

# Exploring Research in Sports Coaching and Pedagogy



# Exploring Research in Sports Coaching and Pedagogy:

*Context and Contingency*

Edited by

Charles L. T. Corsby  
and Christian N. Edwards

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## FOREWORD

CHRISTIAN N. EDWARDS

The origins of this book lie in the unfolding series of conferences, Cluster Research into Coaching (CRiC), that consider critical ideas within sports coaching. The purpose or function of these events has been to bring together like-minded scholars to disseminate their work across a breadth of discipline-related areas. Keen not to produce something of ‘old stock’, we were particularly interested in new ideas that push beyond the boundaries of current thought. However, in putting together the conference, we were quickly reminded of the inherent isolation and fear of the apparent inability to ‘produce anything critical or new’. In deciphering these early concerns, we had uncertainty about what would be submitted. Fearful of the usual positivist approach, which had long served as a ‘blind spot’ in de-sensitising the field, we sought individual creativity to enrich the debate on the true essence of coaching. In many ways, we were encouraging those that wanted to dip their toe[s] in the ‘conference waters’ to move beyond the current debate and produce ‘something new’. In other words, we were asking for writings that served to unlock the door. “The door to what?” you may ask. Well, ‘good’ coaching research. Yet, in the growing body of ‘coaching research’, making decisions on what falls into the discipline remains a point of contestation. With an assortment of works adopting various paradigmatic positions available, it is here we have pulled the rationale for this collection; that is, a need to further make decisions on what is (and is not) coaching research.

On closing the loop of the conference, we felt that the work produced had potential to continue to define the discipline, whilst avoiding becoming too narrow, or stretching ourselves too thin. The purpose was to engage in an on-going collaborative conversation with all authors of the book to cultivate/produce ‘something new’ and accessible. In doing so, we encourage new ways of thinking that ask us to continue our learning and seek to know what lies in the unknown. Rather than being curious about what is being written, we pursued inquisitiveness in thinking: thinking that requires us to do more, to ask more questions in order to process new

information, knowledge that may lead us to new pastures that broaden our understanding of the uncertainty within the field of sports coaching.

In essence, what we sought is work that does not offer the same diluted message[s]. Much like sport, if we carry on with the same information, then you run the risk of staying put. By staying put, you risk nothing, the boundaries are safe and you do not progress. To improve and evolve you must aspire to give everything, think outside the box to be the best you can be. To do this, does not require a 're-birth' of the old; rather it takes patience, time and words. Borrowing from the poet e e cummings, we must offer words of meaning, where the virtue of what is said allows the individual to think and consider where they are heading by staying present in the moment. However, we believe that it is the exploring and realisation of these actions that allow us to ask more questions to develop new knowledge, to be inquisitive to succeed in our quest to legitimise the coaching landscape.

As a point of departure, we would like to offer some reflective thought. The discussions that ensued from the conference, reminded us of the ever present need to adhere to the notion of dialogue and plurality of approaches to help broaden sports coaching research. Without attempting to refuel the 'paradigm war', what we illustrate below is the eclectic mix of writings that serve as a 'way out' to further explore the boundaries of the 'unknown'. In closing the loop, we believe that the work produced has the potential to free imagination and reinvigorate new understandings, ways in which to assure [wider] audience members of the principles to cultivate and produce 'good' coaching research.

