Northumbria Research Link

Northumbria University
NEWCASTLE

University Library

Realist Evaluation of the Football Association's Post Graduate Diploma (PG Dip) in Coach Development

Dr Sam Redgate, Newcastle University, UK samantha.redgate@newcastle.ac.uk

Prof. Paul Potrac, Northumbria University, UK paul.potrac@northumbria.ac.uk

Dr Emma Boocock, Northumbria University, UK emma.boocock@northumbria.ac.uk

Dr Sonia Dalkin, Northumbria University, UK s.dalkin@northumbria.ac.uk

Abstract

Recent studies have provided important initial insights into the relational and micropolitical dimensions of coach educators' and coach developers' work. However, there remains a paucity of inquiry addressing how sporting organisations prepare these members of their workforce to achieve desired goals and objectives. This research uses realist evaluation and normalisation process theory to examine a bespoke 'reality grounded' learning initiative that targeted the professional judgements and decision making of experienced coach developers. This rigorous, longitudinal, and theoretically informed approach allowed for the generation of rich, causal, explanations of 'what has worked within this learning initiative, for whom, and under what circumstances'. Specifically, the study provides original and significant insights into the interconnections between a) new ways of thinking, organising and acting, b) already existing, socially patterned, knowledge and practices, and c) positive and sustainable changes in everyday professional practice; something that has been largely absent in the wider coach education literature base to date. The research concludes that the programme entails more a transfer of knowledge from tutors to coach developers. Importantly, this intervention also aided a) the development of a coach developer community, b) facilitated the exchange of information and ideas between peers and, ultimately, c) impacted on coach development practices and behaviours.

Key words

Introduction

In recent years, coach education has become an increasingly important topic for coaching researchers, as well as organisational policy makers and practitioners responsible for developing, implementing and evaluating its impact in various sports (Allanson et al., in press; Callary & Gearity, 2019; Stodter & Cushion, 2017; Culver, Werthner & Trudel, 2019). Indeed, there has been significant investment into the development of highly skilled and 'professional' coaching workforce in many Western nations (Stodter & Cushion, 2017). To date, much of the available research literature in this area has tended to address one of two inter-related topics. These are a) coaches experiences of, and responses to, their participation in formal coach education and development schemes (e.g., Chesterfield et al., 2010; Ciampolini, Milistedt, Rynne, & Viera do Nascimento, 2019; Lyle & Cushion, 2016; Nelson et al., 2013) and b) the provision of various theoretically informed ideas for enhancing the 'impact' of these programmes (e.g., Deemerset al., 2006; Jones & Turner, 2006; Roberts, 2010; Trudel et al., 2013). While the former has considered various issues regarding the impact of formal coach education programmes on the everyday practice of coaches, the latter has sought to explain how various educational approaches and methods (e.g., problem-based learning, competency-based programmes, model-based instruction, and mentoring, among others) could be beneficially deployed in coach education curricula (Allanson et al., in press). Despite these welcome contributions to the knowledge base, our critical understanding of coach education and the relationships and interactions that comprise it, still remain largely under-developed (Allanson et al., in press; Garner, Turnnidge, Roberts, & Cote, 2020; Paquette, Trudel, Duarte, & Cundari, 2019; Piggott, 2012; Stodter & Cushion, 2017).

Although coach educators and coach developers represent the 'public face' of formal coach learning initiatives, their professional preparation, learning and practice has received scant attention (Callary & Gearity, 2019). This situation is somewhat surprising, especially as it is they who are tasked with delivering formal coach education and development programmes, facilitating and assessing the learning of coaches, and, where necessary, certifying the achievements and proficiency of coaches (McQuade & Nash, 2015; Callary & Gearity, 2019). While recent studies have provided some important initial

insights into the relational, micropolitical, and educational dimensions of coach educators, coach developers, and coach mentors (e.g., Allanson et al., in press; Cushion et al., 2019; Garner et al., 2020; Stodter & Cushion, 2019; Leeder, Russell & Beaumont, 2019; Culver, Werthner & Trudel, 2019) there remains a paucity of inquiry addressing how sporting organisations prepare these members of their workforce to achieve desired goals and objectives (e.g., the upskilling of coaches and improved coaching practice at all levels of sport).

Through the utilisation of realist evaluation methodology and the application of Normalisation Process Theory (NPT), our examination of a bespoke, 'reality grounded' learning initiative targeting the professional judgements and decision making of experienced coach developers breaks new ground in the coach education literature. In particular, this rigorous, longitudinal, and theoretically informed approach allowed the generation of rich, causal, explanations of 'what has worked within this learning initiative, for whom, why and under what circumstances' (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). This study provides original and significant insights into the interconnections between a) new ways of thinking, organising and acting, b) already existing, socially patterned, knowledge and practices, and c) positive and sustainable changes in everyday professional practice (May & Finch, 2009); something that has been largely absent in the wider coach education literature base to date (Stodter & Cushion, 2017).

Methodology

Realist evaluation

Realist evaluation is a theory driven approach that uses the notion of generative mechanisms activating in a context to give rise to causal regularities (Pawson & Tilley, 1997, Dalkin et al., 2015). As an approach, realism has been gaining interest within the sport coaching research community over the past decade as an alternative to positivist and interpretive research (Bygstad et al., 2011; Archer et al., 1998; Cochran-Smith et al 2014; Nichol, Hall, Vickery & Hayes, 2019; North, 2017). The core principle of realist enquiry is the notion that observational evidence cannot alone establish causal uniformities.

Instead, explanations as to 'why' the relationships came about are explored by identifying what is happening within the system (in the form of mechanisms) to connect inputs and outputs (Dalkin et al., 2015).

