Professional coach educators in-situ: a social analysis of practice

This item was submitted to Loughborough University’s Institutional Repository by the/an author.


Additional Information:

- This is an original manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Sport, Education and Society on 05 Dec 2017, available online: https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2017.1411795

Metadata Record: https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/28126

Version: Accepted for publication

Publisher: © Taylor & Francis

Rights: This work is made available according to the conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) licence. Full details of this licence are available at: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

Please cite the published version.
Professional coach educators in-situ: A social analysis of practice

Christopher. J. Cushion
Loughborough University UK.
c.cushion@lboro.ac.uk

Mark Griffiths,
Kathleen Armour,
University of Birmingham, UK.
Abstract
Professional coach educators are key to the success of coach education and play a crucial role in developing coaching practice. However, coach education research remains remarkably coach centric with little attention paid to the coach educator or the broader role of the socio-cultural context that frames the learning process. Four professional coach educators working for a Sport Governing Body in-situ with twenty five professional clubs took part in interviews and focus groups over the course of a year. In addition, interviews were undertaken with nine academy managers and thirty two coaches as well as observations in eight of the clubs. This paper focuses on the coach educators specifically and aims to understand the nature of coach educators’ social reality and practice by examining something of the relational nature of the coach educators and their practice in context. Using the work of Bourdieu the paper engages in epistemic reflexivity and attempts to uncover coach educators’ social and intellectual unconscious embedded in and reflected through their social practice. Findings show the operation of a number of socially constructed legitimating principles where the success or failure of the coach educator’s practice and learning was inextricably linked to power. Each club (field) was a field of struggles, and coach educators had to play a symbolic and relational game being defined by and, at the same time, struggling to define these relations. Hence practice for the coach educators was both social and embodied.
**Introduction**

In professional development programmes, developers/educators support adult learners, with knowledge construction, and enculturation into workplace practices, and have been described as “the linchpins in educational reforms” (Cochran-Smith, 2003, p.5) and “change agents” (Penz & Bassendowski, 2006, p. 254.) who encourage professionals to re-examine their beliefs and assumptions to facilitate change. Professional developers in coaching – coach educators – are no different in that they play a central role in influencing practice-based learning and contesting, legitimizing and recreating coaches’ practice (Blackett, Evans & Piggott, 2015). Coach educators also operate in an inherently conservative and sometimes anti-intellectual learning culture (Abraham, Muir & Morgan, 2010; Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016) where informal learning experiences contribute more to the development of coaching knowledge and practice than formal education (e.g. Mallet, Trudel, Lyle & Rynne, 2009; Stoszkowski & Collins 2016; *inter-alia*). Hence, coaches tend to valorize practitioner knowledge and its associated sources of informal learning making the delivery of transformative coach education something of a challenge (cf. Piggot, 2012; Blackett, et al., 2015).

Despite this, coach educators remain key to coach education systems and play an important role in learning in formal coach education (Nelson, Cushion & Potrac, 2012; Reid & Harvey, 2014). Indeed, as Nelson et al. (2012) suggest coach educators can leave a long-standing impression on coach learners that contributes to experiences and perceptions of formal learning and its effectiveness (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016). However, research tends to be coach-centric neglecting the coach educator. While there is some recognition of the broader role of the socio-cultural context that frames the learning process (e.g. Hassanin & Light, 2014) this remains limited and does not consider the coach educator (Blackett, et al., 2015). Hence, the coach educator is often taken-for-granted, or positioned as a by-product of
coach education (e.g. Hussain et al., 2012; Cushion & Nelson, 2012). The limited research considering coach educators has taken an instrumental approach addressing issues such as training and support, skills and personal development, or recruitment of coach educators (e.g. Abraham, Morgan, North, et al., 2013 Nash & Collins, 2006). Consequently, there has been little research that seeks to analyse the the coach educator in depth, or position them within the broader relational system of coach education. Indeed, Abraham et al. (2013) argue that “there is virtually no research examining the coach developer/educator” (p. 175). This means that the practices in which coach educators engage are rendered invisible. Therefore, this paper focuses on understanding coach educators and developing new insights into their positionality, practices and challenges in order to better prepare them for effective coach education roles.

Coach educators, as former coaches and products of coach education systems, are influenced by their experiences that create dispositions and orientate and facilitate some forms of learning whilst inhibiting or preventing others (Hodkinson et al., 2008). Moreover, coach educator’s practice is embedded in contexts, founded on deeply ingrained knowledge, beliefs and assumptions about ‘what needs to be done’ entwined with ‘who they are’. Practice is always “local, situated, emergent and linked with prior practice” (Coburn & Stein, 2006, p.42) making educators mutually constitutive parts of any learning culture (Hodkinson et al., 2007). Therefore, an educator’s trajectory through the coaching field creates a powerful interpretive framework through which all subsequent practice is formed, and this currently remains unexplored.

