CONTEXT AND PRACTICE WITHIN A YOUTH FOOTBALL SETTING: AN EXPLORATION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING THROUGH ACTION RESEARCH PROCESSES

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Abstract

The present thesis explores psychological well-being (PWB), practice and context within a professional football academy. The thesis also focuses on the processes of action research as a catalyst for practice-change in the academy environment, towards a culture of well-being. During the initial stages, pre-reconnaissance discussions took place with key academy practitioners to explore practitioner perceptions of well-being and coaching practice within context.

The thesis is divided into two distinct phases; the reconnaissance phase, and the action phase. The reconnaissance phase encouraged the researcher to 'live the experience' alongside the research participants. Therefore emersion into the field of an academy football environment was required on a daily basis. The action research from reconnaissance-to-practice provided a detailed account of day-to-day events and on-going lived experiences of players and practitioners within the academy football environment. Consequently, qualitative data collection took place regularly in order to monitor and capture the personal experiences of academy players and practitioners, to follow individual threads of inquiry. Also field notes, player focus groups, informal interviews and formal taped interviews provided sufficient data for triangulation to occur. This multi-method approach enabled the researcher to take advantage of the rich variety of sources upon which were available (Tomlinson, 1983).

The data collection protocol investigated how practitioners engaged in culturally specific practice within the academy. The action phase introduced collaborative practitioner meetings as part of the action research process to address practice that could later be linked specifically to psychological well-being (PWB) dimensions. The overall aim of the collaborative practitioner meetings was to drive debate and change, based on the notion that well-being can be related to everyday practice. Although there was similarity in how the meetings were described, the primary analysis differed, in particular the first two collaborative practitioner meetings underwent thorough content analysis from both an inductive (cultural and situational) and deductive (concept-oriented) stance. The reality of the research reflected the unpredictable process and dilemmas that may occur within the processes of action research and practice-change.

The research provided detailed insight into the culture of football and the perceptions and experiences of full-time academy players, practitioners and the researcher's own reflections on the research journey, with regards to psychological well-being (PWB). Within the processes of action research, the practical utility of theory and the personal-contextual dynamic of a practice-change process within a youth football setting were considered and discussed. The research encouraged notions of emancipation within a participatory and collaborative process.

Key Words: Psychological well-being (PWB), subjective well-being (SWB), action research, context and practice.

Acknowledgements

Introduction

The primary objective of a professional football academy is to produce players for first team football. The window of opportunity and success is narrow, with academies often coming under intense scrutiny to develop and produce talented young players within a short time-frame. The Football Association (1997) stipulated that "technical development cannot, and should not, be viewed in isolation of the player's overall educational and social welfare" (www.TheFA.com). They suggested that the player's overall well-being must be taken into account when considering factors of performance and placed emphasis on the performance-well-being relationship. However, Tomlinson (1983) noted that within the culture of English football "the sudden switch from apparent indispensability to potential redundancy or wastage can be experienced by the player in the most traumatic of ways" (p.158). Within a football academy such experiences occur frequently as academy players' face many challenges whilst trying to progress within the profession.

Little research had been carried out in the elite environment, in particular within the intense and competitive football environment. Creed at al. (2002) proposed that "experiences of time structure, activity level, social contact, status and collective purpose, as they occur in daily life inside or outside of the work domain can be sources of well-being" (p.1051). These sentiments indicated that qualitative research methods may be more appropriate when seeking to measure and observe antecedents of well-being.

In addition, Relvas, Littlewood, Nesti, Gilbourne and Richardson (2010) suggested that there is also a lack of communication between first team and youth environments that

may hinder player development during the transition from youth to the first team environment. In other words, experiences and sources of well-being may differ depending on the environment. It would appear that more support is available to player development within the youth academy environment. Understandably youth and first team environments have different philosophies to practice, the youth environment being development-oriented and the first team being results-oriented. Consequently, with a lack of communication and support during the transition from youth development to first team environment, player well-being may appear vulnerable (Relvas et al., 2010).

The aim of this study was to explore subjective well-being (SWB) and the capacity of psychological well-being (PWB) themes to inform practice-change within an elite youth football academy. The study intended to engage practitioners in action research to facilitate change in practice. In doing so, the action research phase sought to capture the experiences of players and practitioners in context, whilst also reflecting upon the research journey from the role of research-facilitator. As the cyclical process of action research progressed, the utility of theory and the practicality of practice-change were considered.

Links between player well-being and player progression were also examined in that well-being may be interpreted differentially (Diener, Suh, Lucas and Smith, 1999) and situational factors had not been explored in any consistent sense of which previous research had stressed the need for this to be addressed (Diener, 1996).

In the present thesis, the action research from reconnaissance-to-practice sought to deploy a more culturally embedded approach to data collection that allowed the researcher to engage, in a longitudinal manner, with the subject group. Consequently this type of research was able to capture the personal experiences of academy players, practitioners and also draw from the emerging reflections of the researcher. In addition, the use of interview and focus group techniques to gather data and analysis processes utilised established protocols (Biddle et al., 2001).

Overall, the aim of the present thesis was to qualitatively explore psychological well-being (PWB) themes through action research processes in context and practice, within a professional football academy setting. Captured on-going lived experiences of players and practitioners are presented throughout this thesis to help contextualize the data in terms of the on-going life in the club and the events that impact upon the people involved. The utility of theory and processes of action research are reflected in terms of practitioner collaboration, engagement and commitment to drive practice-change towards best practice within the professional football academy environment. The practical utility of theory and efficacy of method are also considered and discussed.

The structure to follow begins with a rationale for the study grounded in the literature and methodology sections. An overview of the study and aims are outlined. The chapter following, presents action research from reconnaissance-to-practice, and includes self-reflections from the research journey. Subsequently this leads in to the action phase of the collaborative practitioner meetings, with insight into life back at the training ground. Finally, the discussion and summary conclude the study findings.

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CHAPTER ONE:

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rationale for the study

The literature review that follows clarifies for the reader themes of well-being, focusing largely on subjective well-being (SWB) and psychological well-being (PWB). The review sheds light on matters of terminology and areas of confusion across previous well-being literature. The development of well-being is then explored and discussed in detail, introducing the reader to the tenets of psychological well-being (PWB) that are later utilised within the practice-change process. Finally, the literature review then moves on to the psychological well-being (PWB) debate and potential connections between subjective well-being (SWB) and psychological well-being (PWB).

1.1 Section A: Definitions and descriptions of well-being

Well-being is an area that has been deliberated over many years and appears to stem from thinking around the term of 'happiness'. Over 2,000 years ago, the Greek philosopher Democritus observed that... "A happy life does not depend on good fortune or indeed on any external contingencies, but also, and even to a greater extent, on a man's cast of mind.... The important thing is not what a man has, but how he reacts to what he has" (Freeman, 1952 in Lyubomirsky and Tucker, 1998, p. 183).

It was not until 1930, that Dodge observed a lack of progression in theories of *happiness*, at least since those originally proposed by the Greek philosophers. Indeed research in this area lay dormant for a further 30 years or more, when the very same view was brought to the fore by Wilson (1967). He suggested that only a few tentative theoretical postulates had been proposed to explain individual differences in, what was now termed, subjective

well-being (SWB). Wilson (1967) indicated that the prompt satisfaction of needs causes happiness, whilst, and in contrast, the persistence of unfulfilled needs causes unhappiness and that the degree of fulfillment required to produce satisfaction depends on adaptation or aspiration level (p.304). These factors in-turn were thought to be influenced by past experience, comparisons with others, personal values, and other factors (Wilson, 1967).

Wilson's research sought to identify external situational factors that consistently affected happiness (a bottom-up approach), and from this he concluded that the happy person is:

> ...a young, healthy, well-educated, well-paid, extroverted, optimistic, worry-free, religious, married person with high self-esteem, job morale, modest aspirations, of either sex and of a wide range of intelligence (p. 294).

Wilson (1967) described a happy person through reference to components of personality (for example extroverted, optimistic, worry-free), and motivation (self-esteem, job morale, aspirations), whilst also including objective measures (age, education, income, religion and marriage). He suggested that positive aspects of the above criteria influences happiness, a view contested a few years earlier by Bradburn and Caplovitz (1965) who argued that those with poor education and high income were found to be happier than those with good education and high income. In contrast to Wilson, they had argued that happiness was not dependent on objective measures, therefore disputing Wilson's objectivity-based claims.

Wilson (1967) made several suggestions for further research, one, in-particular, advised that "studies involving direct attempts to manipulate the well-being of individuals are

(the) most desirable" (p.305). In support of this, he made reference to Guthrie's (1938) story, of how a small group of college men increased the poise and popularity, and presumably the happiness, of a female student by going out of their way to respond to her as though she were attractive. Wilson (1967) expressed excitement at the possibility of systematically developing and applying such principles and techniques more widely.

At this point it is important to note that (in his writing) Wilson (1967) made specific reference to SWB, and appeared to use terms of happiness and well-being interchangeably. Liu (1976) later argued that there are (in fact) many definitions of well-being, arguing that SWB, in practical rather than research terms, is a matter of personal opinion. He believed well-being to be a personal experience largely independent of the views of others (and maybe beyond the reach of research). Andrews and Withey (1976) and Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers (1976) also stressed the importance of personal/individual perception by arguing that although people live in objectively defined environments, it is their subjectively defined worlds that they respond to, such views, later gave prominence to SWB as a relevant index of people's life quality (Keyes, Shmotkin and Ryff, 2002). Diener (1996) appeared to align with the individual's 'relative' evaluation of well-being, when, he explained that subjective well-being (SWB) encompasses all areas of life satisfaction and could be defined as "...a person's evaluation of life in terms of cognition and affect" (p.390). As indicated earlier Diener (1984) argued that:

> ...perhaps the most important advance since Wilson's review is in defining and measuring happiness. This advance is crucial because the ability to measure

SWB is necessary to scientific understanding. In addition, work on measurement is helping to provide clearer definitions of the components of subjective well-being. (p. 543)

Diener (1984) suggested that "terms like happiness that have been used frequently in daily discourse will necessarily have fuzzy and somewhat different meanings" (p. 543). By indicating that the word "happiness" can have several different meanings, Diener suggested that SWB is (or should be) the scientific name for how people evaluate their lives. It is at this point in time, that researchers began to discuss and deliberate measurement issues surrounding well-being (these discussions will be examined at a later stage in the literature review).

1.2 Definitions of Subjective well-being (SWB)

Diener, Suh and Oishi (1997) described SWB as a field of psychology that attempts to understand people's evaluations of their lives, indicating that such evaluations may be primarily cognitive (e.g., life satisfaction or marital satisfaction) or may consist of the frequency with which people experience pleasant emotions (e.g., joy, as measured by the experience sampling technique) and unpleasant emotions (e.g., depression); and explained that researchers in the field should strive to understand not just undesirable clinical states, but also differences between people experiencing positive levels of long-term well-being.

In that regard, Diener, Suh and Oishi (1997) highlighted that *individual differences* in levels of positive well-being are considered important, indicating that they were 'not only

concerned just with the causes of depression and anxiety, but also with the factors that differentiate slightly happy people from moderately happy and extremely happy people'. It is perhaps not so surprising that SWB is defined in terms of the internal experience of the individual and it is worth repeating that Diener et al. (1997) emphasized that much of the criteria that help to define mental health are dictated by the views of outsiders (i.e. by researchers and practitioners). In contrast he argued that SWB needs to be measured from the individual's own perspective as it is *their* beliefs about their own well-being that are of primary importance.

Diener et al. (1997) also defined criteria and a limited range of responses through the constraints of psychometric tools. His work was heavily reliant on self-report surveys, in-particular the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) questionnaire. Through these instruments, they encouraged individuals to report *their* perceptions of *their* experience of well-being. The self-report nature of the SWLS aligns with a wider aspiration to focus on individuals own perceptions of their world, however, and in general terms, there are clear limitations to self-report measures including the possibility of response biases, memory biases and defensiveness. Sandvik, Diener and Seidlitz (1993) had earlier highlighted other assessment methods that can also be used to measure an individual's experience of well-being; for example, the frequency of smiling, the ability to recall positive and negative events, reports on individuals compiled by significant others, the use of additional questionnaires and behavioural observations. This range of techniques and tools were meant to complement self-reports and reduce reliance on the self-report approach as the only form of assessment.

In more recent times Diener, Scollon and Lucas (2003) argued that a number of 'components' relate to or act as indicators of subjective well-being including; life satisfactions, domain satisfactions, positive and negative affect (PA/NA). Earlier, Emmons (1986) had noted that talking in terms of components invites the view that people evaluate their lives in complex and various ways and through the lens of global judgment (life satisfaction), life domains (work, marriage), or ongoing emotions (positive affect; pleasant feelings, such as joy and happiness and negative affect; unpleasant feelings, such as sadness and fear). Later Biswas-Diener, Diener and Tamir (2004) referred to the three components of SWB as being; positive affect, negative affect and personal judgments about satisfaction. These components differ from the earlier components outlined by Diener et al. (2003) and place more emphasis on affect. Biswas-Diener et al. (2004) also described satisfaction judgments as that of 'life and other domains'. However, their description of satisfaction judgments is made with reference to one component, whereas that made earlier by Diener et al. (2003) referred to global judgment and life domains as separate entities. Eid and Diener (2004) explained that SWB refers to people's multidimensional evaluations of their lives, including cognitive judgments of life satisfaction as well as affective evaluations of moods and emotions (p. 245). The notion of SWB being a multidimensional phenomenon promotes the notion of a variety of factors coming into play. That said, the myriad of components and the rapidity with which components were altered, divided or added to others a distracting storyline to readers in 2010 and must have been even more challenging for the scholars of 2003-2004.

1.3 Matters of terminology

By 1984 the contributions of Ed Diener had led to a general consensus, with regards to SWB, and to the importance that might be placed upon it. However, at this point, it is important to signal a cautionary note with regards to the interchangeable or selective use of terms. Across the literature one confounding (and to a degree) frustrating issue, is that definitions and terms that relate to well-being and subjective well-being are used differently and interchangeably.

Wilson (1967) originally made reference to 'avowed happiness' when discussing the subject of well-being. Indeed throughout the early literature, happiness is a term that has often been referred to prior to the introduction of SWB, which was later promoted (as noted earlier) to be a more scientific term. Helping to clarify this matter, Diener (1984; p.543) suggested that definitions of well-being and happiness could be grouped into three categories:

(1) Defined by external criteria (e.g., not thought of as a subjective state, but rather as a possession of some desirable quality).

(2) Defined by life satisfaction, relying on the respondent and their standards to evaluate and determine what is the good life. Diener (1984) explains that this was a popular idea in the last century, yet the concept can be traced back several millennia... Shin and Johnson (1978) have defined this form of happiness as "a global assessment of a person's quality of life according to his own chosen criteria" (p.478).

(3) Defined by pleasant emotional experiences, in other words, when used to signify positive affect over negative affect (Bradburn, 1969), whether that be either due to an experience or predisposition to such emotions.

In that sense, happiness appeared to be subsumed within the more global term of SWB. Diener (1984) later outlined numerous definitions of SWB and grouped these into three categories for easier recognition. Whilst doing so, he also identified three *conditions* within the area of SWB:

(1) It is subjective. Definitions of SWB lack necessary objective conditions such as health, comfort, virtue, or wealth (Kammann, 1983).

(2) SWB includes positive measures. Opposite to mental health, that is often measured by the absence of negative factors.

(3) SWB measures may cover an integrated assessment of an individual's life over a period ranging from a few weeks to an entire life span. As there is no preferred timescale, researchers must expose any findings in SWB within varying time frames (Diener, 1984).

So around the mid 1980's regular and direct reference to SWB were being made, specifically by Diener, who, in the years to follow, played a dominant role in the progression of the SWB research literature.

Some years later, in a similar vein, and again with regards to prior terminology and interpretation, Ryff and Keyes (1995) posed the core question "What does it mean to be psychologically well?" (p.719).

A further layer of definition and explanation is evident as Ryan and Deci (2001) organized the field of well-being into two broad traditions: one dealing with happiness (hedonic well-being) representing SWB, and one dealing with human potential (eudaimonic well-being) representing Psychological Well-Being (Ryff, 1989). Consequently, this added more definitional complexity to an already uneven nomenclature.

Shortly after, Keyes, Ryff and Shmotkin (2002) argued that SWB and PWB are best seen as 'umbrella terms', both of which are fundamentally concerned with subjectively constructed accounts of well-being. More specifically Keyes, Ryff and Shmotkin (2002) argued that:

> SWB involves more global evaluations of affect and life quality, whereas PWB examines perceived thriving vis-à-vis the existential challenges of life (e.g. pursuing meaningful goals, growing and developing as a person, establishing quality ties to others) (p.1007).

Although both approaches essentially assess well-being, they address different features of what it means to be well. Despite the different attempts to define, segregate or aggregate the definitions and the definitional implications of different terms, the following citation suggests that, for some commentators confusion remained:

Subjective well-being is broad and ill-defined, and is associated with contestable, morally laden ideas about happiness and 'the good life' (Carlisle and Hanlon, 2008; p. 263).

In summary, it would seem that terminology is an issue that continues to plague well-being research, in particular when attempting to make references to happiness, SWB and PWB within the well-being literature. Fortunately, when reviewing SWB and PWB literature there is little cross-over between researchers. For example, Diener and colleagues predominantly focus on SWB, whereas Ryff and colleagues place sole focus on PWB, so, at least terminology remains a constant throughout their respective work. The problem appears to arise when attempting to cross-reference the literature to offer the possibility of a more generic representation of what is being explored.
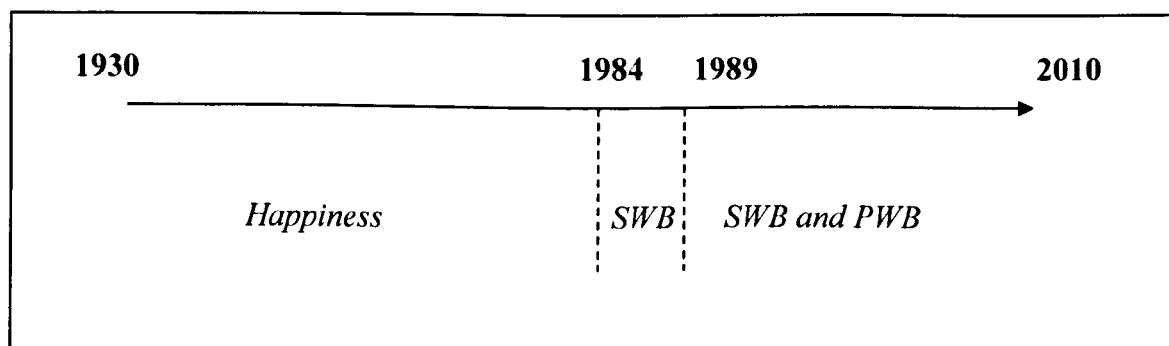
Figure 1.1 - Timeline to represent dominance in terminology

1.4 The development of well-being literature

Having introduced the field of happiness, SWB and PWB in general terms, the sections to follow will form in more detail the work of Diener and Ryff respectively. This section

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will be structured to primarily highlight Diener's work, however, this literature is reviewed in association with the work of others and with specific references to Ryff (1989, 1995). During this phase other contributors of the review also come to the forefront (i.e. Cowen, 1994; Ryff and Keyes, 1995; Ryan and Deci, 2001; Keyes, Schmotkin and Ryff, 2002; Ryff and Singer 2006).

During the initial stages of his research, Diener (1984) reviewed the literature on SWB and place particular focus on measurement (comparing psychometric data on single-item and multi-item SWB scales), causal factors that might mediate SWB, and, the development of theoretical explanations and frameworks. At this time, Diener (1984) noted that for decades psychologists conducted little research, if any, towards the study of positive SWB, whilst unhappiness was explored at great length. He also observed that it was not until 1973, that the *Psychological Abstracts International* began to list happiness as an index term, and in 1974 the journal *Social Indicators Research* was founded, with a large number of articles dedicated to subjective well-being (SWB).

Furthermore Diener (1984) made reference to definitions of well-being by grouping happiness into three categories; the first category, based on external criteria, suggested that "happiness is not thought of as a subjective state, but rather as possessing some desirable quality" (p.543). The second category, life satisfaction, that "relies on the standards of the respondent to determine what is the good life", was also defined by Shin and Johnson (1978) as "a global assessment of a person's quality of life according to his own chosen criteria" (p.478). This secondary category aligns with the earlier work of

Andrews and Withey (1976) who had noted that satisfaction with self was perhaps the most critical contributor when considering overall life satisfaction. Although previous researchers (Andrews and Withey, 1976; Cherlin and Reader, 1975; Warr, 1978) supported Bradburn's model, outlining the split in affective experience. Some findings pointed to a dimension of personal efficacy and Bryant and Veroff (1982) implied that this may be distinctly unlike feelings of either positive or negative affect towards a person's life in general. Finally, Diener's third category was labeled as 'positive affect', stressing the pleasant emotional experience of a well person and whether people generally are predisposed (or otherwise) to experience such emotions.

In continuation, Diener (1984) suggested that the area of SWB has three hallmarks; the absence of objective conditions (e.g. health, comfort, virtue or wealth), the inclusion of positive measures, and a global assessment of all aspects of a person's life. As noted earlier, previous research by Bradburn (1969) and other researchers had found that negative and positive affect vary independently across individuals. Extending from this, Diener and Emmons (1984), as well as that of the emotion researchers, indicated that two types of affects are unlikely to occur within the same person at the same time. Therefore, the more time a person experiences positive emotions the less time they will have to experience negative emotions (Russell, 1980; Diener, Larsen, Levine and Emmons, 1985). This view suggested that the frequency of positive and negative emotions are inversely related.

In association with this proposal, Diener, Larsen, Levine and Emmons (1985) studied the frequency of positive versus negative affect and the intensity of affect, requiring participants in three studies to complete daily and momentary reports on their moods. The findings of Diener et al. (1985) supported the view, that the more frequently positive affect is experienced, the less frequently negative affect is experienced. Verification through SWB scales worded in terms of frequency, demonstrated a strong inverse relation between positive and negative affect; in other words, when one increased the other decreased.

With this in mind, Diener et al. (1985) also proposed that positive and negative affect would co-vary together on an intensity dimension; that is, a person who experiences strong positive emotions may also be a person who feels strong negative emotions as well. This lead them to propose two dimensions that describe the structure of subjective well-being within persons over time: (a) frequency of positive versus negative affect and (b) intensity of affect (p. 1255).

Diener et al. (1985) indicated that, in terms of SWB, how a person experiences happiness and unhappiness will differ as a result of whether they typically experience low- or high-intensity affect. For example, a person who is high in frequency of positive affect and high in intensity may be expected to experience (great) excitement and joyfulness, compared to a person who is high in frequency of positive affect and low in intensity; these who proposed to experience a sense of satisfaction and tranquility. Furthermore, their findings address earlier controversy:

Thus when one considers a period of a few weeks or longer in a person's life, the amount of positive and negative affect one experiences is independent, even though experiencing the two emotions simultaneously is unlikely (p. 1263).

In support of this, Larsen, Diener and Emmons (1986) later conducted two studies, in which participants had to rate their affective reactions to daily events. Using standardized life event descriptions (ranging from very good to very bad) participants were asked how they would react emotionally to each event. They found that high-intense participants indeed responded to actual and hypothetical life events with stronger and more intense affective reactions.

Later, Thomas and Diener (1990) expanded this area of inquiry further by exploring whether participants could accurately estimate the intensity and relative frequency of their positive vs. negative emotions and the degree to which one dimension biases the recall of another. In this study participants completed mood reports at random moments each day or at the end of the day against which their mood estimates were compared. They found that the retrospective reports of a person's emotional experiences over time were *not* extremely accurate, arguing that...

> The analysis of absolute accuracy revealed that the subjects tended to overestimate the intensities of both their positive and negative emotions, suggesting that the very emotional times in people's lives are more salient to them than the more neutral occasions (p. 295).

These findings also suggested that saliency may also be linked to a tendency to exaggerate.

To a lesser degree, participants were found likely to underestimate the frequency of positive affect. Such findings indicated that people are inclined to recall negative events more readily than positive ones, in addition to overestimating the intensity of their emotions in general (Thomas and Diener, 1990). Consequently, when assessing the validity of self-report measures, Thomas and Diener (1990; p.296) found that the relative *frequency* of positive affect versus negative affect can be recalled with significant accuracy. However, there seemed to be little evidence to suggest that people could accurately recall the *intensity* of either pleasant or unpleasant emotions, though findings did suggest that positive intensity can be recalled more accurately than negative intensity (Thomas and Diener, 1990). In summary, the evidence from the above body of work suggested that emotional frequency is recalled more accurately than emotional intensity.

From a different, yet related, perspective, Seidlitz and Diener (1993) hypothesized that after a period of eleven months, happy subjects would retrieve a greater proportion of positive events than negative events, and unhappy subjects would retrieve a greater proportion of negative events than positive events. They believed that over time the amount of events recalled would differ, depending on happy vs. unhappy participants. They predicted that happy participants would tend to recall more positive events and unhappy participants would tend to recall more negative events. However, results indicated that changes in the frequency of positive and negative events recalled at the later period were insignificant.

These results prompted the view that future research would benefit from the use of multiple instruments and methods of measurement when assessing the relative importance of the occurrence of positive versus negative events in various life domains and the personal discrepancies in interpretation of life events:

> One possibility is that individual differences in emotional reactions to valenced events at the time of encoding affect later accessibility. In addition, depending on how positive and negative events are organized in memory, the type of organization might also contribute to the differences in accessibility. Finally, there may be differences in self-schemata that differentially guide retrieval of favorable and unfavorable events (Sedlitz and Diener, 1993; p. 662).

In discussion, Ryff and Keyes (1995), later made reference to findings from Diener, Larsen, Levine, and Emmons (1985), which had challenged the proposed independence of positive and negative affect. Ryff and Keyes also noted that frequency of positive and negative affect tends to correlate negatively, whereas intensity correlations are generally positive. Furthermore, and implying that these conflicting associations led to the relationship between positive and negative affect being suppressed, Ryff (1989) argued that an illusion of independence had been created. Unsurprisingly, Ryff promoted frequency as the better indicator of well-being because it can be measured more effectively and was thought to be more convincing when related to long-term emotional well-being (Diener and Larsen, 1993; Diener, Sandvik, and Pavot, 1991).

1.5 Psychological well-being (PWB)

Ryff (1989) began to explore the meaning and boundaries of psychological well-being (PWB) and in doing so, she critiqued current formulations of well-being and argued, for

example, that previous research was founded on conceptions of well-being that had little

theoretical rationale. Similar concerns had been voiced before. For example, over a

decade earlier, Warr (1978) had referred to psychological well-being as a malleable

concept, to do with people's feelings about their everyday-life activities (Bradburn, 1969;

Warr and Wall, 1975; Campbell, 1976). Warr (1978) explained the difficulty in defining

positive mental health:

> ...since the concept is both multidimensional and value-laden, but it is usually
> considered to include such features as favorable self-evaluation, growth and
> learning from new experience, a realistic freedom from constraints and some
> degree of personal success in valued pursuits. (p.111)

Warr (1978) highlighted an overlap between the many facets of well-being, noting that

'well-being' is not the same as 'happiness', although happiness is a component of well-

being. Therefore in relation to affect (as previously discussed), Warr suggested that many

studies have represented those who were 'mentally ill' (eg. abnormal psychology), and

explored how they might deal with everyday life, activities, problems and their coping

processes; whereas further research into psychological well-being, in its various aspects,

might form one thread of the developing study of the everyday life of those who are 'not

mentally ill' (eg. normal psychology).

Later Ryff (1989) indicated that contemporary indexes of subjective well-being had been

extensively evaluated (by Diener, 1984; Larson, Diener and Emmons, 1985) and that

such assessments had focused largely on the efficacy of psychometrics and the reliability

and validity of existing measures. In outlining her own field of research, Ryff (1989) contended that:

> ...the central objective of the research was not to define the basic structure of psychological well-being, rather the focus was on social change (p. 1070).

It is worthwhile noting at this point, that Diener and Ryff appear to be taking a different view of well-being research, each concentrating on separate issues and as a result their paths do not directly cross within the literature. However, and in conceptual terms, the work of both Diener and Ryff inform and challenged my own thinking as I sought to relate their findings to the findings in the present thesis. For example, Ryff suggested that happiness is not the *only* indicator of positive psychological functioning, as much literature has defined well-being through reference to life satisfaction. Although Ryff (1989) acknowledged that the life satisfaction literature has demonstrated a long-term quality. She argued that the same body of research had failed to acknowledge aspects of well-being, such as autonomy, personal growth and positive relations with others. As a result, Ryff (1989) criticized the previous literature on psychological well-being for being guided by a (somewhat) narrow conception of positive functioning. In suggesting that a block of literature may be too restrictive, Ryff reminded me to consider self-perception in the widest sense possible. Ryff's notion that more generic models of self had been ignored by researchers, acted to further underscore the risks of reductionist perspectives.

To explain, Ryff claimed that a range of literature had attempted to define positive psychological functioning, including perspectives such as Maslow's (1968) conception of self-actualisation; Allport's (1961) formulation of maturity; Rogers' (1961) depiction of

the fully functioning person; and Jung's (1933) account of individuation. However, Ryff argued that these perspectives have had little empirical impact and suggested this might be due to a lack of credible assessment or measurement procedures. Therefore, Ryff (1989) proposed that a difficulty remains over deciding which theories or constructs should serve as the essential features of any conceptualization of positive psychological functioning. This demonstrated that Ryff had considered psychological well-being to be a theoretically complex and multi-layered phenomenon. However, Ryff's conceptual and critical ambition also presented *her* with problems when it came to defining which element of PWB carried saliency. Consequently, Ryff (1989) concluded that when reviewing the characteristics of well-being different theorists had made reference to comparable aspects of positive psychological functioning.

Furthermore, Ryff (1989) had described that previously:

> ...central emphasis had been given to short-term affective well-being (i.e., happiness) at the expense of more enduring life challenges such as having a sense of purpose and direction, achieving satisfying relationships with others, and gaining a sense of self-realization.... Similarly, life satisfaction, despite its more enduring, long-term quality, has failed to monitor such features of well-being as autonomy, personal growth, and positive relations with others. (p.1077)

Ryff subsequently proposed a number of points as core dimensions of an 'alternative formulation' of psychological well-being, including self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life and personal growth. (These dimensions will be discussed in greater depth at a later stage in this review.)

Around this time more psychologically-oriented research surfaced, much illustrating the same definitional and terminology flaws mentioned earlier. For example, Cowen (1994) referred to well-being as 'wellness' and highlighted five pathways to achieve it:

1. forming wholesome early attachments

2. acquiring age-and-ability appropriate competencies

3. engineering settings that promote adaptive outcomes

4. fostering empowerment

5. acquiring skills needed to cope effectively with life stressors (p.158).

Cowen (1994) believed there was a permanent focus on 'what goes wrong psychologically' as opposed to 'what goes right in psychological development'. As a result of this critique, he proposed the need for a shift in paradigm, suggested that the current system was reactive not proactive and argued that:

> ...systematic effort to promote wellness from the start may prove to be a more humane, cost-effective, and successful strategy (p.151).

According to Cowen (1994, p.152) elements of wellness refer to:

1. Behavioural – eating, sleeping and working well; effective interpersonal relationships; mastering age/ability appropriate tasks

2. Psychological – sense of belongingness and purpose; control over one's fate; satisfaction with oneself and existence

3. Physiological – Physical wellness

Overall, he implied that people, not just those at risk, stand to profit from wellness and he also explained that psychological wellness can be attended to via "affective lessons taught through the functional dynamics of human relationships" and, as an illumination he provided an example of how an infant is shaped by the family microstructure and inevitably by the nature of attachment relationship (e.g. if love/nurture are absent then this could pose threat to wellness). He argued that acquiring age-appropriate competencies would also encourage an individual to develop a sense of self-efficacy/empowerment with 'essential nutrients' from home and school playing a key role. Education is positioned as being proactive to wellness enhancement and something that may influence social environments. Therefore he supported specific programmes to enhance wellness on topics such as:

1. Attachment

2. Competence enhancement

3. Social environment change

4. Empowerment

5. Coping with stress

The topics raised by Cowen (1994) appear to address the key components of psychological well-being as introduced by Ryff (1989). From a distance it seems that Ryff (1989) may have influenced Cowen (1994) as conceptual similarities associated with attachment to positive relations, competence enhancement to environmental mastery, social environment change to self-acceptance, empowerment to autonomy,

coping with stress to personal growth, can be noted. However, although the areas appear to relate to Ryff's dimensions, there is little evidence for any direct connection (such as citations or other acknowledgements). Despite the similarity in terminology and certain structural/broader conceptual sympathies, the terms used by Cowen (1994) arguably offer a more functional perspective.

Following on from this, there also appears to be no direct connection between Cowen (1994) and Ryff and Keyes (1995). Ryff and Keyes (1995) questioned what it might mean to be well psychologically and in pursuit of answers they extended the findings on PWB in an attempt to test the theoretical model that encompasses the six distinct dimensions of wellness; autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life and self-acceptance. Moments like this across literature and over time are frustrating in that two authors appear to mirror and move 'in-step' yet neither acknowledge the other.

Ryff and Keyes (1995), as already noted, attended to the absence of theory-based formulations of well-being as something that was 'puzzling'; given there have been abundant accounts of positive functioning in various subfields of psychology (Ryff, 1985, 1989a). In this regard, Ryff cites from developmental psychology, Erikson's (1959) psychosocial stages, Buhler's (1935) basic life tendencies, and Neugarten's (1973) personality changes articulate wellness as traces of continued growth across the life cycle. As mentioned earlier, Ryff and Keyes (1995) also suggested that clinical psychologists were able to offer further descriptions of well-being through Maslow's (1968) conception

of self-actualisation, Allport's (1961) formulation of maturity, Rogers' (1961) depiction of the fully functioning person, and Jung's (1933) account of individuation.

Ryff and Keyes (1995) believed that the convergence of these multiple frameworks of positive functioning could serve as the theoretical foundation from which to generate a new multidimensional 'model' of well-being (Ryff, 1989b, 1995). Consequently, Ryff and Keyes (1995) proposed six dimensions of positive psychological functioning as follows: positive evaluations of oneself and one's past life (Self-Acceptance), a sense of continued growth and development as a person (Personal Growth), the belief that one's life is purposeful and meaningful (Purpose in life), the possession of quality relations with others (Positive Relations with Others), the capacity to manage effectively one's life and surrounding world (Environmental Mastery), and a sense of self-determination (Autonomy).

Figure 1.2 (see p.29) illustrates key conceptual issues that have been addressed so far in the present discussion and position original underpinning theories that support the proposed dimensions of PWB, such as Jung's (1933) developmental theory, Allport (1961), Rogers' (1961) and Maslow's (1968) self-actualisation theory and SWB being one aspect of PWB.

1.6 PWB debate

Ryff and Keyes (1995) proposed that comprehensive accounts of psychological well-being are needed to:

...probe people's sense of whether their lives have purpose, whether they are realizing their given potential, what is the quality of their ties to others, and if they feel in charge of their own lives. Consequently, their call to re-examine the contours of positive functioning illustrates the complexity involved in defining and assessing structure within a particular domain (p.725).

They undertook research to investigate the proposed multi-dimensional model of well-being with a nationally representative sample, to examine the recurrent consistency of age and sex differences on the various indicators of well-being and to compare the relationships between the theory-based dimensions of well-being and three frequently used measures from earlier research (i.e. happiness, life satisfaction, depression).

The findings from Ryff and Keyes (1995) indicated that two of the six theoretical constructs (Self-Acceptance and Environmental Mastery) were highly correlated. Therefore, suggesting a possible five-factor model, this would combine indicators of Self-Acceptance and Environmental Mastery. As a result, Ryff and Keyes (1995) put forward, the analyses of additional group differences (eg. By social class, ethnicity, or culture) arguing that these would further inform understanding of the basic structure of well-being.
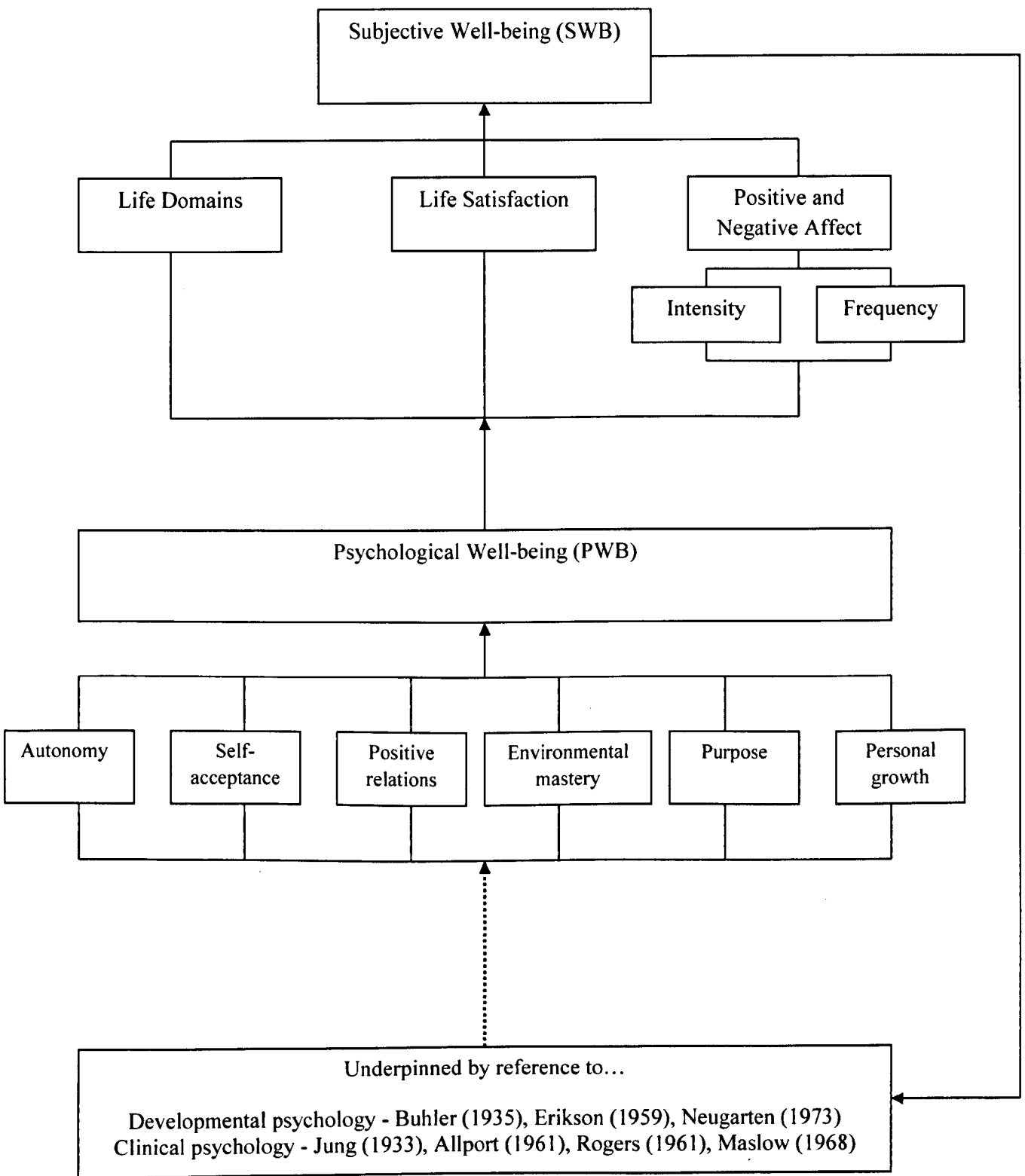
Figure 1.2 - Structure to PWB and SWB

Later, Ryff and Singer (1996) proposed that "understanding who does and does not possess high levels of well-being requires closer examination of the actual substance of people's lives, that is, their life experiences" (p.19). In this quest, they make specific reference to findings from two avenues of empirical inquiry, the first pertaining to studies of particular life events or experiences and their effects on well-being, and the second addressing more complex life history analyses, and how they have been linked with psychological vulnerability and resilience. They write as follows:

> In a series of studies, we have investigated life experiences, and individuals' interpretations of these experiences, as key influences on psychological well-being... these experiences vary by their location in the life course, by the nature of the challenge or task posed, and by their typicality (whether the experience is shared by many or few) (p.19).

Ryff and Singer (1996) also expressed that their formulation of how experiences are interpreted draw extensively on social psychological theory:

> For example, we are interested in how people make sense of their life experiences by comparing themselves with others (social comparison processes), by evaluating the feedback they perceive from significant others (reflected appraisals), by their understanding of the causes of their experiences (attributional processes), and by the importance they attach to such experiences (psychological centrality)... Collectively, these investigations demonstrate that life experiences and how they are interpreted provide useful avenues for understanding human variations in well-being (p.19).

Ryff and Singer (1996) had become increasingly interested in clinical areas such as depression when attempting to explain variations in well-being and suggested that:

> ...positive psychological functioning, exemplified by the acquisition of mastery over the environment, possession of quality relations with others, utilization of

innate capabilities, etc., represents elaborated versions of complex adaptive behaviours requisite to survival (Ryff and Singer, 1996; p.22).

Diener's work, with the company of other researchers, later identified that negative events in particular had received a great amount of attention, largely because of their threatening potential impact on one's well-being (Suh, Diener and Fujita, 1996). In addition, they suggested that:

...the extent to which life events influence individual levels of SWB is not fully understood. (p. 1091)

Ryff might well have thought that the need to assess PWB and its components might help us to fully understand fluctuations that may occur in SWB.

Suh, Diener and Fujita (1996) also indicated that the effects of objective life circumstances, such as income (Diener, Sandvik, Seidlitz and Diener, 1992), health (Okun and George, 1984), years of education (Diener, 1984), and physical attractiveness (Diener, Wolsic and Fujita, 1995), are often found to be small. Similarly, the findings of Campbell, Converse, and Rogers (1976) indicate that the summed effects of demographic variables on SWB are also small. They place emphasis on the work of others that has led researchers to suggest that well-being is primarily determined by enduring individual characteristics rather than by more objectively defined external life circumstances (Costa and McCrae, 1980, 1984; Costa, McCrae and Zonderman, 1987; Diener, Sandvik, Pavot and Fujita, 1992).

Taking a step back for a moment, the literature so far has indicated a divide between the work of Diener and Ryff and, as mentioned earlier, the literature appears to sit with two main strands, one being SWB and the other PWB. Diener's sole focus has been to research SWB over the past 26 years, whilst Ryff has concentrated on driving PWB to the forefront. At this point, there is still little research to suggest integration between the two and although they appear to run parallel, there has been little concerted effort for either research camp to step across from one strand to the other.

Diener, Suh and Oishi (1997) suggested that the field of SWB focuses on longer-term states, not just momentary moods and implied that what may lead to momentary happiness may differ from what produces long-term SWB. In doing so, they outlined their interest in relatively long-lasting feelings of well-being, as oppose to transitory or passing emotions.

At this point, Diener, Suh and Oishi (1997) also proposed that SWB should not be deemed as a perfect definition of mental health, as happiness is not determined by mental health. They imply that SWB is not a required condition for psychological well-being, and although perceived as important, SWB does not automatically equate to psychological health. In this regard, Diener et al. (1997) does make reference to Carol Ryff (1989; Ryff and Keyes, 1995) outlining additional characteristics beyond SWB, in particular the six dimensions that provide the framework to PWB (e.g. environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life etc). Here, there is some evidence that two major branches of thinking (Diener and Ryff) are beginning to interrelate.

Therefore, if SWB is only one contributor to psychological well-being, it is perhaps not surprising that Diener et al. (1997) perceived most people to consider it a desirable characteristic, even though (as noted) high SWB is not proven as essential for mental health. As a result of this, research is yet to determine the level of SWB necessary for positive functioning. Diener et al. (1997) note that although SWB is not deemed essential, it has to be considered as a necessary condition to obtain optimal mental health. For example, if a person is depressed for prolonged periods of time, or suffers from debilitating anxiety they cannot be functioning well.

Therefore, it is important to recognize that Diener et al. (1997) did reinforce the view that SWB is only one aspect of PWB, whilst also indicating that SWB can be assessed either at a global level or at progressively narrower levels. For example, life satisfaction would be perceived as a global form of assessment, whereas marital satisfaction (one domain of life) would be perceived as a narrower form of assessment. They justified that studying narrower definitions of SWB encouraged a greater understanding of specific conditions that might influence well-being in particular domains, stressing that narrower types of measures are often more sensitive to casual variables.

Later and within the discipline of counselling psychology, Christopher (1999) suggested that all perceptions of well-being are in essence moral visions, based on individuals' judgements about what it means to be well. For example, although an individual may not be feeling bad this does not equate to the presumption that the individual is somehow feeling good (Bostic and Ptacek, 2001). Ryan and Deci (2001) also support this view and

raised awareness in perceptions that well-being is not the absence of mental illness, just like positive affect is not the opposite of negative affect (Cacioppo and Bernston, 1999). Consequently, this would support the need to value additional characteristics as Diener (2000) recommends when concluding that whilst psychologists would not choose to evaluate people's lives solely on the basis of whether they are happy, psychologists do value additional characteristics and, therefore, suggested that people's own evaluations of their lives must figure prominently in such assessments.

In terms of the present discussion, and in addition to the work of Ryff, further insights from additional contributions (from other researchers) occurred around this time. Such contributions will now be explored across disciplines in a way that broadly sustains a sense of chronology.

Around this time, Ryan and Deci (2001) looked at two distinct philosophies that had developed and influenced the study into well-being. The first, Hedonism (Kahneman, Diener, and Schwarz, 1999), suggested that well-being consists of pleasure or happiness. Second, eudaimonism, which suggested that well-being consists of more than just happiness and towards fulfilling human growth (Ryan and Deci, 2001). Therefore, the term hedonic well-being was linked to subjective well-being and eudaimonic well-being to notions of psychological well-being (Diener and Lucas, 1999; Ryan and Deci, 2001).

In a similar vein to that of Diener et al. (1997) as mentioned earlier, Ryan and Deci (2001) proposed that the concept of well-being refered to optimal psychological

functioning and experience. They suggested that the study of well-being is not only, what could be described as, the simple focus of everyday interpersonal investigation (eg. "How are you?") but is also an exercise of intense scientific scrutiny. They highlight that everyday practices, such as that of government, teaching, therapy, parenting, and preaching are influenced as a result of how well-being is defined "as all such endeavours aim to change humans for the better, and thus require some vision of what "the better" is" (p. 142). They suggested that well-being matters occur on a daily basis and propose that the day-to-day normality of practice, if used constructively, can in effect, influence well-being as a whole.

In a different vein, Diener, Lucas, Oishi and Suh (2002) examined whether happy and unhappy individuals weighted life domains differently when constructing life satisfaction judgments. They found that different life circumstances may influence happy and unhappy people differently. Results indicated that when there is no excellent domain, happy people are only slightly more satisfied with their lives than are unhappy people. Whereas when a domain is considered excellent or very satisfying, happy people have much higher satisfaction than that of unhappy people. Likewise, the same occurs when the worst domain is bad, unhappy people are far more dissatisfied than happy people.

Furthermore, Diener, Lucas, Oishi and Suh (2002) moved the debate onto a more strategic footing by questioning 'top-down' versus 'bottom-up' models (first debated by Campbell et al. 1976, and Diener, 1984) as they attempted to understand how people compute satisfaction judgments, and suggested that:

...a happy person's overall life satisfaction might be constructed in part in a bottom-up way, but this bottom-up process may differ from the bottom-up process than an unhappy person uses (p. 443).

An example of the bottom-up process would be for an individual to evaluate where they have come from, their family upbringing, social background etc. that enables them to piece together the smaller detail. Whereas an example of the top-down process would be for an individual to evaluate the bigger picture, where they are currently at and what they have in their current surroundings, considering the details that support it. Diener et al. (2002) concluded that happy people may be more likely to attend to the best domains in their lives and ignore the worst, whilst unhappy people may be more likely to attend to their worst domains. Bottom-up approaches do chime with certain qualitative approaches (i.e. building a picture of someone's life).

1.7 Differences between SWB and PWB

Keyes, Shmotkin and Ryff (2002) extend on the criticisms made by Ryan and Deci (2001), although appear to move independently as if unaware of Ryan and Deci (2001). They denote that not only do SWB studies repeatedly include affective indicators of happiness (hedonic well-being) but also cognitive assessment of life satisfaction, whilst certain aspects of PWB (e.g., personal growth, purpose in life) reflect the self-fulfillment meanings of eudaimonic well-being. Therefore, outlining both approaches to assess well-being, however indicating that they address different features of what it means to be well. They explain that SWB involves more global assessments of affect and life quality, reiterating earlier sentiments from Diener et al. (1997), as oppose to PWB examining perceived thriving in relation to the existential challenges of life.

Keyes, Shmotkin and Ryff (2002) demonstrated how each dimension of PWB articulates

different challenges that individuals encounter as they strive to function positively (Ryff,

1989a; Ryff and Keyes, 1995):

> ...people attempt to feel good about themselves even while aware of their own
> limitations (self-acceptance). They also seek to develop and maintain warm and
> trusting interpersonal relationships (positive relations with others) and to shape
> their environment so as to meet personal needs and desires (environmental
> mastery). In sustaining individuality within a larger social context, people also
> seek a sense of self-determination and personal authority (autonomy). A vital
> endeavor is to find meaning in one's efforts and challenges (purpose in life).
> Lastly, making the most of one's talents and capacities (personal growth) is
> central to PWB (p.1008).

Furthermore, Keyes, Shmotkin and Ryff (2002) stress that SWB and PWB are related but

distinct aspects of positive psychological functioning. This stems from previous research

(Ryff and Keyes, 1995) that used data from multiple studies to investigate associations

between PWB and SWB. They found moderate associations between two PWB scales

(Self-Acceptance and Environmental Mastery) and measures of happiness and life

satisfaction. However, only mixed or weak associations to SWB were found with the

remaining four dimensions of PWB (autonomy, personal growth, positive relations with

others, and purpose in life).

According to Keyes, Shmotkin and Ryff (2002) PWB involves the perception of

engagement with existential challenges of life, in other words, an individual's

measurement of psychological well-being may influence perceptions of situational

variables due to their level of psychological well-being status. For instance, a football

player performing below expectations may perceive themselves as having little mastery

of the performance environment. Then subject to injury, they might experience isolation

(lack of positive relations) due to further contact time spent away from the performance

environment. In effect the individual may perceive mastery of the performance

environment to be further out of reach, suffer reduced autonomy and lack of personal

growth, at least such developments might to be plausibly drawn from the thinking of

Keyes et al. (2002). But the rather tidy linkage between a theory and a hypothetical

applied scenario is also recognized... maybe life is not so straightforward.

1.8 Connecting SWB and PWB

Keyes, Shmotkin and Ryff (2002) studied the role of socio-demographic and personality

variables to illuminate the various ways SWB and PWB come together. They confirmed

the hypothesis that SWB and PWB represent related but distinct conceptions of well-

being. Findings indicated that the best fitting model was one that posits two correlated

latent constructs, namely SWB and PWB, rather than two orthogonal factors (or one

general factor). They suggested that PWB indicators are most distinctive from SWB

indicators and although these primary concepts are highly correlated, each retains its

uniqueness as a distinct component of overall well-being.

> It is not surprising that it is the strongly existential aspects of PWB (i.e. purpose
> in life and personal growth) that most cleanly separate from the affective and
> life quality assessments of subjective well-being (p.1017).

As a result, they propose that personal happiness is contingent on committing oneself to

meaningful and purposeful life (Baumiester, 1991; Dykman, 1998; Wong and Fry, 1998).

Simultaneously they also highlight that their findings underline the empirical distinction

between the two traditions of well-being, however, believing that they do not suggest that purpose and meaning lead directly to happiness. Instead, such evidence should invite further inquiries to explore the relationship between PWB and SWB, in particular how one might influence the other through time.

It can also be reported that when they exist at equivalent levels (i.e. on-diagonal types, see Keyes et al. 2002), SWB and PWB may complement each other by providing a sense of self-congruency. However, they may well compensate for each other in the off-diagonal types:

> For example, higher SWB may help preserve positive feelings when PWB is not possible because of lack of opportunities, lack of resources, or compromised personal health and vitality. Alternatively, the high demands of striving to make the most of one's talent may undermine SWB but boost PWB (p.1018).

Similarly, Gagne, Ryan and Bargmann (2003) indicated that for well-being to be attained and maintained, self-determination theory suggests fulfillment of basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness. General well-being and day-to-day fluctuations in well-being are associated directly with perceived psychological need satisfaction. Therefore, this would support the argument that a connection between SWB and PWB does exist.

With PWB in focus, Springer and Hauser (2006) commented that mental health research previously had largely focused on negative health, such as depression and anxiety. However, they suggested that there is also a need to consider positive aspects of mental health:

While the distinct dimensions of well-being have been debated, the general quality of well-being refers to optimal psychological functioning and experience (p.1081).

Due to the popularity in using Ryff's Psychological Well-being scale (RPWB), Springer and Hauser (2006) had stressed the importance to understand the measurement scale and characteristics. They indicated that the multidimensionality of RPWB had been brought into question across various studies (Clarke et al. 2001; Hillson, 1997; Kafka and Kozma, 2002). They even pointed out that Ryff and Keyes (1995) had provided empirical support for the multidimensionality of RPWB, with the exception of environmental mastery and purpose in life. Consequently, there are still matters to debate surrounding this area.

Springer and Hauser (2006; p.1098) had identified the four dimensions, purpose in life, self-acceptance, environmental mastery and personal growth, as consistently having the highest latent variable correlations across all samples and noted previously as having conceptual overlap. In addition, it was reported that, Kafka and Kozma (2002) had found the four dimensions (named above) largely clustered in one factor, Hillson (1997) had found that one factor contained primarily self-acceptance, environmental mastery, and purpose in life subscales, and Van Dierendonck (2004) had found high correlations among the same four dimensions described.

Limitations to the study are acknowledged, due to their large sample size, with over 6000 cases, "…almost any deviation will produce a statistically significant difference in x^2, whether or not the difference is substantially meaningful" (p.1098). Secondly, Springer and Hauser refer to the way that the RPWB subscales were originally created potentially

making it impossible to find the scales/constructs statistically identical, even if the substantive differences between them are truly negligible.

They had suggested that their findings provided additional proof to support the argument that RPWB does not measure six distinct dimensions of psychological well-being. Whilst they had accepted that RPWB undoubtedly captures some aspects of positive mental health, they had strongly cautioned against analyses that consider the scale components to measure distinctly six dimensions of psychological well-being.

