1   Latent learning in the work place: The placement experiences of student-coaches

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24 **Abstract**

25 The aim of this study was to investigate the work-based internship experiences of eight

26 student-coaches. This was particularly in terms of what precisely such coaches learned

27 within the practical context, and how they engaged with unexpected situational events.

28 The methods employed within the project included focus group interviews and

29 participant observation. In particular, the student-coaches were both interviewed and

30 observed over the course of a nine-month sporting season, with each phase of the

31 research informing the next. The subsequent data were primarily subject to a thematic

32 analysis. The findings of the study were organized under four principal themes; (1) the

33 reality-shock felt by the student-coaches in terms of the gap between what they expected

34 and what they experienced; (2) the lack of respect demonstrated by the organizational

35 head coaches for the students; (3) the students' response in terms of developing their

36 micro-political literacy; and (4) the social price paid by the student-coaches in adopting

37 such action. The results point to the limitations of student learning within high-

38 performance sporting environments. In this respect, the student-coaches' experiences

39 were not what was expected or desired. Despite this, many valuable and relevant lessons

40 were learned. These related to developing students' micro-political literacy; necessary

41 knowledge for any neophyte coaches trying to establish bone-fide situational roles.

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43 **Key words:** Work-based learning; coaching; micro-politics; internships.

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Introduction

Over a decade ago, despite the mounting importance attached to formal coach education, the case was made that practical experience remained the primary source of knowledge for coaches' professional development (Cushion, Jones & Armour, 2003). The contention built on earlier work asserting the importance of experiential knowledge in coaches' learning (e.g., Cushion, 2001). A subsequent claim related to the need for coaches to serve an informal apprenticeship to develop a requisite familiarity with the nature of the work (Cushion, 2001). This belief in the 'necessity of practice' provided a compelling argument that more formal means of coach education, inclusive of didactic methods of delivery, have had little impact on coaching per se (Jones & Turner, 2006; Lemyre, Trudel & Durand-Bush, 2007; Mesquita, Isidro, & Rosado, 2010).

In response, many coach education programmes now contain varying practical components, including internships and work-based learning elements, to address this theory-practice gap (Mesquita, Ribeiro, Santos, & Morgan, 2014). Work based learning in this respect has variously been described as that learning which is "generated, controlled and used within a community of practice and brings new understandings to pedagogical principles" (Costly, 2007, p.2). The types of 'hands-on' involvement here are those considered both immediately relevant at a practical level, while also engendering the kind of high-level learning that supports coaches as self-directed practitioners (Lester & Costley, 2010). It is a pedagogy based on the assumption that *in-situ* experiences allow for the construction of situated knowledge which can only be acquired through familiarity with the working procedures of the discipline (Kirschner, Sweller & Clark, 2006). In this respect, work based learning is often positioned as being 'learner centred' and 'experience led' (Boud & Solomon, 2001). It also reflects a view of knowledge as socially grounded and transmittable, with learning considered as

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74   "existential, culturally embedded and activity orientated" (Wareing, 2014, p. 36).

75   Subsequently, many related explanatory 'models' of work based learning have emerged

76   including that of a 'community of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991), a 'work place

77   curriculum' (Billett, 2002), a 'model of working life' (Illeris, 2004) and the so-called

78   'comprehensive work-based model' (Raelin, 2008). Although apparently accepted as a

79   welcome development by coaches and related policy makers, very little is actually known

80   about the precise experiences of neophyte coaches during such internships. Indeed, there

81   appears to be much advocacy but little theory in relation to these developments. Such a

82   situation mirrors an on-going critique of work-based learning in general; that is, its lack

83   of disciplinary rigour and misalignment with the academic purpose (Lester & Costley,

84   2010; Wang, 2008). The reproach contains accusations of disempowerment (and, hence,

85   experience irrelevancy), by forcing learners into distinct employer-driven or instrumental

86   agendas (Zembylas, 2006). Additionally, it has been suggested that where agreements for

87   establishing work-based opportunities have not been fully committed to, the experience

88   for practitioners has been inhibiting rather than liberating (Reeve & Gallagher, 2005). It

89   is a critique that suggests "work based learning has sometimes been construed somewhat

90   naively as an intervention" to meet short term needs, without consideration to

91   organisational cultures and individual motivations (Lester & Costley, 2010: 570).

92   The political tensions inherent in such an appraisal would appear particularly

93   appropriate in relation to coaching contexts. Here, pressures and conflicts have

94   repeatedly been found in more critical work (e.g., Cushion & Jones, 2014), where

95   frictions and strains have been witnessed not only between managers and coaches and

96   coaches and athletes, but also between teams of coaches themselves (Potrac & Jones,

97   2009a). In doing so, coaching has been portrayed as a heavily negotiated and contested

98   activity; an issue explored in some depth by Purdy and colleagues (Purdy & Jones, 2011;

99   Purdy, Jones & Cassidy, 2009). Such work has highlighted the disputed nature of

100   coaching, inclusive of its various layers of power-infused interaction. In addition to

101   issues of compliance and resistance, Purdy's work, perhaps more than anything,

102   emphasised the dependant nature of coaching; that is, as opposed to individuals, the

103   'building blocks' of coaching are to be found in social relations, associations and

104   connections.