Hodkinson et al. (2008) argue that institutions embody and reify both cultural practices and expectations about activities and practice. These expectations influence, structure and limit possibilities for practice and exist as ways of doing and being that are considered ‘normal’. Hence, learning cultures are governed by values and ideals, such as
ideas about ‘good learning’ and ‘good coaching’. Educators are not above the social setting but are developed through engagement with it, and exist in and through their interaction, participation and communication (Biesta, 1994). The implication for coach educators is that they are engaged in a constant process of constructing an identity that is socially legitimised for the learning culture in which they operate. As Christenson (2014, p. 207) argues, “biography structures and is structured by that person’s learning processes”. This, however, is only a partial explanation because embodied social practice is an element of any meaningful account of ‘identity’ (Bottero, 2010). To this end, Bourdieu’s ‘thinking tools’ (Wacquant, 1989) of habitus, field and capital are useful in that they offer additional theoretical leverage to considerations of ‘identity’ that incorporate social identity as embodied structure. Brown (2005) argues that practice is a central dynamic of social production, while Hunter (2004) goes on to suggest that culture is embodied and reproduced in day-to-day activities by the interactions of field and habitus through social structures and agents (Cushion & Jones, 2012). Habitus refers to the way that an individual has learned to perceive and act in the world based on previous experiences, providing “the feel for the game” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 52) and developing an unconscious competence. Thus, habitus not only generates meaningful practices; it also generates “meaning-giving perceptions” (Bourdieu 1984, p. 170). Therefore, coaching is likely to reproduce and legitimise certain orientations of oneself that gradually stabilise into schemes of disposition or habitus (Cushion & Jones, 2012) and can be viewed as a significant central generative site that has the power to shape the consciousness (Bottero, 2010).

As Hodkinson et al. (2007) argue, central to understanding learning cultures is how we grasp the relationship between how people learn, and the contexts and settings in which they learn. An important aspect contributing to learning is the position, disposition and action of the educator. Coach educators are subject to social structures even as they take agentic
action, and that agentic action contributes to the ongoing development, change, or
reinforcement of the social structures (Hodkinson et al., 2007). Central to this is the ability to
view coach educators as epistemic individuals who are constructed from the epistemological
characteristics they carry. This paper therefore seeks to engage in what Bourdieu and
Wacquant (1992) describe as epistemic reflexivity, to unearth the epistemological
unconscious – to explore coach educators social and intellectual unconscious that is
embedded in their social practice and context. This analysis requires uncovering and
recognising the epistemological unconscious of coaching and coach education, and
understanding learning through socially constructed legitimating principles operating in the
social field. The task of this paper, therefore, is to engage in epistemic reflexivity as a
strategy to reflect on the epistemological and social position of the coach educator that goes
beyond simply ‘biography’ or ‘identity’. The aim is to understand how social reality in this
case is organised, constrained and reproduced. An understanding of how coach educators are
positioned within the coach education field shows relationships between core assumptions
and beliefs and practice, developing new insights into coach educators, their practices, and
the structured and structuring nature of the coach education setting.

Methodology

Background and Context

The coach educators were employed full-time within a Sport Governing Body (SGB) coach
development programme. The SGB is a large national organisation with a global presence in
coach education. It is organised in terms of multi-departments, intra-organisational
relationships and distributed work arrangements. The coach educators were part of a new
approach to coach education initiated by the SGB. Responding to criticisms of formal coach
education particularly its ‘de-contextualised’ nature, and underpinned by an understanding of
knowing as situated in the practices of a specific context (Fenwick & Nerland, 2014), the
SGB wanted the coach educators to deliver coach education and coach learning in situ in an
attempt to better meet the individual needs of coaches in context. The educators remit was to
deliver formal coach education as well as supporting coaches’ learning by for example
offering mentoring support. As a new approach to coach education, this study presented an
opportunity to examine the relationships between the social actors and the social structures of
coaching and coach education, and how they interacted to produce and reproduce coach
educator practice and coach education discourses and culture.

The research used a case study in generating context-dependent knowledge
(Flyvbjerg, 2011), while mindful of a case studies potential in contributing to cumulative
knowledge and conceptual generalisations (Yin, 2013). The ‘case’ in this research was the
coach educators as being in-situ day-to-day provided an unusual and interesting example of
the educator role and educator practice. The research reported here forms part of a larger
study that analysed the delivery and impact of the new coach education programme over a
period of twelve months from the perspectives of the coach educators, the coach learners, and
the context in which the programme was undertaken. The data reported here is taken from the
twelve month data collection and focuses on the coach educators reporting findings on the
relational nature of, and the interactions between the coach educators (n=4) and their
assigned ‘cluster’ clubs (n= 20, 5 clubs per coach educator), including academy managers
(n=9) and a sample of coaches from the clubs (n=32).

Coach Educator Participants

The four coach educators (CEs) were all male and aged between 30 and 55. All were
experienced coaches and coach educators averaging over 10 years of coaching and coach
education experience, and they were qualified to ‘level four’ in their sport as coaches (the
highest level of certification) with three qualified to level four and one to level three as tutors.
Two of the participants were educated to degree level in relevant subjects (physical education/ sports science). Each participant is now described individually (identified by pseudonyms) incorporating words from their own initial narratives. This allows each to “highlight critical episodes and events…providing insight into their understanding” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p.69) of their experience and approach to coaching.

