the other point would be that our players may see things differently. You may think that they have had a very poor game, however, they think they've done well and vice versa, so it's getting a better understanding of how they see themselves and their performance, compared to how we, the coaches, see it. (Matt)

I felt that they hadn't entirely addressed my question; their answers demonstrated an awareness or observation, as opposed to something they had learnt. Nevertheless, in seeking to obtain further detail and encourage the coaches to begin to collaboratively attempt to remedy such issues within the CoP, I asked for a solution to the abovementioned discrepancies. The following remedy was provided.

I think that regular feedback is important from us. Often a player has got an opinion of how they are performing and the coach may have a completely different opinion, then I think you've got a problem. We've talked a bit in training about their evaluations and ours. We really could do a lot more with this I guess. (Bob)

#### 4.3.2.1 Theory-Injection: Empowerment

In line with the developmental group, in the second interview, the concept of power was examined and used as a focal point for the second action research cycle. This topic for debate was influenced in part by a previous observation of Bob and Matt coaching, but also, as the developmental coaches initially demonstrated similar behaviours, it seemed fitting for power to be also used as a theme for discussion throughout the elite coaches' CoP. In this sense, and for reasons of consistency, it was deemed logical to attempt to integrate the same theory here, with the elite coaches. As with the developmental group, in addressing empowerment, the coaches were provided with handouts that theoretically outlined the concept, implementation strategies as well as requirements and potential outcomes of its use. With regards to empowerment, the coaches were asked to articulate their current views towards it and whether they felt that they already employed it as part of

their coaching toolkit. The following discussion unfolded.

I think we do. We had a guy brought in a couple of years ago and he almost stage managed the training session. The harsh reality is that it can't always work that way, give the guys the bibs and cones and let them play, it's absolute carnage. (Matt)

Bob agreed with Matt explaining that he believed that a truly empowering approach (as he saw it) would not be of value to his players.

It's funny because I see people coaching the old school way and then there's the new school approach. I brought a chap in, who could be viewed as an extreme. He'd say, "There you are, there's the kit, there's the cones, go and play, go and decide what you are going to do." They aren't then, getting anything from us as coaches other than that freedom. I think that the balance is somewhere in between and people need to be guided. I think they can be used and we do use them but at the end of the day, you've got to get your experience and knowledge across to the kids so that it fast tracks them. That's what we are here for as coaches or they might as well just stick to a 'kick about' in the playground. (Bob)

Both agreed that the approach required a substantial amount of time, and that this was limited. Additionally, using this method had the potential to lower the tempo and pace of sessions.

Because we mix their physical work with their ball work, we are sometimes working in three or four minute blocks with different intensity levels. We set the practices up to bring everything out, then we do a debrief and talk, then we go for another block. I think the fitness side of it may be another consideration. I know that when John came in, it was a lot of stops and starts, and their fitness went down. I think maybe pre-season is a good time to do that isn't it? You can get a lot of learning into them, which is important, but there is a balance as the season goes on. (Bob)

Following the interview, the coaches were encouraged to give the theory further thought, whilst thinking about the issues raised surrounding empowerment and whether they could, and really do, use such a notion into their practice. Additionally, examples from the developmental CoP and my own experiences were used to provide further suggestions for developing the approach in how they coached. The following extracts from subsequent observations provide evidence of this in action.

*Field Notes [5<sup>th</sup> March]*

*Matt's session has just ended, the players are cooling down. Matt is not happy. He*



*and Bob discuss the session whilst packing the equipment away. Matt calls the team captain and two other boys over as the others continue to jog and stretch.*

*Matt: "You're not in trouble lads, just want a quick word." There is a pause while the boys get their breath back. Bob leaves them to chat.*

*"The boys are taking the piss and I want you to have a word. We lost Saturday to an average team, not because we were outplayed but because our attitudes weren't right."*

*"Yeah, it was dire." Sam answers regretfully as he momentarily looks Matt in the eye.*

*Matt goes on to talk about the day's session, drawing attention to the recent run of bad form.*

*"It can't carry on, I don't know what's up with them. Me and Bob have said our bit, now it's over to you guys, they either want it or they don't. I want you to have a word. Not now, but when you're back in the changing room. They look up to you and they'll listen. I want you three to have a chat and give me a review of Saturday's game. Involve the lads and together decide what needs to change or be done."*

*The players nod.*

*"Okay that's great, appreciate it lads, now go and get changed and get some lunch."*

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#### *Field Notes [12<sup>th</sup> March]*

*Matt has just finished his part of the session, it is the last half hour of the afternoon practice. Bob is about to take the players. He asks the players to get a drink and then place the mannequins as instructed. The playing area is set up and the boys gather around Bob.*

*Bob: "Okay, just to finish up we are going to put you into some little conditioned games. First I'll split you into defenders, midfielders and forwards. We are going to pick two teams, I'm going to give you the rules of the game. You're going to go away for a few minutes, have a chat and then decide the best way to win that game, okay?"*

*He continues to explain the design, objectives, and rules of the game. The players are separated into teams and are ready to start.*

*Bob: "Now then, work out the best tactics to win the game, and also just get yourself together, and get your head right to learn! Okay, so a minute to sort your tactics, and a minute to get yourself in a good place to learn. Set yourself some targets and goals."*

*The players break off into their teams and discussion groups. After a minute or so Bob bellows: "Come on then lads! Let's get this going!" they get into position and the game starts.*

It could be argued that the above examples of the coaches' roles equivocally changing from instructors to facilitators, apparently intending to provide players with the necessary tools (responsibility and ability to make decisions) to achieve their desired aims, were conscious attempts to empower players. However, the degree to which the coaches actually afforded the players power is debateable. In this respect, one of the intentions of the follow up interview was to examine the notion of empowerment from the coaches' point of view further. The following extracts revisit empowerment after the initial discussion, and provide time for further consideration and opportunity to toy with the theory addressed in the last meeting.

In certain sessions that you do with set pieces, it can be a problem. Generally though, in coaching, if you can ask them to give their views or ask them questions to get things happening they will be more prepared to actually do it, you get them on side, that's what I find anyway. (Bob)

Matt added:

It's about individuals as well, some individuals are quite happy to participate; we encourage them to come forward and state their views while others are far more withdrawn. It's a case of being flexible and treating individuals as individuals.

In an attempt to get the coaches to move beyond the assumption that to empower a player was simply to use a question and answer approach to delivering information, the coaches were asked how else they might implement it into their practice. Matt responded with the following suggestion.

I think that the problem solving games are the easiest way of doing it, you create a situation and give them group ownership by saying, "What is the problem? How are you going to deal with it?" Give them the problem to deal with as a group and see how the individuals come forward within that group.

Bob gave a further example.

Sometimes I'll say to them "Right, you're the coach; you've just seen that half or that section. Tell me what you are going to say now." It's almost role reversal and they look at it from a completely different perspective and then they come up with some useful ideas.

The question of what happens if the coaches disagree with the ideas and solutions arrived

at by the players, or have an aversion to the approach that players choose to take, was posed.

I think the secret there is to guide them into it. Sometimes, they can be very strong, sometimes you can get a real disagreement if somebody thinks one thing and you think something slightly different to the group. Generally, you guide them and they will come out with what we want. (Bob)

For Bob and Matt, it seemed the intention then, was not really to get players to take ownership (and develop as truly autonomous learners), but to develop an illusionary sense of empowerment within them. In this respect, I wanted to know whether this deception was intentional or whether there were other reasons for taking such an approach. Matt replied:

It's treating people as you'd like to be treated as a player. If you think back to twenty-five to thirty years ago, it was all screaming, "You do this, you do that", it was very much a dictatorial, command style of coaching. I just think that society in general has changed and young players now won't necessarily respond to a rollicking. Now you give something to them; one key time is team talks prior to games; you say to two of the players, "You are giving the team-talk, what are we looking for?" Don't tell them in advance, see what they pick up on, see if the key points of the coaching throughout the week come out, see how the group responds to a colleague giving them a team talk.

Bob sat quietly reading over the handout again, occasionally glancing up and nodding as Matt continued to express his views. As though something had clicked into place, having thought about it a little more, he then gave the following justification.

I think that the ideal situation for me, or possibly for us, would be for the players to solve problems on the pitch for themselves. So many times the game goes slightly differently from the mainstream, especially with foreign teams who are more flexible, and all of a sudden the kids are looking over at me. I'd really like for them to go, "Right, let's bring the centre forward back," or whatever, to come up with the solution to the problem. That's why I think that it is important to set up these games where the kids work out the best solutions, the best way to do it...I think that's the aim for us, to let them do it.

Matt concluded:

You can test them time and time again; you can't suddenly thrust responsibility or power upon them, it has to be a long drawn out process.

#### 4.3.2.2 Theory-Injection: Motivational Climate and TARGET Behaviours

As with the developmental coaches, motivational climate was used as an area for discussion given its links with empowerment and the coaches' insistence that they practiced certain TARGET behaviours (Ames, 1992). Additionally, even though the environment within which they worked was largely performance based and competitive, the educational aspect was a key part of their plans in relation to their remit for 'total player development'. Addressing this notion of promoting a motivational climate would be keeping with the earlier claims made by the coaches about using empowering methods in a bid to produce intrinsically motivated players. The concept of 'authority' (one of the TARGET behaviours) was introduced as a starting point for debate.

I'm a great believer in giving them their task, explaining it, asking them if they understand it then asking them to go away and work out the best way to do it; I have just a half ear cocked to find out who is leading it. It's amazing, they have a little think about a way of doing the task and then they will really try hard to do it because it's their idea. I also think that, with players who have experience, if you value their views they want to do a lot more. I remember last season, we had a poor spell with set pieces and we said right sort a few out yourself and they really tried to make them work...we said, "You do it how you think because you complained that that's not for you", and they really tried to make it work. So that's a good example of passing something over to them. (Bob)

Following further discussion about the 'authority' construct and how the coaches would strategically manage sessions so that players had to make decisions and take on leadership roles, my initial gut feeling was that they seemed to struggle to grasp the concept of TARGET behaviours. It appeared that both coaches were merely reiterating what they had already been told on respective professional development courses. I wasn't sure whether they actually bought into this, or were telling me what they thought I wanted to hear. To begin with, the discussion was superficially centred around task organisation and empowerment; for example:

You usually have a group leader who says, "This is the way I think it should go", and everybody else puts their two pennyworths in. Then, the leader makes the decision on how it's going to be carried out. It's a very similar situation to when we give them

little tasks in practices and they work out the best way. (Bob)

Whilst there was an obvious link with empowerment (rightfully made by the coaches), at times they tended to stray away from the topic of motivational climate and back to the realms of empowerment. As this was a new concept, or at least one where the principles were unfamiliar to them, I felt they digressed in a bid to return to their ‘comfort zones’. Several attempts were made to clarify the subject area (motivational climate) and redirect the coaches to the key points provided. To a large degree, these were rejected or at times ignored; for example, in their response to questions about the significance of TARGET behaviours. Here, the coaches felt that many of the constructs related to promoting a mastery climate weren’t practical in the environment within which they worked. Whilst some of these were discussed, specifically with regards to ‘task differentiation’, ‘authority’, ‘recognition’ and ‘evaluation’, the points raised by the coaches were not always harmonious with the literature (e.g., in relation to the ‘recognition’ and ‘evaluation’ construct, ability comparisons and the ranking of a player’s performance). This was unsurprising given the nature of the environment within which they coached and the performance climate of elite football. Both coaches discounted the grouping (i.e., assemble participants into mixed ability cooperative groups; friendship groups often being considered the most effective) and time aspects (i.e., allowing flexible time and encouragement to participants to work at their own optimum rate) of TARGET behaviours as being unviable in their line of work. Alternatively, they tended to group players based on playing position. Whilst, at times, it was observable that they would allow players to pick their own groups in smaller technical activities, they would also separate individuals and manufacture groups based on who would bring out the best in whom. They wanted to encourage competition within the squad. With regards to allowing players to work at their own rate, the reality for them was that they were “always on the clock”, time was limited

and precious. However, both coaches agreed that the evaluation part was fundamental to their players' development, assertively stating: "It must happen!"

I think that when you run a session or you have a game and you don't do a debrief, it's a waste of time because they haven't evaluated what they have done and taken something from it. In my opinion, they haven't gained experience. Evaluation is massive; that's where you find out how much they know, because if they've done things wrong and then had a think, they come out with things that they would do differently again, that's a huge thing. (Bob)

Nevertheless, their actual methods of evaluation and recognition were largely performance and ego centered. When discussing these constructs, the coaches again reverted back to, or cited, time constraints. As Matt explained:

The difficulty is we only have the players for so many hours a week, then they go home to their parents or relatives, so the feedback they receive in this arena is very important. Honest feedback is important.

Bob added that most of the time, private evaluation and recognition was done through written player appraisals and often involved ability comparisons with other players.

We started giving written feedback and breaking it down, we try to tell the boys what they are measured on; for example if you are a fullback you are measured on this, it's really specific...I think what we are trying to do with the feedback is to make them responsible for themselves. On the group feedback, I think it's worked particularly well, they actually saw how they compared with their peers, it was great. What we did as well was to get them to give their feedback right there on how they felt they'd done and some of them didn't agree, which was fine, then we compared it with our feedback. (Bob)

When asked whether this method worked for them and if there were any issues with such an approach, Bob responded:

To start with it was massively different, then as we went through the season, it was almost identical and they seemed a lot more comfortable with the reports. This is because initially, we asked "How do you think you've done?" They said eight to eight and a half. We said, "Well actually, as coaches, we thought you were a five and this is why we thought you were a five". Then the whole group listened in and they graded themselves as a group and again the score was way out. Eventually, they were getting really close to what we thought, so they were actually giving an honest appraisal of themselves, which is important because if you don't get that you can't address it. It worked pretty well.

Even though the theory I was attempting to inject was based around promoting a mastery

climate, I didn't want to force such notions as suggesting that this was the right way to coach. The aim was to merely provide something new which would encourage deliberation. The intention was to offer alternatives to how they already approached the motivational aspect of players, and see if they could and would experiment with these in their practice. Intentionally taking a divisive stance on the matter, I further explained that whilst their current approach may enhance performance and make players more aware, it may not typically intrinsically motivate them. Not expecting or wanting an answer I asked them to think about the notion further and attempt, where practically possible, to implement and consider the key points raised in the handout and subsequent discussions, in their practice. Both reluctantly responded to my request with "we'll give it a go". I wasn't hopeful. However, in the following observations there were some noticeable alterations (albeit minor) to the usual coaching styles.