In a clear example of overt paper-to-paper exchange, Ryff and Singer (2006) had replied to Springer and Hauser (2006) and suggested that the paper focused on what PWB is *not*, rather than what it *is*, reporting that the claim "RPWB does not measure six distinct dimensions of psychological well-being" (p.32) is not helpful for those who want to study well-being (p.1104). Ryff and Singer (2006) provide critique based on Springer and Hauser's interpretations and lack of understanding:

> Is the message that the six-factor model be replaced with something else, such as a three-, or four-, or five-factor, and more importantly, what should be the substantive content of the reduced factors be? On these questions, Springer and Hauser offer no guidance. Rather, they invest much effort in trying to discredit what their own analyses show... Springer and Hauser then provided a convoluted argument to explain how it is that a six-factor model can somehow best fit the data, while simultaneously not indicate that the six-factors are distinct (p.1104).

Furthermore, Ryff and Singer (2006) had highlighted the relevance to Springer and Hauser (2006) and insinuated that the process of constructing the item pools was

purposefully done. Instead of it occurring by chance, they had suggested that from beginning to end, it was driven by the goal of generating pools of items that has strong empirical ties to the theoretical constructs from which they had been created a case of conceptual circularity.

In spite of this, findings from earlier research by Clarke, Marshall, Ryff and Wheaton (2001) with data from a national representative sample of Canadian seniors had supported the multidimensional structure of RPWB measure.

It seems worthy to note, that intervention research had also been guided by RPWB model over the years. Ryff and Singer (2006) made reference to Fava and colleagues (Fava et al., 1998, 2004; Fava, 1999) and their developed approach to the treatment of recurrent depression, branded as 'well-being therapy'. The treatment had required individuals to keep diaries of daily experiences, with sole focus only on positive events.

Ryff and Singer (2006) pointed out that if any of the six dimensions of PWB were to be perceived as 'overlapping', it would not be in the practitioners best interest of their client to try and judge any of the six dimensions as somehow being the same, as each dimension does equate to different challenges. They believed this would prove obstructive and unsupportive to the client when attempting to treat "the unique vulnerabilities and strengths of each patient" (p.1113). Still, they largely encouraged that researchers include all six dimensions of PWB when incorporating the model. In doing so, they had claimed that, in examining the distinctiveness versus likeness among the underlying dimensions

of well-being to be one of the most important questions researchers could ask of their data as this contributed to the meaning and measurement of well-being.

On evaluating Springer and Hauser's (2006) methods, Ryff and Singer (2006) had suggested problems surrounding the debate of what constitutes good psychometric practice. They had implied such a review displayed differences in views between psychology and sociology. Ryff and Singer (2006) had explained that further evidence would be required and obtained via other methods (e.g. interviews). They placed emphasis on evidence of disagreement as to what constituted as good psychometric practice and trustworthy analytic procedures. Particular references to the differing disciplinary views were also discussed. Importantly, the depth of measurement was highlighted to reflect the lengthy scales that psychologists will administer, in comparison to the sampling scope preferred by sociologists placing priority on larger sample sizes.

Efforts by Ryff and Singer (2006) to close these exchanges floundered, they declared that they would continue to use the six theory-guided dimensions of PWB. In response, Springer, Hauser and Freese (2006) hit back. They had insinuated that Ryff and Singer's (2006) claims of being "the best news yet" for the six-factor model of psychological well-being and its current methods of instrumentation, had merely been "wishful thinking" (p.1121). Again they had disputed Ryff and Singer's attempts to measure six distinct dimensions of PWB. Despite this however, Springer, Hauser and Freese (2006) had pointed out that four of the six measures were virtually impossible to differentiate in several independent samples. They had argued that there was convincing evidence from

survey data and different model specifications used, that four of the six RPWB dimensions were pretty much impossible to tell apart.

In addition, Springer, Hauser and Freese (2006) reported that it was not their intention to dispute that a six-dimension structure of PWB existed, but that they were unconvinced by the items Ryff had proposed to reflect such a structure.

In an attempt to re-address the PWB structure and measurement debate, Springer, Hauser and Freese (2006) had firstly acknowledged Ryff's development of the PWB six-factor model as a "valuable contribution to social psychological measurement" (p.1130). Following this, they had called for an urgent need to rethink and recast current ideas about the structure and/or measurement of PWB, warning that such efforts would require "the integration of careful and critical theoretical, methodological, and empirical work" (p.1130). On concluding their critique of Ryff and Singer's (2006) claims, Springer, Hauser and Freese (2006) had expressed their disappointment that Ryff and Singer had declared to cease engagement in such further matters surrounding the PWB six-factor model. Instead, they had hoped or wished to encourage that other researchers evaluate the facts rather than misinterpret the motives of the research authors. In compiling the present review I sensed a degree of friction here!

Hauser, Springer and Pudorvska (2005) had tested the findings of Springer and Hauser's (2006a; 2006b) as to whether purpose in life, self-acceptance, environmental mastery and personal growth failed to show significant independent variation. They had advocated

that there was little evidence to support the conceptually proposed multidimensionality of PWB.

1.9 Summary

It is clear that there are many similar and contesting theoretical frameworks that might assist our understanding of well-being. The literature is often interesting and mostly intuitive, yet, it does contain challenges. For example the interchangeability of terminology have been reviewed and discussed. Happiness, SWB and PWB are the key terms that have been used over the timeline of the present review. However, the fact that other researchers have deployed different descriptors alongside these terms, and, at times, have used these in apparently random and interchangeable ways, has made the collation and digestion of literature difficult at times. This tendency for researchers to develop a range of terms for, what is essentially, the same process or theme, is not restricted to the domain of well-being. Concerns over the interchangeable use of stress, anxiety and arousal dogged the early development of stress and performance research (Hardy and Jones 1990) and more recent concerns over the mis-representation of phenomenology (Allen-Collinson, 2009) indicates how a 'way of working' might be misunderstood and misinterpreted by others. Those thoughts aside, researchers and other interested parties who seek to understand well-being, will, at times, be tested by sematic progression of the literature.

SWB, as largely discussed here, is used to quantify life quality and this is reflected in the early stages of the well-being literature, with a large focus on SWB. Importantly, Keyes,

Shmotkin and Ryff (2002) highlighted that the study of SWB had so far, infused a variety of social and health disciplines interested in quality of life (Raphael, Renwick, Brown, and Rootman, 1996), whilst also bringing attention to the fact that there had been increasing interest in SWB within major areas of mainstream psychology (Diener et al., 1999), resulting in the studies of SWB as a cognitive process of judgment and attribution (Schwarz and Clore, 198; Tversky and Griffin, 1991), constituents of emotional experience (Diener, Sandvik, and Pavot, 1991; Lazarus, 1991), goal-related behaviour (Emmons, 1996; Omodei and Wearing, 1990; Sheldon and Elliot, 1999), time perspective (Shmotkin, 1991; Strack, Schwarz, and Gschneidinger, 1985), short-term and long-term effects of life events (Shmotkin and Lomranz, 1998), and cross cultural variability (Suh, Diener, Oishi, and Triandis, 1998). The term Psychological Well Being (PWB) then followed, having originating from earlier theories in clinical and developmental psychology. Both traditions share a vision or aspiration to represent values that are believed to "elevate the human capacity to examine what makes life good" (Keyes, Shmotkin and Ryff 2002; p.1017). Despite this, the blocks of literature can appear insular and independent. Consequently SWB studies tend to make little, if any, acknowledgement or reference to PWB literature and vice versa. In some ways this might appear to be a missed opportunity but, again, the tendency for researchers in one area to seemingly ignore the work of those who research in a closely related field can be noted elsewhere; from the field of sports motivation research it is clear that goal-orientation researchers (Duda and colleagues) and motivational climate researchers (Ames and colleagues) undertook interrelated research throughout the 1990's without referencing each other's endeavors in any concerted or purposeful way.

Linley, Maltby, Wood, Osborne and Hurling (2009) proposed that there are important questions yet to be answered about the associations between subjective and psychological well-being, and it was proposed that subjective well-being may be a prerequisite of psychological well-being (see Kashdan et al. 2008).

Following the detailed review of previous literature above, on the development and progression of SWB and PWB theories, it would seem appropriate at this point to introduce and focus somewhat on the professional world of sport, with particular reference to professional football and youth development.

1.10 Research within professional sport

Over the years research in professional sport has grown considerably. In general, research within professional sport has tended to focus either at senior level or with a separate focus on youth development. There has been little research in the professional sport domain with particular focus on matters of well-being, however with a change in times this may be soon to change.

Injury has often featured in research with respect to coping strategies and rehabilitation. Roderick (2006) was initially interested in understanding the relationship between work and health, in particular the implications of how social relations of work in the context of professional football could affect perceptions of injuries and the experience of pain, to the extent of whether the injury or pain was deemed genuine (Bellaby, 1990). Roderick (2006) pointed out that in professional sport, employment is reliant on the management and maintenance of athletes' athleticism, and outlined that in a study of ballet dancers

(Turner and Wainwright, 2003) it had been argued that there were few occupations that held the same dependency on athleticism.

Furthermore, Roderick (2006) referred to the work of Nixon (1992) and Young *et al.* (1994) to consider the notion of 'a culture of risk' and the ways in which athletes cope and deal with injuries at work. Roderick (2006) suggested that although injuries may happen naturally as a consequence of athletes' employment, that the appearance of injuries may be subject to social relations (Kotarba, 1983), especially as athletes may receive 'official recognition' from significant others for playing through pain and carrying injuries (p.77). In doing so, it would seem that this type of recognition encouraged athletes to justify playing with an injury and to detach from any feeling or experience of pain (Roderick, 2006; Messner, 1990, 1992):

> ...players learn to cope with 'routine' pain and injury, but also to protect their sense of self from critical audiences that include people – e.g. club managers – some of whom view them as commodities (Wacquant, 1995). (cf Roderick, 2006; p.93)

Consequently, it would seem that experienced pain and injury do not lead to a simple and straightforward process, instead, many social relational factors may determine how a player decides to manage their injury. In turn, such aspects of research could therefore pose questions with regards to social relations and injury management.

Youth development within the context of professional football

Within youth development, Parker (2000) carried out ethnographic research within a professional football youth training environment and studied the different perceptions of

how *education* and *work* were seen to represent very different trainee career paths. Parker (2000) explained how the majority of trainees disregarded the notion of further education or vocational training as they viewed reaching professional player status as a certainty where further education would not be required. Interestingly, Parker (2000) pointed out that previous research (Willis, 1977; Jenkins, 1983; Banks et al., 1992; Riseborough, 1993) supported claims that such adolescent male attitudes were a reflection of prospective post-school manual labour opportunities and those attitudes may also be linked to the development of *masculine identity* (p.62).

The culture within professional football across many clubs reflected a male-oriented football-focused environment where educational achievement was deemed a distraction from becoming a professional player.

> Implicit within the context of club culture was the understanding that to succeed as a professional player one had to 'think' as a professional player, and that meant 'thinking' only of football. (Parker, 2000; p.67)

Furthermore, it was concluded that as a result of peer pressure from significant others within the football environment (team-mates, coaching practitioners) trainees' perceived education to be less masculine, a danger to their chances of 'making it' to professional status and something that could change everyday life by how others perceive the situation, with particular reference to peer group identity and managerial approval (Parker, 2000).

Within a similar context, Cushion and Jones (2006) examined coach-athlete relationships within the context of professional youth football and coaching culture, with particular emphasis placed on power, structure and social bonds. Cushion and Jones (2006) outlined that academy players were regularly scrutinized by coaches, who in turn and for the most part were also judged on match results as oppose to player development. Players were discussed in terms of 'favourites', 'peripherals' and 'rejects'; favourites being those that played constantly and rejects less so. 'Rejects' were judged as limited in ability and attitude, often corrected or disciplined in front of others for making small mistakes, and furthermore criticised more heavily during games. As a result, findings suggested that players believed they needed to keep coaches on-side as this would play an important role if they were to make successful progress within the game.

Again within a similar context, yet in a different vein, Relvas, Littlewood, Nesti, Gilbourne and Richardson (2010) studied the organizational structures and working practices within professional football across a number of clubs in Europe, in an attempt to understand the relationship between the youth and first team environments. They found that lack of communication appeared to hinder the progression of young players into the first team environment. Subsequently, Relvas et al. (2010) suggested future research needed to include more detailed explorations into the day-to-day experiences, specific training and supportive conditions experienced by young players in the transition from the youth to professional football environment.

Youth development within English professional football

English Premiership Football Clubs are required to have their own Football academy. Football academies are able to provide adequate support necessary to facilitate and nurture the development of elite young players. Elite young players aged between 16-18 years old are selected and awarded full-time scholarships based on their ability to become a professional football player. In 1997 The Football Association (FA) specified that "at the heart of the FA's commitment is the Charter for Quality programme, which ensures best practice in terms of coaching and education received by young players" (www.TheFA.com). Consequently, full-time scholars were in the academy training environment 5 days a week from which 10 hours were allocated to college studies, with matches played on Saturdays throughout the competitive season.

Tomlinson (1983) noted that within the culture of English football "the sudden switch from apparent indispensability to potential redundancy or wastage can be experienced by the player in the most traumatic of ways" (p.158). Within a football academy such experiences may occur frequently as academy players' face many challenges whilst trying to progress within the profession.

The Football Association stipulated that "technical development cannot, and should not, be viewed in isolation of the player's overall educational and social welfare" (www.TheFA.com, 2004). They suggested that the player's overall well-being must be taken into account when considering factors of performance and place emphasis on the performance-well-being relationship. However, there was little evidence to explain how

educational and social welfare practice influenced football performance in this developmental domain.

More recently, in January 2010, the Premier League (PL) held an Academy Managers meeting and discussed the modernisation of youth development. The Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) was produced as part of this process, of which outlined:

> ...in detail and in order, the processes and criteria necessary to ensure that professional football in England is empowered to create a world leading Academy System that serves to provide more and better Home Grown Players and increase the efficiency of Youth Development investment. (Premier League, 2011; p.10)

The vision and principles of the EPPP were stated to:

> ...deliver an environment that promotes excellence, nurtures talent and systematically converts this talent into professional players capable of playing first team football at the club that develops them. (Premier League, 2011; p.12)

Accordingly, the Premier League (2011) placed emphasis on coaching and support services as key to the development of the EPPP. They also highlighted club accountability, in that clubs within professional football will be expected to comply with club *rights* and *responsibilities* that may significantly contribute to the development of *Home Grown Players* in the future.

Furthermore, the Premier League (2011) had chosen to adopt a multidisciplinary approach to academy practice on the basis that the processes involved within the holistic development of academy players had increased and become more complex. All of which were in place to produce players for first team professional football. However, important

emphasis was also placed on the management of player welfare and lifestyle, pointing out that the EPPP is player-centred to ensure that the social development, welfare, safeguarding and lifestyle issues effectively meet provision requirements across every academy:

> If the vision of producing fully rounded individuals is to be achieved through the Academy System, then Academies will need to be able to demonstrate through their philosophy, vision and actions, a programme which understands the need to ensure that they create a safe and caring environment in which the player can fully achieve his potential. (Premier League, 2011; p.72)

The EPPP has adopted a more holistic approach to player development within academy practice. Evidently, it would seem that the proposed forms of academy-based provision aspire to provide security and also psychological support for young players. As a result, and with this study in mind, psychological well-being (PWB) is likely to be influenced by such support and subjective well-being (SWB) is also likely to be experienced (to greater or lesser degrees) as players evaluate their progression within the academy system.

CHAPTER TWO:

METHODOLOGY

2.1 Thoughts on Qualitative Methodology

In the sections and pages that follow the present thesis has sought to explore player and practitioner experiences of subjective and psychological well-being through a series of qualitatively-oriented action research derived cycles. Not only is research into well-being in sport rare, but also in the same regard, there is little qualitative research available across the domain of well-being as a whole. Consequently, the methodology undertaken in the present study offers a fresh approach to the exploration of well-being in this area. Similarly reports of studies that explore practice-based situations through the lens of action research protocols, remain a rarity in sport literature. With the above observations in mind, the discussions and data presentations that follow deviate from previous methods that have dominated inquiry into well-being and practice in sport. In more general terms it is only since the 1990's has qualitative research gained acceptance within the field of sport and exercise sciences, in particular across a range of social sport science disciplines such as sport psychology, sociology, and sports coaching. Contributions from these areas are discussed later after a brief overview of qualitative research in broader terms.

2.2 The contribution of Denzin and Lincoln (1994, 1998, 2005)

Denzin and Lincoln have spent over a decade (from 1994 to 2005) discussing (and promoting) qualitative research in a social science context. In doing so, they have produced three editions of a qualitative handbook. In each edition qualitative research is discussed as a series of unfolding moments. In the most recent publication Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggested that the first qualitative moment (the traditional period), began pre-war and, during this time, qualitative researchers had reportedly written objective

accounts of field experience, reflective of the positivist scientist paradigm. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005; p.15) the 'Other' they studied was alien, foreign and strange. Furthermore, they noted that during this period that the field-worker was somewhat glorified, as someone who (gallantly maybe) ventured into the field and returned with stories about people. Rosaldo (1989) labeled this as the lone ethnographer. Traditional research within the sport psychology discipline has carried a positivistic or experimental tone. Unsurprisingly, undergraduate and postgraduate sport psychologists have, say over the last 20 years been encouraged to follow a scientific research approach, and in doing so, they have tended to become familiar with a distal research process and hard-edged writing style, author evacuated and theory-laden in style and tone. In more recent times current students, in light of the progression of qualitative methodologies (Biddle et al. 2001), may have begun to appreciate that feelings and personal opinions are not always frowned upon and deemed to be of little value.

The second moment, as described by Denzin and Lincoln (2005), has been described as the modernist period, postwar to the 1970's. At this time it is argued that social realism, naturalism and slice-of-life ethnographies were still regarded highly. Indeed Denzin and Lincoln (2005) argued that a new generation of graduate students had begun to contend with new interpretive theories (ethnomethodology, phenomenology, critical theory, feminism). These students were thought to be attracted to qualitative research practices that would let them "give a voice to society's underclass" (p.16). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) also indicated that postpositivism operated as a powerful epistemological paradigm at this point. In this regard Becker, Geer, Hughes and Strauss (1961) are

associated with combining open-ended and quasi-structured interviewing with participant observation and the meticulous analysis of such data in standardized, statistical form, in an attempt to bring qualitative research alongside the scientific counterpart. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) are critical of research undertaken within the modernist phase suggesting it was clothed in the language and style of positivist and postpositivist dialogue (p.17). Even at the time of constructing the present thesis it could be argued that in the field of sport and exercise science is still dominated by a positivist approach to research. Within the sport domain, qualitative researchers have reviewed the impact of qualitative research in a series of critical commentaries that makes reference to different contexts (Biddle, et al, 2001; Gilbourne and Richardson, 2006; Knowles, Gilbourne, Anderson and Tomlinson, 2007; Douglas and Carless, 2009; Krane, 2009; and Knowles and Gilbourne, 2010), and as such texts emerge then sport psychology has been challenged to adopt fresh approaches to both the 'doing' and the 'writing' of qualitative research.

The third moment, was termed as blurred Genres, this phase began in 1970-1986. It was referred to as the moment of blurred genres, because qualitative researchers had a complete set of paradigms, methods, and strategies to use in their research. Different methods of collecting and analyzing data were also presented at this time. Such methods included qualitative interviewing, along with observational, visual, personal experience and documentary methods (p.17). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggested that the work of Geertz (1973, 1983) defined this period from start to finish. They indicated that Geertz had argued old approaches (e.g. functional, positivist, behavioural etc) to human disciplines were conceding to a more diverse and unrestricted perspective. Geertz had

called for a "thick description" of events and that the "observer has no privileged voice in the interpretations... the central task of theory is to make sense out of a local situation" (p.17).

The fourth moment, the crisis of representation, is chronologically located as taking place in the mid-1980's (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Issues and deliberations over definitions and the utlity of terms such as validity, reliability and objectivity began to surface again. In one example from this period Stoller and Olkes (1987) reflected on their previous work and the crisis of representation that they had experienced, describing their dissatisfaction within conventional forms of writing. Maybe in an effort to confront matters, Stoller produced an account of his experiences in the Songhay world through his presence in the text.

In the years that followed, alternative approaches to the representation of research were not always accepted with open arms, for example, Clough (1998) strongly argued against such new forms of writing as she did not believe this represented a way out of the crisis. Richardson and St. Pierre (cf. Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) extended Clough's (1998) arguments by suggesting that writing should be:

> ...a method of inquiry that moves through successive stages of reflection. As a series of written representations, the fieldworker's texts flow from the field experience, through intermediate works, to later work, and finally to the research text, which is the public presentation of the ethnographic and narrative experience (p.19).

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), qualitative researchers have, more recently, been confronted with a triple crisis of representation and so with a series of moments that flow from the question of how and why one might represent qualitatively derived research data in different ways. The triple crisis itself refers to a crisis that combines questions over representation, legitimation, and praxis. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) explained that the representational crisis surrounds the assumption that lived experience can only be created in the social text written by the researcher, and no longer directly captured. Secondly, the legitimation crisis questions the evaluation and interpreting of qualitative research, disputing such terms as validity and reliability. Thirdly, the praxis crisis addresses the ability to effect change, when society is only to be represented as a text. Consequently, the triple crisis of representation, legitimation, and praxis can be related to how the other or self might reasonably be represented within the text and how research cannot just be a text-based activity but might also make *real* change happen within a society. Critical social science implicates research ideas that move the researcher to a point of challenge or change (Carr and Kemmis, 1986).

Gilbourne (2010) in a key-note address to the UK student BASES conference emphasized that much work remained theory driven and constrained to scientific method (see powerpoint presentation notes). He suggested there to be a reluctance to move away from the underlying conventions and writing style of the scientific methodologies, as if there is an obligation to follow past theory and practice in the discipline of applied sport psychology. Gilbourne (2010) proposed that although there is known to be different 'ways' of doing research and different 'ways' of being as a researcher, that publicized

sport-based research still appeared reluctant to embrace the possibilities afforded by these approaches. Although only few have so far chosen to practice and undertake research in different ways, it would seem logical that, as ways of 'being' a researcher change, then, ways of representing findings should change also.

Broadly speaking and in the social sciences generally also, the crisis of representation has received a good deal of attention. For example, Tierney (2002) suggested that the crisis of representation had been generated from changing beliefs and notions as to how researchers were to present their data and findings. He cited Richardson (1997; p.12) "...I don't know what I want to write about, how I want to write it, or who I want to write it for". Richardson was apparently uninspired by the qualitative texts that she read and wanted to find ways of making qualitative texts engaging and thought provoking. Tierney (2002) argued further that qualitative researchers, possibly as a result of editorial reactions to new forms of representation, risked adopting a defensive approach to the narrative voice and reported that there had been a shift in qualitative methods:

> ...away from reproducing the static narrative forms found in traditional, scientist-oriented research, and toward a more dynamic representational strategy that explicitly locates the author in the text (p.385).

He attempted to explain the shift and argued that qualitative researchers had moved towards texts that used the active voice, encouraging the use of first person, enabling the retelling of events to be of a more intense nature and generally being actively involved in the text. Tierney (2002) encouraged researchers to move towards a sense of story,

bringing a fresh perspective into what Denzin and Lincoln (2005) described as the sixth

and seventh moments. The sixth moment is described in terms of excitement and new

ways of writing and the seventh relates to critical and challenging questions that are

asked by both quantitative and qualitative researchers as this writing takes hold. Although

some (e.g. Tierney, 2002; Smith, 2009) have advocated the use and purpose of such new

ways of writing, it appears reasonable to suggest that the sixth and seventh moments are

yet to take place in the discipline of applied sport psychology.

In one early sport-based example of emergent writing Gilbourne, (2002), in his paper

'Sports participation, sports injury and images of self: An autobiographical narrative of a

life-long legacy' illustrates through his writing how he came to consider his own career

ending injury from a life-span perspective. Gilbourne (2002) adopts a style of 'story-

telling' that is based around a creative non-fiction representational style (Sparkes, 2002)

as demonstrated below:

> He spoke about his career ending. The tale was tragic … big contract waiting …
> everything agreed the move of dreams … one last game for his old team (a
> favour for the manager) one tackle ends everything … he never plays again.
> Now he finds it difficult to work, long periods of depression devastate his own
> and his family's yearly cycle. I watched his hands as he spoke, gripped together
> they were constantly moving, shaking. His eyes looked tired, uncertain, devoid
> of any joy. He told his tale, I listened, impassive, just gripped by the intensity of
> the experience. By the end he appeared a beaten man as if the re-telling had
> eaten a little more of him away. We spoke for a while longer and our meeting
> came to a close. I walked with him to the door and watched him make his way
> to a waiting car … his elderly father had driven him to our meeting and would
> now, sharing his grief, take him home. I gathered my things together and made
> my way to my own car … a colleague was walking in my direction and inquired
> about 'what I'd been up to'. I explained that I had met someone to discuss a

sports injury, my colleague asked if the athlete would play again, I explained his career ended almost 20 years ago.

This new and different way of writing also encourages/urges upon the visual capacities of the reader. Gilbourne highlighted in numerous conference presentations (i.e. FEPSAC 2007, BASES Aberwystwyth 2010) that although uncommon in the sports injury literature, auto-ethnography had come to be accepted (at least in-part), yet attempts at publication of this new way of writing had not been successful within the some core sport psychology journals. Eventual publication in 'Reflective Practice' (in 2002) does offer a degree of contextualization and alignment with regards to moments of qualitative research and the status of any representation debate in sport science. Having eventually reached publication in 'Reflective Practice' Gilbourne encouraged that such material *can* be published but stressed that there could be less resistance for publication *outside* sport-based journals. Subsequent Self texts by Stone (2009), Douglas (2010), Smith (2009), and Gilbourne (2010, 2011) have recently appeared in the new qualitative journal *'Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health'*, established in 2009, with another Self paper, from Stone (2009) to follow, and in *'Qualitative Inquiry'*. In one example from these recent efforts, Stone (2009) uses creative writing to reflect and attempt to understand his past, particularly concerning issues of mental illness, anorexia and exercise dependency. The following extracts offer some illustration of this work:

> He ate little and was up at six most days. Sewing, or reading, or walking. In the thin Spring light. It was always Spring in his memory... His mother was a witness to this activity. Sometimes now, as he looked back, he saw her as collusive – as if she could have stopped it happening – that relentless slide into chaos. But she was weak and full of grief herself, he said to himself: it was not her fault. He remembered her as old; but she could not have been old, as she never, in fact, grew old. She died before she was sixty – collapsed from the

inside out. As if her core had crumbled away; the fiction of her identity – its artful constructions, its sayings and idiosyncrasies – imploding, dispersing (p.69).

Stone's (2009) way of writing illustrates a similar style of writing to that demonstrated by Gilbourne (2002), inviting the reader into the scene, with the use of descriptive language to paint a picture for the reader.

> He recalled sitting in their living room on one occasion, completely unable to speak or to hear the conversation. There were several people there – he imagined N- and P- and possibly others too – and he was sitting on the floor. They were speaking – he could see their mouths moving – but sound was such that he could not hear them. Neither, he remembered, could he respond – even to cry out. Even now, so many years later, he lives the fear which that sensation had provoked. The memory physically encoded into the fabric of his body (p.69).

In the text, Stone (2009) demonstrates critical social science in action, making large reference to his distorted memory. This reflects earlier suggestions from Carr and Kemmis (1986) that as well as representing change, Stone (2009) in his acknowledgement of distorted memory, also accepts the fuzzy nature of memory, particularly memory that revisits a time of mental illness, his writing is, in places, overt in this regard:

> It was in the same house that it had ended – or begun. G- came in to discover him in the front room hitting his head on the wall and wailing. He could not remember what G- had done. Presumably he had tried to offer some sort of comfort or reassurance. This must have failed. His memory, cloudy now, was of cars arriving, of doctors, of his mother. Of a bed, of sedation. And, the next day, of the drive to the hospital. On the way they stopped and he bought chocolate. This was significant. He remembered, *or thought he remembered*, his mother's pleasure at this purchase. So perhaps she had noticed his (physical deterioration) after all (p.69 italics added).

Stone (2009) referred to his writing as a piece of autoethnographic research that could be better described as an 'enigmatic articulation'. He explained the history behind his experiences and how the text raises the complex dialogues between the narrated self and the present writing self, and in doing so revealed 'as much about the narrator as the narrated'. Stone's writing is evidence of text that is not lead by theory, supporting Tierney's (2002) earlier reference to qualitative inquiry moving away from theory-led text.

Stone (2009) commented that the inter-animations he presented, with stuttering tone and style at times, reflected everyday speech and thinking. This can be related to Tierney's (2002) earlier suggestion towards embracing a sense of story. By Stone (2009) attending to specific details such as speech, this only helps create a more defined image that arguably helps to inform authenticity within the sense of story.

Tierney (2002) stressed the importance of writing in the first person and suggested this offers personal insight to the text whilst also providing further enrichment to the meaning of such experiences. In doing so, the researcher as author becomes the narrative and so locates themselves within the text.

Sparkes et al. (2001) highlighted that whether quantitative or qualitative methods are used, researchers have to find a way of representing their findings to give a true reflection (of what happened) to the reader. Sparkes et al. (2001) considered the scientific tale (quantitative) and the realist tale (qualitative) that they believed to dominate research in

sport psychology. The scientific tale (later discussed as one 'tale' amongst many, Sparkes, 2002), was referred to as having no style, an impersonal voice. The realist tale was described as having dominated qualitative sport psychology research, along with other qualitative research domains and this observation was made in critical terms. The realist tale, Sparkes explained, not only adheres to the notion that the author be absent from the text, but also that individual cultural member's view be suppressed, in order to suggest that views put forward are authentic and representative of those people in the studied culture (Sparkes et al., 2001).

Sparkes et al. (2001) placed importance on acknowledging the value of both types of tales, coining (or co-coining) the phrase that each way of writing represents a different way of knowing so supporting Richardson (1994) who described writing in different ways as a source of discovering new properties of our subject area and our relationship to it... "different ways of writing lead to different ways of knowing... then there might be something to be gained by qualitative researchers engaging with alternative genres of representation" (Sparkes et al., 2001; p.802).

2.3 Paradigms

Smith and Dainty (1991) had explained that understanding the underlying research perspective is highly significant, helping the researcher to investigate the assumptions, values and processes that underpin the research and in a manner that illustrates thoroughness and care. The research methodology needs to be appropriate for the

research question and, according to Smith and Dainty (1991), the researcher must evaluate their own beliefs and perceptions about the kind of knowledge and experiences being researched. This brings us to questions of ontology and epistemology.

The researcher's ontological, epistemological and methodological viewpoints may be articulated through references to paradigms which have been described as a, "a basic set of beliefs that guides action" (Guba, 1990; p.17). Such beliefs shape how the researcher sees the world and acts in it. According to Barker (1992), the notion of 'paradigm' comes from the Greek language *'paradeigma'* meaning model, pattern or example. Therefore, paradigms might represent the way we see the world, helping us to explain the world and predict its behaviour.

Recently Weed (2009) questioned the utility of paradigms, by examining the original perspectives on the paradigm topic as outlined by Kuhn (1962). Weed (2009) suggested that Kuhn's discussions on 'paradigms', the conduct of 'normal science' and the nature of scientific progress and debate over time, had remained useful for understanding the behaviour of researchers in social science. Weed (2009; p.313) explained Kuhn's (1962) proposal and highlighted the two key points: firstly that the normal science phase is known by adherence to a single paradigm and the period of crisis (revolutionary science) is distinguished by the absence of a single paradigm (McFee, 2007); secondly, that the normal science phase is exactly that, the norm, and the revolutionary phases are infrequent and short-lasting.

Following this, Weed (2009) argued that 'competing' paradigms were therefore a contradiction and misleading (a misnomer in fact). He indicated that in the normal science phase, paradigms surely could not compete as they are noted to adhere only to a single paradigm, implying that there would be no need for a new paradigm unless the old one no longer fits. Furthermore, in the revolutionary science phase, as this lacks the presence of a single paradigm, is therefore deemed to be immeasurable allowing social scientists to avoid debate or further argument by claiming that critiques are not relevant. Consequently, Weed (2009) proposed that a protectionist paradigmatic behaviour by social scientists had formed.

Although, and as we have seen, paradigms might not always be perceived as being particularly helpful, Lincoln and Guba (1994) had suggested that a paradigm is the researchers' most informed world-view based on the answers to three metaphysical questions; ontological, epistemological and methodological questions. Lincoln and Guba (2005) discussed the notion of paradigms by outlining an ontological question that asks what 'reality' is and what can be known about 'reality'. They paid reference to their earlier work in 1994, assuming four different paradigms; positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and constructivism, whilst also addressing the additional fifth paradigm, as participatory (Lincoln and Guba, 2000; Heron and Reason, 1997). A description to each paradigm is provided below:

Positivism: affirms that objective accounts of the real world can be given, whilst Post-Positivism: holds that the ontology is critical realism, accepting that only partially

objective accounts of the world can be established. The epistemology takes an objectivist stance, with methods being modified experimental and techniques used would involve mixed methods or other qualitative means. Post-positivism can be viewed as a theory-led form of qualitative inquiry, as it is the theory that initiates the focus and prompts the questions asked. Such theory can lead the researcher (too willingly, some might say) into a post-positivist agenda and in doing so, away from personal insight and theory-free knowledge, and instead driven towards the reliance on theory-led qualitative research texts. These tendencies have received criticism. Most recently Collinson-Allen (2009) expressed her frustration that post-positivist research (in the guise of phenomenology) is best seen as 'normal' qualitative research due to it often being theory-bound in nature. She suggested this assumption has been formed incorrectly and should not be taken as given.

In an example of post-positivist qualitative inquiry, Harwood, Drew and Knight (2010) investigated parental stressors in professional youth football using qualitative methods. They asserted their study to represent theory-led research using post-positivism:

> This study was essentially grounded in a post-positivist paradigm (Campbell, 1999) and supported a critical realist philosophy (Bhaskar, 1975, Miles and Huberman 1994).

It appears that ideas of paradigmatic location are becoming more accepted in the realms of qualitative research within the area of sport and exercise.

The above criticism suggests an uneven line (in the sport social sciences) between Post-positivism and the assumptions of Constructivism. In the latter paradigm ontology is viewed to be relative and local and specifically constructed, in other words a production of reconstructed realities/understandings of the social world, as indicated by Lincoln and Guba (2005). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe epistemology as subjectively created findings, with methods as interpretation, using observation, interview and focus group techniques. Furthmore, they suggested constructivism to be non-commensurable with positivism and post-positivism. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) proposed that constructivists provide reconstructions of 'others' lived experiences, therefore encouraging multi-voiced texts, with validity based on 'trustworthiness' and 'authenticity' criteria. According to Manning (1997), authenticity criteria is perceived as having:

> no parallel in the positivist paradigm and is characterized by a belief in a single reality, an objective relationship between researcher and respondents, a methodology based on controls and discernible variables (cf. Lincoln and Guba, 2005).

Critical Theory: attempts to address the relationship between theory and practice in the social sciences following criticism of the positivist and interpretive approaches. Carr and Kemmis (1986) highlighted:

> The animate world was being treated as 'methodologically' equivalent to the inanimate, and the forms of reasoning appropriate for dealing with the inanimate world were being applied increasingly and impetuously to the human and social worlds (p.131).

They suggested that there had been a dominance of positivist science and that the success achieved within the physical sciences had led to attempts in which to replicate this success within the social sciences. However Carr and Kemmis (1986) believed that this came at a cost. They suggested the absence of creative, critical and evaluative powers when attempting to conform to the rules of scientific thinking. Challenges to the dominance of scientific discourse are, however, easily found; For example, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) pointed out that the critical theory paradigm focuses on the media, culture, language, power, desire, critical enlightenment, and critical emancipation.

In addition, other perspectives such as the participatory paradigm described by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) as shared ownership of research projects, community-based analysis of social problems, and an orientation toward community action. Features of participatory action research involve sequential steps, consisting of different stages in a spiral of self-reflective cycles. It was suggested that in reality it is unlikely to be a neat and tidy process as the stages overlap, therefore needing to be open to flexibility these are not scientific notions. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) held that participatory action research is best conceptualized in collaborative terms, indicating it to be both a social and educational process. They placed emphasis on the "object" of participatory action research being social, as it is directed towards studying, reframing and reconstructing social practices.

> If practices are constituted in social interaction between people, changing practices is a social process... One person may change so that others are obliged to react or respond differently to that individual's changed behaviour, but the willing and committed involvement of those whose interactions constitute the practice is necessary, in the end, to secure and legitimate the change. (p.563)

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) highlighted that, in general, participatory action researchers are concerned with changes in practice in "the here and now". They also make important reference to participatory action research as being a learning process that involves what people do, how they interact, what they mean and value, and how they understand and interpret their world.

In addition, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) identify seven features that summarise the key elements of participatory action research. They argue that participatory action research is:

1. Social process – concerning the relationship between the individual and the social.
2. Participatory – engaging people in their knowledge.
3. Practical and collaborative – engaging people in examining social practices that link them with others in social interaction.
4. Emancipatory – encouraging people to break from the constraints of social structures that restrict their development and freedom.
5. Critical – helping people to challenge the way they interact, different ways of interpreting and describing their world (language), ways of working (work), and ways of relating to others (power).
6. Reflexive – a process facilitating people to transform their practices through a spiral of cycles of critical and self-critical action and reflection.
7. Aims to transform both theory and practice... *"to connect the local and the global and to live out the slogan that the personal is political" (p.568).*

On the whole, and notwithstanding the thoughts of Weed (2009), it seems fair to argue that researchers might benefit from the paradigm framework as this encourages a sense of location, indicating where they and their data may sit. Lincoln and Guba (2005) indicated that attitudes and behaviours are derived from paradigms that affect the way we interact with each other. They highlighted that people see the world as they are conditioned to see it through their perceptions, paradigms or mental maps:

Still further from objectivism 'reality' is modified to fit the environmental context. Eventually 'reality' becomes a social construct changed by culture. At the other end of the continuum solipsism views the world as an open system, a living organism. 'Reality' is in the minds of individuals (Lincoln and Guba, 2005; p.113).

Work undertaken within the participatory paradigm can be linked directly to the theme and processes associated with action research. Similar to the features listed above, Winter (1998) proposed that the relevance of theory in action research was on four levels. First, that action researchers use, develop, or build on theory in the process of doing action research. Second, the theory used in action research projects is shaped by the research process, the research topic, and the reflections of the different professions involved. Third, explicit theories are used to speculate on the hypothetical meanings of what the people involved perceive. Fourth, theory may be shaped by politics of an emancipatory or empowering nature (Drummond and Themessl-Huber, 2007; p.431).

Within action research the role of the facilitator has previously been addressed as somewhat problematic. McTaggart (2002) referred to the role of university researchers in action research as an important object of critique, and hypothesised that neutral facilitation simply denied social responsibility of the facilitator in making or assisting social change (cf. Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

Therefore, seeing the role of facilitation in neutral terms only encourages the "multiple reality" of practice to be overlooked. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggested that practice

is perceived differently by different participants and observers of practice within action

research:

> ...of facilitation as a neutral role obscures key aspects of practices and impedes
> critique of the way in which practices may sustain and daily reconstitute social
> realities whose character and consequences can be unjust, irrational,
> unproductive, and unsatisfactory for some of the people involved in or affected
> by them (p.570).

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) identified that, originally it was Lewin who argued the

potency of "group commitment" in bringing about changes in social practices. They

referred to the role of the "collective" and suggested it supported three important

functions. The first is claimed to be an expression of unrestricted scientific practice,

termed *objectification of experience*, establishing a local scientific community to use

principles of scientific inquiry to enhance and create richer local understandings (p.571).

The two other functions are expressed as the disciplining of subjectivity, consisting of an

affective aspect of subjectivity and a *political agency* aspect of subjectivity.

The *affective* aspect of subjectivity encourages emotional reactions to be explored,

allowing people to examine their feelings towards particular situations. Denzin and

Lincoln (2005) explained that:

> Again, this work is not simply the preserve of the scientific or professional
> scientific group therapist or facilitator; on the contrary, in participatory action
> research, it must be part of a social process of transformation (of selves as well
> as situations) that is comprehensible to participants. Participants play a
> supportive role, but the collective has a disciplining function, helping to clarify
> thinking and providing a context where affect as well as cognitive questions can
> be justified (p.571).

Furthermore, it was pointed out that the *political agency* aspect is a consequence of heightened understanding and motivation. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggested that as affect becomes more established, and experience more clearly objectified and understood, that both knowledge and feeling then become articulated and disciplined by the collective toward practical action:

> The collective provides critical support for the development of personal political agency and critical mass for a commitment to change. Through these interactions, new forms of practical consciousness emerge (p.571).

In the second edition of the Handbook, Denzin and Lincoln argued that:

> ..."objective" approaches tended to see practice from the perspective of an outsider in the third person; that "subjective" approaches tended to see practice from the perspective of an insider in the second person; and that the reflexive dialectical perspective of critical social science tended to see practice of the insider group, whose members' interconnected activities constitute their own social practices, in the first person (plural). This last perspective on practice is the one taken by participant-researchers in participatory action research (p.572).

On this note, they suggested that is the relationships between social and educational theory and practice that makes participatory action research what it is, rather than the employment of particular research techniques. Following this, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) argued that participatory action researchers will explore how changing *objective* circumstances shape and are shaped by participant *subjective* circumstances (e.g. performances, events, patterns of interaction, roles, system functioning etc). The level of understanding practice 'in the field' can vary as a result of using different research methods and techniques that better suit practice at that particular time.

Importantly, it was also addressed that the person acting as facilitator within participatory action research can be a co-participant, even though acknowledged to have specific expertise that would benefit the group and their efforts. Furthermore, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggested it to be naïve to presume that the facilitator be completely neutral, or separate from the group, and so reinforcing the practicality for the facilitator to be seen as a co-participant.

Sankaran, Hase, Dick and Davies (2007) pointed out that as action research is data driven, it is a pragmatic exercise about what methods are most useful to the researcher for the collection and analysis of data. Sankaran et al. (2007) suggested that there is no room for paradigm wars in action research and that the researcher does not have to be a modernist, postmodernist, critical theorist or discourse analyst with all the ontological and epistemological baggage that all these carry. Instead, they believe the research question drives the method and not the other way around. In other words, it is the research question that inevitably guides the chosen method.

Furthermore, Sankaran et al. (2007) suggested action research to be more than a set of techniques or an approach to doing rigorous research and reason that it is an attitude, a way of thinking. With Smith's (2009) thoughts in mind, Sankaran et al. (2007) had also made reference to the person as researcher. Sankaran et al. (2007) proposed that action researchers tended to be flexible in nature and open to change, with the ability to hear and see what experience tells them. The following section considers the themes and processes of action research in greater debate.

2.4 Action Research

Kurt Lewin (1945) described action research 'as a way of generating knowledge about a social system while, at the same time, attempting to change it' (cf. Hart and Bond, 1995, p. 13). Lewin formed two basic components of action research; generating knowledge and changing social systems describing action research as 'research based on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action'. He implied that such research lead to social action via a cyclical process of planning and action. Dick, Stringer and Huxham (2009) indicated that the purpose of action research had always intended to be about action and research; both practice and theory, whilst Kemmis and McTaggart (1988; p. 11) describe the cycle of action research, simply as 'plan, act and observe, reflect'. Stringer (2007; p.8) describes action research in even simpler terms, as 'look, think, act' (Dick, Stringer and Huxham, 2009).

Within the Educational Action Research Editorial (2006), it was suggested that although there is a tendency to view learning and growth as an 'ever-climbing upward journey', that a truer perspective is cyclical. Furthermore, reference to education was made, often being about returning again and again to certain existential and intellectual problems, yet not with a sense of ever solving them or making them go away (cyclical). In this critique scholarly activity is perceived as self-serving rather than an activity for the benefit of others.

Action research can be undertaken with a view to not only report but also to bring about change and, in that regard, the process might be associated with the assumptions of a

critical social science (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005; and Knowles and Gilbourne, 2010) and, in such a case the research would embrace notions of challenge with a view to liberation and emancipation and 'change' (i.e. in working practices).

Carr and Kemmis (1986) described how Habermas critically examined the way in which positivist understanding of knowledge is legitimised. Habermas expanded a theory of knowledge which brought 'scientism' into question. Carr and Kemmis (1986) reported that he did this in two ways. Firstly, by attempting to show how science offered just 'one' kind of knowledge among others, he sought to disprove any claims that science could define the standards in terms of which 'all' knowledge can be measured. Secondly, he opposed the claim that science offers an objective or neutral account of reality and tried to reveal how different kinds of knowledge are shaped by the particular human interest they serve (p.134).

Habermas is reported to have argued that human knowledge is created by virtue of three knowledge-constitutive interests labelled the 'technical', the 'practical' and the 'emancipatory'. Carr and Kemmis (1986) explained that the 'technical' interest involves interest in acquiring knowledge that will facilitate technical control over natural objects, for example, knowledge taking the form of scientific explanations. However, Habermas refuted that this was not the only type of legitimate knowledge. He indicated that to understand others required grasping the social meanings essential to the nature of social reality. Therefore suggesting that knowledge could also be generated from 'practical

interest' in the form of understanding to inform and help provide meaningful

communicative action. In spite of this, Habermas still reportedly claimed that:

> ...the methods of the interpretive approach cannot provide an adequate basis for
> the social sciences. For, any reduction of the social sciences to the explication of
> subjective meanings fails to recognise that the subjective meanings that
> characterize social life are themselves conditioned by an objective context that
> limits both the scope of individuals' intentions and the possibility of their
> realization (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; p.135).

Consequently, Habermas indicated that it was the 'emancipatory interest' that would not

then alienate conditions within which communication and interaction can occur. The

'emancipatory interest' involves acquiring knowledge of freedom, of the objective

framework within which communication and social action can occur. Carr and Kemmis

(1986) reported that a critical social science is largely concerned with emancipatory

knowledge:

> ...a critical social science will seek to offer individuals an awareness of how
> their aims and purposes may have become distorted or repressed and to specify
> how these can be eradicated so that the rational pursuit of their real goals can be
> undertaken. In this sense, a critical social science will provide the kind of self-
> reflective understanding that will permit individuals to explain why the
> conditions under which they operate are frustrating and will suggest the sort of
> action that is required if the sources of these frustrations are to be eliminated
> (p.136).

Carr and Kemmis (1986) stressed that a critical social science must extend thinking

beyond the interpretive approach towards reaching a better explanation for the causes of

distorted self-understanding. Therefore attempting to overcome or contest problems as

opposed to simply highlighting or reporting them (researcher acting as mirror to a

degree). Carr and Kemmis also make reference to Habermas drawing largely on the psychoanalytic method of self-reflection. He suggested this as a way to bring consciousness to the distortions that individuals may experience and that cause them to lack understanding of themselves and their actions. Furthermore, it seems noteworthy to mention that Kemmis (2006) believes the quality of practitioner research must have a critical dimension:

> ...it must explore issues both inside and beyond the practice, and be participative in nature. With the critical dimension comes the need for action researchers and practitioner researchers to be willing to tell unwelcome truths (p.452)

Drummond and Themessl-Huber (2007) argued that action research is normally described as both a cyclical process and a participatory activity. They argued further that action research is a process that engages with problems and learning in an attempt to create change. They also describe action research as being a controversial concept:

> It is polyvalent in that it accommodates many different theoretical approaches along with a diversity of socio-cultural and political motivations. It is controversial because it is perceived by many in the professional and academic research communities as not adhering to the methodical standards that regulate scientific research. (p.431)

Davis (2007) underlined the key characteristic of action research, supported by the work of others (Kemmis, 2001; Wadsworth, 1998), as the image of a spiral consisting of continuous and overlapping cycles of self-reflection (planning, acting, observing, reflecting and critical analysis). Davis (2007) described it as an ongoing process that

represented a flow of interrelated events over time. Although, reflection on action then appears to lead to new action resulting in a flow of events, Davis pointed out that the process may become messy and original plans may change, but that this merely contributes to the learning experience. Davis (2007; p.189) referred to a comment from Kemmis (2001):

> In reality, the process is likely to be more fluid, open, and responsive. The criterion of success is not whether participants have followed the steps faithfully, but whether they have a strong and authentic sense of development and evolution in their practices, their understandings of their practices, and the situations in which they practice. (p. 595)

Knowles and Gilbourne (2010) highlighted that within the action research literature a philosophy and nomenclature dominated by references to 'critical' engagement is housed. As a result, Knowles and Gilbourne (2010) paid particular attention to Gilbourne's (1999) earlier suggestions in reference to typologies used to guide action research. They explained that Gilbourne's (1999) evidence for critical engagement related to an awareness and examination of self in juxtaposition to wider contextual matters such as institutional power. Consequently, this view included possibilities offered by personal empowerment and emancipation of self and/or others.

Knowles and Gilbourne (2010) made reference to Leitch and Day (2000), who had sought to integrate reflective practice and action research, having argued that teachers' who undertake action research in the classroom, often neglect or give 'insufficient attention' to the nature of the reflective process. Consequently, Knowles and Gilbourne (2010) proposed that this situation signaled a critical agenda as Leitch and Day (2000)

had indicated reflection not to be a passing experience but rather a multi-faceted and potentially *empowering* process.

Knowles and Gilbourne (2010) also draw on the thinking of Carr and Kemmis (1986) and highlighted the claim that action research could be a facilitator of critical social science. They suggested that the desire to demonstrate critical engagement (through critical reflection) had indicated that a certain value be placed on such an achievement. Therefore, and as a result, Knowles (2009) advised caution, not to view reflection of a 'technical' nature and reflection that is 'practical' in nature as less worthy or significant than reflection of a 'critical' nature.

In outlining the value and aspiration of critical social science, Knowles and Gilbourne (2010) referred to the notion of utility of reflective practice existing as a process within action research. Schön (1983) had reportedly emphasised the complexity of the reflective process by differentiating between reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action; and Knowles and Gilbourne (2010) explained that Schön (1983) had suggested reflection-on-action to be a process of *systematic* and *thoughtful* analysis drawing on knowledge from experience, whilst reflection-in-action was related to thinking that takes place in the moment.

Comparable themes are discussed by Knowles and Gilbourne (2010), linking practical reflection to emotional knowledge of self-being. There are differences between reflective

practice and action research, however the two areas appear very close and at times intersect, yet often and in practical terms, they are quite different.

2.5 Reflective practice - A core component within action research

Rutter (2006) attained that critical reflection was challenging, required constant facilitation and could be disorienting and/or disturbing and highlighted the similarities between reflective practice and action research. Whereas, Morley (2007) had described critical reflection as to:

...challenge dominant power relations and structures (p.63).

She explained that participants were wary of the notion that had been imposed by management, for example as a gateway to 'spy' on participants (employees). Morley (2007) also emphasized the notion that critical engagement was likely to be an emotionally challenging process, inclusive of a degree of deconstruction and self-analysis. She advised that researchers would need to be in a 'good place' themselves, progress with sensitivity and care, and to realize that critical reflection is not a gold standard that somehow they must illustrate. Carr and Kemmis (1986) highlighted how the idea of emancipation can generally be related to issues of Critical Social Science, of which Knowles and Gilbourne (2010) recently considered its parameters.

In a similar vein to Rutter (2006), Rowley et al. (2012) also commented on the work of Bolton (2001) and promoted that reflective practice be viewed as facilitative to the

questioning process of practice, as oppose to providing definitive answers to the challenges of practice. Consequently, critical reflection may occur as a result of staged and layered reflection-on-action. Rowley, Earle and Gilbourne (2012) defined reflection-on-action as "a process in which the practitioner's past-experiences are 'mulled-over', considered, and analysed so that future consultancy might be adjusted accordingly where appropriate" (p.32). This not only emphasized the different stages of reflection but also how as practitioners we might reach different levels of reflection depending where we are at that point in time when reflection-on-action takes place and the questions asked when sharing reflection-on-action.

Knowles, Katz and Gilbourne (2012) focused on the intrapersonal nature of critical reflection and suggested that although previous research in a special issue of the British Psychological Society (*The Sport and Exercise Psychology Review*, 2006) contributed to practitioner experiences via reflective practice writing, there was not only little evidence of staged reflection but also critical reflection, as noted by Knowles (2009). Knowles, Katz and Gilbourne (2012) argued critical reflection to be necessary to the reflective process and the most challenging. However, they reiterated the same earlier sentiment made by Knowles (2009) and Knowles and Gilbourne (2010) with regards to reflective hierarchy and indicated this did not signify critical reflection to be more valuable than reflection that is technical or practical in nature.

It would seem appropriate to note, that the timing of staged and layered reflection may play an important role towards critical engagement and the reflective process. Moreover,

Knowles, Katz and Gilbourne (2012) highlighted that despite (author two) being an experienced practitioner the reflective process was deemed just as valuable:

> Far from the potential "complacency of being an experienced practitioner", the experience of completing this diary has resulted in me appreciating that the "real-time" reflective practice provided me with increasingly deeper levels of understanding of personal, professional and interpersonal relationships individually and how they interact. (p.9)

At this stage, it would seem worthy that reflective practice and action research are not the equivalent of one another, yet it is important that the researcher and those participating in action research must engage in reflective and reflexive practices. Action researchers are not just interested in the description and interpretation (as phenomenology-based researchers might be), but they are interested in the notion of bringing about change.

Only if reflective practitioners embrace a critical social science agenda may they hold similar ideals. Whilst reflective practice is more individually-based, action research is conducted with a group and is collaborative. However, Leith and Day (2000) indicated that reflective practice and action research literature had *both* emphasized models that are technical, practical and critical in nature:

A – Technical: increase efficiency and effectiveness

B – Practical: context specific 'wisdom' of the practitioner (eg. coach)

C – Critical: Emancipation, empowering, challenging established structures

Grant (2007) explained how experience has been her teacher. She suggested that her interaction and participation within the process had contributed towards her greater

awareness and deeper understanding of the research process itself. Grant (2007) placed large emphasis on the value of reflection and associated first-person action research practices, as she reasoned that this aided her increased awareness far greater than learning from literature. In agreement, Bartlett (1987) had suggested similarly, that the concept of self-reference (referred to as reflection) was:

> ...best understood informally, by experience rather than by stipulated or hypothetical definition. (p.7)

Grant (2007) commented on the 'bias' with regards to the personal dimension that each researcher imposes, making reference to Glaze (2002) who believed that subjectivity should be not be deemed as negative to the research process, and that the inability to separate researchers' thoughts merely adds value. In addition, Burgess (2006) had reflected on her feelings of anxiousness, confusion and discomfort, and in doing so, came to understand and appreciate that it was the learning process that made for transformation.

