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

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate the work-based internship experiences of eight student-coaches. This was particularly in terms of what precisely such coaches learned within the practical context, and how they engaged with unexpected situational events. The methods employed within the project included focus group interviews and participant observation. In particular, the student-coaches were both interviewed and observed over the course of a nine-month sporting season, with each phase of the research informing the next. The subsequent data were primarily subject to a thematic analysis. The findings of the study were organized under four principal themes: (1) the reality shock felt by the student-coaches in terms of the gap between what they expected and what they experienced; (2) the lack of respect demonstrated by the organizational head coaches for the students; (3) the students' response in terms of developing their micro-political literacy; and (4) the social price paid by the student-coaches in adopting such action. The results point to the limitations of student learning within high-performance sporting environments. In this respect, the student-coaches' experiences were not what was expected or desired. Despite this, many valuable and relevant lessons were learned. These related to developing students' micro-political literacy; necessary knowledge for any neophyte coaches trying to establish bone-fide situational roles.

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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, Armour, & Jones, 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' (Costley, 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 'existential, culturally embedded and activity orientated' (Wareing, 2014, p. 36). Subsequently, many related explanatory 'models' of work-based learning have emerged including that of a 'community of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991), a 'work place curriculum' (Billett, 2002), a 'model of working life' (Illeris, 2004) and the so-called 'comprehensive work-based model' (Raelin, 2008). Although apparently accepted as a welcome development by coaches and related policy-makers, very little is actually known about the precise experiences of neophyte coaches during such internships. Indeed, there appears to be much advocacy but little theory in relation to these developments. Such a situation mirrors an on-going critique of work-based learning in general; that is, its lack of disciplinary rigour and misalignment with the academic purpose (Lester & Costley, 2010; Wang, 2008). The reproach contains accusations of disempowerment (and, hence, experience irrelevancy), by forcing learners into distinct employer-driven or instrumental agendas (Zemblyas, 2006). Additionally, it has been suggested that where agreements for establishing work-based opportunities have not been fully committed to, the experience for practitioners has been inhibiting rather than liberating (Reeve & Gallacher, 2005). It is a critique that suggests 'work based learning has sometimes been construed somewhat naively as an intervention' to meet short-term needs, without consideration to organizational cultures and individual motivations (Lester & Costley, 2010, p. 570).

The political tensions inherent in such an appraisal would appear particularly appropriate in relation to coaching contexts. Here, pressures and conflicts have repeatedly been found in more critical work (e.g. Cushion & Jones, 2014), where frictions and strains have been witnessed not only between managers and coaches and coaches and athletes, but also between teams of coaches themselves (Potrac & Jones, 2009a). In doing so, coaching has been portrayed as a heavily negotiated and contested activity; an issue explored in some depth by Purdy and Jones (2011) and Purdy, Jones, and Cassidy (2009). Such work has highlighted the disputed nature of coaching, inclusive of its various layers of power-infused interaction. In addition to issues of compliance and resistance, Purdy's work, perhaps more than anything, emphasized the dependant nature of coaching; that is, as opposed to individuals, the 'building blocks' of coaching are to be found in social relations, associations and connections.

Building on such a theme, Potrac and colleagues applied a micro-political perspective to uncover the often dysfunctional experiences of neophyte coaches (Potrac & Jones, 2009b; Thompson, Potrac, & Jones, 2013); a far cry from the habitually touted necessity of supportive, functional contexts. Such work reflected an effort to better understand how coaching cultures are practiced, experienced and understood by those who comprise them. It also marked an attempt to grasp the nuanced uncertainties and micro-political actualities of coaching, in addition to the enduring power of existing 'professional territories'; structures which neophyte coaches, be they permanent or temporary, have to respect and traverse if their tenure is going to be fruitful and positive.

The aim of this study was to investigate the experiences of eight student-coaches as they negotiated their course-related practical internships. The precise research questions which guided the investigation related to exploring (1) how the coaches navigated the political as well as the intended learning 'landscapes' of their placements to access the expected or desired professional outcomes; (2) which strategies were used to gain access to such outcomes, and what was the price paid for doing

so. And (3) how the learning gleaned from the practical context related to the theoretical component of the wider course.