*Field Notes [16<sup>th</sup> April]*

*It's the first session of the day; 'breakfast club'. It's 9am and already the sun is burning the back of my neck. I don't envy the boys. They stretch in what little shade there is. Larking about under the sprinklers until they catch Matt's attention. Matt summons them over.*

*Matt: "Right lads, get yourself into pairs! Just grab a mate and then stand next to a cone."*

*One boy is left without a partner. His embarrassment is obvious, as though being last picked in the school yard. The others tease him. He shrugs it off, at the same time cussing them.*

*Following a brief explanation, the session starts promptly. Matt instructs, scolds, praises, instructs a little more; the usual coaching dialect. I'm impressed at the boys' energy in this heat. Matt voices my thoughts of admiration and applauds them for their work-rate. "Hey, I don't mind that! Good Charlie, well done Calum, well done Jamie...! Keep it going, only another thirty seconds!" He continues to stroll around the playing area stopping at the boy who was last to be picked. Taking him aside, "That's great Jase! Can you do it in two touch for me? When you're ready change it again, make it harder".*

*The session progresses into a half-pitch practice. Matt again allows them to select their own teams. They stop for a break, get a drink. Matt reiterates a few coaching*



*points. “Right, change the floater. Sam go as a floater, you’re on two touch, you can’t score, I’ve done you a right favour there, I’ve seen you shooting!”*

*He continues to observe and shout encouragement. The tempo drops slightly. “It’s gone flat lads, lift it!” One of the more energetic boys comes within close proximity of Matt. In his next breath he instructs “If they’re dicking about go and sort them out!”*

*Later, I follow up the observation over lunch. I ask Matt how he thought the session went and whether the integration and manipulation of the TARGET behaviours was intentional. He responds “I did what it says on the tin didn’t I? Ask me if I’ll try it again...I dunno!”*

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#### *Field Notes [16th April]*

*Hopeful that Bob would repeat Matt’s efforts I take my usual spot at the edge of the pitch. My attempts at remaining unobtrusive are starting to wear. The boys take turns jokingly pulling faces and other gestures at the camera. Bob arrives and the mood quickly changes; back to business.*

*The boys gather and sit on the grass around Bob and another senior coach. They listen as he outlines the forthcoming session. Several minutes pass. The boys’ attention starts to wander. “Up we get then lads! Jonas can you sort the lads into teams and be the senior man for now in Youngy’s absence?” The session starts and Bob strategically positions his players. I watch in anticipation waiting for some hint of the integration of TARGET behaviours. Nothing.*

*As we stroll back to the pavilion, I quiz Bob about the session. Before I can get onto the subject, he hastily explains his decision not to incorporate TARGET behaviours. “It’s a difficult session Kerry. Time is an issue. I only have forty five minutes to get five or six set plays out. It has to be short and sharp or I’ll lose them (the boys)! I’m on the clock, I guess a bit like you are to get these recordings in. The only difference is mine is dependant on results and ultimately my job.” I nod and empathise with him.*

#### 4.3.2.3 Theory-Injection: Panopticism

In continuing with the theme of power, the idea of panopticism was introduced in the next action research cycle. As with the developmental group, the suggestion that such a structure may encourage a sentiment of ‘invisible omniscience’, and may be applied to the coaching environment, was provided. The same process was followed as in previous cycles, in that participants were provided handouts outlining the concept as a focal point for discussion. Initially, the coaches perceived such a notion to be too abstract, as



evidenced in Matt's initial response.

The only question is how do you compare lurking around the training grounds with prisoners' rehabilitation?

After further consideration and being provided with an exemplar session detailing how such an approach might be managed in practice, the coaches started to see some relevance. Here they drew on other analogies in seeking comprehension and their own interpretation of the concept.

You get on a bus and you are disciplined but if you are not prepared to meet the criteria set as a group you've got to get off the bus. It's up to the group on the bus to offload people if they won't do the things they are supposed to do. You can transfer that into a game. They obviously boss their own group, and it's the same in training and with training standards. (Bob)

In arguing that this was a commonsense concept, Bob continued:

In all sports, when you are trying a new technique, if there is somebody watching, you tend to analyse every move and you are put under added pressure. I think that just the fact that they go away and practice without me watching is good. I'd certainly use it myself and I'd encourage coaches to use it.

However, still uneasy about some of the terminology used, Matt hinted at cynicism when it was proposed that it is not necessarily the type and amount of power you give players, but more so, the illusion you provide in granting them power. In this respect, I argued that such an approach may encourage compliance from disruptive players.

To be honest, looking at this for the first time, you give them problem solving games, you watch their reactions and they find their own solutions. If they can't find solutions then you steer them in the right direction without taking over the session. I think that sometimes it's the small pieces that you do with them; also it's about their response to you, what we said last time about each individual being different, I've got a squad of twenty boys this morning, of whom, six will respond very well to this, but I know that there are probably eight who wouldn't be able to handle it, they just don't know what to do. They wouldn't ask questions, they are not that way inclined. They are not, should I say, the sharpest tools in the box.

I tried to explain that this approach would be more suited to instill internal discipline within such players. For example, every now and then Matt may need to step in and give some guidance as and when needed, but on the whole players will be more inclined to

engage and ‘knuckle down’ if they believe they are being watched, even if they are not.

Still unconvinced Matt gave the following response.

The problem there Kerry, is the as and when needed. With the six boys I mentioned I can say as I did this morning: “This is what we are working on, this is the situation, what would you guys do to solve this? Come back to me; put it on a flip chart.” They are motivated, they are hungry, and the other guys would just look around. That’s not being rude to them; their school and social reports tell you the same thing!

I then asked Bob if there was any attempt to purvey ‘invisible omniscience’ in his practice, and whether this led to internal discipline.

I think they want to do well anyway because they know people will be watching... We don’t use it so much with the older age groups, although I have done it in specific work. I’ve seen coaches do it as well, where you explain how and you give them a few little pointers and then let them go away and play without pressure, so you pretend not to watch and they actually just hit a few without being watched and they just get a feel for things and then you maybe come back to them and ask how they are doing. (Bob)

Still, I felt that there was some confusion, and that both were missing the point with regards to creating a situation where there is uncertainty as to whether players are being watched or not, thus encouraging compliance. This was evidenced in Bob’s ‘off the mark’ interpretation.

For example, after a session, a couple of lads who are on set pieces; they say that there should be one specialist set piece person in every successful team. So lads come up and say, “Can we practice?” I say that it’s ok as long as it’s professional and they don’t just slam balls in or whatever. Occasionally, I will come away and go behind a hedge or somewhere to have a look at things and look around without them knowing; they are practicing very conscientiously. (Bob)

The fact that Bob gave the example of observing his players unknowingly, highlighted his misunderstanding of panopticism. Although Matt seemed to have a slightly better comprehension of the subject, still unconvinced and sceptical he added:

I’ve just come back from a very famous Dutch club, I spent two days watching them and their social behaviour is so much different. They did a passing drill that we do here, they did it for fifty-five minutes and it only broke down three times. When it broke down that person got loads of good humoured derision but they got on with it for fifty-five minutes! If we did ours for eight minutes we would have had first and second year scholars messing about. Maybe it’s concentration issues or maybe it’s a social thing, I don’t know.

It wasn't that I thought the coaches refused to engage with the theory, or that they didn't already practice such an approach, albeit unintentionally. More so, that they could not see the connection with practice as the concept was presented. Indeed, what is in reality a very simple concept, was hidden under a level of discourse difficult for the coaches to relate to despite it being part of many of the activities the coaches engaged in. The focus of my next observations was to highlight examples of where an element of panopticism was in effect. The following ordinary incidents were used and discussed in the fifth interview.

*Field Notes [21<sup>st</sup> May]*

*We're sat in our usual spot at the back of the dining hall. Some of the boys have finished their lunch and are playing pool and table tennis with the senior players. The rest sit and chat on the sofas, others loiter at the serving counter eagerly awaiting second helpings.*

*"Like vultures you are! Bless you, over worked and underfed. Youngy, here you are love, you need to get some meat on those skinny bones!" The lady at the counter sympathetically surrenders.*

*Matt notices, "That's enough for him!" he bellows. "He turns like a double-decker bus as it is!"*

*I continue to eavesdrop on the conversation as we finish coffee. The conditioning staff are discussing training issues with Bob, Matt and the rest of coaches. The boys are getting rowdier as the stakes of the games rise and peer pressure intensifies. There is a roar of laughter, followed by taunts and ridicule as one of the players misses his shot. A senior member of staff stands, leaves the table and makes his way over to the commotion.*

*"Lads! Keep the fucking noise down! If the Gaffer hears you, look out! You're all on clean up for the week!"*

*The noise reduces promptly but within minutes starts to escalate. The Gaffer walks in. Immediately the noise drops. Without acknowledging the players, he makes his way over to our table. Briefly addressing the coaches, he picks up a coffee and leaves. Minutes pass and you can still hear a pin drop.*

At this stage, I didn't expect the coaches to change or adapt their practice, nor make explicit attempts at incorporating the features of panopticism. More so, my intentions were to attempt to better their understanding of the concept and assist them in recognising that

through slight manipulation of their current practices they could (if they so choose) affect the internal discipline of their players. The following excerpt demonstrated this.

*Field Notes [3<sup>rd</sup> May]*

*The boys are doing 'pre-hab' in the gym with Dan and Paul the strength and conditioning coaches. Bob arrives midway through the session. He takes a seat on one of the old torn benches, gets a pen and some pieces of paper out and begins to read and make notes. The boys are undoubtedly aware of his presence but there is no interaction between them. Every now and then he glances up and gazes around the room whilst twiddling a pen between his fingers. Occasionally, the players' eyes stray away from the chalk covered equipment and the partner they are supposed to be 'spotting' over to Bob. They continue to go about their routine almost robotically.*

Such an example was presented to the coaches and used to further exemplify the existence of the concept in practice. Both coaches agreed that in such a situation, their mere presence (even without interference) would convey a sentiment of invisible omniscience and was perhaps, until the discussion, one of the many implicit everyday coaching deeds that they took part in, but without conscious knowledge.

#### 4.4 The Value of Developing Coaches' Knowledge within a Shared Community of Practice

This section is largely centred around the latter half of the fifth and final interviews (following a brief return and review of panopticism). Here, my intentions are to comparatively present the findings in relation to the effectiveness of the established community of learning among the coaches of the developmental and elite players. I also draw on evidence from the previous interviews that support the coaches' claims. In terms of structure, I firstly address the value perceived by the coaches in developing their knowledge within a shared CoP. This is inclusive of the strengths and weaknesses of the process, their feeling towards sharing information and the benefits of doing so, and whether they believe a collaborative approach to coach education works. Secondly, I examine the coaches' learning and generation of further coaching knowledge whilst

involved in the study, and whether the coaches' practice changed as a consequence of the process of collaborative inquiry.

The developmental coaches were unanimous in their agreement that, on the whole, the CoP that they believed had been established, and their engagement within it, had been a positive and worthwhile experience. This was summarised by Bill:

It has been useful for me, just listening to other people. The focus group has made me think, "Well, maybe I could use what Dan said or what John did." It's the same when I'm coaching, I would always be looking over my shoulder to see what others are doing and I know that they would be doing the same with me. It's like stealing each other's ideas and this has given me the opportunity to talk about them, not just watch and assume; it's given me opportunity to discuss and understand.

Additionally, even though they perceived that taking part in the CoP was an "informal educational process", they believed that it was effective and enjoyable. They were motivated by this novel opportunity to share each others' experiences of implementing theories. As a result, whilst their commitment was optional, their attendance was influenced in part by their desire and intrigue to hear what other members had to say.

I've never been in a group like this before and I've enjoyed the opportunity to speak and to hear what other people are saying. Just that alone was enough to make sure that I would turn up for the next meeting. I found the theories and discussion about them and other things related to our coaching very interesting. (John)

However, when the coaches from the elite group were posed the same question; whether they thought this approach worked, their responses were more ambiguous. They argued that this means of learning is dependant upon an individual's needs, characteristics and motives. In Matt's words:

I just think that it depends on the different strengths within each group, be it a small or large group; you've got different individuals, some are very vocal, some are very deep thinking. It's a case of what suits each one. I just think that it depends very much on the coach's response to new ideas, whether they choose to engage with them or just nod along with the concepts.

In relation to the dynamics of the development group, at times there could be considered

catalysts and inhibitors, leaders and followers, enthusiasts and pessimists. The characteristics of both groups differed, as did the personnel within them. It could be argued then, that this was a major factor in the perceived superiority of the developmental group in sharing information. All four coaches were characteristically different as well as diverse in range and level of experience. Often, their characteristics would compliment each other, just as, at times, there were subtle ‘clashes’. Nevertheless, they all constructively shared practice.

In contrast to the developmental coaches who felt obliged to engage with the on-going learning process, it appeared that, at times, the elite coaches chose not to engage with the concepts and theory articulated. For the elite coaches, there came across a sentiment that their attendance was a chore. Seemingly, this was something they had agreed to, so had to see out. Throughout the interviews, both Matt and Bob’s eagerness to get through the theory and discussions speedily implied that it was a onerous task for them; just another activity to eat into time that was sparse. Their lack of enthusiasm was obvious, and in discussing the value of the approach, they implied the same cynicism that was evident within the theory-driven discussions. In Bob’s own words:

I think that we have the opportunity to ‘pick’ the expert minds around the country and come back and share that with each other in informal discussions. We watch each other coaching, look at different ways to get things across to the players and so on. This is not that different to what we do anyway. Some of it has been useful but I think you pick a bit up from all of the best practices and decipher it and see what works for you.

They argued that this method or way of learning through interactions was already in effect, albeit as an informal knowledge network<sup>3</sup> at the club.

All the stuff in here and all of the stuff we’ve talked about, I haven’t disagreed with anything; you do it in different ways and then reflect on it. I think that we are actually

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<sup>3</sup> Where people know one another and exchange information; discussions are loose and informal because there is no joint enterprise that holds them together, such as the development of shared tools (Culver & Trudel, 2006).

already doing, in some way or another, what we have done here, even though it's been all milked up, professionally, with interviews and discussion points. (Bob)

It may be argued that this lack of engagement was partly influenced by the size of the group, evidently the dynamic changed dramatically with Carl's departure (this is dealt with in the next section). Despite the reduction in participants, the same structure and intended theory was used as a vehicle for debate; a social learning process was offered, whereby the intentions were to co-construct knowledge in their specific context (i.e., it was embedded within their respective social and physical environments). In this regard, the elite coaches didn't completely discard the worth of the CoP, as Matt suggested:

There has been some value, and it's been good to hear your views and the examples you've given us from the other group have been helpful. However, we can get that on the sideline, chatting to each other and also other coaches when we come across them, in all sorts of places; here at the training facility or wherever.