Furthermore, Grant (2007) discussed her own experiences through her doctoral studies and supported such reflections. She encouraged that feelings of discomfort should be acknowledged as oppose to being kept back, in order to further both our development and knowledge. Interestingly, Reason and Marshall (2001) added:

> As intellectual competence develops so too does the ability of researchers to develop their own frameworks and ideas and present them in their own 'voice',

thus moving beyond the 'safety nets' of an encompassing literature review (cited from Grant, 2007; p.270)

Robertson (2000) had placed emphasis on practitioners being key to the action research process and that through engagement in critical reflection-on-reality practitioners are encouraged to take ownership of their own work. Gilbourne (2001) emphasised the need to establish a reflection process that could facilitate and bring about change, encouraging practitioners to develop and apply reflective skills to their own practice.

With process in mind, Gilbourne and Richardson (2005) advised that an organized timetable for groups of practitioners to reflect is a critical aspect of the role of a sport psychologist. Whilst claiming that regular meetings set the tempo of reflection, they indicated that it is easy to get caught up within a busy football environment, and for the progress made in one meeting to fade, as a result of daily commitments potentially overriding the importance of a more longitudinal reflective process. Momentum was key to the up-keep and maintenance of continual progression and improvement (Gilbourne and Richardson, 2005). It was advised that regular meetings would help to develop and sustain momentum.

Although perceived to be very different, the football environment can be related to a generic context. Gilbourne and Richardson (2005) placed emphasis on the different approaches to practice whether in the same context or not:

> ...professional soccer, like education and healthcare systems, is based around complex institutions (soccer clubs) with their own histories, traditions and staff. Despite the universality of the above institutions' respective desire to educate,

care for the sick and compete, most schools, hospitals and soccer clubs are likely to develop their own way of doing things. Consequently, reviews of unique approaches to practice occupy a good deal of the action research literature. (p. 654)

Interestingly, they pointed out that although education and healthcare environments can be deemed similar when attempting to make institutional comparisons, they are different in respect to their own methods of doing things. Therefore, in a football environment the ability to care may be demonstrated and carried out differently to that in a healthcare or nursing environment, for example. Agreeably, this accounted for differences across institutions, however could having your own way of doing things also be applied within the same institutional environments? E.g., From one football club to another, such ways of doing things may differ.

2.6 The utility of reflective practice within action research

Reflective practice has also become part of the training process within sport psychology supervision. It has often been deemed as an invaluable learning tool that helps the practitioner gain a better understanding and knowledge of their own applied experiences that may, further down the line, lead them to confidently move towards and adopt their preferred philosophy of practice.

At this point, it seems appropriate to mention that as the author of this study I was able to relate the introduction and use of reflective practice when applied to my own supervision experiences. In particular, extracts of such experiences are revealed and discussed in a paper by Knowles, Gilbourne, Tomlinson and Anderson (2007). In light of this and for

what is to follow, I write in first person, in order to represent the data with true authenticity.

Knowles et al. (2007) explored the theme of shared and layered reflection in relation to the reflective-supervision relationship and associated reflective-practice skills. They suggested that in group settings reflection could be facilitated by reframing events through reference to different applied strategies and by both, the supervisor and supervisee asking reflective questions:

> I began to increasingly recount practice-based reflections in meetings with my supervisor. Feedback helped me to gain professional direction and support whilst re-running my own thoughts also helped me to consolidate how I was feeling about particular interventions or specific moments or events... I discussed various ideas with my supervisor: How will I decide what to include? How will I get the coaches' input? What will be the best method of delivery? My supervisor challenged my thoughts, asking reflective questions that provoked further development in thinking. We talked about the initial steps that I might take in designing the psychological component of the program. Following these discussions I read work in this area focused on the development of an educationally structured-psychology program (Botterill, 1990; LaRose, 1988; Ravizza, 1990). Meetings with my supervisor also dealt with the question of "how" I would introduce my ideas to the coaches. This process influenced my thoughts in planning towards the session and challenged what I already know. As a result, I felt prepared and confident of the aims and objectives I intended to achieve. It was decided that I would present my thoughts at the next coaches' meeting (p.117).

At the time, practice-based reflections were something new that I began and became accustomed to as part of the learning process and my journey into applied practice. However, in looking back, I was able to recognize how valuable those reflections were, and how they helped shape the practitioner I was to become:

Driving home after the meeting I had time to reflect, my head was buzzing…when I got home I began to write…my notes had an upbeat tone "The meeting went well. I was surprised at the staff turnout and the way in which the coaches got involved and engaged in the process". Everyone had something to contribute, which for me made it all the more worthwhile. As my journey got underway, I begin to mull over some of the key points raised in the meeting… "Everyone needs to be speaking the same language" was identified as an essential factor (p.118).

I had highlighted the process I went through regarding my practice-based reflections, specifically as I had begun to try new things and needed to discuss such matters with my supervisor in order to gain appropriate guidance. Consequently this phase moved from an initial prescriptive approach towards a shared (two-way) approach to reflection (Knowles et al. 2007). Furthermore, the two-way approach to reflection with my supervisor was later extended to supervisory group meetings:

I felt that a large amount of support, feedback and reflection was generated through the supervisory support group meetings. I used this opportunity to put forward particular case studies to the group and so was able to evaluate and reflect on my own actions and also that of my peers. Also these meetings were able to facilitate the process of layered reflection in that I was able to reflect further on reflections that had taken place earlier in the practice domain.

…Taking this opportunity to share my experiences with others created a round-table discussion that enabled views to be exchanged and generated further reflective practice (Knowles et al., 2001). Significantly, this procedure demonstrates reflection-in-action (personal accounts) and reflection-on-action (group discussion) taking place (p.118).

Throughout the three-year process of supervision I had been able to develop my reflective-practice skills, incorporating the development of layered reflection, generated through using a range of different mechanisms. I was therefore able to illustrate how I engaged in reflective practice procedures via personal journal writing, one-to-one

meetings with my supervisor and shared supervision group meetings. In particular, addressing how those experiences increased my capacity to better understand my own practice.

Finally, Knowles et al. (2007) proposed an alignment between the three levels of reflective practice identified by Goodman (1984) and the three levels of cognitive interest outlined by Habermas (1971):

> Goodman's first level of reflection with what Habermas termed "technical" cognitive interest that relates to a "limited" form of reflection. Such reflection might deal with measurable issues such as efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability. In a similar manner, Level 2 reflection might be associated with practical cognitive interest which embraces an assessment of the consequences of actions and also touches upon a review of the underlying rationale for practice. Finally, Level 3 reflection contains strong intuitive associations with emancipatory processes and incorporates reflection on ethical issues (p.120).

Level 3 was indicated to "locate" practice within the wider social and political scheme of things, suggesting that higher levels of reflection could possibly be attained through the process of writing in a personal and reflective way. In a similar vein, it was reported that in the context of a national school improvement project, Wennergren and Ronnerman (2006; p.454) had concluded that being in action (shadowing) together (in this case for example, as a group of sporting practitioners) formed an authentic base for written and verbal reflection. Interestingly, they indicated that without similar experiences of action, there is a risk that situations with a potentially high learning factor may only act to serve as a mental activity instead. Consequently, if located in practice and shared with others in

similar experiences of action, Level 3 is viewed as a realistic target for achievement within the process of action research (see Knowles and Gilbourne, 2010).

Whilst reviewing the literature on reflective practice, there appears to be links that could be made in a meaningful way to the action research literature. In an attempt to cross-reference reflective practice literature with action research literature, comments from Humphrey (2007) seem appropriate. She explained her initial surprise at having to 'dig down' into her own repressed unconsciousness and unexpectedly becoming her own psychoanalyst. Therefore suggesting that reflective practice, when applied at the higher level, could bring a degree of personal almost therapeutic challenge:

> Such complexity could unravel in a longitudinal project where changes in the self and/or the site are almost unavoidable, creating a curious choreography between self and site as both may change in tandem or in contradistinction. A crystallizing project must be sufficiently solid to with stand the heat of change and sufficiently lucid to refract the light complexity (p.23).

Humphrey (2007) addressed the unavoidable occurrence of change and used the analogy of a crystalizing project to help illustrate the complexity associated with the management of it. Based on her experience, she also explained that as an insider-outsider, she was aware that she could have been be pushed and pulled along an invisible insider-outsider continuum by others (in a political and practical sense). This was deemed likely to result from those who have a vested interest in who she was and what she was doing. Most significantly, she described how as an insider-outsider, involved being viewed as an

'insider' by some and an 'outsider' by others, she felt she was potentially at risk of losing

her sense of self:

> To actively take charge of the hyphen is to appreciate one's uniqueness as an insider-outsider and to cultivate the art of crossing-over between life-worlds. It is only when the researcher cherishes herself as an insider-outsider and commits herself to journeying between life-worlds that she can protect herself and her project from others (insiders and outsiders). This 'taking charge' is about 'taking responsibility' for defining one's identity, discharging the project and defending one's integrity which promote the 'ability to respond' as embedded in the etymology of responsibility.

> ...An insider-outsider who cross-fertilizes the values and views spawned from different life-worlds gives birth to a new world whose contours cannot be known in advance. If she is to become the hyphen, she must preserve attachments to different worlds I order to respect their inner truth, whilst cultivating a non-attachment which allows for critical and creative growth (p.23).

Humphrey (2007) indicated the importance in understanding the researcher's role as

insider-outsider in order to appreciate the full potential of what the researcher stood to

gain by accepting their position in the two different worlds. A message she was able to

communicate as a consequence of her own reflective practice.

2.7 Action research across disciplines

From the field of nursing Hart and Bond (1995) commented that although there was clear

evidence, both among practitioners and research alike, of the potential value of research

to inform the work staff and organizations, there was also a continual problem in progress

due the perceived separation of theory from practice (Wright, 1985; Clarke, 1986; Hunt

1987; Webb 1989, 1990; Everitt et al. 1992; Munn-Giddings, 1993; O'Connor, 1993).

Furthermore, Hart and Bond (1995) made reference to Tierney and Taylor (1991; p.506) indicating that there is:

> ...no-one "best" way of bringing research and practice into closer alliance', action research was designed specifically for bridging the gap between theory, research and practice (Holter and Schwartz-Barcott, 1993; p.299).

In a sport rehabilitation context Gilbourne (1999, 2001) suggested action research could be associated with changing practice in the workplace through the active engagement of those practitioners who are located within it and later Gilbourne and Richardson (2005) report using the technique to explore applied practice in soccer academies; in the 2005 paper they point out that:

> ...while Elliott (1978) defined action research as a process that leads to improvement in the quality of action, Dickson and Green (2001) perceived action research to lead to the "empowerment" of others. These twin aspirations of improvement and empowerment can be realized through collaborative, reflective and reflexive mechanisms (McMahon, 1999). (p.652)

Empowerment might be associated with a person developing confidence in their own abilities, seeking to gain control over self and thinking positively about the ability to make change. Whereas improvement can also be associated to making something better, however the underlying motive could vastly differ. For example, a person may seek to improve at the request of someone else, as oppose to wanting to improve for their own sake.

2.8 The process of action research

Janesick (2000) noted the need for research practice to have an 'elastic quality' and suggested that an advantage within action research, was that the research practice is able to be adapted, changed, and redesigned as the research proceeds. It would appear that the untidy reality of many applied settings suggests that the model of reflection and action may have to be accepted as messy and maybe at times, irregular. In reality, the delivery of shared reflection and change may bear little resemblance to the neat textbook models, as suggested earlier by Grant (2007) with reference to a 'cookbook' like framework. Change cannot necessarily be planned and prepared for.

The Educational Action Research Editorial (2006) reported on the ethical essay of Capobianco and Feldman that sought to explore the concept of quality in teacher action research from the perspective of researchers facilitating collaborative action research:

> They believe that it is important to be able to assess the quality of research efforts and products by teachers under the umbrella of action research as a methodology that helps teachers as researchers improve their practice and understanding of their practice. By taking a methodological stance, they place focus on teachers' orientation towards research, rather than a particular set of research methods. Emphasis therefore is placed on both the improvement of practice and the teachers' generation of new knowledge and understanding. (p.453)

Drummond and Themessl-Huber (2007) noted that while being grounded in participatory practice, the process of action research is also often motivated by theoretical standpoints. They suggested not only to consider the people involved, but to also consider the contextual factors that may help to determine the extent to which research studies are

theory-driven, practice-driven, or carried out in a theory/practice balance (McMahon, 1999; Winter, 1998). Grant (2007) described action research as being a distinct research strategy that reached across and beyond boundaries to encompass practices from many disciplines. As a result, Grant believed that research students should not be surprised by the depth, richness and variety of practices which may emerge through the process of action research. Furthermore Dadds (1998; cited in Gilbourne and Richardson, 2005) highlighted that as a research typology, action research is associated with understanding and engaging practitioners who work within institutions such as schools, colleges and hospitals, or more loosely formed groups.

Educational Action Research Editorial (2006; p.453) also addressed matters of quality with respect to the design and enactment of action research. They questioned what part context played in carrying out action research acknowledging that some environments are more restrictive and constraining than others. As an example they refer to Hairon Salleh who considered some of the very real cultural constraints placed upon teachers participating in an action research-based learning circle in an environment that was unaccustomed to risk-taking and where the operational mantra was *'Do it right the first time'*.

With context in mind, Gilbourne (2001) had suggested that when applied to a sporting context, the process of reflection would seem helpful to physiotherapists as it can be seen to play a part even if not conducting research and only aiming to improve practice:

Reflection is viewed as a process that can 'tap into' the creative capacity of practitioner groups and in doing so help them find their own solutions to their own problems. (p.175)

Gilbourne (2001) placed emphasis on the process of reflection as a means to facilitating debate within practitioner groups and encouraging improvement and change in the workplace. Examples of his own practice from sport include work with sports physiotherapists, in which he illustrated how a group of sports practitioners took part in a systematic process of reflection with the intention of improving one aspect of their individual practice. Gilbourne (2001) explained how he acted as an outsider, the external facilitator, to organize and chair group meetings, whilst also having collated information from practitioner and athlete sources, making particular reference to craft and professional knowledge:

Examples of integration between craft and professional knowledge were also encountered as the nature of 'educational' input was discussed. In this case, craft knowledge was based on the experience of listening to injured athletes. In contrast, professional knowledge drew from the practitioners understanding of the implications that accompanied different forms of dietary advice (p.190).

2.9 Action research contested and discussed

Action research always has been a contested form of research. For example, differential views on what action research should or could be, have been considered by a number of authors (Carr and Kemmis, 1988; Tinning 1992; Sparkes, 1991; and Gilbourne, 2000). In contrast, action research in sport has been an emergent and less controversial methodology. There are, however, examples of challenge and critical comment. For example, Evans, Hardy and Fleming (2000) presented a study to utilize the process of

action research in a longitudinal psychological rehabilitation intervention with three injured athletes. They employed a cycle of planning, acting, monitoring, reflecting and evaluating (following the work of Carr and Kemmis, 1988; and Tinning, 1992) reportedly in a climate of critical thought and empowerment of participants (Sparkes, 1991). Evans et al. (2000) suggested that their study demonstrated the importance of a multi-modal approach to intervention research. More specifically, consultations took place with three participants as case studies that involved goal-setting and intervention strategies to meet individual and situational needs during the course of rehabilitation.

An invited response from Gilbourne (2000) offered a critique based on Evans et al.'s (2000) central claim that they had conducted action research. Gilbourne's response highlighted a number of challenges all undiscovered by his claim that Evan's et al. (2000) had:

> ...failed to capture the epistemology of action research (Gilbourne, 2000; p.208).

Although certain action research processes may have everyday qualities to them, Gilbourne (2000) indicated that this does not necessarily demonstrate action research had taken place, and as a result, he did not believe that action research was evident. More specifically, Gilbourne (2000) questioned the definition, classification and location of their research and utilized Castle's (1994) work in supporting the notion that action research is concerned with interventions in real life situations.

However, Gilbourne (2000) discouraged the view that life (or applied practice) itself may be viewed as a conduit for action research, indicating that many practitioners may intervene in real life situations, however this would not necessarily confirm action research had taken place, nor, he argued, would it be evidence of practitioner engagement in action research themes and processes. Gilbourne (2000) argued:

> ...many practitioners may reasonably be expected to review what they do, think up ideas to improve matters, introduce these ideas, and reflect further on the efficacy of any changes (p. 208).

On that basis, Gilbourne suggested there had to be a clear *commitment* to the action research process, despite recognizing that such processes might be described in everyday terms. He advised that action research needed to be more visible in the research process and philosophy in order to clarify its position and suggested that the cycles of seeing (someone) do not sufficiently locate the research process in action research terms or demonstrate critical thinking, which as, emancipatory action research, he associated with a sense of understanding and insight into generating knowledge that guides practical judgment, as opposed to being focused on technical or practical aspects (a view also supported by Tinning, 1992). Gilbourne (2000) used a previous example to highlight the challenge in emancipatory action research:

> Action researchers ask "Are things better than they were?, not "are we emancipated yet?" (McTaggart et al. 1997; p.136)

Although Gilbourne (2000) concluded (in the case of Evans et al.) that applied practice and (some) action research had taken place, he did not see them as being equally

represented, and indicated that there was little evidence of action research in design or intention. In an attempt to ensure clarity of the research location, Gilbourne (2000) advised that researchers introduce the definitions and notions they intend to make use of. Evans et al. (2000) clearly did feel that they had conducted action research, as opposed, say, to a case-study of an applied intervention and so gave some ground in accepting that:

...different readers see different things in the same texts (p.212)

In addition, Gilbourne referenced McFee (1993), who had indicated that craft knowledge and professional knowledge were fundamental to the epistemology of action research. Along with McFee (1993), Gilbourne (2000) valued the insights of craft knowledge and professional knowledge, and believed that with access to both, the researcher may capture elements of *critical*, *technical*, or *practical* engagement (p.213). It was the briefest of insights into craft dilemmas (provided by Evans et al.) that suggested to Gilbourne that some facet of action research was to be found.

In response, Evans, Fleming and Hardy (2000) argued that they found it difficult to establish a pure definition of action research, as (in their view) previous attempts had been off the mark from a true and valid description. They defended their interpretation of action research and claimed that they did not suggest that interventions were the only distinctive factor of action research:

> ...there are many people who undertake interventions in everyday situations who are not engaging in action research. There are also practitioners who engage routinely in the cyclic process of planning, acting, monitoring and reflecting who are not engaging in action research (p.298).

Evans et al. (2000) proposed that action research must involve praxis, and in doing so made reference to McNiff et al. (1996; p.8) in that committed action, informed by other people's views, and with intentional values forms the basis of action research. Whereas, Gilbourne (2000) had stressed that action research is about the epistemological location, critical thinking and the commitment to the action research process.

From the broader literature and from the points above, I began to form an idea of what I wanted this study to aspire to, in terms of action research. I want the research to embrace both craft knowledge and professional knowledge through the continuous cycle of action and reflection, for these cycles to draw from theory as well as the day-to-day knowings of practitioners, and in doing so able to reflect aspects of critical engagement through emancipatory action research. It also became clear to me that the challenge faced by practitioners was central to my inquiry as, also, were my own thoughts and feelings. Ultimately, I wanted to engage with an epistemology that encouraged notions of emancipation within a participatory and collaborative process.

2.10 Study Overview and Aims

Pre-reconnaissance discussions evidenced that well-being in practice did exist from practitioners perspectives (see Appendix). The findings from this therefore provided reason to study and observe practice over the reconnaissance period, which sought to act as a platform for action research from reconnaissance-to-practice within an embedded longitudinal process (over an 18 month time period). This was the first stage of the action research process that involved the researcher assisting practitioners, the *stakeholders*, to

examine practice or, as the researcher, to identify a problem and bring it the attention of practitioners (Berg, 2004; p.198). The issues raised were considered important as they had frequently featured within the reconnaissance period, and not simply out of interest to the researcher (Berg, 2004).

The duration of the reconnaissance phase covered a period of six months, from July to December. Its purpose also provided insight into *life on the ground* within the context of a professional football club academy environment. Day-to-day dialogue and events set the scene to highlight player and practitioner experiences, interactions and conflict that occurred within the first six months of the season. Practitioner-researcher reflections are evident throughout to offer valuable insight and authenticity into the reflective processes that took place on a continual basis, more specifically demonstrating reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action with theoretical links.

An introduction to collaborative practitioner meetings took place and then consecutive group meetings followed on a monthly basis for a further twelve months. The timings of meetings were flexible and dependent upon academy activity i.e. when matters to be addressed seemed most suitable. The data is highly contextualised in nature (i.e. workplace practice-based) and theoretically deductive in parts. Overall the study aimed to engage practitioners in the action research process and work towards change in practice.

Data collection took place in the form of action research, which included various types of data collection during different stages of the study. The reconnaissance phase largely

involved formal/informal contact (feedback on practice), field notes and journal reflections, that were supported by in-depth interviews and focus-groups aimed to explore experiences. Undertaking the role of practitioner-researcher (insider-outsider) I had an established strong rapport with participants that enabled them to trust in sharing their experiences, thoughts and emotions, possibly more so than with a researcher they had been unfamiliar with. Consequently, the interviews and focus-groups that were conducted were rich in data information (Patton, 1990). This collective data, along with practitioner reflections, were used to inform practitioners within the collaborative practitioner meetings to debate and discuss towards points of action to drive change and improvement in practice.

Data was analyzed and interpreted in participant language to ensure data authenticity and to avoid misinterpretation. Content analysis was applied to collaborative practitioner meetings one and two in order to provide a detailed and thorough analysis, both from an inductive and deductive stance. Content analysis validation was achieved through supervisory meetings and triangulation. Member checks (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) took place where needed, if further validation on interpretation was required by a participant they were asked to read the transcript of dialogue to confirm accuracy or inaccuracy of data and interpretation (Shenton, 2004). Analysis and representation of subsequent collaborative practitioner meetings provided a general sense of discussion, highlighted key points of discussion and dialogue extracts, and included research-facilitator perceptions of group dynamics and interactions (Lederman, 1990).

In addition, stories on the ground progressed over time, and were not pitched with something specific in mind to focus on, rather just to present what was hitting the fan at the time. It was important to capture on-going *living* experiences as this helped to contextualize the data (both to others and self). Shenton (2004; p.69) encouraged a *thick description of the phenomenon under scrutiny* as a valuable process to promote credibility, as it helps to illustrate situations within context. Therefore stories reflected events experienced by players, practitioners or myself.

The study placed large emphasis on action research and the importance of context, in particular with day-to-day research dialogue, that seeks to close the gap between pragmatic day-to-day doing research and the often view taken on paradigms... *how it works on the ground*. Therefore, paradigms and the permeability of qualitative research came into question.

Within the scope of this research, I have questioned the likely approach to paradigms and methodology and concluded that there is room for permeability across the paradigms, as, it would seem, different parts of action research could be categorized within separate paradigms. For example, from a deductive well-being viewpoint, this research could be perceived as theory-led by literature suggesting post-positivist inquiry. However, when considering the inductive nature of action research and methods used, then aspects of the endeavour would fit the participatory paradigm. Consequently, I have rejected the notion of locating the research within one paradigm.

Setting

Within the football environment and across the course of a season, there were many changing factors to observe and report, the likelihood being both player and coach behaviour that was dependent on the progression and success of the team (Potrac, Jones and Armour, 2002). Therefore to reflect a true picture of changes within the environment, observations were deemed necessary over a period of time, to witness (and experience living practice) the ups and downs throughout the football season, and the challenges faced. Similar to Davis (2007), the study was not contained to a set period of time in which to collect, analyse and interpret data. Due to the potential untidy nature of action research, observations were continual and on a daily basis, both on and off the training pitch.

Ethical considerations

Participants were required to sign consent forms, whilst ethical consent was approved from the ethics board at Liverpool John Moores University. However, it seemed likely that ethical dilemmas might arise when conducting action research in the field of an applied setting over a period of 18 months. Although I have my own standards and moral view on practice which seeks to incorporate a person-centred philosophy to practice, where I believe participants to be people and not a product, and that as a practitioner I aim to provide a supportive role within the professional football environment. The research required that I get to know people in complex ways, and therefore complex ethical issues were somewhat to be expected. For example, attempting to understand where a person was at and whether they were in a 'good place' at that moment in time.

Bond (2009) at a research conference referred to the cyclical approval and re-approval with ethics that must be considered in part of a longitudinal study. Consequently I was aware that I had gained continual consent (Bond, 2009), however not from the formal route of going back to the university, but from the informal approval of the workplace where the research was carried out.

Confidentiality issues were also considered and appeared to present certain dilemmas. Being practitioner-researcher was sometimes awkward, as I knew I was able to ask important questions being an insider, yet it somehow felt wrong (as a practitioner) to want to explore a participant's personal pain as 'gold dust' (as a researcher) and still wanting to write about it. On the other hand, Bishop (2005) noted that there could be bias as an insider and as a result as researcher it may be more awkward to ask critical questions, and so creating a practice-dilemma. Such instances were dealt with sensitively as they were paramount to the research process.

The role of social researcher

The social researcher role is to bring theory and knowledge into real-life situations, as Berg (2004) suggested it is to produce information and knowledge that will be directly useful to a group of people through research, education, and socio-political action (p.197). In agreement with Reason (1994), Berg (2004) indicated that the role of the social researcher was to empower the group of people to use the information and knowledge taken from the research.

I applied such sentiments to my role as practitioner-researcher within the context of this research. In practice I'm there to look after the players, and my moral view on practice is that they are not just players; they are people with a life inside and outside of football. With ten years' experience, of which six years I've now been a full-time practitioner within a professional football academy environment, I feel I've learnt a great deal in terms of craft knowledge and professional knowledge, and still yet with a lot more of learning to take place. I feel I've jumped through the hoops of accreditation and BPS chartership, in what I thought I had to do in terms of gaining credibility and job prospects.

However, over the years I've learnt differently in the applied field of football. You're not necessarily judged on the qualifications and certificates you hold, you're judged on how you apply yourself in the environment around the players and other practitioners, working well with people, being effective and facilitating best practice... how you engage and interact effectively. Most importantly, I believe, is that you have to care about what you do. That's what matters. That's what makes a difference.

Aims of the study

The aim of the present thesis was to explore well-being themes within an elite youth football academy. The thesis attempted to engage practitioners in action research, in order to facilitate change in practice. The action research reconnaissance-to-practice phase also aimed to capture the experiences of players and practitioners in context:

1. To reflect upon the role of research-facilitator within the action research process with specific reference to role conflict and strategy

An insider's tale – reflections on the research journey

2. To explore the capacity of psychological well-being (PWB) themes to inform practice-change, in an applied youth football context

Considering the practical utility of theory

3. To reflect upon and discuss the personal-contextual dynamic of a practice-change process within youth football

The realpolitik of practice-change in context

4. To reflect and critically comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the deployment of action research design within a sports-based context

Efficacy of method

CHAPTER THREE:

ACTION RESEARCH FROM RECONNAISSANCE-TO-PRACTICE

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                    ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                    │        RECONNAISSANCE           │
                    └─────────────────────────────────┘

┌─────────────────────┐          ┌─────────────────────────────┐
│   COLLABORATIVE     │ ──────▶  │  Back at the training ground │
│    GROUP ONE        │          └─────────────────────────────┘
└─────────────────────┘

          ┌─────────────────────────────┐
          │      COLLABORATIVE          │
          │       GROUP TWO             │
          └─────────────────────────────┘

┌─────────────────────┐          ┌─────────────────────────────┐
│   COLLABORATIVE     │ ──────▶  │     COLLABORATIVE           │
│   GROUP THREE       │          │      GROUP FOUR             │
└─────────────────────┘          └─────────────────────────────┘

          ┌─────────────────────────────┐
          │  Back at the training ground │
          └─────────────────────────────┘

┌─────────────────────┐          ┌─────────────────────────────┐
│   COLLABORATIVE     │ ──────▶  │  Back at the training ground │
│    GROUP FIVE       │          └─────────────────────────────┘
└─────────────────────┘

          ┌─────────────────────────────┐
          │      COLLABORATIVE          │
          │       GROUP SIX             │
          └─────────────────────────────┘

┌─────────────────────┐          ┌─────────────────────────────┐
│   COLLABORATIVE     │ ──────▶  │  Back at the training ground │
│   GROUP SEVEN       │          └─────────────────────────────┘
└─────────────────────┘

          ┌─────────────────────────────┐
          │      COLLABORATIVE          │
          │      GROUP EIGHT            │
          └─────────────────────────────┘
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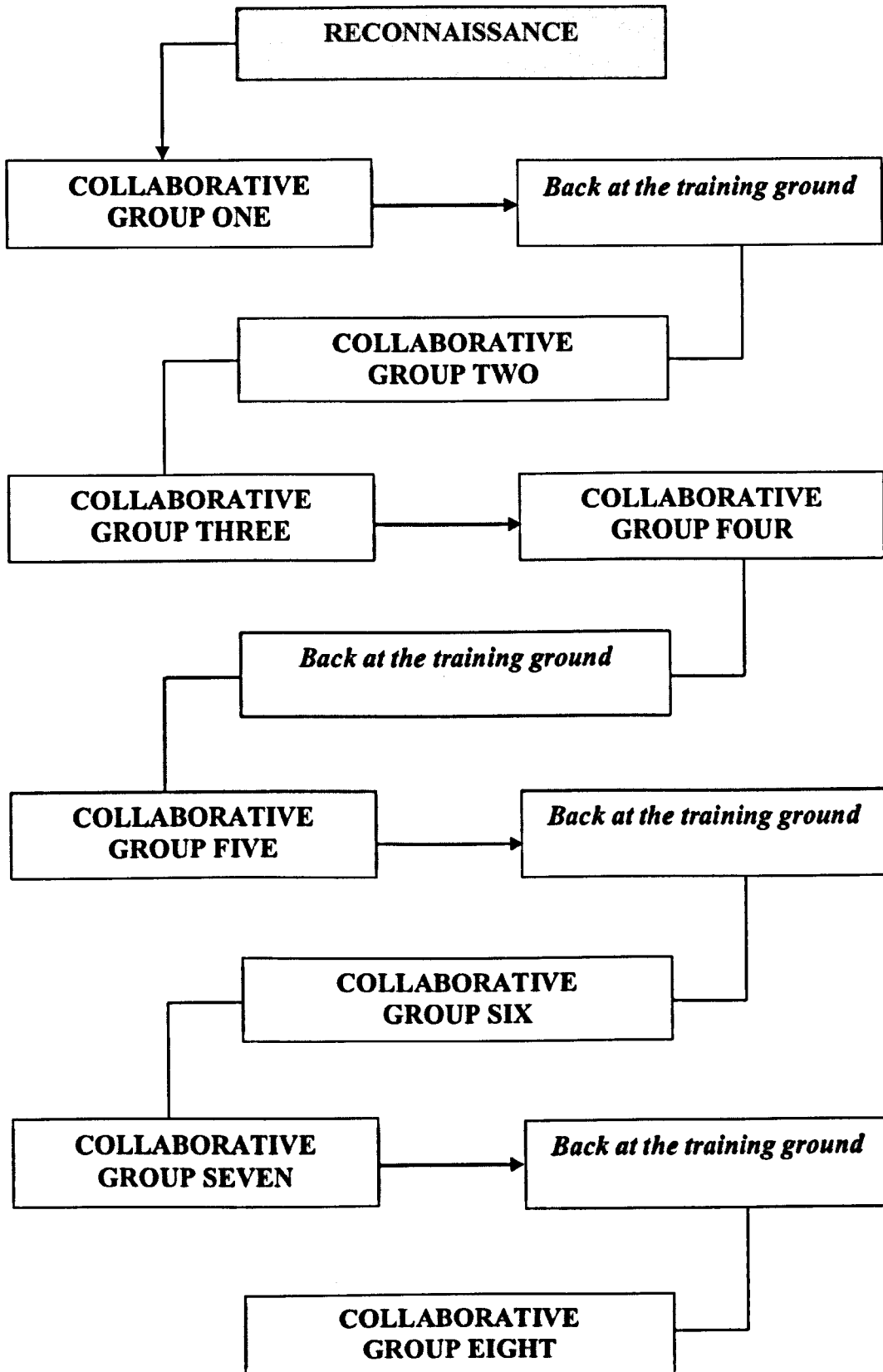
Figure 3.1 – Map of Meetings

3.2 Starting the process: Reconnaissance Phase

July 2nd, my first day back into preseason. As I pulled up to the training ground I felt a surge of butterflies in my stomach… I was nervous about my first day back after the summer break. I didn't know what to expect or how my new role would be perceived by other staff. I was going with the preconception that a meeting would take place between the Academy coaching staff and myself to establish my role as a practitioner-researcher. I was not sure that everyone would buy into the process of action research that was planned to take place over the next 18 months or so.

I walked through the entrance at the training ground and was greeted by Martin on security. As I carried on walking something caught my attention, something was different. On the wall was a large framed photograph taken at the Millennium Stadium in the play-off final, the 1st team players are lifting the cup together in triumph celebrating their victory of promotion. It brought a smile to my face, reminding me of the achievements of last season. Feelings of adrenalin came rushing back as I remembered back to the day of the final. Having seen them get relegated 2 years previously, this was their chance to make the step back up. I knew it could make a difference, not solely for the players but also for the staff that I worked alongside. They 'live and breathe' AD United Football Club. I remember mixed emotions when the final whistle blew, I was both relieved and elated at the same time, this was the positive lift the club had been waiting for. It was a fantastic feeling. I made my way through the corridor to the Academy offices and was met by a familiar lingering smell… a mixture of disinfectant and football boots, the smell of football.

The first person I bumped into was Jamesy, he carries out fitness testing with the academy players. "Hi, how's it going?" I said feeling slightly disoriented as to where everyone else was. "Yeh fine", he replied and continued to work at his computer. Then as I peered into the room opposite I could hear movement and I noticed Steve was in (the assistant academy manager and U18 coach).

This was Steve's third season at the Academy. Steve is a strong and fiery character. He is dedicated to his job and constantly strives for success and he views success in terms of winning. When Steve first started as the U18 coach I initially had concerns as to whether he would accept my role. I realized he preferred to work alone and also that he did not see the need for a role such as mine but the academy manager encouraged me to persist. I often tried to engage Steve with open-ended questions trying to strike up conversation, "What did you make of that training session? How did the boys get on?" With little in the way of attention he would answer "Yeh ok, not too bad" and that would be conversation over. I never felt relaxed around Steve, probably because I felt I had to try so hard to communicate and get engaged when in his company.

This unease occurred on a regular basis, at such times I would often feel pretty insignificant and sensed also that I was failing to do the job asked of me. I continued to have meetings with the academy manager, Bill, who seemed aware of Steve's potential to impact on the way I worked. "What are the boys plans today? Are they training this afternoon?" I asked trying to get an idea of the day's schedule from Bill. In a short and sharp tone he replied "You need to ask Steve". "I have asked Steve, but he didn't really

give me an answer" I said quite sheepishly. "Why, what do you mean?" he asked curiously. "Well I've tried but he just won't work with me... he doesn't understand why I'm here". I half expected Bill to defend Steve's behaviour but instead he simply said "You've got to deal with it Vic, you HAVE to work with him and you both need to be talking more than you are now, YOU need to explain to him, to make him understand". I suddenly felt quite isolated realizing that Bill was aware of the situation and I could understand his reasoning. I recognized that Bill wanted me to work independently with Steve, without needing Bill's input. It was clearly time to test whether I could stand on my own two feet without relying on Bill for support. As I walked out of his office I felt like I'd been assigned a challenge, a hurdle to overcome and I knew that I wasn't guaranteed to succeed.

Initially (during season 2003/2004) it was difficult adapting to working alongside a new coach. I had become comfortable working with Bill and doing things 'his way'. Now I had suddenly been thrown in at the deep end, feeling as though I had to start all over again, getting used to the ways of a new coach and how he liked to work. I felt immediate resistance from Steve, he saw my work as being very separate from his own, with little involvement if any with on-pitch issues. Steve's resistance left me feeling quite vulnerable, for example, I worried how other coaches would perceive the working relationship between Steve and I... cool maybe? distant even? Having attempted to gain credibility as a practitioner in the previous season, I felt all this could now be in jeopardy. My ability to work with Steve was critical. I often asked myself the question... *'Does Steve deem my role to be of any value?'* Steve's drive came from his playing career and

now as an ex-professional he often made reference to his experiences as a player, also questioning that coaching practice needn't be any different from 'my day' as a pro? *Why did Steve want to be a coach?* Doubt began to set in my mind... *Would Steve ever see a purpose for my role in the academy, having never experienced such support when being an apprentice himself?* Steve's coaching style/behaviour appeared to reflect everything he already knew through his experience as a professional footballer. He demonstrated this in various ways. Steve would often take the warm-up prior to a game, actively participating himself. Yet in contrast he showed little interest towards working closely with other staff that may reduce time from the training pitch, for example, the injury prevention programme received little support and was therefore perceived to be unimportant by the players. His behaviour could sometimes be confrontational when giving feedback to players, often publicly criticizing individual performance in front of the whole team. All these things (I presumed) he had learned from his playing days.

I was constantly driven to ask myself... *Why won't he work with me?* I began to formulate ideas. Steve didn't appear to like working outside the remit of technical and tactical measures. I felt that he also lacked understanding of my sport psychology role and the purpose or the potential scope of it. Steve gave little time to other areas of support to player development that detracted from time spent on the grass. He believed that was how the boys would become better players. However, others tended to disagree.

My task this season (2005/2006) was to continue my role as a practitioner (sport psychologist) whilst also adopting and integrating into a new role as action researcher.

Previously my role as practitioner has broadened in scope each season, taking on new and varying responsibilities. However I was aware that adopting the role of action researcher would come as a challenge and at times could possibly compromise my role as a practitioner (as discovered and discussed later). From the outset I was concerned that as a researcher I would need to open-up issues and delve further to get a real sense of how the players and other academy practitioners experienced events during the season, whilst also recognizing that as a practitioner I would want (feel the need) to attend to matters on hand.

In order for these two roles to function I was aware that I needed the staff to understand that there will be times where I will be solely acting in the mode of action researcher and will need their trust and support in this throughout the season. *Is this possible? Could I potentially fulfill one role whilst discarding the other? Could I be action researcher or practitioner at my own discretion, whenever I choose?* I felt it would be a complicated process.

I reasoned that my practitioner role would be key to the effectiveness of my role as action researcher. This would be a major contributing factor to the quality and richness of the research to come, having already removed barriers that would enable me to gain trust and rapport. As a result, and at least in general terms, I felt readily accepted, and this helped me feel confident that my role as action researcher would be able to function in a positive manner.

That said, I grew conscious that being female possibly made this task even more complicated. Steve had made it clear that women had little to offer to the game of football, through his general demeanor and derogatory comments with reference to female coaches. This heightened my sense of insecurity particularly when in Steve's presence. I often tried to imagine his way of thinking to pose the question "What can a woman contribute to the football programme that he didn't already know and deliver?" I had to accept that this was a common perception within the football domain, the environment is predominantly male-oriented with many ex-professionals practicing through the lens on their own career experiences. This seemed to be the way of things, the challenge (first one at least) was to find a way of breaking into this mindset with the view to introduce new concepts and possibly different practice methods to aid players.

It was clear to me that ex-professional players receive automatic respect as a coach in direct relation to their prior football ability and playing achievements. Staff with previous playing experience (but not necessarily at a professional level) don't seem to receive the same respect and so find acceptance more difficult. In essence, they have to prove themselves further. In the case of my own practice these observations made all that lay ahead more daunting. Clearly I had no such experiences to help me gain credibility from the players or coaching staff. As a consequence, my insecurities gained fresh momentum and focused not only around gender issues but also upon an associated lack of playing experience. *How could I possibly get by in this environment that was very much based on 'what you've achieved' as opposed to 'what you're about and who you are as a person'?*

I began to doubt myself. How was I to gain any kind of respect as a practitioner and I was unsure as to how much I had to offer.

I attempted to unpick my insecurities having been in and around the environment 2 years prior to this newly stated position that I found myself in. I came to realize that I would need to facilitate individual and group discussion and be in direct contact with each practitioner working alongside the U18 squad on a daily basis. Also having only worked with Steve at an arms distance, it was difficult to imagine how things would develop with increased contact time. This was an unnerving prospect. I surely had to contain, if not resolve or overcome, any insecurity that may pose a threat to the demands and quality of my data collection; I could not hold back on the basis of apprehension, being too timid to confront the thoughts, feelings and actions of others would only hinder the action research process.

My relationship with Steve felt unstable, and with little rapport established from the outset, I began to try and understand the reasoning behind his behaviour, in attempt to grasp why he worked the way he did. *Why does he prefer to work alone? Why is he reluctant to entertain the mere suggestion of new ideas in academy practice? Does Steve feel threatened in some way?* In coaching terms Steve appeared to be quite 'old school' in his methods and in his approach to player development. He believed (and often suggested) that things should be as they were for him as a football apprentice, "When I was a player we didn't have all this support, we just got on with it and made the best of it... We didn't have it easy, so why should they?" He would often, for example refer to

times when he was a player "We didn't have all this sport science stuff, we just trained, played and did our jobs". Steve did not understand the role of a sport psychologist, it would take time to build an effective working relationship with him.

I had to gain his confidence and trust. However, over time he warmed to the idea of my role and not only began to understand the purpose of my role but more importantly began to encourage sport psychology into coaching practice. From this point Steve and I established a much improved working relationship, from initially starting out as two people who shared an office yet never really worked together to two people who suddenly communicated and gained rapport. Although encouraged by this breakthrough I was still apprehensive and cautious that challenges would continue to present themselves further down the line.

Steve looked up and smiled as I walked into his new office, as he was previously based in the coaching staff room. We exchanged pleasantries and asked about pre-season and how training had gone so far. In general Steve felt that things seemed to be going well yet they may be short of players (some of the older players were now training with the first team). He highlighted that seven new first years had started this season.

At lunchtime I had a meeting with Bill, to discuss my combined role for this season and specifically my research intentions. As we sat in the canteen the 1st team manager walked in and briefly gazed over, I immediately felt on edge (I am often wary that he may question my presence at the club). I often sense that I am out of place (or maybe that

others perceive me to be out of place) in particular, when I'm around the first team. When often go out onto the academy pitches, to watch the scholars training, it can be quite intimidating. For example, when the first team run past during their warm-up some say 'hi' but there's usually the odd look and occasional comment thrown out. It's pretty unnerving I can tell you. In general terms, I try my best to ignore it, I keep my head down and accept it as part of the environment that I've chosen to be in... *after all it's my problem isn't it?* I tell myself I'm just being paranoid and try to blend in as much as possible but it's not as easy as it sounds to 'not stand out from the crowd' when you're the only female on the pitch. *I confirm to myself, whether credibility or no credibility, the response wouldn't be any different... simply male bravado? (In the same way workmen can't but help shout out to passing women walking by!)*

If I'm honest I like to think that gender is not an issue for me but sometimes I can't help but think that it is an issue to others, even now, having been in the environment for a certain period of time, and, therefore, I find myself feeling insecure as a result of what others may think. For example, I'm given a club tracksuit each season as uniform and eventually after two seasons I plucked up the courage to ask... "Why does it have to be more than one size if not two sizes too big for me?" The coach I was with at the time just started to laugh, "Its done deliberately you know". I was shocked at his response thinking this had to be a wind-up, "What do you mean?" I curiously asked, not sure if I wanted to hear what was coming next. "Well to put it simply, the baggier the tracksuit the less noticeable you are. Let's face it, a girl in a football club can be an issue in itself. You were lucky you came in before management changed over again". I was surprised that the

coach had been so honest with me, however, I found myself asking the question… *Where did equality fit into all of this?* At the same time I was satisfied that he had put my suspicions to rest.

This wasn't to be the last I would hear on the subject, for example, the academy manager pulled me to one side and advised me to 'play it safe' for the first couple of months whilst the new first team management got used to seeing me around more. It was hard to hear, but expected and all I could do was act on it, bide my time and hope acceptance would follow. It made me conscious of every next step I took.

July 12th…

In a very short space of time things began to get better, I felt less on edge with every moment and I felt accepted by others, maybe my increased involvement was no longer a novelty and people were now comfortable with my 'being around'. However, I began to question myself… *How can I not feel undermined when I know such things? What really are the causes of my insecurities? Will such feelings ever surpass? Would I have them in other settings?* I concluded that these issues were localized and context specific. So, as I was generally fine I decided to get stuck in, to ensure the action research skills I wished to deploy were not inhibited at any way, at any time. As I saw it, if I was committed to meeting the demands of an action researcher, I needed to be fully prepared to step beyond my own boundaries not only as a practitioner but as a person also. Hopefully the various stories that follow will chart my journey clearly enough.

Over a lunch conversation I was able to put across my thoughts and ideas to Bill as he indicated what he expected from my role this season. Although he fully agreed to my research commitments and the implementation of action research I was still unsure of what Bill's expectations were of the research process and how accommodating he would actually be as the season progressed and the work really began.

The game in the afternoon was against Rovers U19's. They were a year older and had a greater physical presence. We got off to a bad start. Steve's body language was not good "Danny that should have been yours", "who's in control of midfield?" and "Kevin, head it, you've gotta create chances in the box" he was not happy, not with the team or individual player's performance. Each time a poor pass was made, the ball was given away and opportunities to score were missed, Steve would swear, remarks such as "that was absolute shite" whilst throwing his arms up in anger, behaviour that contrasted with the coaching staff on the oppositions bench... they were fairly composed, gave fewer instructions and offered less verbal commentary.

Few of our players' looked as though they wanted the ball. Steve later questioned their work ethic (it did appear low at times). He argued that they "weren't talking to each other, that they had stopped communicating as a team". The players seemed concerned about Steve's reactions, with players looking over to the bench for guidance and approval. Steve, even Bill at times, would shout advice to the players whilst often giving criticism at the same time. Some players answered back to deflect responsibility with an excuse, rather than actually listening or acting on any feedback given. This form of

interaction made me feel frustrated and annoyed, whichever way you looked at it, it was confrontational and it simply heightened the strain and conflict between the group. I felt the players had nothing to gain if they were unable to show a willingness to learn and accept feedback to hold their hands up and take responsibility.

Steve's frustration was evident at half-time. He picked-out every player, highlighting individual weaknesses, from poor performance to allocated blame for specific mistakes. No player escaped his wrath. The players appeared to give more in the second half but it wasn't enough to affect the game. There was no comeback and the game was lost.

I began to reflect on what I had just witnessed… *What instructions did the players' take into the second half that they could use in a positive and constructive manner… What was said that would change their approach to the second half? I noticed little change in team morale. What message did Steve think he had given for them to act upon? After observing Steve's frustration throughout the game I began to ponder other questions… I knew Steve was passionate about his work, but I was still to understand what drove him? Why did he want to be the U18 coach? What was he striving to achieve?*

July 23rd…

Whilst pre-season progressed, the coach's frustration with the players' began to grow. Steve felt he was under increasing pressure (from the board) to do well this season as expectations were high as a result of last year's league position… "We've made things worse for ourselves finishing 2nd last year, cos they'll be expecting the same this year".

That was my first insight into Steve's frustration. That lead to explain his recent behaviour... born out of him being results oriented.

Danny got brought off at the beginning of the second half. Steve shared his thoughts out loud "he isn't running enough to be in midfield... does he want to be there? He doesn't look like he does, does he?" Danny got a bollocking when he came off, challenged by Steve "Is that the best you've got?"

With his head down, looking disappointed, Danny replied "No". "Well why aren't you playing your best? YOU can have the worst game ever sometimes but you're still running and putting effort in. You're on your way out..." As the other players watched and listened Danny went and joined them sitting on the bench. He looked deflated, I don't think he agreed with Steve's comment.

Since the boys were back from pre-season Danny hadn't seemed himself. It was the little things I noticed, he often looked a bit down at the end of training... often the last to get up from the warm down, generally he appeared distant from the group.

August11th...

In keeping with the general tradition of pre-season, fixtures were against lower league teams to ensure attainable success in winning and as a result enhancing team cohesion and confidence. However, all that said and done, winning can never be guaranteed and pre-season was not deemed as a great success, the team struggled to find form, the games they managed to win were not achieved through good performance, managing a draw at

best on most occasions. It was a disappointment to the staff but also detrimental to the players.

August 14th...

It was uncomfortably warm watching the game that afternoon. As I took a step back in an attempt to get in the shade of the dugout, I studied Ben's reaction to being brought off. He had abidingly jogged off the pitch. Although his body language reflected confidence and composure, his face told a different story... he looked upset, eyes glazed, with little eye contact to anyone as he ran over to the dugout. Ben had been taken off for JD, the older keeper. Ben looked disappointed in himself and instead of sitting with the rest of the boys on the bench he went and sat down at the side of the dugout. I wanted to go over, just simply for someone to make contact with him, yet at the same time I was wary that I did not want to bring attention to the fact that he had chosen not to sit on the bench with the others, as this would be looked upon negatively by the coaches. All the players are expected to sit together and reflect being part of the team.

On the sideline Jimmy, Andy and Martin stood and analyzed the game. They were talking through the events that surrounded conceding the goal, in particular addressing Ben's mistake. Fortunately Rob (goalkeeping coach) stepped in to support some of Ben's decision making that was currently under fire. I was relieved to see that following this discussion, Rob went over to Ben and crouched down to give him feedback on his set plays. As informative as it probably was, I was just pleased that the contact had been made and felt this would make a difference to Ben. It would be interesting to see how he

recovered from this potential setback going into next week. With it only being pre-season it was still difficult to predict different personalities and how players (in particular 1st years) would react to certain situations that they found themselves in…

There was a knock at the door. "Yep. Come in" I shouted, just finishing an email I looked up from my desk, I hadn't expected it to be Rob (goalkeeper coach) walking in with Ben. Immediately my attention was drawn to Ben as I could see he was crying and looked pretty distressed. Rob had a worried expression on his face, "Sorry to bother you Vic, but I thought it best for Ben to come and see you. I don't want him going back down there whilst he's in this state. He needs to calm down. I'll put you in the picture and I don't mind staying in on this, but it's obviously something you need to know about as its really upset him". With full attention on Ben, I quickly responded "Yeh yeh that's fine. So what's gone on?" Ben began to speak, whilst sobbing at the same time. There was a pause for a few moments and then Rob stepped in "Have a breather mate. I'll briefly explain. Basically Vic, the other boys have pulled a prank on him whilst he's been out training, cos he's been the only one out training with the me and the first team goalkeepers. So he's come in, back into the changing rooms and realized his shirt, toilet bag and pants had been put in the showers. And I think he's felt it was him against the team". Ben blurted out at this point "I've had enough, I just can't take anymore". Ben had tears rolling down his face, he was genuinely upset. "What's the point if I'm not happy? What's the point, if I'm not as happy as I could be?" I suddenly felt a mixture of emotions. I was really upset for Ben, he was a nice lad and wouldn't have brought this on himself. At the same time I was frustrated because this seemed to be a familiar scenario

that would happen during pre-season, often carried through by the second years imposing their hierarchical status to the first years.

At this point Rob opted to leave us to it. As he left the room and he told Ben that he must let him know if anything like this happened again, reassuring him things would be ok and that it would all blow over and be forgotten about in a day or two. From there Ben and I chatted for longer. I wanted him to take a step back and try to look at it from a different perspective. He wasn't the only player this had happened to, and by no means was I attempting to condone what such behaviour, but I just wanted him to reason with it, in the hope that he would detach from his original perceptions, was it a matter to be taken so personally? I felt strongly that it wasn't and that the same prank would have taken place no matter which first year player was absent from the changing rooms at the time.

Ben started to come round and seemed to gather himself together a little. He even managed the occasional smile in conversation. Before he left we chatted about his experience so far as an apprentice and I used this as an opportunity to highlight how far he had progressed since starting in July. After he left, I mulled it over. One question that replayed over in my mind... "Were players being asked to change their character in order to fit into the *football environment*, the banter that comes along with *'if you can't handle that, then you'll never be a footballer?'* was often expressed by the coaches". So far, Ben had appeared quite reserved and shy within the group and I couldn't help but feel that it was possibly this tendency to be quiet that could have led him to get picked-out... some people might say he needs to toughen-up.

August 21st... the season had started

I had a meeting with the players to reflect on Saturday's game against Abbey Athletic. All the players seemed pretty low. They were gutted with the result and poor performance. Along with the physio and fitness coach, the players believed that if the game had stayed at 1-1 until the final whistle then they may not have received such a bollocking after the game. As the players began to evaluate performance I sensed that confidence was low across the team as a whole.

At this time in the reconnaissance phase I began to focus more and more on the player-coach relationship both on and off the pitch. *How did the players interpret negative feedback from the coach? Were they able to handle criticism in front of the group? As a result, did they know how to improve? Did the players feel comfortable to ask questions if they didn't understand instructions?* Such questions I felt related to the overall well-being of the players and to elements of the well-being literature. If the players were unable to cope with negative feedback and criticism whilst being unsure of how to correct/improve their performance and with little opportunity from which to gain clarification, then (I reasoned) that the psychological well-being of players would be at risk. In particular, relating to self-acceptance and environmental mastery as elements of PWB, well that neat-fit seemed intuitive enough. But as I sensed the players' difficulties I also faced my first direct practitioner-researcher conflict.

Am I fulfilling my role as sport psychologist? Is there scope to support players and their ability to receive feedback in order to better prepare them to become accustomed with the

academy/1st team environment? If the academy environment is hostile to prepare players for the 1st team environment, realistically does this facilitate or hinder player development?

Although acknowledging that players have not performed to their potential so far this season with consecutive poor performances both individually and as a team, I tried to take a step back... *"Are the coaches expecting too much too soon from the 1st years? For example, Kevin was taken on knowing he couldn't head the ball well, yet now he's in full-time as a scholar he's constantly criticized for his lack of ability in heading? Why take him on if only to highlight his weaknesses?"* These questions seemed to emanate from my practitioner-self, yet, they did feed back into more generic research questions – an interplay of sorts.

September 10th...

It was early in the season and Steve was showing signs of being seriously fed-up, predicting a negative season. To my mind, the players weren't happy either... they didn't seem to benefit from the constant levels of criticism and negative feedback they had received. To my mind it was not constructive and I suggested it contributed to their lack of confidence. I thought that the players were just like me, wanting to receive praise or at least some positive feedback (or possibly they now NEEDED to receive praise to maintain motivation). The importance that Steve placed on winning had been absorbed by the players. They felt that everything was about results and if they lost even a good performance still resulted in negative feedback from the coach. I understood the players'

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viewpoint but I also felt that they only seemed to remember the negative statements from the coach, in particular the name calling. Few of them, seemed to disregard or overlook any of the negative comments made by the coach. However, those that were able to take some positives appeared to reflect a fairer view of games, when analyzing performance.