105   Building on such a theme, Potrac and colleagues applied a micro political

106   perspective to uncover the often dysfunctional experiences of neophyte coaches (Potrac

107   & Jones, 2009b; Thompson, Potrac, & Jones, 2013); a far cry from the habitually touted

108   necessity of supportive, functional contexts. Such work reflected an effort to better

109   understand how coaching cultures are practiced, experienced and understood by those

110   who comprise them. It also marked an attempt to grasp the nuanced uncertainties and

111   micro-political actualities of coaching, in addition to the enduring power of existing

112   'professional territories'; structures which neophyte coaches, be they permanent or

113   temporary, have to respect and traverse if their tenure is going to be fruitful and positive.

114   The aim of this study was to investigate the experiences of eight student-coaches

115   as they negotiated their course-related practical internships. The precise research

116   questions which guided the investigation related to exploring (1) how the coaches

117   navigated the political as well as the intended learning 'landscapes' of their placements to

118   access the expected or desired professional outcomes; (2) which strategies were used to

119   gain access to such outcomes, and what was the price paid for doing so. And; (3) how the

120   learning gleaned from the practical context related to the theoretical component of the

121   wider course.

122   The significance of the work lies in better understanding the learning trajectories

123   of neophyte coaches. This concept of a 'trajectory' is more complex than that of mere

124 process. This is because it takes account of multi-faceted flow of events and

125 conversations over time, and the meanings learners attach to them. In doing so, the

126 concept does not isolate the coach as such, but includes other relevant stakeholders

127 within a given culture, all of which make an impact on any given situation.

128 Consequently, the current trajectory is analysed in terms of what and when neophyte

129 coaches learn, and from whom they learn it, on practical, work-based programmes. In

130 this respect, the work expounds that of Stodter and Cushion (2014) who discovered

131 considerable conflicts among learning practices between different coaching contexts and

132 cultures. The value then relates to exploring the tension between agency and structure

133 within such experiences for young and developing coaches; between what they want to

134 do, and what they are allowed to do. In doing so, the pressures between the demands and

135 opportunities provided by the workplace and the need to develop capable practice is

136 further examined, as can accusations of contradiction between the two (Wang, 2008).

137   Similarly, the paper serves as a further examination of the complex relations

138 between knowledge and power within established work places. Hence, it builds on

139 existing micro-political work in coaching in terms of how new or temporary staff

140 negotiate their 'working spaces' (Potrac & Jones, 2009a, 2009b), as well as the price paid

141 for doing so. Consequently, the study holds the potential to develop greater 'reality

142 grounded' preparation programmes for coaches, where an attempt to grasp the nuanced

143 uncertainties, dilemmas and everyday actualities that neophyte coaches deal with, is

144 undertaken (Potrac & Jones, 2009a, 2009b). Finally, and relatedly, the value of the work

145 not only lies in furthering work-based learning as a field of study in its own right (Lester

146 & Costley, 2010), but also in more fully appreciating and exploring the socio-historical

147 context within which coaches work and develop, as a precursor to better understanding

148 the concept of non-linear practitioner learning. Doing so, further moves coaching away

149 from an unsophisticated demand for discrete based skills and competencies towards the

150 development of socially-aware practitioners, reflective of, and responsive to, their

151 politically charged environments.

152 **Method**

153 Qualitative methods were used to address the research question(s). This was because the

154 task involved exploring and deconstructing the experiences of neophyte coaches. In this

155 respect, the project marked an attempt to capture the often complex, ambiguous and

156 negotiated nature of coaches' working lives. The specific methods employed included

157 focus group interviews and participant observation. Focus groups are often considered a

158 means to explore a topic or phenomena with a group of experienced participants; that is,

159 to elicit information about why an issue is considered salient amongst a particular group,

160 as well as what is salient about it (Morgan, 1988; Ennis & Chen, 2012). In other words,

161 focus groups are said to offer opportunities to observe the 'coconstruction' of meaning in

162 action (Wilkinson, 1998), thus allowing the study of a particular topic from the

163 perspective of the participants themselves (Wibeck, Dahlgren & Öberg, 2007). What

164 further distinguishes focus groups from broader collective interviews is the "explicit use

165 of group interaction as research data" (Kitzinger, 2004, p.269; Morgan, 1988). Relatedly,

166 hearing others discuss issues holds the potential to further spark thoughts, allowing such

167 a group to become more than a 'sum of its parts' (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p.19). Hence,

168 focus groups can often facilitate access to areas of knowledge not previously considered

169 (Ennis & Chen, 2012). Within the present study, the focus group interviews were

170 'reflexive' and investigative in nature, with the student-coaches being invited to explore

171 their perceptions and thoughts related to their internships experiences. Hence, a list of

172 issues/topics for discussion was prepared in advance of each focus group, with any new

173 ones that emerged during the dialogues also being explored as appropriate. Such an

174   approach allowed freedom in terms of the sequencing of questions in addition to

175   investigating new ones, whilst still retaining some control in relation to the amount of

176   time given to each topic.