#### 4.4.1 Sharing Information

Both groups of coaches agreed that the opportunity to share information was a pivotal feature of the value they placed on engaging in the study. There was also a tendency for them to assist one another in their comprehension of the theories provided. The following extract illustrates an example of this in response to the suggestion that coaches engage in semi-theatrical performances (like actors) in order to obtain power, respect, trust and so on; a notion in keeping with Goffman's concept of 'front'.

I'm not sure about the word 'actors'. (John)

Well, we're performers John. (Bill)

It's just the word 'actors' Bill. It just sounds a bit deceptive. You could spend all day working, perhaps you feel a bit under the weather, a bit tired, but you've got to go to that coaching session full of sparkle and enthusiasm. So I agree that you've got to put on an act at times but I'm not sure about the term, for me it implies falseness. (John)

It's a performance, and the way that you perform is like being in front of an audience. I always say to younger coaches "You have to perform, you are on stage. You can be quiet and introverted afterwards, but during your session you've got to be bubbly,

excited and upbeat because kids will respond to that”. We are talking about body language, it tells a million stories. (Bill)

I said about the word actor because I think it sounds deceitful and that you’re not being true to yourself; I think the kids will see through that. I guess if you put it that way though, it’s true. (John)

The developmental coaches revelled in this interactive experience of the CoP; as Dan in his own words put it; “There’s nothing better, everyone in sport loves talking about what they do. It’s much better in a group like this”; and Bill, “It’s been good; I’ve enjoyed it, having the opportunity to speak very freely of my thoughts and views.” Furthermore, they felt that it assisted them in developing new and existing knowledge, by synthesising a range of information sources. As Steve suggested:

Sharing coaching ideas is like watching a drill. If I’m watching a practice that Bill is taking, I will use some of it but maybe change it to suit me, and perhaps someone else watching me doing it, will do the same. So, that one drill becomes a massive drill with loads of little variations. It’s the same with the ideas here, you take an idea, make your own interpretation of it, and it changes a little bit and it adapts.

However, the coaches were not always forthcoming in sharing information. For example, the elite coaches were initially wary of this type of disclosure. Bob suggested that he was happy to share information but only up to a point.

There comes a point where we are a professional club and you’ve really worked hard to get there, you’ve got a way of doing things that’s very successful, you don’t want to just give that away to everyone. Let’s face it, we’re in a competitive environment (Bob).

There were obvious organisation issues associated with the focus groups in ‘tying down’ all the participant coaches at the same time and thus, getting them to share practice within a CoP, as Bob acknowledged:

I think also that we’ve had massive logistics problems even getting myself and Matt together because we try to maximise our time during the day. I think that if we had more people involved it might have been almost impossible to organise.

All the coaches believed that the size of the respective groups worked well for them. It was useful for the developmental coaches because it helped evoke experiences from their own



practice, as Dan suggested:

Someone will say something that reminds you of something you've done; things like that. If it was just a one-on-one interview or the group was smaller it would be easy to breeze over something you haven't thought of.

Although their group (i.e., the elite group) was smaller, in a similar vein, Bob added; "Maybe some of the points have just triggered things that we haven't thought of for a while." Whilst a larger group may have encouraged more profound discussions and been more insightful for the elite coaches because of greater diversity in experiences, knowledge and opinions, Matt's response suggested he didn't favour it and for him it would be a pointless exercise:

With group dynamics, I think that they'd have done it the same way or worked to the same structure, the end result would have been similar to what you've got anyway. Carl was the same as us, we've all come through the same badges, all work for the same club, and all have the same issues and pressures to work against.

The coaches' learning experience also seemed to generate their own momentum and direction. For example, even though the discussions were initially pre-structured, they soon followed the coaches' experiences of day-to-day coaching. John summed this up well when he said:

It would be a backward step if we were too clearly led. At the end of the day, I felt that we were setting it out. It wasn't prescriptive and I think, if it had been, perhaps it might have put a few people off.

The developmental coaches were unanimous that to some extent their practice had changed as a consequence of the process of collaborative inquiry i.e., sharing information and interaction with myself as the facilitator. They believed that at the very least it had made them think more critically about their practice.

I think it has had quite an impact. I know they talk about ongoing training and people having to go back for refreshers now and again but by having fairly regular meetings it did concentrate your mind. I would like to think that, to an extent, we've always done that but the fact that there was this group of meetings made you think a lot more. I think that it was quite useful. (John)

To be honest Kerry, and you will have picked this up by coming to see me a couple of times, I haven't changed much from forty years ago. Like Dan, I always give thought

to things and maybe the structure of my sessions might not have changed, but it's the thought I've put into it. With me and possibly John being the oldest here you are not going to change a huge amount. I might change a little bit and I will use one or two of the things in there but I'm not going to change the whole structure of things that I've been brought up doing for the last forty years. But I still say that it has been very useful because it has made me think more about things that I didn't know of or had just taken for granted. (Bill)

For Steve, there were more practical implications through a reassurance in the discussions that he was doing the right thing.

Sometimes it's just nice that you might be working on something a bit different and you give a scenario for other people to agree and say, "That's how we do things, that's not a bad idea". When you are put in an environment where there are similar attitudes and mentalities and you hear that they are doing similar things, you think, "Yes, I'm on the right path." It's especially good with the theoretical back up as well.

Being able to apply theory to certain coaching practices that they already engaged in provided a vehicle for further development of the coaches' knowledge. In Bob's words: "It's what we are already doing in one way or another, but it was good to see and understand the theory behind it." There was thus a recognition that the content had contributed to some new insights. As Dan suggested;

I think I've thought about it more, definitely. I feel that I do a lot of this anyway and coach in this manner, but I've tended to think about it in a little bit more detail during and after my sessions. I've definitely been more reflective afterwards, until now I just sort of took it for granted and didn't really notice I was doing it.

In terms of coaching information and generating further coaching knowledge through the injection of theory, the developmental coaches all believed that there was some level of learning, the taxonomies ranging from comprehension to analysis and evaluation. They believed that the areas covered had been "topical, relevant and related" to the ways in which they worked. However, not all the comments about the theories were positive. For example, as Matt argued: "Some of the theories are quite far fetched". Nonetheless, Bill implied that whilst his practice is unlikely to change as a result of such a process, he had grasped the theories and information shared.

You have to take something from this. If any of us four has not taken something from

this then there is something seriously wrong with us as coaches, because the learning opportunities are there. As I've already said, you never stop learning and you should treat these type of things as a chance to pick up extra bits. Whether I use much of it is another thing, but I've certainly taken it on board and enjoyed listening to the comments and picked up one or two words, phrases and theories, so from that point of view it's been superb.

John agreed, adding that the study had helped him keep up with the fast moving, ever changing nature of top-level sport.

It's reinforced for me the view that you've got to keep abreast of things. Not only changes in ourselves, because we may be a bit stuck in our ways in a way, but changes in the players we actually coach and society as well. When you started coaching Bill there wasn't a lot of difficulty with players' enthusiasm or discipline and so on. They were there every session because football was the only thing they wanted to do outside of school. Today, there are a lot of other things going on for them. I think we believe we've got a lot of experience of coaching young players but things happen, and incidents occur and someone shares their solution with the rest of the group and you think "Well that's a novel way of dealing with it." It makes you question the methods that perhaps you're accustomed with; I think that it's just good for us. I've really enjoyed it. (John)

The elite coaches however, remained pessimistic in their conclusions; a sentiment echoed in Bob's summarised view of his learning whilst involved in the study.

I think, irrespective of the age, you are still learning. I don't disagree with all these things here, they can fit in practically, it might be that you do little crib lists just occasionally to remind yourself of different things. It hasn't done any harm anyway.

#### 4.5 Examining the Role of the Facilitator

Despite the (justified) enthusiasm for the theoretical framework, its potential in respect "of learning for coaches should be tempered by the knowledge that there can be extreme difficulties in establishing and maintaining fully functioning communities that fulfil the conditions of being a CoP" (Rynne, 2008, p. 13). Such difficulties were apparent throughout this study and are summarised in relation to my role as a facilitator below. Firstly, I highlight the 'physical' and organisational aspects of harnessing and maintaining productive CoPs. I then explore the complexities of facilitating such social learning environments and, without intending to seem overly narcissistic, my personal survival as a

facilitator; i.e., the struggle and dilemmas associated with nurturing such CoPs.

#### 4.5.1 Issues of Access

Obtaining access to potential participants proved problematic, with initial attempts to recruit willing and suitable coaches being unsuccessful. Persuading coaches to make the emotional investments necessary for participation in a longitudinal CoP proved arduous. I was, therefore, forced to rely on coaches I already knew to persuade others to take part. With regards to the developmental coaching group, as previously stated, Bill provided referrals for both John and Tony, and helped recruit them as participants for the study. Similarly, having already agreed to take part himself, Dan then persuaded Steve to join. Undoubtedly, my gender, age and status as an outsider prevented me from gaining access directly at the elite level. In this respect, a key informant (also a former coach, and later colleague of mine), used his powers of persuasion to help recruit the elite group of coaches. Unlike my previous attempts, where many doors were shut firmly in my face, he convinced them to take part. Although gaining participants in this way could be termed successful use of a ‘snow balling’ method of purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002), the limited enthusiasm of some of the eventual participants for the project was to prove problematic. Additionally, having gained access into the elite environment, my gender, status as an outsider and initial demeanour were also, at times, problematic. The following excerpt illustrates one of the many examples of where I felt ‘out of place’ within it.

#### Personal Reflections [27<sup>th</sup> February]

It’s a cold and wet winter’s morning. I slowly drive up what seems to be a never ending driveway. It resembles more of a set from a Jane Austen novel-turned-film, than a training ground. The picturesque surroundings have a calming effect on my rushed state. The feeling of panic that I would be late for my first observation (one that had already been rearranged twice at the coaches’ request) starts to ease, as I notice a sign with the club’s logo on it. I reluctantly squeeze into a space amidst the

assembly of ‘flash cars’ and ‘gas guzzling’ four wheel drives. I scramble for my bag, put the camera and tripod case straps over my shoulder and make my way to the pavilion.

“Can I help you?” a deep voice growls behind me. Startled, I turn to address the rather large security guard. Realising my mistake, I quickly reassure him that I am not from the media. He seems a little less guarded once I give him Bob’s name. He points me towards the pavilion changing rooms offering to escort me over. As we walk, we engage in small talk discussing my journey, Cardiff City’s recent run of good form and much to his surprise, that I am not a Cardiff City fan! We pass what appeared to be players and staff, each nodding and giving greetings of “Good morning!” Even though polite, I sense that my female presence and lack of club kit encourages uncertainty. Some younger looking players peer through the foyer windows, as though wondering what my business is. Bob and the coaches are already at the field. As I trudge up the muddy path, I see Bob and Matt working separately with small groups of players affirming their claims from the previous interview. I can’t see Carl (I’m told later that he is ‘on leave’). I set up and start to observe. My intentions for the visit are to gain an insight into the coaches’ worlds. I want to get a feel for the environment in which they work, as well as find some points for discussion for the following interviews. I’m eager to get something gritty and worth my long journey. To a degree, my intentions are ruined by the weather. Visibility is poor and I can barely make out Bob and Matt’s broad accents.

#### 4.5.2 Dismissals and Withdrawals: Maintaining a Productive CoP

Further difficulties related to the job insecurity and fluidity of coaching at the elite level also became evident. This was witnessed when two of the coaches from one of the CoPs were dismissed from their posts; one before the first interview (as a result we didn’t get chance to meet), and the other, Carl, mid-way through the study. Incidentally, Carl wasn’t ‘on leave’, as I was told during the above observation. I was later advised on route to the second interview, that his departure was permanent.

A further coach (Tony) also withdrew from the developmental CoP due to a change of professional circumstances. Such changes are typical of the uncertain world of top level coaching. Curtailing the groups in this way impacted on the dynamics and functionality of the developing CoPs. Additionally, there were a few occasions where one of the developmental coaches couldn’t attend. In this respect, as a facilitator, it was necessary for

my involvement to become more emancipatory. I attempted to facilitate reflective discussion with the coaches, at times through drawing on my own experiences and stance as a player, coach and academic. This assisted me in becoming a collaborative member of the group, whilst also, where discussions could be short-lived (as a consequence of a reduction in participants), my involvement would encourage further dialogue. My input and suggestions would, occasionally evoke additional ideas and help the coaches draw reference from their own experiences. I anticipated that such participation from myself, would result in more rich and detailed responses. Such attempts were not only theoretically driven, but also influenced in part by my own views and experiences. Often these were bold contentious statements solely intended to promote further discussion and debate. The following passage is an example of where, as a result of a recent article I had read, I attempted to provide ‘food for thought’. Suggesting that in terms of coaching control, the coach was like a pilot of a plane, it led to the thoughtful unfolding discussion presented below.

I think that’s about right. I’d just add that the Pilot has the control to change which airport he lands at as well. I think that at times during the season something comes out and you see it and think, “Hold on, let’s go in this direction with this player now.” (Dan)

Good point. (Bill)

I would say that he’s not a Pilot at all. I’d say that he’s the Air Controller because all I see that the coach has been doing is to tell the plane when to take off, make certain that it uses certain paths and that it lands in a certain spot. (John)

All the things we have discussed today are summed up there really. (Bill)

The reason I say that the Pilot is the Controller is that the Pilot is the player and the coach should stand back on occasions but he controls them from point to point along their route. (John)

I personally think that’s spot on. The end product to the session, the take off, the landing and the middle part are in our hands. You either go on auto pilot and let them carry on or you go in and take them on. It’s spot on. (Bill)

I agree with Dan entirely. You may come down at a different airport than you

intended because the over structured sessions didn't actually progress to meet demands. (John)

It just might be that you get part of the way through a season and all of a sudden a player may do something or suggest something that makes you think, "Great, I'm going to take that player in that direction now." Part of coaching is that you must be flexible and change. (Dan)

That's one of the characteristics of coaching. That's happened to us at the club, I was very strong about the systems we played. We played 4-4-2 and that was it. Then we had an injury to a player just before Christmas in the fabulous run that we'd been on and we had to change it. So we played three in the back, five in the middle and bang, tremendous. Because of an injury to one player, another player came in and we had to change it. That made it like Dan said about changing where you land. (Bill)

#### 4.5.3 Demands of the Job and Needs of the Individual

Similar to the insecurity and fluidity of coaching in elite sport, the nature of the research and the demands placed on those involved at the highest level of football impacted upon the procedures of the study and the limited enthusiasm of Matt and Bob. My intentions for the data collection process were not always in sync with the participants' availability. It was originally anticipated that both groups would run parallel to each other. However, the reality soon became obvious that I was on their time and had to fit around them. The synchronicity of the social intervention then, was often compromised.