Bill suggested we have a chat as we walked off the pitch following a training session, he wanted to know my thoughts regarding feedback from the boys in my session earlier that morning. He wondered if they were intimidated by Steve.

Bill had observed the boys responses when asked to be honest in evaluating Saturday's game. He noticed that those players who did put their opinion forward and spoke up, were generally shot down for what they said. I agreed and suggested that this triggered players into thinking they were better off saying nothing at all.

At the time, I was slightly startled that this had been brought to Bill's attention, that he felt uneasy about it. From the players' perspective, although on rare occasions, his behaviour had sometimes reflected a similar approach/attitude. However, personally speaking, I wasn't sure that Bill had ever recognized this himself.

Bill and I headed for Cath's tea-room. He questioned whether Steve had placed a barrier between himself and the players'... "He's incapable of 'putting his arm around' a player because he says 'nobody ever did it for me'?" Bill used the example of one of the player's whose girlfriend recently had experienced a miscarriage. Bill had suggested that

Steve, as the coach, should have phoned the player to see if he was ok. Steve had defensively replied "no, you do it". Was he uncomfortable with the more gentle side of the emotional continuum?

What's in the players' best interest?... *"Maybe Steve is feeling heightened pressure as he believes that results are needed from the U18's team. Which in itself is having a knock-on effect to the players... they feel under constant pressure. Certain players are playing three games a week and coaches know this is not in the players' best interest for development. In turn, could this also impact on player well-being? Maybe Bill wanted to relieve the pressure from Steve so as to prevent any further frustration."*

3.3 Self-reflections (1) (Research timeline: Ten weeks)

The research process was only ten weeks in, still in its early stages, but, nevertheless, this seemed a good time to step back and review what had taken place. This reflection is a combination of thoughts *at the time* and further reflections *over time*.

During the initial stages of the reconnaissance phase a number of personal and conceptual issues had arisen. I was encouraged by the fact that it seemed possible to 'observe' some sense of how people might be 'feeling' but this seemed some distance from being able to claim that I could 'see' well-being. This point is important when the well-being literature, and the nature of past research, is taken into account. As noted earlier in the thesis, it is clear that qualitative approaches have not been utilized in any direct research-based way, however, the use of observations had been commented upon. For example, Diener et al.

(1997) had suggested that psychometric tools (the dominant methodology in this field) did have a number of constraints, such as response biases, memory biases and defensiveness. The present thesis is based on other methodologies and to a degree these might appear un-tested (in the field of well-being that is), however, Sandvik, Diener and Seidlitz (1993) had noted that other assessment methods might also be used to measure an individual's experience of well-being; for example, they noted things such as the frequency of smiling and other behavioural observations.

So, watching others and attempting to draw some deductive interpretations from these observations had, to a degree already, been highlighted in the well-being literature. Of course this did not mention professional football, this was my research world. So I wondered what might I look for in the culture of football to indicate well-being or a lack of it? Guidance from Sandvik et al (1993) might suggest I look out for smiling! Whilst this might appear a little glib it is quite logical as the well-being literature is concerned greatly with the notion of being happy or sad (more of this later). I thought about that notion of smiling and recalled one particular day, a day on which there were not many smiles to be found, during pre-season July 23rd (see p.118).

Observation in the world of football is a multi-sense affair. It is not just about what I was able to 'see' but also what I heard, also what I sensed others had seen and heard. The way people stand, the way they make eye contact, or avoid eye contact, the gesture, the tone of voice, all these house messages and I needed to become sensitized to this myriad of information and slowly, piece-by-piece, make some sense of it.

At this relatively early stage of the research process I had begun to ask myself how deductive-type observations might be oriented or used. In the earlier discussions on qualitative methodology I point out that my research is an eclectic mix of post-positivist, constructivist and participatory ontological and epistemological assumptions and this hybrid view of my research location would doubtless influence the way I located theory aside the football world I was engaged with. To offer an example of my thinking, I sensed, already, that a post-positivist deductive stance (in which narratives are 'locked-onto established concepts and to sub-themes of concepts), might be appropriate at times, yet, I also understood the need to consider how this professional or theoretical knowledge might be considered in terms of utility; in other words, how might it be of *use* to practitioners on the ground; more of these thoughts as the reconnaissance progresses.

Aside from these theoretical challenges, I was sure that I needed to develop my multi-sense field skills, so that throughout I took account of context as well as person (Sparkes, 2009). In this sense I have opted to illustrate specific moments in-action, such as the game described above, I was also beginning to feel that understanding context required some aspect of history, some insight into events gone before (see p.118).

In the context of my research I saw different 'takes' on history as the contextual backdrop to what I was seeing in the here and now. In my own research history took many forms, for example, a coach's past playing career allowed me some insight into how they behaved in the present, the way a player started the season or a player's performances this

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season before again provided me with a platform of appreciation and, I sometimes felt, a degree of understanding.

Being accepted as an observer

Although I was now engaged as both researcher and practitioner I had, before this project, worked as a sport psychologist with the club (for two seasons). This had not always been full-time work, but, over time, I had got to know how things ticked-over within the academy. This engagement had, to my mind, allowed to build relationships, a degree of trust also (a point I discussed earlier). So, my observations of the here and now were taking place against my own history of being around, the notion of me being there watching, was not new to anyone and I think that helped me get a truer or more authentic take on matters than might have been the case otherwise. For example, had I been new to the club I wondered if this might have closed down people's reactions both to me and to others when I was in proximity. In action-research terminology I might be best described as someone who fitted the descriptions of both insider and outsider (Gilbourne, 1999). In terms of the cut and thrust of methodological debate this hybrid notion of involvement can be linked to Humphrey (2007) who spoke about the 'perils' of the insider-outsider dynamic. She argued that the action researcher might be:

> *...pushed and pulled along an invisible insider-outsider continuum by others who have a vested interest in who she is and what she is doing, and as she is cast now as 'insider' and now as 'outsider' by different actors and audiences, she can lose her sense of herself (p.23).*

This was an initial concern I held. I worried that my insider status was in jeopardy as a result of wanting/needing to come across as someone new – a researcher now! In this role

I felt I sometimes needed to remove myself from situations and step back, as opposed to naturally acting on instinct and getting involved (as I used to). Sometimes I purposefully wanted to be at suitable arms-length to ensure I got the most from time spent within the reconnaissance phase.

Bishop (2005) had suggested that cultural "insiders" might well undertake research in a more sensitive and responsive manner than "outsiders". Earlier, Merriam et al. (2001) had hinted that the common assumptions to being an insider are associated with having "easy access, the ability to ask more meaningful questions and read non-verbal cues, and most importantly be able to project a more truthful, authentic understanding of the culture under study" (p.411). However, it had also been disputed by Bishop (2005), that insiders ran the risk of being biased, or getting too close and wrapped up within the culture to step out and ask critical questions when needed (in Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

I realized this was something I had to be wary of throughout the study. That said my initial perceptions of being an insider seemed to be mainly beneficial, as noted I had already established trust and rapport with staff and players, I generally knew how to be around them and for them to be at ease in my company. Yet as researcher I was, in part, a visitor into my own domain and that seemed a little strange. I was conscious that I had to somehow separate myself from the active practitioner role I had acquired. I suddenly had to consider how I 'typically' reacted to situations and how, now, as researcher, I would need to act differently. This was essential if I was to critically reflect on the research process, when monitoring change and the impact of change on others.

In Bishop's (2005) example (study relating to indigenous people), he explained that there are many other variables to consider with regards to the research relationship that cannot be ignored. Amongst other variables, the impact that age, class, gender, education, and colour may have are all worthy to bear in mind (in Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). I believed that age and gender could be my biggest aid (in parts and in moments) and also my biggest hindrance at times. The advantages of a my age (25 years old at the time), lent itself to being close, yet not too close, to the age of the players (16-18 years old), i.e. young enough to relate with them on their level, hobbies and humour etc., yet old enough to be perceived as knowledgeable (enough!), and this, I felt, helped me to maintain their respect from a professional perspective.

At times, I would say one of the drawbacks would be lack of authority within a group setting. The risks of attempting to stay on their level and to be a 'friend' to the players, were clear when, on a few occasions, I felt that I lacked authority. At such moments I wondered if the players saw me as a member of staff in that I could not easily appear strict with the players, I could not deliver a punishment or consequence to rebuke poor behaviour.

On the other hand, and maybe surprisingly to some, I felt my gender brought definite advantages to my role, both as researcher and practitioner. I felt there were less barriers when it came to accessing emotions. For example, once I had established rapport with the players they appeared comfortable to open-up and reflect on their feelings and emotions, maybe in that sense I acted as a listener and maybe the players felt a women would be

good at that...though, of course, it is difficult to be certain over such matters. I hoped that the players would perceive me as being no threat to selection, no matter what feelings they expressed, to some, maybe, I was in the role of a 'big sister'. Possibly, someone who they felt comfortable in being honest with to express how they really felt without holding back on how or what emotions their experiences brought, along with the freedom of speech, reassured that regardless they would not be judged. I began to realize that the disadvantages of being female in such a male-oriented environment were mainly initial barriers, barriers to be overcome at the beginning, for example when attempting to gain acceptance from the staff.

Swisher (1998) considered similar relationship dilemmas in action research by commenting on the challenges of bringing different voices to the reader. She suggested that readers need to be encouraged to listen to the voices of those involved in the study in order 'see them through a different lens' (p.191). Swisher had implied that one advantage of being an insider was that it allowed the researcher to lead, ensuring that their involvement assists in keeping control over the research (and so) have access to voices that provide depth and variation.

In the context of her research area, Swisher (1998) had also argued that as a result of outsiders conducting the research (in this case, non-Indians reporting about Indians), the literature lacked "the passion from within and the authority to ask new and different questions based on histories and experiences" (p.193). In other words, an insider could be

perceived to have better access to more culturally enriched data and that this richness might be unobtainable to an outsider.

Similarly, Tillman (2002) had emphasized the importance of considering whether the researcher had "the cultural knowledge to accurately interpret and validate the experiences" (p.4). Applied to my own predicament and taking such factors into consideration, these points of view helped me to consolidate the value of being an insider. As a result of my previous experience, I now had a knowledge and understanding of the culture in order to better *interpret* and *validate* the experiences of the players and practitioners.

Along with Tillman (2002) and Swisher (1998), Humphrey (2007) made reference to the hyphen when attempting to appreciate the role of an insider-outsider and the challenges associated with crossing over from being one to the other... "It is only when the researcher cherishes herself as an insider-outsider and commits herself to journeying between life-worlds that she can protect herself and her project from others (insiders and outsiders)" (p.23). As mentioned earlier, the ability to 'take charge and lead' can be associated with being an insider, whereas, an outsider is associated with the opposite and so may have less control. Humphrey (2007) had stressed that to become the hyphen of the insider-outsider, attachments from both worlds would have to be preserved in order to respect their personal integrity and genuineness, whilst encouraging a non-attachment to allow for critical and creative growth (see p.122).

Returning to well-being

In an early phase of observation (7 weeks in), players appeared low in confidence when reflecting on performance. They seemed to seek positive praise that seemed unattainable, or at least it was in their eyes. They hadn't taken well to further criticism received following games. The atmosphere seemed tense and I wondered if this would last or simply blow over once another match-day had past. Going off past experience from day-to-day observations, I presumed the former would win-out.

From a progress and development perspective, I wonder if this could be associated with the thinking of Waterman (1984), who had earlier suggested, when referring to aspects of positive functioning, that players (to achieve their goals) would require enormous amounts of effort and discipline, and that such demands may initially mediate the players short-term happiness. As if in agreement, Ryff and Keyes (1995) reinforced that short-term happiness may have to be sacrificed in order to achieve longer-term happiness.

At this point, it may also be worth considering the proposal put forward by Diener, Suh and Oishi (1997) that SWB is not a required condition for psychological well-being. As mentioned earlier, they had made reference to Ryff (1989) and Ryff and Keyes (1995), who had outlined additional characteristics beyond SWB, specifically the six dimensions attached to PWB. Therefore, and with regards to PWB, and when applied to the context of the situation concerning progress and development, it might be more appropriate to prepare and expect momentary fluctuations in well-being when, for example, (say early in the season) it may be unrealistic to expect mastery of the environment as a straight-

forward achievable goal. In other words, getting to where everyone wants you to be can be painful and may take time.

On the flipside, Steve had grown increasingly frustrated with the players performance. He was finding it difficult to convey this message in any other way than to express his anger and disappointment often through aggressive rants. As a result, strain was placed on the coach-player relationship. I wondered was it plausible to suggest that Steve's inability to deal with his own disappointment could have a direct effect on player well-being. If players were to be continuously told that they were not good enough, was it more than likely that they would become disheartened with performance and feedback in general? Such musings relate to a point highlighted by Andrews and Withey (1976) who contended that when considering overall life satisfaction, a decisive contributor was satisfaction with self. So maybe the coach's own sense of self could have an important role to play in player well-being.

As noted earlier, literature suggests that well-being measures can include different forms of assessment, such as behavioural observations and the ability to recall positive and negative events (Sandvik, Diener and Seidlitz, 1993). These methods allowed initial judgments on player well-being and coach well-being to be formed. Not only did it seem possible to monitor fluctuations in player well-being, but now the notion of coach well-being was also brought to my attention as an area for consideration.

For example, during one discussion that took place with the players (September 3rd) in the canteen; I recognized that they made regular reference to negative comments and feedback they had received from the coach... *'Few of them, seemed to disregard or overlook any of the negative comments made by the coach'*. This resonates with previous research by Thomas and Diener (1990) who had suggested that individuals are inclined to recall negative events more readily than positive events. In the players' defense, they had few positives to hold on to, however, certain players appeared able to reflect in a manner that allowed a more balanced view. These players appeared to show an understanding and acceptance of the negative feedback and to accept and take responsibility for faults in their own performance. This forced me to reflect on importance not simply on the inclination to recall negative events but also on *how* negative events may have been interpreted by others, be it coach or player.

Maybe variations in the interpretation of events is dependent on whether players are perceived to be happy or not (in more general terms). According to Seidlitz and Diener (1993), general 'happiness' is an influential factor in predicting the recall of events. So, some players were clearly able to handle criticism better than others, did this indicate some mark of underlying happiness? I could not be sure but the theoretical inter-play was interesting indicating how theory can prompt critical interpretation. I began to wonder also whether these more productive reflective patterns might relate more to the balance between positive and negative feedback that they had received over time. Certainly the players that gave a more balanced view tended to be the same players who have received some positive feedback for individual performance. So, it is possible that the former

observations could be perceived as supporting assertions in literature, in that the frequency and intensity of emotions experienced may reflect players' ability to recall and interpret such negative events (Diener, Larsen, Levine and Emmons, 1985; Seidlitz and Diener, 1993; Ryff and Keyes, 1995). My take on this would be to look at the pattern of interactions. Some players get 'blasted' endlessly whilst others only now and then, or not at all, therefore, I suspected, that such contextually located patterns might impact on a players' tendency to reflect constructively.

Another way of theorizing the potential impact of differential levels of feedback could be related to the thinking of Lazarus and his explanation of cognitive appraisal (Lazarus, 2000). As I listened to the players 'chew-over' the coach feedback it was clear that a range of emotions were in evidence. Lazarus (2000) had identified that 'the emotions we experience depend on an appraisal of the significance of what is happening for an individual's well-being' (p.230). He had suggested that as the relational-meaning from the person-environment relationship changes, this will influence which emotion will occur or change. So possibly placing emphasis on the subjective nature of a given situation and individual appraisal. Messages from this theory tell me that it means to one player can differ to the next, and such perceptions may influence the reported intensity of positive and negative events. Lazarus (2000) had suggested that appraisal can influence the quality and intensity of the emotions evoked by a competitive event as each emotional experience is based on *relational meaning*. Lazarus (2000) would also suggest that an individual may also be expected to experience a sequence of feelings, from initially feeling angry and then moments later feeling guilty, and then sad etc. This reflects the

changing relational meaning as the event unfolds and the effectiveness of the coping strategies used (Cerin et al., 2000). In summary, the relational meaning is subject to the individuals own sense of their own world.

This brief phase of theorizing has allowed me to draw off motivational theories that sit outside the domain of the well-being literature, yet, it would not be too difficult to imagine the possibilities offered by integrating these perspectives into the well-being literature. For example, cognitive appraisal deals with both moment-to-moment and the cumulative impact of events, subsequent and on-going appraisal of those events and the various deployments of strategies and so forth. It is, essentially, a cyclic view of cognition, coping and affect. Attribution, similarly, might be viewed as a separate theory of cognition or as (and more intuitively) a sub-cognition within the appraisal cycle. Sadly, our theoretical offerings do not tend to explore the symbiotic or integrative potential but rather present separate and insular views on how people think and feel and behave. As a practitioner I have often viewed such insularity as a luxury that I cannot afford to engage with, people are complex, it has always seemed to me that explaining behaviour through reference to one theory is essentially problematical. Throughout my reflections I have opted not to 'hide' from discussing other theoretical possibilities whilst, and with due reverence to my thesis title, primarily exploring the deductive associations with well-being literature, more of this to follow.

Also, it would appear relevant to consider, feedback from authority figures. Maybe, when and who gives the feedback may influence a players' interpretation of events. During the

period of observation, players had received individual criticism from the coach that was delivered to them in front of the group. Understandably certain players may have found this difficult to handle, particularly if unfamiliar with this manner of coach interaction and negative feedback (e.g. first year apprentices). As a result, the intensity of emotions experienced could be heightened due to circumstance and therefore distort the ability to recall and interpret negative events objectively.

Returning to practice

While players were given the opportunity to reflect within a team debrief meeting (August 21st) following the game, presumably this became ineffective, as players appeared reluctant, if not intimidated, to speak up (also picked up on by Bill). The problem here was the risk of *getting it wrong* and *not giving the right answer* in line with Steve's thinking, neither of which should be in the forefront of the players' mind during this process. For example, if a player is consciously thinking about the repercussions or consequences of *what* he says *before* he says it, then he is unlikely to speak out honestly, reflecting his true thoughts. Instead such thoughts spoken out loud, to an extent would become pre-meditated. Consequently, although this aspect of practice may have seemed fairly beneficial to both the players and the coach, as it gave Steve time to reflect on the game in order to give players constructive feedback, to my mind it had failed to attain the desired outcome. The environment was supposed to encourage players to voice their thoughts and put their opinions forward in the style of an open forum. However, instead of the meeting being player-led, it appeared more coach-led, with players opting to listen rather than contribute. Players seemed reluctant to comment or ask further questions, and

so the intended learning exercise was stunted. I felt that this was a missed opportunity for players to gain clarification and to express their thoughts and opinion. I also wondered, as a result, was aspects of psychological well-being potentially then left vulnerable and neglected.

It was refreshing to hear Bill value the player-coach relationship, expressing that the coach needs to be able to put his arm around the players now and again, offering a supportive role. This example could be associated to psychological well-being, in particular one aspect of psychological well-being that is 'positive relations with others', initially described by Ryff (1989). Bill highlighted the importance of the working relationship with positive interaction that was valued and beneficial to the players.

Again, another issue in relation to coach behaviour that potentially impacted upon player well-being, was the frustration of the coach, that I felt, stemmed from him feeling under pressure to get results (pressure that appeared to be self-inflicted). Maybe this had taken then took its toll on the way Steve chose to work. A spiral seemed to be developing. As a consequence of poor results the players began to feel under pressure, criticized for mistakes at every opportunity, they received few positives. Inadvertently, certain players were playing more games than anticipated or recommended, with regards to their development. In one sense, I could understand how this could positively impact the PWB of such players; perceiving their ability to be recognized and rewarded by further playing time associated with representing the reserves squad. Maybe Lazarus would suggest to me that the impact on PWB would be down to the subjective nature and interpretation of

the players involved. How people see and respond to others is an extension of this, for example, Bill showed empathy towards Steve and the situation, I sensed him wanting to remove the pressure that Steve felt he was under, Bill seemed aware of his feelings of frustration.

As an applied sport psychologist I might, by now, have concluded that a number of points were there to be addressed, as the role of researcher I judged that I should react differently, to remain in the background and resist the temptation and desire to step in and suggest or guide action towards a short-term resolution. I found this difficult, I wanted to act on what I saw, feeling the need to support both the players and coach. Through this dilemma I understood better the challenges of being an insider-outsider and how it would challenge my role as a practitioner-researcher. One perspective would test the other. There would be tensions. So, not only did I find it uncomfortable at times as I was pushed beyond my personal comfort zone in conceptual and methodological terms, I also found it difficult to justify and contend with the creeping guilt of not stepping in and being at arms-length.

In respect to this, I related to comments from Grant (2007), outlining the need to 'live' what her thesis primarily inquired to support. She made reference to participant-driven aspirations leading her to relinquish control in order for her, as the researcher, to share the action research journey. Grant indicated that the journey may travel a varied path if it were to stay true to its participant driven intentions.

Maybe as a result of Grant's thinking I began to question the current academy environment an environment that is often hostile, sometimes, I suspect, purposefully. The rationale, or at least the rationale as I understood it, was that this way of being prepares players for the 1st team environment. I often questioned whether providing such an environment *realistically* facilitated or hindered player development? That said I recognized there was scope to support players and help increase their ability to receive challenging feedback in order to better prepare them to become accustomed with the academy/1st team environment.

3.4 Reconnaissance continued

September 11th...

The following day I had a meeting with Steve to discuss player progress. I wanted to understand the reasoning behind his behaviour and actions. Steve argued that "the players are not coachable as, in his mind, they were not "naturally gifted". He felt that they were not responsive to feedback (although different types of feedback had yet to be tried and tested by Steve). Believing there was no answer he rhetorically asked "So what can I do with them?" This was a big moment. I sensed that Steve had opened-up, he had become vulnerable, for the first time he was not guarding his emotions; in this second, I sensed no barriers, he was letting me in.

Challenged by Steve's question, I could not help but think that within the realms of action research... *'This was the opportunity I had been waiting for'*. The coach was discontented and feeling pretty helpless and I already knew that the players were

generally unhappy. There was a definite need for change. My mind was in a 'scurry'...

'What does the action research literature have to offer here? What might they describe my role to be? Do I respond as an AR or practitioner? I responded as an action researcher, for the process of change to start.

Steve continued to talk (somewhat digressing) about changing the culture in football, initially suggesting that the attitude cannot be changed (contradicting Bill's belief that attitude can be changed at a young age and then developed). He went on to express that the players parade a 'not bothered' attitude and that if questioned 'Why are you here?' they wouldn't be able to give an answer. Put simply, Steve didn't think the players' realized *why* they were playing the game.

That week I talked a lot to Steve, *"had his thoughts and feelings changed on reflection of the game at the weekend?"* Steve seemed less fraught but still deflated by current progress, as if he'd given up searching for answers to improve the situation. I felt something had to happen *now*. I felt, again, compromised. I wanted to act and respond but as an action researcher (I was conscious that the first action research meeting to be held with staff was a matter of weeks away), Yet, the practitioner voice was strong, I felt I could not sit back. I needed to act now in the interest of both parties, this seemed to me to be an ethical matter, maybe one that only an insider might face.

Having held a meeting with the players, to reflect on Saturday's game they commented that they would like and prefer constructive feedback as they felt they would benefit if

given the opportunity to improve understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, highlighting areas for improvement. For the time being, as performance was below par, players were subjected to feedback immediately after the game that consisted mainly of the coach's frustration, anger and rage, an approach that risked affecting the players' confidence and self-esteem. In a similar vein, I wasn't sure how it helped the coach either. Therefore I thought that allocating a time to constructively debrief following the game would give both the players and the coach time to reflect, consider their emotions and discuss events in a rational manner. This might give closure to the game whilst encouraging preparation for the next game ahead. It might also provide an opportunity for players to develop the ability to assess performance in a practical and helpful way, recognizing when to accept responsibility and how to react to criticism. Ultimately, the players and the coach could voice their opinion following the game in order to accept and move on as well as learn and understand from it... I told Steve my idea and he bought into it.

September 15th...

"At half-time in against Southfield, Steve attempted to motivate the boys when 3-0 down... "Without sounding negative let's manage to keep it at 3-0. You don't want this to be embarrassing"... We lost 6-2."

We had a team debrief in the canteen on Monday morning, everyone was involved, players, substitutes and injured players. Bill and Steve were both going to be present. I tried to make it informal without flipchart, simple open-ended questions to allow the boys

chance to express their thoughts and opinions. As we waited for the coaches to come down, Jamie asked what the meeting was about… "Are we just going to get a bollocking about the match on Saturday?"

"No. It's to talk about Saturday's game though". I attempted to reassure the boys.

Bill and Steve walked into the room. The boys sat up and the room went quiet. Steve broke the silence by explaining that we would be doing this every Monday morning to speak about Saturday's game for the last time before moving on to the week ahead. Also allowing people to have calmed down from Saturday and think rationally.

September 22nd…

Steve was already fuming on Saturday morning (before the game had started). He came into the coaches room and asked me to read out what was said on the team sheet "What do these instructions mean to you?" I could sense from his tone of voice that he was annoyed at something or someone.

I read aloud, "Everyone here for 9.45am".

Pacing in the room he snapped, "What does 'everyone' mean?"

"All players, subs and injured. Why what's happened?"

The players had been told the team the day before. Saturday morning a player from the starting eleven had to drop out so Steve altered the team. Sam not originally picked for the team now had the opportunity to start… not only did he turn up late for the team-talk not wearing the club tracksuit, he didn't even bring his boots! Steve sent him home.

As the game started, yet again Steve's frustration became visible. Certain players were not carrying out their job on the pitch. Steve quickly turned round to the bench... "When are you two gonna get fit?" Both players gave a puzzled look, as if startled by the comment; they looked over to the physio for support as Steve turned his gaze back to the pitch. Injured players are often annoyed by any mere suggestion that they are slacking off or not working hard enough to come back as quickly as they could. They can often feel that blame is unfairly deflected onto them if the team are not doing well. In one sense, it meant that they were recognized for not being available for selection which could be taken as a positive, that the coach valued them as a player and wanted them to be fit. On the other hand, they felt they were accused of 'not wanting' to play, to come in everyday be alienated from training and any other collective team stuff, instead they rehabilitate on their own in the gym. What appeared to hurt most of all was that the coach actually made out they 'wanted' it to be that way... one of the injured players looked in disbelief "nobody WANTS to be injured".

Within football there is a 'traditional' take, one readily adopted by Steve, that injured players are perceived as 'cheats'. This stems from the view that injured players have it easy, they get out of training, often out of the cold and the rain, and get too comfy on the physio bed, where it's nice and warm. As a result, coaches often feel that players do not want to come back from injury and therefore are seen as slackers, avoiding hard work, instead opting for a 'presumed' easy life that comes with injury.

September 29th... The incident

It was a grey dismal day. We arrived late, so had little preparation time for a warm-up. Despite this we started well, having most possession in the first 20 minutes. However, things soon regressed. The opposition took advantage of mistakes and began to apply pressure. In the last 20 minutes of the first half, Steve turned and looked at me... "Do you see any talking?" I shook my head. The players' appeared internally focused with little awareness of each other and expectations of where to play the ball next.

At half time all the players sat in the dugout, while staff stood around the outside to form a circle. Steve started at one end of the row pointing at each player in line (aside from 3 players who he gave credit to) whilst shouting "NO PASSION" as he went through the team. The boys didn't flinch, they sat in silence. "You're better than them and you should be winning. There's no work ethic, commitment or pride in wearing this badge on your shirt".

Steve singled out Wayne Adams and his lack of effort in the first half. He then went on to warn Kevin Yates that he will become the same if he doesn't sort his ways... "I'll tell you something, we'll be tearing up contracts soon". The boys were often threatened with this comment, which I believe Steve used as a means of motivating them to try harder, however, it didn't always have the desired effect.

During the second half there was more communication and encouragement between the team. Although when performance was poor the players seemed to find it easy to blame one player in particular... Danny.

At the end of the game everyone gathered together for a team talk. The boys walked over to the dugout, heads down and shoulders dropped. Steve began... "it looked as though the team didn't believe, yet you should have won that match? Its stuff we've covered all week and work done with Vicki". The boys sat in silence listening to what Steve had to say, occasionally looking up to make fleeting eye contact. It was pouring down. As Steve continued speaking to the players it was clear from his tone of voice and the content of what he was saying... he was furious. He singled out individual player's, turning to Kevin... "What did I say to you at half time? What did I tell you not to fuckin' do?"

"Not to argue with the ref and to get on with my own game".

"And did yer? Did yer?" Steve's voice got louder. "No, yer fuckin' spent the majority of the time arguing with the ref. He should have fuckin' sent yer off?" Steve was incensed at this point, the physio and I made eye contact... I was now uncomfortable. I didn't want to be stood there any longer, listening to another verbal rant. *Professionally do I accept this as part of the football culture? Do I say and do nothing in fear of being shot down myself? Yet for me, I found the intensity of the exchanges and the aggressive tone of the comments disturbing, it had stepped over the line, surely this wasn't supposed to happen, was it? Is it acceptable because they lost? Is that deserved as a result of poor performance? Who was I to dispute Steve's behaviour? The assistant coach hadn't stepped in.*

Steve leant down to Kevin's eye level, so that he was inches from his face… "And I'll tell yer what, I'll fuckin' hit yer meself if yer ever do that again… yer a fuckin' disgrace". He took a step back and looked at the group as a whole… "I suggest you all have a long, hard think over the weekend about what yer here for". Steve turned his back and made his way back to the changing rooms. The boys didn't move. There was silence. *Surely, this was not right? They lost but does that make all this acceptable? Yet was I really in a position to question Steve's approach?* The physio quickly jumped in "come on then, lets do a warm-down… come on, come on the quicker we do it the quicker we can get in out of the rain". Matt's attempt to get the boys going didn't have much effect, his enthusiasm didn't rub off. They'd need a bigger lift to come back from this…

Although most staff were likely to understand and agree with the points Steve tried to put across, I couldn't help but feel most would consider the delivery and content of the message to be questionable when dealing with 16 to 18 year olds. It left us all with a lot to think about. Intimidation and harsh words are one thing, but words that could potentially be interpreted as a physical threat along with supporting behaviour to confirm that view, can't be ignored, or can they, in the context of football in the UK, with its traditions and unique culture? To some, the threat may be perceived as harsh but not necessarily out of place or unusual within such a setting. Maybe it would not be such a problem if other aspects of practice were 'softer' or more supportive. Unfortunately this was not the case.

3.5 Self-reflections (2)

As I reached the mid-stage of the reconnaissance phase I began to recognize a number of recurring patterns and consequences. Steve's frustration had continued to grow, to the point where he felt that he was running out of ideas to work productively with the players. He showed signs of discontentment and helplessness. This prompted and presented a new and unexpected challenge to the research process... the exploration into coach well-being.

I became intrigued by Steve's behaviour, curious in attempting to understand the reasoning behind his actions. The fact that Steve had described the players as "not coachable as they are not naturally gifted" was enough to recognize that Steve was in need of support. I felt his statement was destructive in itself. It was clear that Steve did not believe that the players had natural talent. *So, was he was going through the motions of working with the players? Did he have no belief that his coaching would make a difference or that the players would improve?* If he truly believed that the players were not coachable, there could be no purpose or motivation to his actions.

He appeared at a loss and perceived himself to be ineffective due to the players' apparent lack of ability. I couldn't help but think... *Did Steve's perception of the players and his interpretation of the situation, expose his motivation and true values towards player development in professional football? What chance did those players, not deemed as naturally gifted, have if the coach lacked in belief to work with them? My ultimate concern...Why put them through it if there was no room for improvement?* Maybe a

sweeping statement, but in my view, Steve clearly seemed to value nature over nurture when it came to development. I felt it was harsh to generalize that all the players were not responsive to feedback, particularly as Steve's autocratic style of leadership showed little variance in the way he delivered his message.

Earlier I recognized that Steve had shown a glimmer of vulnerability, which, and as insensitive as it sounds, was a foot in the door, an opportunity I could not afford to miss. Steve appeared bemused and at a loss, maybe even powerless to some extent. This sense of opportunity didn't sit easy with me. I felt I was relishing his bemusement. However, as a researcher, I knew this could be a significant break-through, a move in the right direction towards my intentions to work closely with Steve. At the time, I found it testing.

As I mulled it over, I began to recognize that this situation was now part of the research process. This was my involvement within the evolving and unpredictable action research practice. I was beginning to question and challenge my own thoughts, feelings and actions. This could only be a good thing. It was now outside my comfort zone and pushing boundaries that I was previously unaware of. I related this to comments put forward by Grant (2007), she had suggested that first-person action research practices, in terms of contributing to development as the researcher are invaluable. In other words, I was learning about myself, whilst also attempting to learn about others. Grant (2007) had addressed earlier research (Bartlett, 1987) that had made reference to the concept of reflection, it was suggested that it was 'best understood informally, by experience rather than by stipulated or hypothetical definition' (p.7), and by doing so, promoted that

researchers value their subjectivity, in order to help reinforce the personal element of their research. This had supported Marshall (1981), as she had previously highlighted the need for researchers to acknowledge and embrace their own *biases* in appreciation that it is part of their contribution to the research process.

Steve had suggested he believed that the culture in football could not change. Worryingly, a somewhat different belief to the current academy manager, as Bill did believe that the culture could be changed at a young age and developed. Immediately recognizing Steve and Bill were not on the same page with regards to this matter, my concern was that Steve would not buy in to the research process or that he would be the link that broke the chain, in terms of agreed action. Steve had also made reference to the players parading a 'not bothered' attitude, as he felt they were unaware of why they were in the academy. His views were pessimistic, he focused heavily on the negatives, but I felt this was related to the immediate here and now, as oppose to his overall outlook on the bigger picture, or at least I had hoped this to be the case.

It was glaringly obvious that Steve was unhappy, ill-at-ease with the current situation. He constantly appeared disappointed with the players as they failed to meet his expectations. Steve felt that being in the academy didn't mean enough to them. Having also labeled them as 'not coachable' due to a lack of naturally gifted talent, it was surely slightly confusing to then place unachievable expectations on the players. For example, Kevin had come up through the ranks. Last season as an U16, it had been acknowledged that his ability to head the ball was poor and often unsuccessful. However, why now as a new

full-time apprentice, he was being criticized for his lack in ability to head the ball, this had been identified and accepted prior to offering him an apprenticeship.

As mentioned earlier, I felt Steve had given up searching for answers. To use everyday language 'he wasn't in a good place'. On discussing the weekend's events, he had still appeared deflated. At this stage, what was becoming more and more apparent was my overriding focus on coach well-being. Something I had originally not accounted for as a presenting issue to the research project. Initially I was apprehensive as to where I was 'allowed' to stray from the research path (one that stressed player well-being) I had not previously envisaged that I would go off on a tangent, and so soon in the research process. However, I found it somewhat comforting that in the action research literature such a predicament had previously been acknowledged. Davis (2007) had reasoned that action research could not rely on linear methods and could not be tightly designed in advance. Wadsworth (1998) also supported this view and expressed that although action researchers do not know precisely where the research will end or what any new situation will be like, this should not be considered embarrassing, as they will know (in relative terms) where the research is coming from and where it is going to. I found these texts comforting.

Fisher and Phelps (2006) had made reference to conventional research where there is a culture of leaving 'dead-ends' unacknowledged. They suggested it is often the mistakes we don't hear about that lead to significant rethinking or insight and that they should be viewed as critical to the learning, change and theory development process. Supporting my

temptation to follow an additional lead, Fisher and Phelps (2006) also highlighted the importance of representing the context, change processes, resultant learning and theorizing of individuals or groups in a process of change and inquiry, shared within action research. So, was this me? Was I re-theorizing? I didn't think so, was I changing direction? well, maybe a little, in effect I was widening my gaze, taking in a fuller sense of context.

Davis (2007) argued that action research be viewed as a necessary form of inquiry as such qualities enable full understanding of the realities and authenticity of working with individuals or groups in complex situations. Davis (2007) and Winter (1998) had stressed that the focus and scope of the inquiry were expected to change due to the nature of action research. So, as the situation progresses over time, with on-going developments, this should be deemed critical to the learning process:

> *For the focus of an action research project to shift is by no means . . . a defect of the original plan: it can be a positive indication of innovative, creative thinking (Winter, 1998; p.63).*

I began to make connections between the well-being literature and Steve's perceived state of psychological functioning. Over a short period, Steve had increasingly appeared emotionally low. I suppose that if this emotional dip was directly related to performance and games this could be seen to worsen on a week-to-week and performance-to-performance basis. Interestingly, Ryff (1989) had promoted frequency over intensity as the better indicator of well-being, because it can be measured more effectively and it had been suggested to strongly relate to long-term emotional well-being (Diener and Larsen,

1993; Diener, Sandvik, and Pavot, 1991). So, in terms of frequency and as I was working closely to Steve, through observation and monitoring during the reconnaissance phase, I sensed his own psychological well-being to be low. He seemed increasingly to lack any sense of motivation and purpose in his role as coach and failed to believe that any positives could currently be gained from the situation. Warr (1978) referred to psychological well-being as a malleable concept, to do with people's feelings about their everyday-life activities (Bradburn, 1969; Warr and Wall, 1975; Campbell, 1976). So taking this into account, Steve's feelings about everyday-life activities could be viewed as downbeat.

Again, and in relation to the well-being literature, Ryff (1989) outlined that life satisfaction research had failed to acknowledge aspects of well-being, such as autonomy, personal growth and positive relations with others and as a result she had criticized the previous literature on psychological well-being for being guided by a (somewhat) narrow conception of positive functioning. On considering the aspects above thinking, I felt this could be intuitively applied to many of the scenarios I had recently witnessed within the academy environment, from both player and practitioner perspectives, and so perceived such aspects of the literature to be of value.

Player well-being appeared to be particularly fragile in the injured players. More often than not, injured players would express that they felt dejected as a result of their injury. They felt separate and distant from the rest of the group as they were not out on the training pitch. In general, the less contact time they had with players and staff the less

purpose they felt at the time. And what unsettled them most, was if they felt ignored by the coach.

With support from Ryff and Keyes (1995), injured players could be observed with the proposed six components of psychological well-being kept in mind. In the main, it could be said that injured players felt they lacked purpose as no footballing objectives could be met. They also had less contact with team-mates and staff which they believed led to perceived weakened positive relations, possibly heightened by insecurities concerning the perceptions of other in relation to their injury. Ultimately, injured players might sense that their personal growth was limited.

Although I was starting to gain more insight and understanding into Steve's behavior and was able to sense a degree of reasoning for his motives, I was still surprised at the level of frustration he showed at times and began to wonder how long this could go on for:

There was a definite need for change and I knew where the change had to occur but I posed the question 'How?' (What does the action research literature have to offer here? What might they describe my role to be?) I was aware that I responded as an action researcher, somewhat conscious then but more so now on reflection. I had *needed* to. The coach had reached a sense of destructive level of discontentment and helplessness, maybe that needed to happen in order for the process of change to start. In answer to my earlier question, this was *how* change would begin to occur.

Following the incident, I had taken a step back to reflect. I had witnessed practice that had made me feel discomfort and anxiety; because of the language and Steve's demeanor, it had upset me. However, it was important to remember that I was looking at practice from the angle of action research; therefore surely this ticked a box? If truth be told, that was an understatement. From the angle of action research this was gold-dust. *(I find that even uncomfortable just to write? In reality, I'm referring to a situation that was at the expense of a player and coach, two real people. Really, should I even be admitting that?)*

I found myself questioning my thoughts, feelings and actions, or more so no actions to be precise. At no point did I feel it acceptable. *Morally and ethically, why did I not say anything, attempt to intervene, act on my feelings?* Instead I chose to be a passive observer. *Surely this was a conscious decision?* I seemed to flit between the two stances, one of myself as a person, and the other as a researcher keen to engage in the action research process. I quickly realized the two stances were poles apart when relating to this incident. I needed to be mindful that my personal stance could impinge on my need to be a researcher, potentially getting in the way of allowing things to unfold naturally without artificial/external interference. I had to stay the course but this was not just for me, for my thesis, this was also a chance to help through encouraging Steve to reflect on his own practice.

Grant (2007) referred to the development of growing intellectual competence and placed large importance on the ability of the researcher to be aware of the changes the research process is having on their own personal development, encouraging the researcher to not

only reflect on what is and/or is not happening in the research process, but also to attend to what is happening to them as people caught-up in the research dynamic. Interestingly, Grant (2007) expressed that reflecting on what angered, surprised, and/or intrigued her in both the rereading of literature and analyses of empirical observations from her time in the field, helped to identify the researcher she was becoming. I related this directly to my own experiences when initially starting out. On reflection, I was able to recognize my personal discomfort and feelings of anxiousness that in turn helped to develop self-awareness, learning from my own experiences. Yet, to begin with I was slightly confused in my role as action researcher on witnessing the incident that stirred so many emotions.

Action research primarily consists of two basic components, as indicated by Lewin (1945)... generating knowledge and changing social systems (Drummond and Themessl-Huber, 2007; p.432). As I stood there, I saw that the purpose of action research would enable important issues surrounding academy practice to be addressed towards reaching improved and best practice within the coaching environment. From that one incident alone, my observations as researcher gained insight into coaching style and conduct, the interaction and communication between the coach and players, along with reactions and coping behaviour, all of which are incorporated working relationships between staff and players that involved constructive interaction and communication.

The incident not only had a bearing on the tone and direction of the research project, but also significantly to my development as a researcher and practitioner. It seemed to open up a myriad of questions. It forced me to ask questions of myself, that I found

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challenging from both a personal and professional perspective. However, on reflection and with hindsight, I can now see the impact that this moment had on my development and it was invaluable. Similarly, Grant (2007) had described (when conducting action research) that it wasn't until she fully understood the value of reflection that she was able to appreciate her research journey and the role that each detour played, both in the research and to her own development. She made reference to learning through 'being' and 'doing'.

At this time I also found it reassuring to identify with Mellor (2001) as he described the need for an 'honesty trail' that would reflect true perceptions of the 'research-mess' and the personal unease that may be attached to such research practice. Grant (2007) linked this to issues raised by Reason and Marshall (2001), as they had highlighted how academic visions (unwritten rules) and personal discomfort may influence and distance the writing process from the lively and sometimes chaotic process of research.

'Rather than subjectivity being seen as a negative attribute, qualitative writers recognize that researchers' thoughts cannot, and indeed should not, be separated from the research process' (Glaze, 2002, p. 154). However, Torbert (2001, p. 250) suggested that this is rarely adhered to and encouraged that researchers should attempt to become more aware and experience themselves as being present in a wondering, inquiring, and mindful way, accepting that learning is part of the process.

Finally, and at this stage a key message that I began to identify with, relates to the thinking of Grant (2007); to place value on how the changing research process was to affect my own personal development and intellectual competence, requiring that I were to reflect on the happenings, both within the research process and myself.

3.6 Reconnaissance continued

1st October...

As a result of the weekend's events Monday morning involved 'fireworks' from every angle. Bill told Wayne Adams that he had to go home until Friday and to use that time to think about what has been said. The coaches were unhappy with his attitude and motivation both on and off the pitch... he was potentially a 'bad apple' in the group. Wayne was told that he had to change his personality otherwise he stood no chance of being a footballer. "He has two weeks to change his personality"... Bill made it sound that simple, *but was it really that simple? Why ask him to change his 'personality'? Why not change his 'behaviour'? Or was that what was meant?* He had another chance to get things right.

It was the first day back at college. I decided to tag along with the boys to follow their experience out of the training ground environment. I had made contact with the college tutor to make sure it was ok to sit at the back of the class, simply to observe. We arrived at the classroom. It was a tight fit to get everyone in and seated. The college had put the two academy groups together, which was interesting to say the least! Each set of boys seemed to move like animals in a pack, protecting their own whilst exchanging banter

across the groups. As the boys are not only in the same league but also each other's biggest rivals, the important question was soon to be asked... "Who did you play on Saturday? Did you win?" It was obvious that not many were prepared to give too much away. Surely revealing too much about their performance on Saturday could be seen as a sign of weakness... giving information to the enemy that could be used against them.

I was surprised to hear Wayne bring up the incident from Saturday's game where Steve threatened Kevin. "Should av' seen our coach... fuckin' told one our players he was gonna hit him... it was mad" Wayne had everyone's attention at this point.
"Who at? Who did he say it to?"
"Yatesy... Kevin Yates". Fortunately the conversation was interrupted as the college tutor entered the room, asking everyone to take their seats. I was taken aback by Wayne's openness to divulge such information, and in particular to outsiders when the players had been asked not to discuss it outside of the academy.

That afternoon I was able to observe how the boys behaved in a different setting away from the training ground environment, how the relationships functioned within the group. Yet again I found myself questioning Wayne's behaviour. During a break in lesson Wayne struck up conversation with some of the opposing academy boys. With reference to performance he began to put Danny down, loud enough for all to hear. Fortunately Danny had nipped out of the room, but was due back shortly.

I couldn't understand what Wayne hoped to gain from doing this? What was his underlying motive? Other than coming across as disloyal to his own team-mates? I accept not everyone on the same team will necessarily like or get on with each other, but why bring him down here and now, if at all? I was aware Wayne and Danny were not good friends and very different in character. I felt Wayne liked attention, often involved in dishing out banter rather than receiving it, shirking out of jobs where possible. I also sensed that he had the potential to be a bully towards weaker members of the team. This was a prime example. Bringing down Danny in front of others ensured that he gained little social status at college also.

2nd October...

The following day I had a meeting with Bill. He highlighted ongoing issues with staff that had occurred since the game last Saturday. In particular, making reference to a complaint that Kevin's Dad had made regarding 'bullying behaviour' from Steve. Kevin's Dad had asked that action be taken from the club against Steve. In the hope of finding some kind of resolution Bill had invited Kevin's Dad to his house for a meeting on Sunday night. "I mean, I shouldn't have to have meetings at my house with parents but what else am I supposed to do?" Bill was frustrated and seemed unsure how best to react to the situation. He was angry with Steve, feeling he should know better than to think he can speak to the players like that. But he also wanted to tread carefully. He didn't want to make an issue of it in front of others, as it could potentially be damaging to the academy and a distraction to the other players.

I realized at this point that Steve was in trouble, that this would have to be reported and I was uneasy as to how Steve would react to the accusation. *If he saw no wrong in his actions, such as inappropriate coaching methods, then it was unlikely that he would deem his behaviour as unacceptable? I felt Steve would justify his actions and that he would struggle to reason otherwise.*

Later that day, in a brief discussion with Steve, he made reference to the recent accusation following Saturday's game, "I don't know what to make of it". Steve seemed shocked by the response of Kevin and his Dad but also with the seriousness that had been associated with it. He declared that he would change his ways, although Steve was forthcoming to my way of thinking his desire to change appeared to be for the wrong reasons. It was not a result of him recognizing his behaviour was not constructive to good practice but simply because that he had to in order to keep his job. So Steve aims to change his behaviour as a result of the incident last week! However his motive for changing is to keep others happy as oppose to understanding why change is necessary. Steve surrendered "…it's not worth it anymore".

Bill was now under pressure from both the board and Kevin's family, action had to be taken. It was revealed that Kevin had refused the offer of reconciliation with Steve and opted to go out on loan to another club. On hearing this news I had immediate concerns… *How would the other players' perceive Kevin going out on loan? Would they see it as punishment that the player has had to leave the club? I questioned the relationship between the coach and other staff (e.g. Why doesn't Andy speak up to Steve if he*

disagrees with his actions/behaviour?) Also are levels of intimidation building within player-player and coach-player relationships? This all seems somewhat unhealthy and potentially damaging to certain individuals? Secondly, was this a result of players reflecting coach behaviour?

At times, I felt that players reinforced traits of Steve's behaviour within the team. For example when a player had a poor game, and had received negative feedback, the stronger characters within the team would then take it upon themselves to reinforce such messages from the coach, offering their own interpretation and taking any opportunity to do so. This second round of negative feedback (or bullying), provided little support to a player that was usually already feeling down and disappointed with performance, instead as if intentional to make the player feel worse, and have little or no confidence.

In a meeting with the players' later that afternoon, Richard made reference to the scene at college, where Wayne had openly discussed the incident to others outside of the academy, he said he had been "fraternizing with the enemy". I understood that Richard felt it important to address such behaviour, however, I had mentioned it *in confidence* to alert staff's attention that word could potentially spread. I knew that Bill wanted it to stay in-house, assuming there was no cause for it to get further. To my knowledge this had already occurred. I felt uncomfortable, not realizing that would happen. The boys' would know straight away where such a comment had come from! Had I now exposed my position, the players' may now see me as a potential 'spy' at college, these are delicate matters... trust is hard gained and easily lost. Feeling disappointed at the situation, I

pondered over my relationship with the players' both as a researcher and practitioner. *Have I broken their trust? When (if at all) is it acceptable to break their trust?*

I viewed the trust of the players of upmost importance, in both my research and practice. I felt that the players (when around me) should have been able to conduct themselves in a natural manner without the need to look over their shoulder, wary of the consequences of their actions. I wanted them to feel that they could 'be themselves' even when I was around. Following this incident I had worried that I had jeopardized the trust I had worked so hard to gain.

That day we had a match debrief to reflect on the game. The debrief highlighted numerous issues, in particular that the boys were scared of making mistakes. As a result, Steve had suggested that players' had not wanted the ball in order to avoid making further mistakes and so on. In agreement with the coach, the players' expressed that they didn't want the ball enough and understood that it this would have been visible for others to see. Due to players not wanting to get on the ball during a game and with many worried about making mistakes their collective work ethic dropped, players stopped doing their job for the team, and with roles and responsibilities not adhered to, this had a drastic effect on team performance.

7th October...

That morning I spoke with the coach at the club where Kevin had gone out on loan. Dave used to work at the academy so fortunately I was able to contact him to check that Kevin

had settled in and was making progress. Dave briefly explained "...well, he isn't his usual self and he's definitely low in confidence from the Kevin that I know". The conversation continued and Dave agreed that he would keep us informed on how Kevin was getting on, it was likely he would be there for the rest of the season. However, I was made aware that if he plays in their reserves and first team he'll get brought back in to the club.

I felt discontent as I put down the phone... *At the moment is Kevin still the responsibility of this academy?* I was unsure. As a practitioner I felt a duty of care to ensure Kevin is feeling fine and that he is still monitored, yet I was uncertain as to the contact we were now meant to have or not have, as a club. *Was it possible to have regular contact? Did Kevin want further contact? Was it fair, or should he be left to get on within his new surroundings?* I began to consider these questions. Also keeping in mind that such questions may not appear in my remit and therefore consideration of such matters may be of little consequence. I tried to empathize with the position Kevin now found himself in... *Will he feel under more pressure to perform, to ensure his progress is tracked and that he not be forgotten, and also as a form of motivation to come back? It was evident that issues between the player and coach would remain unresolved, and as a result would this now appear to be extra baggage?*

I could only guess as to how Kevin might be feeling towards the current situation. Potentially, this could be a source of motivation, where Kevin is driven to progress at another club, making life more difficult for Steve. On the other hand, it may hinder

Kevin's progression, suddenly at a new club, with different staff and players, in effect starting again, with the worries over coming back in his mind. This led me to question the coach-player relationship in general, wondering whether the coach genuinely cares whether a player makes it, or is more a sense of reflective honour a need to produce players for the 1st team? I imagine in most cases, it would be a bit of both.

13th October…

Prior to the game at Littleton, in the changing rooms Steve gave strict instructions "pick it out and execute". Steve was focused for the game and the boys appeared to listen in to what he had to say.

It was a bright, sunny morning with few clouds in the sky. It felt fresh, great weather for a football game. Steve took the warm-up, as he does every week. He warms up with the players, going through the motions himself. He called the players over to the dug-out just before the game was about to start. He reiterated instructions as stated in the changing room prior to the warm-up.

The first 20 minutes went well. Then players began to make errors and the opposition took advantage. After conceding the first goal, Nicky screamed at Wayne, "that was your fault". The boys' heads' went down immediately, there was no encouragement from each other to come back from this. Similarly there was no encouragement from the bench either. Steve simply turned around to the subs on the bench… "What did we talk about all yesterday?" There was silence "… areas" he continued.

At half time Steve's team talk was short and abrupt "There's 5 things we've talked about and team performance… so now I'm leaving it for you to sort out". The players looked despondent, unsure of how to react and in need of a lift to instill a degree of confidence to get them through the next 45 minutes. It was an uncomfortable silence. Eventually they began to pick themselves up in preparation for the 2nd half, talking in small groups.

Little changed during the 2nd half, the team lacked enthusiasm and a sense of togetherness. It was like watching them press the self-destruct button, as one mistake after the other caused further loss in self-belief. It was at this point Steve slowly walked past the dug-out and turned to watch the U16's game on the adjacent pitch. The subs on the bench looked-on in disbelief. Apart from a few players on the pitch, it seemed as though everyone had given up, including the coach. After 10 minutes Steve returned to the game but said very little, sitting down at one point on the plastic barrel at the side of the dug-out.

Nicky was involved in a collision on the pitch, the ref gave the decision against us. Nicky disputed the decision and within seconds the ref pulled out a red card and sent him off. The players couldn't believe it and nobody seemed to understand why it warranted a straight red.

The players that came off for subs were then told to go and get a shower instead of staying to watch the rest of the game as usually expected. Isolated from the team (maybe

as punishment for performance on the pitch?), Steve told them they were "not needed anymore". Things couldn't get any worse. We lost 5-1.

As the final whistle blew, the boys gradually walked over to the dug-out, it looked like the 'walk of shame'. Steve didn't wait around. He walked across the pitch heading for the changing rooms. He hesitated, looking over his shoulder as he went. *Did he want someone to follow him? Did he want to talk to someone?* I looked around and noticed that no one else was likely to follow, so I decided to get to him... I sensed he needed to speak to someone... to vent his frustration... as I quickly jogged after him, I wasn't sure how he would react or respond to my being there.

Both the abrupt half-time team talk and walking away at the end of the game, appeared as coping responses, Steve's way of dealing with his frustration differently, he knows he is in trouble after the issue with Kevin, he knows he can't keep ramping-up the ranting, he knows he risks losing his job.