177   It has been argued that participant observation, as a form of subjective sociology,

178   allows the capture of rich and detailed information about a particular social context

179   (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2001). It does so through allowing immersion in the 'hows'

180   and 'whys' of situated action, in addition to allowing insight into aspects of social scenes

181   governed by rules and norms beyond the immediate comprehension of social actors.

182   Observations then, allow research to get close to social practices and everyday situations

183   (Öhman & Quennerstedt, 2012). In this respect, they can give access to what deMunck

184   and Sobo (1998, p.43) described the as "backstage culture" of any group. The use of such

185   a method in the current context related to interpreting and documenting what the student-

186   coaches did in their practice, not just what they thought they did, thus generating a

187   'rounder' picture of the internship experience. In this respect, they afforded an

188   opportunity to view practice in-context, thus allowing a sense of familiarity with the key

189   stakeholders' actions and behaviours to develop. Here, field notes, or in the words of Van

190   Maanen (1988, p.223), "gnomic, shorthand reconstructions of events, observations, and

191   conversations that took place in the field", were recorded as data.

192   To avoid (or address) commonly experienced pitfalls in relation to participant

193   observation (and qualitative methods in general), a considerable degree of researcher

194   reflexivity was embarked upon. Here, the lead researcher constantly acknowledged his

195   potential, and actual, influence on the context under study during the collection and

196   presentation stages of the research process (Gergen & Gergen, 2003). More specifically,

197   this involved an on-going scrutiny of "personal, possibly unconscious reactions" and

198   judgements in light of the data recorded (Finlay, 2002, p.224)

Participants and Setting

199 The participants were selected using both purposive and convenience sampling criteria.

200 Hence, they were chosen both because they were considered information-rich in terms of

201 having specialist knowledge of the research issue being investigated, as well as their

202 capacity and willingness to participate in the project. Although availability was

203 undoubtedly a consideration, of greater importance within this selection process was

204 securing individuals most likely to contribute appropriate data, both in terms of relevance

205 and depth. Guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity were explained. Therefore, all

206 the students included in the final sample signed informed consent forms agreeing to their

207 participation in the project. Preceding this, each was made aware of the scope of the

208 research and their role within it. Hence, all the names used within this paper are

209 pseudonyms. The students were also informed that they could leave the project at any

210 time without fear of penalty. The host university's ethical commission approved all

211 procedures. The ultimate sample included eight final year under-graduate student-

212 coaches.

213 The placement opportunities were principally established by the university,

214 although where a student already had firm and favourable contact with a club or

215 organization, he or she was allowed to argue the merits of carrying out the placement

216 there. The final decision in this regard, however, lay with the university. The module in

217 question formed an official aspect of the students' university curriculum, designed to

218 give them first-hand work-based experience of the theoretical concepts covered and

219 tentatively explored in previous academic units. Consequently, the placement clubs

220 and/organizations had established and agreed protocols with the university in terms of the

221 intended student experience, which were, in turn, directly aligned with the given

222 module's learning objectives. These related to "to designing, implementing and

224 evaluating personal coaching practice through active participation in all the tasks and

225 activities related to training and competition" (Mesquita, 2013, p. 4).

226   The internship experience itself covered a full nine-month sporting season, with

227 the student-coaches being officially 'supported' by two supervisors, one from the

228 university and the other from the hosting club. The precise responsibilities of all relevant

229 parties (i.e., the university supervisor[s], the placement supervisor[s] and the student[s])

230 were clearly defined at the start of the module. In particular, the role of the placement

231 supervisors or mentors was to support the students realise the learning objectives outlined

232 above. To assist this process, three meetings between all parties (for each student) were

233 scheduled during the course of the internship. A practical support structure in relation to

234 the placement experience was thus evidenced.

235 **Procedures**

236   Over the course of the data collection period, the student-coaches took part in

237 eight focus group discussions and were subject to 112 separate observations (fourteen for

238 each student-coach). Each observation took between 40-60 minutes, while each focus

239 group included either 3 or 4 members and lasted between 70-90 minutes. The process

240 began with general focus group discussions about the aim of the project and its structure.

241 This was followed by each coach being observed in their work place. This pattern of

242 group discussions followed by observations, followed by further group discussion, was

243 repeated throughout the period in question. Each interview and set of observational field

244 notes were both transcribed and analysed before the next phase of the research. Not only

245 did such a design ensure a sense of developing insight and progression, but also enabled

246 a valuable linking of the respective methods thus providing differential layers of

247 collaborative evidence for key claims and understandings.

248 **Data Analysis**

249   As stated, following each stage of the collection, the data were transcribed, coded and

250   analysed. They were then subject to a process of thematic analysis. Although some have

251   argued that confusion continues to exist about its precise nature, Braun and Clarke (2006)

252   claim that thematic analysis is generally concerned with identifying, analysing, and

253   reporting patterns (or themes) within a set or sets of data. It is an approach which

254   emphasizes participants' perceptions, feelings and experiences as the paramount object of

255   study. As opposed to being theory driven then, a thematic analysis is designed to

256   construct theories grounded in the data themselves. In differing from content analysis,

257   thematic analysis also focusses upon meaning (that which individuals and researchers

258   give to reported experiences) which, in turn, promotes a more discursive interpretation.