**Trevor** had over 30 years professional coaching experience: “It was ’82 and…there was a vacancy at youth level and the head coach offered me the youth team coach’s job”. Previously Trevor had played professionally but his playing career was cut short though injury: “Well, I got in the game as a trainee up in 1970…After six years well, I got injured and sort of retired really”. Trevor expressed clear views about coaching: “I was always very much aware of the player being the most important person and not me as the coach…I needed to give them more ownership”.

**Mike** had twelve years coaching experience. Mike was qualified as a coach educator and tutor and was able to tutor to level 3 (second highest level of certification). He had a degree in sport science and had worked as a tutor in Higher Education: “I’ve worked in an educational setting at a university as a lecturer as well as delivering coach education for the SGB and coaching part-time at the club.” His approach to coaching was also expressed clearly from the outset: “Coaching is like teaching, is around personal relationships, time, getting to know people, understanding where they are, where they need to go, where they want to go, being able to shape that”.

**Phil** had coached full-time for fifteen years but had “thirty years coaching in an elite environment”. Phil was qualified as a coach educator and tutor and was able to tutor to level four. For some of the coach education awards “I didn’t complete them as a candidate, I completed them as a tutor”. He had a degree in physical education and had worked as a PE
teacher, and his views about coaching had some similarities to Trevor’s: “It’s too much about
the coach, it needs to be more about the players, if the players get ownership then there’s a
better chance”.

Norman had obtained the highest level of coach certification available in his sport, and had
20 years’ playing and coaching experience. His coaching career had been characterised by
short-term contracts, full-time/part-time hours and job instability. Prior to securing the coach
educator role, Norman had worked in the sports development sector and he identified this as
a key influence on his approach to coaching:

“I’ve really been influenced by the Balyi stuff, in terms of long term player development.
Every player has potential, and if I as the coach can get them to their potential...there isn’t a
ceiling. That’s what I like about the model, it’s not elitist”.

Norman also noted that education opportunities provided by the SGB had been influential,
teaching him that “learning can be messy you are allowed to make mistakes. Coaches need to
consider different ways of doing things”.

Research Design and Procedures

Central were the coach educators (CEs) and each CE delivered coach development
opportunities to a cluster of professional sport clubs (5 clubs per cluster). To capture
processes constraining or enabling educator practise, the study drew upon a 3-stage design
where data were collected over twelve months and in three main phases:

• Phase 1 (month 1): individual, semi-structured coach educator interviews (n=4) collecting
personal narratives – interviews ranged between 60 and 120 minutes and were conducted
within the CE’s cluster. A focus group with all four coach educators was conducted at the
SGB offices and lasted 180 minutes.

• Phase 2 (months 2-11): Participant observation in a sample of clubs from each of the
clusters (n=8) to observe coaches and understand the challenges educators encountered in
clubs to support coaches – field note data were collected. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Academy Directors (n=9) and coaches (n= 32) in situ. Academy Directors were important gatekeepers to the CE’s work (see findings) as well as having extensive coaching and coach education experiences.

• Phase 3 (month 12): follow-up which repeated phase one, individual interviews with the CEs, ranging from 60 to 120 minutes and a CE focus group lasting 180 minutes. Phase three interviews were conducted in a university setting.

Semi-structured individual interviews offered opportunities to gain an understanding of each participant’s views, enabling the line of enquiry to be modified, and underlying motives to be investigated (Charmaz, 2006). This ensured that the respondents and interviewer explored themes together, making the process reflexive (Hiller & DiLuzio, 2004).

The focus groups were a data-gathering technique that allowed systematic questioning of the CEs simultaneously (Fontana & Frey, 2000). Focus groups were used to investigate what the participants thought and also to probe the reasons why the participants thought as they did (Krueger & Casey, 2014). As a result, CEs were brought together in an environment that represented a “collective remembering” (Kitzinger, 1994, p.105) in terms of commonality of shared experiences. For example, discussions were prompted on issues such as: What is effective coach education? What are your views on learning? Do you have views on how people learn best/most effectively? In this case, the spontaneous interaction of focus group members produced insights not obtained readily from the individual interviews and helped understand how the CEs contextualized, and categorized phenomena (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). The design of the study facilitated the linking of data from different sources and over time, allowing an identification of the layers of the case (Yin, 2013). This approach resulted in layers of collaborative evidence that was used to increase understanding, but was no guarantee of ‘validity’ in traditional terms.
Data Analysis

Data analysis was grounded conceptually and empirically in the ideas and objectives informing the research and in observations about relationships in the data. Specifically, the analytic process involved three overlapping phases, each with increasing levels of abstraction meaning that data were analysed thematically, using an approach similar to grounded theory.