**PART I:**

**BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT**



# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

CHARLES L.T. CORSBY  
AND CHRISTIAN N. EDWARDS

### **Introduction: Context and contingency**

In recent years, it has been argued that the pre-eminence given to sports coaching as a social activity is worthy of much debate. Such development has seen the discipline become a bona fide area of study where the connection between theory and practice has allowed for a better grasp of the [re] and [de] construction of the work of coaches. This agenda has aimed to ‘shine a torch’ on the ‘darker’ aspects of coaching practice by bringing to light the mundane, taken-for-granted discourses of interaction evident within the relational, wider (shared) world of coaching (e.g., Jones, 2006, 2009, 2011; Denison, 2007; Potrac, Jones, Gilbourne and Nelson, 2012). Here, then, the case has been made for sports coaching research to be sociologically analysed in earnest (Jones, 2000). Indeed, the subsequent literature has moved away from the traditional conformist thought of coaching being unproblematic in nature, to a position where the activity is recognised as a dynamic, social endeavour (Jones and Wallace, 2005; Jones, 2007; Purdy and Jones, 2011). This sociological ‘lens’ has raised the level of critical reflection and analysis so that ‘original thinkers’ within the field (e.g., Cushion and Jones, 2006; Purdy and Jones, 2011; Potrac et al., 2012), continue to shape our knowledge in the quest to better understand such a complex activity. The point has not been to radically change our view on coaching but to offer a more critical investigative lens into the serendipitous dynamics that for many lay hidden in the often ‘positivistic’ landscape of coaching.

In speaking of coaching research as social and problematic, welcome strides have been made in terms of understanding how coaches manage their respective contexts (Jones, Armour and Potrac, 2004; Jones, 2007; Potrac

and Jones, 2009). Such work has not been limited in scope to the interactions between just coach and athlete but extended to coaches and other contextual stakeholders such as managers and other related actors (Purdy, Jones and Cassidy, 2009). The consequent shift in focus has moved from the 'what' and 'how' to coach, towards the 'who' is coaching (Jones, 2006, 2009). With this in mind, such work gives credence to further uncover the relational nature of coaching and how it is enacted (Jones and Ronglan, 2016); something of an investigation of the 'social beyond the interactional' (Crossley, 2011). More recently, Jones and colleagues produced a novel and significant contribution to the field in the form of 'The Sociology of Sports Coaching' (Jones, Potrac, Cushion and Ronglan, 2011). With creative integration of social theory, the objective, as pointed out by Jones et al. (2011), reflected an attempt to 'decode' the scarcely discussed culture of coaching through drawing upon a variety of critical social theorists. The body of work presented in this volume included the use of sociological frameworks provided by Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault and Erving Goffman among others, to better understand the relationships which lie at the heart of the coaching process. Drawing upon sociological thinkers, such work has, above all, attempted to deconstruct and uncover the "constitutive rules of everyday behaviour" (Goffman, 1974, p.5). In doing so, the proposal has been to use theory to bring "into focus, sharpen and angle our understanding of what might otherwise be a blurred stream of perception" (Ely, Vinz, Downing and Anzul, 1997, p.228).

Yet, in spite of recent developments to capture the everyday endeavours of coaches (e.g., Jones, 2006; 2009; Purdy, Potrac and Jones, 2008; Toner, Nelson, Potrac, Gilbourne and Marshall, 2012), the discipline itself appears to have arrived at a dilemma. Whilst such work has raised our critical understanding we are, however, suspicious of the growing work that remains unchallenged; of overly simplistic coaching research that potentially indoctrinates uncritical thought. We are left with questions as to where and how the discipline should and will be shaped by future research? Echoing previous arguments of Law (2006), a refusal to acknowledge the messy nature of life will repress the possibility of understanding the work of coaches. Consequently, chasing personal itineraries, consumer style critique and reconceptualising 'old' ideas with 'old' names or, new areas with 'old' names, will not result in new ways of thinking and writing about coaching. With growing issues surrounding policy, practice, media, behaviours and more, research in coaching and pedagogy must be questioned to ensure the discipline not only endures but makes a significant contribution to the (social) lives that are infiltrated by coaching as a discipline. Drawing upon the insights of Bauman (2000), if sports coaching is a social endeavour then

it must be human made and, accordingly, holds the potential to be human unmade; reconstructed in the possibility of 'doing' things differently. In this respect, we argue that sport coaching research is not dependent on wrestling the endemic contingency and uncertainty of the human condition, but on recognising complexity and fronting the consequences. In so doing, we must continue to question if our work is 'good' enough; is it worthy of the discipline and what are we contributing?