There has been a rapid take-up of realist frameworks for understanding the relative success or failure of innovation in health and social care contexts (e.g. Calo et al., 2019, Dalkin et al., 2019). This is due to its ability to look at initiatives and acknowledge the importance of the contextual environment within which interventions are being delivered, as well as the impact(s) this then has on outcomes for individuals (Dalkin et al, 2015). However, to date it has had limited use in coach education and coach development contexts (Boocock, 2017; Dohme, Rankin-Wright & Lara-Bercial, 2019), with only a few academics adopting this perspective to critically interrogate and theorise coaching practice (Nichol et al., 2019; North, 2013, 2017). The use of this approach in respect to coach education allows for a detailed focus on the generative mechanisms allowing an identification of what exactly it is about the coach education practice that is working, for whom and in what context. Wood (2017) proposed that evidence from the health sector is similar to that in an education setting whereby both settings are complex in nature and consist of systems with non-linear processes that are emergent and permeable to external drivers (i.e. the factors outside the organisation which are likely to influence, or impact upon it).

Interventions are viewed to operate through introducing new ideas and/or resources into existing social relationships thus creating mechanisms for change by modifying capacities, resources, constraints and choices for both participants and practitioners (Judge, 2000). Realist evaluation attends to the ways that interventions may have different effects for different people, by trying to understand configurations of contexts, mechanisms and outcomes. The formulae Context + Mechanism = Outcome (C+M=O) is often used as a heuristic to express this. Mechanisms at the individual level relate to the combination of resources offered by an intervention and the reasoning that these are able to enhance in a particular context, leading to measurable or observable outcomes (Dalkin et al, 2015; North, 2017). The term outcome can mean different things in different evaluation scenarios. Wong et al. (2016, p8) provided

example definitions of the term as referring to 'patterns of implementation', or '…efficiency, in addition to the normal uses of the term'. Context describes those features of the conditions in which programmes are introduced that are relevant to the operation of mechanisms. Context is often institutional, social and cultural (i.e. norms, values rules, inter-relationships, economic conditions, existing public policy) in nature (Dalkin et al., 2015; Pawson and Tilley, 1997). CMO configurations are used as explanatory formulae (programme theories), which are refined as the project progresses, then 'tested' through empirical data. They, in effect, postulate potential causal pathways between interventions and impacts (Lhussier et al, 2018) and provide a more nuanced account of how the intervention works (Dalkin et al, 2015).

Implementation and Normalisation Process Theory

'Grand theories' are used within realist approaches to provide abstract concepts, supporting generalisation across different contexts and provide perspective to the developing programme theories. A number of theories, including theory of planned behaviour, social learning theory, social development theory and normalisation process theory (NPT) were reviewed in order to provide a framework for the research. NPT was identified to have the most explanatory potential for the analysis, as the evaluation sought to understand 'how' and 'why' elements of the learning become or do not become routine and normal components of everyday work for the Coach Developers.

NPT is a theoretically informed approach which shares similarities with realist evaluation; it was employed to provide an explanatory framework for investigating the routine embedding of coach development practices in social contexts (May & Finch, 2009). In particular, both use generative conceptions of causality in order to explain how interventions work (Wilson et al., 2015). NPT is concerned with the work that people do individually and collectively to perform certain acts and achieve specific outcomes (May and Finch, 2009; May et al., 2009). It explores early implementation of an intervention, and then looks beyond this to the point where an intervention becomes so embedded into routine practice that it "disappears" from view (i.e. it is normalised) (May and Finch, 2009). NPT was

chosen to frame this study as it seeks to illuminate the processes by which staff 'normalise' or make routine a new practice.

NPT can be used at different points in qualitative research. In this study NPT was utilised to complement and enhance evaluation findings by framing emerging programme theories. NPT proposes that the work of implementation is operationalised through four domains, which have previously been conceptualised as generative mechanisms in realist research (Tsang et al., 2016); coherence; cognitive participation; collective action; and reflexive monitoring (these concepts are explored within the findings).

Research Context: Post Graduate Diploma in Coach Development

In 2017, a Post Graduate Diploma (PGDip) in Coach Development was launched in a collaboration between a UK university (Leeds Beckett University) and the Football Association (FA), devised by the UK university. The PGDip built on a Post Graduate Certificate previously delivered to Coach Developers by the university and aimed to provide focused learning relating to reality of the professional role and context of the Coach Developer. It is unique, in the fact that it aimed to address the issues experienced by professional FA Coach Developers, providing learning to support Coach Developers in making informed judgements and decisions in a context of greater shared understanding. Throughout the course, the delivery team from the university aimed to work with Coach Developer's existing experience and knowledge base, in terms of the part they play in individual learning, and the transfer of practices into 'real-life' contexts when working with football clubs. The course included classroom-based teaching at national training session events bringing together all Coach Developers, alongside interactive group work and practical demonstration activities. In additional, regional groups were formed, led by staff from the delivering university in order to facilitate more regular teaching contact and to provide a platform for discussion and reflection. Thus, the PGDip aims to promote stimulus for

learning through use of critical self-reflection. The PGDip is itself a complex programme affected by numerous compounding factors.

Twenty-eight Coach Developers registered on the PGDip; 17 from Youth Coach Development, 5 from National Coach Development, 3 from the Professional Footballers Association and 3 external to the FA, from individual professional football clubs. Participants represented a mixed demographic. Prior educational achievement varied, ranging from individuals who had completed no further education since compulsory school, to some having completed post graduate studies. Of the participants, 7 had previously completed the Post Graduate Certificate in Coach Development. In addition, Coach Developers ranged in terms of background experience, some being former professional football players, some from coaching backgrounds and others from educational settings. This research was commissioned by the FA and due to the complex nature of the PGDip, the evaluation not only addressed '*Has it worked?*' but looks to also understand '*What is it about the PGDip that has worked, for whom, in which circumstances and why?*' This approach is sensitive to generative causation, whereby there is a need to explore and understand what it is about the PGDip that works, what benefits it generates for both Coach Developers involved and the wider FA, and why outcomes might differ between Coach Developers.