First, data were inductively examined and organized into a system of themes representing the CEs’ practices within active, unfolding contexts. Second, classification of themes was used to produce an ordered descriptive account of the experiences of the CEs and the context of their practice. This was done to gain an insight into, and to outline, the characteristics of CEs’ practice and their dispositions that were developed and developing. Although these descriptions highlighted the various relationships and processes under study, they did not capture fully the complexity of CEs’ practices. Consequently, Bourdieu’s work was employed as a third level of analysis in order to situate the data within a theoretical framework that enabled a move from concrete description to abstraction (cf. Cushion & Jones, 2012). Doing so, increased the understanding of the relationship between the social actors and structures under study, and how they interacted to produce and reproduce coaching and coach education discourses. Importantly, the use of a theoretical framework was not a rigid prejudgment as to how to read the data (‘correctly’), but a process of supporting analysis and interpretation (cf. Cushion & Jones, 2012). As Bourdieu suggests theory is a construct which takes shape for and by empirical work (Wacquant, 1989). Thus, the data analysis was not viewed as a singular event but instead can be better conceptualized as an iterative process between data and theory.

Data are reported integrated with the analysis. Integration — the interaction or conversation between the different components of a study — is an important aspect of mixed
methods research (O’Cathain, Murphy & Nicholl, 2010). This approach enabled all the data collected within the case to be studied together, focusing attention on themes within the study. Allowing data to be examined in detail for example, comparing interview, focus group and field note data from different respondents in different contexts within the case provided attention to surprises and paradoxes between types of data as well as patterns across the case. This created what O’Cathain et al. (2010) describes as conversational threads that run through the analysis but link the components of the research together in the main themes; the coaching field – learning in context(s), CE Dispositons – habitus, practice and learning, and Athlete (player) Centred discourse.

**Analysis & Discussion**

**The Coaching Field – learning in context(s)**

**CE contexts – the structure of the field**

Learning and teaching are inextricably linked to, embedded within and influenced by the nature and nuances of their contexts (Fenwick, Edwards & Sawchuk, 2015). The CE’s contexts can be analysed in terms of Bourdieu’s field; “networks of social relations, structured systems of social positions within which struggles or manoeuvres take place over resources, stakes and access” (Bourdieu, 1990b, p.98). Fields, according to Bourdieu (1990a) are semi-autonomous, and characterised by their own determinate agents (CEs, club, coaches, players, SGB, leagues), its own accumulation of history, its own logic of action and it various forms of capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Fields are not objective in the sense of clearly delimited and drawn frontiers but can be seen as a structured system of social positions that define the situation for its occupants (Bourdieu, 1984a). The limits of a field are found where the effects of the field cease, hence, agents are situated across multiple fields, each with specific “cultural conditions which produce social norms and expectancies, or normalising practices” (Bourdieu, 1998; Blackett et al., 2015, p. 7). As Bourdieu (1998)
suggested, socially constituted interests only exist in relation to a socially constituted space and differentiation within social fields is not solely concerned with macro issues and oppositions, thus an analysis of CE practice is flawed without an understanding of social context and the positioning of individuals within local fields (Grenfell & James, 1998).

The CEs, and hence practice and learning, were embedded in complex matrices of social relations, relational contexts and cultural arrangements, with CEs ever dialogically engaged. These can be considered horizontally across the coaching field [clubs, the sport governing body, leagues], and vertically, so not only fields of organisations [clubs] but organisations [clubs] as fields (Bourdieu, 2005). The CEs pointed out that not only were each of their clusters of clubs very different (horizontal), the individual clubs within cases were different (vertical):

Phil: My big two [clubs], purely qualifications. Purely you deliver what we can’t ‘cause they believe they’ve got the best…[But] at the other three, ‘cause they’ve got less experienced staff, and they know that my experience is a lot bigger than theirs…

Mike: How big is the gap between the bottom and the top...

Phil: Massive.

Norman:...what’s being delivered and the type of stuff that’s going on?

Trevor: At the very, very top you’ve got Coach Education Department with three people running it; they have individual development programmes for the coaches. They have five hours a week to go and work at that. They have a Life Skills Coach who comes in and speaks to them every month, so they’re miles in front. At the other end you’ve got coaches who haven’t even qualified to do the job they’re doing. So, I’ve got a massive, massive [variation]… (CEs Focus Group)

Therefore, it is crucial to consider the totality of CEs and not consider their practice and learning as uniform, or simply as the sum of individual agents and their ‘interaction’ within
an organisation or group – but as an organisation of social forces, individual agents and
collections of agents located in relation to one another – relationality was central.

Importantly, the coaching field and the clubs therein “all follow specific logics” (Bourdieu
& Wacquant, 1992, p. 97), with their own unique stakes, and distinctive dynamics, providing
their own rules and regularities requiring CEs negotiation. Hence, the CE’s role was highly
variable depending on the club’s status and resources, and its own perceived ‘tradition’ and
‘expertise’ in youth development.

Interviewer: How do you see the CE within your club?

Academy Director: Well, first of all, the word ‘within’ is dangerous, ‘cause we
wouldn’t be within!

Interviewer: Okay.