From this line of questioning, we might encourage ourselves, as it were, to travel as academic nomads, dynamic and eager to explore ambiguous territory. However, the academic nomad we describe here must constantly be on the watch and deal with a state of contingency, insecurity and uncertainty in context; like skating over thin ice. Returning to Bauman (2000), the temptation of individuals is to seek the safety, security and refuge in their speed; in the researcher's case, the production speed of 'coaching' research. But, such speed is not conducive to thinking; that is, long-term (critical) thinking and development. Rather, the academic nomad we are advocating must have some roots to their work. While she/he might wander, peer beyond their boundaries, they should have some home, which shapes their identity and supports their search for new territory. They are not free to move uncritically from place to place. For the coaching scholar, then, these questions remain: How far should we wander? What are we doing? Where are we going? The scope of these questions is bound to developing a consensus about what is important for coaching scholars.

For us, the academic nomad in coaching, whilst supporting the search for new territory, must take a particular stance to define the area. In keeping with Jones, Edwards and Filho (2016), we believe the discipline should be grounded within interpretivist and critical paradigms. Here, then, lies the principal purpose of this collection of extended abstracts; an opportunity for reflection on our cascading discipline. This is a call for a pause and taking one's time; recapping, revisiting and re-assessing the steps already taken to better shape the future.

Despite raising uncertainty concerning the depth and quality of some interrogative 'coaching' work, we are equally concerned with the lack of engagement in critical thought and discussions between, and with, National Governing Bodies, stakeholders, coach educators and the coaches themselves. In this respect, rather than being bound to the usual sign-posts of 'coaching' research, which infiltrate curriculums, coach education programmes and (some) coaching research, we feel there is a need to continue challenging the potentially damaging orthodoxies of sports coaching research. Therefore, the originality and significance of this book also lies in its presentation. Here, this collection of abstracts provides a brief

and accessible snapshot into existing (and current) coaching and pedagogy research projects at various points in their journeys. By condensing each chapter and specific trend, it is hoped this collection of abstracts appeals to coaches, coach educators, as well as coaching researchers. The point is not to provide an inexhaustible list of 'gold standard' research projects. Nor is it a request for navel-gazing at various individuals' works. Instead, the edited edition should be seen as a collective, which includes a small, but significant, cohort of scholars who are inevitably connected in thought, supervision, research interest, and the state of the discipline more generally. Returning to the earlier suggestion, this is a call for us to take a rare 'pause', to think and reflect, to question, and to contemplate the state of sport coaching as a discipline, which is keeping speed regardless. The objective, then, is to stimulate critical thought and discussion among readers engaged with coaching pedagogy as an area of study and, in turn, facilitate reflexive introspection among their existing research endeavours.

### **How to use the book?**

This section links closely to the one we have just left. It will reinforce the study of coaching and pedagogy in sport as a discipline in earnest. Specific attention will be paid to the audience and use of this book.

The following edited collection stands alone as a contribution to the field of sports coaching, not as a pioneering influence, but, as established earlier, an exclusive opportunity to reflect and critique the development of the discipline. In this regard, what is presented are 19 'extended' abstracts. By this, we asked the contributors to develop a 'bite-sized' edition of an existing research project. The selection of authors was taken exclusively from scholars who have contributed to CRiC (see Foreword). From the outset, this might appear myopic or insular in its approach. This was not the intention. Rather, with the discipline hanging on a few 'original thinkers', the authors reflect the 'inter-connectedness' of academics (i.e., the supervisors), early career researchers, doctoral researchers and students, who share similarities in thought and approach towards the study of sports coaching and pedagogy. In this regard, the collection mirrors some of the more general trends in the area and should be used as a source of inspiration to search for new grounds and developments.

In addition, the purpose of this compilation is to promote the publication of accessible, interrogative and theoretically underpinned issues within sports coaching. Building upon this sentiment, the parameters set to the authors mean this book offers an, albeit brief, glimpse of sports coaching and pedagogy research at various interjections. Taken from wider research



projects, the abstracts provided are condensed, reduced or summarized in an attempt to capture their essence. The resulting chapters vary in emphasis, including rationale, methodological discussion, findings and implications. This was a conscious decision to challenge the authors on their key messages, but also, to produce a resource that might inspire future projects and promote further reading of related concepts, trends and ideas. As a consequence, each of the chapters reflects temporal differences between projects and researchers. Therefore, we encourage a consideration of 'history' to help distinguish the 'completeness' and 'levelness' of the work. Here, the biography of each author can be found in the 'Editors and contributors' section to allow readers to contextually place the author(s) of the work.