The significance of the work lies in better understanding the learning trajectories of neophyte coaches. This concept of a 'trajectory' is more complex than that of mere process. This is because it takes account of multi-faceted flow of events and conversations over time, and the meanings learners attach to them. In doing so, the concept does not isolate the coach as such, but includes other relevant stakeholders within a given culture, all of which make an impact on any given situation. Consequently, the current trajectory is analysed in terms of what and when neophyte coaches learn, and from whom they learn it, on practical, work-based programmes. In this respect, the work expounds that of Stodter and Cushion (2014) who discovered considerable conflicts among learning practices between different coaching contexts and cultures. The value then relates to exploring the tension between agency and structure within such experiences for young and developing coaches; between what they want to do, and what they are allowed to do. In doing so, the pressures between the demands and opportunities provided by the workplace and the need to develop capable practice is further examined, as can accusations of contradiction between the two (Wang, 2008).

Similarly, the paper serves as a further examination of the complex relations between knowledge and power within established work places. Hence, it builds on existing micro-political work in coaching in terms of how new or temporary staff negotiate their 'working spaces' (Potrac & Jones, 2009a, 2009b), as well as the price paid for doing so. Consequently, the study holds the potential to develop greater 'reality grounded' preparation programmes for coaches, where an attempt to grasp the nuanced uncertainties, dilemmas and everyday actualities that neophyte coaches deal with, is undertaken (Potrac & Jones, 2009a, 2009b). Finally, and relatedly, the value of the work not only lies in furthering work-based learning as a field of study in its own right (Lester & Costley, 2010), but also in more fully appreciating and exploring the socio-historical context within which coaches work and develop, as a precursor to better understanding the concept of non-linear practitioner learning. Doing so, further moves coaching away from an unsophisticated demand for discrete based skills and competencies towards the development of socially aware practitioners, reflective of, and responsive to, their politically charged environments.

Method

Qualitative methods were used to address the research question(s). This was because the task involved exploring and deconstructing the experiences of neophyte coaches. In this respect, the project marked an attempt to capture the often complex, ambiguous and negotiated nature of coaches' working lives. The specific methods employed included focus group interviews and participant observation. Focus groups are often considered a means to explore a topic or phenomena with a group of experienced participants; that is, to elicit information about why an issue is considered salient amongst a particular group, as well as what is salient about it (Ennis & Chen, 2012; Morgan, 1988). In other words, focus groups are said to offer opportunities to observe the 'coconstruction' of meaning in action (Wilkinson, 1998), thus allowing the study of a particular topic from the perspective of the participants themselves (Wibeck, Dahlgren, & Öberg, 2007). What further distinguishes focus groups from broader collective interviews is the 'explicit use of group interaction as research data' (Kitzinger, 2004, p. 269; Morgan, 1988). Relatedly, hearing others discuss issues holds the potential to further spark thoughts, allowing such a group to become more than a 'sum of its parts' (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 19). Hence, focus groups can often facilitate access to areas of knowledge not previously considered (Ennis & Chen, 2012). Within the present study, the focus group interviews were 'reflexive' and investigative in nature, with the student-coaches being invited to explore their perceptions and thoughts related to their internships experiences. Hence, a list of issues/topics for discussion was prepared in advance of each focus group, with any new ones that emerged during the dialogues also being explored as appropriate. Such an approach allowed freedom in terms of the

sequencing of questions in addition to investigating new ones, whilst still retaining some control in relation to the amount of time given to each topic.

It has been argued that participant observation, as a form of subjective sociology, allows the capture of rich and detailed information about a particular social context (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2001). It does so through allowing immersion in the 'hows' and 'whys' of situated action, in addition to allowing insight into aspects of social scenes governed by rules and norms beyond the immediate comprehension of social actors. Observations then, allow research to get close to social practices and everyday situations (Öhman & Quennerstedt, 2012). In this respect, they can give access to what deMunck and Sobo (1998, p. 43) described as 'backstage culture' of any group. The use of such a method in the current context related to interpreting and documenting what the student-coaches did in their practice, not just what they thought they did, thus generating a 'rounder' picture of the internship experience. In this respect, they afforded an opportunity to view practice in-context, thus allowing a sense of familiarity with the key stakeholders' actions and behaviours to develop. Here, field notes, or in the words of Van Maanen (1988, p. 223), 'gnomic, shorthand reconstructions of events, observations, and conversations that took place in the field', were recorded as data.