259   The subsequent themes identified are done so, not necessarily in terms of frequency of

260   occurrence, but whether they capture something important in relation to the overall

261   research question(s) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Acknowledging that an element of

262   deductive evaluation was unavoidable in relation to the framing influence of the study's

263   aims, the general analysis undertaken within the current study was largely inductive in

264   nature. Hence, the thematic analysis employed was flexible, it not being tied to any

265   predetermined theory or explanatory meaning framework. Subsequently, in line with the

266   work of Charmaz (2006), the data were examined line-by-line to identify thematic

267   categories within them. Naturally, this process of interpretation, in addition to working at

268   the level of individual categorisations and meaning, also involved transcending the data

269   to develop theoretical explanations of the phenomenon in question (Walcott, 1988). This

270   entailed tentatively reconstructing the student-coaches' stories during their time in the

271   field in relation to some theoretical concepts that might explain the key issues evident

272   (Charmaz, 2006).

273   **Results**

274 *An initial reality shock: 'This isn´t what I expected'*

275 The student-coaches were initially excited to embark on expected opportunities to apply

276 theoretical knowledge in practical environments. The following exchange summed up

277 their mood.

278   Ricardo: *It [the internship] will prove if my ideas are correct or if I should try*

279   *other ways….to adapt what we learned to work with a real team and players.*

280   Fernando: *We have the opportunity to really apply it, because we have to plan*

281   *and coach…we have the opportunity to be assistant coaches and see how we do.*

282   Ricardo: *It´s an experience that allows us to learn in the field, no doubt...*

283   Afonso: *…we´re going to face some problems I know, but it´s going to allow us to*

284   *grow as coaches.*

285 Although somewhat aware that they were entering a dynamic non-linear environment,

286 almost immediately they did so, the magnitude of problems faced became apparent to the

287 cohort. This principally related to not having clear (or any in some cases) ideas about

288 their precise roles in context;

289   Ricardo: *I'm a coach but I don't have a defined role...*

290   Rui: *I like it [my internship], but I only really do the same thing, and I can't do*

291   *what I want to do.*

292   Helder: *I'm in a club with fantastic organization, but I can´t implement any of my*

293   *plans and ideas. I just sort of help out.*

294   Afonso: *I only really watch what the other coaches do…It's all very controlled by*

295   *the head-coach. I'm not an active part of the workout at all.*

296   Rui; *Same for me… it's pretty unmotivating.*

297   This absence of clear working ´spaces´ and roles was naturally troubling and

298 frustrating for the students, as it conflicted with their expectations as stated in the

299 objectives of the internship. Their experiences here, however, were varied; a divergence

300 which somewhat correlated to the competitive level of the sporting organization or club

301 in question. Within less elite teams or clubs then, the student-coaches were given more

302 scope and responsibility to practice as the field note below indicates;

303 *The session is about to begin. The players are gathered in front of the coaches*

304 *[the head-coach and Fernando, the assistant]. The head-coach explains the*

305 *exercise in detail. After this, the six best players follow the head coach to work*

306 *with him, while the rest stay to work with Fernando (Field note).*

307 Where competitive success was increasingly prized, the student-coaches had less

308 autonomy to behave as they wished (Ricardo: *Honestly, I have no authority to try my*

309 *exercises with the team… It's all very controlled by the head-coach. I'm not really*

310 *involved in the practice at all).* The student-coaches´ feelings of disempowerment here

311 were not only confined to sport specific issues, as they were also excluded from decision

312 making meetings and processes. The following incident illustrates the experience of

313 many in this respect;

314 *Afonso collects the bibs and cones from the previous exercise. Meanwhile, the*

315 *head coach takes a few steps away from the group with his two ´formal´ assistants*

316 *Afonso is not invited to join them….he notices that he has not been called and just*

317 *looks at the ground while he puts the cones away. The coaches´ conversation ends*

318 *and the next exercise begins. Afonso still hovers on the side-lines (Field note).*

319 Although this lack of involvement was a general theme identified from the data, again,

320 the student-coaches´ experiences here were subject to variation. This was particularly

321 related to the (assumed) specialist skills that they possessed. For example, one student,

322 being a former high level football goalkeeper, was asked by his head coach to

323 specifically work with the goalkeepers at the club in question. Although beneficial from

324 one respect, from another, it was equally disempowering and frustrating, as it forced

325 engagement and action in an area he didn´t particularly wish to work. In this respect, the

326 students were used to 'fill' technical roles within existing coaching teams. For example,

327   Ricardo: …b*ecause I was goalkeeper the head-coach sent me to work with*

328   *goalkeepers. OK, but what I really wanted and needed was to work with the*

329   *outfield players. It´s pretty frustrating to always do what they (the head coaches)*