Academy Director: Okay. He would be ‘outside’, supporting us with our qualifications.
Now, our circumstances could be unique...The CE could not come and start telling
anybody what to do. It doesn’t work that way. He’s invited in as our guest, as our
support person.

“I told him that he could come in but he wasn’t going to change anything as we have
our own way of doing things and our way is the right way” (Academy Director)

“So, in a few of my clubs they’ve got their own identity and their own philosophy. If I
go in and, like, do what I think I’ve got to be careful that I’m not contradicting their
philosophy.” (Trevor)

Because obviously we’ve set our programme really regardless of what the SGB are
wanting us to do. We’re doing it for the Club –and what we feel is right for the Club…
look at the results we’ve had players who’ve made it to the first team, obviously it
works. (Academy Manager)
Therefore, each club was a crucial mediating context wherein external factors or changing circumstances were brought to bear on CEs’ practices and learning. The structure of fields both “undergirds and guides individuals’ strategies whereby they seek, individually and collectively, to safeguard or improve their position” (Bourdieu cited in Wacquant 1989, p. 40). In this respect “the field is very much a field of struggles” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 101).

**CE Practice, Capital and Power**

Crucially, struggle characterized the CEs’ work not as benign or neutral but as a series of power relations where positions in the field, in their respective clubs, were viewed as more-or-less dominant or subordinate, reflecting access to capital. Capital occurs in a number of forms; economic, cultural (e.g. educational credentials), social (e.g. social position and connections), symbolic (from honour and prestige) and is a form of power (Portes & Vickstrom, 2011). Within the field(s) capital was unequally distributed, with different positions having differing amounts and types of capital. A voice requires a certain position (capital) within the field to be heard and listened to (cf. Cushion, et al., 2003).

“It’s because he’s [CE] been in the Academy structure he understands how it works.”

( successes
Coach)

“I’m not there to challenge their...either their role within the club or the way in which they deal with their staff. They know me as a person, I’ve known all of them for ten or fifteen years at least and some for more. I’d got a background that said, well, actually you’ve done it for 15 years”.

(Phil)

“I don’t feel there was any questions over me because of where I’d worked in the past which was an advantage”. (Norman)

Therefore, a crucial issue in understanding the success or failure of the CE’s practice and of learning was linked to the possession of capital – and therefore power. Key was symbolic
capital that arises from the other forms, is converted when it is deemed legitimate in the field, and is found in the form of prestige, renown, reputation and personal authority (English & Bolton, 2016). Possession of symbolic capital and control over its legitimation enables the setting of the parameters for knowledge production to which everyone is required to tacitly respond. Symbolic capital gives the “power to consecrate” (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 23) and impose the legitimate vision of the world. CEs were embedded in clubs engaged in conservation strategies, to safeguard or even enhance their position (in relation to other clubs). Clubs were an internal space of struggle for organisational power over the capacity to determine which capital was the most influential in defining its activities and formulating its policies. Therefore, holders of cultural and social capital struggled for power, including CEs, the Leagues, and the SGB, as each had differing conceptions of a club’s legitimate goals, activities and policies.

“It goes deeper than the SGB, the clubs are insular, one club down the road will be completely different to another one saying ‘what are they doing that’s better than us?’.”

(Mike)

“Right but are (Club x) interested in that, no. (Club x) haven’t got one iota of interest in the others or the SGB, but they are very, very interested in getting ahead themselves”

(Trevor)

I mean, it’s even got to a point where people now, in the clubs, aren’t sure. They used to strike out against the SGB. ‘Well, why aren’t the SGB doing it? But now, all of a sudden, it’s, ‘hang on a minute, is it the SGB or is it the League?’” (Mike)

“There’s always this, this, sort of...I don’t know, suspicion, close on paranoia. You know, if ever you had a contact from the SGB it was deemed that you’d done something wrong, or why are they looking at us?” (Trevor)
“The club warn you about CPD put on by the SGB its long winded and I’m told I’m going to see something different, and I don’t.” (Coach)

Holders of the dominant symbolic capital oppose others’ legitimation of their capital, and struggles and contestation over symbolic authority are the most significant (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008). This was a key challenge for the CEs and was crucial to the success of their role given that the successful gain a dominant position. The coaching field brought together holders of a variety of social (e.g. position within the club) and cultural capital (e.g. previous playing or coaching experience, coaching and educational qualifications), and conflict arose over which was most highly esteemed. That is, different types of social and cultural capital commanded different levels of respect and deference (credentials, qualifications, successful playing and/or coaching experience) and acted as symbolic capital conferring advantages on its holders.

“I’ve been doing it for thirty five years.........working in the pro game. I understand the pro game, I understand the youth development pro game. I knew I had a head start, because they all know me [academies]...that’s the thing...” (Trevor)

This meant that CEs were not simply or unproblematically ‘delivering’ coach education in a supportive environment, but were engaged in a dynamic struggle over the representation and definitions of the social world, as well as over access to valued resources. Their position in fields were objects of struggle and important in framing practice and learning. This was a “classification struggle” (Bourdieu, 1984b, p.164), and for the CEs centered on the capacity to appropriate and impose legitimate names and categorisations for coaching and coach education. The CEs engaged in symbolic work within clubs attempting to create symbolic power through the transformation of practices, appropriating symbolic
capital as a form of power not perceived as power, but as legitimate demands for recognition, deference, obedience or the service of others (Bourdieu, 1990).