Finally, whilst the underlying rationale for this collection is to probe, question and test the discipline of sports coaching, we feel that those working in the area, who endeavour to understand their practice, should see this compilation of works as an accessible bridge to (some of) the latest critical thinking in coaching. The idea is not to provide an indispensable list of exemplar projects. The point we have reiterated here is that, to promote a clear vision for the discipline, whilst working in the parameters that constrain us, we must struggle and wrestle with the 'levels' of our contributions. In this way, the collection might serve as a reminder of the essence of research, which includes the discomfort, insecurity and struggles for new ground and original contributions. We encourage readers to 'think with' this resource. In doing so, it is hoped the collection provides a catalyst to challenge and develop a range of agendas: (1) To encourage all readers to reflect on the state and quality of sport coaching as a discipline and, essentially, consider what we are doing, where we are going and why? (2) To appreciate the importance of time and development required to design rich and insightful work, irrelevant of researcher experience; (3) To provide an accessible resource that supports (and challenges) students designing research projects across all levels; (4) And finally, to expose coaches and coach educators to existing research in an accessible format.

## **Structure of the book**

The structure of the book includes five sections, which have been loosely connected by a central theme. A total of 19 chapters are contained within the four principal sections of the book. Part I, 'Context and contingency', has been divided into three chapters to outline the purpose and rationale underpinning the collection. Following this introduction (Chapter 1), which outlines the book's scope and purpose, Professor Paul Potrac shares some

personal and general thoughts about how we might productively advance our scholarship in sports coaching, paying specific attention to the (micro)political terrain of coaching (Chapter 2). The third contribution of Part I, Chapter 3 by Professor Lars Tore Ronglan, uses Scandinavian sport as a site to discuss the complexity and subtleties of context at various levels. The paper discusses how societal, cultural and organisational conditions influence coaching processes. It is hoped the opening three chapters frame the subsequent discussions raised in this book to help (further) define the field of sports coaching.

Part II, 'A critical sociology of coaching', are abstracts broadly themed by their use of social theory to understand sports coaching. More specifically, Chapter 4 uses the work of Pierre Bourdieu to explore the entrenched legitimacy and authority that makes coaching 'work' in a professional youth football context. Remaining with Pierre Bourdieu's writings, Chapter 5 explores and presents elite youth professional coaches' understanding of coaching philosophy. Examining how coaching philosophy is reproduced, the abstract sheds light on the construction of coaching and its influence on practice. In Chapter 6, the attention shifts towards understanding the emotionality experienced by community sports coaches. Here, the authors address the interconnections between identity, emotion and workplace relations. The succeeding Chapter 7 draws upon a wider project with professional Norwegian handball coaches to explore how participants attempted to manage the complexities of their day-to-day coaching practice. Following this, Sewell and Barker's 'ironic' framework was used in Chapter 8 to introduce how caring and coercive acts simultaneously shape individuals' perceptions in relation to the application of surveillance technologies.

We assert there is an inescapable overlap between chapters and sections moving from Part II to Part III, 'Pedagogy, coaching and coach education'. As alluded to earlier in this introduction, as coaching scholars we are often fearful of providing recommendations, however, the principal focus of Part III shifts towards the learning endeavours of coaches; the pedagogy of coaching. Whilst the abstracts presented in this section search for deeper insights, such work is not locked solely into understanding. To borrow from Robyn Jones' conceptualisation of coaching literature, the work includes a deconstruction and reconstruction of coaching. As a result, we concur that the conceptual blending makes it possible to move coaching practice forward, not as clear 'gold standards', but rather, as illuminating the structures relevant to coaches' work that allow for insightful developments to practice; careful consideration of knowledge for 'understanding' and knowledge for 'action'. In doing so, Chapter 9 begins with an examination