330   *want and not what I want…"*

331 *Reaffirming status in an insecure world*

332 The difficulties experienced by neophyte coaches were exacerbated by what they felt was

333 a general lack of respect for their positions and learnedness in context. Echoing

334 practitioner distrust of academic knowledge, the student-coaches were subject to several

335 instances of hierarchical power plays in this regard. For example,

336   Afonso: *He (the head coach) is not open to anything. The problem is that he*

337   *doesn't believe in what we are doing [at the university]. He even told me: "Oh*

338   *here you come with a 'Dutch exercise'", meaning it´s the only exercise taught at*

339   *the Faculty.*

340 Such dismissiveness even extended to openly undermining some of the student-coaches´

341 as they worked, with the students being subjected to given 'relations of ruling' (Smith,

342 1990). For example,

343   *Ricardo begins a warm-up planned with the head coach. However, shortly*

344   *afterwards the head coach interrupts it, even though it is not finished. Ricardo*

345   *looks confused, then angry. He just watches the rest of the session from the far*

346   *touch line, alone (Field note).*

347

348   *After a disagreement, Bruno sent a player to the dressing room. A few moments*

349   *later, Bruno and the head coach have a conversation in the middle of the field. All*

350   *the players and staff are watching from a distance. It's obvious the head coach is*

351   *angry; Bruno just 'takes it' in front of everyone (Field note).*

352 In many ways, this situation wasn´t helped by an (unofficial) discursive misalignment of

353 goals between the student-coaches and their host organisations. Here, where the students

354 often argued for greater player understanding and broader development, the coaches, and

355 in particular those operating at the elite level, were intent on achieving good competitive

356 results and on winning ´the next game´ (Afonso: *I have head coaches who don't think the*

357 *same way that I do. They only care about the better players because these are the players*

358 *that can win the games).*

359   Such a disconnect was not only evidenced in the relationship between the interns

360 and the head coaches, as it could also be seen within the differing organizations

361 themselves. For example, although the ´coaching guidelines´ of one club (as produced by

362 the general Sporting Director) spoke of a philosophy related to player development, the

363 manifestation of the discourse through the results-orientated actions of the head coach

364 was very different. In addition to their conflicting 'on the ground' experiences, this

365 divergence or rhetorical gap was a further surprise and source of confusion for the

366 student-coaches. In the words of one;

367   Ricardo: *In my club, the Coordinator or Sporting Director is a person who sets*

368   *the direction and the path for the coaches. He presents a game model to be used*

369   *as part of the players' long-term development. But when it comes to the head*

370   *coach, he does things totally different, absurd things. If I say anything, the head*

371   *coach just says 'okay' and does what he always does. He thinks I'm just*

372   *theoretical and scientific, with no knowledge of real things...it becomes a bit*

373   *complicated to work.*

374   When asked why the head coaches appeared to behave in such ways, the general

375   consensus from the students centred on ideas of vulnerability and insecurity (Ricardo:

376   *Now, if I ask head coach to do anything, he won't let me because he feels vulnerable).*

377   Such insecurity was considered as rooted in the need to maintain control over as much of

378   the coaching process, and hence (assumed) results, as possible. It also stemmed from the

379   students´ perception that they were viewed, despite their lowly status, as something of

380   threat to the head coaches. This was in terms of the 'new knowledge' they brought with

381   them to the coaching context (Ricardo: *the coach is not open to either new ideas or to my*

382   *ideas!*). By prohibiting or denying the space for such new knowledge to surface, the head

383   coaches' practices and standing remained beyond question. Rather ironically, however, a

384   couple of the students, while lamenting the restrictions placed upon them, somewhat

385   sympathised with the head coaches' actions here. In the words of Fernando;

386   *Well, if I was head-coach, I wouldn't allow another person to come in and*

387   *question me because I certainly don't want to lose credibility….especially if it's a*

388   *student-coach who is there to learn with him and not to teach him.*

389   *The students´ responses: Developing political literacy*

390   Acknowledging that what they encountered was not what they expected, the

391   students still appeared determined to struggle with their contexts. They came to realize

392   that although their intended learning outcomes were being frustrated, they were still

393   gaining valuable 'work based' knowledge. This was related to better appreciating the

394   social and political 'landscapes' of their placement organisations; i.e., how the sports

395   clubs and organizations were hierarchically and socially organized, in addition to what

396   forces prevailed within the delivered coaching practice. Through such insightful

397   observations and engagement, they came to recognise what their functional places could

398   be as temporary assistants within their contexts of work. In the words of one;

399   *Confronting him (the head coach) is not the best strategy; it doesn't bring a good*

400   *result. He's a coach who has fixed ideas. Maybe I have to be 'softer'; to say*

401   *something like: 'we can try to do this in a different way...what do you think'?*

402   (Ricardo).