#### Personal Reflections [27<sup>th</sup> February]

I'm driving home; my head is thumping. I've been up since four in the morning and it's now rush hour. I'm not even half way home. News of a traffic jam worsens my disgruntled feelings. It's dark, the flashing lights of passing cars and the wagging of my windscreen wipers causes my eyes to blink longer than they should; I fight to keep them open, taking a large swig of cold coffee left over from the drive up. The vile taste bolsters my decision to stop at the next service station. I sit and dwell on the series of adverse events; last minute notification of Carl's absence, the torrential weather conditions and gruelling day spent filming in the rain, to name but a few. I'm angered by the fact that I have to drive another six hours and return in the morning, having wasted a day waiting around to meet Bob and Matt.

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#### Personal Reflections [28<sup>th</sup> February]

The interview takes place in a cramped dirty changing room. The musty lingering smell of muddy kit and Matt's eagerness to get away permeates the room. He checks his watch and perches himself on the edge of a bench, sitting on his hands as he rocks back and forward as though anxious to make a run for it as soon as the tape is stopped. The responses to my questions are short and unforgiving. I feel uneasy; a burden keeping them from getting on with the rest of their day. Bob's drawn face is a tell tale sign of the strain he is under having to take on the extra workload after losing Carl. The interview finishes, eager to catch up and move the meetings in line with the other group, I ask when would be appropriate to make the next observation. I get a 'don't call us, we'll call you' kind of response.

The above are examples of where patience, empathy and flexibility was a necessary requirement of my role as facilitator. On several occasions, an appreciation of the tensions between the demands of the CoP and the needs of the individuals within such groups was called for. Indeed, a CoP shouldn't take place in a changing room, physiotherapy office or corner of a canteen. Nor should it consist of so few participants, or have such bureaucratic time restrictions. However, in reality, such formidable contextual issues are characteristic of elite level coaching, and a rejection or intolerance of them would result in the non-existence of a CoP.

#### 4.5.4 Nurturing the CoP

In relation to getting participants to sincerely share practice, tensions were immediately evident within the elite group. What could they learn from the CoP? And what benefit could a facilitator such as myself hold? "Imperialistic communities are not open to alternative views, outside experts, or new methodologies because of their passionate belief that their perspective is the right one" (Wenger *et al.*, 2002, p. 142.).

#### Field Notes [28<sup>th</sup> February]

*I'm sick of hearing "We already do this"! I feel like we are not getting anywhere. Granted they understand what it is, albeit they believe themselves in the illusion of*



*empowerment and are convinced that they are passing it [power] over to the boys, but getting them to think along different lines, is like banging my head against a brick wall! I either get fobbed off with the same eluding, diplomatic response, or we go completely off track. I keep trying to reel them back in, it's hopeless! Matt's sighs say it all! I'm not asking them to change, just consider. One almost always agrees with the other and neither is willing to step outside their 'safe' institutionalised confines.*

Attempts (by myself) at resolving these problems were made through careful 'impression management' (Goffman, 1959) and exposing participants to other theory and practical contexts beyond their immediate domains, and to problems that could be better solved by combining multiple approaches (Wenger *et al.*, 2002).

*Field Notes [15<sup>th</sup> April]*

*Did a lot of name dropping today. Told them about the problem we had at Welsh camp and how we dealt with it. Used the usual football clichés and they seemed interested! Showed them Dan's footage [with his consent and upholding anonymity of Dan and his players] they immediately changed their tune. Matt and Bob were both keen to hear more and seemed much more open-minded. In one way or another, both actually tried to implement it into their practice!*

My attempts at 'winning over' the coaches through the overuse of football jargon, presenting myself as a coach and generally attempting to 'fit the mould' did, at times, have positive repercussions in respect of the coaches' engagement with the CoP (particularly the elite coaches). Additionally, making comparisons between groups, and managing the CoPs so that participants were exposed to examples of theory-practice integration outside of their own coaching milieu and respective CoP, ensured that all participants were, to varying degrees, involved in 'legitimate peripheral participation'.

#### 4.5.5 Consistency vs Intellectual Access

The theory that I exposed the coaches to was on occasions, problematic. The coaches' puzzled faces when I initially introduced some of the ideas gave a clear sense of confusion; so too, did their misconstrued responses. My endeavours at ensuring consistency amongst

both groups, and the coaches within them, were limited by intellectual access. The intentions were to provide a similar and logical theoretical progression for both groups. In hindsight, however, this orderly hope, that the same research plan, procedures and ‘tools’ could be used for two *very* different groups, was naïve. In this respect, there were times when I had to either ‘soften’ the theory, or accept that the coaches were not going to gain the levels of comprehension that I had hoped for. As a result, I would ‘tie up any loose ends’, clarifying as much as was necessary (i.e., to the level of discussion we were at), and thus, terminate that particular theory-centred discussion. Initially, when this happened, there was to a degree a personal sense of failure as a facilitator of learning. From time to time individuals would either give an ‘off the mark’ example or statement, but also had a tendency to ‘go off on a tangent’. When this was the case, I would make every effort to correct and redirect them so as to avoid confusion with the other coaches also. This wasn’t always successful; the coaches were at times very determined as to what they were going to discuss regardless of its relevancy; my attempts at redirecting them in such instances were futile so I would reluctantly let them go with it.

#### 4.6 Some Reflections on the Results Section

Like others (Purdy *et al.*, 2009), at times, the way in which the data have been presented in this chapter raises questions of realism which are tied up with ethical dilemmas. On reflection, although I have attempted to protect the anonymity of participants by providing pseudonyms, changing recognisable details (e.g., club names) and being non-specific about certain events, there is potential to see through such masquerades (Boruch & Cecil, 1979; Lee, 1993; Purdy *et al.*, 2009). The data could have been censored to protect against this, removing anything that could reveal personal or compromising information about participants (Jones, Potrac, Hussain & Cushion, 2006). However, whilst such censorship

might protect the participants from harm, it could have also compromised the sincerity and frankness of the study (Jones *et al.*, 2006), resulting in a ‘washed out’, non representative version of the research (Purdy *et al.*, 2009). In attempting to thwart such a disadvantage, the accounts were somewhat fictionalised (Grenfell & Rinehart, 2003). Although these were based on actual events, the field notes were presented as evocative narratives as opposed to ‘true’ representative accounts (Sparkes, 2002). The intention here was to highlight the ambiguities and contradictions of the coaches’ worlds whilst enhancing accessibility for the reader, who can, in turn, interact with the material in a different way (Purdy *et al.*, 2009; Tsang, 2000). In this chapter, some of the data have been presented through a fictionalised version of realist tales. Whilst recognising and not wishing to ‘brush under the carpet’ accusations of ‘truth’ and realism, I defend against such charges by agreeing with other scholars (Adler & Adler, 1994; Jones *et al.*, 2006; Purdy *et al.*, 2009) who have argued that in a study such as this, the nature and extent of behaviors cannot be known, if for reasons of protection, they are ‘watered down’ and hidden. Thus, realist tales have gained appreciation and are recognised as a legitimate genre (Richardson, 1999).

In proof reading this chapter it became obvious to me, and others who have read it, that the question could be raised as to whether the action research approach was effective and whether a CoP was really in operation. It could be argued that the discussions and handouts were not altogether successful in consistently changing practice upon movement through the action research cycles. In this respect, the way in which I have presented my findings should at times emit a sentiment of resistance from coaches to engage with topics, and frustration from myself in trying to encourage this. On completion of the project, there was still some ambiguity surrounding the theory for individuals and the groups on the whole. Others might argue that some of the theory introduced to the coaches was done so

superficially. In particular, it was suggested by a supervisor that the motivational climate elements of the theory-injection focused too much on the 'authority' construct, thus overlapping too much with the previously discussed notion of empowerment. This initially wasn't intentional, but a result of the coaches' discussions and what they did and did not choose to engage with. As during the theory-injection phases, there were aspects of the different theories that the coaches would 'lean toward', it seemed reasonable in light of the tenets of action research, just to 'go with it'. Indeed, it is suggested that action research is associated with addressing practical problems in the workplace and encourages individuals to promote change and improve working procedures through their own enquiry (Castle, 1994; Waters-Adams, 1994). In this respect, whilst I attempted to feed theory to the participants in an effort to engage them in reflection on, and improve their understanding of, their own practice, whilst also to promote change in their coaching behaviours, it could be argued that in its true form this is not action research as it does not focus on practitioners researching their own practice and identifying their own 'problems'. Here, in relation to focusing too much on particular areas (e.g., the 'authority' construct of motivational climate and empowerment), such an issue seemed less problematic than initially perceived as it demonstrates the flexibility for, and freedom of, the participants to go down their own action research 'path'.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

In this section, I attempt to interpret and tie the thesis together in light of some of the issues highlighted in the previous chapters. It is organised around the main findings of the study as per the overall objectives identified in Chapter One. Specifically, these include a discussion of developing coaches' learning through socially located, self-reflective practice, the value of developing coaches' knowledge within a shared CoP, comparing the effectiveness of a 'community of learning' among coaches of developmental and elite athletes, and the role of the facilitator in this process. Included within the discussion are a few brief examples of data. Whilst it was intended that the results stand in isolation from the rest of the thesis, the purpose of including some data is to 'bring to life' the points made in the accompanying commentary. In particular (although not exclusively), the aim here is to position these findings within an expanding body of work which recognises the nature of learning as a collaborative, social process (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and examines coaches' learning from an experiential and sociological perspective (Culver *et al.*, 2009; Gilbert & Trudel, 1999; Gilbert & Trudel, 2005; Jones *et al.*, in press; Jones & Turner, 2006). The limitations of such surmising should be considered when drawing conclusions; the intention is to provoke further discussion about coaches' learning and possible methods for its development, as opposed to arriving at a solid approach as to how coaches' experiential learning can be maximised.

### **5.1 The Existence of Communities of Practice**

The difficulties and potential challenges associated with forming, nurturing and defining effective CoPs have been well documented (e.g., Kerno, 2008; Pemberton, Mavin & Stalker, 2007; Roberts, 2006). With those in mind, I will firstly attempt to answer the question of whether CoPs really were in existence in this study. Here, a loose comparison

with Wenger's (2004) definition would suggest that CoPs were present. Specifically, both groups shared common concerns, problems, and passions about a topic, and attempts were made to develop understanding through interaction with one another and myself. Additionally, the structural (i.e., domain, community and practice) and design requirements as proposed by Wenger *et al.* (2002) were, to a large extent, adhered to within the limits and needs of the participants and their contexts. In terms of *domain*, the groups formed were something more than clubs, groups of friends or networks of connections between people (Wenger, 2004). They had identity defined by a communal domain of interest, that being coaching. Additionally, a commitment to the domain and a shared competence was demonstrated, which distinguished members from other people, i.e., they were coaches of elite or developmental players. In terms of the *community* element, the coaches engaged in joint activities and discussions, attempted to help each other, and shared useful (and at times not so useful) information. To a certain extent they built relationships that enabled them to potentially learn from each other. The *practice* element was also evident in so far as the coaches were practitioners, here they developed a collective repertoire of resources including experiences, stories, tools, and other ways of tackling problems (Wenger, 2007). In relation to the design of the CoPs, in keeping with Wenger *et al.* (2002), there was no fixed structure and the communities were allowed the flexibility to grow. Within permeable boundaries, the coaches were free to manoeuvre the themes and discussions as and when they wished. Dialogue about inside and outside perspectives was encouraged, and opportunities for different levels of participation, so that all participants had a role to play based on their interests and commitment, was provided. These discussions were tailored in relation to the different demands of the coaches and the needs of the individual players with which they worked. Formal events were organised (e.g., interviews) as well as more informal, conversational one-to-one interactions amongst participants and myself

akin with the design requirements of CoPs. Additionally, familiarity and excitement were combined, i.e., frank discussion was encouraged, as well as providing theory and notions that were, at times, novel and innovative to the coaches. Finally, attempts were made to set the pace of tasks (i.e., the discussions and reflective activities) so that they were both challenging and attainable for the participant coaches (Wenger *et al.*, 2002). On the surface then, the established groups resembled CoPs. Furthermore, unlike Culver and Trudel's (2006) findings, the interactions and exchange in coaching knowledge that occurred was not particularly focused on player and organisational issues (although on occasions, conversations had a tendency to drift towards these), but more so on coaching practice (Wenger *et al.*, 2002). Perseverance to curb loose, informal discussion and 'safe', diplomatic responses, keeping 'practice' as the framework for discussion (Wenger *et al.*, 2002), meant that for the majority of the time the groups could be defined as CoPs, rather than Informal Knowledge Networks (IKNs) (Culver & Trudel, 2006). So why then, if the groups looked, sounded and acted like CoPs do I feel, that the project fell short of truly enhancing the coaches' experiential learning through co-participating in CoPs (Lave & Wenger, 1991)?

## 5.2 Developing Coaches' Learning through Socially Located, Self-Reflective Practice

The importance of reflection in ongoing professional development has been extensively emphasised in recent literature (e.g., Boud & Walker, 1998; Cronin & Connolly, 2007; Mamede & Schmidt, 2005). Schön (1985) has promoted the practice of reflection as a form of professional development, highlighting it as one of the cornerstones of a profession (Nash, 2008). In keeping with the work of Schön (1983) and the construction of domain-specific knowledge in the context of professional practice, the coaches' reflection-in and on-action was encouraged throughout the study. This involved the coaches justifying and

trying to actively make sense of what was said and done (Mehan, 1992). Also, in reflecting on their own practice (and theory), the coaches were given the opportunity to deliberate others' accounts of coaching, and subsequently became used to giving and receiving constructive but critical feedback. As an interpersonal activity, this interactive reflection can reinforce a learning community among participants through promoting open and honest communication (McGuire & Inlow, 2005). This proved to be a novel and enlightening learning experience for most of the participants involved in the present study, as they were given the individual freedom and responsibility to honestly appraise each other whilst also offering group support (Fernández-Balboa, 1997).