“The most important thing is the academy manager, and what they want. If they want to coach in this style, that’s the way they coach. Not what the way me as the CE says or the SGB says” (Norman).

“You know, he’s[CE] always calling up and making sure that the staff that we’ve got are up to date with things and he keeps on top of it, which is good. If I’ve got the CE there telling me that such and such needs to get on this course, needs to get this qualification done” (Academy Manager).

“So a significant amount of time’s been spent with the individual coaches – I designed it in that way for a two-fold effect really – well, more than two-fold but – so obviously, meet the course requirements, but to get to know the coaches better, win them over” (Mike)

The CEs were engaging in creating and recreating difference; where the basis of identity and hierarchy were endlessly disputed and contested. Within fields all parties (coaches, CEs, clubs, Leagues, SGB) tried to maximise their possession of capital and had an interest in the reproduction of those conditions. As a result, each worked to discredit “the form of capital upon which the force of their opponent’s rests and often try to valorize the capital they preferentially possess or support” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 99).

Interviewer: Can you describe the impact that the CE’s had on your coaching programme?

Academy Manager: None.

Interviewer: None?

Academy manager: No, we – I’ll be – we’ve probably – we’ve asked the CE when he comes in on the support days to reinforce our coaching programme.
“I told the club, I’m not an SGB person, I don’t do it the SGB way, I don’t like the
courses, I generally don’t. I don’t believe the way we teach is right. I don’t think the
way we bring coaches through is right”. (Trevor)

“I was told I could come in but wasn’t going to change anything as they (the club) have
their own way of doing things and their way is the right way” (Norman).

“When I first came across the CE, and asked who that is…..’oh it’s Mike from the
SGB. Straight away I was defensive”. (Coach)

The nature of these varied, relational, dynamic social microcosms illustrates something of
the difficulties for the CEs in organisational contexts that attempted to legitimise specific
practices and militated or feared perceived interference from outside. External forces and
developments (CEs and their coaching) were necessarily refracted through the prism of a
variety of specific interests.

To be successful, therefore, CEs had to be capable of imposing themselves as
legitimate spokespersons and delegates within fields, and to distinguish and distance
themselves from others within the field by symbolically position-taking; e.g. type of work,
service, acts, arguments. This, however, only had meaning with reference to a CE’s position
and trajectory within a club, so not all action had similar meaning in all clubs.

“Now, I’ve just tried to give information, give examples from the professional game,
say, ‘Look, that’s what we did there,’ without using the name of the other club. Just
say, ‘Well, look, that’s my experience. Now where does that fit your…?’ and then try
and link it into their club”. (Phil)

“The CEs been different and it’s opened people’s eyes a little bit, we have….. our set
way of doing things and suddenly everyone’s thought, hang on…he’s challenged that
way of doing things” (Coach)
The CEs were faced with both an integrative struggle and a reproductive struggle (Bourdieu, 1984a). For example, the CEs had to align their professional practices with those demanded by the contexts, but paradoxically this helped create and re-create the coaching field, giving certain practices an entrenched legitimacy and challenging the CEs as agents of change. Hence, the space of position-taking for the CEs was a ‘space of possibilities’ (Bourdieu, 1996c) but also as a space of impossibilities where the cultural structure in some clubs imposed constraints, limiting what could be attempted or accomplished.

“We have to strike this balance between personal views and what we bring in because that’s dangerous ‘…if you do go in strong and say ‘I think you should be doing this’, well… we have to be really careful” (Trevor).

“As an academy director etc, etc, you all know me, if you don’t want me to bring anything of me in, I’ll leave it at the back door, I won’t bring it in”. (Norman)

“I said to the director, if your staff don’t like what they see, tell them to leave it alone. If you don’t like what you see, tell me, and we’ll leave it alone”. (Phil)

**CE Dispositions – Habitus, practice and learning**

CEs were engaged in a process of practice improvisation structured by cultural orientations, personal goals and the ability to play the game of social interaction. To understand this Bourdieu’s concept of habitus is useful. Habitus is the “durably inculcated system of structured, structuring dispositions” found within a field (Bourdieu, 1990b, p.52); it is the “social inscribed in the body…a feel for or sense of the ‘social game’…the source of most practices…a tendency to generate regulated behaviours” (Bourdieu, 1962, p.11). Habitus is the combination of a social actor’s deeply ingrained identity and their less fixed, occupational identity. As a structured space, the field tends to structure habitus, while the habitus tends to structure the perceptions of the field (Bourdieu, 1990b). In this case, habitus acted as a
unifying and internalised cultural code for the CEs, as well as characterizing types of practice.