403   This period was described in one focus group as the 'adaptation phase'. Within it,

404   discussion increasingly centred on suggested and tried strategies by the student-coaches

405   to negotiate improved working conditions. The debate across the focus groups during this

406   phase of the research was indicative of the student-coaches' growing awareness of what

407   they were able to do, and how they could go about it. The following excerpt was typical

408   of many;

409   Fernando: *The way that you're interacting is important. You need to say, 'Do you*

410   *think that we could try to do this in this way, in order to see how it runs?' You*

411   *cannot come and say: 'This is wrong'.*

412   Rui: *Yeah, you have to talk with your head coach. Maybe this week, you can ask*

413   *to do the warm-up, next week to lead another exercise. You need to gain your*

414   *space slowly…you need to think of ways for gaining it.*

415   Bruno: *I think (we have to gain respect) by competence. I conquer them by*

416   *competence.*

417 Consequently, the student-coaches began to be more careful and selective with their

418 comments, and general presence. In some ways, such political work could also be viewed

419 as resistance against a more general culture. This was particularly seen through acts of

420 seemingly covert coaching, with the student-coaches' seizing opportunities to give advice

421 to players during water breaks or even between the exercises set up by the head coaches.

Afonso was working alone with the 'reserve' athletes. The prescribed exercise was

not working as explained by the head coach. Once the head coach had walked

away with another group, Afonso halted the practice and called the boys in. After

a further short instruction, the practice began again, and ran much better. Afonso

was smiling (Field notes).

Although welcome, and sustaining for the student-coaches, such small victories were nevertheless carried out against and within a head-coach dominated culture. Deviance against the perceived norm, therefore, was kept to a realistic minimum (Ricardo: *They can't open (the play) too much, but opening it a little has improved things*); a recognition by the student-coaches of the power of context and the related restrictions on innovative practice.

A second strategy employed by the student coaches to gain the professional 'space' and role desired was to increasingly develop friendly relations with athletes. Although initially this seemed to work, it soon brought problems of its own;

Pedro*: They (the players) respect the head coach more than me, so I´ve become*

more friendly with them to give them confidence….but, they are abusing it now.

Now when I say something, it often leads straight to fun.

Ricardo: *I developed a closer relationship with them and this has cost me. They*

are harder to control now, and it's led to some confusion.

The student-coaches' immediate response to this situation was to swing the other way and present a very formal or professional 'front' when faced with indiscipline; an attempt to imitate the power-loaded actions of the head coaches (Ricardo: *They [the athletes] were joking with me again so I said, "no more…you lot can't distinguish when you need to work"….I was upset, but I just can't maintain the order*). Subsequently, the student-coaches reflected that they had somewhat misread the situation in that their initial

447 response of developing closer social ties with the athletes had not been an altogether

448 appropriate one. In doing so, they came to better delineate their developing roles within

449 their respective coaching contexts. They also recognized that their words and messages,

450 despite being similar and in some cases identical, could never carry the same weight and

451 gravitas as those uttered by the head coaches (Fernando: *I just don't have the same effect*

452 *as the head coach. When it's said by him, it just has a different value!).* They did not

453 have the same status or authority. Hence, they had to find other ways to exert influence

454 within and over the contextual group.

455   As a result, some of the student coaches adopted a more social role with athletes

456 as opposed to a sport specific one. In contrast to the 'friendly' strategy tried earlier, this

457 consisted of increasingly providing and demonstrating a degree of care and emotional

458 support where and when needed. In the words of two;

459   Bruno: *I know I can't or shouldn't be their friend otherwise I can lose credibility,*

460   *but I can certainly sit with them when they feel a bit fragile or talk to them about*

461   *what's bothering them. It's sometimes easier for me to do this than the head*

462   *coach I think.*

463   Afonso*: I made a point of talking with John (a pseudonym) because he was not*

464   *selected for the game. I think he appreciated that. I just tried to comfort him a bit*

465   *and make him feel better.*

466 A few of the student coaches thus saw an opportunity to develop a particular function

467 within the general coaching milieu. Although very valuable in itself, and one that was no

468 doubt appreciated by the recipient athletes, such a role nevertheless had little to do with

469 the stated aims of the academic module in question.

470 *The cost of action*

471   Over the course of their work-based experiences, it was evident that the student-coaches

472   evolved and adjusted their ways of thinking and began to better deal with contextual

473   considerations and pressures. No doubt this could be viewed as a positive development.

474   However, in embarking on this process of compromise in terms of 'reading the coaching

475   landscape', there was a price to pay. This related to often sacrificing individual beliefs,

476   learnings and positions to the dominant organizational culture. Although some of the

477   student-coaches engaged in 'covert' coaching actions, these were relatively minor acts of

478   resistance. Hence, as the experience unfolded, many of the coaches found the everyday

479   exertion and toil too much. In the words of Pedro;

480   *I gave up struggling, and in the end just did what the head coach wanted, even if I*

481   *didn't agree with it. I know I was being a bit of a fake in relation to what I should*

482   *have being doing, but…*

483   Although philosophically problematic, such a strategy was considered necessary

484   by some, both to pass the module and at least to have some experience of practical

485   coaching (Afonso: *I could say, "OK, enough. I'm leaving the club", but why? I'm leaving*

486   *for what? At least I can say that I was there and now understand how it works*).