of an 18-month talent development coach programme through the theoretical lenses of Landscapes of Practice and the Value Creation Framework. Shifting the context to Higher Education students, Chapter 10 outlines an ethnographic study exploring the experiences of students engaging in work-based learning at university. The focus of this study was to investigate the contextual conditions in which coaching ‘work’ was undertaken by undergraduate students. Following this, Chapters 11 and 12 present empirical examples that attempted to inform and influence coaching practice through adopting an action research design. Drawing upon pedagogic notions from jazz musicians, Chapter 11 presents how creative decision making in volleyball players was explored, challenged and developed. The abstract positions creativity as a collaborative and communicative act. In keeping with an action research design, Chapter 12 used the work of Lev Vygotsky to inform a game-based approach adopted by a rugby union academy coach. The project drew upon Vygotsky’s concept formation to facilitate player development. The penultimate abstract in Part III, Chapter 13, illustrates how the sociologist Michel Foucault’s writings can be used to critically examine mentoring in coach education. The discussion sheds light on the potentially political social structures within coach mentoring schemes. Part III concludes by presenting a historical analysis of coaching experiences. Here, Chapter 14 examines the coaching “toolbox” of inter-war practitioners to question the assumption that coaches can no longer rely on “learning the trade” through experience.

In keeping with the pedagogical thread, Part IV, ‘Pedagogy of martial arts’, changes from traditional sites of exploring coaching practice, to shine a torch on the often-overlooked coaching contexts. The first abstract in this section, Chapter 15, adopts an ethnographic research design to understand the traditions, practices and experiences in a minority sport, Savate. The Chapter centers on a Savate coach’s dual identity as a world champion and a recognised teacher to explore his coaching assumptions and strategies. Following this, the accepted health practices in martial arts are examined in Chapter 16 and 17. Initially, Chapter 16 focuses on (un)healthy practices used for preparing the body for training that are undertaken on day-to-day basis across martial arts. Here, the author considers such practices from both a theoretical and methodological standpoint. Following this, Chapter 17 builds upon this examination by presenting the specific practices of an elite judo athlete’s weight management practices to gain competitive advantages.

The final section, Part V, ‘Concluding thoughts’, contains a series of critical considerations for the development of sport coaching as a discipline provided by Professor Robyn Jones and Dr. Alex McKenzie. In Chapter 18, Robyn provides a personal commentary about the present state and future

directions of sports coaching as an academic field of study. The argument here situates coaches as more than ‘practitioners’ to make the case for coaches as practical theorists. The final abstract within this book then, is Chapter 19 by Alex McKenzie, an experienced coach educator and academic. Alex concludes this collection of abstracts by providing a rich and insightful account of the challenges for coaches, coach developers, researchers, theorists and sporting organisations concerning how best to translate and disseminate ‘coaching’ research among ‘practitioners’. This final piece provides a balanced account that promotes introspection for coaching researchers.

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## CHAPTER TWO

# EXPLORING POLITICS AND POLITICAL ASTUTENESS IN COACHING: SOME CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

PAUL POTRAC

### Introduction

I initially thought that speaking at this conference would be a (relatively) routine or ‘safe’ affair. Indeed, apart from managing my anxiety of public speaking, I simply had to make a case for researching the (micro)political dimensions of coaching. So, I very quickly said ‘Yes’ to Charlie, Christian and Robyn’s invite. How difficult could it be? I’d turn up, ‘do’ the presentation, and enjoy spending the rest of my time at the conference speaking with, and listening to, friends and colleagues. Hopefully, I’d take away some good ‘thinking’ that could inform my own research and, better still, some initial ideas for a future collaborative project. A sense of comfort washed over me. After all, this is a topic that I have increasingly written about (e.g., Cassidy, Jones and Potrac, 2016; Potrac and Jones, 2009a, 2009b) and have been invited to present on at various universities and coach education events. I had (or so I thought at the time) all the necessary materials already at my disposal. I just needed to revisit some of my existing presentations, lecture notes, and outputs and ‘*put something together*’. As I worked on the slides and the accompanying script for this presentation, I all too easily fell into the re-running of material and arguments that I had already made and used elsewhere. What is (micro)politics? Check. Why should we explore this topic in relation to coaching (and coach education)? Check; What insights have we been able to glean from the existing, albeit small pool of, coaching specific scholarship in this topic area? Check; and a conclusion that advocated for ‘more’ research into the (micro)politics of coaching, as well as its inclusion in coach education provision (Check). Done, or so I had thought.