To avoid (or address) commonly experienced pitfalls in relation to participant observation (and qualitative methods in general), a considerable degree of researcher reflexivity was embarked upon. Here, the lead researcher constantly acknowledged his potential, and actual, influence on the context under study during the collection and presentation stages of the research process (Gergen & Gergen, 2003). More specifically, this involved an on-going scrutiny of 'personal, possibly unconscious reactions' and judgements in light of the data recorded (Finlay, 2002, p. 224)

Participants and setting

The participants were selected using both purposive and convenience sampling criteria. Hence, they were chosen both because they were considered information-rich in terms of having specialist knowledge of the research issue being investigated, as well as their capacity and willingness to participate in the project. Although availability was undoubtedly a consideration, of greater importance within this selection process was securing individuals most likely to contribute appropriate data, both in terms of relevance and depth. Guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity were explained. Therefore, all the students included in the final sample signed informed consent forms agreeing to their participation in the project. Preceding this, each was made aware of the scope of the research and their role within it. Hence, all the names used within this paper are pseudonyms. The students were also informed that they could leave the project at any time without fear of penalty. The host university's ethical commission approved all procedures. The ultimate sample included eight final year under-graduate student-coaches.

The placement opportunities were principally established by the university, although where a student already had firm and favourable contact with a club or organization, he or she was allowed to argue the merits of carrying out the placement there. The final decision in this regard, however, lay with the university. The module in question formed an official aspect of the students' university curriculum, designed to give them first-hand work-based experience of the theoretical concepts covered and tentatively explored in previous academic units. Consequently, the placement clubs and/organizations had established and agreed protocols with the university in terms of the intended student experience, which were, in turn, directly aligned with the given module's learning objectives. These related to 'to designing, implementing and evaluating personal coaching practice through active participation in all the tasks and activities related to training and competition' (Mesquita, 2013, p. 4).

The internship experience itself covered a full nine-month sporting season, with the student-coaches being officially 'supported' by two supervisors, one from the university and the other from the hosting club. The precise responsibilities of all relevant parties (i.e. the university

supervisor[s], the placement supervisor[s] and the student[s]) were clearly defined at the start of the module. In particular, the role of the placement supervisors or mentors was to support the students realize the learning objectives outlined above. To assist this process, three meetings between all parties (for each student) were scheduled during the course of the internship. A practical support structure in relation to the placement experience was thus evidenced.

Procedures

Over the course of the data collection period, the student-coaches took part in 8 focus group discussions and were subject to 112 separate observations (fourteen for each student-coach). Each observation took between 40 and 60 minutes, while each focus group included either 3 or 4 members and lasted between 70 and 90 minutes. The process began with general focus group discussions about the aim of the project and its structure. This was followed by each coach being observed in their work place. This pattern of group discussions followed by observations, followed by further group discussion, was repeated throughout the period in question. Each interview and set of observational field notes were both transcribed and analysed before the next phase of the research. Not only did such a design ensure a sense of developing insight and progression, but also enabled a valuable linking of the respective methods thus providing differential layers of collaborative evidence for key claims and understandings.