487   Consequently, despite often quite frustrating experiences, the students certainly came to

488   realize and better understand the existence and power of institutional cultures, and that

489   such cultures have to be engaged with if (any) new coaching spaces are to be constructed.

490   In this respect, they became increasingly cognizant of the social complexity of coaching,

491   something that their previous coach education modules had ill-equipped them for.

492   Afonso: *I've heard it said that 'coaching is fundamentally a human activity'. But*

493   *here, in our (university) Faculty, they seem to have forgotten to prepare us to deal*

494   *with an activity that is essentially human... We certainly have some good*

495   *knowledge, but when we take it into practice it's still crazy, coz I felt so ill-*

496   *equipped. I still thought 'Whoa...what's happening here?*

497 **Reflective discussion and conclusion**

498 From the beginning of their internship, almost without exception, the student-coaches

499 perceived a misalignment between their expectations and the reality faced. Despite the

500 existence of official access agreements (between the university and hosting

501 clubs/organisations), complete with 'job' specifications relating to the technical and

502 pedagogical purpose of their proposed work, once in contexts, the students found

503 themselves "disqualified from full social acceptance" (Goffman, 1963, preface). This

504 encompassed being excluded from meetings and related decision-making activity, being

505 used in ways that suited the organization rather than themselves, while being treated as

506 little more than generalist errand staff or 'hired help'. What exacerbated the situation

507 were the not uncommon power plays acted out by the head coaches, where the students'

508 actions and assumed 'theoretical' knowledge were publicly undermined. Unsurprisingly,

509 the resultant 'reality shock' left many frustrated and perturbed (Jones & Turner, 2006). In

510 essence, what the students were exposed to, and were unprepared for, were entrenched

511 'institutionalised texts' often created by, and reflective of, the beliefs and abilities of

512 contextual power brokers (in this instance, head coaches) (Wang, 2008). Such results

513 echo those of Thompson et al. (2013), where Adam, a beginner coach, found himself

514 subject to repeatedly conflicting organisational motivations, ideologies and personal

515 status degradation. Similar to the students in this study then, Adam found himself subject

516 to particular social and symbolic relations that were already deeply woven into the

517 professional coaching context he entered; relations he knew little about, or how to deal

518 with.

519   A clue to the motivation of such behaviour by the head coaches in the current

520   study lay in their perceived 'vulnerability' and insecurity ('*he won't let me because he*

521   *feels vulnerable').* This was an issue recently discussed by Jones and Allison (2014) and

522   Santos, Jones, and Mesquita (2013) who, in building on previous conceptualisations of

523   coaching as an inherently insecure and ambiguous activity, argued that such seemingly

524   defensive responses could be viewed as not unnatural rejoinders. Consequently,

525   'outsiders' (no matter what their level) possessing alternative qualifications and

526   motivations were treated with suspicion and distrust (Kelly, 2008; Parker, 2000).

527   Similarly, despite official agreement, the differing goals sought, together with

528   related divergent expectancies, proved problematic for all the contextual actors. Tension

529   and frustration, therefore, became immediately apparent for the student-coaches; again

530   not an altogether unexpected occurrence when individuals with significantly different

531   views and values regarding pedagogical practice converge (Reeve & Gallacher, 2005).

532   The result was the often humiliating use of social power, of the over-riding 'business

533   hegemony', something which most of the neophyte coaches experienced to their

534   detriment.

535   The students' responses were to engage in a variety of social strategies to deal

536   with the collective predicament faced. These ranged from initially being the athletes'

537   'friend', to later adopting a stern persona, to covertly coaching in between session breaks

538   or when the head coach was away. Although not particularly successful, such actions

539   illustrate the students' learning trajectory in that they were actively negotiating with the

540   political climate of their contexts. Echoing Giddens (1991), it also suggests that the

541   students were discovering a life world where actors still have choices and possibilities

542   despite a dominating hegemonic power. In doing so, they certainly demonstrated an

543   increasing engagement with that mixture of rational, intuitive, emotive and social process

544   familiar to all communities of practice (Fenwick, 2003). In this respect then, the students

545   learned much about the social 'ropes', complete with managing conflict and the related

546   culturally defined meanings of the coaching contexts they inhabited. It also forced them

547   to realise their positional 'boundaries', and to make sense of their assistant practitioner

548   roles. Doing so, encouraged, and to a degree ensured, a critical reflection among the

549   students; a development in line with the generic educational intention. Although these

550   were valuable insights and lessons for any neophyte practitioner to learn, they

551   nevertheless were largely removed from the stated pedagogical and learning objectives of

552   the module in question. The planned learning from, or within, a community of practice

553   then, could not be guaranteed, as the student-coaches were generally denied the

554   anticipated 'participation'. In this respect, the students' learning experiences could be

555   considered more restrictive than expansive, although always grounded within a social

556   terrain. An important point to consider here is that such terrain was always in a state of

557   flux; thus capable of shifting the identities of those that inhabited it. Similarly, and in line

558   with the work of Westwood (2002), the power evident within the witnessed placements,

559   generated, influenced and sustained the learning and related identities of the students who

560   experienced it.