The CEs’ habitus can be traced back to their early (or earlier experienced) practices and, unsurprisingly, the CE’s knowledge and action were rooted in their personal experiences of coaching and coach education. Thus, CEs were key agents in the production of practice as they represented the embodied link between experienced and internalised past and present practice. Indeed, the CEs highlighted the depth and importance of these experiences. For example, Trevor remarked, “I’ve worked for 30 years in the sport and I’ve actually done it” later commenting that “I’ve got a ton of experience”. While Norman stated, “This is what I’ve done, coaching and coach education, this is my experience. Mike commented on the practices of the group “We’ve all been…been shaped by obviously, a lot of past-experience here”.

Habitus disposes actors to behave in ways that have legitimacy within the field and are embedded with a series of material and symbolic ‘legitimations’ around rituals, language and notions of difference that obscures power relations, making them unrecognisable to, and misrecognised by agents (Swartz, 2012). Therefore, CEs acted out relations of domination embodied in and perpetuated by the dispositions of the habitus. ‘Doxa’ – the conditions of existence or the order of things – became perceived as acceptable, natural, self-evident and legitimate (Bourdieu, 2005). In this study, it was the knowledge acquired from practice that was privileged (structuring) while CEs’ experiences created a framework for understanding and delivering learning that was also shaped by the learning culture of the sport and their biographies (structured).

“He’s [CE] got to be able to show some sort of pedigree, some sort of experience, some sort of knowledge in our field of expertise.” (Academy Manager)
“Mine’s just the practicality of fifteen years in the real game, the players that I worked with I’ve worked with them for fifteen years prior to that. That’s the way players are going to learn best, it works. I just did fifteen years of practical coaching in the real game” (Norman).

“I've worked for twenty-six years in education and coaching and teaching and that’s possibly the time to say, ‘Well ok.’ When I actually bring across information I can go back on personal experiences and say, ‘Well actually we did do this and this is what we got, it worked.’ You can go back onto your experiences because it’s very easy as a tutor to put out information…but it’s because I've actually done it and can say this works” (Phil).

I like what he has to say, he’s (CE) got loads of experience in the game and knows what works. (Coach)

While habitus provides the mediating link between social structure (macro) and individual action (the micro), there is a further micro level. This can be described as the “postulates and axioms, or, even more fundamentally the binary oppositions, labels and categories used to lend meaning to the world” (Everett, 2002, p.66), the basis for the common-sense, taken-for-granted logic of the field (doxa). In this study, this involved classification schemes built upon a fundamental binary logic of inclusion and exclusion dividing and grouping items into opposing classes and hence generating meanings (Swartz, 2012). For the CEs, binaries included, for example, professional/non-professional, academic/non-academic, experience/education, theory/practice, good coaching/bad coaching, coach-centered /athlete (player) centered. Such distinctions became the classification lenses through which CEs perceived the social world and gave it meaningful order while serving a social function of differentiation and legitimation.
Symbolic distinctions correlated with social distinctions, turning symbolic classifications into expressions of social hierarchy. For example, that only ‘practical experience’ was needed – legitimating past experiences – was an approach the CEs reinforced and elevated, thus also distancing themselves from academic theory. Consequently, the CEs pursued strategies that attempted to maintain or improve their positions, were richest in particular symbolic capital (e.g. previous experience, SGB qualifications), and invested in this to their advantage while actively downplaying other capital. The CEs sought to preserve the field but struggled over its control. Bourdieu (1987d) depicts such conflict as those who defend ‘orthodoxy’ against those who advocate ‘heresy’. Challenges to common sense or doxa comes from heterodox discourses and results in efforts to defend the doxa. The key heterodoxic discourse in this case was from academic theory. The outcome of this was a pervasive anti-intellectualism, reinforced by a disdain for anything informed by research. The CEs pursued strategies that were both practical and dispositional through an anti-intellectual stance and the rejection of theoretical matters, thereby defending doxa and legitimating, defending, or improving their position in the field, and their capacity to legitimate social arrangements (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

“I’m not an academic I’m more a practitioner, that’s what I do. I’m coming from a non-theorist point of view, I’m reading a few books, it sounds like I’m an academic but I don’t like reading books, not because I want to start quoting a lot of theory stuff” (Phil).

“I got this myself through practice, I didn’t read a book, because I don’t read books!” (Trevor).

“Last few years, working practically, I’m not a theorist. I don’t do research. I don’t, mine’s practical” (Norman).
“My approach to learning, it’s not because of my great academic knowledge and because I’ve read a million books, it’s not that” (Mike).

The CEs were positioned as cultural intermediaries at the intersection of fields, the SGB, Leagues, the clubs and the coaches working therein, and pursued activities reflective of this position and their institutionalised habitus. Bourdieu (1998a) described the monopoly of the universal evident in the logic of the field, demonstrated in this case by the SGBs’ control of qualifications and the Leagues’ ‘licensing’ of Academies. The CEs had to negotiate a clash between the the universal and the the local in respect of the logic of their work, and were arbitrating between the values and beliefs of stakeholders (clubs, SGB, Leagues), viewing themselves as the embodiment of coach education’s collective values as their own values which were consciously or sub-consciously lived out through their practice.