Data analysis

As stated, following each stage of the collection, the data were transcribed, coded and analysed. They were then subject to a process of thematic analysis. Although some have argued that confusion continues to exist about its precise nature, Braun and Clarke (2006) claim that thematic analysis is generally concerned with identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (or themes) within a set or sets of data. It is an approach which emphasizes participants' perceptions, feelings and experiences as the paramount object of study. As opposed to being theory driven then, a thematic analysis is designed to construct theories grounded in the data themselves. In differing from content analysis, thematic analysis also focusses upon meaning (that which individuals and researchers give to reported experiences) which, in turn, promotes a more discursive interpretation. The subsequent themes identified are done so, not necessarily in terms of frequency of occurrence, but whether they capture something important in relation to the overall research question(s) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Acknowledging that an element of deductive evaluation was unavoidable in relation to the framing influence of the study's aims, the general analysis undertaken within the current study was largely inductive in nature. Hence, the thematic analysis employed was flexible, it not being tied to any predetermined theory or explanatory meaning framework. Subsequently, in line with the work of Charmaz (2006), the data were examined line-by-line to identify thematic categories within them. Naturally, this process of interpretation, in addition to working at the level of individual categorizations and meaning, also involved transcending the data to develop theoretical explanations of the phenomenon in question (Walcott, 1988). This entailed tentatively reconstructing the student-coaches' stories during their time in the field in relation to some theoretical concepts that might explain the key issues evident (Charmaz, 2006).

Results

An initial reality shock: 'this isn't what I expected'

The student-coaches were initially excited to embark on expected opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in practical environments. The following exchange summed up their mood.

- Ricardo: It [the internship] will prove if my ideas are correct or if I should try other ways ...to adapt what we learned to work with a real team and players.
- Fernando: We have the opportunity to really apply it, because we have to plan and coach ... we have the opportunity to be assistant coaches and see how we do.
- Ricardo: It's an experience that allows us to learn in the field, no doubt ...
- Afonso: ... we're going to face some problems I know, but it's going to allow us to grow as coaches.

Although somewhat aware that they were entering a dynamic non-linear environment, almost immediately they did so, the magnitude of problems faced became apparent to the cohort. This principally related to not having clear (or any in some cases) ideas about their precise roles in context.

- Ricardo: I'm a coach but I don't have a defined role ...
- Rui: I like it [my internship], but I only really do the same thing, and I can't do what I want to do.
- Helder: I'm in a club with fantastic organization, but I can't implement any of my plans and ideas. I just sort of help out.
- Afonso: I only really watch what the other coaches do ... It's all very controlled by the head-coach. I'm not an active part of the workout at all.
- Rui: Same for me ... it's pretty un motivating.

This absence of clear working 'spaces' and roles was naturally troubling and frustrating for the students, as it conflicted with their expectations as stated in the objectives of the internship. Their experiences here, however, were varied; a divergence which somewhat correlated to the competitive level of the sporting organization or club in question. Within less elite teams or clubs then, the student-coaches were given more scope and responsibility to practice as the field note below indicates

The session is about to begin. The players are gathered in front of the coaches [the head-coach and Fernando, the assistant]. The head-coach explains the exercise in detail. After this, the six best players follow the head coach to work with him, while the rest stay to work with Fernando. (Field note)

Where competitive success was increasingly prized, the student-coaches had less autonomy to behave as they wished (Ricardo: *Honestly, I have no authority to try my exercises with the team ... It's all very controlled by the head-coach. I'm not really involved in the practice at all*). The student-coaches' feelings of disempowerment here were not only confined to sport specific issues, as they were also excluded from decision-making meetings and processes. The following incident illustrates the experience of many in this respect

Afonso collects the bibs and cones from the previous exercise. Meanwhile, the head coach takes a few steps away from the group with his two 'formal' assistants Afonso is not invited to join them ... he notices that he has not been called and just looks at the ground while he puts the cones away. The coaches' conversation ends and the next exercise begins. Afonso still hovers on the side-lines. (Field note)

Although this lack of involvement was a general theme identified from the data, again, the student-coaches' experiences here were subject to variation. This was particularly related to the (assumed) specialist skills that they possessed. For example, one student, being a former high-level football goalkeeper, was asked by his head coach to specifically work with the goalkeepers at the club in question. Although beneficial from one respect, from another, it was equally disempowering and frustrating, as it forced engagement and action in an area he did not particularly wish to work. In this respect, the students were used to 'fill' technical roles within existing coaching teams. For example

Ricardo: ... because I was goalkeeper the head-coach sent me to work with goalkeepers. OK, but what I really wanted and needed was to work with the outfield players. It's pretty frustrating to always do what they (the head coaches) want and not what I want ...