Data Generation

Programme theories are the ideas and assumptions underlying how, why and in what circumstances complex social interventions work and are the units of analysis used within realist evaluation (Best et al., 2012, Gee et al, 2017). The initial overarching programme theory used to guide this research proposed that:

Coach Developers have a wealth of previous experience (variable context). New learning using self-refection (resource; mechanism) enables coaches to apply and integrate new knowledge directly to their local, specific knowledge (reasoning; mechanism), facilitating in-situ decision making (outcome 1), generating new ways of working (outcome 2) and improving the game (outcome 3).

Qualitative interviews were used to explore propositions highlighted from a PGDip document analysis of the PGDip curricula and course materials, alongside fieldwork which incorporated observations. Documents included in the documentary analysis included course overview related papers from the delivering university and FA papers relating to the background and aims for the PGDip.

Manzano's (2016) notion of theory gleaning, theory refinement and theory consolidation interviews were used to guide the focus of the interviews and analysis. Initial theory gleaning consultations were conducted with key stakeholders, including three staff connected to the delivery of the PGDip from the delivering university and three staff within the Education Department at the FA. The interviews aided in exploring and refining the insights gained from the documentary analysis, before entering the field (Manzano, 2016) (see supplementary file 1 for further detail). Initial programme theories were developed from these conversations, combined with emerging findings from the literature scope and PGDip programme document analysis (stage 1). These were then tested and refined, in observations of PGDip delivery and theory refinement interviews with Coach Developers (Stage 2). Further follow-up theory refinement and consolidation interviews with Coach Developers, FA staff and delivering university staff were used to understand the nuances of being an active student on the PGDip (stage 3). These interviews aimed to *'… refine general programme theories while exploring unobservable events or thought processes'* (Manazo, 2016 p355). Further detail regarding each stage of the research process is detailed below and in Table 1:

1. The first stage was a literature scope, PGDip course content analysis and theory gleaning consultations with key stakeholders from the FA and the delivering university. This work provided evidence about the contexts in which the PGDip was delivered and the contingent mechanisms that may trigger outcomes. The synthesis of this evidence resulted in 15 initial programme theories, mapping out how the PGDip was intended to work and hypothesising any potential factors that may limit outcomes (supplementary file 1).

2. The second stage was to test and refine the initial programme theories. This was conducted over two phases, using multiple qualitative methods.

3. The third stage consisted of consolidating the findings to provide finalised programme theories.

Table 1 details the data collection schedule (note: national training sessions included all Coach Developers and North/South training sessions included circa 10 Coach Developers).

[Table 1: Data generation schedule]

Participation in the research study was voluntary and recruitment was conducted via an introductory email about the research process sent out from the FA to all staff on the PGDip, with the Researcher's email address for Coach Developers to opt-in to participate in the study. Coach Developers were anonymously categorised in relation to their level of engagement and participation with the PGDip by the delivering university (i.e., fully engaged, somewhat engaged, little engagement) and interviews attempted to gain representation from each category to ensure spread and 'real' findings. Interviews lasted between 25 minutes and 1 hour. Data collection took place from September 2018 - October 2019 with interviews conducted until data saturation was reached. Ethical approval was granted through the Northumbria University Ethical Approval System.

Findings

Rather than addressing the development of initial programme theories and the iterative process of theory testing and refinement (see supplementary file 1), this section focuses on the three consolidated programme theories that were the end product of the analysis process. These are PT1: Learning must link to practice, PT 2: Influence of peers, and PT3: Professionalisation.

PT1: Learning must link to practice

The structured learning in the PGDip predominantly focused on theories and concepts regarding adult education and learning, rather than football or coaching, where Coach Developers reported already

having significant experience and expertise (context). Many of the participants reported increasing their knowledge in terms of education theory and adult education through the PGDip (mechanism; resource).

In terms of curriculum development. Certainly, in terms of how people learn. In terms of how to develop the individuals. Yeah, definitely. And, you know, around, sort of... Technical aspects as well. Not necessarily the technical aspects of football, but... The... Sort of the... The technical aspects of how people learn, and it effects... (CD7)

Throughout the interviews it was apparent that a core element of the delivery of the PGDip related to facilitating self-reflection within the Coach Developers. Reflection remains at the heart of all experienced based learning theories (Kolb, 1984; Schon, 1983), as it is the process that mediates and aids in the process of sense making of an individual's experience and knowledge (Gilbert & Trudel, 2001). The notion of self-reflection resonated with many of the Coach Developers who stated that they had previously used this practice but not to the same extent promoted by the PGDip. Self-reflection created the link between theory and the Coach Developers 'real-world' working within the football clubs.

I think it's [PGDip] complemented... It's given me a better understanding of why I think… My gut feel about how that works… I know your gut feel comes from your reflections, but I think it's giving you a little bit more understanding about, oh, I get that... A bit more confirmation, I guess… A bit more something to hang your hat on. (CD1)

The self-reflection was also viewed to challenge existing conceptions and practices held by the Coach Developers:

…it challenging my thinking about, sometimes, how I've used the tools. Because I've used them without really knowing why I've used them. Basically, I'm experimenting. Which isn't a bad thing… (CD 2)

This linking of theory from the PGDip and 'real world' knowledge aligns with the construct of collective action within NPT. Collective Action relates to the operational work undertaken to enact the

theory from the PGDip, i.e. questioning can new information fit with old ways? Relational integration is a component of collective action and refers to the knowledge generation that individuals undertake to build accountability and maintain confidence in a set of practices as they use them (May & Finch, 2009). In the focus of this research it asks what is done by Coach Developers to maintain confidence in the practices taught through the PGDip.