As I looked down at what I had produced, that initial feeling of comfort evaporated (rapidly). It was replaced with a nagging doubt. There wasn't too much wrong with what I had produced. It was logical, coherent, grounded in literature and 'on-topic'. However, it just didn't feel right. I felt underwhelmed. I began to think more deeply about why I had been invited to give a keynote address at this conference. Was I meant to do more of the same? To reproduce the familiar? No. I was certain that didn't match the organisers' hopes and ambitions for this gathering. What will those in the audience think? Already seen it. Heard it before. Or both. Quite probably, yes. How did what I'd produced reflect the much-valued advice of my (long-time) mentor regarding the need to challenge ourselves in our intellectual explorations of sports coaching? It didn't. Did I really want to walk away from a keynote talk knowing that I had could have tried to do more? No, I expect more of myself. It was this sobering period of thought that led me to reframe my presentation so that it at least tried to offer something of value (however small) to our growing community of scholars. Rather than settle for repeating the familiar then, I instead decided to focus on an honest sharing (or critique) of my research in this topic area to date and, importantly, articulate some thoughts about how we might generate richer and more sophisticated insights in the future. Taking this route, especially when it was to be presented in such a public forum, certainly wasn't easy or comfortable (far from it). However, thinking about our work in this way is something that we probably owe ourselves and each other. Indeed, avoiding the uncritical acceptance and reproduction of the safe and the comfortable is important to our individual and collective identities and development as coaching scholars. In what remains of this short paper, I will briefly consider some of the thoughts and suggestions that evolved from this period of critical reflection. On one level, I hope these personal views are generative for those who wish to explore the (micro)politics of coaching or coach education in their research. On another, I hope that the sharing of my reflections, observations and ideas can contribute to wider discussions about how we might continue to refine and enhance the scholarship of sports coaching more generally.

### **The 'what' and 'why' of (micro)political inquiry: Revisiting the familiar (briefly)**

As eloquently outlined by Leftwich (2005) (micro)politics is a timeless feature of social life that is comprised of three interactive ingredients. These are people (who often have different priorities, preferences and ideas), power (the potential for an individual or group to achieve a desired



outcome) and resources (which may be material or non-material in form and are frequently limited in terms of availability). Leftwich (2005) and other scholars (e.g., Ball, 1987; Blase and Anderson, 1995; Kelchtermans and Ballet, 2002a, 2002b; Kelchtermans, 2011) have argued that (micro)politics is an inextricable aspect of human collaboration. It exists whenever two or more people engage in any form of collective activity, be it in informal, formal, public or private settings (Leftwich, 2005). Researchers engaged in the study of (micro)politics focus their investigative efforts on developing rich insights into the inter-personal negotiations, collaborations, and conflicts that comprise our everyday lives.

From a (micro)political perspective, coaching is conceptualised as a social accomplishment that involves “thinking, acting, interacting, resisting and adjusting” agents (Grills and Prus, 2018, p. 5). Within this activity, coaches occupy the roles of both tactician and target. That is, while they seek to influence others towards desired outcomes, they are, themselves, the subject of others’ attempts to influence and navigate the sometimes-problematic aspects of joint action (Grills and Prus, 2018). Rather than viewing people as dependent, independent, or intervening variables then, this line of inquiry prioritises the lived, everyday experiences of coaches and various other contextual stakeholders (Grills and Prus, 2018). While I know that some may disagree, such knowledge has much to offer if we are to develop a body of knowledge that reflects some of the realities, dilemmas, and challenges that coaches encounter in their engagements with various others (e.g., athletes, assistant coaches, parents, administrators, among others). Indeed, by studying what people do and how they engage with one another in particular associational contexts, our accounts of coaching can respect the essential human nature of our subject matter; the “fundamentally problematic and intersubjectively achieved nature of group life” (Grills and Prus, 2018, p. 8).