Reaffirming status in an insecure world

The difficulties experienced by neophyte coaches were exacerbated by what they felt was a general lack of respect for their positions and learnedness in context. Echoing practitioner distrust of academic knowledge, the student-coaches were subject to several instances of hierarchical power plays in this regard. For example

Afonso: He (the head coach) is not open to anything. The problem is that he doesn't believe in what we are doing [at the university]. He even told me: 'Oh here you come with a "Dutch exercise"', meaning it's the only exercise taught at the Faculty.

Such dismissiveness even extended to openly undermining some of the student-coaches' as they worked, with the students being subjected to given 'relations of ruling' (Smith, 1990). For example

Ricardo begins a warm-up planned with the head coach. However, shortly afterwards the head coach interrupts it, even though it is not finished. Ricardo looks confused, then angry. He just watches the rest of the session from the far touch line, alone. (Field note)

After a disagreement, Bruno sent a player to the dressing room. A few moments later, Bruno and the head coach have a conversation in the middle of the field. All the players and staff are watching from a distance. It's obvious the head coach is angry; Bruno just 'takes it' in front of everyone. (Field note)

In many ways, this situation was not helped by an (unofficial) discursive misalignment of goals between the student-coaches and their host organizations. Here, where the students often argued for greater player understanding and broader development, the coaches, and in particular those operating at the elite level, were intent on achieving good competitive results and on winning 'the next game' (Afonso: *I have head coaches who don't think the same way that I do. They only care about the better players because these are the players that can win the games*).

Such a disconnect was not only evidenced in the relationship between the interns and the head coaches, as it could also be seen within the differing organizations themselves. For example, although the 'coaching guidelines' of one club (as produced by the general Sporting Director) spoke of a philosophy related to player development, the manifestation of the discourse through the results-orientated actions of the head coach was very different. In addition to their conflicting 'on the ground' experiences, this divergence or rhetorical gap was a further surprise and source of confusion for the student-coaches. In the words of one

Ricardo: In my club, the Coordinator or Sporting Director is a person who sets the direction and the path for the coaches. He presents a game model to be used as part of the players' long-term development. But when it comes to the head coach, he does things totally different, absurd things. If I say anything, the head coach just says 'okay' and does what he always does. He thinks I'm just theoretical and scientific, with no knowledge of real things ... it becomes a bit complicated to work.

When asked why the head coaches appeared to behave in such ways, the general consensus from the students centred on ideas of vulnerability and insecurity (Ricardo: *Now, if I ask head coach to do anything, he won't let me because he feels vulnerable*). Such insecurity was considered as rooted in the need to maintain control over as much of the coaching process, and hence (assumed) results, as possible. It also stemmed from the students' perception that they were viewed, despite their lowly status, as something of threat to the head coaches. This was in terms of the 'new knowledge' they brought with them to the coaching context (Ricardo: *the coach is not open to either new ideas or to my ideas!*). By prohibiting or denying the space for such new knowledge to surface, the head coaches' practices and standing remained beyond question. Rather ironically, however, a couple of the students, while lamenting the restrictions placed upon them, somewhat sympathized with the head coaches' actions here. In the words of Fernando

Well, if I was head-coach, I wouldn't allow another person to come in and question me because I certainly don't want to lose credibility ... especially if it's a student-coach who is there to learn with him and not to teach him.

The students' responses: developing political literacy

Acknowledging that what they encountered was not what they expected, the students still appeared determined to struggle with their contexts. They came to realize that although their intended learning outcomes were being frustrated, they were still gaining valuable 'work-based' knowledge. This was related to better appreciating the social and political 'landscapes' of their placement organizations; that is, how the sports clubs and organizations were hierarchically and socially organized, in addition to what forces prevailed within the delivered coaching practice. Through such insightful observations and engagement, they came to recognize what their functional places could be as temporary assistants within their contexts of work. In the words of one

Confronting him (the head coach) is not the best strategy; it doesn't bring a good result. He's a coach who has fixed ideas. Maybe I have to be 'softer'; to say something like: 'we can try to do this in a different way ... what do you think?' (Ricardo)

This period was described in one focus group as the 'adaptation phase'. Within it, discussion increasingly centred on suggested and tried strategies by the student-coaches to negotiate improved working conditions. The debate across the focus groups during this phase of the research was indicative of the student-coaches' growing awareness of what they were able to do, and how they could go about it. The following excerpt was typical of many

Fernando: The way that you're interacting is important. You need to say, 'Do you think that we could try to do this in this way, in order to see how it runs?' You cannot come and say: 'This is wrong'.