There were methods used throughout the PGDip which facilitate the use of self-reflection as a tool to enable Coach Developers to reflect on the information from the course and how this could be used within their own context of the football clubs they work into and thus increase confidence in practices taught (mechanism; reasoning). Methods included group-based discussion where Coach Developers shared experiences, on-pitch practical sessions at the national training events and more formal reflections captured as part of assignments. Reflection, in this sense, bridges the gap between the application of professional knowledge and practice, and raises it into conscious intuitive knowledge (Knowles et al., 2001). We learn therefore, as a result of reflecting, which emphasises the need in all professional environments to use reflective practice on a regular basis. In its simplest form then, reflective practice is the learner's response to an experience through an iterative process, rather than just a one-off event (Bell et al., 2010). These practices assist in making the knowledge gained from the course relevant, and in doing so assist with the relational integration of knowledge into 'real-world' contexts, therefore increasing the probability of the practices becoming routine.

The use of self-reflective exercises (e.g., 'reflective conversations') were triggered by dilemmas in the practice environment, which are bound by practitioner's expectations, beliefs, and values regarding that environment (Gilbert & Trudel, 2001 Cushion, 2018). These conversations held as part of group discussions at national and regional events were viewed to challenge thinking, prompting critical analysis of previous and current practices to identify different ways of working.

> *It's* [PGDip] *challenged some of the stuff I did...And it's also confirmed some stuff as well. You know, in terms of influencing, etc. And what have you. It's changed my thinking about the... The game. In terms of sense-making, syllabuses and curriculums.* (CD7)

Self-reflective learning prompted acknowledgement of Coach Developer's own values and beliefs, it re-framed learning, prompting connection between current knowledge gained on the PGDip and existing practices of the Coach Developers. Self-awareness has been identified as a trigger for prompting behaviour change (Cushion et al., 2012) and reflects the cognitive participation construct within NPT. Cognitive participation relates to the work people do to build and sustain a community of practice. When a set of practices is new or modified, a core problem is whether or not key participants are working to drive them forward (May et al., 2015). Throughout the data generation period is was evident that unless learning from the PGDip was linked to relevant contextual everyday practices of Coach Developers it was not viewed to be relevant.

The use of personal stories was given as an example of how a Coach Developers personal experience can link with new learning, to prompt new behaviours within football clubs. For example:

> *So, how you link in your stories and experiences to stuff that's going on in the club. So, you know, my using past experience in the club, I'll tell stories of what we did and what worked and what didn't. And it's getting that balance right...* (CD8)

In addition, as part of the group discussions observed at regional and national sessions, it was noted that coach developers were very much engaged in group discussions where others were explaining situations that they had been in and outcomes/key learning points from these experiences, often contributing with their own similar experiences/stories to reinforce main themes of the discussion.

The extract above also relates to self-reflection as a mechanism through which to assist Coach Developers to use new learning in familiar situations; breaking the cycle of employing old and more accustomed ways of working. This reflects the notion of skill set workability within NPT whereby the allocation of work which underpins the division of labour, is built up around a set of practices, as they are operationalised in the real world. What has been learnt, must be able to easily be transferred and

applied within the field (May & Finch, 2009). This therefore will increase the potential for re-enactment of, or to provide influence on future behaviours (outcome).

A refined programme theory was generated from the analysis:

The PGDip provides a fundamental knowledge base surrounding coach development related theory (resource; mechanism) and learning that promotes an acknowledgement of individual Coach Developer values and expertise through reflection (context), which facilitates connection between current learning and existing practices (reasoning; mechanism). This increases the likelihood of new practices being enacted in the field (outcome).

PT2: Influence of Peers

A substantial part of the PGDip was the bringing together of Coach Developers at national and regional events to deliver the educational learning of the course (context). This is associated with the notion of interactional workability within NPT. That is, the interactional work that people do with each other to inform practices (May & Finch, 2009). As an intended consequence through the course design by the delivering university and the FA, the bringing together of Coach Developers, enabled peer to peer relationships to be forged and grown. This finding reflects the wider coach learning and education literature that has highlighted how coaches a) value the practical nature of meeting, and conversing, with other coaches during formal coach education settings (Culver & Trudel, 2006; Cushion et al., 2010) and b) regard such interaction as an opportunity to overcome the often isolated nature of their work and interactively generate solutions to specific practice related problems (Culver & Trudel, 2008; Nash & Sproule, 2009).

Group work within the delivery of the PGDip included events such as classroom based lectures followed by smaller group discussions, as well as practical coaching sessions where Coach Developers could put theory into practice within a controlled environment. The PGDip provided a facilitated environment where the lecturers from the delivering university promoted a culture of shared self-reflection through

posing questions within the sessions. The facilitation of the sessions ensured that discussions were kept 'on track'. However, it was witnessed that the lecturers were knowledgeable as to when to let conversations develop slightly off topic which appeared to enhance the learning together experience. This has assisted in facilitating a sense of belonging in the Coach Development community (outcome).