However, encouraging critical self-reflection was not without shortcomings. At times, the coaches' reflective behaviour could only be branded descriptive and superficial, which scholars have argued may not be an effective means of learning (Kim, 1999; Mezirow, 1998; Moon 2004). In relation to the depth of their reflections, a further issue was identified. Specifically, when asked to directly reflect on their own practice and issues they had faced in the lead up to the second interview, a degree of defiance was met. In particular, some of the coaches' actual reflections could be perceived as no more than recalled details and descriptions of events; this was also evident in some of the later reflective activities on attempts at applying theory to their practice. Gilbert and Trudel (2006) proposed that this resistance may be because coaches feel they will be ridiculed. In drawing on Moon's (1999) work, they suggested that the coaches may fear being "knocked back or laughed at" (p. 169), or that this conflict may be the result of certain power relationships within the group. Indeed, for interactive reflection to occur, it is critical that "all feel safe enough to try on new skills and attitudes" (Raider, Coleman & Gerson, 2000, p. 500). Within this study, a sentiment of inferiority was sometimes felt by the younger and



less experienced members of the groups. This was particularly evident in the first group interview with the development coaches where the presence of Tony and Bill and their dominance over or within the discussions often meant that Steve ‘slipped into the background’. Later, in the second interview, when asked to highlight something they had learnt since the first interview, Steve’s points in particular were the most descriptive and least reflective. However, Dan and John, who were both more experienced coaches and considerably older than Steve, did demonstrate more critical reflection. This may have been due to the initial power hierarchy within the group or simply because Steve was first to speak. Furthermore, reflection takes time and effort, and for the elite coaches in particular this was sparse. If there is little time available or given for reflection, there becomes a failing to provide “the opportunity for the learner to construct new meaning in relation to the existing meanings, leaving the learning process incomplete” (Laurillard, 1994, p. 21).

My intentions were for the action research element of the project to add a further ‘string to its bow’ by attempting to develop coaches’ learning through socially located, self-reflective activities. In this respect, as with other work (Jones *et al.*, in press), action research was used as a vehicle for encouraging critical reflection in light of theory introduced to the coaches in the interviews or group discussions (although my presentation of theory was in response to issues *they* raised) . Like Jones *et al.* (in press), it certainly seemed as though some new insights were developed through a reflection-on-action approach in attempts to implement and consider the use of new theory in the coaches’ practice; a bringing together of “expert research and local knowledges” (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood & Maguire, 2003, p. 25). This gave some of the coaches a sense of responsibility over their coaching; a development encouraged through the adoption of a process of self-evaluation. This was not

only in relation to clarifying what they already knew, but also, through the learning and implementation of new theoretical knowledge, to becoming aware of alternatives (Jones *et al.*, in press).

In relation to the theory injected as part of the action research element of the study, the coaches acknowledged that the concepts presented were not prescriptive but a means for steering practice. For the most part, the developmental group certainly seemed to engage with this notion. Wenger (1998) suggested that when engagement is coalesced with imagination, reflective practice will occur. “Such a practice combines the ability to both engage and to distance, to identify with an enterprise as well as to view it in context with the eyes of an outsider” (Wenger, 1998, p. 217). With regards to (this) imagination, it could be argued that, at times, an element of ‘janusian’ thinking (Rothenburg, 1996) was evident. Here, the coaches demonstrated the capacity to conceive contradictory or opposite ideas and theory simultaneously, consider their relationships, similarities, pros and cons, and interplay, then create something new and useful out of the theories for them. For example, Dan demonstrated this in his approach when applying the TARGET behaviours to his practice. Here, Schofield (2003) suggested that by moving away from ‘comfort zones’, we can follow the process from vagueness to inevitable precision, demonstrating how knowledge is shaped and put to use. Instead of working within some abstract, imprecise or indistinguishable position, Schofield’s notion alternatively referred to treating theory as living, useful frameworks that can guide, but not dictate, everyday action (cited in Jones *et al.*, in press).

According to Schön (1987) simply learning a theory and applying it to practice is insufficient. Instead, practitioners are required to construct “an integrated knowledge-in-

action approach, much of which is spontaneous” (p. 25), reflecting a professional artistry or “the kinds of competence practitioners display in unique, uncertain and conflicted situations of practice” (p. 22). This type of reflection may be largely intuitive and difficult to articulate. In this study, unlike the work of Jones *et al.* (in press), in terms of forcing critical reflection on practice, credit was not always given to the coaches’ existing coaching knowledge (i.e., it seemed as though they were ‘selling themselves short’). On occasions they found difficulty in articulating their knowledge and getting their point and understanding across to other members of the group including myself. Often, thinking is subordinated to, and informed by, a requirement to make communication effective. In relation to thinking and reflecting, Sfard (whose work on metaphors of learning will be addressed later in the discussion) argued that the basic driving forces, and thus basic mechanisms, are similar whether communicating with oneself or with others (Sfard, 2001). She suggested that dialogue should not be regarded as the “window to the mind – as an activity secondary to thinking and coming just to express a ready-made thought.” (p. 27). Instead, they (i.e., dialogue and thinking) should be considered as “inseparable aspects of basically one and the same phenomenon, with none of them [speech or thought] being prior to the other” (ibid, 2001, p. 27). She further proposed the power of thinking-as-communicating to bring a significant change in our perception of learning in general. In this respect, the coaches’ within this study struggled to sometimes put into words their ideas and beliefs. However, this should not be viewed as an inadequacy. Rather, Sfard (2001) suggested that the thinking-as-communicating approach should be viewed as complimentary rather than as a replacement for the more traditional approaches to learning such as the acquisition and participation approaches (discussed in the next section).

Some of the participants also struggled with the level of academic discourse used (on

reflection, a facilitator failing). Consequently, in terms of new knowledge and the evolving injection of theory throughout the study, they were often not able to “conceptualise what was being afforded to them” (Lea & Nicoll, 2002, p. 89). For example, Matt found it difficult to ‘get his head around’ the introduced panoptic approach; it was too abstract for him, and as he hadn’t yet ‘seen’ it in practice, he questioned its relevancy. Here, it may be argued that coaches (like people in general) are limited by language, and subsequently, reflection on what is known is also limited. Indeed, Matt’s understanding of some of the terms used in the panoptic discussions were restricted by his unfamiliarity with the rhetoric used and thus added confusion. For instance he asked “how do you compare lurking around the training grounds with prisoners’ rehabilitation?” For him, the terms used were not transparent enough to grasp and draw reference to his own practice.

In referring to the work of Schön (1987) scholars have suggested we need to test possible intervention strategies in the ‘swamp of practice’ (Cushion *et al.*, 2003). However, this should not to be confused with random trial and error. The reflective process is a series of deliberate moves with the objective of improving a practice situation (Gilbert & Trudel, 1999). Here, it has been proposed that activity structures cognition (Rogoff & Lave, 1984). In other words, a persons’ thinking and behaviour is ordered by the activities they engage in, influencing what they learn and what they redistribute in other activities. Similarly, Brown and colleagues suggested that through gaining access to real-life standpoints are individuals then only able to behave meaningfully and purposefully because "situations might be said to co-produce knowledge through activity" (Brown, Collins & Duguid 1989, p. 32). Consequently, in this study, attempting to provide theoretical relevance and a workable praxis was crucial in helping to develop value and encouraging engagement. Here, the action research element enabled the study to be conducted in a pragmatist mode,

where reflection was not separated from praxis, nor method from application. Merit lay in its potential to attend to the holistic, complex character of real life problem situations (Reason & Bradbury, 2006).

### 5.3 The Value of Developing Coaches' Knowledge within a Shared Community of Practice

The value the coaches placed on collaborating and interacting with other group members supports the notion of CoPs as important contexts for learning and knowledge sharing (Culver & Trudel, 2006; Erickson, Bruner, MacDonald & Côté, 2008; Trudel & Gilbert, 2004). The developmental coaches placed great worth in the opportunity to co-participate with others in this particular social learning environment. This differs from the work of Lemyre *et al.* (2007) who, in studying youth sport coaches, found that at a competitive level, coaches were unlikely to share information with coaches from other teams or organisations and rarely engaged in an exchange of ideas beyond the mundane. In contrast, for the developmental coaches in this study, this engagement was an incentive. They were given the opportunity to share information and claimed that their commitment was influenced in part by their desire and intrigue to hear what others had to say. In keeping with the findings of Erickson *et al.* (2008), this interaction with coaching peers was frequently reported as an actual and preferred source of generating coaching knowledge. These conversations, led to the coaches developing a greater catalogue of skills with which to deal with a specific problem. Frequently, this development was a result or the use of a phrase that a coach had not heard or used before. For example, Bill claimed to have “picked up one or two words, phrases and theories” through these interactions, and saw benefits in developing his knowledge through the process of doing so. However, in terms of the elite group, and their perceived value of this interactive process of engaging within a CoP, there was often a sense of antipathy (which will be addressed in later discussions).

This is dissimilar to most of the elite coaches interviewed by Jones *et al.* (2004), who highlighted interaction with other coaches as integral to their learning. The coaches in Jones *et al.*'s work were consistently looking to gain further knowledge; they tried to integrate all they learnt from other people into their coaching philosophy and embraced a number of learning activities to better their understanding of coaching. Studies addressing coaches' professional development have highlighted the significance of the training that they received and how the coach's development should be considered in light of this (Abraham, Collins & Martindale, 2006; Bloom, Salmela & Schinke, 1995; Jones *et al.*, 2003; 2004). These studies have also identified the need to take into account the biographic perspective and how particular factors could have an effect on the process of coaches' learning (Gilbert *et al.*, 2006). In this study, it may be argued, that the coaches' varying backgrounds and experiences influenced their development during the study. For example, Steve and Dan; both fairly recent graduates, had, through their studies, developed a familiarity with some of the language and theory used. Where the others struggled with the initial rhetoric barriers, they seemed to find it easier to relate to and critique some of the introduced notions.

The developmental coaches in this study also suggested that the opportunity to apply theory to practice, and experimenting with new and old information in their respective coaching environments was, on the whole, a valuable process for them. This was not because it was likely to radically change their future delivery, but more that it enabled them to "pick up extra bits" of information that they had not been theoretically aware of, or didn't practice. Here, Lemyre *et al.* (2007) coined the term "a skilled thief" (p. 204) when referring to taking ideas and information from other coaches and areas for their own benefit. John summed this point up well when he said "It's about watching sessions, you

see someone who does something and you think, Hey that really works!” This is not surprising, as this method of knowledge development has been highlighted as being a fundamental means by which coaches determine what is effective or useful and what is not (Gilbert & Trudel, 2001; Gould *et al.*, 1990; Irwin, Hanton & Kerwin, 2004; Jones *et al.*, in press; Salmela, 1995). Similar to some of the findings of the work cited here, the coaches in this study suggested that in addition to learning from observing good practice, they learnt just as much from observing poor coaching practice (Irwin *et al.*, 2004; Jones *et al.*, 2004; Salmela, 1995).

Trudel and Gilbert (2006) suggested that the abovementioned interaction and learning-by-doing are sources of learning located within Sfard’s (1998) work addressing the participation metaphor. Here, learning is grounded in Vygotskian and social constructivist theories, which suggest that individuals construct knowledge through social processes and collaborative activity (Vygotsky, 1978). Erickson *et al.* (2008) consider both learning through practice and interaction with others as derivatives of experiential learning; learning from one’s own experiences, sharing those experiences and subsequently learning from the experiences of others. It could be argued that the coaches in this study certainly gained some knowledge through such experiential learning. In referring further to Sfard’s work, evidence of the coaches’ desire to learn via the acquisition metaphor is also noteworthy. Here, Sfard (1998) suggested a passive-receptive view of learning, where it is mainly a process of acquiring chunks of information delivered. At times, the coaches favoured this straight-forward approach of knowledge transfer via theoretical printed handouts as opposed to the often lengthy and not always successful process of knowledge-elicitation through discussion. One such example was when Bill responded to a request to meet at a more appropriate time (he could not attend the second interview) with “can you just send

me the notes?” It may also be argued that the coaches acquired the notion of CoPs (they had never heard/or were unfamiliar with it before the study commenced) and thus, the reflective and empowering activities embedded within that process from me as the facilitator.

Paavola and colleagues have argued the case for a further metaphor of learning that focuses on how something new is developed during learning (Paavola & Hakkarainen, 2003; Paavola, Lipponen & Hakkarainen, 2002). Their ‘knowledge-creation metaphor of learning’ highlights the deliberate transformation of knowledge, and corresponding collective social practices. According to Paavola *et al.* (2002) learning is perceived to be analogous to an innovative process of inquiry where new ideas, tools, and practices are developed collaboratively, and the existing knowledge is either considerably augmented, or altered during the process. The focus is not on an individual’s mind (as it is in the acquisition metaphor), nor on social processes (like in the participation metaphor), but instead on the mediating artefacts, objects, and practices that are collaboratively developed during the process of learning. Knowledge is significant when it assists in the development of these mediating artefacts and practices (Paavola, Ilomäki, Lakkala & Hakkarainen, 2003). The point here is that in terms of the elite and developmental coaches’ preference and their perceived value in developing their knowledge within a shared community of learning, there was no ‘one size fits all’ solution. A blended approach was needed; drawing on a range of methods/metaphors highlighted in the literature (e.g., Paavola & Hakkarainen, 2003; Paavola *et al.*, 2003; Paavola *et al.*, 2002; Sfard, 1998; 2001) to meet the participants’ needs. In this respect, others have advocated that whilst learner preferences should be considered and incorporated, “there is also a need for those who are well informed (e.g., highly experienced researchers and education practitioners) to make



suggestions that may run counter to individual preferences but which nonetheless may have a significant impact on the abilities of a coach” (Mallett *et al.*, 2009b, p. 363). Here, my motives were not always akin with the coaches’ preferences. For example, whilst at times it was easier to take an acquisition approach (and some of the coaches would have preferred it), the participative approach had more potential to extort a rich variety of information.

#### 5.4 Comparing the Elite and Developmental Communities of Practice

Notwithstanding the potential value and contribution that CoPs can offer, there were unresolved issues, difficulties and differences between the elite and developmental groups in this study. Aside from the challenges described below which highlights the difficulties inherent with the different CoPs, there were also problematic constructive elements. My intention here is not to generalise, but to present a cautious standpoint alongside the existing literature that addresses CoPs and, in particular, to those who would attempt to organise learning around social co-participation. Whilst acknowledging that not every situation is unique, and thus, coaches will share an abundance of realities between their coaching environments, but also, that no two coaches will be exactly the same either, there is then potential for understanding individual contexts and their commonalities (Cushion *et al.*, 2006). As Cushion (2009) asserted, it is important that “research pays attention to the specific circumstances of context and practice rather than be tempted to adopt a more generalised approach” (p. 3). By bringing to light these endeavours, academics and coach educators attempting to cultivate and nurture coaches’ CoPs may gain insight to where additional support and guidance may be necessary. Additionally, an awareness of the situations, circumstances, and coaching milieus where a CoP may be appropriate or even inappropriate, and thus harvest only marginal developments in coaches’ knowledge, can be developed (Kerno, 2008).