As I caught up I was able to start conversation "Steve, is everything ok?"
He blurted out "What can 'I' do to control my frustration now when it gets like this? What do I do with it?" I was surprised at Steve's response. I was expecting him to rage about the game, about the poor performance... I wasn't expecting him to turn to his own difficulties but I was glad he had. In my eyes this was a further turning point, a moment of progression, as he had recognized his frustration before anything else. I began to piece together the events of the game and Steve's behaviour... he had withdrawn from the

situation to avoid expressing his frustration by verbally lashing out, however, his frustration and anger remained as shock responses to another poor performance.

We continued to talk whilst waiting for everyone to come in from the bottom pitch. Steve takes defeat as a reflection of him as the coach "this will affect my weekend now". Often questioning himself "are they bothered?" He feels the players lack desire and commitment. A large part of Steve's frustration stemmed from his opinion of the standard of players he was working with, as he doesn't believe any of them will make it to be a pro.

Today he had opened up and let me in, even if only for a few minutes. Steve was clearly in need of support both he and the players were unhappy and if he was going to help them in any way he had to begin to change his approach to them.

20th October…

In the team talk against Hollingworth, Steve still referred to "what we had last season, where we'd won it before the game started" and explained that he's worried they're readily adopting the 1st team stance of thinking they're "in a tough league so we're going to lose". He told them "we can win. Those not selected are the unlucky ones, those with a shirt are lucky and this is an opportunity for them".

We drew 1-1, although it felt like we had lost based on the reactions of both the coach and the players. Heads were down, the boys looked reluctant but slowly walked over to

the dugout. I got the feeling, if they had won; the players may have felt relieved and expected the coach to be happy. However it seemed a draw was not good enough. Matt (physio) asked if they were doing a warm-down but Steve didn't see the benefit "what's the point!" Steve was really frustrated "the standard of players is not good enough... you're just wasting your time with that lot".

22nd October...

I had a meeting with Steve after lunch, attempting to find out where Steve saw himself right now. How did he feel he was coping and possibly acting on recent events? He began to explain that he carries the burden of recent events regarding Kevin's situation. "What if there's a repercussion, if he doesn't make it at County?" He expressed concern over this, that Kevin may have a case in placing further blame on Steve if at the end of his apprenticeship he does not make it as a player. Steve feels that he may have affected Kevin's chances of making it, as he was now training at another club, and if Kevin didn't make it, at the end of it all could he turn round and use that as a factor to place further blame on Steve.

Furthermore, Steve was embarrassed that he had a written warning and worried about others finding out. "How will it look?" He felt it was a "wake up call" and "the need to change may make me a better coach". However, Steve suggested that he may have lost some of his passion (normally evident through his big behaviour) and now only gives 80%. I began to question this notion... *He only gives 80%? Why? If so, he isn't*

necessarily changing his behaviour but simply holding back? Does he understand that he

can change behaviour yet still give 100%?

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Steve feels that he can't get involved with the team, as he is worried that anything he does may be misconstrued and as a result he could lose his job. He understands the situation with Kevin and appears to be accepting of the terms and conditions. The written warning is only in place for 12 months yet it seems that it is always at the back his mind.

When referring to games, I was surprised to hear Steve say "It helps to have you there… to have support and people to sound off after a game". I was unaware that Steve got any release when off-loading his frustration to myself or Andy, let alone that he would perceive it to be of any help and to appreciate it. When Steve did sound off, the way in which he did it often gave the impression that he gained nothing from doing so; he didn't seem relieved or calmer after a rant, if anything his desperation at the players was heightened and it often seemed that little could change his mind or way of thinking at that point in time.

"It's really affected me… keep thinking that it gets better and forget, then something reminds me again. I mean, Richard Johnson has noticed a change in me and said at my hearing I now don't give 100%, just 80%. So you know that's something in itself. Originally I was assistant manager at another club but I was too young and not ready so I stepped out of that environment, whereas, now, I feel ready for that. I wouldn't justify what I did, although I know where it was coming from and I'd never go that far. You can

only deal with the standard of player and provide them to the best of my ability". Steve's comments, although a little contradictory, revealed his belief in his practice and the moral code of which underpinned it "I know where it was coming from". He genuinely believed in the reasons for his actions. When he refers to the standard of the player and in relation to performance. *I wondered... Are his expectations based on his own past capabilities or that of the present group of players?*

Steve seemed to always take defeat and success as partial reflection on himself, therefore when he's not getting the response he wants from the players his frustration intensifies, putting himself under greater pressure to avoid defeat and also avoid poor reflection on him as the coach.

3.7 Self-reflections (3)

Now at the closing stages of the reconnaissance phase, I had observed and experienced many moments that might, in some way or other, have the potential to impact on well-being. Coach behaviour, player management, the way team-mates treated one another. Throughout relationships seemed central and interaction key. In the player group I sensed that Danny was vulnerable; could I say his well-being was susceptible to the nature of the performance environment? Certainly he seemed open to 'attack' from coaches and team-mates alike. I was concerned for him.

I had gained valuable insight attending college with the players, simply being around had opened my eyes to issues that I may not have realized were there or as easily readily

picked up on, this reinforced the issue of multi-layered contexts, that life in one setting might not necessarily reflect life in another.

Wayne had his own insecurities, in my opinion he craved attention for the wrong reasons. He would be the one to dish out the banter at the expense of others misfortune. He would be the one to avoid doing his job, instead leaving it for someone else to do. However, and those observations aside, his deliberate attempt to ridicule Danny in front of others was a concern for me as it might impact on Danny's standing within the group. I couldn't understand what Wayne hoped to gain from doing this and I wondered what was his underlying motive might be. I accept not everyone on the same team will necessarily like or get on with each other, but why bring him down in front of everyone? As I reflect further on this, all I can think is that football is a dog-eat-dog setting.

Steve was also in big trouble, the incident had been reported, Kevin's Dad had accused him of 'bullying behaviour'. Initially he had seemed shocked at the complaint made against him and surprised that he had been asked to change his ways. At no point did Steve deem his actions inappropriate but did say he would change. With the action research process in mind, I began to question his motives to change and improve his coaching practice. Evidently this would prove difficult if he saw nothing wrong in the first place. How can you encourage someone to change or adapt their ways, if they do not believe there is a problem to fix?

Despite all of these thoughts and questions, Steve did aim to change his behaviour as a result of the incident (he said as much), however, his motive for changing was to keep others happy as oppose to understanding why it is necessary "...it's not worth it anymore". I pondered over this statement. Steve was not happy? What effect was this having on the players? I began to mull over the prospect that maybe the well-being of the coach had to be considered when attempting to look at the well-being of players. This was something I had not previously given much thought to, yet it seemed a logical step to make. I talked this through in my head *'attending to the well-being of the coach could indirectly influence the well-being of the players'*.

I began to recognize, that had this incident not happened, my reflections may not have led me to this notion. If the action research process ran smoothly, with no hiccups (unlike the incident above) then surely my level of reflection would have remained on course, on players, unchallenged to an extent. From a researcher stance, and as wrong as it may sound, I had sensed that the reality of practice had opened-up my thinking and pushed me to the next level away from the tunnel vision I may have been caught up in when solely focused on player well-being.

In accordance with Schön (1983) and his views on the complexity of the reflective process, this type of reflection was likely to be deemed as reflection-on-action. I felt this could possibly link to Gilbourne's (1999) suggestion based on evidence for critical engagement that could be related to an awareness and examination of self in association

to wider contextual matters, an approach supported by Knowles and Gilbourne (2010), in their approach to reflection and critical social science.

As I had found myself questioning how the other players would perceive Kevin going out on loan, I had also come to question the relationship between the Steve and the other coaching staff, in particular Andy. I was confused as to why Andy did not speak his mind when he disagreed with Steve's behaviour and actions. Did Andy feel it wasn't his place to speak up as assistant coach, or maybe he felt inferior, that he may be shot down by Steve's disapproval. I had also sensed levels of intimidation building within player-player and coach-player relationships, which appeared unhealthy. At times, it was as if, certain players took it upon themselves to reflect Steve's behaviour, possibly in a bullying sense that was potentially harmful to weaker individuals or those that may have been going through a tough time of it. As a result, the well-being of these individuals could come under pressure from both staff and peers. With disappointment and little confidence the less strong characters may begin to feel pretty low, and without the reliance of the coach to help pick them up when they're down, then surely their SWB and PWB are left vulnerable, exposed and unprotected.

During the debrief, it had been noted that the players were scared and worried about making mistakes. I sensed this fear came from Steve's reactions in a game to mistakes that were made (players were often shouted at or ridiculed). It was therefore inevitable that if the players did not want to make mistakes, then they were likely to avoid getting on the ball. This had been expressed by both the players and Steve, that they "didn't want

the ball enough", there was a cyclic (ness) to all of this. Predictably, there were consequences to this avoidance type behaviour and collective standards dropped. On reflection of this situation, I felt that aspects of PWB, such as environmental mastery and positive relations in particular, would be difficult to meet. If the players don't want to get on the ball they will never achieve environmental mastery, and if they fear making mistakes due to the coach's reaction then surely it is likely that their relationship with Steve is marred.

Then there was the issue that surrounded Kevin going out on loan. At this point I had felt slightly torn between my role as practitioner and researcher. The club had seemed happy to have regular updates from the coaching staff at the new club that Kevin would now be attending, in order to monitor how he was getting on. Although that seemed a good thing. I was curious as to whether we would have direct contact with Kevin himself, and if so who would be his port of call. As a practitioner I felt tied to conform to club expectations, I did not wish to rock the boat as it were. I was apprehensive when I suggested keeping in touch with Kevin, feeling unsure of Steve's thoughts on this, worried that he would see me taking sides. Of course that was not my intention. Yet in my role as researcher, this could be an opportunity missed, to monitor Kevin's experiences in his new environment. Such thoughts often engendered guilt, was I just becoming opportunistic and disguising this under the cloak of research?

When Steve had turned his back on the game in frustration to watch the U16's on the adjacent pitch, it seemed to have an immediate impact on the players. Maybe they had

sensed that their coach had given up on them. In the short-term and whilst the game continued, I now wondered what actual impact that one moment might have had on player confidence, for them to see that their coach had resigned himself to watch a different game, would the players question themselves or the coach? And did they feel that they needed to drive on to prove Steve wrong or had the relationship deteriorated too far? Did they all now lack any purpose?

Again, and going back to the action research process and the unpredictable nature of social situations, I had not been prepared for Steve's sudden vulnerability as a result of his frustration after the game, where he had turned to the control of himself as opposed to his controlling others. I had to react in the moment, and this certainly did not fit into the neat and tidy cycle of staged-reflection. This also brought my attention to coach well-being matters. Steve had begun to question himself, not only did Steve appear low, but maybe he sensed he lacked purpose, and possibly what he perceived to be his own environmental mastery could never be achieved as a result of the quality players he was working with. After all, he had come to the conclusion that none of the players would make it as a pro... *"the standard of players is not good enough... you're just wasting your time with that lot"*.

Upon realizing that both Steve and the players needed support when considering matters of well-being, it seemed logical to believe that if the well-being of the coach was raised then maybe the well-being of the players may also stand to be improved. I was under no illusion currently, nobody seemed at ease (or happy).

Steve carried the burden of recent events, yet did not overtly acknowledge that his behaviour had a large part to play. He agreed that the written warning had been a *"wake-up call"* and that there was *"the need to change may make me a better coach"*, however he perceived this to be more a matter of *reducing* his behaviour as opposed to *changing* it in any fundamental way. On the one hand, it was positive to hear that Steve had reflected on his behaviour but I couldn't help but feel that he needed to view this from a different angle, from a deeper, more philosophical perspective, otherwise his actions could maybe present further problems down the line.

3.8 Reconnaissance continued

27th October...

In the next game, players were blaming each other for poor performance, there was little togetherness and constructive communication... no sign of team moral. There was no team talk after the game from Steve. The players looked at each other slightly confused... they looked over to the assistant coach for some guidance. Andy reinforced they hadn't done badly and did ok in the 2nd half. Ready to set them up for next Saturday's game against AD City.

I brushed past Andy in the corridor... "Vic, are you ok?" I was quite tense and realized Andy was asking with concern. I simply explained that "it worries me when Steve is frustrated with the players, as it can't be good for him? Also, I'm uneasy about how it affects the players and how they then interpret the situation". Andy nodded in agreement, "I know what you're saying but don't worry about it... the players seem ok. I just don't

see the point in talking about mistakes made in the 1st half. I mean what do they get from that? I'd rather focus on what's ahead!"

29th October...

On Monday morning I planned to meet with Steve. He was aware that the aim of the meeting was to discuss his current thoughts and feelings that may lead to the reasoning behind his actions. I was intrigued to know how Steve perceived recent events, his interpretation, reasoning or even justification behind his actions as coach. But more importantly, to attempt to gauge Steve's current state of well-being in the workplace. I chose Gibbs (1988) reflection cycle as a template to use in the meeting, as I felt Steve might see purpose in adopting a structure that had readily been used before and also one which I use regularly with the players.

Description
What upsets you as a coach?

Thoughts/feelings
What emotions do you experience when you don't get what you want from them?

Evaluation
Why do you feel like that?

Behaviour
What do you do when you feel that way?

Conclusion
What would you like to change?

Action plan
What can you do to take things forward?

As I walked into Steve's room I noticed he didn't seem put out and instead appeared quite welcoming towards getting the meeting started. I introduced the reflection cycle

(Gibbs, 1988) and proposed that this would be the basic template from which to refer back to in meetings to follow. I explained that the purpose of self (coach) reflection enabled him to monitor his own changes in practice that may encourage him to adopt new strategies to vary his approach/coaching style. The meeting allowed us to cover each point of the reflection cycle, requiring Steve to talk, open up and at times question his own actions. (See meeting transcript)

"As a coach you may feel restricted? Compromised? Or even undermined?"

"Restricted in what way?"

"Well, previously you mentioned that you only give 80%. For example, Rooney plays at a certain pitch, and coaches don't want him to lose that. Do you see what I mean? Where you feel your actions are restricted, like something holds you back?"

"Yeh I suppose it is a bit like that. Yeh definitely I hold back now cos its not worth it."

"But really, when using Rooney as an example, it's the intensity of the pitch versus the nature of the pitch... therefore recognizing the emotion. Can you relate to that?"

"Yes I see where you're going with it. I've never looked at it like that. However I think it'd still be very difficult to manage... D'you not think?"

"Well in your case there'll be certain risk categories that you'd need to be aware of once reaching that intensity, so you would possibly look to avoid one-to-one conflict?"

There was a short silence whilst Steve pondered on what I had just said. He then nodded as if to say 'I could try that'.

1st November…

The week building up to Saturday's game placed an even greater emphasis on the result… it was the derby. This game was always treated differently, by players, and also staff. Academy philosophy has always supported player development above winning; however this game was more about winning and less so about performance, that's just the way it is! Although it appeared that for most of this season Steve has adopted this stance.

The boys had been talking about the game all week and I had already started to feel the nerves set in. I knew what it meant to them, there was so much was at stake, most importantly as to who would own the 'bragging rights'! There were crowds of parents and friends stood watching on the opposite side of the pitch. As the game kicked-off I noticed the subs and other players on the bench were more nervous than usual. It was tense and every challenge seemed to be made with conviction. The game seemed to bring out a strong team work ethic, supportive play, encouragement, a general camaraderie – quite a change in fact.

After the game Steve gave a constructive team talk. "I'm happy with that even though we lost. We were the better team. Now we've got something for next time we play them". Steve had recognized their hard work and seemed to have little to fault them on aside from the final result. I felt that was just what the players needed to hear, they were praised for their efforts and overall performance. Only one player got criticized and that was JD the goal keeper, for "not being a match player". I walked over to him as we walked off the pitch "are you ok?" "Not really no, just totally fucked off at that (referring

to Steve's comments). Why am I'm not a match player cos of that? I couldn't have done anything else in that situation. He can't just blame me". We spoke about it walking back to the changing rooms. I didn't want JD to leave angry and upset, with the rest of the weekend to mull it over. Steve's words are potentially devastating to the players, especially when emotions are running high after a game like that. I felt Steve had lashed out at JD over a couple of mistakes he made during the 2nd half, which showed a glimpse of Steve's general frustration directed laser-like at one player. I walked alongside JD as the team made its way back to changing rooms… "Well, how do you think you did?" I asked in a cautious and quiet manner.

"I thought I'd done ok, yeah I could've done better with the goal but my distribution and kicking was good, don't you think? I mean why am I not a match player cos of that?"

I quickly responded "What do you think Steve meant by 'not being a match player'?"

"Well he obviously thinks I've played shit and that I should've saved it or that I could've done more, but I couldn't and don't see how I can be the only one to blame, Nicky and Tim were in front of me. I'm so fucking pissed off'. "Ok I understand what you mean and remember the good stuff that has come off for you today in terms of your distribution and kicking. I think Steve obviously thinks certain things you did or didn't do could've helped to win the game and so he's putting it down to that fact and has used the term 'match player'. I know it's easier said than done but try not to let it get you down."

7th November…

I held a small focus group with some of the players, asking them to report on their progress since the start of the season, where they felt they were at, what had they found

easy/difficult to contend with, in particular addressing 3 recurring themes in academy practice... induction, recovery and transitions. The focus group went well with each player having something to contribute. However towards the end of the session, there was a knock on the door. Steve interrupted "Would you mind if I come and just sit in?" Without thinking I blurted out "Er well...it's up to the boys', as long as they don't mind?" As I looked around the room to gauge the players' reactions, they each looked over in a similar manner, as if wanting to say 'What did you say that for?' or 'Couldn't you just say no?' I was annoyed at myself for not putting across my opinion that it wasn't a good idea. I had been reluctant to suggest this as I didn't want to offend Steve or lead him to think otherwise, such that it was him the players would be speaking about, when actually at times it was.

11th November...

We had a staff meeting and current issues at college were discussed... Danny had received a warning as he was behind with his work. Although Danny was not the most motivated when it came to college work, I felt this was a harsh reflection. Having been to lessons with the boys' it was quite apparent that little time was given for one-to-one tuition, so it was fairly easy for those that were not as academically bright or less confident in applying themselves to drop behind, as this was not addressed by the club (or college) in any formal way.

16th November...

After a long journey we finally arrived, got off the coach and made our way to the changing room. At this point I decided to 'get the coffees in' for the staff. It was a typically cold Saturday morning in Newfield as I stood and watched the team warm-up ready for the game. Three of the regular starting players were injured and numbers looked depleted, plus it would be Alex, Pete and Browny's first academy league game since arriving from Scotland at the beginning of October. This aside, the boys' didn't look focused during the warm up. They didn't seem prepared for a game. Tom came running over to the side of the pitch halfway through the warm up then started to run back to the changing rooms. "Where are you going?" Andy shouted. "I've forgotten my contact lenses... gotta go and get them". The coaches just stood and shook their heads.

Back in the changing rooms they were given clear instructions in the team talk... "It's about attitude, stopping them playing. Make them play through the middle. Make them feel like they're in a game". I scanned the room, the players sat and listened to everything being said but something about their body language seemed wrong. I questioned the belief of the players sat in the room, 'their belief' in 'their ability' as a team to go out there and win... they just didn't look confident.

At half-time we were 2-0 down. Newcastle looked strong. Steve tried to give constructive feedback to the players "you're not doing badly, could be worse. It's about positioning and reading state of play. It needs to be better". He explained where players needed to be,

who should be getting support, who to put the ball into. They went out for the 2nd half unconvincingly confident that they were still in the game.

The game got worse… we lost 4-1. It was awful. There was such a mix of individual performances… Nicky the backbone of the team, gave it his all as he does in every game, at one point running with the ball from the defensive position, deep left back, across the length of the pitch to create a chance on goal for the strikers, you couldn't ask for more. But then you had the likes of Wayne and Jamie in midfield who simply didn't seem up for it, they'd given up in the 2nd half, if the ball didn't come to feet then they just complained and caused conflict. And then there was Alex, Pete and Browny who at least looked like they were trying but they were lacking in form and parts of the game seemed to pass them by. As the whistle blew Steve made his exit to the changing rooms. Andy and I waited for the players to make their way off the pitch and gather their stuff before walking back to the changing rooms with them.

Steve waited for everyone to get back in before he spoke to the group…"You speak to me about that game". There was silence. Steve looked around the room, "come on you speak to me about that game. What would YOU say about that game?" Certain players held their heads low, not wanting to look up. Then someone spoke up "we were shit", someone else added "they were miles better than us". Steve seemed to appreciate the response but jumped all over it and proceeded to tell the players that they were not good enough and possibly shouldn't be playing at that level week in week out. The players

were gutted (would they question the point in continuing?), more so would the players think they were wasting their time if the coach didn't believe they'd make it.

As the boys were left to get showered and changed I went in search to get the second round of coffees for the staff. As I came back Steve was sat down in the lounge area at the side of the changing room corridor. I walked in with his drink and sat down. I paused, he looked deflated. I remember thinking what would be the best thing to say right at this moment. He beat me to it. Before I had chance he calmly spoke with a puzzled expression on his face…"mentally weak, worst performance, no fight, desire, team performance". He seemed beyond frustration (if possible) "What can I do with that lot?" Again he emphasized "None of them are going to be players?" He asked the question like he was desperate to be given an answer. From his perspective he genuinely didn't know what he was expected to do with 'them'. I didn't have the answer but felt compelled to help him feel better, even if just for the short-term, at the very least by having someone there to listen to him talking things through. Although admittedly at the back of my mind I had hoped that at the same time Andy would be speaking with the players in the changing room as they would need to vent their own frustrations.

As Steve spoke about his frustrations and concerns the underlying factor seemed to be the ability of the players. Steve expressed strong belief that the academy might as well be a centre of excellence "it's doing nothing for them (the players) losing every week. I just don't see any light at the end of the tunnel". I felt helpless. It seemed to be a vicious circle. *How can I be effective in that moment? What is my role? As a practitioner, I'm*

meant to help people feel better, look at things from a different perspective when they're

down? But how do I make either the coach or the player's, feel better in a situation like

this? But what about the researcher?, me the researcher?, well maybe I do more good by

changing things over time, over the course of the research, maybe what happens 'in-the-

moment' matters less in comparison

I ponder over the bigger picture the truth is that most never 'make-it', only a few even travel the distance, so academy coaching has to be about other things as well as progression e.g. growth (this could attach to the wider equation of well-being structure?) Steve did not see this perspective and I'm not sure how much he would value it. When looking at the bigger picture... *Maybe my job might be just to be there at that moment and to try and change things...alter the bigger picture over time...that sounds vaguely emancipatory (definitely for me, but maybe even for the coach) and very much like action research, I'm starting to warm to this now?*

Steve began to walk back into the changing rooms and as I grasped at something positive to say, to leave on a lighter note, I shouted..."have a good weekend". Steve turned and smiled as if to say "after this!" But the smile was at least something?

19th November...

I had a meeting with the injured players. There were 5 boys injured at the moment, making it easy for a group to form away from the rest of the team. And along with this came disadvantages, such that they were able to distract one another from their individual

rehab programme. If one injured player is feeling down, it appears easy for this to transfer through to the others. They were also more noticeable when at a loose end, waiting for training to finish, as there was a larger group of them hanging around in the canteen or gym area... easily 'picked-at' as loungers!

I wanted to take the opportunity to find out what progress they were making, how they perceived events whilst injured and what were the key factors that made a difference to their, often monotonous, day. I asked them all to meet in the TV room after they had finished their rehab work with Matt (physio).

I began the meeting, asking the players to reflect on their progress since the start of the season, leading on to current issues surrounding injury. Jamie bluntly responded "Steve ignores you if you're injured". "How do you mean?" I wanted examples. "Well he passes you in the corridor and just doesn't even acknowledge you... it's like you don't exist cos you're injured and he doesn't need you". Tim spoke up, "It's not like you wanna be injured? Who wants to be injured?" The others appear to nod in agreement.

Jamie explained that he had played in the reserves game yet knew he was injured. "If you knew you were injured, why not say?" I queried. "Cos I wanted to play. I thought I'd be able to play through it".

Tim referred to the AD City game coming up this week. "Steve asked if I was fit and whether I'd be playing"... Tim replied "not sure". After hearing the answer Steve

repeated the question, so second time round Tim replied "yes". Steve said "good cos you'll be getting us out of the shit". "Why did you say 'yes'?" "Because I felt I had to. Not much choice really. Anyway I might be ok, so". Tim felt pressured to say 'yes' but also a part of him wanted to say 'yes' as he really did want to play.

25th November...

Following on from our last meeting, I caught up with three of the players still injured. They re-addressed their frustration in relation to Steve ignoring them because they were injured... there had been no change. "He's not bothered about us". And having witnessed the incident that occurred on Monday, I knew it wouldn't go unmentioned. On Monday afternoon Steve had called a meeting with the players to cover match analysis in preparation for the game on Saturday. Steve and I were already in the room when the boys began to walk-in and take a seat. The TV room is pretty cramped at the best of times, and it soon began to fill up, with no seats left and players sitting on the floor. It was at this point Steve looked around the room to see who was in. The last few to walk through the door were injured boys as they'd have come up together from seeing the physio after lunch. As they walked in the room, made space and settled down ready for the meeting, Steve suddenly turned and requested that they leave "You injured players, you're not in this, I don't need you, you're no use to me on Saturday". The room fell silent and the injured boys stood up and walked out, heads down. When reflecting on this moment, one of the boys reiterated their previous comments made the week before... "As if we want to be injured".

Later that day I spoke with Steve to discuss issues surrounding each player and the recent problems he has faced with them. He took the opportunity to dissect each player individually, in particular the 2nd years. More often than not, describing what they lacked in order to make it to the next level. I know I have said this many times now, but Steve said it many times, his mantra was fixed.

30th November...

We lost at the weekend against Basing 1-0. There was no desire, poor warm-up, lack of effort and unsurprisingly Steve was not happy with performance. The sense of having been here before, the theme of the movie 'Ground-hog-day' seemed to be playing-out in our enclosed football world. In the changing rooms Steve asked how many thought they had the qualities to become a pro? Max answered "I do." "Go on then, what've you got?" Max fired back... "I show work-rate, good attitude and I'm prepared to do the shitty bits". "Ok I'll give you that. So that's one of you. What about the rest of you?" No one else spoke up. Steve stood and looked around the players in front of him. He stopped and paused at Alex "we made a mistake signing you". Alex just looked to the floor and gave little reaction. He'd only been at the academy a few weeks, let alone in the squad. I couldn't help but feel it was undeserved, not that any of it was deserved, 'expected' may be more appropriate a word to use. But Alex had just moved down from Scotland, left his family behind at 16 years old, for the opportunity to come and give it a go, and already Steve was implying that they'd made a mistake and that he wasn't good enough... and that decision or statement was based on 3 games at the most! *In this moment I felt that*

Steve's behaviour reflected elements of bullying, and if this were so, it also occurred to me that he bullied the most vulnerable?

On Monday morning I sat with John and Matt reflecting on Saturday's game. Matt traced back the steps, "they had a bollocking at half-time and after the game, the lads have got to be down. They got shot down in flames". John nodded in agreement, "some of them have gone… up there" pointing to his head. "They need more positive feedback, they don't get any, and they need a positive outlook. If you keep getting told you're shit, you'll eventually start to believe it". As I sat and listened to John and Matt, I began to realize that maybe other members of staff were becoming weary of Steve's ways. After all, if the boys were down it was inevitably going to affect everyone who worked alongside them, potentially making their job that little bit more difficult also? And it was these other members of staff that would then attempt to raise the boys' confidence going into another week of training, trying to convince the players' that it was worth it and that they still had something to gain.

Following this conversation I sought-out a further discussion with Bill. He was unhappy having had a phone call from Alex's Mum regarding the 'bollocking' after the game. Bill was now aware of the comments thrown in Alex's direction, "we made a mistake signing you" and the damage this had potentially caused. Bill was dismayed, "How is that helping his development?" saying that we made a mistake in signing him. "You can't say things like that. I don't blame his Mum ringing up and complaining because it shouldn't have been said in the first place. I mean what must she be thinking when her lad gets on

the phone to her and says that? In fact what must Alex be thinking? I'm gonna have to have a word with him today".

Bill was unhappy with the pressures on him as a result of Steve's coaching style and general behaviour. He felt Steve was not a team player and that he took defeat personally. I held a view on this, I had to come off the fence...I felt (now) that Steve cannot afford to personalize defeat, not when working at an academy level where player development takes priority not results.

Steve seemed down and low in motivation. Grasping at straws he had decided to give the boys more time off this week, only in Tuesday and Thursday in the hope that giving them a break from him and him a break from them would somehow alter things. I sensed that Steve's strategies and behaviour were becoming erratic! I moved into practitioner mode and tried to address that the important factor was to give the boys explanation and reasoning as to why they were having time off. So as to avoid them wrongly interpreting the situation and seeing it as some kind of punishment or an uncaring move.

Later speaking with Jimmy, he made reference to the current problem "when the players are low they need someone to be able to pick them up. The players have no belief in their ability, cos they know the coach has no confidence in them". He was right. The players did know that the coach had no confidence in them, being candid they had nothing to make them think otherwise.

This cycle of mistrust and negativity has been in operation all season and seemed to have built and built, before now becoming consolidated. This story has developed also, maybe it makes a good research read? I am conscious of that and have mixed feelings towards my feelings! The story contains distortion, discontentment, (a powerful dynamic) and personal tragedy from both players (as victims) and coach (as what?).

What will give the players the lift that they need? Is it possible for things to change when there is little or no belief within the squad? As a practitioner I wanted to meet the needs of the players and also the coach, and, as hinted before I felt that this mindset also brought into play my role as the action researcher, someone who should facilitate change in practice. Yet I know this lacks a sense of stage-by-stage, a sense of being systematic and flowing smoothly from one action research phase (reconnaissance) to another reflection on change. I moved here on an ethical urge, bringing the action research process along with me, I needed to attend to the coach-player relationship...*What do they think Steve sees? (Eg. Steve's observations of them) Can they change this? If so, how? Ultimately the coach needs to understand what the players see and the players need to understand what the coach sees.*

As training came to an end, Steve called the players in to give some feedback. It was clear that the coaches were unhappy at the players' standards in training and this was reflected by the lengthy team talk that followed. The players wandered over, they looked deflated, despondent, heads down, their body language said something... "we've heard it all before". Maybe it was going to be long, hard season.

As this was going on Nicky came over as he'd been training with the 1st team, they had finished early. We got into conversation as he was wondering why the U18's team talk was going on for so long. He didn't seem his usual chirpy self, so I attempted to find out how his morning had gone training with the 1st team. "So do you prefer training down there with them?" As I signaled over onto the 1st team pitch, expecting him to say yes without thinking. He paused, then replied as if slightly unsure "er...yeh, I suppose". "Why d'you say it like that?" He continued hesitantly, "well it's just they always have a go at you. Any chance to get at you..."

"Who gets at you? The players or the coaches?"

Nicky shuffled his feet for a second, "the players... certain players do anyway... Greg Harper always does... always tells you to fuck off and stuff... and says 'what do you know?'"

The academy coaches know this goes on. Nicky had previously been elbowed when going up for a header in a 1st team practice drill and he had also experienced a verbal whiplash after trying to gee-up the team for a reserves game, each time by the same pro. Nicky seemed to accept this as normal behaviour, something that he would have to get used to. I asked whether the 1st team coaches were aware of it going on and he just shrugged his shoulders. I felt helpless, knowing all I could do was speak to the academy coaches. I preferred to broach this with the academy coaches as oppose to the 1st team coaching staff. I'm on unfamiliar territory when it comes to the 1st team as I have little contact with players, simply passing them in the corridor or on the pitch. Around the 1st team coaching staff I tend to 'play it safe' and keep my head down as advised by Bill at

the beginning of the season... "due to being more permanent around the place... not everyone (i.e. the gaffer) knows your role, so it might take a bit of time for them to get used it. It's an inconspicuous role... just play it safe. Even when we go out training, don't stand in between the two top pitches... try and stand near the wall or sit in the dugout, then you'll be less noticeable". I appreciated Bill's honest advice. However I couldn't help feeling slightly unnerved, worried that maybe I wasn't going to be readily accepted on a more permanent basis within my research role. I began to feel a familiar vulnerability in the environment again, as I had previously experienced when a new manager had come in... from Tom Gregory to Collin Goodwin to Peter Mitchell. This had been a testing time, although only present in a part-time capacity I was aware I had to tread carefully.

I held a session with the players. I wanted to use this opportunity to speak with the players on a level footing, without any of the coaches present. I made reference to last week's session and confessed that I hadn't intended for the coaches to get involved. I reflected on what the players had said in the last session as I felt they probably didn't answer with how they honestly felt. In particular, the boys' were told by Steve, that if they don't understand what they should be doing on the pitch they should be asking the coaches questions before, during or after a training session. I revisited this subject whilst the coaches were no longer present, Jamie spoke up "...you can't ask questions if you don't understand, cos you just get laughed at or bollocked for it", the rest of the group showed a general consensus. "You never get time to ask questions". A voice of minority

came from the back "yeh but we don't exactly come in early or stay behind to ask questions, do we?" No-one responded.

I also made reference to the morning's training session, addressing what they took on board from the end of session team talk with Steve. Steve had stressed that he felt the players' did not learn from the progressive steps in training sessions, from one practice to another. The players' felt that they needed to do the training session more than once in order to be judged on it. They also explained that they are often "scared and worried about making mistakes, and always look for the coach's reaction after making a pass (particularly in a game) as its likely he'll be "shaking his head on the side line".

The majority of the players appeared down-hearted and had nothing positive to comment... "What's the point, they're not bothered about us... they're just bothered about their job, about winning and how that looks on him (coach)". The players were genuinely unhappy. They didn't feel of value to the coaches. They felt they were just there for their disposal. Another player spoke up... "I'm injured and you don't even get spoken to, you just get completely ignored... its shit".

The session had turned into an open forum, mainly where the boys' took it as an opportunity to express their feelings. Realizing the session had to come to an end I felt the boys' needed regain focus as they believed that the coach was only bothered about winning rather than concerned with their development. I felt they were questioning their purpose within the academy, as if accepting defeat that any one of them would make it as

a pro. I felt uneasy at the thought of them leaving without addressing their concerns. I also felt it was part of my role to make them feel better about the situation than they currently did. Otherwise surely problems would lie ahead. As a knee-jerk reaction, I quickly intervened as an attempt to remind them why they were here, "but lads what is the main aim of this academy?" They responded immediately, "to produce players for the 1st team". From my experience of the academy environment and in agreement with Bill's philosophy, the academy is driven towards player development. Having a 'winning mentality' is a key feature seen to be important, however acknowledging that the U18's team winning every Saturday will not guarantee that any academy players will make it into the 1st team must be recognized. In hope that they would agree, I asked "So are results going to be the be all and end all?" The majority agreed that in the long-term results won't count, however in the short-term they didn't see things changing for the better.

The topic of conversation continued as the players began to offload their grudges, "You never get pulled aside and given advice on what you're doing wrong, it's always in front of everyone, and you get slated... everything is team focused". At this point an opposing voice chipped in, "yeah but sometimes I feel players need to take responsibility... standards in training today can only be down to us (looking around the group of players), what can the coach do?" Nicky tried to reason with the players, although not many agreed with him. Taking everything into account I asked the players whether they felt such factors contributed or affected their performance. They suggested it had a negative impact on how they played... "You end up playing shit because you're so worried". It had

become a vicious circle, the players didn't perform to their best, the coach is unhappy and criticizes the players, the players feel worse under more pressure to perform… and so on.

Later on I caught up with Bill as I had a few things to run past him. He was curious to know how my session had gone with the lads, having possibly detected a degree of unrest within the boys'. Quite abruptly he asked, "How do I know you're telling me what I need to know when it comes to the players?" Bill was referring to recent on-goings between the coach and players. He was aware there was unease in the camp and maybe he expected me to provide him with specific information that he could act on directly. I felt uncomfortable as my role as a practitioner conflicted with my personal views. I wanted to tell Bill exactly how the boys felt, however I was concerned that if too much was given away, as a result I would lose the boys' trust to confide in me. Slightly put out by the question as I felt he should already know the answer, and in defending my actions I replied, "Well that's down to trusting your members of staff to do their job correctly".

Whilst sat at my desk in the coaches' room, Bill took a seat at the physio's desk to continue conversation further. The academy was fairly quiet as the boys' had gone home and other members of staff had drifted in and out. I decided now would be a good time to discuss my research as I wanted to take the soonest possible opportunity to arrange a staff meeting. I felt slightly on edge as I tried to gage Bill's mood before broaching the subject. I was hesitant, in case it was the wrong time. Usually Bill is the joker but today he seemed somewhere else… As he leant back in Steve's chair he gave a deep sigh as if he had a lot on his mind. There was a pause of silence and then Bill blurted out "Vic, I've

got something to tell you and this is not to be repeated as no one knows about it".

Nervously, I gave him my full attention and curiously wanting him to continue but at the

back of mind cautiously wondering if I was going to like what I heard... I'd not heard

Bill speak like this before. "Ok you know I won't tell anyone, what is it?" I questioned.

"I'm leaving" he replied waiting for my reaction. "No you're not!" I said defiantly,

convinced he was trying to wind me up, as I refused to believe him. He nervously

laughed, "No really I am. I've only mentioned this to Jimmy". Still trying to work out

whether it was true, I asked "Why?" I wasn't shocked by his answer but immediately I

felt sad, "it's time to move on... if I stayed here I'd have to move Steve cos I can't work

with him". I hadn't imagined it would come to this. I was speechless as it gradually began

to sink-in that Bill was actually leaving. As I struggled for words I became

uncomfortable, too many thoughts rushing through my head. In an attempt to support his

actions and beliefs, in a relaxed manner Bill asked "Give me your honest opinion.... I

think he's completely lost the players', what d'you think?" I felt put on the spot and

unsure how honest to be in my answer without breaking issues of confidentiality.

However, at the same time I felt I needed to acknowledge that there were problems that

we both knew weren't going to be resolved easily. Not wanting to agree, as I felt I was

being disloyal to Steve, having got an understanding of how and why he works the way

he does. Reluctantly, I gave my personal view "maybe some yes".

As other members of staff began to wander in, we continued the conversation in Bill's

office. He explained the situation and how he felt he'd reached a point where he'd put all

the structures in place for the Academy, there was nothing more he could do and that the

academy needed someone new to come in and take it further. Bill stressed the importance that he wanted his position to be filled by someone who supported everything that was in place now, encouraging the same philosophy in practice. As I walked out of his office he advised, "Work closely with Jimmy and have a think about where you stand in all of this". I felt lost as I left, unsure and insecure of what would happen next.

Driving home from work, I reflected on the day's events. *"My main ally, my boss, is now leaving... the person who I probably trust the most and someone who has supported my work at all times.* Trying to push aside my thoughts and feelings on how this may affect my own work, more importantly questioning *How can I support the players'... after today's session knowing how the boys' feel about current practice... how can I put a positive slant on ANYTHING?*

I arrived at the training ground Thursday morning to hear confirmation that Bill was leaving. Everyone seemed a bit on edge as not all staff knew about it and the players' didn't know yet either. I went out to watch training. As I walked past the 1st team training, looking over onto the academy pitches, I noticed that the players' were training in two separate groups. One group was training with Bill and Jimmy, and the other group with Steve. Steve appeared to be working on shape in preparation for Saturday's game. I hadn't seen them do this training drill before and found it really interesting to observe the players, as it couldn't have been closer to recreating a game-situation. The boys looked really focused and enthusiastic during the session. It was dramatically different to normal. Body language, communication, responsiveness to the coach... there was a positive

atmosphere, where the players' were learning and enjoying training. This was also reflected in the coach's actions, his feedback and relaxed manner that came across. I noticed that Ben looked bright and eager in training, usually he seems to carry 'the world on his shoulders' having come back from injury but today even he looked more at ease.

After training we headed for Anne's tea-room, in search of warmth and a hot drink! Some of the first team players' were already in there. At this point I apprehensively took the opportunity to prompt Bill about the staff meeting I wanted to hold at lunchtime, worried it would be the last thing on his mind and questioning would he be as eager to support it now he was leaving. He was very responsive and allowed us all to agree a time that was convenient before afternoon training. I immediately felt the relief... my first action research meeting with the staff was going to happen today. I was nervous yet excited at the same time. I was at the next step wanting to engage the coaches, get them on board to encourage a change in practice... it was now or never!

Back in the coaches room I asked Steve how he felt that morning's training session had gone, "Yeah... thought it went ok, they seemed a lot sharper this morning, it was better". Also worthy of note was that the other coaches had observed the morning training session to be a success. Possibly as a result, Steve looked more relaxed and less frustrated than when normally reflecting on training.

3.9 Summary of the Reconnaissance

There was plenty to take-in from the reconnaissance phase, it had been a challenging experience and a critical part of the research process. It seemed to me that a thorough reconnaissance brought the detail of context into the foreground. I observed, followed and shadowed work on the ground, from pre-season until December. Importantly, it had allowed me to experience and become accustomed with my new role as an insider-outsider (practitioner-researcher), taking stock several times along the way. The purpose of this phase had been to establish key themes that were evidenced in everyday practice and this had been achieved. I intended to present the key themes to practitioners in the first collaborative practitioner group meeting. The three key themes that had emerged were:

1. Recovery – players were required to analyze, evaluate and reflect on performance. Structure in the delivery and content of feedback needed to be applied on a consistent basis.

2. Transitions – players experienced changing circumstances often on a regular basis with regards to injury, stepping up or down from the reserve or first team training environment, managing college work and the environment, and living away from home in digs.

3. Induction – new players were expected to settle into the full-time professional environment of which they were required to learn quickly from mistakes, bond well with team-mates, meet high standards set within the training environment and cope with negative feedback.

I had been aware of Steve's initial resistance to accept my role and had felt dubious as to how things would progress. Although I had felt isolated at the time, I had come to realize the value in Bill's actions towards forcing Steve and I to interact and form an effective working relationship. I had quickly recognized that I needed Steve to value my role if I was to gain any credibility and to feel less vulnerable.

It was clear from the start of the reconnaissance phase that Steve bared his frustrations in the form of confrontational behaviour. He publicly criticized the players, which, at times, had been uncomfortable to witness. This was an issue of contention that I felt, was likely to raise its head again within the coming months. His frustrations, behaviour, and lack of coping ability, evident from the start of pre-season, had a negative impact on his ability to form productive player-coach relationships. I had begun to question the players' ability to interpret negative feedback and handle criticism in front of others. If the environment at the academy is designed to facilitate player development then it needed to provide players with the opportunity to learn and increase understanding of their game. At this point, I was unsure whether the players were encouraged to do so, if pushed I would say that if learning and understanding did occur it did so within a negative and sometimes hostile environment.

The hostility of the academy environment is proposed as preparation for the harsh reality of the first team environment, in that regard it has a 'moral' framework of sorts. However, I found myself questioning the primary goal of the academy. If this is indeed

sound preparation for the first team environment, did this facilitate or hinder player development? Although I had heard sufficient reasoning for why players may be put under such intense scrutiny, I was unsure as to whether this was enough justification, especially as it is common knowledge that a minimum of 90% of players do not make it to professional status. Why then I wondered, is the primary goal of the academy to prepare players for an environment they are unlikely to reach?

The negative feedback from Steve had potentially led to a lack in confidence within the team and individual players, or so it seemed. From group discussions, it was evident that players appeared to hang on to the negatives. They had often only recalled the negatives and seemingly mulled over any points of criticism. In particular, any points that questioned players ability and effectiveness.

Reflecting on my own role I had almost certainly underestimated the difficulty in adhering to my new role as practitioner – action researcher. In theory it had seemed fairly straightforward, I was to observe and experience the on-goings of daily practice. However, in reality this was more challenging than I had anticipated. I found myself wanting to react and respond to situations that were developing in front of me. I wanted to step in, to attend to matters, to make a change, or to at least make a difference and intervene where possible. I suddenly found the reconnaissance phase a complicated process. *If I were to step out of researcher mode and follow my natural instinct as practitioner, could this be justified within the realms of action research and the apparent*

reconnaissance phase? Or would this be deemed void in research terms, only encouraged

to participate through observation and experience?

Also when adjusting to my new role I had grown conscious that the respect and trust that I had already gained, was now in jeopardy due to aspects of my research commitments. Again, this was attached to the need to resist acting on impulse. Each time, this appeared to be an internal battle, constantly either having to restrain or weigh up the consequences of stepping in and acting on behalf of my role as practitioner. I felt guilty. Others would surely expect that I fulfill my role as practitioner and not act as a mere bystander.

During the reconnaissance phase, there were incidents that possibly reflected feminist issues, a route that I could choose to go down maybe as a result of my own insecurities. Instead, I opted not to. This was a matter that I hoped would resolve itself with time. I was also aware of the potential advantages that I stood to gain being a female in a male-oriented environment, in my role.

Early on, Bill was uneasy over the way coach-player relationships had developed. Bill wondered if the players were intimidated by Steve's approach and manner. In doing so, he had disclosed a caring side and displayed a level of empathy towards the players, a side that was rarely exposed. Although similar responses seemed out of reach for Steve, I couldn't help but feel (maybe in an attempt to search for answers) that Steve felt under pressure in some way, and that that was the cause of his frustrations. Furthermore, I began to understand Steve as a result of his playing history and experiences within

professional football, earlier I used the term 'old-school' maybe that was unhelpful, he is who he is and I came to 'feel' his unhappiness.

The reconnaissance phase provided the platform to explore feelings via formal and/or informal interaction and through observation of behaviour. However, although feelings were explored, it was still a distance from being able to claim this to be well-being. Nevertheless I was able to make some tentative deductive interpretations from these observations. I began to consider 'what should I look for' in the culture of the football environment that may offer some insight into well-being? I have said before that it became a multi-sensed affair, as it was not only about what I could see and hear, but also what I sensed others could see and hear, like putting together a jig-saw whilst knowing the perfect 'fit' is elusive.

I increasingly became more aware of my own thoughts and actions as a result of the insider-outsider experience, in effect bringing me closer, face-to-face with my own self (Rowan, 2001).

As I was more conscious of my actions as insider-outsider now and how this may affect the research process both during the reconnaissance phase and going forward. In particular, I felt my age and gender, although largely contributing to the barriers that I initially had to overcome in order to gain acceptance within the environment, had also contributed to my current status. Being the younger of the staff meant that I was a closer age to the players than the coaching staff, with Matt (physio) being of a similar age also.

Generally, when around others players or younger staff, the players did seem more relaxed. I suppose in a way I could relate to this. I was possibly more relaxed too, or to put it better, maybe less on my guard when having an informal conversation with Matt, as opposed to other staff. Although, I was also aware, that not only were we similar in age but our roles were both similar in nature, in terms of attending to players needs outside of the coaching remit. That aside, it was always my intention (as practitioner) to be seen as a friend to the players and hoped that player perceptions would ultimately confirm this.

Tillman (2000) had suggested that cultural knowledge was needed to accurately interpret and validate experiences. I felt, having now experienced involvement both as an insider and outsider, that I had enhanced my grasp on this culture that I was a part of. As like most working environments, there were written rules, and then there unwritten rules which everyone knew of, adhered to, and accepted as *the norm*. I related this to my experience as an insider-outsider. If I had not previously been exposed to the people and the environment then my interpretation of situations could have been very different even difficult. For example, a newcomer into the environment may perceive player feedback as being too severe and overly critical, deeming it to be an unsuitable learning environment (I certainly would understand how this view might have been readily formed). In doing so, their opinions on certain practitioners, rightly or wrongly, may be negatively formed based solely on such matters and as a consequence may act as an unconscious barrier when attempting to build rapport with them towards action research engagement.

> ... I found some new 'friends' in the sense of 'consultants' during my sojourn in the desert... With the help of these distant allies I started to re-conceptualize the

subject-matter and the subjects of the study... This attempt at deconstructing and reconstructing self-organization made me acutely aware of the fine line which may separate a critical-constructive insider from a critical-destructive outsider (Humphrey, 2007; p.19)

Based on my understanding and experiences during the reconnaissance phase, I had started to formulate questions. I knew that such questions were unanswerable for the time being. *Does short-term happiness come at a cost, to achieve goals for longer-term happiness? Do individuals need to be achieving on every level (across all domains) for PWB to be met within academy practice?*

As the reconnaissance phase unfolded - The notion of coach well-being had been brought to my attention. I formulated the idea that when dealing with people, those in charge and leading others, may also need stable well-being to carry out their job to the best of their ability, and in doing so, maximize the potential to be gained by others. For example, how can a coach help a player to the best of his ability, if he the coach is in need of help himself? If the coach is not stable with-in emotionally, then how can he successfully attend to the needs of others? When a player has issues off the pitch, more often than not, the matters surface presenting as problems on the pitch. Similarly, if a coach has his own issues to contend with, could this perhaps impact on their performance as coach? These were all questions that had now been brought to the forefront of my mind and not previously considered.

Players

Players who had received elements of positive feedback had demonstrated their ability to reflect a more balanced view. A pattern of interactions could then be associated to the type of feedback they had received. For example, if a player is doing well, they generally will feel better about themselves and are likely to tick more of the boxes attributed to the components of PWB, and in effect may be able to provide a more balanced view when evaluating performance. Whereas, it would seem fairly understandable for a player not doing so well, to focus only on the negatives, as this is what they may currently relate to.

Returning to Lazarus (2000) and his views on relational meaning appear worthy at this point. Coach feedback is perceived to be crucially important to a player, to my mind they hang-on to every word said particularly when related to their performance. Consequently, feedback will potentially carry high levels of relational meaning and according to Lazarus, influence their appraisal of a given situation. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, cognitive appraisal deals with moment-to-moment and cumulative impact of events, which would appear pertinent to the points made in the reconnaissance data. Evidently, there seems to be a strong case for monitoring on-going appraisal, to better understand how certain players might interpret feedback and how this may then impact on their emotions.

When questioned informally (in conversation) or formally (in debriefs) players appeared to be conscious of deliberately attempting to give the right answer, may be one that they thought the coach would want to hear. So whether they agreed or not, this would be a

feedback process under false pretenses. Could this mire positive relations and personal growth? Debrief meetings were designed to be player-led, yet due to Steve's approach and handling, they had quickly reverted to being coach-led. Again, in my view, this risked stunted growth in attending to aspects of PWB, hindering the process of furthering player learning, knowledge and understanding.

Bill was able to show empathy with both Steve and the players. It wasn't that Steve was incapable of caring (that would not be a fair evaluation) but he appeared incapable of displaying any emotion or behaviour that would suggest it. Bill, in-contrast, was more inclined to show a caring nature and empathy with both, the players and the coaching staff, when appropriate to the situation.

As I reflected on the action research process generally and the reconnaissance specifically I had constantly gained rapport from the thinking of Grant (2006). She had outlined the need to 'live' what her thesis had primarily inquired to support. With this in mind, I realized that to fully commit to the realm of action research I too had to 'live' day-to-day practice within the academy. However, in accordance to Humphrey (2007) there were further complexities to consider:

> ...the act of embarking upon action research itself propels the researcher into a new role as insider-outsider, which harbours the potential for confusion and contradiction. On the other hand, a research site is likely to shelter several grouping with conflicting identities and interests under its umbrella, and an insider researcher will have particular loyalties and antipathies like all the other players which renders insider-hood problematic for all (p.23).

I related to Humphrey's (2007) analogy of a crystal when attempting to explain the role of becoming an insider-outsider:

> The perpetual crossing-over between life-worlds gave birth to a complex narrative which surpasses anything that I could have produced had I been simply an insider or an outsider. It imbued the research with what Laurel Richardson (1997) dubs 'a crystalline validity'. The crystal reflects and refracts light so that multiplicity of colours radiate out in different directions and assume different shapes. The crystal is also one of the hardest objects on the planet, and its sides can be some of the sharpest: crystallization is not for the faint-hearted (p.15).

I had 'bought-into' the idea of looking at the academy through a different lens and from this new ideas began to form. For example, I sensed there was scope to support players (as a practitioner) in ways that increased their ability to receive challenging feedback, in particular in how to react, respond and cope better, especially if this was something they would have to become accustomed with in preparation for entering the professional first team environment.

Back to the well-being literature and from a deductive sense, during the early reconnaissance phase (Self-reflections (1)) there appeared to be a risk of sounding vague when making reference to well-being. At that point, only an intuitive position could be taken to assume that all feelings and consequences of events might in some way impact on PWB well-being. However by the end of the reconnaissance phase, I felt that if events are challenging and difficult, and repetitive then it is difficult not to suspect some influence on PWB.

Finally, I began to feel that the well-being literature was context weak, along with being a weak in terms of complexity at the individual level also. Peoples' lives are complex both in sport and out of sport, and this complexity leads directly to challenge the assumptions of intuitive positions as well as global theoretical assumptions. Therefore, and from a contextual/complexity position, it can be worthy to note that sometimes, stories can *only* be told of lives in-flux and these tales may suggest discomfort, unease, anger, and joy; yet may not necessarily imply consequences in terms of well-being. Maybe through action research allowing/encouraging an appreciation of the contextual/complexity position, the drive towards practice and change might be flexible and so effective.

CHAPTER FOUR:

THE ACTION PHASE

The action phase

The next section offers...

In brief, the next section presents material from the Collaborative Practitioner Meetings one-to-eight that took place over a 12 month period. The text that follows documents how the meetings unfolded, what was said and how action plans were derived. Practitioner evaluations, and reflections, and points of practice-action will be evident from one meeting to the next. Links to the data file can be made throughout this section as a point of reference.

Table 4.1 - Data File as point of reference

Data File	Page Number
Collaborative Practitioner Meeting 1	1
- *Inductive content analysis*	244
- *Deductive content analysis*	294
Collaborative Practitioner Meeting 2	42
- *Inductive content analysis*	331
- *Deductive content analysis*	376
Collaborative Practitioner Meeting 3	73
Collaborative Practitioner Meeting 4	88
Collaborative Practitioner Meeting 5	117
Collaborative Practitioner Meeting 6	127
Collaborative Practitioner Meeting 7	144
Collaborative Practitioner Meeting 8	187

Table 4.2 - Character Profiles

Academy Manager:

Bill Armstrong (37 years old)

Background:

An experienced coach with a background in sports science. Previous experience working within the coaching structure of a National set-up.

Job Responsibilities:

To oversee the entire academy programme, attending to the structure and development of the academy environment, whilst managing the organization of staff and players.

Basic Nature:

A fun and friendly character, often perceived to have a cutting edge and clear vision. He adopts an autocratic approach to his role as academy manager, demonstrated in his authority when instructing others to carry out how he wants things to be done. Bill brings a sense of order and realism to the table. He cuts straight to the point but in a tactful manner, that does not offend.