> *Everybody is in the same room at the same time. And, like, that is a big group. And the benefits of that are you do get a vast variety of experiences.* (CD2)

This importance placed on the role of peers in providing a community is reflected in the construct of coherence within NPT. Coherence in this sense, relates to the sense-making work required for successful implementation of an intervention, such as the PGDip. Within this construct there is a reliance on people working together to build a shared understanding of the aims, objectives, and expected benefits of a set of practices (mechanism). Peers were seen to be used as a 'sounding board' to discuss current practices and emerging issues, to share ideas and to influence the consolidation of learning from the PGDip by being exposed to practical examples from others, which detailed how and why the learning from the PGDip was enacted (mechanism; resource). In all, this led to a collective shared understanding between Coach Developers that proved to be very influential in terms of willingness to learn and impact on new behaviours.

> *…just about how different they work, and taking ideas from what they do, and adapting it to my work, really.* (CD3)

Discussions within the group work settings were seen to generate individual reflective practices relating to how others might act in that particular situation and produce a feeling of 'shared understanding' and increased cohesion between Coach Developers.

> *Although you're working independently, you know you're part of a bigger team and a group. So, it's nice sometimes to share those insecurities or problems. Some of the problems that you encounter. So, I think it… It brings… You know, you… It brings you together, knowing that you're not on your own and there are similarities.* (CD1)

The key mechanism identified within the context of the group work element of the PGDip was related to bringing Coach Developers together, as this prompted discussion. Peer to peer discussion on general issues relating to practice (mechanism; resource) were highlighted by many as being one the most beneficial aspects of the PGDip. Group work was conducted through small group meetings held at the national gatherings, regional group work through the geographical cluster sessions, and structured group work through assignments, whereby Coach Developers were directed into particular groups by the delivering university to undertake assignments.

The outcomes of the group discussions are seen to prompt cohesive new ways of working by Coach Developers. Examples of what other Coach Developers have done in similar situations often resonated with individuals and prompts attitude change (mechanism; reasoning). The notion of enrolment within the cognitive participation construct of NPT supports the emerging findings in relation to the importance placed on peer support within the learning environment. It states that people may need to organise, and reorganise themselves and others in order to collectively contribute to the work involved in new practices (May et al., 2015). The influence of peers is highlighted here in terms of prompting behavioural changes as an outcome of being exposed to practices and experiences from other Coach Developers. It should be noted that it is not always specific behaviours that Coach Developers were seen to adopt from one another, but more the prompting of different ways of thinking. This was often coupled with the formal learning delivery, particularly around learning theories delivered through the PGDip. For example:

> *I think you're always picking up on… On things when you see somebody else work.* (CD9)
>
> *But I think once we got onto the grass, and we're coaching players and we're helping each other and we're doing coach developments, we actually… Everyone then said afterwards that was a really powerful two days. Because it's doing what we do. You know, we're recreating a bit with some college lads, but actually, you know, it's as close to what you really do as you can get.* (CD8)

The structure of the PGDip facilitated group-work exercises within the national meetings, which saw Coach Developers working with a variety of their peers. The continuous 'shuffle' of groups was able to prompt discussion, sharing of practices and develop support between Coach Developers who may not normally work together. There was a mix of Professional Football Association, Youth Coach Developers and external staff as well as varying degrees of professional football playing experience within each of the groups. This led to interesting dynamics in terms of observable power and respect within the group. The effect of the varying social capitals within the room in relation to what was shared within the group discussions cannot be known. However, the discussions were observed to be very open, with a willingness to share sometimes quite personal information in relation to coach development practices delivered. Linked to this, the size of the group was viewed to influence types of information shared. Small group (circa 8 Coach Developers) discussions at national event and the regional events promoted discussion and sharing of experiences. However, when tables were asked to feed back about their discussions to the whole Coach Developer cohort there did not appear to be the same level of willingness to share information.

Following the analysis, a refined programme theory was postulated:

In the context of group work-based learning approaches (resource; mechanism) shared understanding between Coach Developers is prompted through peer discussion (context) which influences new Coach Development related attitudes (reasoning; mechanism) promoting the development of a coach development community (outcome 1).

PT3: Professionalisation

A key mechanism that emerged as the research progressed was the notion of the professionalisation of the role of the Coach Developer. This professionalisation was stated to enhance the credibility of the role (outcome), both within the Coach Developer community and the wider football community, including the football clubs' that the participants worked with.

I think as an industry, for ourselves. I think people looking across from other industries, it will give us more respect amongst those industries. Whether that's in education, whether it's in… In business or wherever. I think that can only be good. I don't think coaching probably gets the recognition it deserves. And then to have something that's specific around coach education, and tutoring and helping coaches… You know, there's… There isn't really an award that's out there that's recognised. (CD4)

Linked to the notion of activation, within the cognitive participation construct of NPT, is a requirement for participants to collectively define the actions and procedures needed to sustain a practice once it has begun in order to stay involved (May et al., 2015). The increased professionalisation of the Coach Developer role is linked to the development of a new language within the role, incorporating terminology linked to learning theories and adult education practices (mechanism; resource). Many of the Coach Developers stated that they had been in football for most of their life but did not necessarily have any formal qualifications to 'back up' their extensive football knowledge. This formal aspect of the qualification was therefore important to many of the Coach Developers.

You know, I've got the A license and this, that and the other. But to go and get… a qualification from an education background… I think that always makes you, maybe, stand out from the crowd. And people think, well, if you've been through that, you know, he's credible. He knows his stuff. (CD 5)

…you learn a lot of theory. And then it's being able to understand and work out how that theory is applied within the role of what you do… makes you think about slightly different things in the way you approach certain subjects. Certain ways of working, back in your own environment. (CD2)

In addition, the course was delivered by an external organisation (the delivering university), which was viewed very favourably in terms of recognising and acknowledging the specialist nature of the role in order to give it credibility.

