Understanding the Change Process: Valuing What it is That Coaches do

A Commentary

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INTRODUCTION
The ultimate aim of coach education is to improve coaching practice. Specifically, coach educators, who are responsible in leading change, seek to affirm productive coaching practices and challenge those in which behaviour change is desirable. Sports coaches (and those who are charged with the responsibility of educating coaches) do desire increased certainty and predictability in the pursuit of optimal practice; however, many scholars have underscored the complexity and 'muddiness' in pursuing that primary aim [e.g., 1]. Therefore, any attempt to improve our understanding of the change process and subsequently inform appropriate change has merit. As such, Cassidy should be commended for her attempt to stimulate discussion regarding how those wishing to initiate change (where appropriate) might better understand the enablers and barriers to the change process and subsequently consider suitable ways in which to approach that challenging endeavour. The central tenant of Cassidy's argument is clear: using a rational argument to change practice is limited if consideration is not given to the way coaches learn how to coach. Furthermore, she argues the utility of the notion of 'knowledgeability' within Giddens' (1984) Structuration theory [2] as an explanatory framework. There is plethora of literature on innovation and change and so our commentary considers the explanatory power of using Giddens' concept of knowledgeablility and its potential contribution to the sports coaching literature. Before progressing to a commentary on the use of this concept, we examine Cassidy's characterisation of coaching work.

CASSIDY'S CHARACTERISATION OF COACHING
Cassidy introduces the article with a comment about 'languaging issues' in the coaching science literature. Although we consider 'languaging' an issue [e.g., 3], we are unsure that attempts to address the issue were "based upon the assumptions that coaching is a rational process" (p. 143). In describing the flaws of employing a 'rational process' view of coaching, Cassidy emphasised the notion of uncertainty. Previous authors have also noted the problematic nature of viewing coaching as a reductive, series of knowable steps [e.g., 4, 5]. Indeed coaching has been specifically characterised in relation to its uncertain or chaotic nature [e.g., 1]. From our work with Australian Institute and Academy of Sport (AIA) coaches and those in professional sports (e.g., Australian Football League), it is clear that Cassidy's characterisation of the coaching environment as 'uncertain' is apt.

Similarly, we agree with her contention that much of what coaches 'do' is comprised of

'taken-for-granted' practices, which is an important point. As well as having the potential to enhance learning and subsequent practice (as demonstrated by researchers employing experiential learning theories), previous experiences may serve to reinforce negative practice, limit innovation or at least may not actively encourage critical thought [6]. As Cassidy rightly points out, ignoring or underestimating the importance of these taken-for-granted elements has serious implications for the effectiveness of any program of education (e.g., hidden curriculum in PE teaching literature). Nevertheless, we cannot assume coaches are conscious of what are taken-for-granted behaviours. Indeed, can we identify these taken-for-granted elements? How do these practices become identifiable? Is mediated reflection key to identifying these taken-for-granted coaching practices? Perhaps Cassidy should have provided some examples of these taken-for-granted practices to enrich the discussion. Her example from Norman's research [7] seems to cloud issues between policy and coach behaviour change.

KNOWLEDGEABILITY AS A FRAMEWORK

In previous work, Cassidy and Tinning [8] and others [e.g., 9] argued the utility of socio-cultural frameworks for examining the dynamic process of socialisation in teacher education. Specifically, this framework for investigating socialisation has assisted in explaining the slippage between the intended message (e.g., from the coach educator) and the message that was received (e.g., by the coach as student) and enacted. Nevertheless, neither the functionalist (i.e., maintenance of social order through social structures and institutions) nor symbolic interactionist (i.e., individuals' beliefs, values and identities) perspectives privilege the dialectical relationship between human action and social structure. An appreciation of the dialectical approach promotes an examination of coaching as a dynamic process in which there is consideration of the recursive relationship (interdependency) between agency (human action) and structure (social and organisational influences) [e.g., 10]. This is an issue that has strongly influenced the research frameworks that we have previously adopted. Consequently, we have used workplace learning theories [11] in an attempt to consider the notion of relational interdependence between structure and agency in the coach learning context [e.g., 10].