Assistant Academy Manager / U16 Coach

Jimmy Reid (34 years old)

Background:

A wealth of playing experience. Now an ex-professional and passionate about youth development. Previously assistant manager to a professional team in the conference.

Job Responsibilities:

Recently joined the club to manage upwards from the under 9-16 age groups.

Basic Nature:

A spritely character, personable and in-tune with person/player management. Jimmy provides a lot of humour, with a large personality. He is very honest and tells it how is it, regardless of putting others out. This has never presented itself to be a problem as generally everything Jimmy has to say is typically of value and respected.

U18 Coach

Steve Jackson (45 years old)

Background:

An ex-professional, with history having played for the club. Steve has worked in youth football for a number of years, despite already having first team management experience.

Job Responsibilities:

Steve works closely with the players every day in preparation for training and games.

Basic Nature:

Extremely passionate about football and strongly believes in the standards he adopted as a player which can sometimes lead him to appear old school in method.

Academy Physiotherapist

Matt Cullen (27 years old)

Background:

A chartered physiotherapist from Australia. He had previously worked for another football academy since coming to the UK.

Job Responsibilities:

Although sometimes regarded by others as young, with plenty of experience he brings new ideas to the table that benefit the programme.

Basic Nature:

Caring in nature and a laid-back character. Matt has strong views and is prepared to stand up for what he believes to be good practice, even if this creates conflict with other practitioners.

Education and Welfare Officer

Richard Johnson (58 years old)

Background:

Vast experience working at the top level of professional football as Chief scout. Offering insight and knowledge to the professional set-up of both first team and academy environments.

Job Responsibilities:

A supportive role, providing help and guidance to practitioners, in particular coaching staff.

Basic Nature:

A strong and confident individual. Often referred to as the guru!

4.2 Collaborative Practitioner Meetings (overview)

In the first meeting I introduced practitioners to the notion of well-being by means of a PowerPoint presentation (see handouts in Appendix 1) that defined well-being and outlined the key themes surrounding practice. In addition to this, I had previously conducted a focus group with the players in order to gauge their thoughts on practice as the reconnaissance period was nearing an end. The main purpose of this was to gain insight from the players' perspective as oppose to solely my own thoughts and observations. I also believed that this was important to address in order to present accurate and reliable feedback as it was first-hand and not open to misinterpretation.

Initially, critical points were fed into the agenda for the first collaborative practitioner meeting (see handouts in Appendix 1) with observations and interview data that was intuitively/deductively linked led to well-being literature. The data collection helped to inform practice and could suggest that well-being was under threat. Therefore once informed, practitioners were encouraged, through open discussion, to dissect issues and suggest changes in practice.

Over the coming collaborative practitioner meetings, practitioners began to address practice that could be linked specifically to PWB dimensions, presented formally in the fifth collaborative practitioner meeting at the end of the season. Consequently, the overall aim of the collaborative practitioner meetings, was to drive debate and change, based on the notion that well-being that can be related to everyday practice.

The collaborative practitioner meetings are presented in pairs. Although there is similarity in how the meetings are described, the primary analysis differed, in particular collaborative practitioner meetings one and two, underwent thorough content analysis from both an inductive and deductive stance. However, due to the intended time-frame between collaborative practitioner meetings and the continuous cycle of action research, this level of rigorous analysis was no longer deemed appropriate. Please refer to the data file handbook for primary analysis.

Alongside the collaborative practitioner meetings, it was important to capture on-going lived experiences as this helped to contextualize the data in terms of the on-going life in club (sections labeled *back at the training ground*) and the events impacting upon people involved (practitioners/players) and myself.

4.3 Back at the training ground *(prior to Collaborative Practitioner Meeting One)*

In the coming weeks, I continued to observe and gather more data, continuously attempting to build a bigger and better (more accurate) picture of individual players within the team and across the academy as a whole. Running parallel to this, I was also conducting the same cyclic *listening* and *reflecting* process but amongst the coaching staff. There was so much to take in; different personalities, circumstances, interactions happening on a daily basis. I now began to appreciate what "just being around" eventually meant. The nature and variety of these interactions acted as 'informing background noise, and contrasted with the formality of the reflective group meetings with

staff. This informal arm of the research process proved to be critical, allowing me to stay-in-touch with events and with aspects of practice change that were emerging after each meeting.

After the incident between Steve and Kevin (see earlier p.142), Steve had since had to face the ramifications. All staff that were present on that day, were called in on the Monday morning to have a one-to-one meeting with Bill, in order to explain their view of events of how and what had taken place. I was surprised to get called in.

This information was then collated and Bill had to present the findings to the board. In the meantime, as noted earlier, Steve was under verbal caution awaiting confirmation on how matters would be dealt with there on in.

Kevin had refused to come back. However, fortunately the club were able to get him out on loan to another club where he would be able to continue his first year scholarship. As mentioned earlier (see reconnaissance), I had concerns over the welfare of Kevin as to how this would continue, the logistics of it all? More so, what he would make of the new situation he found himself in. Was this a new opportunity or a potential setback? I felt pretty helpless and I was unsure how best to get answers. I didn't want it to look like I was taking sides, but I felt that I needed to make contact. I was apprehensive about picking up the phone to ring Kevin. It wasn't like we had built a strong relationship, he may even wonder why I was calling at all. And it definitely wasn't for research purposes.

I wanted to ring him out of a duty of care, and this may sound selfish, but more so for myself. I wanted to check he was ok. To let him know that people at the club cared. That if there was anything he needed he still had our academy staff to turn to... I rang but there was no answer. I left a voicemail.

Following the board meeting, Steve agreed to a proposal put forward by Bill that seemed to appease the board whilst keeping Steve from further disciplinary action being taken. Bill had to ensure that steps were being taken to address the issue and monitor Steve's subsequent behaviour and actions. My name was involved in the proposal. In an attempt to be seen to be acting from an in-house perspective, Bill had suggested that Steve and I have regular meetings to monitor and discuss progress whilst providing an outlet for Steve to use as a sounding board. Consequently, this also became part of the action research process as I was to work closely with Steve, encouraging him to analyse, evaluate and reflect on his own thoughts and behaviour, and to engage in the practice-change process.

In the first week in October, I held my first one-to-one meeting with Steve as part of the agreed process. I felt hesitant, unsure of how Steve would approach the meeting. I sensed he may be reluctant and possibly resentful at the fact the meeting had to take place. It also crossed my mind that he may just see it as means to an end, and so in doing so pay it little, if any, due care and attention. We had arranged to meet after lunch...

Satellite work

When I had questioned Steve on how things were going, he expressed disappointment in the poor attitudes of the players and indicated that this was reflected in their lack of professionalism and preparation:

> When a kid has no cart (motivation) to training in a morning, no spring in his step... they don't look as though they are ready to train, they don't look eager... lethargic and sloppy they don't work hard, it's like - they shrug their shoulders, their heads just bobble about, they just look like sloppiness - it drives me mad... It looks like its hard work at times through their general body language and sloppiness... once you've entered into that mode then it becomes difficult to get them out of it.

He had sounded disheartened and upset by the players' lack of enthusiasm, not just in their general approach to training, but also in their desire to become professional footballers. He said it in a way as he if didn't understand how the players could have such an approach.

Steve reflected on previous events, and made comparisons to how he now felt a few weeks on. I was surprised at his openness to talk about his actions and how he had felt at the time. I hadn't expected him to be so frank.

> I told you about what went off not too many weeks ago and up to that point I had been utterly frustrated, wound up, feel it's all my fault.

He went on to explain his attempt to adopt a more laid-back approach towards games, admitting that a slight change in his own actions and behaviour during and following a game had helped him deal with disappointment differently.

They are a reflection of me and I do think now that I am more laid back since what happened and a little bit easier to accept it... Yeah I know there is a game when I might just shout a little bit louder but there are times in the game when I am thinking like I won't – it's not worth it. But I do think in the past I would have got to the stage where I would take it out on myself.

...especially at the end of a game... could have gone and said certain things you didn't really mean because it was the heat of the moment – I'd say like your useless or something like that. Whereas like now I ain't said that for ages. I'm a bit more reflected after a game where I'll talk to them now. I haven't given them a serious bollocking for ages and I do think that has helped me a little bit... I accept what is going off in front of me.

And whereas I'm saying normally probably in the past where I might have used the easier option to give them a bollocking, because I'm wound up, aggression, pent up frustration, anger... So it would be easy to go you're going to get it... I'm not frightened to give it any more but I'm a little bit wary because I might lose it and go through the situation like I've had before... I am just frightened to death of going too far.

The opportunity to speak with Steve on a one-to-one was interesting. It wasn't that his views necessarily changed (though his actions seemed to have adjusted a little), nevertheless I had begun to understand him better. I recognised that his reasoning, his motives behind his actions, suggested that he cared. However, this was often marred (or somehow lost in translation) by the way he chose to react in situations, actions that on the surface could be deemed as misleading from his original motives. *Maybe Steve was just misunderstood?*

But I do think I might come across to them now a little bit more approachable... I have always thought that I had a decent relationship with the kids, anyway most of them... they might think there is a change in him because he doesn't shout as much. He still shouts but he doesn't shout as much, and as often and he doesn't use his frustration, he is a little bit easier to talk to when he actually puts his point of view across, better for me as an individual to understand. It is not all aggression and passion, it's come down a little bit and you can still get your point across. It makes it a little bit easier for the kids to understand. They

might like it they might not – I don't know they might not see any difference – I don't know.

I think you have got to look as though you are passionate and that you care. Whether I look that I have changed that much… I still think that I come across as caring.

Steve had made reference to the standard of the team being lower than previous years and that this brought its own problems and difficulties. Although he was aware he *had* to change, I was unsure if he truly accepted or understood *why*, that it was not only for himself but also for the benefit of the players.

> …what I failed to do is actually manage myself properly which resulted in me saying that throw away comment which made me have a look at myself and thought you have got to change here mate. Whether it's for your own good or whether it makes you a better coach, or whether it makes you a worse coach, you have got to change because that frustration is just eating away at you… Again that was probably eating away at me whereas now I feel… what will be will be.

Encouraging Steve to adopt new methods into his coaching practice, had so far been a positive experience, he had noticed the benefits in feeling happier in himself.

> …makes it more of a rounded job… where you take over the log books like now and have a few one-to-ones with them… which I think it helps and I think it's quite productive… I am happy at the moment as regards becoming more of a rounded coach, broadening things out as a coach.
>
> I always come in and do something or drag them in on a Wednesday afternoon because I think that makes me look to be a good coach… now I'm happy enough to accept right I've done that you need a day off. It's not worrying about what people think it's always being happy with yourself in which you triumph.

This led me to question Steve's coaching philosophy. He seemed to do things in practice because he *thought* that's what was expected to be a *good* coach, therefore Steve had previously not valued or entertained anything outside of these preconceived expectations, remaining fairly narrow-minded as to what should be deemed right and wrong in coaching practice... to be a *good* coach. I began to wonder... *were Steve's preconceptions solely based on his own experiences as a player. If so, did he believe that what worked for him should work for everyone else.*

It was interesting to hear Steve admit that the pressure of work, often having the role of two or three jobs, along with the addition of external factors outside of the work environment somewhat took its toll, and he accepted that these factors helped to play a part in how he was feeling. It seemed that Steve had gone through a period of unease and he had recognized that the minor things took effect, Steve getting tickets for example...

> And I think things like that Vicki were the major problems earlier on this season because everything away from here and everything out of this room was affecting me and winding me up.

At the end of the meeting, we had discussed much more than I had initially thought possible. I had gone into the meeting with a fairly skeptical view, that Steve would be reluctant to speak up, predicting that he would not want to chat about his frustrations and so on. However, I was surprised *how* open Steve was. He hadn't seemed reluctant one bit. If anything he appeared to *want* to talk about everything that had gone on and from his personal perspective.

That evening, on my way home, I reflected on the meeting with Steve. As daft as it may sound, from that 'one' meeting, I felt I knew so much more about what Steve stood for, his morals and work ethic, all critical aspects of practice from an action-research perspective. He felt strongly about the standards that the players set themselves and how they applied themselves in the training environment. He seemed to often feel they didn't want it enough and that they lacked quality in preparation that was needed to become a professional footballer. When such standards were not achieved or did not materialize, they triggered an emotional response that Steve admitted he had not always managed effectively. I began to wonder... *Would other coaches feel the same, if in a similar situation?*

I had come to realize that Steve appeared a different character when in a one-to-one situation. He seemed more at ease than he did in group settings, open to questioning and appeared to welcome the reflective process. However, in group meetings he could come across as being very defensive, in particular about his own practice, particularly when attempting to justify his actions. Therefore, having the opportunity to work with Steve on an individual basis was insightful, it gave me greater understanding into him as a person and practitioner, enabling me to understand 'what he was really about'.

Jones, Armour and Potrac (2003) had highlighted Schempp's (1993) work and the importance to be gained in attempting to understand coaches' knowledge. They suggested that it is necessary to:

...know about their goals, their priorities and how they rationalise their behaviours; in short, we need to know more about their lives. We need to know about the way the culture of the workplace socialises coaches to fulfil expected roles, and how such influences can be both constraining and liberating. Consequently, to understand coaches' knowledge and their utilisation of it, it is necessary to understand the dynamic influences upon their occupational and social worlds as perceived by them (p.214).

Consequently, I too felt this was key to understanding Steve's motives and reasoning behind his behaviour. The one-to-one meetings with Steve and the informal contact that happened in day-to-day situations provided essential interpretation to better understand his thoughts, behaviour and actions as academy coach.

The more I began to understand Steve, the more I could prompt and gage his reaction to moments in group meetings, and so where possible to facilitate discussion in an effort to achieve maximum input from all practitioners involved. I recognized that conflict was inevitable in group settings and that this was also reflective of the challenging action research process. I wanted practitioners to engage fully within the action research process and realized that conflict might be expected, particularly in the initial stages. So, the challenge to help Steve, also helped the overall action research process within academy practice.

I worry a little whether my presentation of meetings with Steve might appear as a false separation. The action research process within this study is messy, complicated and the meetings with Steve are a good example of how matters can be taken out of a researcher's hands. Yet, the meetings appear to have helped us both!

Leading up to the first collaborative group meeting, I was mindful that it was important to present the academy practitioners with an accurate and true reflection of player experiences that had taken place within the last six months (reconnaissance period). From an external perspective, pre-season was often viewed as key to the transition and progression of new players coming in and to those moving up the ranks. I was nervous, as I knew the first meeting would play a significant role in the drive to kick-start the action research process within practice. In order to do this well and to provide the academy practitioners with valid and reliable information, I had deliberately worked closely with the players, to gage their perceptions and experiences prior to, during and after day-to-day events within the academy environment. However, I was about to engage in my first practice-based experience as an action researcher. It was a daunting prospect as I was unsure of what to expect. I was filled with uncertainty.

4.4 Introduction to Collaborative Practitioner Meeting One

The first practitioner meeting took place. All practitioners were given handouts that provided a user friendly quote to help define well-being (see handouts in Appendix 1). This was necessary in order to ensure all practitioners had a basic understanding of the term and how it might fit into the context of day-to-day practice. I felt it was important to engage practitioners in both deductive and contextualized terms, in an attempt for them to recognize and value their individual roles within the action research process. The intentions of changing practice were outlined. The three topics that emerged as a result of the reconnaissance phase were also briefly mentioned.

Each of the topics came about as reoccurring themes from the reconnaissance phase. The first theme was termed *recovery*. This aimed to encompass both physical and mental aspects of the recovery process. Issues surrounding the recovery process had been on-going throughout the reconnaissance phase, creating tension between practitioners with different beliefs in how, when and what recovery should involve. Issues had also appeared to cause unrest from the players as a whole. This theme sought to involve recovery from the last event towards building for the next event. The topic of recovery had originally come to light in an elite/high performance seminar that I attended a month earlier and therefore was brought to my attention around the same time as I was witnessing the recovery process unfold in front of me within the club.

I intended to address matters concerning recovery in two forms; physical recovery and mental recovery. Physical recovery clearly involved the physical aspects that could be related to getting the most from the player, within restrictive time periods. Whereas, mental recovery involved dealing with matters attached to performance evaluation, successful/unsuccessful experiences, reflection and coach feedback. Additionally, there was also an element of staff recovery that needed to be considered, something I had begun to think over during my conversations with Steve.

The second topic was termed *transitions*. During the reconnaissance, this theme appeared to cover many aspects of a player's experience. The number of transitions a player could go through was dependent on their level of progression. Whether they progressed at a slow, steady or rapid rate they would experience numerous transitions along the way.

Such transitions could involve reserves and first team experience (making the step up or the step down), increasing expectations and pressures, adjusting and settling into digs, coping with injury, education and time management, coping with opportunities and selection, coping with failures and disappointment, and other personal or social issues. Consequently, it would seem good practice to reflect upon player transitions closely.

Finally, the third topic was termed *induction*. This had been a large focus due to the timing of the reconnaissance phase beginning pre-season. There were many features that could potentially contribute to a successful induction process. Such features involved the integration of new players to the environment, the ease at which new and positive relationships were formed (player/practitioner), and initially addressing their knowledge of experience (expectations and effective coping skills). Therefore, monitoring and assessing the induction process could be on-going throughout the season, and be used in preparation for the following season.

*See Appendix 1 – Collaborative Practitioner Meeting One (Handouts)
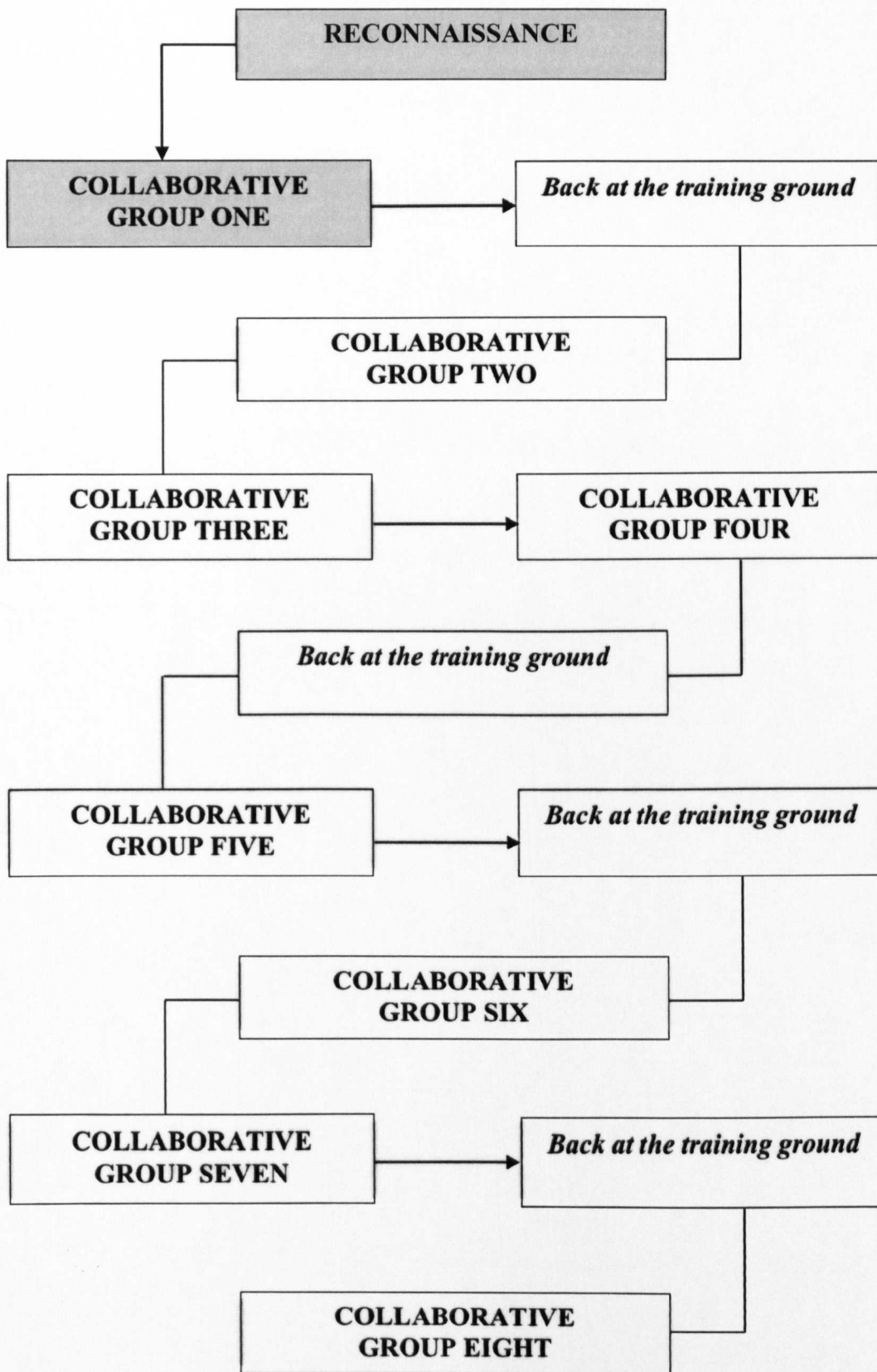
Figure 4.1 – Map Meeting 1

4.4.1 Collaborative Practitioner Meeting One

Practitioners present – Bill, Steve, Jimmy, Matt, Richard, and Rob

I felt under a degree of pressure, this practitioner meeting, I sensed that the first in a group could go some way to setting the tone for the remainder of the study and pave the way for what was to come. I hoped that the first meeting could initiate responses that would later gather momentum and feature strongly within the practice-phase of the action research. I felt both nervous and excited. This was the first step towards formal collaborative, practice-oriented reflection.

The atmosphere in the first meeting was edgy. I sensed that the participating staff members were apprehensive (Steve, Jimmy, Matt and Rob) about what to expect. It was possible (I suppose) that some thought they would be put on the spot and interrogated through having to answer questions concerning their position and views. Yet others had appeared enthusiastic about the initial meeting (Bill and Jimmy)... maybe they knew they had a lot to say and that now they were faced with an opportunity to speak.

The meeting took place in the academy staff room, as this was the biggest room at our end of the building, it could accommodate everyone involved, whilst also providing a level of privacy away from other practitioners (first team staff) and players. One by one the coaching staff had begun to filter through from lunch, some arriving early in anticipation of the meeting start-time and others rushing in minutes later having dealt with last minute player issues. Although the dynamics of the group were mixed and everyone appeared upbeat with banter a plenty as they started to take their seats. I hoped that all the academy practitioners present were all there by choice and willing-fully ready

to engage as a group, seeking to improve their own practice through the process of further learning and understanding within critical reflection over the coming months (but as I write this I know that sounds a little idealistic!). Different practitioners gave off different messages. For some, I could sense an energy towards strategic engagement with player centred practice at the forefront, whereas, in others I sensed a slight apprehension... they were there to engage as practitioners to improve academy practice, yet I was unsure as to whether they felt they had a vital role to play (i.e. that they were in effect, a cog in the wheel) and if they truly believed that their input could have impact within such a process.

The handouts were passed around, each taking a copy (see Appendix 1). This provided me with a sense of security, as I intended to use the hand-outs as a form of direct feedback from the players, therefore presenting player experiences, as said in their own words. Previous research supported this, Ragland (2006) pointed out that merely speaking about matters in simple conversation may itself prompt insight for the first time, and that Pollio, Thompson and Henley (1997) had noted that dialogue helped the speaker to describe the experience and clarify its meaning to others involved:

> Language both evokes our narratives and invokes the reactions of others (Ragland, 2006; p.172).

By providing the practitioners with handouts I had hoped this would further consolidate this process and help the practitioners to better understand player perceptions, whilst also recognizing themselves or their role to play within the dialogue, as previously suggested by Jones, Armour and Potrac (2003).

Evidently key messages developed as the meeting progressed, with some issues reoccurring throughout. When discussing matters surrounding induction, it was interesting to hear that most staff held the same views when it came to helping the new apprentices better prepare for the full-time academy football environment. It was felt that we could do more as staff to help the players have a smoother transition towards settling-in. Bill had referred to the expectations placed on new players coming in. He had suggested that we should expect players to make mistakes and accept that such experience comes as part of the learning process that players must go through in order to gain long-term benefit.

> *It's still experience isn't it, you can't count for experience because it doesn't matter how much we tell 'em they've got to make the mistakes before... they've got to experience coming in and the Monday morning thing, it takes 2 or 3 years, it doesn't matter how much we talk to them about it, they've still got to go through the experience of this... making mistakes breaking the rules for them to learn in the first place (BA, 1, 42).*

Other factors were discussed to determine features that appeared influential to the induction process. Features such as the changing room dynamics were discussed in relation to team cohesion. Unfortunately due to limited facilities the changing room layout restricts space and as a result players are divided into groups and assigned to one of the three changing rooms, this issue is raised again in later meetings as a major structural concern. Consequently this is viewed to inhibit team cohesion, and although this situation is unlikely to change in the immediate future, it was suggested that the more attention be paid to the grouping of players to best foster team cohesion that will cause least disruption to the team dynamics.

Player management was also a topic deliberated over. The management of players seemed important to consider when addressing player motivation and feedback. It was easy to forget that Jimmy had already been an assistant manager at a professional club in the Football League. But you could tell he spoke from experience by the way he told his stories, they were meaningful. He had spoken about managing players tactfully to get the most from them whilst at the same time attempting to keep them happy. He then went on to illustrate how the coach was able to influence players at different stages of development through the use of choice words.

> *...in fact you do it in reserve team games... you turn round to the pro's and say 'you were brilliant today you lot' and they were crap, but you say 'you were brilliant' because they'll support the others. So your main conversation, whenever we had reserve games, we had pro's playing for 'em, you go in and speak to 'em and you say 'listen this isn't the most important game for you, but all you've gotta get out of it is fitness work don't worry about anything else, if the ball bounces off your shin I don't give a flyin' fuck, because you've just got to be fit. This game is about fitness and your prime objective is fitness'... (JR, 37, 32).*

It was acknowledged that different players may respond differently to the same feedback dependent upon their personality and general character. Therefore there appeared to be value in treating players as individuals. Managing the players and their progression may attend to PWB factors, such as player autonomy and personal growth. Richard and Bill had made reference to influences that may affect PWB, placing particular emphasis on feedback and positive relations.

Maybe from a deductive angle, it was possible to consider that flexibility to the programme would encourage and allow players to achieve success in other areas of the training programme that may facilitate mental and physical well-being factors also.

A large topic of debate focused on recovery. There was a lot to be said on this topic. Everyone seemed to have a view and input from each practitioner made for a stimulating conversation. It was exciting for me to hear a difference in opinion from various practitioners. Their ideas appeared to differ dependent on the background of their discipline area. For example the physiotherapist, Matt, held the view that the players were in need of rest and that this was simply a natural part of the recovery process that could not, and should not, be ignored. On the other hand, Steve felt very differently about recovery, in particular when considering how, when and what should be involved, and to an extent the value he placed on the recovery process as a whole.

SJ: ...I mean this is where work life to pro's is a lot different... Cos you can say like, you're doing too much and this that and the other.

MC: So how's it a problem from the young ones to the pro's?

SJ: Well I think you've gotta try and grind in to young'uns that they're here and you've got a 2 year period of time where obviously you're trying to get as much into em' as you can. I think you've gotta be responsible and put them in situations where you say 'well hold on, if you get pro you'll get plenty of time to get your recovery in and stuff like this'...

MC: ...I would be very, very scared about saying training 7 days a week. I'm sort of the opinion that you always have a day off a week, and I know that most Olympic level athletes and any sort of injury excellent athletes you have a day off a week and...

SJ: But what about... as I'm saying they get time off through the week with college don't they?

MC: They get half a day, but they're always in that day though aren't they?

SJ: Erm, yeh Mondays and Fridays, and Wednesdays they have a chance. I mean again I'll put that down on my discretion, cos I think there's times where they need to come in for whatever reason... as regards work on a Sunday, it wouldn't be working on a Sunday it would be actually to come in and have a recovery session, as regards stretches and stuff like that and then have the chat...

MC: Hmm...

SJ: So Sundays is off, you're not physically working. I mean you're coming in...

MC: So you're getting you're physical rest then, but what about like what Bill says their day to themselves when you just stay at home and play playstation and go to their mates and watch a movie... Personally I would really struggle to work 7 days for more than 3 or 4 months at a time. And I've done it when I was doing my Masters... its horrible mate... I was working for a few hours a week and I was doing a Masters and unless you just get that day of just completely to yourself... it'd just kill ya, cos your body simply can't sustain it.

SJ: Well as I said, wouldn't Sunday be that then?

MC: No cos its still... Nicky has to get in his car, drive 25 minutes down here, come in see the same old people at the same old time at the same training ground, drive 25 minutes all the way back home.

(SJ, 42, 10)

Matt and Steve both held very strong views. I sensed friction, which appeared to increase as the conversation progressed. The main sticking point surfaced when discussing reasons to have a day off. Sundays were seen as a day off, with Mondays being the new start to the weekly timetable. It was agreed by all, that Sunday was accepted to be part of the recovery process and that the players should be aware of the importance of rest. However, the difference in opinion occurred when Steve suggested that recovery needed to take place under the supervision of staff for the players to gain any benefit, otherwise it was potentially seen to be pointless as it could not be monitored objectively. Matt

disagreed and believed the players could be trusted to rest-up appropriately at home, and highlighted the physical and mental advantages that the players stood to gain by not having to come into work on a Sunday.

From a deductive perspective, recovery (physical and mental) was perceived as able to affect player SWB. This reiterated earlier points from the inductive perspective, with regards to players having a day off. Large emphasis had been placed on the need for players to have time away, a day off from travelling into work, seeing the same people and doing the same thing, it was suggested that they would benefit from no contact time with staff or the environment of their daily routine... a break from the norm.

The need for recovery to be independent of the result was also key topic of debate. During the reconnaissance phase, Steve had suggested otherwise depending on the result and how the game had gone. However, other staff, and in this case Matt in particular, expressed their disapproval. Matt believed that the recovery process and procedure should be structured and become routine, *irrespective* of the result.

> *...want a system that works under all conditions don't ya? When you've won 6 months straight but you've gotta still have that system in place for the boys to make sure they've got some structure, cos when they've lost 3 on the trott are you going to say we're in every day after we're winning but no we're going to change it if we start losing (MC, 13, 22)*

Therefore encouraging the development of good habits and enhancing players' ability to cope with the ups and downs (both physically and mentally) that may occur from game-

to-game situations. This was discussed as a potential factor that may influence player well-being.

Even from a deductive perspective, if the processes of development and recovery are kept independent of the result, then it could be suggested that SWB is at a lower risk of being affected, with fewer fluctuations.

The topic of recovery had prompted other practitioners to address the flexibility and variety to the training programme whilst maintaining structure. Jimmy believed there were plenty of options that would bring variety to the training programme yet currently they were not being utilized, and he also believed that little value was placed on doing so. Jimmy was not happy as he indicated that we had qualified staff in specialist areas that were simply not able to use their skills to maximum potential as a result of Steve's controlling behaviour towards the players. Jimmy had suggested that Steve only valued work that was done out on the pitch and therefore the players' development, learning and improvement would be limited as a result of not having appropriate access to other, more suitable, staff.

Furthermore this tied in with Jimmy's thoughts on the general structure of the programme. He indicated that if Steve only valued the time spent out on the grass, then any downtime would not be deemed important and so explained why little time had been made available for other activities.

Maybe a more structured approach to downtime for injured players could prove to play a crucial part in their rehabilitation and recovery process. There was still room for ample learning to take place even though they would be unable to step onto the pitch. This was discussed in detail as to how injured players could benefit and structure their programme to maximize learning.

> BA: You don't want to punish them, but you want to educate them to say while you're injured, look what I'm gonna do for you to get you fitter and stronger and better than anybody else (BA, 34, 30).

In relation to injured players, the topic of transitions was discussed. It was suggested that the inclusion of injured players be addressed where possible. All staff felt it was important that injured players are still able to maintain a sense of involvement in and around the squad, and that this was perceived as achievable.

> BA: I went into the canteen the other day... all the injured lads were there, at about 12pm eating their lunch, and I walked in and said listen 'you lot don't eat again until all the players are off the pitch'. And I think Matt (physio) caught me and said that's a bit harsh, and I said no, cos I want them sitting round the table when all the players are in too (BA, 33, 42).

Various methods of inclusion were deliberated over as to how injured players could be involved and with purpose. Although injured players might perceive themselves to be in a different environment, no longer the competitive daily training environment, maybe deductively it could be viewed that by creating an environment for injured players to compete and achieve success (eg. mastery of the environment) this would help to maintain levels of PWB.

Player development and coach feedback were addressed in terms of the general motivational climate provided within the environment. There were specific themes that were seen as able to have a significant effect and that would need to be managed to fully capitalize on player development. The winning and losing of games was perceived to be important. Bill and Richard discussed the success of the academy in different terms. They based the success criteria on whether players made it to first team football, whether that be at our club or another was viewed as successful in terms of professional football.

The above flow of conversation led to the learning environment being discussed at length. Different practitioners clearly held different beliefs concerning player development on the social environments that players were exposed to and on the external influences that were out of our control. Between now and the next meeting practitioners were requested to reflect on the following; the routine of debriefs, optimising physical recovery (fitness and conditioning weekly plan), to consider an alternative programme for injured players and to think over aspects of induction that could be improved for better preparation.

At first I got the impression that the practitioners expected, to a degree, and possibly wanted, the meeting to be led by theory. For example, that I would maybe present them with the knowledge of where we need to improve practice and that based on previous literature and studies, this is what has been done before and therefore we will replicate this approach and so forth.

JR: Vicki, you're the one that's looked at this Vic, so you should be telling us.

VT: To do with...

JR: You're the one that's looked at this to do with well-being and physical and mental soundness, you should be telling us, you've gone in, and you should be saying 'well listen these aren't physical specimens and these aren't mentally sound, injured players are pissed off... and not getting treated right'.

VT: Well I'm sure at every club injured players are always going to feel excluded but its to the little extremes of when you say hello to them on the corridor and you know different things like that that are going to impact.

(JR, 34, 17)

Although I felt privileged that the staff would trust my input to that extent, I realized it was my job to help illustrate further how we *were all* participants within the action research process, we all had knowledge, both craft and professional knowledge, and therefore this cycle of reflection would be on-going and draw from all our different experiences.

I had felt that SWB was often discussed in more general terms when considering player well-being, however I sensed that it was maybe possible to identify the greater significance of PWB throughout more specifc scenarios that came up in discussion. In practice terms, there was a natural tendency for the narrative to drift towards PWB matters. I started to recognize themes developing that appeared to logically reside with the six components of PWB and so as a result, it did not seem forced (in any deductive sense). Certain things that were being discussed seemed to immediately resonate with aspects of PWB, I sensed this to be a significant development, one that might signal how the action research process would unfold in both practical and theoretical terms. As someone who was attempting to drive change, I began to question how theory was of use

to me. *What could it offer me? What could it offer the practitioners? Could I form a strong case to present PWB to the practitioners?* I was increasingly confident that PWB was a theory that the practitioners could grasp and utilize accordingly, one they might easily incorporate into their own practice.

The deductive analysis processes (see data file) encouraged this association with theory, an association that was not concrete, more flexible and tentative. Overtime these associations became more convincing with repeated exposure. It seems commonsensical to say that anyone can see a good day from a bad day and it is unlikely that a good or bad day in isolation will impact unduly on macro-themes housed with the well-being literature. So, psychologist or not, this does not mean that I feel able to say whether a person has a well-being problem, such decisions cannot be made in an instant. However, I can see when a person has a good day from a bad day, and (over-time) I am able to see *patterns* in people. At that point, it seems more viable to discuss their well-being, following repeated exposure.

Whilst the well-being literature provided a framework and structure that the practitioners appeared happy to follow, I also felt that the action research literature supported my needs, in terms of guidance and confidence in judgment when attempting to facilitate the practice change process. I had doubts. Particularly throughout the initial stages of the process when trying to gauge the level of the first meeting and how best to conduct it the first meeting, hoping to keep a sense of openness and flexibility to this approach.

Practitioners agreed to consider areas of practice noted in Table 4.3. However, now the first meeting was complete, I was left questioning... *the role of theory? What role does it play? And inevitably, what role WILL it play? This research is just not about me identifying the theoretical threads embedded in the narrative, so how does this help me, to help them?* I had to be mindful of the meaning and utility of theory throughout this process.

Table 4.3 Academy Practice Box (1)

Action points to academy practice:

Key areas discussed

- ✓ The role of the coach and player relationships

- ✓ Reasons to have a day off in the weekly training timetable

- ✓ Injured players and inclusion

- ✓ Reasons to have a structured programme

Areas of practice considered

- ✓ To inform player expectations for better preparation, long-term planning for induction next season

- ✓ Adhere to a structured programme that is flexible to meet player needs, in particular attending to physical and mental recovery strategies eg. Debriefs and structured down-time

- ✓ To include injured players, keeping them involved in and around the squad wherever possible and opportunities to continue learning

Relationship to theory/AR

- ✓ Exchanging ideas on craft knowledge in practice that could be introduced as part of a revised induction process next season, can be deliberated over and implemented as a result of the review process within collaborative group meetings

  Linking craft-knowledge and daily practice to professional knowledge (psychological well-being)

- ✓ Adding structure to the programme will help support the purpose of physical and mental recovery strategies that in turn may benefit player subjective and psychological well-being

- ✓ Opportunities for injured players to continue learning may encourage self-acceptance, whilst keeping them involved and in contact with coaching staff and team-mates will help to maintain positive relations and subjective well-being

Back at the training ground

December 7th...
We had an early start, the team bus left at 7.15am; we were playing away at Sunderland. Steve wasn't going to be at the game as he was travelling away with the 1st team. This would be a new experience to the players, as Steve had never missed a U18 game. Andy took the team in his absence.

We arrived after a long journey, even so the players still appeared lively. Andy and I observed the warm-up. It was strange, the atmosphere felt different, less tense, the players appeared more relaxed. Andy handed over warm-up responsibilities to Nicky Webb. As we stood and watched, Andy quietly commented "... the players seem to have the weight of the world lifted off their shoulders". I had to agree, they confidently knocked the ball about, seeming to play with a degree of freedom. Following the warm-up, Andy sent the boys in and delivered the prep talk in the changing rooms. Andy put ownership on the players for their own performance and what they aimed to achieve. The coaching style and delivery of information completely contrasted to that usually given by Steve, and what the players' were used to. Andy gave instructions in a calm manner; he used clear and simple words to put his message across. He knew the players had a point to prove in the absence of Steve and used this as motivation.

During the game I sat on the bench. Three of the subs went to warm up behind the linesman. Sam stayed put watching the game. Curiously he looked over and asked "Vic,

why do you think we're playing better today?" I hesitated to answer and in doing so deflected the question back to him, "Why do you think they're playing better?" He paused before saying "I think its different cos Steve's not here, the lads look like they're not as bothered... like scared of making mistakes, they're just playing and getting on with it, do you know what I mean?" I understood what Sam was trying to say, although I was unsure as to whether it would be damaging for the players to attribute performance to the absence of the coach! Andy's coaching style was noticeably different to that of Steve's. From the way he conducted himself during the game, to the feedback he gave at half-time and at the end of the game, it was constructive, encouraging players to take credit and responsibility for their own performance and ultimately the result. We won 2-0.

The following Monday, I had a one-to-one with Ben. I'd noticed a change in his behaviour and attitude, the way he conducted himself was reflected by his reaction to disappointment; his frustration more noticeable and evident in his body language and tone of voice. His short temper was directed towards other people, in particular to those associated with the incident at college. Furthermore, his frustration was greatest when in the presence of certain players, that in his eyes, trained below the group standard. Ben believed training standards were sloppy and he didn't want to take his scholarship for granted.

I spoke with Steve following Saturday's game. As he reflected on the result, he appeared flat... "I feel it was because I wasn't there. I obviously have this effect on them, that when I'm not there they can relax". There seemed to be a realisation or a presumption

that the long awaited result had been achieved through the absence of Steve. I was

puzzled that Steve identified 'himself' as being the contributory factor, admitting that he

knew the players were unable to relax in his presence.

If he knew this and recognised his approach was somehow debilitating to performance,

would he not want this to change? ...maybe he is losing heart.

Steve went on to say... "In the debrief on Sunday Jamie Cohen dug a hole for himself but

I laughed it off, when he said "we just did what we wanted to do". Cos there was actually

more responsibility for them to make decisions. Maybe it'll have the same effect tonight

or it'll prove if it's one-off or not". As a result, Steve intended to make himself scarce at

the youth cup game that evening. I was confused as what he hoped to achieve by this...

Will Steve's absence be noticed by players?

The conversation continued. Steve seemed bitter (about the current situation with the

club) although I couldn't help feel that he had created his own predicament. He

commented about the players, in particular Jamie Cohen... "If Jamie Cohen plays well

whilst I'm not there, then I'll know he's not a player, he'll never be a player". I

understood that Steve was trying to make the point that to be a player you have to be able

to play under pressure and in front of anyone, in any environment. However, I could not

understand how a player could be written off so easily, Jamie is (supposedly) still

developing and it seemed odd that if Jamie did perform well then Steve would dismiss it without wanting to investigate reasons why. It was a no-win situation for Jamie.

Steve deliberated over mentally strong vs mentally weak players. He believed those that relied on or needed positive praise were the mentally weak players, "players shouldn't need to be given confidence, they should have it... it should be in them already, they can't rely on other people to give it to 'em".

December 10th...FA Youth Cup

Pre-match team talk was focused on results, going out there and giving them a game.

Danny came in late. Steve stopped in his tracks and watched Danny walk in and sit down. "Where've you been?"

"Er, I'm in new digs and was getting a lift", (Danny had a new landlady).

"What, can she not tell the time?" From the stern tone, no answer was required. Steve continued with the team talk, covering individual jobs and what not to do.

At half-time the players went back into the 1st team changing rooms, each player took their seat. There was silence, no one spoke, some heads were down, whilst others looked ahead anticipating feedback from Steve. Every player was singled out for poor performance, apart from Jamesy who had played well so far. Steve pointed at Ryan Jacobs... "Are you ill?" Steve had clearly expected more from him, implying that surely

he must be ill to have given such a poor performance. Ryan looked up, like a rabbit in headlights; he shook his head "No".

"Well is there any chance of doing something out there".

Ryan was the youngest player in the squad, 15 years of age, he'd come up from the U16's a couple of weeks earlier to sub for the U18 bench. This was his first experience playing in the youth cup and having to perform on the big stage in front of a crowd at the stadium. Given his age, it didn't seem fair to me that Steve had challenged him in such a way.

Steve moved on to address the team with technical and tactical errors that had been made in the first half. The bell rang to indicate it was time to go out for the 2nd half, "they will beat us if we don't step up to the plate. You're better than them, so go out and show it". We won...

At full-time, everyone headed back into the changing rooms. As we all piled in, Steve stopped abruptly, "What the fuck are you doing?" The question was directed at Ben. "I thought I could come in and get a shower".

"Oh right, you just do what you fucking want then, don't bother about the game. You're a fucking joke". Following Ben's substitution he had gone in to the changing area and got changed without permission, and we entered he was in the changing rooms having

already showered. Fortunately this did not escalate into conflict or a further argument as Steve wanted to concentrate on giving feedback to the team, so he quickly turned his focus to the rest of the squad.

Steve was clearly annoyed. His feedback to the team expressed his disappointment and frustration in performance. He then gave individual feedback, highlighting those who'd done worse than others. Again, his thoughts came back to Ryan, "I don't care if you're only 15, you won't fucking do it again cos that's the second time you've fucking done it". Steve was frustrated that Ryan had underperformed. He felt that this was now proven to be more than a one-off, in his eyes, Ryan was not meeting performance expectations and this was deemed unacceptable.

As I drove home that evening, I reflected on Steve's post-match feedback to the players. It dawned on me that all preparation leading up to the game during the week, had been result-focused, yet post-match feedback was focused solely on performance, surprisingly making no reference to the result! I also mulled over Steve's behaviour towards Ryan. *Why single-out a 15 year old? Was it really fair? And to what cost?*

The game debrief took place the next day. Steve took control of the 'intended' open forum to reflect on the game. I noted down his comments when speaking to the players:

- "Players should set high standards and ensure these standards are maintained for every game. We only just did enough to beat Northend"

- "Level of consistency no matter who we are playing, rather than being up and down depending on the opposition"

- "Adapted well to shape – midfield need to switch, open out more"

- "Decision making at times could have been better eg. Not afraid to get on the ball"

- "Generally decent performance"

- "Believing that we're going to get on the end of things... habits"

- "Need to be more effective on set plays"

- "On occasions kept the ball alive even though didn't get a shot"

- "Be confident that shape allowed us not to concede a goal and that we can create chances"

Steve presented the players with his view on the game, addressing key points. Although I felt the players welcomed this contact and further reflection on the game, I was slightly agitated. The debrief appeared to be coach-led and not player-led as originally intended when we had discussed the purpose behind conducting debriefs, in the first meeting. As a result, when Steve opened it out for the players to express their thoughts and opinions, it fell flat. Players seemed reluctant to contribute. When comments did come forward they were generic in nature..."We believed that we would score (going out for 2nd half)" and "the majority of players seemed composed throughout the game".
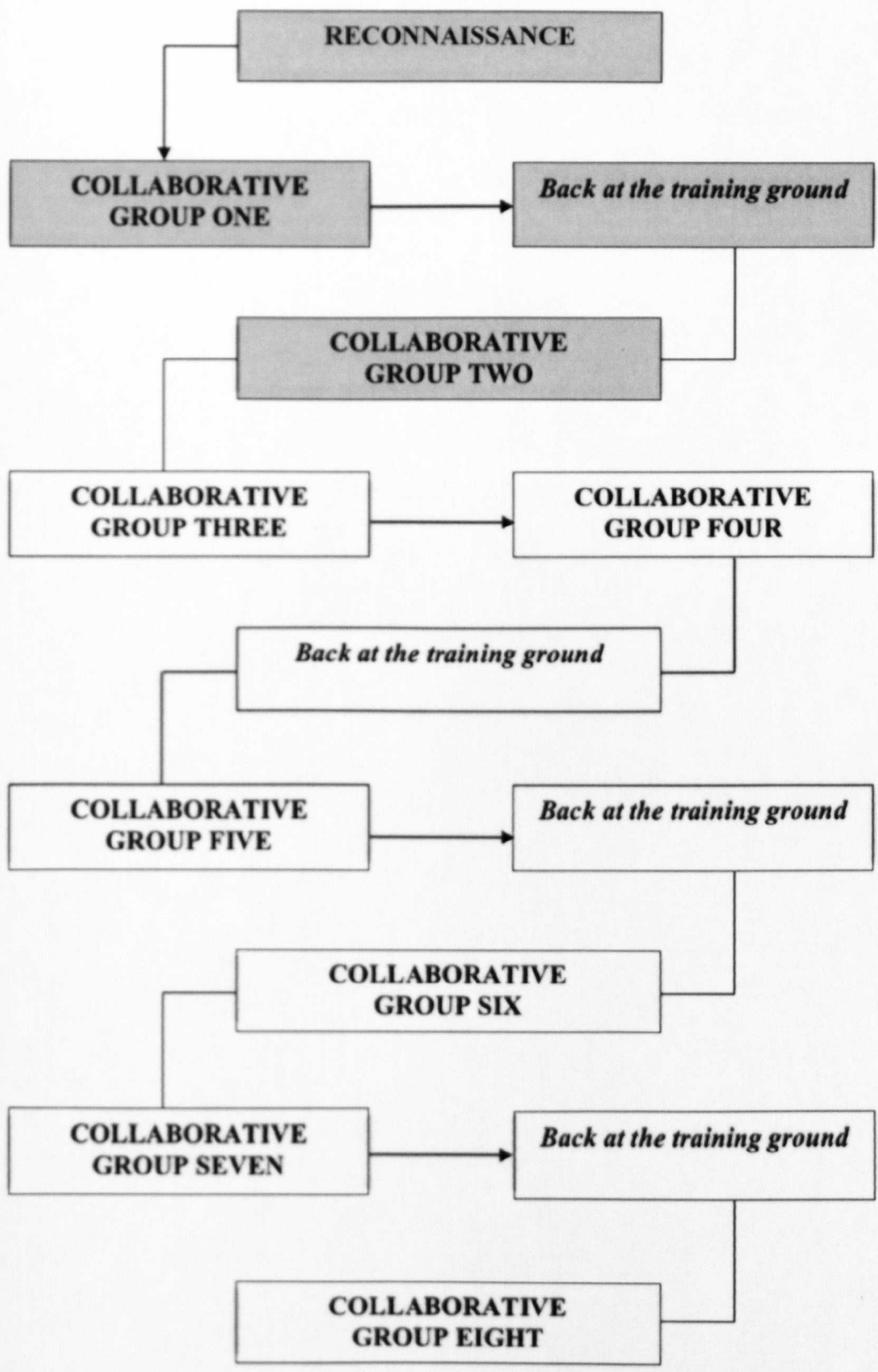
Figure 4.2 – Map Meeting 2

4.4.2 Collaborative Practitioner Meeting Two

Practitioners present – Bill, Steve, Jimmy, Matt, Richard, Rob and John

Since the first group meeting, I had asked the practitioners to think over the three themes

that I had initially proposed to run with, and to raise any additional or supportive points

that may be worthy of consideration to practice. This had seemed like the useful starting

point. I summarized the key points from the first meeting, in an attempt to remind

practitioners of stand-points taken and where we had left matters ready for further

discussion and debate. *So, any further thoughts or ideas?*

Recovery was the first topic on the agenda for discussion and differences in opinion

began to surface, even in the early stages. Steve appeared to question the players'

commitment to performance and their desire in wanting to succeed. He believed that

some would be unaffected following a bad game, therefore mental recovery was not an

issue to those players. However, Matt disagreed with such comments, he acknowledged

that some players' behaviour after a game may reflect otherwise but that all players

would feel it from the game, they would just show it in different ways.

> *SJ: You know if they've had a bad game they'll have forgotten about that in half*
> *an hour, some of 'em. They'll have forgotten about that when we're 15 minutes*
> *on the coach and on the way back from wherever.*
>
> *MC: Do you really think?*
>
> *SJ: Absolutely.*
>
> *MC: I mean I know some of 'em slip off afterwards and have a giggle and that*
> *sort of thing. But I think the hangover's a bit longer than that even, even for our*
> *less disciplined players ...*
>
> <div align="right">*(SJ, 47, 5)*</div>

To engage practitioners further in the case for debriefs when considering mental recovery, I read aloud the quote from a player focus group taking their views on debriefs into account.

> *"you know then, when you go through the debrief what you've done right and what you've done wrong and that you can improve on things then throughout the week and use that to work on". (Player focus group – see Appendix 2)*

I explained this as a positive and suggested that players can obviously take that feedback forward and use it, in order to improve, along with increasing their confidence in the environment, such information might provide them with purpose in training having specific goals to work to. Finally I suggested that it may encourage coach-player dialog, in that they may seek out the coach and ask further questions.

The success of debriefs was then discussed. I felt slightly relieved to hear that Steve had found debriefs helpful to the recovery process.

> *SJ: I think they're very, I think they've been a success (introduction of debriefs). Just the fact that you do finish off that Saturday game with a debrief and let them have their say like, the only thing for me is that it's just the same ones who keep talking all the time. I'd like the other ones to open up a little bit (SJ, 42, 11).*

It was also encouraging to me that all practitioners were involved in the discussion, willing to hear different ideas (to some extent) and having an input themselves. This was promising for the early stages of the second meeting, and for the action research process as a whole.

The second meeting had gone well, a steady progression on the first meeting. With all practitioners focusing on matters that had originally arisen in the reconnaissance phase during the first six months of the season, it was reassuring to observe their enthusiasm and eagerness to engage.

Different views and ideas were put forward without hesitation, which I saw as a good sign. All the practitioners were able to contribute their thoughts and opinions freely in an open forum. Nobody seemed to be holding back, although, I had sensed that practitioners were overtly aware that the meeting was being recorded and maybe as a result used less cultural language! Usually the use of such language would ebb and flow, especially when all in the same room together.

I paid particular attention to the group dynamics. There was a noticeable clash in view points between Steve and Jimmy. Similar to the first meeting, I had sensed slight friction between them at times as their views often differed.

SJ: I just think you need to say 'alright we're putting Saturday's game to bed... just gag Nicky Webb, Max... and say what d'you think the rest of you?' Cos they just sit and... Jason Davenport stands up all the time and talks, which is good. The rest of 'em like, your Danny's and whatever don't say ought.

JR: Could you prompt 'em?

SJ: I do prompt 'em. I go down them individually and say 'what do you think?'

JR: Tell them or prompt 'em?

SJ: 'What do you think? What do you think?' (as if speaking to the players)

JR: But I mean, could you be more specific in terms of saying 'how did you feel about, you know situations in the game?' (see SJ, 43, 33)

Initially I had put this down to their job roles, with Steve fronting up the U18's and Jimmy leading the U16's along with overseeing the U9-14 squads below. However, as the meeting progressed (and also as a consequence of my observations from the reconnaissance phase) I quickly came to realize it was not simply a case of them defending their own practice. They appeared to have very different views on player development (different philosophical standpoints) and what it entailed. Jimmy's ideas appeared to focus mainly on the learning environment and how practitioners seek to improve performance, whereas Steve was, as noted before, more results-oriented, and placed huge importance on match outcomes.

JR: So I think it's vital that we talk within a group but you've also got to assess the individual cos its youth football and the winning results and stuff like that, creates a better atmosphere but you create a better atmosphere instead of being ego orientated make them task orientated and then you've got the likes of Nicky Webb improving his game and feeling a better player. So it's not down to I only feel a good player when we win, because the supporting players round him possibly aren't going to make him feel that good, cos they're not going to win that often (JR, 48, 40).

As these counter philosophies were voiced I began to realize that a disagreement or confrontation within the collaborative group meetings seemed more than likely. Maybe I should have seen this coming, maybe it was inevitable, not everyone was going to see eye-to-eye all of the time. At this point I had started to wonder if practitioner friction was actually a useful part of the action research process, particularly within such a highly pressured environment where opinions mattered, and after all, I was challenging the practitioners' on their own practice! The meeting had provided an open forum for debate and reflection, and I could not have really expected cozy agreement.

In the meeting, there had been numerous references to last season. Comparisons were made to player interactions within the team, along with performance and results. This may have seemed appropriate (learning from past practice) as to what had previously worked well and what had not. However, from season to season the team changed, as did the players, therefore team personnel and personalities that made up the team would differ and present the practitioners with something new to work with. Potentially this presented new problems for the practitioners to face; in that sense, reflecting back could also be flawed if past personalities dominated over strategy.