Rui: Yeah, you have to talk with your head coach. Maybe this week, you can ask to do the warm-up, next week to lead another exercise. You need to gain your space slowly ... you need to think of ways for gaining it.

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

Consequently, the student-coaches began to be more careful and selective with their comments, and general presence. In some ways, such political work could also be viewed as resistance against a more general culture. This was particularly seen through acts of seemingly covert coaching, with the student-coaches' seizing opportunities to give advice 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 cannot 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 response of developing closer social ties with the athletes had not been an altogether appropriate one. In doing so, they came to better delineate their developing roles within their respective coaching contexts. They also recognized that their words and messages, despite being similar and in some cases identical, could never carry the same weight and gravitas as those uttered by the head coaches (Fernando: *I just don't have the same effect as the head coach. When it's said by him, it just has a different value!*). They did not have the same status or authority. Hence, they had to find other ways to exert influence within and over the contextual group.

As a result, some of the student-coaches adopted a more social role with athletes as opposed to a sport specific one. In contrast to the 'friendly' strategy tried earlier, this consisted of increasingly providing and demonstrating a degree of care and emotional support where and when needed. In the words of two;

Bruno: I know I can't or shouldn't be their friend otherwise I can lose credibility, but I can certainly sit with them when they feel a bit fragile or talk to them about what's bothering them. It's sometimes easier for me to do this than the head coach I think.

Afonso: I made a point of talking with John (a pseudonym) because he was not selected for the game. I think he appreciated that. I just tried to comfort him a bit and make him feel better.

A few of the student-coaches thus saw an opportunity to develop a particular function within the general coaching milieu. Although very valuable in itself, and one that was no doubt appreciated by the recipient athletes, such a role nevertheless had little to do with the stated aims of the academic module in question.

The cost of action

Over the course of their work-based experiences, it was evident that the student-coaches evolved and adjusted their ways of thinking and began to better deal with contextual considerations and pressures. No doubt this could be viewed as a positive development. However, in embarking on this process of compromise in terms of 'reading the coaching landscape', there was a price to pay. This related to often sacrificing individual beliefs, learnings and positions to the dominant organizational culture. Although some of the student-coaches engaged in 'covert' coaching actions, these were relatively minor acts of resistance. Hence, as the experience unfolded, many of the coaches found the everyday exertion and toil too much. In the words of Pedro

I gave up struggling, and in the end just did what the head coach wanted, even if I didn't agree with it. I know I was being a bit of a fake in relation to what I should have been doing, but ...

Although philosophically problematic, such a strategy was considered necessary by some, both to pass the module and at least to have some experience of practical coaching (Afonso: *I could say, 'OK,*

enough. I'm leaving the club', but why? I'm leaving for what? At least I can say that I was there and now understand how it works). Consequently, despite often quite frustrating experiences, the students certainly came to realize and better understand the existence and power of institutional cultures, and that such cultures have to be engaged with if (any) new coaching spaces are to be constructed. In this respect, they became increasingly cognizant of the social complexity of coaching, something that their previous coach education modules had ill-equipped them for.

Afonso: I've heard it said that 'coaching is fundamentally a human activity'. But here, in our (university) Faculty, they seem to have forgotten to prepare us to deal with an activity that is essentially human ... We certainly have some good knowledge, but when we take it into practice it's still crazy, coz I felt so ill-equipped. I still thought 'Whoa ... what's happening here?'