561   Of greater significance in terms of the study's findings perhaps, was not so much

562   the 'face work' employed by the student-coaches to secure their continuing employment,

563   something which to a certain extent has been documented elsewhere (e.g., Chesterfield,

564   Potrac, & Jones, 2010; Jones, Armour, & Potrac, 2004). Rather, it was the toll that this

565   work had on the students' sense of self and perception of the wider learning process.

566   Here, the resultant intra-personal tension led many to only engage with their intended

567   learning at a very superficial level, to only 'pass the test'. Although the social

568   'performance' here could be viewed akin to surface acting (Hochschild, 2000), the depth

569 of related feeling was nevertheless evident as the students consciously, under

570 considerable 'internal' protest, suppressed personal beliefs for what they perceived to be

571 appropriate situational behaviour. Hochschild (2000) termed such actions 'emotional

572 labour', where individual feelings are denied and subjugated in the interests of political

573 action. Unsurprisingly, the result can be a frustrating alienation from perceived 'selves'

574 and identity-forming meaningful work. Consequently, despite the general

575 acknowledgement of coaching as an 'arena for struggle', the hegemonic effects on young

576 coaches need to be carefully recognized and monitored. This is particularly in terms of a

577 potential "bureaucratization of the spirit" (Goffman, 1959, p. 56) and self-alienation

578 resulting from the emotional labour undertaken in the interests of accessing or

579 maintaining new positions. This aspect of coaching must be readied for, otherwise we run

580 the risk of losing bright, enthusiastic practitioners who (it can be argued) can point to

581 existing policy makers and claim an unpreparedness for the vagaries and realities of their

582 work.

583   Before we address the question of what lessons can be learned from this work for

584 coaching and coach education, two related notes of caution are warranted. Firstly, we

585 acknowledge that others within the contexts featured, for example, the head coaches,

586 would have different stories to tell. Although holding the potential to supplement an

587 understanding of 'what went on', an exploration of others' standpoints would necessitate

588 an auxiliary set of questions to be addressed; additions considered beyond the scope of

589 this study. Secondly, and similarly, we recognise that care must be taken when drawing

590 conclusive inferences from a limited cohort of participants. Consequently, we do not

591 unproblematically claim that the findings here can somehow make 'sick' coach education

592 'well'. Nevertheless, paying heed to the concept of naturalistic generalisations, we

593 believe that greater attention could be paid to the limitations for, and of, student learning

594 within performance-orientated sporting environments. Doing so, enables reflection on the

595 entwining, personalistic problems of sociality, in addition to the degree of expansiveness,

596 and the conditions that allow it, that student coaches can expect to experience in work

597 based settings. This is particularly in terms of the operational spaces and 'ways of being'

598 allowed in already established textualisations of working practices (Stodter & Cushion,

599 2014). In this respect, we need to better recognize that the demands of coaching often

600 prove a barrier to learning in the work place; a rather ironic conclusion which resonates

601 with that of Wareing (2014) in the health profession. This relates to the hectic, insecure

602 and often uncontrollable nature of coaching, with head coaches unable or unwilling to

603 relinquish any considerable degree of autonomy to neophytes. Similarly, such

604 programmes should also engage with Westwood's (2002, p.17) claim that "there is no

605 social space beyond authority". Such an assertion takes issue with the often assumed or

606 desired 'autonomy of practice' agenda, thus bringing into the bounds of realism the

607 stated ambitions of work-based learning in general, and within sports coaching in

608 particular.

609   Perhaps then, and again borrowing from Wareing (2014), it may be beneficial to

610 differentiate between practice-based and work-based learning for young coaches in terms

611 of expectations and opportunities. Coupled with this is the need to better realize the

612 hierarchical (often unofficial) social order within such contexts; an order reflective of a

613 division of labour that dictates how work based roles are to be fulfilled (Wareing, 2014).

614 This involves recognizing the situational 'relations of ruling' (Smith, 1990) within

615 coaching, and the power realities embedded in such "multi layered complexities of

616 intentions and beliefs" (Wang, 2008, p.193); an awareness of which would appear an

617 obvious requirement if desired outcomes are to be realized (Wang, 2008). The results

618 here then, could go to improving coaches' understandings of the workings of power,

619 including the "ways in which alliances are forged and processes of legitimation are

620 secured" (Westwood, 2002, p.135).

621 Finally, we believe the findings could be used to educate neophyte coaches to

622 better engage with and 'read' their respective socio-political environments; to take note

623 of 'how things work' and how to 'inscribe' appropriate places for themselves within

624 them. It is to emphasise that coaching does not occur within value-free vacuums, thus

625 highlighting the fallacy of context anaemic recommendations. Consequently, coach

626 education curricula could or perhaps should include elements of problematic micro-

627 political workings to help coaches deal with this unavoidable aspect of their daily lives.

628 This would not only give coaches a sense of the structures which affect and allow action,

629 but also of agency, of what they can realistically do to change things for the better.

630

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