Key points arising from the meeting addressed the player group dynamics, as cliques appeared to be forming. Also feedback was considered as a process that could determine levels of SWB within the player group. Another area of debate, over reasons for the players to have a day off and rest, generated lively exchanges between Matt and Steve. Although, it must be said that the majority of other practitioners agreed a day off was needed for mental and physical recovery. Flexibility and variety to training, along with allocated time slots for debriefs, irrespective of winning or losing, performance over results although the importance of winning had to come from the players mentality (SWB). At this point, practitioners were alluding to SWB, however I had now begun thinking more in terms of PWB; within practitioner conversation, there seemed to be a pragmatic connection between the components of PWB and reported practice.

Steve had raised questions over the integrity of the players, he didn't believe that losing hurt them. This possibly led to his reasoning for placing little importance on the players

needing mental recovery following games, although he had expressed value in conducting debriefs. I had a growing concern that Steve was not buying-in. If he was the practitioner that had the most contact with the players and also dictated the timetable, then, everything that was agreed round the table in the collaborative group meeting may not be adhered to or carried out in unison. *Surely this would hinder the action research process as there would not be a smooth transition from one cycle to the next? And how would I get Steve to willingly contribute?* I related this to Drummond and Themessl-Huber (2007) as they acknowledged that the cyclical approach was identified as one of action research's key characteristics, yet applying the cycle in practice could potentially be deemed a significant challenge for most researchers and practitioners.

Similarly, Grant (2007) had echoed the same sentiments. I began to realize that maybe the incident with Steve early in the season, had been a wake-up call reminding me that action research is a human process that involves emotions and day-to-day dilemmas on a varying scale... *should I have thought it would ever go smoothly?*

Furthermore, reasons to conduct and improve the debrief structure were deliberated. Debriefs were spoken about positively and so far deemed successful. All staff gave input in suggesting ideas for how to get other players to open up in debriefs. Debriefs were perceived to encourage others to voice their opinion, as this would not only facilitate learning and understanding, but also aspects that may contribute to player well-being.

Practitioners had suggested that the regularity of the debrief should be consistent, whether the team won or lost. Therefore proposing a consistency in debriefs, which was perceived as an important part of mental recovery via means of reflection, and encourage player self-acceptance within the environment, providing players with the opportunity to consider both the positives and the negatives of match performance.

Again going back to a point raised in the first meeting, it was a natural assumption from Matt that Sunday be classed as a day off for the players. Although Steve believed physical recovery could be addressed on Sunday with the players coming in as this would then allow the new week to start on Monday in preparation for the following game.

> *MC: Well, if they play on Saturday and I assume you're talking about having Sunday off, and then coming in on Monday and doing the debrief...*
>
> *SJ: I would er... in an ideal world, Sunday would be the time to go and bring 'em in and while its still fresh in their minds a little bit. But as regards that, if Monday's the time we're going to do it then, then recovery goes out of the window a little bit doesn't it, cos its 24hours after.*
>
> *(see MC, 45, 21)*

Disagreement occurred between Steve and Matt/John, as Steve felt that the players could not be trusted to use Sunday appropriately as a recovery day. It was apparent that Steve was uncomfortable placing responsibility and trust with the players, yet how could player autonomy be developed if they were not surrounded by an environment that encouraged them to make their own decisions.

After considering different methods to learning, I linked this back to a point mentioned in the first practitioner meeting, regarding variety to the training programme. If individual

needs and learning styles are to be taken into consideration then this might increase players' sense of environmental mastery (a PWB concept) and improving the learning environment might enhance players' ability to succeed in a given area. At the same time and whilst on the topic of individuals, it was also suggested that if one individual was perceived to do well and was supported with positive praise and feedback from coaching staff, that this form of communication might also trigger a positive reaction from others (i.e. to learn from the individuals that excel). If this were the case, then this strategy had within-it the potential to assist development of player autonomy and foster positive relations (with practitioners) through a process of positive osmosis. Unsurprisingly though, Steve had remained pessimistic at the thought of others following the good habits of individual players. He had little faith in the players to think for themselves and learn lessons from others.

Steve rarely spoke about the players as individuals and more often than not referred to them as a group. Generally he felt the players didn't care enough. I suppose he questioned their hunger to reach professional status. In fact, it was interesting to note at times where practitioner perceptions touched on objective well-being factors, often hinging a lack of desire or motivation from players as a result of their social background and objective measures, being middle-class etc.

> *I just look sometimes and think, you know, what some of the stuff that comes out and trying to get 'em going as regards enthusiasm and stuff like that, it's things what I think it should be already in kids, and it's not there for whatever reason. Whether it's a bit of middle class parents stuff like that, nice background, but they don't come in here and think 'right I've got 2 years to get a contract here. I've gotta do everything I can in that 2 years' (SJ, 48, 17).*

However, in contrast, Jimmy would often refer to the players as *individuals*, as he had felt it was important to keep a separate focus on individual players, or rather players as individuals.

> *I think we've gotta remember why we're here as well. I mean you doing a lot of, a lot of the words that are coming out 'as a group, as a group'. The youth side is developmental, we're talking about individuals (JR, 7, 28).*

It was intriguing to work so closely with two coaches that had very different perspectives on player development and their philosophy to practice, and yet again, I sensed myself relating current matters to the components of PWB, with Jimmy's suggestion for an individual focus. I automatically began to link this to aspects of environmental mastery, purpose and personal growth – maybe through a goal-setting programme. (That said – Jimmy would not discount background, and the case of Strachan (later) highlights this).

All practitioners agreed that constructive use of injured players' time would better their experience within the environment and in doing so the players were likely to become easier to manage. This provided injured players with the opportunity to continue learning whilst unable to train with the rest of the squad. I sensed that this could also give them more purpose, something specific and that they would maybe recognize as beneficial to their game. In addition, this may also impact on positive relations and self-acceptance within the challenging scenario of injury. Consequently, both Steve and Jimmy agreed to treat injured players differently, with more purpose.

There was further debate over how much responsibility should be placed on the players, particularly when first entering the full-time environment as an apprentice. It was described as a large step coming up from the U16's into the U18 full-time football environment. Although the players are encouraged to learn from each other, in terms of jobs it was suggested that there is maybe too much responsibility placed on first years when they initially come in. To engender positive relations during the induction period the buddying system was put forward, placing responsibility on the older players to over-see and help. It was also mentioned that the only difference in responsibilities, if there was to be any, should be visible on the pitch and could be related to mastery of the environment, as greater expectations should be placed on the third years as opposed to the first years.

The meeting came to a close with the final discussion indicating that responsibility for performance and results should be shared across the coaching staff and not just taken by Steve. This appeared a difficult idea to implement as Steve placed this responsibility on himself (regardless) which possibly explained his frustration and demands when the team was not performing well. Ideally, for the players to experience success independent of the result, the motivational climate would need to be more personally task-orientated (something that might also translate to a goal-setting theme) rather than group-win and also ego-orientated. In effect these changes had intuitive potential to maybe cushion and support player levels of self-acceptance, environmental mastery, personal growth and autonomy, by providing them with a purpose to train. Inevitably, sharing the

responsibility for performance and results would impact on coach well-being - hopefully in this case, Steve.

On reflection, both collaborative group meeting one and two, had gone well and could be deemed productive as the action research process had highlighted the need for change and improvement. The meetings appeared to cover a range of practice areas and the practitioners were passionate about their own work. This was encouraging to see, as, I felt, the more enthused the practitioners became in reflecting on current academy practice, the more engaged they might become in the action research process.

In deductive analysis terms it was easy enough to make numerous theoretical links to practice. However, I was mindful not to force these connections, opting instead to note possibilities and opportunities to *utilise* theory-in or through-practice.

There were tensions within the group at times, but surely it would be naïve to expect anything less. Steve appeared to take a different angle on most topics, in particular recovery as this impinged most on the training programme. Consequently there were strong views between the practitioners, and in some cases from one extreme to the other. In this particular meeting there was a change in group dynamics when Steve had to leave the meeting before the end, in order to go out and take training. The other practitioners' seemed to elaborate and extend on earlier points in his absence. So, again, people 'relax' when he's gone. When this occurred they often used Steve as an example in current practice that was driving the need for change. It was obvious to see that all other

practitioners' held similar views and that it was Steve who stood outside of the group as a whole. I related this to Carr and Kemmis (1986) with reference to the perfect speech situation (when someone feels free from coercion), as the practitioners appeared more at ease to speak their mind when Steve had left the meeting. In reality, they had expressed their opinions in the presence of Steve, however they seemed to do so in a more firm and forceful manner when he had left the room. Their views seemed more honest and unrestricted – as if a coercive force was no longer present.

As a practitioner, when making important decisions (often opinions on players) or attempting to be heard over something you feel strongly about (either about a player or practice)... *how much is based on instinct, relationships, knowing people and your own opinion on what practice might mean, and was I helping develop a new perspective via theory?... or was this something they just went along with... maybe for my benefit?*

Table 4.4 Academy Practice Box (2)

Action points to academy practice:

- Key areas discussed

    ✓ Evaluation of debriefs and areas for improvement
    ✓ Flexibility and variation to the training programme
    ✓ To provide injured players with a structured timetable

- Areas of practice considered

    ✓ To alternate the way debriefs are conducted, use different methods to challenge ALL players. This may involve changing the group size in order to create an open forum that will facilitate group discussion e.g. Sub-group reflection (attack, mid-field, defenders)

    ✓ Introduce variety to the weekly training programme, and place importance on different methods of training. Strength and conditioning work in the gym will provide players with a different challenge, whilst working alongside and learning from other practitioners

    ✓ Promote goal-setting to target individual player needs and development, to be applied in a variety of training environments, not simply on the pitch

- Relationship to theory/AR

    ✓ Encouraging others to voice their opinion may facilitate learning and understanding of team and/or individual performance, and in doing so, may contribute to player PWB, with the potential to promote autonomy, self-acceptance, personal growth, and purpose towards the training week ahead

    ✓ With a consistency to the timing of debriefs, irrespective of whether the team has won or lost, will provide players with the opportunity to reflect. Debriefs encourage players to consider both positives and negatives of match performance, therefore helping to foster player self-acceptance within the environment

    ✓ A variety to training allows players to experience a change in environment, working alongside different practitioners and so able to develop new working relationships. The change in environment may also help to nurture player autonomy. In addition, sharing the responsibility for performance and results may also impact on coach well-being

    ✓ Adopting a task-oriented motivational climate may help support player levels of self-acceptance, environmental mastery, personal growth and autonomy, by providing them with a purpose to train independent of the result. Similarly, treating injured players differently (goal-setting theme), could increase purpose, positive relations and self-acceptance within the challenging scenario of injury
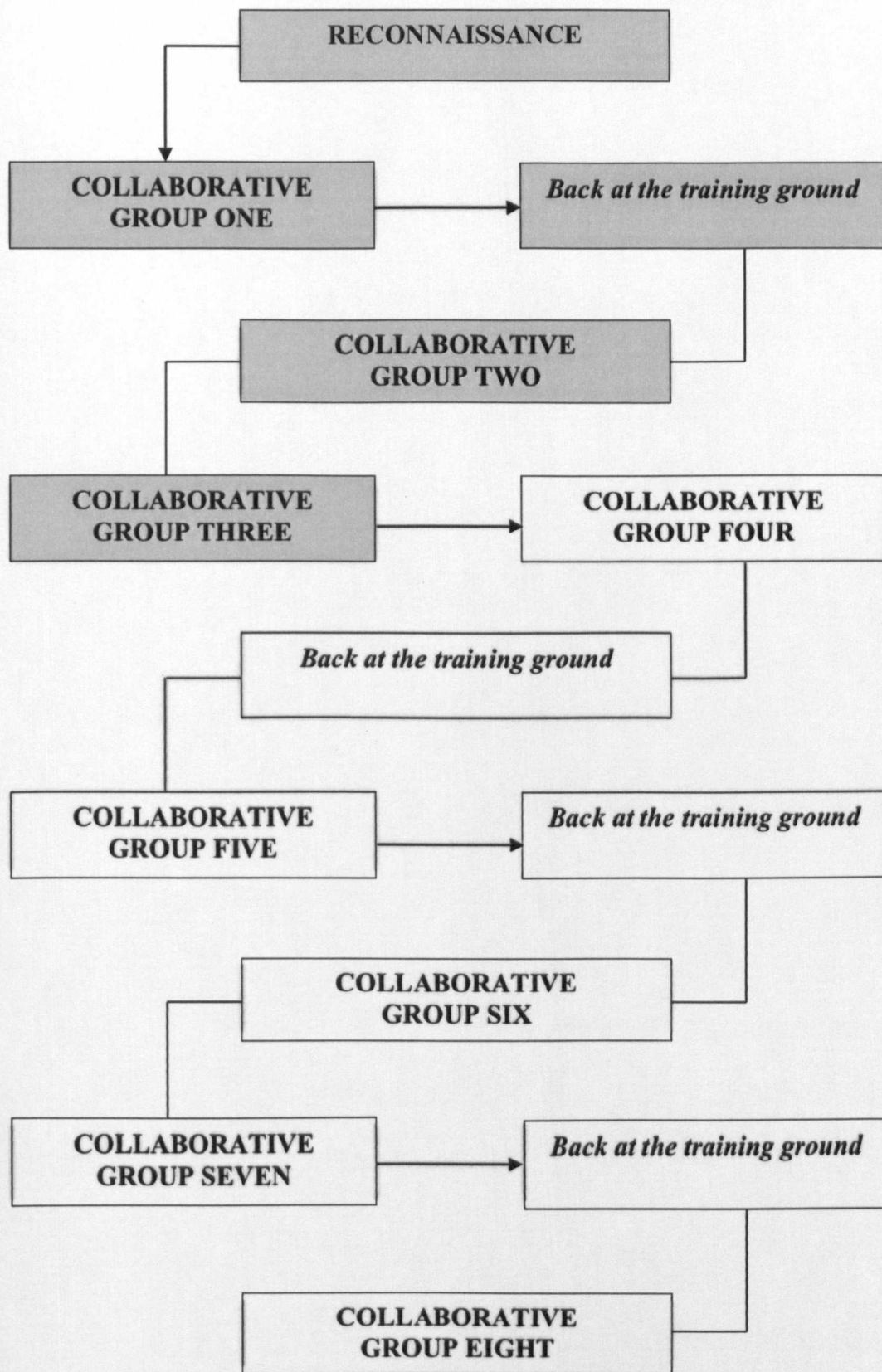
Figure 4.3 – Map Meeting 3

The next meeting was only a few days away. I was looking forward to it, whilst also being mindful of the fact that a few weeks had gone by with the Christmas break in between. I was wary that certain points may have been forgotten or overlooked.

Going into the next meeting I aimed (straight-off) to raise the action points discussed in the last meeting, to refresh key thoughts and ideas. Specifically, addressing matters around induction for the first year apprentices. I wanted to continue along the same line of debate questioning the advantages and disadvantages of treating all apprentices the same with the distribution of individual and group responsibilities. Time permitting I hoped to introduce another topic of debate, for practitioners to consider the management and transition of injured players, along with structuring their time to effective use.

4.4.3 Collaborative Practitioner Meeting Three

Practitioners present – Steve, Jimmy, Matt, Richard, Rob and John

The third collaborative group meeting was intended to re-group practitioners after a short holiday period, to review and reflect on what had been said in the last meeting, and importantly, to evaluate progression based on their perceptions of, if, or how, things had changed or improved. I opened the meeting in a pretty informal manner... "So what's been happening?"

I also used this meeting as an opportunity to give feedback from the players, and to address other points that had possibly arisen since the last meeting. The initial evaluation had aimed to reflect on the three main topics previously discussed, which addressed

mental recovery with regards to debriefs, physical recovery in relation to players independently stretching at home on a Sunday, and placing extra responsibility on injured players that involved different types of work until they came back into full time training.

I had collected player feedback with regards to mental recovery and debriefs, which reflected positively, as on the whole, players felt they had taken a great deal from it. Although not all players spoke up in debriefs, they felt it gave them a better idea of coach perceptions attached to the game. Those that did speak up felt it allowed them to be heard, to put their opinion forward, and in some cases to possibly defend their actions. Players suggested that they left the meetings with a purpose in mind, and with something to focus on in training. Steve acknowledged it to be a practical process that was of benefit:

> *I think it has… it draws a line underneath that game and they can forget about that and start moving on. So it's good that you can put it to bed. As soon as we finish that debrief that game's gone (SJ, 75, 3).*

Players had also expressed the helpfulness of one to one meetings, as this encouraged contact with the coach and allowed them to gain access to further constructive feedback directed at their own performance. Consequently, the positive feedback regarding one-to-one meetings reinforced that such practice was recognized and deemed useful by the players'.

At the time, I felt it worthy to mention the progress and changes made towards attempting to further maintain and develop players' understanding of what was asked of them on the

pitch. Jimmy agreed that player understanding had improved with the combination of debriefs, one-to-one contact and the visual addition of session plans for players to see. Changes in practice had started to happen.

> *I think that's been really good, the session plan on the wall, because it gives them an understanding... presumably in the debrief you'll say things in relation to the following game... the debrief has got to mention something about the following one and the session plans will follow on from that (JR, 75, 25).*

Jimmy started the discussion surrounding injured players. He explained that to keep injured players involved, he felt that they will need to have a purpose, therefore placing importance on the rehabilitation process and in doing so, encouraging them to remain motivated. He reiterated points from the last meeting, emphasizing the need to create a competitive environment for injured players to individually compete against themselves:

> *I also think that to keep them involved, and to provide them with extra work, can come physically - in circuit training...but make it competitive, make the injured lads have a competitive environment... it's like 'shit I've got to get back out there, I'm getting put under pressure - in the gym'. And he doesn't have an easy ride and he says 'well I'm fit now'...Or it might be that there is that competitive environment in there and doing really well, if you get someone who says 'oh I like it in here, I keep winning all the time' - what you can say, and you've got evidence to say is you've got to go outside, because you're winning everything, because you're fit enough (JR, 73, 37).*

From the deductive angle looking at PWB, maybe this could be related to the players being given a purpose whilst injured, something specific to concentrate on and work to achieve, to master within that particular performance environment, all the while remaining task-focused (Gilbourne, 1998). It seemed a logical strategy that could be put

into practice quite easily.

The issue about induction was then addressed. From previous player comments it had been apparent that the players felt that they hadn't gelled as well or as quickly as they probably had expected or wanted to, and some indicated a lack in communication at times. It was questioned as to whether there had been a clear divide between or if players had integrated straight away, and the immediate performance issues which led on from pre-season, for months after, needed to be discussed in an attempt to try and prevent or make it a better experience next time round. Jimmy believed that next season would be less problematic due to the different personalities of the players coming in. That aside, the induction process for next season was discussed, with particular reference to encouraging the development of positive relations and their surrounding social environments. The three players from Scotland came into question, as it was felt they were still yet to integrate fully into the team environment.

> *The only problem I see is the three Scottish lads - because they've not integrated this year I think they will come in and they'll be better players as well, especially Strachan, I thought he was excellent last night. We've got to manage him because he might be the one that starts edging his way through. I just think that they might come back really confident and really sort of cocky and we've just got to remember where they're going for 8 weeks. When we break up they're back over there totally.....totally different environment and then how long is it going to take him, or will he come back a different animal? (JR, 78, 21)*

So, individual monitoring could ensure they settle quickly back into the academy system. Continuing on the theme of induction, Matt took the opportunity to raise concerns regarding the changing rooms. He felt that the four small changing rooms forced the

players to split into groups, which in turn contributed to the lack of interaction between players. He also pointed out that it was more likely to be those that were new to the squad that would sit in the far changing rooms, furthest away from the older players.

....the things I've noticed around that separate the boys, the biggest one is the changing rooms. Everyone new goes into the far changing room, so the three Scottish boys have been sitting there, with usually the trialists (MC, 79, 7).

In a similar vein, Matt moved on to mention the pairings of the players when doing injury prevention. Players formed their own pairs, as they had not been told otherwise, therefore this created further barriers in terms of getting players who were unfamiliar with one another to mix.

The other one I've noticed is when I did my injury prevention in there, they used to all go in pairs and they'd pick and that was horrible so I just went 'no we're not doing that, I'll choose the pairs'. I put a Scottish boy with an English boy and then broke them all up and they developed little friendships from that because they talk all the way round the programme. But otherwise they wouldn't have mixed with each other you know. (MC, Meeting 3, p.486)

It was quickly recognized that academy practice could influence and reduce issues surrounding induction with what could be seen as minor changes, whilst acknowledging that such changes could have major impact. Changes in practice could alter and improve the induction process.

So we've got to create the opportunities for the boys to get together... (MC, 80, 26).

Incorporating the above mindset into the induction process was also felt to have the potential to be influential and beneficial to the players. It was put forward that staff were to monitor the successful completion of jobs at the end of every day. It was also deemed important that jobs were allocated to those most capable and that way the use of the buddy system would come into effect.

> *It will create a team spirit as well because they'll be waiting together for the answer to leave. Regarding jobs, I think we've got to look at that in terms of, what are the most important jobs that we want them to do. Balls, bibs and cones I think are the most important because that's daily work, so they need to be correct. We can't give that to a first year, or we give it to a first year with a second year (JR, 82, 38).*

I then addressed opinions concerning digs, and what we knew about new players coming in. As previously, we had not known what they do on weekends. For example, have they got friends or are they just sat in digs on their own? Might we put them in digs in pairs, to avoid this? Odd, (I suppose) that such matters had not been addressed before.

> *RJ: It was interesting when Ben had a problem after his injury and I asked him what he did of an evening and he said mostly spending it upstairs in his room...*
>
> *JR: I don't think they should be in digs on their own, it's very difficult for them to be in digs on their own.*
>
> *(see RJ, 85, 23)*

This reinforced the need to consider wider individual circumstances that might impact upon player well-being. Within academy practice it seemed that we lacked attention to detail when it came to the social background of the players and their personal information. How could we fully attend to the PWB of players if we didn't have an understanding, or knowledge of the environment they had come from?

RJ: I've got Strachan in on his own simply because of the family situation, but he's with a woman (lives on her own) and her family live three or four doors away. He's now part of the family, he goes to Sunday dinner at her parents. Straight away I drew on my experience of working with really difficult kids thinking - Strachan hasn't got a mother, she's dumped him, father's probably not able to cope so he needs to get into a real family atmosphere. The one up at borough was too intense but that one's perfect because he can go home and come and go, but Sunday dinners he's part of the family.

JR: And in that situation he's good on his own and he's never had that in his life. It's important that we look at that... (see RJ, 86, 6).

The meeting drew to an end. The key points agreed by all staff were to continue with the success of the debriefs and one-to-one meetings (prompted by player feedback) and to adapt the injury programme in order to provoke healthy competition.

Overall, I felt the meeting had gone well. Within the cycle of meetings so far, this one had felt like the first meeting where we had been able to evaluate and reflect on changes that had been conducted as a result of previous practical-action. Everyone had appeared enthusiastic to report their views on how it had gone for them. I took this as evidence that the practitioners were engaged within the process of practice-change. It felt good to know they were actively involved and not just merely part of the process because they somehow felt they had to be.

When reflecting on mental recovery and debriefs, both coaches and players had given positive feedback. The coaches felt it was successful and a useful tool to gage where the players felt they were at and to gather any common perceptions. The players had expressed their views on the process. They suggested it allowed them to speak up and air

their views, those that chose to anyway. They had also indicated that one-to-one meetings had helped to give them purpose and structure towards knowing where they needed to improve and how best to go about it.

The coaches had also discussed introducing different methods of practice to increase player development and learning. For example, Steve had put up session plans in the changing rooms prior to training and also the game, so the players then had something visual to look at before going out onto the pitch. I suppose it could be seen as planting the seed before having to go out and ask them to do it, providing the players with prior knowledge and expectations, and to get them thinking about the session ahead.

It was agreed that we could encourage injured players to have a purpose whilst keeping them involved and part of the squad. Hopefully this would facilitate positive relations as players would not feel as isolated from team-mates and staff. It was also suggested that creating an intra-personal competitive environment may help to sustain motivation when injured, as it would give players a purpose to master the environment whilst developing task-oriented skills. For example, they would be their own competition, doing better in the gym or running than their previous session.

It was acknowledged that there were different personalities to contend within the academy players and this also included the different social environments they may come from and potential issues that may arise from this. It was discussed in detail and recognized that players in digs may have very different issues compared with players that

live locally at home with their parents. No circumstance was necessarily viewed as more difficult than the other, simply that each would likely consist of differing matters.

From the last meeting, induction was revisited and ideas progressed. All staff noted that the changing room layout was problematic and prevented interaction between the players, and possibly helping to create/form clichés or sub-groups. Matt had made reference to injury prevention and outlined that, with awareness and attention to detail, he was able to manipulate the pairs/groups of players during the session. In doing so, this highlighted the need to do the same in other areas when deemed appropriate and looking to improve player positive relations between their peers.

Table 4.5 Academy Practice Box (3)

Action points to academy practice:

- Key areas discussed

  ✓ Positive player feedback on debriefs and one-to-one meetings with the coach

  ✓ Task-focused environment for injured players

  ✓ Induction and team-bonding

- Areas of practice considered

  ✓ To create a more competitive environment for injured players within the rehabilitation setting, promoting task-focused activities

  ✓ Continue to introduce new methods of learning – session plans in the changing rooms prior to a game have encouraged player understanding

  ✓ To facilitate positive relations between players during induction, the buddy system will be introduced to different aspects of the programme. It will be applied to encourage players to form working relationships and learn from the older players eg. pairing-up in injury prevention and allocation to jobs

- Relationship to theory/AR

  ✓ Within the process of action research, there has been positive support for the introduction to debriefs and the constructive role it plays towards mental recovery following games, both for the coach and the players

  ✓ Encouraging injured players to remain task-focused is likely to support and help to sustain the PWB of injured players, in particular, self-acceptance and purpose

  ✓ The same is likely to be achieved when promoting positive relations between players to facilitate team-bonding and to improve the induction experience. As a result of this process, players may more readily… gain acceptance within the team environment, experience personal growth and with increased learning and understanding, master the environment
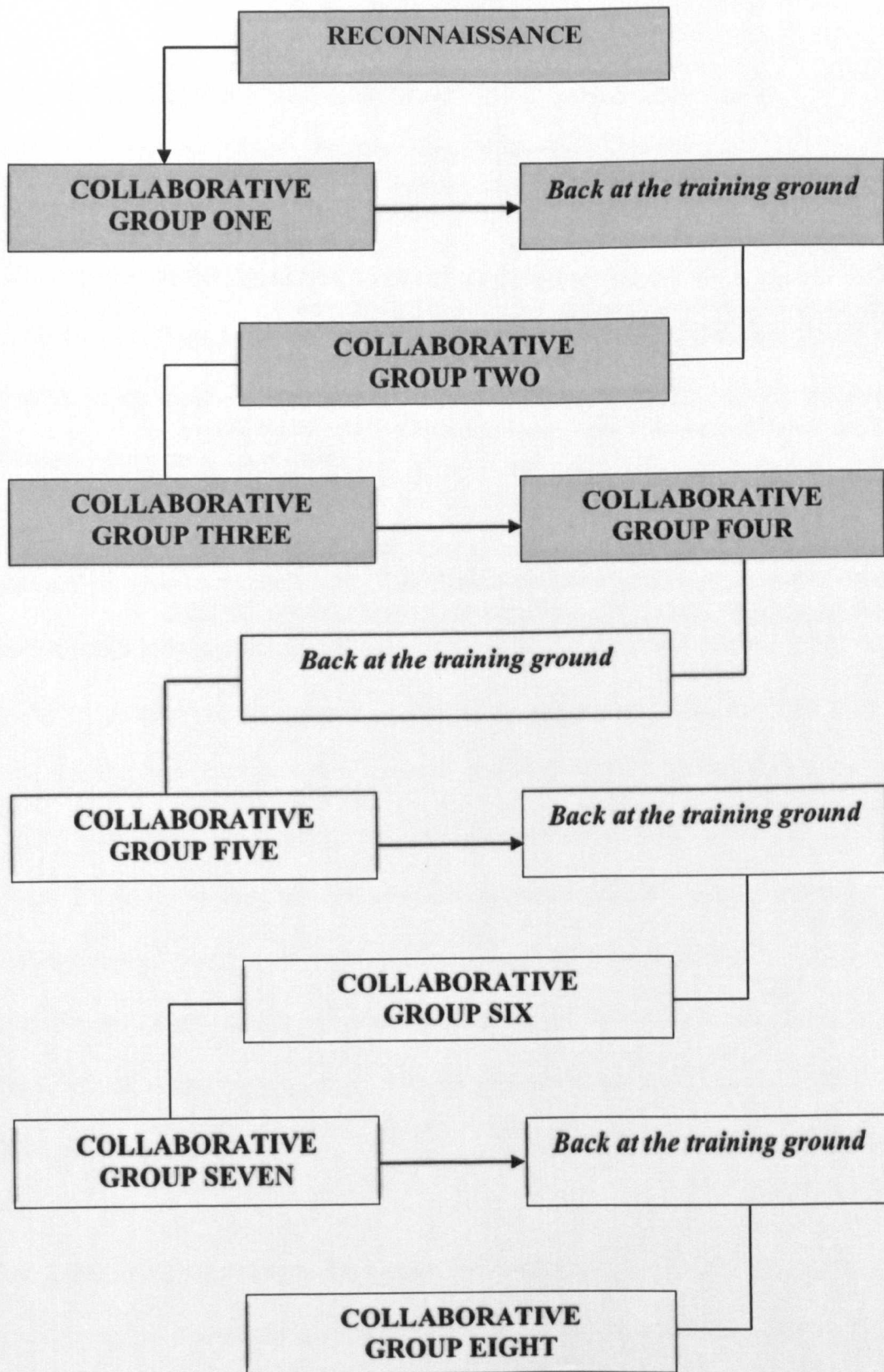
Figure 4.4 – Map Meeting 4

4.4.4 Collaborative Practitioner Meeting Four

Practitioners present – Steve, Jimmy, Matt, Richard, and Martin

The fourth collaborative group meeting took place just a couple of weeks later (April 19th). Rather than discuss specific matters that were currently going on, I wanted to address practice from a broader perspective, as the season was coming to an end I hoped to prompt thoughts towards next season, challenging practitioners to be pro-active in their thinking towards the season ahead.

I intended to give more player feedback from the focus groups in the following week. This particular meeting was aimed more at thoughts towards next season, what were staff hoping to introduce to the players or hoping to put across. With academy purpose in mind, I asked how staff felt they prepare academy players for the first team setup – whether it be going out training with the first team or actually getting to go with the squad – I asked how they felt the academy prepares them for it in that respect. I was interested to find out if there were different views on what they feel the academy as a whole prepares them for, or specifically what they felt their role, as coach, or as the physio, helped prepare them for in entering that environment. The review process was able to take place again.

When questioned, practitioners had agreed that academy players needed to physically and mentally develop in order to be able to withstand meeting the challenges of the first team environment. It had been interesting to hear Jimmy explain that he felt academy practice helped prepare the apprentices for the first team environment by putting them into challenging situations. Both Jimmy and Steve contributed similar viewpoints. Although

they illustrated similar points in a different manner:

> *So the difference is between playing on our pitch and playing on the first team's pitch is physically they've got to develop, so we put some physical preparation in for them and psychologically they've got to develop because the game's different because you're playing in front of a crowd, you're playing for points and things like that. So the training that we do, even though possibly subconsciously we are providing them with a more sterner environment the older that they get... The learning that they get, the education also tactically and the technical work is just the same programme as what the first team will do. The only difference that we have to prepare them for is physically and psychologically and that's where we've got the decision of are they ready at 18 (JR, 89, 4).*

> *We mentally challenge them so when they're in on the pro-side, A: they haven't been in an environment where it's always been 'pat on the back' and 'oh unlucky' because they might go in the first team and then get pelted from somebody stood at the side because that's how pros work (SJ, 89, 12).*

Steve and Jimmy explained the challenges that the players must contend with upon getting closer to the first team environment. They are required to be both physically and mentally tough, not only to enter and perform in the first team environment, but also to cope with the ups and downs that will come with it.

> *The difference is the really good ones can do it under pressure and the ones who are playing in lower divisions can't do that same skill under pressure. You could give somebody from the third division a skills test and then put David Beckham on the same pitch, the problem is David Beckham plays football with his foot on the accelerator all the time, the player in the third division plays with is foot on the brake (JR, 90, 27).*

Following on from this, I felt it necessary to probe the staff on their perceptions of what the players thought. How would the players perceive their skills when faced with the opportunity to train with the first team? Staff acknowledged that they knew the players were not ready or good enough yet to sustain being in the first team environment. Matt

reflected on the academy within the club and the first team setup. He pointed out that the environment could be seen to provide many positive aspects due to the close transition from U18's to the reserves and then through to the first team as a result of being on the same site and therefore staff from both ends working in a closer capacity.

This discussion led onto the perceptions of players in relation to playing for the reserves. The culture and environment at the club were perceived to play some part in how players may evaluate their own progression, as most of the academy players at some stage will be called upon to play for the reserves, due to a fairly small first team squad often stretched by fixtures, injuries and suspensions.

MC - Possibly the negative could be that they get a false sense of security by playing for the reserves when they shouldn't really be...

VT - ...And then when you think about it, yes well they are playing exactly the same football as one of the players that possibly does have that chance. You can't blame them for possibly having this wrong perception that they do stand a chance.

SJ - ...Is there anyone going to turn around and say 'listen I know I play in the reserves but I'm not good enough' - do you think they would think like that?

JR - I think they all think they're good enough, if they play in the reserves they're good enough. But that doesn't come from us because we constantly say to them, every debrief that Steve does, we're constantly saying to them you're being assessed all the time.

(see MC, 94, 28)

It was clear that there were mixed views. The players may perceive themselves to be doing well (stepping up to the reserves squad is interpreted as progression). Therefore if players perceived this as a progressive step, that reflects positively on their development, reinforcing improvement, then it was understandable for them to possibly *miscalculate*

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where they were at. Undoubtedly, this would create conflict within their self-evaluation of progression and performance. Practitioners had felt players were able to realistically evaluate where they were at, or were at least able to give a fair assessment in comparison to how close they were to reaching the first team. I sensed it was important to reflect on how the players may interpret opportunities to play for the reserves, as this could potentially create a false sense of security if players were to believe such opportunities rested solely with good performance. Generally, in an academy football set-up that is how it should be perceived, but unfortunately not at our club. With the first team squad being fairly small and having many fixtures to cover it was inevitable that players were at high risk of picking up injuries, furthermore the manager would not want to risk putting first team players in the reserves in case they became injured. Therefore the academy players were often relied upon to fill places and make up the numbers. So from my viewpoint, when evaluating progress, I felt academy players needed to keep such thoughts in mind (first team fixtures, injuries and rest) and to remain grounded and not get carried away at the opportunity to play at the next level.

Without wanting to sound pessimistic, it was still worth noting that playing for the reserves was essential to development, as the game was played differently. The players had more time on the ball and got to play alongside or against better players, all of which contributed to their learning experience. Both Matt and Jimmy suggested that the players needed more time to develop than the current two year period that they were allocated. They had expressed that in their view that this was not enough time for the players to

make the necessary step up to first team level, having to be fully developed and ready for professional football at eighteen years old was too much.

Practical matters

There was recognition from players and practitioners that players received feedback on a daily basis, and that this was done in various forms, formally or informally, and either on a one-to-one level or when in large or small groups. The process and amount of feedback given to the players was acknowledged to having improved. Jimmy suggested that the players received feedback on a daily basis, following training and games, along with additional one-to-one meetings.

The discussion returned to matters attached to induction (a topic considered at length in previous meetings). I revisited the main points that the staff intended to achieve as a result of deliberately influencing academy practice in order to meet the expectations and maximum potential gains from the induction process. Jimmy revealed the key influential factors that could be implemented within practice:

> *JR - Roles and responsibilities, rules and regulations, team building, team bonding. That would be my pick.*
>
> *VT - And those will benefit what?*
>
> *JR - They'll benefit their attitude of coming in, because they know that they've got to be in for nine o'clock, they know their weekly timetable, they know where they're going to be and where they're at so we're taking all of that sort of anxiety away from them - this is it, you're now becoming a working man. Because we've got to develop them into a man at 16, hardest job in the world, because we can't wait until they're 20 (JR, 114, 34).*

Various ideas were debated that would positively impact on the academy environment, in particular the players daily experiences, and Ryan Jacobs became topic of conversation as individual cases were discussed. It was clear staff were wary of his character, unsure of how to take him. Interestingly, Steve and Jimmy held very different views when asked to judge Ryan's character and describe what their thoughts on him. The discussion shed light on external factors that could be considered as potential impact factors on player well-being.

Table 4.6 Academy Practice Box (4)

Action points to academy practice:

- Key areas discussed

  - ✓ How practitioners help to prepare academy players for the first team environment

  - ✓ How players perceive and evaluate aspects of development and progression

  - ✓ The facilitative role of induction

- Areas of practice considered

  - ✓ To encourage and improve preparation for the players to develop physically and mentally to enter the first team football environment, they need to be put into challenging situations

  - ✓ Daily feedback in various forms to promote learning and understanding

  - ✓ Place importance on player responsibilities and team-bonding

- Relationship to theory/AR

  - ✓ The utility of theory. It was necessary to make the link to PWB components in practice. However, now that PWB components have been identified within practice, at this stage, does the theory serve a further purpose to practitioners? *With professional knowledge to hand, is it craft knowledge that will guide practitioners to improve and better their daily practice?*

  - ✓ Daily feedback in different forms may better inform players self-evaluation and self-acceptance within the environment

  - ✓ There are strong links with critical social science theory in the Self reflections, "contesting" what has happened.

Back at the training ground

Following the Christmas break, all the players were expected to turn in for 9am Tuesday morning. It was early January now and their first day back in the New Year. Routine would resume as normal and players would now be expected to 'kick-on' for the final remaining months of the season.

Danny did not come back as planned. In fact, staff doubted that he was going to come back at all. Danny lived in digs and so for the Christmas break had gone back home to spend time with his family. This was often a critical time. If players were not to come back and decide they no longer wanted to be in football full-time, this would be the time they often chose to part ways, especially if living away from home was difficult for them.

The term 'not feeling 100%' was used to describe why Danny had not made it in for the first day back. This was a vague term to use as it didn't seem to pin-point why exactly. Rightly or wrongly, I began to jump to my own conclusions. I convinced myself that it was because he didn't want to come back, as he hadn't seemed to be enjoying himself up until then this season. Moreover, I was worried he was just putting it off and I was conscious that the longer he left it to come back then the harder it would be for him to integrate back into the environment with the rest of the players.

Steve briefly voiced his concern upon realizing Danny was still yet to return to training. "What's Danny's problem? If you do speak to him can you make sure he has some structure, cos for all I know he has had 2 weeks off doing nothing". Steve was clearly

concerned over Danny's level of fitness. His comments had reminded me how, very often, the boys can be seen as a playing entity, as if they did not really exist as a normal person with feelings and a life to live.

As a result of the attention it had raised, Matt (the physio) and I decided to speak with Danny on the phone later that day. We had both raised our unease over his absence and wanted to make contact with him in order to sound him out on how he was *really* feeling and to express our concern in delivering the correct support. The phone call was only short but I felt better having spoken to him. Danny had explained that he was experiencing feelings of anxiety that were causing him slight discomfort, so he had been along to his family doctors, who had told him to rest up for a few days to see if the symptoms persisted. Danny had seemed grateful for the call. Matt and I both reassured him, things would be fine and to check-in with us on how he was getting on during the week, to which he agreed.

A few days later Danny turned up late in the morning. The others were already out training. We had expected him coming in but no set time had been given, I was worried for him. It was a nice surprise to go and greet him in reception he had a big smile on his face. That, I definitely hadn't expected. He said he felt a lot better and went on to explain that his feelings of anxiety had gone away, he now felt refreshed having been home and spent time with family. He seemed eager to want to start back training, although I did sense a slight reluctance in him to see the boys at lunch time. He opted to meet them at

college instead. So far, this appeared to be fairly positive. He had come back, seemed happy and wanted to get on with things. We would need to monitor his situation...

We were two games into the New Year. I had planned a meeting with Steve that day, this took place following a typically cold Monday afternoon training session. I had been out to watch and was now frozen! Steve had seemed in a relatively good mood, so I had high hopes for the meeting.

With the action research process in mind I know that, so far, I have had access to all areas of academy practice and felt that this enabled me to provide an accurate and more detailed picture, not only to represent the interaction and change driven by the practitioners, but also in terms of the wider impact this had on practitioners as individuals. In particular, it also seemed significant to acknowledge the impact that emotions may have on ways in which practice is understood (Meyer, 1993). Steve was an obvious example of this.
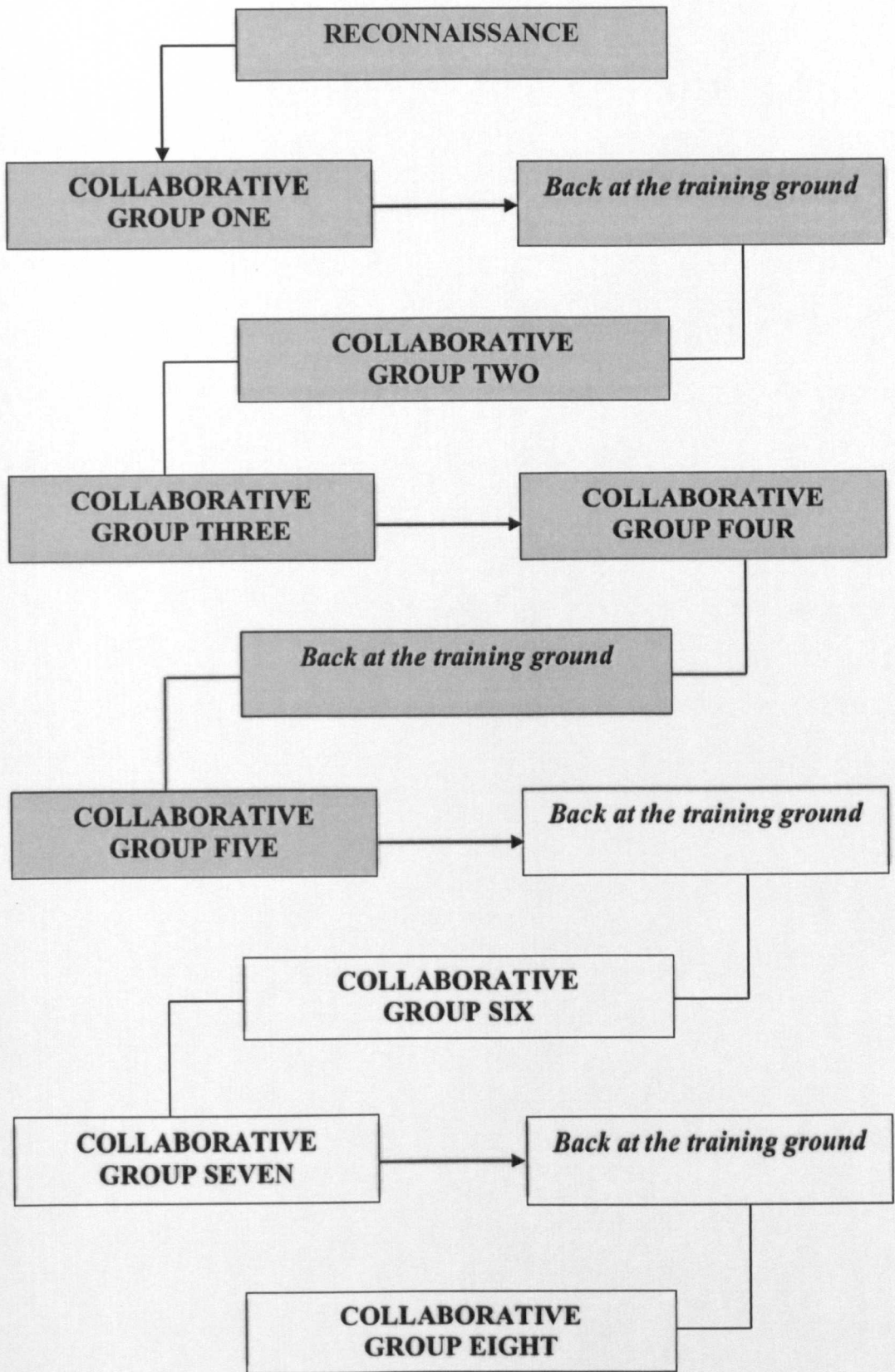
Figure 4.5 – Map Meeting 5

4.4.5 Collaborative Practitioner Meeting Five

Practitioners present – Steve, Jimmy, Matt, Richard, John and Rob

The fifth focus group was held at the end of the season. I had intended to prompt practitioner thoughts towards pre-season. In the last meeting we had addressed more general questions, aimed at what we wanted the development of academy players to achieve for the 16s-18s. In this meeting I wanted to highlight the feedback from player focus-groups (see Appendix 5) and to ask questions regarding how as an academy and in academy practice we viewed and dealt with certain issues that have occurred in the season so far.

Firstly, I addressed physical and mental soundness, as a general term. I then broke it down into objective well-being, that I felt in academy practice was what we highlighted as the main issues. For example the coaches would often refer to objective factors when attempting to evaluate player well-being. Objective well-being appeared more measurable rather than to use categories such as physical, social, emotional and material development and then activity levels.

I commented that within my role, I felt the need to attend to player PWB if and where possible, and whether that is in a one-to-one or group situation. I then went on to explain how PWB was maybe able to directly influence players subjective perceptions of their well-being. I aimed to address how, within academy practice, we looked at the two lists and how they interacted with each other. Also questioning, within academy practice, whether we could address self-determination, positive relationships, and how players actually manage their performance environment. I suggested that if so, this could be used

as the core theoretical framework around which to consolidate practice-change.

Furthermore, I explained that in the player focus groups I had addressed the six aspects of PWB directly with them. Outlining that the players had been given the terms directly and that I was now about to present them with the feedback from the players. I provided an example to illustrate... I referred to some of the general comments made by the players, one in particular being self-determination relating to autonomy. Players claimed that self-determination could be influenced by the team as a whole:

2nd years

"Sometimes it can be day-to-day."

"Depends what mood you're in. You know if you're tired or fresh. How games and training has gone. Stuff away from the ground as well as at the ground, personal problems."

"If you're not motivated then you're not going to be determined are you."

"Team determination affects your own determination."

1st years

"It's hard when you're injured, cos it's a drag, it's boring"

"When you see Nicky going with the first team that affects it, cos it makes me want to do it. It makes you want to train harder, achieve what they have"

"If you've had a bad game mentally it can affect your determination"

"When someone in your position goes off with the first team you wonder what is it that they're doing and it makes you more determined"

"Asking the coach what you need to work on"

I explained that this could perhaps be seen when some players have reportedly written off

a game this season, and as a result it has had an impact on the rest of the players on the pitch. Jimmy had responded:

> *It shouldn't be the case in the sort of football we're playing though should it? Because, development and contracts and when it's three nil down...you can still perform well in the second half can't you for your own self and your own benefit (JR, 119, 33).*

I had been somewhat nervous about this meeting, even though the meetings had gained momentum in terms of actively seeking to improve and change practice. It had felt strange going back to a theory-led approach to introduce the concept of PWB (more directly) and its six components to the practitioners. I was unsure of how this would be received and what 'buy-in', if any, that I would get from the other practitioners. If my proposal to introduce the components of PWB was not readily accepted, I had to wonder if this would then potentially complicate the process and undermine the progress and engagement in action research. Up to this point, the practitioners have willingly participated within the action research process – would I now jeopardize this?

The atmosphere was fairly relaxed, with practitioners now seemingly more comfortable in what to expect from the meeting and what was required from them. I had their full attention when explaining the concept of PWB and how it maybe appeared to fit into daily practice within the academy environment. I had appreciated the attention that the practitioners paid towards taking on board the additional information and the relevant questions that came from this helped further understanding of the notion and what it involved.

Practitioners appeared to relate easily to the notion of PWB and the components that were discussed. Autonomy was the first to be addressed and practitioners demonstrated their understanding of where this was evident in practice, and suggested appropriate examples. Practitioners believed autonomy could be related to various aspects, such as player motivation, attitude and work ethic. The effect of positive role models was also deliberated over as to whether this could influence players autonomy.

So I saw straight away - in that household there was an element of competition from the patriarch right through to the siblings. Wayne Adams wouldn't have that in his household, so what we've got to reinforce is being reinforced by Nicky's parents. Eddie is different kettle of fish because he's had to survive on his own, he's lived away from home. We all have these things in our formative years don't we? The dye is set before you go to school (RJ, 125, 14).

It was acknowledged that autonomy could be the causal factor for individual differences between players of similar talent, as although individuals may be different types of learners, their desire to learn plays an important role. The autonomy of players was also discussed in relation to individuals having different underlying motives and determinations, and that this may be dependent on their background (an objective issue) and their social support network (a more fluid notion). It was interesting to hear practitioners debate over whether there could be a link between confidence and autonomy, they were inclined to believe there was. It was suggested that as confidence grew so too could player autonomy. This highlighted practitioner engagement with a theoretical concept, aided by the addition of their own craft knowledge.

Practitioners seemingly appeared to welcome the theoretical stance on SWB and PWB and seemed to acknowledge and understand both concepts and the differences that each posed. Following further discussion they seemed able to distinguish between observations attached to SWB and observations attached to PWB, providing examples of their own to illustrate their understanding.

In my attempt to drive change, the theory had proved more than useful in this meeting. Initially I had been apprehensive, however, the practitioners had appeared comfortable with each of the terms and the way that they fit into daily practice. I had expected the acceptance of such terms to be more challenging and difficult. The fact that the practitioners were able to relate to the six PWB components, had suggested the potential viability in theory facilitating further understanding, knowledge and hopefully as a result, improvement and change in practice for the future.

In my view this meeting proved vital to the action research process. With participation and collaboration in motion, it seemed a good time to extend the theoretical stance a little more. It had given the practitioners food for thought prior to heading into a new season, therefore little action was now to take place over the summer (moving into the closed-season), yet it had planted the seed in preparation for pre-season (July) to come. In addition, the practitioners were now ready to run with the concept of PWB, they had embraced the theory and appeared keen to put this into use.

From an external research perspective, the post-positivist approach could be proposed, based on hearing PWB in the narratives that are to do with practice, and therefore resigning to the conclusion that such research is theory-based. For example, practitioners may be perceived as amenable to well-being, the language of well-being is picked-up and useable to practitioners. Similarly, Drummond and Themessl-Huber (2007) and Dick, Stringer and Huxham (2009) highlighted that theory was not new to action research, and made reference to the work of John Dewey (1916) that had foreshadowed action research, valued theory/practice integration. According to them, in the early days of action research, Kurt Lewin (1946, p. 40) intended it to contribute to 'more precise theories of social change', and also highlighted that Paulo Freire (1972) valued informed action, in other words, action informed by understanding or theory.

However, that had not been my sole intention. I did not want the practitioners and the research process to be bound by this. On reflection and with the utility of theory central in mind, I came to recognize that early on in the meeting or in the research I had wanted them, the practitioners, to adjust their thinking, whereas now I had felt I was starting to adjust mine. So I looked at their experiences, their knowledge and asked did theory have any role in helping them develop. To some extent it did... PWB had a real applied connection and utility to practice.

Table 4.7 Academy Practice Box (5)

Action points to academy practice:

- Key areas discussed

    ✓ To address self-determination, positive relationships, and how players manage their performance environment

    ✓ The important role of player self-confidence

    ✓ Adopting different learning methods has, so far, proven to benefit the needs of individual players

- Areas of practice considered

    ✓ To better manage induction and player transitions in an attempt to facilitate player self-confidence within a new and different environment. E.g. New apprentices starting their first year, injured players, living away from home.

    ✓ To encourage positive role models with valued attributes to learn from

- Relationship to theory/AR

    ✓ The six PWB components can be related to every-day practice, and as a result encourage practitioners to consider individual player needs. PWB theory lends itself to the process of action research, as practitioners are able to incorporate such factors into their own practice and monitor the effects of change. Therefore, the utility of theory serves purpose towards increasing practitioner professional knowledge and awareness of PWB within applied practice. However, beyond this point, practitioner craft knowledge accompanied by the action research process, are key to the application of methods and strategies that may bring about change.

    ✓ Seeking to improve player self-confidence may directly support player self-acceptance within the environment, as noted with second year apprentices that they appear more comfortable and familiar with their surroundings than when they were a first year apprentice.

Back at the training ground

After speaking to Jimmy, I got off the phone, the club had let Steve go. His position had been made redundant. It had seemed the events of last year were all too much for the club. I knew. In fact everyone knew. Steve had caused more than his fair share of problems within the academy set-up. But I suppose I always thought, if he was going to go then it would have happened by now, that it would have happened in the early stages. It felt strange knowing that he would not be there this coming season. I felt sad.

For the sake of the academy and the staff driving it forwards, I could understand that the unhelpful friction over the last season had potentially hindered any improvements and changes in practice when attempting to create and provide a better learning environment. Maybe this had to happen for things to move in a positive direction. Although, I still felt sorry for Steve. This would have come as an unexpected shock and I was unsure as to how he would react and cope.

As an insider-outsider, I felt torn. On the one hand, as practitioner, matters from now on may be easier to manage, less conflict and potential fireworks surrounding the process of changing practice (although I felt slightly reluctant to admit this). Yet on the other hand, as researcher, potential problems could arise in the continuity of practitioner engagement in both the practitioner group meetings, and also the action research process as a whole (i.e. Player-coach interaction and the forming of new working relationships).