The first and most obvious issue challenging the effectiveness of the CoPs in this study was the time available for participants to engage in the activities necessary for such structures to be operative (Wenger *et al.*, 2002). Here, I define time as the opportunity to engage in discourse which may need to be lengthy and sustainable. This engagement would ideally have been cultivated by a certain amount of ‘ring-fencing’ from the participants’ everyday coaching duties, which are subject to many and various external constraints and the often capricious issues associated with them (Cushion *et al.*, 2006). When referring to time, I also consider the importance of being able to organise participants in the activities advocated for the effectiveness of a CoP. For example, the facilitator should help group members learn together by creating structure, data, time, and tools while instilling a desire to learn and promoting learning as a life-long process (Culver *et al.*, 2009). Indeed, time is required for regular meetings and thus, the ongoing engagement with others (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The coaches in this study were not exempt from the strains and time ‘shackles’ typical of the fast paced, unpredictable, and highly demanding nature of top-level coaching. Indeed, the indication of ‘don’t call us, we’ll call you’ suggested in Culver and Trudel’s (2006) work was a sentiment echoed in this study. Here, the “social and emotional, as well as the cognitive and content-based, demands of coaching” (Jones & Turner, 2006, p. 191) ‘took their toll’, particularly on the elite coaches. Just one example of this would be Bob’s response to me asking how he was: “Tired Kerry, very tired; spread thin. This one won’t last long will it?”

Coaches today must contend with increasing complexity resulting from the knowledges, competencies and skills required (Gilbert & Trudel, 2001) and the expansive technological know-how of sport (Jones & Turner, 2006). According to Martens (2006), they must also possess the pedagogical skills of a teacher, the counseling wisdom of a psychologist, the

training expertise of a physiologist and the administrative leadership of a business executive (Jones & Turner, 2006). Scholars have also suggested that the coach is responsible for the welfare of athletes, the overall management of the coaching process and the quality and progression of each athlete's individual sporting experience, in addition to the success or failure of team performance (Borrie, 1998; Jones & Turner, 2006; Lyle, 2002). Furthermore, the abundance of stakeholders in elite sport means that coaches are increasingly expected to use improved performance as a means of satisfying financial demands (Kerno, 2008). The convergence of these forces demands 'faster' and more coaching activity and time from its workers. As this acceleration continues, and as clubs demand ever-increasing efficiency from their coaches, it becomes difficult to demonstrate the value of CoPs to participants and interested parties. This 'time crunch' had an obvious effect on both CoPs in this study, but was more evident with the elite group. Bob and Matt certainly felt such pressures and these impacted upon their commitment and willingness to participate fully within the CoP. Indeed, the pressures on those working at the highest levels of football are omnipotent and impacted upon the participants' availability and the sincerity of their participation. Community participation consumes time, thus community members experience both internal and external pressures (Wenger *et al.*, 2002). These 'degenerative structures' certainly appeared to impact on the ability to engender CoPs within the study (Venters, 2007).

Although more obvious in the case of the elite coaches, participation within the CoP was also an issue for the developmental coaches. Whilst the term 'participation' is used synonymously within work on situated learning and CoPs implying a shared meaning, the ambiguity surrounding the actual functionality of the term throws into question what constitutes a healthy CoP? At the heart of this 'fogginess' is the dilemma of being able to

tell when individuals are, or are not, participating in a CoP. Wenger distinctly differentiates between participation and what he described as “mere engagement in practice” (Wenger, 1998, p. 57). “A key assumption here seems to be that participation involves 'hearts and minds': a sense of belonging (or a desire to belong), mutual responsibilities and an understanding of the *meaning* of behaviours and relationships” (Handley, Clark, Fincham & Sturdy, 2007, p. 177). In this regard, it may be argued that occasionally, the elite coaches in this study were ‘going through the motions’, i.e., appearing to fully participate, but often lacking sincerity, in the sense of experiencing a feeling of belonging and, perhaps, of shared commitment and responsibility (Handley, Sturdy, Fincham & Clarke, 2006). At times, I suspected cases of ‘nodding dog syndrome’, particularly with Bob and Matt; they seemed to be merely ‘jumping through the hoop’ for the sake of the study. Here, rather than their learning and development, they voiced a commitment to the study and its processes, indicating a lack of CoP engagement. Here, the elite coaches emphasised their dedication to the project, claiming that despite receiving a number of research proposals each year, they “only accepted very few of these requests”. According to them, this was one that interested them and having agreed to take part were adamant in ‘seeing it out’. However, the same commitment wasn’t clear with regards to their learning. For them, mere attendance was the important thing; it was a case of just turning up because they had to, not because they saw any real benefit in doing so. However, “the simple act of getting people together does not constitute a COP” (Culver & Trudel, 2009b, p. 31).

Scholars have argued that learning ought not to be thought of as an automatic result of gaining experience and the simple exchange of opinions, but instead that improvement requires a certain type of experience and participation, referred to as ‘deliberate practice’ (Ericsson, Krampe & Tesch-Römer, 1993). In this sense, practice is planned, highly

structured, and of most relevance here, performed with an expressed desire for improvement (Ericsson, 1996). If all that matters is appearance, then the distinction between engagement and participation is trivial. However, in partly answering my question from the earlier section about the existence of the CoPs, whilst the elite group looked, sounded and acted like a CoP, they fell short of being effective. Here, the distinction between engagement and participation is significant. This is because within the CoP literature, participation entails a sense and desire for belonging, mutual understanding and a progression along a trajectory towards complete participation which circuitously defines the community and thus is the target of ‘belonging’ (Handley *et al.*, 2006).

The developmental coaches’ participation was much more earnest than the elite coaches’; they embraced the topics, discussions and process of being involved in a CoP. In echoing the findings of Jones and Turner (2006), whilst the elite coaches seemed to find the approach frustrating and were less inclined to “take responsibility for their own investigative learning” (p. 187), the developmental coaches seemed to enjoy the freedom of the practice element of the community. Additionally, there seemed to be varying transitions from the periphery to more central areas of the community with each member of the developmental group. Whilst the elite coaches didn’t reject what I was trying to do or the theories and notions introduced, nor was there any blatant disagreement, there just wasn’t the same expansion of practice and identity as there was within the development coaches’ CoP (Handley *et al.*, 2006). This may have been due to differing circumstances, biographies and needs, or that the long-practiced reproductive pedagogies that they were accustomed to in relation to their professional development had roots that were just too deep (Jones & Turner, 2006).

### 5.5 Examining the Role of the Facilitator

The notion of hegemonic masculinity within football (Parker, 1996) was echoed in my feelings, at times, of ineptness and being ‘out of place’ during the fieldwork. In the results section, I use expressions such as ‘impression management’ (Goffman, 1959) ‘winning over’ and ‘fit the mould’ among others. Here, not only were my initial personal anxieties as a young academic and ‘tenderfoot’ in the area magnified by being a contextual outsider, but also by the reproduction of gender. There were also a few occasions where I felt I was being patronised or told the ‘blindingly obvious’. These were not for clarification purposes, but more so that it was assumed I was oblivious to such activities and ways of thinking, hence, supporting the suggestion that gender is reproduced in differential forms (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992).

Like other female fieldworkers in a male-dominated setting, the need for continued presence in that setting may be dependant upon ‘trying moments’; ignoring derogatory remarks or allowing gender to provide a source of humor for the group (Gurney, 1985; Purdy *et al.*, 2008). Here I was, the only female without an apron on; I was certain to experience the presence of ‘gender’. Whilst I was never intentionally belittled, nor blatantly ousted, my gender was an ever present issue. Perhaps however, to a certain extent, this feeling may have been a result of my own insecurities about others’ perceptions of me.

Gurney (1985) argued that an important, but frequently overlooked, issue in qualitative research is how the status characteristics of the researcher affect the process of gaining access to, establishing, and maintaining rapport with, respondents or informants in a setting. Some female researchers may never succeed in achieving more than superficial

acceptance from their respondents. Whilst gender played an initial role in how I was treated and/or felt, like other female academics, I soon became, in effect, ‘one of the lads’ (Purdy *et al.*, 2008). My experience of gender in football, acceptance of the ‘norm’ and the embodied ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1977) that influenced the ‘maleness’ of the environment would perhaps infuriate the feminist. However, it equipped me with a broad-mindedness to endure rather than attempt (and waste valuable field time in doing so) to dismantle it. For example, comments such as “not bad for a lass!” (having spent a very short period of time as a ‘feeder’) could be deemed chauvinistic, but were taken light heartedly and seen as an opportunity to prove myself as a football ‘person’ and not just an academic. When invited to do so, I would demonstrate the ability to dissect a (football) game, giving my views on the performance. Doing so gave me some social capital. Although, my contextual knowledge of the language and routines of similar settings, as well as my willingness to tolerate and at times engage with it (gender), didn’t give me privileged and instant access, it certainly eased my immersion into the environment, and, overrode any initial problems associated with trust (Purdy *et al.*, 2008). This also helped in my struggles to achieve more than a superficial acceptance from the coaches (Gurney, 1985). On reflection, perhaps my own ‘thick skin’, biography, earlier experiences and somewhat ‘survival’ in football and other male-dominated arenas helped with these processes; I was simply ‘used to it’. I highlight these issues with the intention of contributing to the existing body of work in the area, outlining the potential issues that female academics may face. In saying that, whilst it may have inhibited initial attempts at access and was present throughout the study (particularly in the earlier stages), on a personal level, gender wasn’t really an issue for me. I was aware of it; could see it in force, but it certainly did not trouble me as a facilitator. As a facilitator, it was necessary for my involvement to become emancipatory (i.e., I would try to help the coaches make their beliefs, experiences and struggles explicit). I attempted to

facilitate and mentor reflective discussion with the coaches, as Schön suggested:

A facilitator is both a part of the learning environment and will influence other aspects of the learning environment. They will understand the nature of reflection, how it relates to the quality of learning (deep and surface learning) and be clear about what they are trying to achieve in the learners...how they can use reflective techniques to upgrade their previous, less organised but valid levels of knowledge and understanding. (Schön, 1987, p. 167)

At times, I would draw on my own experiences as examples, not only in terms of reflection, but also as a player, coach and academic. Pertaining to the suggestions of Douglas and Carless (2008), such experiences, provided as short stories, “can provide a catalyst for coaches to explore their own subjective, moral and ethical beliefs in a supportive environment which more closely aligns with the dynamic nature of their work” (p. 46). This assisted me in becoming a collaborative member of the group, whilst also, where discussions could be short-lived (as a consequence of a reduction in participants), would encourage further dialogue. Douglas and Carless (2008) also argued that;

From a pedagogical perspective, providing storied accounts which resist simplistic solutions to complex and messy realities appears to be a successful way to enhance reflection and critical thinking. Allowing coaches to share their responses through group discussion further enhances learning opportunities through mutual consideration of alternative perspectives. (pp. 44-45)

Some scholars however, have warned against such participation. For example Kaufman and colleagues argued that “the facilitator should remain unbiased to any particular point of view whilst also creating a supportive environment where participants feel comfortable in sharing their ideas. The facilitator should listen carefully and talk only when it is required...[and] be careful not to interject oneself or one’s biases into the discussions” (Kaufman, Guerra & Platt, 2006 p. 118). Others meanwhile have contended that “any seeming neutrality often belies an involvement of facilitator as ‘person’ who contributes to defining the relevance of issues acceding to so-called group endorsements – this is dangerous to the extent that it remains unacknowledged” (Gregory & Romm, 1996 p. 325).



In reference to my own constructivist already highlighted viewpoint, Gregory and Romm's suggestions sit more comfortably than those of Kaufman and colleagues. Like the former, I celebrate subjectivity and believe that the facilitator as a 'person', their values and biographies, cannot be escaped. The researcher and those being researched are entwined and my findings are the result of the interaction (Long, 2007).

In intending to promote further discussion when conversations went 'flat', the strategies I used to coax, unearth and extract information from the coaches were not only theoretically driven, but also influenced in part by my own views and experiences. In echoing the work of Culver and Trudel (2006), a crucial role for me as "facilitator was to monitor the rhythm and organise activities that afforded members of the CoP the opportunity to interact in such a way that the community developed the quality of aliveness." (p. 105). Similarly, it was hoped that this would assist in the communities' momentum (Culver *et al.*, 2009). However, as Culver and Trudel suggested, every community evolves in different ways and whilst in one instance I would need to involve myself more as a facilitator, in another the community's development constrained me to be "less directive, involving mostly managing who spoke when and making links" (p. 105). Nevertheless, in my attempts to make the 'invisible visible' (Gibson, 2006) and where the embeddedness of knowledge was viewed as problematic, in keeping with Checkland and Ackoff's proposals, I would add suggestions in the process of facilitating debate amongst participants (Ackoff, 1981; Checkland, 1981). Additionally, with regards to theoretical reflections on relevant issues and ways of addressing them, these were aided by ideas generated by myself as the facilitator (Evans, Reynolds & Cockman, 1992). Others have argued that as a partner in the design effort, the facilitator may also make suggestions regarding the "design of knowledge systems" (Pasmore, 1994, p. 79-80). Here, he or she will follow planning,

diagnostic and experimentation processes, analogous with action research. Furthermore, the level of facilitator involvement should not always be viewed as impartial as, by “withholding their personal perspectives on content or process, facilitators may prevent important information from reaching the group’s awareness” (Berry, 1993, p. 31).

To allow for and promote this collaborative form of learning, the role of the facilitator required the virtue of patience (Raelin, 2006). Indeed, there were many instances throughout the study where I needed to appreciate the tensions between the demands of the CoP and the needs of the individuals within them. Here, attempts at maintaining continuity were complex and contested. The strife between the participatory requirements of the individual coaches and their clubs’ goals of sustaining current norms and practices was evident (Billett, 2002; Billett & Boud 2001). This was magnified by an array of cultural conditions and situational factors such as local needs, the internal interests of individuals involved, and the locally-negotiated goals for the activities including bases for judgments about performance (Billett, 2002; Engestrom & Middleton 1996; Suchman 1996). For example, the developmental coaches’ lack of enthusiasm to attempt to interject a panoptic approach to their practice in a highly competitive and stressful time in the playing season (i.e., a forthcoming cup final for Steve and Dan). Changes in the organisation also influenced the relative importance of the elite coaches’ community and placed new demands on it (Wenger *et al.*, 2002). In this respect and drawing on the offerings of Brockbank and McGill, “an understanding of the world” (1998, p. 195) from the coaches’ point of view was required. Not only in terms of their feelings, experience and behaviours, but also an appreciation for, and of, the demands and working conditions (such as those mentioned in the earlier discussion) placed on them (Potrac & Jones, 2009b). Indeed, the physical learning environments and research settings (i.e., location of interviews) were not

always ideal, but do bring to light the nature of the messy reality of the research, the demands and issues with which those being researched must contend (Swanson & Holton, 1997), and what the facilitator must grapple with.