You know, we're all kind of A License, pro license coaches. But there's nothing really to say that we're actually qualified in developing. So to actually have a… You know, a PG diploma or a Masters to say that, you know, actually… You know, I'm actually good at what we do – this is why. (CD5)

The significance of the educational element of the qualification and associated increased professionalisation of the Coach Development role highlighted above also relates to the notion of sense-making within NPT, whereby people are seen to understand the value, benefits and importance of a set of practices (May & Finch 2009). In the case of this research, the information from the PGDip needed to be seen as valuable to the Coach Developers. Although opinions towards having an educational qualification varied, the majority felt that having an academic qualification linked to coach development assisted with the profession gaining credibility (outcome) and brought with it an element of respect in terms of theoretical knowledge on the subject to compliment the extensive football knowledge many of the Coach Developers also bring to the role (outcome).

The changing culture within football was also highlighted as important. Specifically, most of the Coach Developers had been working in football for significant time periods and commented that 'new blood' was coming into the game with different, often academic backgrounds (context). This prompted a number of the Coach Developers to want to increase their knowledge on educational and adult learning theory and application. The PGDip was viewed to equip Coach Developers with a new language in relation to learning and development practices that they can use to converse and thus maintain their credibility within club settings and future longevity in their working role (mechanism; reasoning). For example:

Eight years in the post… I think the main benefit… It's the retention of your own credibility in clubs. So, the first time, really, I've… I've seen the real relevance, was talking to a… Well, a couple of coaches who've gone on – real high fliers. Young guys who've been on the academic qualifications. And I think the first time they start talking around a… You know, the language

or certain, sort of, theories… That you can converse with them – it maintains your credibility.

(CD1)

Coherence within NPT requires that people understand their specific tasks and responsibilities around a set of practices (May & Finch 2009). The PGDip has prompted the expansion of professional knowledge on coach development practices at both an individual and collective level (mechanism), and as such is viewed to influence behaviours and increase the perceived professionalisation of the role through developed understanding. Linked to this, the idea of communal appraisal within NPT refers to Coach Developers working together in formal collaboratives. These collaboratives include the formal groups facilitated at national gathering days, or informal groups, such as having discussions with peers during breaks on the PGDip or outside the structured learning environment with the aim to evaluate the worth of a set of practices; which in the case of this example relates to the evaluation of the worth of the PGDip and how it contributes to the professionalisation of the role.

This link to increased professionalisation of the role fostered through the completion of a formal qualification to build credibility, also links in part to standardisation of practices. This standardisation is brought about by the participation in group lectures delivered as part of the PGDip whereby professional knowledge in relation to coach development practices is expanded. However, many of the Coach Developers were cautious in interviews, highlighting that there are some elements of the role that could be standardised, such as core principles, but that it is not possible to completely standardise practices across Coach Developers. This is because the context of the individual clubs Coach Developers worked in and the individual experience (in terms of football playing experience) of Coach Developers played a crucial role in influencing coach development practices.

I think you need a framework around teaching and learning. And what that looks like. But then the context of the environment you're working all depends on what that particular coach is having to deal with. (CD1)

And when you go back to your club, they say, well, we play this style. So, it's how you interpret that piece of information in that environment, with that coach, that group of players. (CD2)

Following data analysis, a refined programme theory is proposed:

In the context of the changing nature of the game (football) (context), the need for increased professionalisation of the Coach Developer role (reasoning: mechanism) is required. This is achieved through expansion of professional knowledge on coach development educational practices (resource; mechanism) which leads to new knowledge informing coach development behaviours (outcome 1) and the increased professionalisation of the Coach Developer role (outcome 2).

Interconnection between programme theories

Figure 1 illustrates how the delivered structured learning which utilised learning theory and adult education was both a successful mechanism in programme theory 3 and a contextual consideration for programme theory 1 (figure 1). Within this context there was an identified need by both the course developers and the Coach Developers to be able to relate the structured learning being delivered to the 'real-world'. As highlighted in findings section, Coach Developers have a wealth of expertise in terms of football knowledge and experience, and it is this which has predominately led them into a career within Coach Development. It was crucial therefore for this existing expertise to be recognised and used as a base to build new knowledge upon, if the new knowledge was to be of use and ultimately retained and acted upon. Through the use of self-reflection, the PGDip was able to facilitate the link between 'new' structured learning and existing expertise, experiences and values, and thus much of the new learning was evidenced to have been utilised in new emerging practices from the Coach Developers. This is turn reinforced the credibility of the role due to the integrity and validity of learning theory and adult education resources (Figure 1).

The PGDip created a new environment for the Coach Developers on the course. It was reported that the role of Coach Developer is often an isolated one whereby a large proportion of time is spent traveling between and in football clubs with no other representation from the FA. The course therefore provided

an opportunity for all Coach Developers to get together prompting both formal and informal group work between peers. This context was evidenced to be fundamental in relation to prompting a shared understanding between the Coach Developers as to their understanding of the course content and to how learning can be translated into practice. The discussions held as part of this group-work context also fed into the notion of the reasoning mechanism within programme theory 1, whereby the discussions Coach Developers were having within the context of either formal or informal group-work helped to promote understanding regarding behaviours and thus facilitate connection between current learning and existing practices (Figure 1).

[Figure 1: Programme theories]

Limitations

Although the fieldwork attempted to achieve a representative sample across the spectrum of engagers to non-engagers participating on the course, the sample was skewed more towards those that choose to actively engage with the course. Attempts were made to encourage participation in the research, but participation was voluntary. However, all Coach Developers were witnessed within the observation episodes.