“Cause I do believe in the process and I believe I’m doing this job for two reasons. One, I was doing a lot of the things in the first place. I just did it because I thought it was the best way” (Phil)

The CEs were ‘reflective’ not reflexive, where reflection had become a process of rationalising and reconfirming ideas. While the CEs were willing to share and present knowledge, they were unwilling to open it up to critical reflection thus resisting heterodoxic discourses resulting instead in the production and reproduction of orthodox discourses.

‘Athlete (player) centered’ discourse

“We’ll be looking for a player-centered culture” (Mike)

“It suits the way I coach, the way I believe in because it’s player-centred. It’s too much about the coach it needs to be more about the players, player-centred.” (Trevor).
“Because good coach education is what we’re doing, it becomes personalised all in the needs of the individual player, player-centered.” (Phil).

The CEs were united in their approach to learning, considering ‘player-centred-ness’ and ‘player ownership of learning’ as an orthodox discourse and the cornerstones of what they did. However, data showed that CEs’ notions of player-centred coaching were a conflation of sometimes contradictory philosophies, positions, methodologies, and ideologies under a broad banner of ‘player-centered’ around ‘playing’ (i.e. styles of game play), ‘coaching’, and ‘learning’.

“I deliver information, I put information out. So visually, auditory, how I actually start to deliver the information” (Phil).

“So, I very rarely stop practice, it’s based around challenges, it’s based around discovery, it’s based around filling the players with information, you know, the set up is done, the organisation is done. Then give chances to make mistakes in trial and error” (Norman).

“It will be for them to find, and solve problems as they get to a different stage to take them to the next bit, and so on, and so on” (Trevor).

Interviewer: So how do they learn in that way?

Trevor: “Player ownership…and I didn’t go on a course to learn it!”

“The process is a problem-solving approach, go through a sort of problem-solving cognitive approach. That’s what we need to try and shape the coaches to do too. Impact the learning environment and give the coach more knowledge to put over information to help learning” (Mike).

As a concept, therefore, ‘player-centered’ can be described as “polymorphic, supple and adaptable, rather than defined, calibrated and used rigidly” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1997,
p.23). The CEs agreed their role was to present a ‘player-centred’ approach. However, this was an organised assemblage of meanings and practices and, for the CEs, a dominant system of meanings or ideology. ‘Player-centered’ was also symbolic, and not only an instrument of knowledge but an instrument of domination. The CEs decided what was player centered, what that looked like, and therefore how the social world should be perceived and, as Bourdieu and Wacquant (1997) argue, engaged in a struggle to impose the definition of the world most congruent with their interests. Thus, as the data suggests the CEs imposed a wide-ranging definition of ‘player-centered’. However, adherence to the ideology of ‘player-centred’ practice in fact imposed learning related to language, meanings and symbolic systems with the CEs ‘misrecognising’ the arbitrary and culturally derived nature of their practice.

The dispositions of CEs to push for greater player autonomy positioned them with specific skills and knowledge that were rare and valuable, enabling them to maximise this capital to advance in the field. Because of their unconscious commitment to the rules of the game (Swartz, 2012), the CEs rationalised their actions as being in the best interest of the clubs and the game. Moreover, the CE’s authority was backed by institutional forces including their experience, qualifications, and the SGB that had legitimised their position. Thus, the CEs acted as agents of a selective tradition and cultural incorporation, where practices and learning had become normalized and legitimised.

Conclusion

As Patton, Parker and Neutzling (2012) argue in professional development programmes little is known about the role of the developer/educator. Findings of the current study showed that the educators’ role, task functions and understanding did not exist in isolation, but were part of a broader relational system in which they had meaning. In other words, CEs’ practices
were both structured by, and structuring of, the context. Importantly, the success or failure of
the CEs was inextricably linked to power as each field was a field of struggles, and CEs had
to play a symbolic and relational game being defined by and, at the same time, struggling to
define these relations. Hence practice and learning for the CEs was both social and embodied.
Consequently, the CE’s role and processes were neither benign nor neutral and were
constructed from a myriad of power relations and interactions in contextualised social
practice. In addition, each club context was different meaning that facilitating the learning of
coaches involved recognising that what was needed or ‘worked’ in one context could not
simply or unproblematically transfer to another.

In a particularly crowded professional development space (SGB, Clubs, League)
coach educators needed to possess appropriate symbolic and social capital. Therefore, to
enhance and strengthen their position in the field, CEs often aligned with coaching practice
ideology that reproduced rather than challenged existing coach education ideology and
rhetoric and this resulted in a reinforced anti-intellectual orthodoxy. Consequently, there was
a way of talking about coaching and learning to coach that became affirmed and reproduced
through uncritical CE practice, and coach educators had a vested interest in controlling and
maintaining a particular body of knowledge.
References


Kitzinger, J. (1994). The methodology of Focus Groups: the importance of interaction between research participants. Sociology of Health & Illness, 16(1), 103-121