## **CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION**

### 6.1 Introduction

Undertaking an action research study as a means through which coaches' experiential learning can be maximised (an area in which there has previously been little research done), has been a challenging experience. This should not be unexpected given the often "volatile, guarded, and fundamentally competitive nature of coaching" (Mallet *et al.*, 2009a, p. 329). This chapter is my opportunity to summarise the findings that emerged from my research and to draw conclusions from them. In terms of structure, after initially re-addressing the aims and objectives of the study introduced in Chapter One, a précis of the underlying findings of the study will follow, before outlining some limitations, potential directions for future research and finally, implications for pending practice within coach education.

At the start of Chapter One, I reflected on the present state of coaching research. I highlighted how a significant rise in work done had helped legitimise coaching as a 'standalone' discipline worthy of its own analysis, free from the 'shackles' of sports psychology and other positivist disciplines. I argued that whilst there had been an investigative upsurge, and that this had gone some way to better our understanding of coaching, it was not having the desired impact on coaching practice due to the predominant rationalistic nature of the work. It might be fair to argue that coaching had been done an injustice; it had been oversimplified, with many of its realities overlooked. Subsequently, coach education courses and professional development programmes which this work informed have been significantly underrated in comparison to the learning that coaches experience in their everyday working environments (Fleurance & Cotteaux, 1999; Jones *et al.*, 2004; Saury & Durand, 1998; Werthner & Trudel, 2006). I further emphasised how

more recent work by a growing number of scholars had attempted to tackle the abovementioned complexities engaging with the dynamic intricate nature of coaching and drawing attention to the need for research to focus on the social world of individual coaches (Jones, 2000; Jones, Armour & Hoff, 2000; Potrac & Jones, 1999). Whilst this work has developed a greater understanding of how coaches manage themselves and their respective environments, it nevertheless has had a limited effect on practice (Nash, 2008). I supported the suggestions that coaches' knowledge was established through implicit experiential learning, more so than explicit coach education courses (Cushion *et al.*, 2003) and that this should not be considered 'out of the ordinary' or problematic. Indeed, an array of evidence has confirmed the suggestion that we learn best from experience and subsequent reflection upon it (Gilbert & Trudel, 2001; Gilbert & Trudel, 2006; Irwin *et al.*, 2004; Nash 2008). I proposed that a failing in coach education had been not to take greater account of this learning force, instead, trying to impose a set of coaching ideals upon coaches whose circumstances and challenges are often inimitable.

## 6.2 Recapping the Aims and Objectives of the Study

This thesis set out to address how, through an action research based study, coaches' experiential learning could be maximised. The intentions were to develop a model of professional development to assist coaches to better deal with the problematic and complex nature of their work. The research process used five main goals to inform the enquiry:

- To explore the value to coaches of developing their knowledge within a shared 'community of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991).
- To examine if coaches' learning is developed through socially located, self-reflective practice; and if so, how?

- To compare the effectiveness of a ‘community of learning’ among coaches of developmental and elite athletes.
- To examine the role of an external facilitator in this process.
- To construct a process by which implicit coaching knowledge can be formally developed.

### 6.3 A Summary of the Main Research Findings

The coaches in this study appeared to demonstrate a number of similar behaviors documented in previous work on coaches’ learning. At the same time, however, the study also unearthed findings that have been ‘skimmed over’ or received limited attention in the aforementioned previous research.

The results suggest that the coaches involved in the study from start to finish had idiosyncratic responses and levels of development through participating in it. Each coach’s progression was, to a degree, distinctively different from the next; a finding that scholars who have studied coaches in other sporting contexts should not be surprised by (e.g., Culver & Trudel, 2006; Culver *et al.*, 2009; Jones *et al.*, in press). Much ambiguity exists with regards to whether two distinct CoPs were realised within the project. At ‘face value’ there appeared to be both a developmental and elite CoP, albeit these weren’t always very ‘healthy’. However, delving below the surface would suggest that the elite CoP in particular, failed as a social learning enterprise.

The openness and honesty that was encouraged throughout the study resulted in the reflective activities that the coaches took part in within the CoPs, being for most, a new and edifying learning experience. However, the depth and extent to which the coaches reflected

could be questioned as not being sufficiently critical to learn from. Nevertheless, all of the coaches acknowledged that some new knowledge was personally developed through their reflections on applying new theory to their practice. Additionally, the developmental group seemed to engage with the notion of action research as a learning process much more so than the elite coaches. Still, at times, both groups found it difficult to conceptualise some of the theory and new materials being afforded to them, and to express their thoughts and opinions about such theory.

The developmental coaches placed great worth on the opportunity to co-participate with others in the afforded social learning environment. They were captivated by the opportunity to listen to, and share experience and ideas, which consequently had a positive impact on their ‘belonging’ (Wenger *et al.*, 2002). However, with the elite coaches, there was often a sense of aversion in relation to their perceived value of the interactive process of engagement within a CoP. In their case, there was little evidence of any ‘belonging’ throughout the study.

The developmental coaches in this study also suggested that the opportunity to apply theory to practice, and experimenting with new and old information was, on the whole, a valuable process. This was not for reasons of change, but more so that it enabled them to develop new learning ‘tools’ and ‘artifacts’. In terms of coaches’ partiality and their perceived value of developing their knowledge within a shared community of learning, there was no common solution to meeting each coach’s preference. Here, a blended approach was needed and a recognition for diverse preferences of learning (Gulati, 2004), drawing on a range of methods or metaphors highlighted in the literature to meet the

participants' needs (e.g., Paavola & Hakkarainen, 2003; Paavola *et al.*, 2002; Paavola *et al.*, 2003; Sfard, 1998; 2001;).

The confluence of the archetypal roles and responsibilities of the coaches and the demand to use improved performance as a way of satisfying financial requirements and stakeholders, necessitates 'faster' and more output from coaches (Kerno, 2008). This acceleration, and clubs' demands for ever-increasing efficiency from their coaches, makes it difficult to demonstrate the value to participants and interested parties of CoPs, given the conditions necessary for them to be effective. This 'time crunch' confronting coaches was one that had an obvious effect on both CoPs, but was more evident with the elite group. They certainly felt such pressures and had a distinct bearing upon their commitment and willingness to participate fully within the CoP. Indeed, the pressures on those working at the highest levels of football are relentless and impacted upon the participants' availability and the sincerity of their participation, and thus the ability to engender CoPs within the study.

Although more obvious in the case of the elite coaches, participation within the CoP was also an issue for the developmental coaches. In the discussion, I use Wenger's distinction which differentiates between participation and engagement (Wenger, 1998) to highlight how the elite coaches (in particular) were 'going through the motions', i.e., appearing to fully participate, but often lacking sincerity, in the sense of experiencing a feeling of belonging and, perhaps, of joint commitment and responsibility (Handley *et al.*, 2006). Whilst the elite coaches emphasised their dedication to the project, the same commitment wasn't clear with regards to their learning. For them, mere attendance was the important thing. In echoing the suggestions of Culver and Trudel (2009), this simple act of



assembling people together does not represent a fully functioning COP.

The developmental coaches' participation was much more earnest; they embraced the topics, discussions and process of being involved in a CoP and seemed to enjoy the freedom of the practice element of the community. Additionally, there seemed to be varying transitions from the periphery to more central areas of the community with each member of the developmental group. In contrast, this was much less the case with the elite group. I argued that notwithstanding the differing circumstances, biographies and needs of individuals, the long-practiced reproductive pedagogies that they were accustomed to, in relation to their professional development, may have also have been too 'ingrained' in the coaches (Jones & Turner, 2006).

My findings surrounding gender were not revolutionary, nor surprising. Like other female fieldworkers attempting to enter a male-dominated setting my gender was an ever present issue. However, I have suggested that some of the insecurities I initially felt may have been more to do with how I thought others in the field would perceive me, than any obvious issues related to bigotry about my femininity. My familiarity with the environments and their accompanying 'maleness' made my immersion into them much easier and superseded problems associated with gender, trust and access later in the study (Purdy *et al.*, 2008). This also helped in my struggles to achieve more than a superficial acceptance from the coaches (Gurney, 1985). Through drawing on a range of experiences and involving myself in discussions and the overall study, I became a collaborative member of the groups. Where scholars have warned against such participation, suggesting that the facilitator should not interject themselves or their biases into the discussions (Kaufman *et al.*, 2006) as a constructivist I have argued against this, suggesting that the facilitator as a 'person', their values and biographies, cannot be avoided. The researcher and those being researched

are interlinked and my findings are strengthened as a result of their interaction (Long, 2007). In terms of my own input, I have criticised the case for impartiality and drawn on others who have stated that neutrality may limit the information available to the group (Berry, 1993).

The strife between the participatory requirements of the individual coaches and their clubs' goals of sustaining current norms and practices was evident (Billett & Boud, 2001). This was magnified by an array of cultural conditions and situational factors (see Engestrom & Middleton 1996, Suchman 1996). In relation to the elite group, changes in the organisation influenced the relative importance of the community and placed new demands on it and its members (Wenger *et al.*, 2002). Here, both a comprehension of their world and appreciation for, and of these pressures, from the coaches' point of view was required (Brockbank & McGill, 1998).

#### 6.4 Implications (and Limitations) of the Study

As with previous pedagogical experimentation (Jones *et al.*, in press; Jones & Turner, 2006), I recognise the limits of what can be achieved by, and claimed for, in a relatively small scale study such as this. Here, care should be taken when generalising findings based on small groups of participant coaches. It should also be acknowledged that the results are illustrative of their experiences only. As Purdy *et al.* (2008) suggested, this type of research is a complementary way of understanding the coaching environment but will always be framed from the researcher's perspective. In this respect, I also accept and celebrate the subjectivity of my work and assert the picture that I have painted should be viewed as "a text, to be read, understood, and interpreted on its own merits and in its own way" (Atkinson, 2002, p. 131). Here, my attempts to comprehensively but precisely tell my

research story inevitably means that I have only presented a fraction of the data gathered. In referring to my own epistemology and ontology, I have presented what I deemed to be important. Others may argue that alternative segments of the data deserve greater emphasis.

In terms of the methods I employed to cultivate collaborative learning, it may be argued that limitations also relate to the pedagogical framework adopted. Indeed, the action research method and CoPs were also not without their shortcomings. Here, Rynne made a valid point:

The identified weaknesses associated with CoPs tend to appear only when researchers (or those interpreting the research of others) attempt to account for components of learning that are simply not fore-grounded in the concept. That is not to say that the CoP framework denies the existence of some of these components, it simply does not emphasise or deal with them. (2008, p. 13)

Indeed, ‘power’ has not been dealt with sufficiently in the CoP literature (e.g., Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). In their earlier work, Lave and Wenger only vaguely make reference to it suggesting, “unequal relations of power must be included more systematically in our analysis” (1991, pp. 42). Wenger (1998) later suggested that “learning is a matter of social energy and power” (pp. 226-7), but whilst explicit reference to power is made through the issue of identity here (i.e., how people become members and then belong to communities), it is not dealt with in relation to practice (Fox, 2000). The broader issues of power and conflict are safely tucked away (ibid, 2000). Consequently, an increasing number of scholars have argued that CoPs are limited in that they somewhat ignore the affect of power, control and wider social conditions (Alavi, Kayworth & Leidner 2006; Blackler & McDonald, 2000; Roberts, 2006; Swan, Scarbrough & Robertson, 2002; Thompson, 2005; Wenger *et al.*, 2002). That said, those like myself, attempting to facilitate and understand coaches’ learning using such pedagogical methods can still acknowledge

and examine power whilst doing so (using alternative sociological notions), but, the CoP framework is not sufficient in itself to analyse and deal with it.

In the results section I have highlighted the problems associated with gaining access and entry into the coaching environments. The implications of such ambitions meant that my attempts to recruit willing and suitable coaches and persuade them to make the emotional investments necessary for participation in a longitudinal CoP proved arduous. Many doors were shut firmly in my face. However, a key informant's 'powers of persuasion' consequently led to the successful use of a 'snow balling' method of purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) and resulted in eventual entry. Subsequently, having gained access into the elite environment, my gender, status as an outsider and initial demeanour were also, at times, problematic and have been exemplified in my reflections. For example, in one of my reflections I explain how "I sensed that my female presence and lack of club kit encourages uncertainty. Some younger looking players peer through the foyer windows, as though wondering what my business is."

Further limitations relate to dismissals and withdrawals from the groups and consequently the difficulties of trying to maintain productive CoPs. Such withdrawals had a 'knock-on' effect in terms of an increase in the workload of the remaining coaches. This impeded on the processes and time available for participants to engage in the activities necessary for the CoPs to be operative (Wenger *et al.*, 2002) and challenging their effectiveness. This engagement would ideally have been nurtured by a certain amount of 'ring-fencing' from their everyday coaching duties. However, the coaches in this study were not exempt from the strains and time constraints typical of the expeditious, erratic, and highly taxing nature of top-level coaching. Here, Côté (2006) argues that three variables must be considered

before setting up any kind of coach education programme. First, as suggested earlier, the individuals' different backgrounds, experiences and knowledge. Second, coaches work in various types of contexts with varying amounts of access to resources, equipment and facilities; and finally, coaches work with athletes that vary in terms of age, developmental level and goals. These personal characteristics of the coach, of the athletes' and contextual factors may affect the learning environment and the type of learning that a particular coach necessitates and also prefers. However, others have argued that whilst learner preferences should be taken into account and incorporated, there is also a need for 'architects of learning' and those who are well informed to make suggestions and offer alternatives that may not be the individual's preference but, which nonetheless, may have a significant impact on the abilities of a coach (Mallett *et al.*, 2009b).

The small group of developmental coaches that participated in the study were by and large not altogether reflective of all coaches at this level. Here, attempts based on findings from studies such as this to impose orthodoxy on knowledge generation, could be problematic (Denison, 2010). Further exploration into coaches' preference for, and the effectiveness of different learning modes such as the acquisition, participation (Sfard, 1998) and the knowledge-creation metaphors (Paavola *et al.*, 2002) is required, before the conclusions from this study can be treated as anything but provisional pointers.