Due to the extension of timescales for the PGDip part-way through the evaluation, the fieldwork only covered modules 1 & 2 within the PGDip, as opposed to all 3 modules. The potential effects of this are thought to have been mitigated as modules 1 and 2 were taught modules, whereas 3 was a professional project, where it is expected learning from modules 1 and 2 will be applied and more individual working is required. In addition, practical sessions at national events and assignment presentations and feedback at regional group events were observed, which illustrated the application of knowledge gained through the PGDip.

Conclusion

The evaluation highlighted the impact of the changing nature of the 'game' (football context), in relation to 'new blood' in football clubs and internal re-structures within the FA. In response to these changes there was a perceived need from the Coach Developers to increase their professional standing and credibility in the role, which was facilitated through the completion of the PGDip. Indeed, for some of the participants, it was their respective reading of the micropolitical terrain of their working worlds that informed their engagement with this programme of study; a finding that reflects recent inquiry addressing micropolitical literacy in coach education work (e.g., Allanson et al., in press). In particular, the PGDip was perceived to equip them with new theoretical knowledge to enhance their professional status and standing. Active participation in the programme also provided a signal to employers of commitment to the organisations strategic development and direction. Combined, these were perceived to be important to their continued employment as Coach Developers. It was also apparent that Coach Developers varied in relation to professional football experience (years and level of participation) and, as such, there was an acknowledgement of the need for the Coach Development cohort to address any lack of theoretical learning or educational understanding to supplement extensive football knowledge and experience. The PGDip was therefore held in high regard by Coach Developers in being able to fill this gap.

Importantly, the programme theories developed and tested within this study focused on explaining what it is within the PGDip that works, for whom and in what circumstances, whilst understanding how and why elements of the PGDip become, or do not become routine components of everyday practice in order to influence future education service delivery within the FA. This realist evaluation has explored contexts, and the mechanisms triggered as a result of Coach Developer participation on the PGDip. This was addressed through the development, and refinement of programme theories using NPT to enhance the explanatory endeavour, concluding in an overarching explanatory framework which maps out the key generative mechanisms of the course, which were found to have the greatest influence on the Coach Developers. Our analysis indicated that the PGDip has been successful in delivering relevant training which has impacted upon and shaped emerging coach development practices (programme theory 1). It

has also been successful in bringing together Coach Developers in order to develop a more cohesive workforce (programme theory 2), and brought about a shift in the way Coach Development as a profession is viewed, providing a level of credibility to the role (programme theory 3).

Overall, these findings have contributed to a more detailed understanding of what mechanisms within the delivery of the PGDip are effective within the context of the FA's Coach Developer workforce (detailed within programme theories). Importantly, the findings suggest that the PGDip has been more than simply a transfer of knowledge. Instead, it has helped develop a Coach Developer community, thus facilitating the exchange of information between peers, ultimately impacting on Coach Development behaviours. In addition, a key concept running through the programme theories is that the outcome related behaviours are anticipated to become normalised, embedded in everyday practice by Coach Developers. However, it should be highlighted that normalisation is only one possible outcome. Other related outcomes include adoption, whereby outcomes are delivered but do not become routinely embedded in everyday work; and rejection, where Coach Developers may refuse the behaviour change (May et al, 2017). Future research is necessary to understand these longer-term impacts. Future research is also required to understand the impact of the identified mechanisms in broader educational fields.

In generating evidence-based understandings of the effective delivery of the PGDip, and using NPT to show how the behaviour outcomes become normalised in professional and personal contexts, this research has the potential to inform the development of future education provision within the FA and beyond. Further longitudinal evaluation of coach education and development programmes using realist approaches will assist further towards understanding 'what works for whom, in what circumstances and why'. Research that seeks to understand the dynamics and benefits of bringing coaches together from different backgrounds (Piggott, 2015), and the time it takes to stimulate normalised behaviour change in coaching, would be of benefit to coach education programme designers in the future.

References

Allanson, A., Potrac, P., & Nelson, L. (in press). The Career Experiences of Football Association Coach Educators: Lessons in Micropolitical Literacy and Action. Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health.

Archer, M, Bhaskar, R, Collier, A, Norrie, A & Lawson, T (1998) Critical Realism: Essential Readings London: Routledge

Best A, Greenhalgh T, Lewis S, Saul JE, Carroll S & Bitz J (2012) Large-system transformation in health care: a realist review. *Milbank Quarterly* 90(3):421–456

Bhaskar (1998) The Possibility of Naturalism (3rd edition), London: Routledge

Boocock, E. (2017) A Realist Evaluation of an Elite Coach Development Programme in Football. (PhD Thesis). Leeds Beckett University, Leeds, UK.

Bygstad, B & Munkvold, B (2011) In Search of Mechanisms. Conducting a Critical Realist Data Analysis. In: International Conference on Information Systems, ICIS 2011, Shanghai, China: Available at:
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/221600158_In_Search_of_Mechanisms_Conducting_a_Critical_Realist_Data_Analysis

Caló, F, Roy, MJ, Donaldson, C, Teasdale, S & Baglioni, S (2019). Exploring the contribution of social enterprise to health and social care: A realist evaluation. Social Science & Medicine 222, 154-161

Chesterfield, G., Potrac, P., & Jones, R. (2010). Studentship and impression management in an advanced soccer coach education award. Sport, Education, & Society, 15(3), 299-314.

Cochran-Smith, M, Ell, F, Ludlow, L, Grundnoff, L & Aitken, G (2014) The Challenge and Promise of Complexity Theory for Teacher Education Research, Teachers College Record Volume 116

Cushion, C. J., Griffiths, M., & Armour, K. (2019). Professional coach educators in-situ: a social analysis of practice. Sport, Education and Society, 24(5), 533-546.