To date, some initial insights into the (micro)politics of coaching have been generated. For example, my own work (and collaborations with others) has variously addressed the strategic and (micro)political actions of coaches (e.g., Booroff, Nelson and Potrac, 2016; Potrac, Jones and Armour, 2002; Potrac and Jones, 2009b; Potrac, Jones, Gilbourne, and Nelson, 2013), as well as athletes’ efforts to resist the authority and methods of a coach (Purdy, Jones and Potrac, 2008). While such inquiry has (hopefully) helped to challenge the overly functional accounts of coaching that have traditionally dominated the literature base (and indeed the public perception of coaching), there remains much we can do to better understand the notions of *influence*, *resistance*, and *situated adjustments* within coaches’ social

worlds (Prus and Grills, 2018). I outline some of the ways in which we may do this below.

### **Trying to do (micro)political inquiry better 1: Looking (and thinking) harder with theory**

One possible route for enhancing scholarship addressing the (micro)politics of coaching is to make the most of (or work harder with) the theoretical frameworks that have already been deployed to underpin our investigations in this topic area. This is a theme that Robyn Jones addressed more eloquently than I did at the conference and is one that he revisits later on in this volume. By way of an example, I wish to consider my own use of Goffman's theorising, especially his writings on the presentation of the self in everyday life (Goffman, 1959). For me, Goffman's dramaturgical ideas have considerable utility in helping us understand the micro-level interactions and dynamics that comprise coaching. To date, I have drawn upon several of his ideas, however I believe there is much scope for improving the depth and breadth of my coaching scholarship through a greater critical appreciation and application of his analysis of face-to-face interaction. For example, at the level of when, how and why a coach may attempt to maintain his or her individual face more could be made of Goffman's ideas about *expressive equipment* (i.e., setting, manner, appearance, and the use of props) but also his insights regarding *defensive* and *protective strategies*, *unmeant gestures*, *front* and *back regions*, *inopportune intrusions*, *mystification*, and *misrepresentation*, among others. Similarly, in terms of collective performance (e.g., such as those that may be planned, rehearsed and enacted by a head coach and his or her assistant coaches), there remain no published, systematic expositions or applications of his ideas regarding *dramaturgical loyalty*, *dramaturgical discipline*, and *dramaturgical circumspection*.

Importantly, I am not advocating that we should use Goffman's vocabulary as some kind of academic checklist in our work (i.e., look for a concept in action and then say we found it). Instead, I think it is important that we recognise its potential for helping us to generate more detailed and sophisticated appreciations of coaches' interactions and relationships with various situational others than we have produced thus far. Equally, through the judicious, thorough and critical application of his ideas to coaching, it also becomes possible for us to question, problematise, and build upon his writings in terms of how they are connected to the intricacies and dynamics of contemporary social life. Ultimately, the production of such scholarship may help redress some of the concerns about the perceived 'quality' of coaching research that were formally and informally expressed and

discussed during the course of the conference. While I have had to purposefully limit my argument in this section to some ideas from one of Goffman's books, it equally applies to the potential utility of the other texts (e.g., *Stigma* and *Strategic interaction*, among others) that comprise his oeuvre (Goffman, 1963, 1969). Similarly, the need to engage with theory in a deep and meaningful way applies equally to the other related frameworks I utilise to explore coaching.

## **Trying to do (micro)political inquiry better 2: Recognising that coaches are embedded in organisational (social) networks**

My next observation relates to the way that I, and others, have explored the (micro)political dynamics of coaching. Thus far, such work has typically concentrated on a specific relationship or set of relationships (e.g., coach-athlete interactions and coach-coach interactions). While I believe this foundational inquiry has provided some important initial insights, there is certainly scope for enhancing our investigative efforts. One way to do this would be to better chart and examine the *social networks* that comprise the everyday organisational life in which coaches are embedded than we have to date (Potrac, Nelson, and O' Gorman, 2015). Such work could, for example, initially consider who a coach is connected with, and to, but also how these individuals (e.g., athletes, assistant coaches, administrators, support staff, and parents, among others) are, in turn, interconnected. Such social mapping might also include a coach's understandings of the strengths and weaknesses of the connections and ties that exist between the social actors that comprise his or her organisational network. Importantly, this information could be utilised to better recognise how the (micro)political thoughts, feelings, and actions of coaches are "shaped on various levels by the situations in which they find themselves, the others involved and the relations they enjoy with those others" (Crossley, 2011, p. 2). Similarly, there is perhaps much to be gained from not simply exploring (micro)political dynamics from the perspective of the coach, but also from the viewpoints of the various other agents that comprise an organisational network. Here, the relational theorising of Crossley (2011) has, in my mind, much to offer in guiding and supporting such polyvocal inquiry. Especially, as it is concerned with examining how:

Action is always oriented to other actions and events within the networks in which the actor is embedded. And how the actor responds to these actions and events is influenced by both their impact upon her (sic.) and by the

opportunities and constraints afforded her within her networks, networks comprising other actors (Crossley, 2011, p. 3).

### **Doing (micro)political inquiry better 3: Engaging with, and including, emotion**

My final suggestion regards the need to better recognise and examine how (micro)political engagements in coaching are, like all aspects of social life, inherently emotional affairs (Potrac, Jones, Purdy, Nelson and Marshall, 2014; Sandstrom, Lively, Martin and Fine, 2014). Unfortunately, despite making the call to explore the emotional dimensions of coaches' engagements and relations with others (e.g., Potrac et al., 2014), there remains, aside from some notable exceptions (e.g., Jones, 2006; Nelson, Potrac, Gilbourne, Gale and Allanson, 2014), a paucity of inquiry that either explicitly focuses on, or substantively incorporates, emotion. As such, I believe that our investigations of (micro)politics could be enhanced by paying greater attention to the *emotional cultures*, *display rules* and *feeling rules* that are a feature of the organisational settings in which coaches work (Sandstrom et al., 2014). Indeed, there is perhaps much to gain from considering how coaches attempt to navigate their relations with others though their engagement in *surface* and *deep acting*, especially in terms of when, how, why and to what cost or benefit they variously conceal, show, and manufacture specific emotions (Hochschild, 1983).

Equally, to continue to focus on human interchange in coaching (e.g., acts of interpersonal negotiation, collaboration, and conflict) and not recognise how this is connected to emotions such as *hope*, *fear*, *embarrassment*, *pride*, *anger*, and *joy* is, for me, increasingly problematic for our scholarship (mine included). This is especially so when we consider how such emotions are inextricably and often powerfully attached to our images of self (Sandstrom et al., 2014). Indeed, Sandstrom et al. (2014) noted that when an individual's self-image is challenged, threatened or undermined by his or her own choices or actions or, indeed, those of others, he or she will seek to protect or repair it in a variety of ways. Thus far, the connections between *self-image* and various *reactive* and *proactive strategies* have been alluded to in our explorations of (micro)political action (e.g., Huggan, Nelson and Potrac, 2015; Thompson, Jones and Potrac, 2014). However, I believe that much more could be done in future work to better encapsulate the visceral, emotional experiences of coaches (and others) and, indeed, the strategies of repair that coaches subsequently utilise on such identity-threatening occasions. A forthcoming special edition of *Sport Coaching Review*

addressing emotion in sport coaching will, hopefully, provide some new developments on this front.

## Summary

In this brief communication, I have sought to engage with two interconnected issues. The first concerned the sharing of some personal thoughts about how we might productively advance our scholarship addressing the (micro)political terrain of coaching. While I hope the ideas and suggestions presented are helpful to others, I certainly do not present them as the best or only ways to move forward in this topic area. I, of course, recognise that they very much represent my theoretical interests and orientations to coaching. The second, and more general, issue related to the personal and collective attributes required to improve the quality of coaching scholarship more generally. My participation in the conference, has proven especially valuable to me in this regard. Being able to listen to, and engage with, people, be they PhD students, early career researchers or senior coaching scholars such as Lars-Tore Ronglan, Robyn Jones and Christopher Cushion, has reinforced my belief that open-mindedness and intellectual courage *really do matter* for our subject area. “Playing it safe” and “doing more of the same” are not the way forward.

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