## 6.5 Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study contribute to the body of evidence-based studies that seek to examine and build pedagogies for coach education, and on which, a valid argument for the concept of CoPs as a conceptual framework to study and develop coaches' learning can be based. Whilst it is one among many conceptual frameworks that have the potential to study

coach education as it occurs through social participation (Culver & Trudel, 2008b), enough promise exists to merit further investigation into the outlined framework to develop coaches' knowledge exclusively as a vehicle for coach education. To understand whether this approach to learning, and method to construct knowledge, is effective more research needs to be undertaken examining a variety of different coaches. These need to be from a range of coaching contexts; with a homogenous and heterogeneous sports focus, in a combination of formal, non-formal and informal education settings. For example, would this approach work better perhaps if it was supported by NGBs in some way or another, but beyond the official curriculum adding to the coaches' professional credentials as a recognised professional development activity? Thus, future work could examine the value of official endorsements. Additionally, further questions emerging from this research are how do we measure coaches' learning when it is organised around social co-participation within a CoP? What means do we have to determine whether it is really effective or not? Finally, would others who are more respected in the organisations and able to inspire a new view of the coaching practice, but also familiar with the concept of CoP and how to nurture it, do better in assuming this facilitation role? (Culver & Trudel, 2008b).

Throughout this thesis I repeatedly refer to the emotional demands of being a facilitator, highlighting how at times, I felt frustrated, anxious, troubled and inadequate. Hiding, managing and suppressing these emotions in order to fulfil the hope of sustaining fully functioning CoPs was a significant part of this research process. Despite this, the role of the facilitator is one that has been largely underplayed in Lave and Wenger's earlier work and whilst it is 'touched on' in their later studies on CoPs, it has not been done in any real detail. Furthermore, whilst some scholars have addressed the role of the facilitator (e.g., Cassidy *et al.*, 2006; Raelin, 2006) and the emotional aspects of membership of

collaborative learning environments (e.g., Allan & Vince, 2006), little work has been done on the emotional issues specifically associated with the role of the facilitator. Understanding the role of the facilitator within a CoP, the associated struggles and responsibilities, is crucial to address some of the challenges that have been identified with respect to the effective functioning of CoPs (Tarmizi & de Vreede, 2005). Trying to avoid getting ‘tangled up’ in the emotion of the CoPs, the role of the facilitator and duties as a researcher was at times a real test and one worthy of acknowledgement and further exploration.

## 6.6 Final Reflections: My Journey

The years spent doing this PhD have been undoubtedly the hardest few of my entire life. I have done other large pieces of work before and each was hard graft but nothing in comparison to this thesis. At times, I would have done anything to avoid looking at my PhD again; tidying, sorting, rearranging (I started to question my sanity when I would get excited about cleaning, but at least it gave me a short, unperturbed break from my work!) not to mention my other roles and responsibilities at UWIC. I was trying to get my ‘foot in the door’ of academia and coaching so would say yes to anything; any opportunity to develop my CV and to add value to myself as an employee seeking a full-time job. Only in recent years have I learnt to say no. Hence, much of this thesis work was done in the early hours of the morning as my supervisor will vouch having read many a late night draft chapter, inclusive of some VERY long sentences, a serious lack of punctuation and some extremely iffy and amphibolous statements. On occasions, I’ve wanted to jump across the table and hit my supervisor around the head with my work when he dared to utter the words: “Just a few more late nights Kerry!”, but, at the same time I am grateful for his perseverance. Indeed, this work, unlike others, has appeared to be endless.

An array of influences have had bearing on the development of this thesis, as they would into the development of any ‘brain child’. What has materialised at the end of the process is significantly different to what I imagined at the start. When I started this project I was in a transitional period as a coach. Having completed the UEFA B licence I was forced to either revalidate this qualification and repeat elements of the course, or move on to the UEFA A License. Naturally, the most sensible option for me was to do the latter. Given the opportunity I would have remained at that level (UEFA B License) and honed my skills within that phase of the coach development pyramid. I had no real need, given the players’ abilities that I coached to move onto the next level (the practices and mode of coaching was too advanced for them) and at the time I wasn’t ready for it myself. Having been through the coach education system I could think of nothing worse than to have to sit through such a course once more. The thought of being an isolated female again among forty or so other male candidates, answering the same questions and seeing the same surprised faces wasn’t appealing. I was never treated unfairly but I couldn’t help but feel patronised and frustrated at some of the comments and views of others. I found these courses lacking lustre, de-contextualised and out-of-date. The often superfluous ‘death by PowerPoint’ approach exasperated my dislike. This and a general aversion for any didactic mode of teaching (I didn’t really enjoy those elements of my undergraduate and masters studies either), but also, knowing others’ shared similar points of view provided the initial impetus for this study. I wanted to see if others, like me, would thrive in less traditional, situated and co-participative learning environments that allow for self-directive learning.

I started this study about two months after submitting my masters’ dissertation. When I read that work now, it seems condescending, preachy and quite superficial, although to an extent I maintain the values and curiosity that inspired its production. That investigation



was more a typical observe-and-report; this time around I wanted to get stuck in; move closer to the ‘front line’, try something new. This required me to move away from the status quo of traditional research to what I believe to be a more honest, accurate portrayal and exploration. A realisation that I was not held to rules such as writing objectively, in the third person and using the passive voice (the principles of research methods that had been ingrained in me at undergraduate level) came about as a consequence of attending a qualitative research conference in the early stages of my PhD studies. Listening to some of the key speakers there talk about their work and a completely different approach to presenting data to that which I was accustomed with, awakened something within me. They argued the case for taking into account the non-quantifiable elements of experience, such as emotions, feelings, desires and so on. In a similar vein I wanted to celebrate the unique access I had to these coaches’ lived experiences and try to evoke these experiences with as much drama and detail as possible (Markula & Denison, 2005). In this respect, when I think back to where I was as a researcher before starting this project and where I am now, I believe my understanding of research methods has evolved considerably. I have undergone a massive transition, from a rudimentary understanding and acceptance of what was deemed ‘good’ research practice (that which I had read in conventional research guides or been taught in my earlier studies), to what I feel is now, a far more detailed and critical understanding of research methods and the research process. My research approach is now more eclectic. During my studies for this thesis I have developed my own research tool kit, sharpening my academic skills as needed for the completion of this work and also my teaching. Consequently, this has impacted on my supervision and delivery of the research process as the students I now teach, through me, have become increasingly critically aware. Thanks to the PhD experience, it is a consequence and function I continue to treat with considerable care and reflexivity.

As an ambitious young academic I had a puerile desire to make a real difference and contribute to the cause for a transformation of coach education. I was a little ‘wet behind the ears’ and irrefutably I believed in this approach. Two years down the line (into the data collection phase) my enthusiasm dwindled. The visions I had at the commencement of the thesis were quite naïvely impractical. It has been a somewhat arduous process accepting the reality of my hopes and the pragmatic fate of an ambitious and risky research question. This change has been helped by the careful assistance of my supervisors, Professor Robyn Jones and Doctor Kevin Morgan. I am hugely indebted with gratitude to both Robyn and Kevin for helping me to transcend from an idealistic to a realistic perception of what someone such as myself, working in environments such as those specified, can achieve as interpretive and transformative aims. Additionally, they have also supported me through other events of my life whilst completing this thesis.

Since 2005, when I began this thesis (I enrolled in November, 2005), the typical types of life events have had an effect on my ability to work on my thesis single-mindedly. From ‘break ups’ to new projects, I have found these periods extremely difficult and at times struggled to focus on my work. On occasions I’ve lost motivation and my PhD has suffered. For example, in December, 2007, a close family member had a serious accident and without going into detail (it’s funny how I’d now prefer to avoid this unlike in the rest of my ‘stories’), it resulted in me having to take a considerable amount of time-off from my work. Other events have also been detrimental to the time I had available to do this work. Frequently, I felt guilty about not meeting thesis deadlines and consequently this dominated my thoughts, but also, like other graduates, so did my financial situation and worries about finding a way to ‘make ends meet’. It wasn’t easy living off the small amount of money I received as a Graduate Research Teaching Assistant. This drove me to

do any overtime and extra teaching or coaching I could. More recently, births and family separations have thrown further ‘curve balls’ my way. Whilst I have also had my fair share of positive experiences such as sporting achievements, completing my PgC and being appointed as an assistant GB coach, these have also impinged upon the process of completing this study and sometimes caused distraction.

I share the above experiences not as a ‘woe is me’ justification for the time taken to complete my PhD, but that this end product is a result of my life experiences as well as my academic influences. Without the continued support and guidance of my supervisor, encouragement from my parents, friends and colleagues (all of which I have been dependant upon) throughout these often chaotic periods of my life, I would never have got to this stage. At times writing this thesis has been truly agonising. Like other doctoral students who go through this “brutal, mind blowing experience” (Brause, 2000, p .12) my own values, beliefs and influences have shaped and adjusted the lenses through which I view the world, coaching and research. They have also helped in scaffolding this end product. I now sit and stare at this almost completed version and wonder whether I really still believe in this collaborative approach to learning and whether the often feelings of overwhelming exhaustion and frustration have been really worth it. In answer to that question I would say ‘yes’. At the very least, I got immense satisfaction at times throughout the study in seeing my work develop, but also, the dividends and sense of purpose I received in some positive (albeit very minor) feedback from the small group of developmental coaches. Maybe it was just Bill being nice, but when he commented at the end of one of the meetings “I’ve enjoyed this session, I got a lot from it, it has been really interesting for me”, it gave me some much needed reassurance. I would say that of all the participants involved in the study, my knowledge of coaching has developed the most (but

you really can't tell). Having been involved as a facilitator I have been fortunate to collaborate, listen to and gain from other coaches' experiences. I think reading my thesis will confirm that this wasn't the case for all those involved, but it benefited me (more so than just in the academic sense), and in listening to Bill it worked for him; I think it was also effective for John, Dan and even Steve to varying degrees. Indeed, whilst at times Steve may have been accused of free-riding (as a non-contributing resource taking member) and it appeared that he had a tendency to 'lurk' or be silent in discussions (at times, this was also the case for Matt and Bob), which may be perceived as unwanted behaviour, there is limited evidence to support that 'lurkers' (like Steve) are not learning. Here, the work of Sfard (2001) and Paavola and colleagues (2002; 2003) is significant in deciding the outcome and fate of the study; a lack of communication does not necessarily mean that there was a lack of learning. It may be argued that for Steve, mediating artefacts, objects, and practices were still being collaboratively developed during the process (Paavola, *et al.*, 2003) despite a lack of involvement in discussions. Perhaps then, on reflection, in one way or another, my initial intentions weren't as ambitious and naïve as I have thought.

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### **An Empowerment Approach to Coaching (Adapted from Jones, 2001)**

Important tools in the learning process are to develop new ideas, knowledge and the ability to make decisions. This can mean the difference between success and failure.

#### **What is it?**

When coaches use an empowering style to coaching, players gain and take ownership of knowledge, development and decision making that will help them maximise their performance.

#### **How do we implement it?**

- Evaluate the athlete population (your players/team/squad)
- Identify goals, motives and expectations (indicates how athletes would react to a change of philosophy – one that requires a much higher degree of mental investment [thinking] from players)
- Create an environment focused on mutuality – individuals and teams can grow in the same direction with a shared vision of goals and means of achieving these
- Gradually divest prescriptive power as and when you think athletes are ready
- Reflect on the nature and extent of initial questions
- Athletes accept or reject – what now?

The coaches role changes from instructor to facilitator who provides players with the necessary tools (knowledge and ability to make decisions) to achieve desired aims.

Coaches' may be viewed as: "Agents of learning who help athletes understand their current limits; it is a role of nurturing involvement and autonomy in the learning athlete" (Usher, 1997, p.11).

#### **What does it require?**

- Patience to let activities run at the speed of the athletes
- Athletes must be open to change (accept ownership) – needs, desires and recognition of its (empowerment's) value
- Respect of the individuality to achieve shared ownership of common goals
- Appreciation of the environment and context
- Critical reflection

#### **What does it result in?**

Mature, independent creative thinking athletes. Players are no longer looking to the sideline for answers!

## Appendix 2. Motivational Climate Handout (Theory-injection)

### **Motivational Climate (Adapted from Morgan, 2007b)**

Motivational climate refers to a situationally induced psychological environment influenced by a teacher or coach.

#### **What is it?**

Research suggests that performers excel in either or both of the following environments:

- Performance / ego climate: focused on normative ability comparisons
- Mastery / task climate: focused on self-referenced effort and improvement

#### **How do we implement it?**

Mastery climate can be promoted by manipulating the task, authority, recognition, grouping, evaluation and time structures (TARGET) (Ames, 1992).

#### **What does it require?**

- *Task – Goals*

Players set their own self-referenced learning goals. Players self-assess the achievement of these goals throughout the session.

- *Task – Differentiation*

Design tasks for different levels of ability. Alternatively, observe the group and modify the tasks accordingly to challenge individuals and groups at their optimum level. Differentiate the tasks without drawing the attention of the whole group. Encourage individuals and groups to modify their own tasks in order to challenge themselves.

- *Multi-dimensional Tasks*

Set a variety of different tasks to take place simultaneously, thus reducing the public comparison between players. A variety of tasks in the session promotes interest and enjoyment and reduces boredom.

- *Authority*

Encourage players to make decisions and take on leadership roles.

- *Grouping*

Group players into mixed ability/cooperative groups. Friendship groups are often the most effective.

- *Recognition & Evaluation*

Recognise individual effort and improvement, in private if possible. Focus on self-referenced evaluation – get the players to reflect on their individual goals. Attempt to distribute your feedback equally amongst the players. Avoid ability comparisons.

- *Time*

Allow flexible time and encourage players to work at their own optimum rate. Maximise activity, participation & learning

#### **What does it result in?**

Intrinsically motivated and empowered performers.



### Appendix 3. Panopticism Handout (Theory-injection)

#### **Panopticism (Foucault, 1977, based on Jeremy Bentham's work)**

##### **What is it?**

The Panopticon is a type of prison building. The concept of the design is to allow an observer to observe all prisoners without the prisoners being able to tell if they are being observed or not, thus conveying a "sentiment of an invisible omniscience."

Foucault proposes that not only prisons but all hierarchical structures like the army, the school, the hospital and the factory have evolved through history to resemble the Panopticon. We could also say that the training ground at times also resembles it.

##### **Design/ architecture:**

Incorporates a tower central to a circular building that is divided into cells, each cell extending the entire thickness of the building to allow inner and outer windows. The occupants of the cells are thus backlit, isolated from one another by walls, and subject to scrutiny both collectively and individually by an observer in the tower who remains unseen.

##### **How do we implement it?**

- Unequal gaze
- Activities strategically designed so that players cannot be sure whether they are being observed or not.

##### **What does it require?**

Strategically set up activities or the coaching environment granting players the responsibility to carry out tasks and provide their own solutions to problems faced. The coach is present but has little input. and positions themselves so that he/she can see everything (like the watch tower). Although the players can see the coach, little input means that they don't really know what the coach is thinking or doing.

##### **What does it result in?**

The unequal gaze causes the internalisation of disciplinary individuality and the docile body required of its inmates (in this case players). This means players are less likely to break rules or laws and conform if they believe they are being watched, even if they are not.