Reflective discussion and conclusion

From the beginning of their internship, almost without exception, the student-coaches perceived a misalignment between their expectations and the reality faced. Despite the existence of official access agreements (between the university and hosting clubs/organizations), complete with 'job' specifications relating to the technical and pedagogical purpose of their proposed work, once in contexts, the students found themselves 'disqualified from full social acceptance' (Goffman, 1963, preface). This encompassed being excluded from meetings and related decision-making activity, being used in ways that suited the organization rather than themselves, while being treated as little more than generalist errand staff or 'hired help'. What exacerbated the situation were the not uncommon power plays acted out by the head coaches, where the students' actions and assumed 'theoretical' knowledge were publicly undermined. Unsurprisingly, the resultant 'reality shock' left many frustrated and perturbed (Jones & Turner, 2006). In essence, what the students were exposed to, and were unprepared for, were entrenched 'institutionalized texts' often created by, and reflective of, the beliefs and abilities of contextual power brokers (in this instance, head coaches) (Wang, 2008). Such results echo those of Thompson et al. (2013), where Adam, a beginner coach, found himself subject to repeatedly conflicting organizational motivations, ideologies and personal status degradation. Similar to the students in this study then, Adam found himself subject to particular social and symbolic relations that were already deeply woven into the professional coaching context he entered; relations he knew little about, or how to deal with.

A clue to the motivation of such behaviour by the head coaches in the current study lay in their perceived 'vulnerability' and insecurity (*'he won't let me because he feels vulnerable'*). This was an issue recently discussed by Jones and Allison, (2014) and Santos, Jones, and Mesquita (2013) who, in building on previous conceptualizations of coaching as an inherently insecure and ambiguous activity, argued that such seemingly defensive responses could be viewed as not unnatural rejoinders. Consequently, 'outsiders' (no matter what their level) possessing alternative qualifications and motivations were treated with suspicion and distrust (Kelly, 2008; Parker, 2000).

Similarly, despite official agreement, the differing goals sought, together with related divergent expectancies, proved problematic for all the contextual actors. Tension and frustration, therefore, became immediately apparent for the student-coaches; again not an altogether unexpected occurrence when individuals with significantly different views and values regarding pedagogical practice converge (Reeve & Gallacher, 2005). The result was the often humiliating use of social power, of the over-riding 'business hegemony', something which most of the neophyte coaches experienced to their detriment.

The students' responses were to engage in a variety of social strategies to deal with the collective predicament faced. These ranged from initially being the athletes' 'friend', to later adopting a stern persona, to covertly coaching in between session breaks or when the head coach was away. Although not particularly successful, such actions illustrate the students' learning trajectory in that they were actively negotiating with the political climate of their contexts. Echoing Giddens (1991), it also suggests that the students were discovering a life world where actors still have choices and

possibilities despite a dominating hegemonic power. In doing so, they certainly demonstrated an increasing engagement with that mixture of rational, intuitive, emotive and social process familiar to all communities of practice (Fenwick, 2003). In this respect then, the students learned much about the social 'ropes', complete with managing conflict and the related culturally defined meanings of the coaching contexts they inhabited. It also forced them to realize their positional 'boundaries', and to make sense of their assistant practitioner roles. Doing so, encouraged, and to a degree ensured, a critical reflection among the students; a development in line with the generic educational intention. Although these were valuable insights and lessons for any neophyte practitioner to learn, they nevertheless were largely removed from the stated pedagogical and learning objectives of the module in question. The planned learning from, or within, a community of practice then, could not be guaranteed, as the student-coaches were generally denied the anticipated 'participation'. In this respect, the students' learning experiences could be considered more restrictive than expansive, although always grounded within a social terrain. An important point to consider here is that such terrain was always in a state of flux; thus capable of shifting the identities of those that inhabited it. Similarly, and in line with the work of Westwood (2002), the power evident within the witnessed placements, generated, influenced and sustained the learning and related identities of the students who experienced it.