Dalkin, S, Forster, N, Hodgson, P, Lhussier, M, Philipson, P & Carr, S (2019). Exposing the impact of intensive advice services on health: A realist evaluation. Health Social Care Community 27(3): 767-776

Dalkin, S, Greenhalgh, J, Jones, D, Cunningham, B & Lhussier, M (2015) What's in a mechanism? Development of a key concept in realist evaluation. *Implementation Science* 10:49

Davidoff F, Dixon-Woods M, Leviton L, Michie S. Demystifying theory and its use in improvement. BMJ Qual Saf. 2015; https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjqs-2014-003627

Demers, G., Woodburn, A. J., & Savard, C. (2006). The development of an undergraduate competency-based coach education program. The Sport Psychologist, 20(2), 162-173.

Dohme, L. C., Rankin-Wright, A. J., & Lara-Bercial, S. (2019). Beyond knowledge transfer: The role of coach developers as motivators for lifelong learning. *International Sport Coaching Journal*, *6*(3), 317-328.

Gee, M, Bhanbhro, S, Cook, S & Killaspy, H (2017) Rapid realist review of the evidence: achieving lasting change when mental health rehabilitation staff undertake recovery-oriented training. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 73 (8): 1775-1791.

Jones, R. L., & Turner, P. (2006). Teaching coaches to coach holistically: Can problem-based learning (PBL) help?. Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy, 11(2), 181-202.

Judge, (2000) Testing evaluation to the limits: the case of English Health Action Zones. *Journal of Health Services Research Policy* 5(1)

Lyle, J., & Cushion, C. (2016). Sport coaching concepts: A framework for coaching practice. London: Routledge.

Lhussier, M, Dalkin, S & Hetherington, R (2018) Community care for severely frail older people: Developing explanations of how, why and for whom it works *International Journal of Older people Nursing* 14(1)

Manzano, A (2016) The craft of interviewing in realist evaluation. *Evaluation* 22(3): 342-360

May, C. A rational model for assessing and evaluating complex interventions in health care (2006) BMC Health Service Research 6, 86

May, C & Finch, T (2009) Implementing, Embedding, and Integrating Practices: An Outline of Normalization Process Theory. *Sociology* 43(3): 535-554

May, C, Mair, F, Finch, T, MacFarlane, A, Dowrick, C, Treweek, S, Rapley, T, Ballini, L, Ong, B, Rogers, A, Murray, E, Elwyn, G, Legare, F, Gunn, J & Montori, V (2009) Development of a theory of implementation and integration: Normalization Process Theory. *Implementation Science* 4:29

May, C, Rapley, T, Mair, F, Treweek, S, Murray, ., Ballini, L, Macfarlane, A Girling, M &Finch, T (2015) Normalization Process Theory On-line Users' Manual, Toolkit and NoMAD instrument. Available from http://www.normalizationprocess.org

May, C, Finch, T, Mair, F, Ballini, L, Dowrick, C, Eccles, M, Gask, L, MacFarlane, A, Murray, E, Rapley, T, Rogers, A, Treweek, S, Wallace, P, Anderson, G, Burns, J & Heaven, B (2007) Understanding the implementation of complex interventions in health care: the normalization process model. *BMC Health Services Research* 7:148

Nelson, L.J., Cushion, C.J., & Potrac, P. (2013). Enhancing the provision of coach education: The recommendations of UK coaching practitioners. Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy, 18(2), 204-218.

Nichol, A. J., Hall, E. T., Vickery, W., & Hayes, P. R. (2019). Examining the relationships between coaching practice and athlete "outcomes": A systematic review and critical realist critique. *International Sport Coaching Journal*, 6(1), 13-29.

North, J. (2013). A critical realist approach to theorising coaching practice. In P. Potrac, W. D. Gilbert & J. Dennison (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Sports Coaching*. Routledge, London.

North, J. (2017). *Sport coaching research and practice: Ontology, interdisciplinarity and critical realism*. Taylor & Francis, London.

Pawson, R & Tilley, N (1997) *Realistic evaluation*, London, SAGE.

Piggott, D. (2012) Coaches' experiences of formal coach education: a critical sociological investigation. *Sport, Education and Society*, 17(4), 535 – 554.

Piggott, D. (2015) The open society and coach education: A philosophical agenda for policy reform and future sociological research. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, *20*(3), 283-298.

Roberts, S. (2010). What can coach education programmes learn from the teachers? Model-based instruction in a UK National Governing Body award course. International Journal of Sports Science and Coaching, 5(1), 109–116.

Stodter, A., & Cushion, C. J. (2017). What works in coach learning, how, and for whom? A grounded process of soccer coaches' professional learning. Qualitative research in sport, exercise and health, 9(3), 321-338.

Trudel, P., Culver, D., & Werthner, P. (2013) Looking at coach development from a coach-learner's perspective: Considerations for coach development administrators. In P. Potrac, W. Gilbert and J. Denison (Eds), Routledge Handbook of Sport Coaching (pp. 375-387). London: Routledge.

Wilson P, Mathie E, Keenan J, et al. ReseArch with Patient and Public invOlvement: a RealisT evaluation – the RAPPORT study. Southampton (UK): NIHR Journals Library; 2015 Sep. Health Services and Delivery Research, No. 3.38

Wood (2017) Overcoming the problem of embedding change in educational organizations: A perspective from Normalization Process Theory. *Management in Education* 31(1): 33-38

Wong, G, Greenhalgh, T, Westhorp, G & Pawson, R (2012) Realist methods in medical education research: what are they and what can they contribute? *Medical Education* 46: 89-96

Wong, G, Westhorp, G, Manzano, A, Greenhalgh, J, Jagosh, J & Greenhalgh, T (2016) RAMESES II reporting standards for realist evaluations. *BMC Med* 14(96)