Cassidy proposes the use of the framework of knowledgeability, which is a key concept within the work of sociologist Anthony Giddens and in particular, his Structuration theory. Specifically she draws upon two of the three components of knowledgeability [12] – *discursive consciousness* and *practical consciousness*; however, she foregrounds the utility of the latter in terms of the opportunities and barriers for understanding change process within coach education and subsequent coaching practice. Practical consciousness might be a useful tool for examining why social reproduction is commonplace within sports coaching practice and might subsequently assist with behaviour change. It is expected that coach educators have intentions of developing coaching practice in those they intend to 'educate' through their pedagogy; however, the potential for 'slippage' as espoused by Cassidy is probable. Central to this slippage is the challenge of 'new' information for the 'ontological security' of the coach. Cassidy suggested that "by beginning the change process from within existing and shared realities it is possible that coaches and coach educators will maintain their ontological security, as well as their faith in the coherence of the practices, thereby developing an emotional commitment to the change process" (p. 145). Cassidy introduces the concept of 'ontological security', but neither explains the term nor clarifies its link with the notion of practical consciousness. Nevertheless, while it is certainly possible to maintain ontological security, the question might be posed: Is the absolute maintenance of ontological

security potentially problematic? The maintenance of ontological security will be highly desirable in the majority of situations, but is there value in the slight perturbation of it at selected times and in selected cases (i.e., constructive threatening of the coach's ontological security)? Unfortunately, Cassidy does not explain 'ontological security' and more specifically how it might relate to sports coaching. Furthermore, Cassidy fails to elucidate on how practical consciousness can be used as a tool within coach education (and perhaps more broadly within sports coaching). Perhaps in the reflective process some consideration of bringing the practical consciousness to the discursive consciousness might be generative.

The uncritical reproduction of existing practice is a current limitation in how coaches develop their craft and an examination of the slow process of change (if at all) is worthy of investigation. The benefit of using the notion of practical consciousness is that it provides a tool for examining and making sense of the 'slippage' between the aims of coach education and the coach behaviour change process – social reproduction and/or production. Nevertheless, a concern might be the overuse of such a tool that creates dogma within coach education. Moreover, while we support the utility in investigating the day-to-day routines and regimes of sports coaches, this line of research has the potential to reduce an understanding of coaches' work to some key aspects of 'practical consciousness' rather than recognise and value the idiosyncratic, complex, and dynamic nature of coaches' work. That is, we need to be modest in our expectations of this potential tool. Our research has shown the considerable variation in day-to-day routines of high performance coaches both within and between teams, clubs and organizations [10, 13].

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

While the notion of practical consciousness (within the concept of knowledgeability) was raised in terms of its possible explanatory power, it is reasonable to link this to the practical implications for coach education. In contemplating these implications, there were some issues that came to mind that needed further consideration.

The first is whether or not the framework of knowledgeability would be equally generative for understanding the change process at all levels of coaching. Our initial sense is that it may be most applicable in the behaviour change of high-performance coaches (as opposed to community coaches). The reason for this is that there may be more scope for the meaningful analysis of routines and regimes, and the subsequent initiation of change from within existing and shared realities. That is, the need for change might be perceived as more important for high-performance coaches. If this is the case, then it is not surprising that Cassidy draws on the comments of elite women coaches in supporting her contention [7].

It is also clear that coaches will not be asked to proceed down this path on their own. Cassidy indicates that coaches *and* coach educators will be involved. This has significant implications for the skills required by those hoping to guide and support coaches. Those responsible for the education of teachers generally have extensive educational experience and post-graduate qualifications. It is probably unrealistic to assume that this will be the same for coach educators outside of universities, but to facilitate the change process (as discussed in Cassidy's paper) a similar skill set will be required. Indeed, if ontological security is to be constructively threatened, then highly skilled educators would be a necessity.

Finally, given the proposed foregrounding of what it is that coaches 'do', perhaps this might be seen as a loose endorsement of competency-based training as a framework for large-scale coach education, which we know is problematic.

CONCLUSION

Cassidy problematises the rational process view of coaching and her acknowledgement of the issues associated with the taken-for-granted nature of many coaching behaviours. Moreover, she infers the limited impact of coach education in the change process. Giddens' concept of knowledgeability, and specifically practical consciousness, may provide a useful analytical tool for examining the slippage between the intended and the enacted; however, Cassidy does not provide convincing arguments for: a) why it is generative, i.e., its explanatory power; b) how it can be used as an analytical tool; or c) a clear link between the concept of knowledgeability and the way in which coaches learn. Moreover, some clear examples of taken-for-granted coaching practices were not presented, which would have assisted the arguments for using practical consciousness as an analytical tool for behaviour change.

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