Of greater significance in terms of the study's findings perhaps, was not so much the 'face work' employed by the student-coaches to secure their continuing employment, something which to a certain extent has been documented elsewhere (e.g. Chesterfield, Potrac, & Jones, 2010; Jones, Armour, & Potrac, 2004). Rather, it was the toll that this work had on the students' sense of self and perception of the wider learning process. Here, the resultant intra-personal tension led many to only engage with their intended learning at a very superficial level, to only 'pass the test'. Although the social 'performance' here could be viewed akin to surface acting (Hochschild, 2000), the depth of related feeling was nevertheless evident as the students consciously, under considerable 'internal' protest, suppressed personal beliefs for what they perceived to be appropriate situational behaviour. Hochschild (2000) termed such actions 'emotional labour', where individual feelings are denied and subjugated in the interests of political action. Unsurprisingly, the result can be a frustrating alienation from perceived 'selves' and identity-forming meaningful work. Consequently, despite the general acknowledgement of coaching as an 'arena for struggle', the hegemonic effects on young coaches need to be carefully recognized and monitored. This is particularly in terms of a potential 'bureaucratization of the spirit' (Goffman, 1959, p. 56) and self-alienation resulting from the emotional labour undertaken in the interests of accessing or maintaining new positions. This aspect of coaching must be readied for, otherwise we run the risk of losing bright, enthusiastic practitioners who (it can be argued) can point to existing policy-makers and claim an unpreparedness for the vagaries and realities of their work.

Before we address the question of what lessons can be learned from this work for coaching and coach education, two related notes of caution are warranted. Firstly, we acknowledge that others within the contexts featured, for example, the head coaches, would have different stories to tell. Although holding the potential to supplement an understanding of 'what went on', an exploration of others' standpoints would necessitate an auxiliary set of questions to be addressed; additions considered beyond the scope of this study. Secondly, and similarly, we recognize that care must be taken when drawing conclusive inferences from a limited cohort of participants. Consequently, we do not unproblematically claim that the findings here can somehow make 'sick' coach education 'well'. Nevertheless, paying heed to the concept of naturalistic generalizations, we believe that greater attention could be paid to the limitations for, and of, student learning within performance-orientated sporting environments. Doing so, enables reflection on the entwining, personalistic problems of sociality, in addition to the degree of expansiveness, and the conditions that allow it, that student-coaches can expect to experience in work-based settings. This is particularly in terms of the operational spaces and 'ways of being' allowed in already established textualizations of working practices (Stodter & Cushion, 2014). In this respect, we need to better recognize that the demands of

coaching often prove a barrier to learning in the work place; a rather ironic conclusion which resonates with that of Wareing (2014) in the health profession. This relates to the hectic, insecure and often uncontrollable nature of coaching, with head coaches unable or unwilling to relinquish any considerable degree of autonomy to neophytes. Similarly, such programmes should also engage with Westwood's (2002, p. 17) claim that 'there is no social space beyond authority'. Such an assertion takes issue with the often assumed or desired 'autonomy of practice' agenda, thus bringing into the bounds of realism the stated ambitions of work-based learning in general, and within sports coaching in particular.

Perhaps then, and again borrowing from Wareing (2014), it may be beneficial to differentiate between practice-based and work-based learning for young coaches in terms of expectations and opportunities. Coupled with this is the need to better realize the hierarchical (often unofficial) social order within such contexts; an order reflective of a division of labour that dictates how work-based roles are to be fulfilled (Wareing, 2014). This involves recognizing the situational 'relations of ruling' (Smith, 1990) within coaching, and the power realities embedded in such 'multi layered complexities of intentions and beliefs' (Wang, 2008, p. 193); an awareness of which would appear an obvious requirement if desired outcomes are to be realized (Wang, 2008). The results here then, could go to improving coaches' understandings of the workings of power, including the 'ways in which alliances are forged and processes of legitimation are secured' (Westwood, 2002, p. 135).

Finally, we believe the findings could be used to educate neophyte coaches to better engage with and 'read' their respective socio-political environments; to take note of 'how things work' and how to 'inscribe' appropriate places for themselves within them. It is to emphasize that coaching does not occur within value-free vacuums, thus highlighting the fallacy of context anaemic recommendations. Consequently, coach education curricula could or perhaps should include elements of problematic micro-political workings to help coaches deal with this unavoidable aspect of their daily lives. This would not only give coaches a sense of the structures which affect and allow action, but also of agency, of what they can realistically do to change things for the better.

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