On reflection, my relationship with Steve had seen some awkward times, yet I couldn't help but feel that things had progressed from where we initially started (girls don't know football etc.). Steve had also made a conscious effort to change his behaviour, or at least to change certain habits that sought to improve practice. Although Steve had found the transition difficult at times, I felt he had accepted various aspects of support. However, the other practitioners appeared to hold different views.
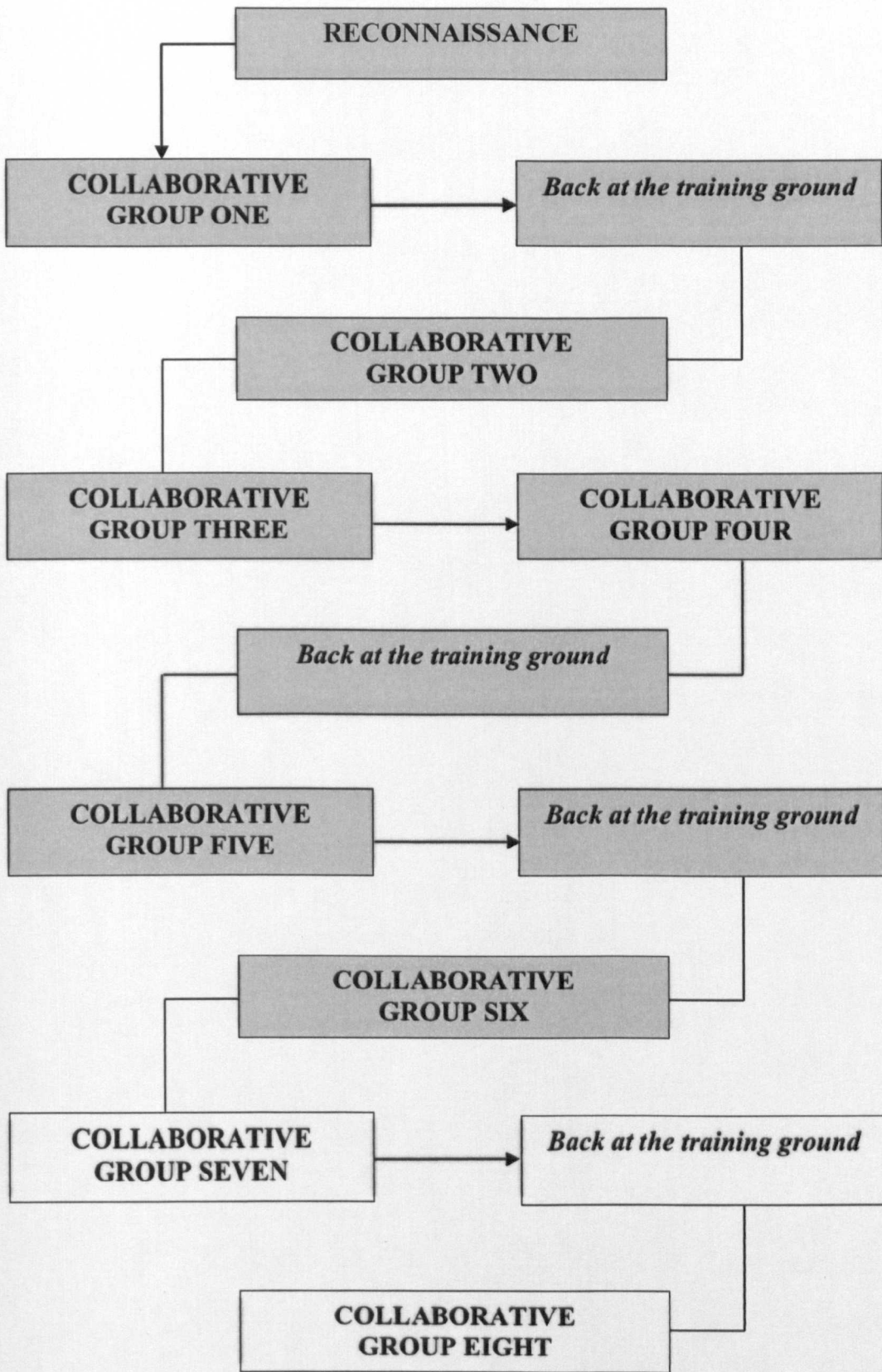
Figure 4.6 – Map Meeting 6

4.4.6 Collaborative Practitioner Meeting Six

Practitioners present – Jimmy, Matt, Richard, Rob and Martin

This was the first meeting back from pre-season. There had been a change in practitioner personnel over the closed season. Jimmy's role now undertook the duties of academy manager and U18 coach, taking over from Steve's role. As Jimmy called everyone in for the first meeting of the new season, the group dynamics were different.

During this meeting there was more direct focus on the six components of PWB and how the academy environment addressed such matters within practice. I explained that focusing on PWB enabled us to categorize certain things that took place in academy practice at the moment. In an attempt to illustrate how a player's PWB may impact on their SWB, I used confidence as an example. For instance, where a player might be pretty confident at passing the ball but not heading the ball, in practice the coach would work on all those weaker aspects in order to develop self-efficacy on a range of levels, and to have a direct impact on overall confidence when they're playing. I then related this to PWB and explained that as practitioners we might seek to emphasize personal development as a core facet of academy practice. In doing so, we can try to hit the six components of PWB that could potentially have a direct impact on overall SWB.

To start the meeting, I prompted practitioner thoughts and asked for suggestions on what they felt they were already doing towards ticking those boxes or meeting those six components within their own practice; how they felt they were addressed in academy practice at that moment in time.

JR - Personal growth is more holistic, right. They're getting a more rounded personality, whereas they're not this robotic footballer, you know what I mean? I.e. I don't mind them being ball boys, I don't mind them having a bit of banter together...they're enjoying their experience while they're here. But the education side does give them another angle towards their personality. When Strach was late because of the bus, we told him to write a letter to the bus company, stuff like that (JR, 129, 21).

Practitioners related easily to the components of PWB throughout the meeting, which reflected a similar atmosphere to Meeting five, when practitioners were introduced to the six PWB components. As a result, and now early into pre-season, practitioners made constant reference to PWB terms and used appropriate examples from daily practice that further reflected their conceptual knowledge and understanding of how the components applied to practice. Although I was pleased that the practitioners had embraced the concept of PWB, I was somewhat surprised that they were immediately able to relate this to practice, so I remained slightly cautious until I could be confident the PWB components were fully understood.

JR – I think it's important that when they go to sit in front of the manager he sees a man and not a boy. So I think we've got to provide the environment to grow up, rather than keep them down.

Look at JD, we've got problems with JD in terms of he is a difficult personality to deal with. He's got a 'bad attitude' but he's potentially a very good player. There's two things you can do, you can, as we did last year in the academy, criticize him and constantly have a pop at him. Or, make light of what he's doing, i.e. his dress, his hair. Just constant reminders and hope that he changes. I think the more you deal with him like that, with banter, without bullying him, but trying to get him on the same level as you. You're bringing him up to your level as an adult rather than talking down to him as a kid. So you bring him up. Which hopefully, in six months' time when he gets a pro, he can sit in front of the manager.

I watched him on Friday. He was in the first team in a small-sided game and he was telling people to turn, 'get hold of it', he's growing up and we're allowing

him to grow up rather than stopping him.

(see JR, 129, 35)

Rob addressed the goal-keeping situation, as unhelpful comparisons between the two

goal-keepers had appeared to cause problems, particularly as Ben (first year apprentice)

would attempt to evaluate his progress against that of JD (second year apprentice):

> *RM - I think he's like the rabbit in the headlights, he's gone from being with the boys to being on the bench for the Youth Cup, to being a full-time scholar to training with the first team. I think we've got to manage him really carefully now, because I think he could be one of them that crumbles. And I think the fact that JD's doing so well and he's maturing and he's with the first team, the gap from Ben's point of view is massive, whereas at the end of the season I think Ben might have thought 'it's not that far'.*

> *MC - I don't think Ben's all that good at talking to adults from what I've seen, so by giving him responsibility and working with me, working with you, working with Vicki, all those different people and learning how to interact with adults that'll give him a little more 'autonomy'. Hopefully then he can go sit with the gaffer and look him in the eye, shake him by the hand and get some respect from him.*

> *RM – The thing is when JD came in here eighteen months ago he was a bit like Ben, so you look at the way he's developed....*

(RM, 130, 9)

Within the group there seemed to be understanding of the possible impact that PWB

could have upon player SWB, and again this demonstrated the practitioners' ability to

distinguish between the two concepts. I felt that the practitioner narratives often drifted

towards personal growth and self-acceptance, as they seemed the most commonly

referred to. Whereas, purpose in life was reportedly harder to locate at day-to-day

practice level, and at times practitioners seemed reluctant or uncomfortable to use this

particular label. So, it seems normal enough for different aspects of the six components to

be more amenable to practice than others, some have, at face value, more utility and practical connectivity.

> *MC - With purpose in life, do you think we miss out with a few players because...I know this is really dicey but, a couple of players, second years don't have a chance in hell of getting a pro but they're doing really well at the moment and they're enjoying themselves, helping the team. But, do they still think they've got a chance of being a pro? What can you do about it? Cos purpose in life, if they think they're getting a pro, we're not ticking that box?*

> *JR - You're right but you're looking at it from a football aspect, what Vicki's looking at is like psychological well-being. So their psychological well-being is that they are doing well, they have got purpose because they're doing well. The overlap comes when we give them all the other pathways.*

> *MC - That has to be a really concerted effort. Maybe a little bit more of them.*

> *JR - It's difficult for us to give them realism, otherwise we'd never have any players.*

> *RM - You never say never, and if they carry on as they're doing now, you said they've done well over the past month, then they may be good enough for someone else. If you give them the inkling that they're not going to get anything here, would they keep going as well as they've gone in the last month?*

> *JR - So they have got a purpose, they've got a chance haven't they?*

> *MC - The best possible thing they can do is work really hard in the next 8 months, regardless of what happens. I wonder whether someone should have chats to them and say where, do you think they're going so you can start to point them in the right direction.*

> *JR - We've just got to get away from that robotic footballer, that they're thinking that being a footballer is their only purpose in life.*
>
> *(MC, 136, 17)*

I reminded practitioners that in the last meeting there had been debate about the different types of feedback and as to whether players take on board informal feedback from the coach when stopped in the corridor, as oppose to in a formal one-to-one situation. From the coaches' perspective, they believed both forms of feedback to be effective. So I

questioned what they thought the players' perceptions were, with regards to getting

feedback and how, or if, it had an impact on some of the points we were trying to address

within academy practice.

> *MC - They (players) might not have many one on ones but I think if you ask them how much feedback they've had they'll say 'I've had quite a lot of feedback this year'.*

> *JR – I have had one on ones but they've only been used when they've needed to know stuff, it's not been in a structured way, like everyone's got 15 minutes. What I've found easier is, rather than having a row with them outside, I'm better waiting until the end of the training session and bring them upstairs in here.*

> *Peter Strachan took a bit of a rollocking on Thursday.*

> *ML - But he's responded well to it.*

> *JR - Rather than abusing him in front of everybody, well, by the time I've got him up here and he's calmed down, he's all apologetic isn't he?*
> > *(see MC, 135, 18)*

There appeared to be conflict in considering when and how to give feedback, along with

confidence in mind. It was highlighted, that positive feedback was necessary to

encourage confidence, yet to keep players grounded and to avoid further conflict in the

later stages, feedback needed to remain realistic.

I began to bring the meeting to a close, I asked if there were any aspects of PWB that

they felt did not overlap, as practitioners had suggested that all six components of PWB

overlapped in some way or other. For example, self-acceptance and personal growth:

> *JR - I think they all overlap and I think we're making a conscious effort for personal growth and self-acceptance. And I think the others are done naturally.*

> *MC - The only one that doesn't fit in nicely maybe is purpose in life. I think we*

can do all the others really well but maybe we can't deliver on that. I'm not sure we're doing that as well as we can.

JR - It's difficult, I think we're starting to... purpose in life, because we're changing the purpose... But is it David Priestley and Tom Lancashire's purpose to be supporting players, without them actually knowing it? You know at the end of the two years do we turn round and say 'fucking 'el Rob you were fantastic, your reference is there and you've been great to work with'. If we give him that positive experience, he walks out of here like that. He's going to remember back to that in ten years' time.

MC - At some stage we have to start bringing them up to the right level.

JR - I think we've put in place plans to make it realistic that they might not get anything.

VT - Originally, regarding purpose in life, it may have been that the whole drive was about being a pro. If you don't get a pro there's no point in being here, whereas now it seems to be shifting to being a purpose in doing the education and the coaching.

ML - We're making a better person, not just a better footballer. I think we are making better footballers and we're taking them to their potential.

(see JR, 139, 41)

It was encouraging, especially at this stage, to listen to the practitioners and their determination to adhere to and value the components of PWB. It was clear, that they believed their role within academy practice could potentially influence players PWB and that change/improvement would contribute.

Finally, I asked practitioners if they thought we were hitting autonomy factors within academy practice. I explained that in meetings held with the players, I was able to monitor their perceptions and their response to whether, in their view, certain things had been put in place. So to draw the meeting to an end, I queried whether the practitioners would say things have changed since last season, and if so, how. This was also an attempt

to prompt their thoughts on the implementation of previous action points that were planned, or that were now in place.

JR - ...Because we're conscious of what we've discussed last year about jobs and buddying-up in the second year, I think we're doing o.k.

VT - What would you say if you had to summarize it? The key points that are different this season compared to last season.

MC - The environment's better, it's more positive. The kids do have more responsibility, critical to autonomy, also they are better players in terms of personality.

VT - Two major things we discussed about recovery issues and inductions issues, do you think they've come into play?

MC - I think the problem last year was that recovery was being overrun and overloaded so recovery was pretty much impossible, it's not so much a concern now. Our approach is not particularly scientific now, we're just saying they need a rest after they've worked hard and I don't think they were getting that initially.

VT - Regarding induction, do you feel you've noticed anything in the lads if you compare it with last season?

MC - No-one complains about sore legs, injury rate's been a quarter, I think it's 4 or 5% for the first month and I'm pretty sure it was 22 or 24% last year. That's amazing, 4% as opposed to 20% and they're not complaining about their legs being sore so they're going out with a view that they want to run hard as opposed to last year when they were on the table moaning about their legs. No-one really complains about the running now. As long as you think they're fit enough (to the coach), that's absolutely spot-on.

Induction, pretty good?

JR -I think they've had more meetings letting them know. We had a meeting on the Sunday before they came in on the Monday, they've all had a copy of roles to jobs and responsibilities. They've now got the rules.

Can I suggest another reason why I think it's going ok? They're getting to deal with different people. So they're not bored of me and they're not bored of you, or the rest of the staff.

(see JR, 142, 26)

Overall, practitioners seemed in agreement that things had changed since last season, with a large focus on the academy environment. The environment was described as better and more positive, more conducive to player development and their individual needs. The development programme had appeared to incorporate a routine structure to the management of recovery, which in effect may be an attributing factor towards induction issues.

When driving change, the utility of theory was increasingly important, particularly when considering contextual matters, i.e. when considering PWB issues surrounding induction for goal-keepers (position-specific). Consequently, practitioners were able to rely on the six components of PWB and attach them to practice where and how they saw fit. The practitioners were able to use the six PWB components as a framework, a baseline to work from. This guidance seemingly instilled a degree of confidence into the practitioners, as they embraced theory and applied it to their practice. It seemed there could be great potential in the fusion between practitioner professional knowledge and practitioner craft knowledge.

Intuitively (and maybe even convincingly), this demonstrated the utility of theory. However, I also sensed that such theoretical perspectives would only go so far, before theory-free knowledge would begin to shape practitioner perspectives on how they perceived well-being matters within the culture of the academy, as previously indicated by Smith (2009) 'who we are is imperative to how we see the world'. Smith (2009) importantly argued against the idea that all observation is theory-laden or that there is no

possibility of theory-free knowledge. He believed that there can be no separation between the researcher and researched or the observer and observed.

In a similar vein, I deliberated over the utility of theory in terms of longevity... *Given that practitioners understand the theoretical knowledge provided, does the utility of theory ever become surplus to requirement? If the utility of theory were to be permanently on-going, was I right to assume this would then provide new implications to practice on a continual basis?* The practitioners had welcomed the challenge to take on board and apply such theoretical knowledge to practice, however I was also aware that practice was not always theory-led. Certain aspects of practice could be related to PWB theory, where the practice was already being done irrespective of newly learned theoretical knowledge. Consequently, the utility of theory then served as an informative reassurance to practice already in place.

Maybe the theory had served its purpose. The theory to practitioners has acted like stabilizers to a bike, supporting the practitioners until they became confident and comfortable to ride with the notion of well-being in their own practice. With this in mind, I felt that the action research process had now become automatic. The practitioners had embraced the theory, continued with practice and appeared to reflect without being prompted, particularly in terms of reflection-on-action. Independently they were engaging in the process of action research. I related this to Knowles and Gilbourne (2010)... "Was this a clear sign of practitioners becoming empowered within their own practice"? I felt it

was. Practitioners were utilizing their professional knowledge and craft knowledge within context.

Moving into the start of a new season, the practitioners appeared secure when discussing matters relating to PWB and the implications to practice that would occur. Everyone seemed in agreement, confident and assured that they could influence academy practice. It felt sad to admit, but with the departure of Steve the group dynamics were more positive. Only time would tell as to what impact this may have on practice and the action research process. I couldn't help but feel there was less friction. In terms of action research, the cogs in the wheel could now turn without obstruction.

> It seems clear to me now that no single person, no matter how that person is situated, can positively impact on a workplace culture, except as she engages others at the level of the practice. (Unfortunately, it appears that one person can often negatively impact on the workplace culture.) (Ragland, 2006; p.180).

I continued to think differently about theory. All the practitioners were listening and working around the theory that brought them round the table *but* the utility of the theory was surely determined by the people within that culture – interaction and relationships between practitioners, the fusion of practitioners' professional knowledge and craft knowledge within a context. I also began to appreciate the practical nature of action-research. Overtime it allows you to see how people start to react to things and/or each other, yet how people change. Who the practitioners are as people, in essence, seems to matter as much, if not more than any theoretical perspective.

Table 4.8 Academy Practice Box (6)

Action points to academy practice:

- Key areas discussed

  ✓ Evaluation of PWB components within practice – Practitioners addressed PWB components within their own practice
  ✓ Different and effective types of feedback
  ✓ Attending to personal growth and self-acceptance may play an important role to first year apprentices
  ✓ Practitioners suggest purpose in life is hard to locate or measure

- Areas of practice considered

  ✓ Feedback (formal and informal) to be given to reinforce the positives that will help to instil confidence, yet must be realistic to ensure players understand where they are at

  ✓ To gradually give the players more responsibility, for example, jobs that help master the environment

  ✓ Monitor and encourage player self-evaluation, as this may prompt or determine necessary feedback/guidance

  ✓ Help players to understand and define their purpose, in relation to where they are at. This can be done via means of short-term and long-term goal-setting.

- Relationship to theory/AR

  ✓ The action is with the subcomponents of PWB as there is a pragmatic feel, intuitiveness about them, and hard-nosed practitioners latch onto them. Maybe well-being will flow based on these aspects. Practitioners are able to use the components of PWB as a core baseline, therefore the utility of theory may act as a starting point or a point of reference.

  ✓ If the practitioners are confident and comfortable with PWB theory, the action research process is then able to accelerate. In other words, this cyclical process may grow into an accumulative process. Each practitioner is able to apply theory to practice in different ways. This accumulation of action can then be applied in a consistent direction… towards improving PWB within academy practice.

  ✓ Player responsibility may facilitate and increase levels of autonomy, encouraging players to master all aspects of the environment, and in turn may positively impact personal growth and self-acceptance. *Are we seeing that by enhancing subcomponents, that it increases the capacity of the player? (i.e. to do the business, to reach maximum potential)*

RECONNAISSANCE

COLLABORATIVE GROUP ONE

Back at the training ground

COLLABORATIVE GROUP TWO

COLLABORATIVE GROUP THREE

COLLABORATIVE GROUP FOUR

Back at the training ground

COLLABORATIVE GROUP FIVE

Back at the training ground

COLLABORATIVE GROUP SIX

COLLABORATIVE GROUP SEVEN

Back at the training ground
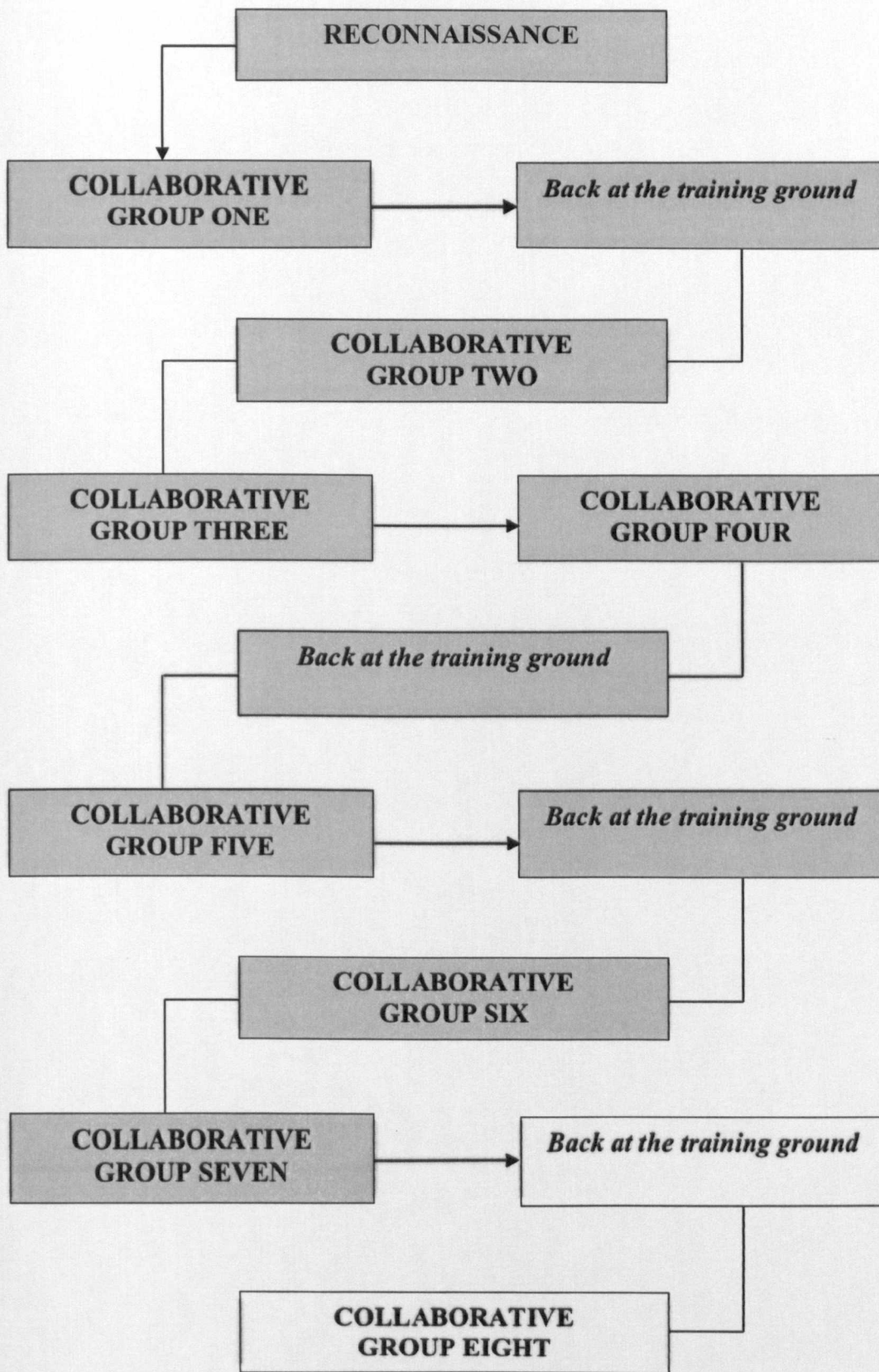
COLLABORATIVE GROUP EIGHT

Figure 4.7 – Map Meeting 7

4.4.7 Collaborative Practitioner Meeting Seven

Practitioners present – Jimmy, Matt, Martin, and Andy

It was now autumn and the seventh meeting was about to take place. Practitioners began to gather their things together, pens, pads, hand-outs and one-by-one filed into the meeting room. I noticed there was a buzz about the practitioners today. Everyone seemed rather upbeat, conversation was in full flow and banter was flying about, followed by lots of laughter. The practitioners now seemed accustomed and at ease with the formality of the meetings. It had become routine.

As the meeting started, *results* appeared to become topic of discussion. Jimmy confidently opened it out to the group with a fairly challenging question:

JR - Why are we competing this year, why are we competing? (JR, 144, 42)

Andy had pointed out that the same players were still in and around the team, albeit there were differences in comparison to last season; not only had the atmosphere improved but the team now had some wins behind them.

AR: Same players, better atmosphere and a few runs of winning games so it's gone on and gone on... I think the kids would rather play in under 18s than any other team in this club, because they're winning... David Priestley thinks they're going to win the league, he thinks they're going to win the league and he thinks he's going to be captain when they win the league. If that's what he thinks then great, but that's why there's no injuries... Not very rarely do they want to come off, like they did last year... because they're winning and to be honest I'd be the same.

ML: It's a belief in their own ability now isn't it? I think last year there wasn't.

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MC: They think they could beat anyone this year, last year...

ML: It's a belief in their own ability because they're being praised for what they're doing.

AR: I think they were going to Middlesbrough and everyone on that coach believed they were going to come back with a draw or a win, they believed that, every one of them. Last year they didn't (see AR, 145, 3).

Andy, Martin and Matt had deliberated over the perceived change in players'. They suggested the players' had a belief in their ability that was not present last season, and proposed this was linked to the praise that the players had received this season. Playing one of, if not *the*, best academy in the country, the players had still believed they could win the game. Matt had put it down to Jimmy telling them, which in turn indicated his own belief in the ability of the coach (Jimmy) to influence the players'.

Andy and Martin continued, commenting on the players' desire to play for the U18's this season. Both used examples where players were able to help each other, possibly with reference to a stronger work ethic within the team, as opposed to last season. Interestingly, but maybe not surprisingly, there appeared to be a positive association between players supporting each other on the pitch and the achievement of better individual performances, overall resulting in a better team performance.

ML: I think the likes of Tom Lancashire, we've got a hell of a lot more out of Tom Lancashire this year because the others are spurring him on. The better players like Strach, Alex are spurring him on so he's looking up to the better players and he's getting more out of his own game due to other players getting on (ML, 146, 12).

Matt believed that with a good programme, better performances would come. I was unsure as to the reality of this statement, but I could understand Matt's logic and reasoning in wanting to believe there was truth in this:

> *MC: Basically if you run a good programme you'll tick those six boxes and if you run a good programme you'll have better performances from your players (MC, 147, 43).*

By this stage there was less reliance on literature and the practitioners seemed less inclined to refer to theory. It was now hands on deck and practitioner-led. PWB terms were used and discussed freely, even questioned at times. From an action research angle this was fulfilling and rewarding to see. The practitioners appeared comfortable, confident and empowered by their own practice. Rightly so, they seemingly took ownership, having evidenced they were able to identify and carry through improvements and changes to their own practice.

> *MC: It's like how do we get the best out of him?*
>
> *JR: When, you know like I said to you at the weekend Rob Brown and I seen the Gaffa at the weekend, he needs to go out on loan because these boxes aren't being ticked for Rob Brown.*
>
> *MC: They're going to be less and less ticked as time goes on aren't they, they might be ok at the moment.*
>
> *JR: Yes, especially with that purpose in life, it's not getting ticked for him.*
>
> *MC: And it's going a bit worse...*
>
> *JR: Yes, hence the reason why I'm saying to him he needs to go. Same with Rob, he needs to know that there are other things available, so he's got a drive... Forgive me for not using psycho-jargon but I don't look at Rob Brown and go 'that player, one of our players has lost his purpose in life'. You can just see, can't you? You don't use the jargon, but you can see that he's struggling.*
> *(MC, 148, 15)*

Although the narratives naturally drifted towards PWB and the intentions in practice, in particular certain PWB components had seemed more prominent to occur, or of greater relevance, than others. The significance of this may indicate that some were more useable than others. *However, did this then encourage, or at least support the idea of theory-free knowledge and how we see the world, as suggested by Smith (2009)?*

Jimmy and Matt held different views on whether players are open in suggesting when they want change, Matt felt they would hold back, whereas Jimmy felt they would be pretty honest based on recent actions:

> *JR: You'd be surprised, they do, when they want a change in something...do you know when it's bad and they want to change something, they'll let you know.*
>
> *MC: I'm not sure about that, I've asked them direct questions about what they think about something and they won't always say...*
>
> *JR: That's possibly something about you, you might not be able to get it out of them. Whereas they've come up with a list of things to Vicki of what they want changed and last year during all this we were getting those feedback sheets from last year saying (reads off handout) 'this is shit, I'm injured you don't even get spoken to you just get completely ignored, it's shit'... I think when they want something changed, which might benefit them, I think they say and I think Magnus and Reid were leaving anyway and I think they'd say something. Easy to do isn't it, when you're walking through the door? 'Well to be fair my fucking digs are useless', I would prefer it...you know what I mean? (JR,150, 15)*

A recurring topic of debate has been the situation that goal-keepers finds themselves in, in particular the goal-keeper as a first year apprentice. It has been acknowledged by practitioners that apprentice goal-keepers are faced with greater or more challenging problems, when considering practice to maintain or improve player PWB. Therefore

theory continued to serve a purpose.

JR: Do you know when you talk about socially accepted, his level of social acceptance might be different from David Priestley?

MC: Absolutely, David Priestley expects to be in the centre.

JR: He might want one friend, because he had one friend at school. Some people do not want to be in the middle of everything, going 'alright yeah, see ya next week' and some people like to lead and some people can be really comfortable following...

ML: they like their own space...

MC: Yes but he's not following because he's not even part of the team.

JR: He's part of the team....

MC: Socially he's not.

JR: Neither is Jason Davenport, because they (goalkeepers) train separately.

MC: Jason Davenport is part of the team socially yes.

JR: Because he's playing?

MC: And because of the way he interacts with the boys socially.

JR: But that's your take on how you want them to be socially.

MC: I would like Ben to talk to his team mates, have a laugh with his team mates and have some social interaction. What I see is he's not interacting socially with them.

JR: I've played with a number of footballers who do not go out with the team because they do not want to and they're not horrible and they're not twats it's just that they're not comfortable, it's not their scene.

ML: But were they accepted because of that?

JR: Yes because they played...and I agree with you in terms of if Ben's position because he's not playing, he might not be ticking a few of these (PWB boxes) because he's not playing. But is he in a position, and this is where the induction should have been better and possibly Rob should spend more time with him, telling him and talking to him and taking time being spent with him. But we did

say in the last meeting... he needs looking at and he needs talking to all the time for the simple reason, he isn't going to play... We had a chat with him on Saturday for instance, on Saturday after the game when he was in the dressing room.

(see JR, 151, 26)

Self-acceptance within the environment was perceived to be different and possibly more challenging to goalkeepers than outfield players, due to various factors such as training separately and position-specific meant there was only one place available in the starting eleven. The practitioners recognized that induction could play a large part in helping a first year goal-keeper settle into the environment if given appropriate support and guidance on what to expect, in order to influence the way they evaluated themselves within the performance environment. Therefore, the action research process facilitated further discussion for improvement:

JR: It's the induction, he needed to be made aware that you are second choice.

AR: But he might be aware of that already.

JR: That's what I'm saying and I think he is and it might be 'nah it's' not a problem, I'm going to wait and get my chance'. But this is where the overlap comes into all of these right, in self-acceptance right, purpose in life, he's aware of it but he's not playing. He might say yes it's fine, but really how can he make a positive evaluation of himself, how can he evaluate himself when he's not playing. So he might be aware of...and saying yes I'm ok, but really at this moment in time he's not getting the chance (JR, 154, 17).

Again, I returned to the question... *had theory now served its purpose?* Agreeably, theory had got the ball rolling, in terms of the process of action research it had provided the practitioners with a platform of which to study and observe their own practice, encouraging them to recognise the important role they played in the development of the academy players. However, maybe it was no longer that clear-cut. Having discussed the

development and progression route for an apprentice goalkeeper, practitioners (Jimmy in particular), expressed their concern in meeting the PWB needs of a goalkeeper. They had different needs to outfield players... *so does this mean as practitioners we refer back to theory?* Surely it did. This case would need separate attention.

As the practitioners reflected on last season, they appeared confident that positive changes had taken place that was beneficial to the environment and player development. In particular, they reflected on player development and performance:

ML: It's the way they're being treated, full-stop.

MC: And I think, me and Robbo were talking about this the other day, recovery. Think how much recovery we do compared to last year...how many days off did the boys get last year?

AR: How them kids were dealt with, and it's not a witch-hunt now, it's to say like because they've told me differently, that's shown this season. Quite rightly people can see what the difference is. I think the kids are more responsive this year but also don't forget, they are a bit more relaxed, the place is more relaxed isn't it? I'm not sure if every player wants that relaxed atmosphere.

MC: Some players do like playing under pressure. I think we're running a good programme this year, maybe a very good programme. I think last year we were running a bad programme. Whether we've had enough time to make a difference on the pitch I'm not sure, but there's a point that you must consider, we're running a good programme this year.

AR: Last season the 18s weren't performing, no player developed, but it was a result-orientated practice you were in... which is not what they are now, players are developing more individually.

MC: That's...when I was looking at this though, personal growth, I just hope we don't get too result-orientated, not so much from us but from the players. Because I hope they don't forget that 'hey I'm doing all these weights, that's good, I'm getting heaps of football from the small-sided games, I'm getting a reserve game, I'm getting a few trains with the first team'.

(see ML, 162, 1)

Practitioners had viewed purpose in life as a contentious component to assess, as they felt players may perceive their purpose within the academy to be different to perceptions of academy practitioners. However, through group discussion, practitioners realized they could attempt to influence how players individually perceived and evaluated their purpose within the academy:

> JR: Do you think our players think about first team or do you think they think about getting a pro? Or, and this is what I think, so I don't want to lead you but... I think they think that pro comes with the first team. They don't see it as that, they see it as going in and once they get a pro they'll become a first team player.
>
> ML: I think it's a mixture.
>
> AR: Here it does.
>
> JR: Yes, but Whitey knows... three years in football, so when he's 24 he's still a footballer.
>
> AR: David Priestley thinks that if he's got a pro here...
>
> JR: ...he's a first team player, yes, that's what we've got to separate.
>
> MC: What should he think?
>
> JR: He should think I'm going in to be a pro and once I'm pro I'll battle away to get into that eleven (see JR, 168, 22).

Jimmy and Martin suggested that it was the players who had already had the opportunity and experienced training with the first team that would jump the ladder (so to speak!) and perceive themselves close to becoming a first team player as oppose to facing the first hurdle of becoming a pro:

> JR: I just think that our lads need to know that there are stages and I don't think they know there's stages.

ML: I think some of them do, some of them are aiming for pro, some of them are setting their sights a bit higher because they've already had a sniff at it.

JR: Yes that's the difficulty.

ML: If they've gone over the wall to train with them, they're possibly thinking 'I'm going to play for the first team'. The ones that haven't gone over are thinking of pro.

(see JR, 169, 22).

Positive changes to induction were acknowledged. One feature in particular that was praised related to the players knowing what to expect, having a better idea, knowledge and understanding around their timetable, and knowing what to do:

JR: Yes and I would say we sing off the same song sheet in here. So we've given them an induction, right, and for the first week of pre-season Martin and Steve took them. But we all knew what we were doing, so then if there's any time when Martin needs to take them or Andy takes them, or if you take them they all know...

AR: They know what's coming don't they.

JR: They know what they've got to do and they've had a lot more contact prior to signing. Not in terms of rules and regulations and stuff like that, I've just said listen this is what you've got to do, this is what we will be doing, this is your timetable and we've structured it. Now if you think about last year nobody knew what was happening with the players, nobody.

(see JR, 171, 26)

This was intended to encourage players to understand and take responsibility for their actions. If they knew what was expected of them, they would have a clear idea of what, when and how to manage themselves within the environment. Potentially, this could facilitate personal growth and environmental mastery:

JR: I think the 18s induction has been good because they get a lot of contact... They know where they're at.

MC: They know where they stand. It has a direct relationship doesn't it because the more they understand about where they're at, we guess the happier they are. You said today that perhaps we could have done that a little bit better with telling them about the different levels and then perhaps they'd have slightly better well-being if we'd inducted them even better. So there is a really nice correlation between the induction and their well-being so it must have a really good effect.

JR: Everything that we've talked about there, well-being, is that they know where they stand.

(see JR, 173, 3)

In a similar way to practitioners, player personnel can or will alter the action research process, due to different personalities that may change the dynamics within a group. Consequently, the context is not replicable as the practitioners, players and group dynamics will never be the same, they will always differ due to the change in personnel. Therefore, the context will change from one season to the next. However, the process steps are replicable and could be applied in different contexts.

MC: But this year the first years have done better and had more opportunities and they're probably better players as well so that probably helps a little and also personalities. Last year's personalities were not good, this year's personalities are a lot easier to deal with (MC, 174, 7).

Recovery and variation to training were also noted as positive changes to the academy programme this season. Matt felt that the players had a better understanding of why and when they carry out certain aspects of the programme, and highlighted that the variety in training introduced new challenges and opportunities where possible:

JR: They get more of it, they get more, we make a conscious effort...

MC: We didn't give them that many days off, you've said to them and you proved that by giving them two days off. They're still getting every Sunday off and they know that you're trying to give them the days off that they probably see

and I back this up and go 'we want to give you some time back but we've got this, we've got this' and I think they understand why they're getting recovery or not getting recovery. I think it's very good.

JR: You know what used to do their head in? Training every afternoon.

MC: And also weights, we're doing two sessions of weights a week and we've only missed that twice I think. And that's a day it's not on the pitch, it's not with you, it's not with Martin, it's not pounding on the ground and it's a different stimulus. So that's a form of recovery as well. They get a break from running, a break from the coaches, a break from football and some of the weaker players can be the best as well...

JR: It gives them an opportunity to succeed.

(see JR, 174, 13)

Adding variety to training was perceived as a mental break from difficult and challenging tasks, it encouraged players to achieve in different areas of the programme.

In a similar vein, when discussing individual players, Peter Strachan came into conversation as he had just come back into the U18 squad after a spell in and around the first team. Not only was his motivation now in question, but also the difficulty of the task... was playing for the U18's too easy a task.

JR: He's floating.

AR: 'What do I want to do this for?'

JR: I don't think he's big time, right, I don't think he's big time. Things aren't going well for him.

MC: He was first team now he's an average player for the 18s, should he not play reserve team more?

(see JR, 176, 7)

Another player topic of debate was Ryan Jacobs. He was currently injured and had

recently made a throwaway comment in the treatment room suggesting that *'you can't be injured at this club'*. Jimmy had not taken lightly to it and was annoyed by such a suggestion, believing it held no substance and was far from the truth:

> *MC: Do you think by that he means you can't be treated fairly if you're injured and he feels that he's unhappy with the treatment he's had and that's what he means by you can't be injured at this club.*
>
> *JR: I don't understand... If he's injured?*
>
> *MC: No the way you and I talk to him regarding his injury, 'look play through this, it's just a little bit of pain blah, blah, blah', maybe he's feeling more.*
>
> *JR: Right so if he's feeling more what do we do? We fetch the fucker off. Don't be hard on yourself Matt and I know we're creating a bit of a discussion and stuff like that. We are fucking treating them right.*
>
> *MC: Yes, what about their perception, that's what we're talking about?*
> <div align="right">*(see MC, 180, 7)*</div>

Tension began to build as Jimmy's voice had started to get louder and sterner as he disputed Matt's questioning. The action research literature helped me to recognise that things may not go smoothly within the action research cycle (Davis, 2007), but that this does not mean that the research is unsuccessful or failing in any way. If anything, this highlights the nature of the research, the complexities of the environment and the people involved.

> *MC: I think he thinks he gets treated badly when he talks about his pain.*
>
> *JR: So if he gets treated badly when he talks about his pain what treatment has he had? And you just said we're doing everything about it, so what treatment has he had? He's come off in a game because he's injured. He didn't want to come off and he's saying I've got a bit of pain. Is that treating him badly, bringing him off?*
>
> *MC: I think he's talking about the way you speak to him. (see MC, 181, 15)*

The action research cycle itself provided structure for practitioners. It encouraged them to work to timelines, therefore not putting things off, and instead facilitated change or improvement to practice on a day-to-day basis. It may also be said that the repetitive cycle of action research had forced practitioners to reflect on and in action, to the extent that it has become automatic procedure within their routine. Reflection had now become habit.

It was evident there were clear changes that had taken place from last season. More importantly, such changes had been deliberately structured and implemented by key personnel within academy practice. There was thought and purpose behind the changes and improvements from last season that was able to reflect the adherence to the process of action research. The meeting had gone well.

Table 4.9 - Academy Practice Box (7)

Action points to academy practice:

- Key areas discussed

    ✓ Players belief in ability and coach influence as a result of positive feedback

    ✓ Continued improvements and changes to practice – Induction for goalkeepers

    ✓ Positive changes to induction – Players are better prepared for the full-time environment

    ✓ Individual case studies discussed

- Areas of practice considered

    ✓ Recognition and value placed on positive feedback from the coach to continue

    ✓ Induction for goalkeepers – prepare them for what to expect, in particular in terms of development and performance. Their purpose will differ to that of an outfield player and opportunities to progress may be restricted in their first year apprentice

    ✓ To monitor and encourage realistic player perceptions of purpose in life depending on individual development and circumstances

- Relationship to theory/AR

    ✓ The further along into the cyclical action research process the more practitioners appear to have engaged and have taken ownership towards changing and improving their *own* practice. Changes in practice have become less reliant on theory and more practitioner-led, consequently the *purpose of theory* is less dominant at this stage.

    ✓ Some PWB components seem more useable than others in terms of practice, whereas the use of action research as a process and catalyst to change practice has is continual.

    ✓ When attending to aspects of PWB it is evident that goalkeepers are faced with different problems compared to that of outfield players due to available playing time and only one available position. Therefore it seems reasonable to suggest that the utility of theory *does* serve an extended purpose in such circumstances, when having to consider how practice can adapt to the PWB needs of a goalkeeper.

Back at the training ground

It was now autumn (October) and the apprentices were two months into the competitive season. I had sensed that some of the second years were beginning to get nervous and anxious in the realisation that they only had six months left in which to earn themselves a professional contract. It was beginning to creep into their game. They were feeling the pressure. Some of them had dropped by my office to chat over U18 and reserve game performances. They (Alex and Kevin in particular) often questioned me on what Jimmy had said and his current thoughts based on how they were doing, *"what did Jimmy say?"* This was then followed up by asking my opinion on what I thought and how they should go about things from here, if needing to improve or evidence change. The second years were made up of strong individuals, in the sense that they reflected on their own performance and would seek out advice whenever possible. This that had not always been the case! They were eager to improve and hungry to get a professional contract.

I had a meeting with Jimmy to discuss the second years and where they were currently at. I felt it was my responsibility to flag up any concerns and to let him know my thoughts having casually chatted with the players. From my perspective the key concern was that the second years were playing under pressure that was having a negative impact on their performance. Clearly, I wasn't stating anything that Jimmy didn't already know, but I sensed that he could be the one help to reduce their anxieties through direct contact and feedback that would provide a different form of support. Jimmy agreed as he felt it was visible on the pitch, and not just in games, in training also. So instead of training, he decided to box-off the afternoon, in order to have one-to-one meetings with the players.

Jimmy requested that I sat in on the meetings, as this then gave me insight as to what was said and agreed, and from there would allow me to reinforce any points addressed by Jimmy through one-to-one contact opportunities that I would have with the players. The meetings were always useful and more than beneficial to the players, they would walk in feeling nervous and unsure of the feedback they were about to receive. More often than not, the players would then leave Jimmy's office with a smile on their face and the worry fixed. As simple as it sounds, Jimmy would encourage the positives and highlight areas for improvement in a way that gave each player a purpose when they walked out of his office. As if they had been sent on a mission!

November 1st ...

The following week, under my remit as education and welfare officer, Jimmy and I had to attend a meeting at a school for one of the U16 players who was looking to into train during the school timetable on a the new day-release programme that we were attempting to put in place. We met with the Head teacher and discussed our plans and the support that would be available. Keeping with tradition, the Head teacher was not easy to win over. Although what took me by surprise was being in the meeting and hearing Jimmy initiate conversation on well-being. I suppose I just hadn't expected Jimmy to speak about it so keenly and with purpose outside of the academy setting. He was promoting the work and research that was taking place and applying it externally. Obviously, I tried to not give-away any expression on hearing this during the meeting with the Head teacher, but secretly I was chuffed. The academy manager was now educating the Head teacher,

illustrating how within academy practice we attend to player well-being, in particular aspects of PWB.

November 3ʳᵈ...

Due to other first team commitments, this week's away fixture had been moved to Friday afternoon instead of normally being played on Saturday morning. The players had been prepped and the team-talk had taken place the day before. Jimmy was taking the first team training session and couldn't make it to the game, so Martin and Andy Robinson were left to take the reins.

I sensed that today would be insightful without Jimmy and that certain players may approach the game differently than normal. The players approached the game poorly, the warm-up appeared to be hard-work, and they didn't look spritely. They seemed fairly quiet in themselves and there was definitely a lack of team focus between them. I sensed the tension in the second years... Alex was angry, Priestley seemed frustrated and JD looked lethargic, both in the warm-up and the game. Individually they were each strong characters when they stepped onto the field of play. Little by little their lack of composure began to unfold and the pressure that they (possibly unintentionally) began to place on their other team-mates as the game went on. It seemingly had a knock-on effect, as other players them started to unleash their frustrations, directing them either at the referee (which was hugely frowned upon by Jimmy and the players knew this) or at each other. It was like watching the team press the self-destruct button.

Fortunately, Jimmy turned up just minutes prior to half-time, which seemed to have immediate effect. At half time they were hanging on Jimmy's every word and inspiration to go out into the 2nd half and change the game. We lost 2-1. Jimmy was annoyed at their resilience to accept defeat. As we walked off the pitch after the game, there were many unhappy faces.

In the absence of Jimmy, who would normally manage individual's attitude and behaviour upon witnessing scenes like today, the blame culture instead raised its ugly head. This had been more than evident in reflection with the players' on Monday morning. Players attempted to place blame on anything and everything, other than themselves... Poor organisation prior to leaving the training ground, having to drive separately, the state of the pitch, Martin's team talk and lack of training leading up to the game. I had challenged them to question their performance, to which they all agreed nobody had been outstanding, yet some went on to blame the three forwards who missed a sitter... *'how could they miss from there?'* Yet such players failed to recognise that the time they had wasted in arguing with referee, opponents and each other... far outweighed the time that a striker had in front of goal. It was as if they had gone into the game assuming that they would win. Not only overestimating themselves as a team, but clearly underestimating the opposition.

Alex came to chat after the game...

"Can I have a word?"

"Yeh sure, come on... What's up?"

"I've been thinking about what Jimmy said this week. I had a meeting with him and he asked if I was bothered about anything or had any problems. At the time I said no… but I've been thinking since then… and I reckon I have…"

"Ok and what is it that's bothering you?"

"Well sat in digs this week and talking to Browny… just thought I didn't have a chance, thought I'd blown it… and that we'll be going back to Ireland at the end of the year"

"Why do you think that? That you've got no chance?"

"Just didn't think I was getting anywhere and I'd stuffed up a few times, always having to put bad stuff in the black book for Jimmy to read, knowing it'll just get thrown back at me"

"And do you still feel that's true?"

"Well no not really now since Jimmy spoke to me this week and told me I had a chance of getting a professional contract… like that made me look at it differently and that I shouldn't just write it off"

"So how d'you feel right now about it?"

"Like I've got a chance… but I think previously I was worried and thinking it was all over and then of having to go back home…"

(Pause)

"What did you think of today's game?"

"Yeh it was good, everyone played better individually and had a good game"

"And what about you, your performance, you happy?"

"Well I thought I did alright and better than the last couple of games"

"Yes and you did do much better, definitely improved…"

"I still get a bit frustrated though... like at times today"

"Yeh I noticed, there were moments... you played far better but there were moments where you need to catch it sooner... stop yourself from reacting... like squaring up with that lad today"

"Yeh I know, I mean I didn't let it go any further but I know what you mean... I need to work on it"

"Well you've already made progress since the last two games so that's something positive you can look at. You just have moments that you need to catch yourself sooner that's all, and you can work on it. If you were sat here telling me you didn't know what was wrong and where your frustration came from... then I'd be worried... but you're aware of it and understand the effect it has on your game... so it'll take a bit of time to perfect".

RECONNAISSANCE

COLLABORATIVE GROUP ONE

Back at the training ground

COLLABORATIVE GROUP TWO

COLLABORATIVE GROUP THREE

COLLABORATIVE GROUP FOUR

Back at the training ground

COLLABORATIVE GROUP FIVE

Back at the training ground

COLLABORATIVE GROUP SIX

COLLABORATIVE GROUP SEVEN

Back at the training ground
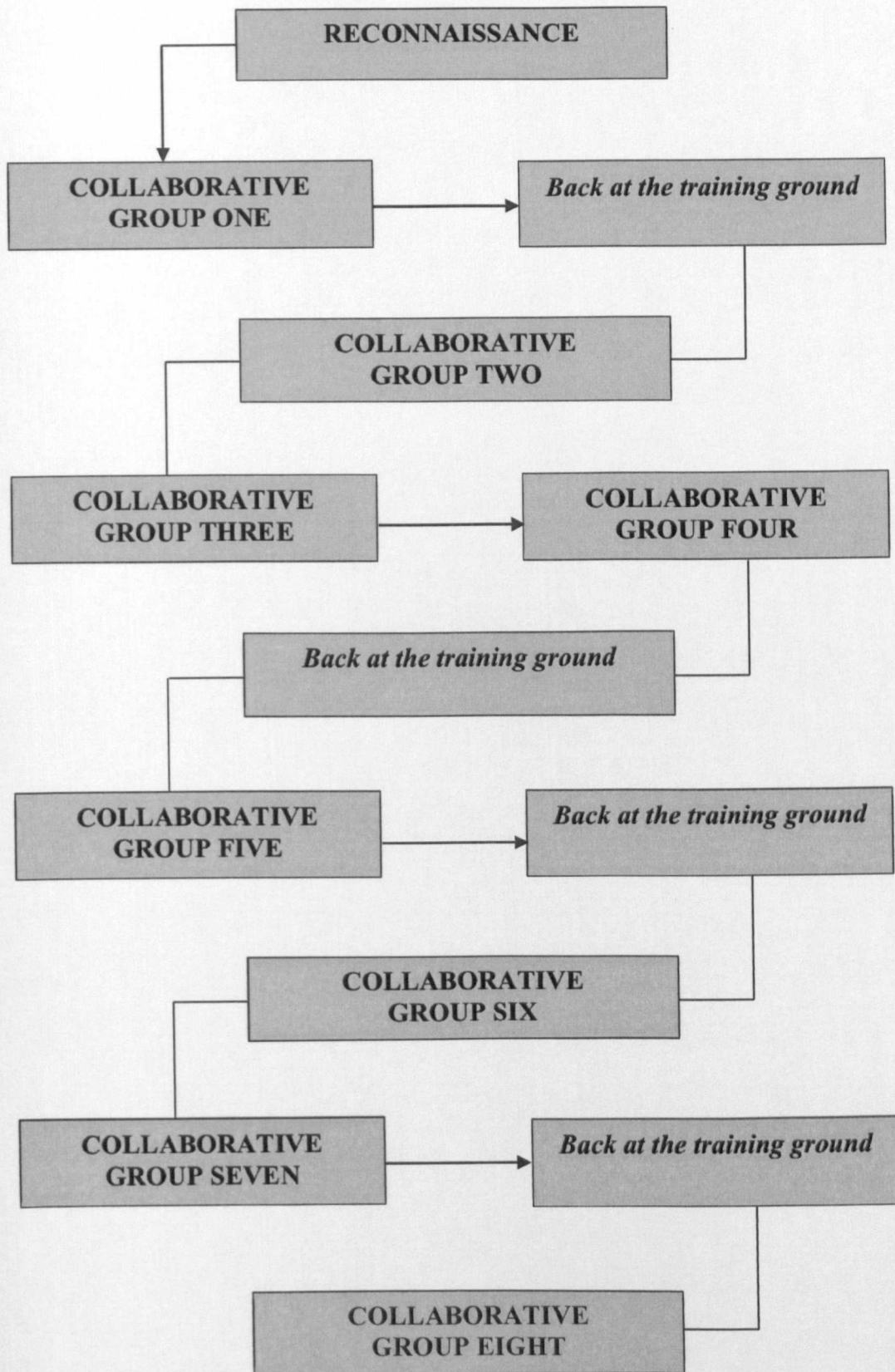
COLLABORATIVE GROUP EIGHT

Figure 4.8 - Meeting 8

The final collaborative practitioner meeting was nearing closer and I was beginning to feel nervous. It was hard to visualise how I would bring things to a closing point and the fact that I didn't really want to! I had discussed with Jimmy the aims of the meeting and emphasised the importance of all practitioners being able to attend. Willingly, Jimmy arranged the practitioner meeting at a convenient time. All practitioners involved arrived for the meeting with their notes in hand as agreed from the last meeting, aware that it may be the final discussion...

4.4.8 Collaborative Practitioner Meeting Eight

Practitioners present – Jimmy, Matt, Martin, Andy and Rob

I lead into the eighth and final meeting. I had a nervous energy, whilst feeling slightly apprehensive. I wanted to it to go well, aware that there were a lot of points to cover and that this was the final round-up. If all went well that is.

I explained that the main aim for the meeting was to address the original three themes that have carried through each meeting over the past eighteen months. This basically involved talking around the major benefits and what they have been, in particular associated with induction, recovery and transitions; the terms that have been used from start to finish. Also, with the intention to highlight where improvements have occurred, providing specific examples and any further suggestions that could follow on from this.

I proposed that we went round the group individually as they presented on their own practice, using notes made on the forms they had completed since the last meeting.

Practitioners were expected to use examples to illustrate how they felt that their practice within the academy hit on aspects of psychological well-being, addressing any deliberate changes to practice with the intention to directly impact well-being in and about the place.

I initially suggested that we talk around one aspect of psychological well-being in particular, letting everyone have their say in turn, before moving onto the next one and to provide everyone with the opportunity to address changes within their own practice. I revisited the last form that was given out (see appendix 4), specifically highlighting induction, recovery and transitions. Making reference to the handout, I pointed to phase one, and suggested talking about player autonomy, in order for players to make their own decisions, I asked how as individual practitioners, they felt they hit on that particular aspect.

Autonomy was the first topic of discussion. Martin started off and explained how he thought he had improved his practice with player autonomy in mind; in particular he outlined the ownership he had placed on the players in order for them to take more responsibility in performance.

> ML: ...we need to give more responsibility and ownership to the 16's for
> instance that they start to take their own warm-ups now, this is rather than me
> trying to make them more determined and sort of motivate them, they have to
> self-motivate and by doing their own sort of warm-up's, they should know
> specifically what they need to get out of the warm-up, motivate them and to
> make them more determined before a match... as part of their preparation
> towards the match... they have got to take some ownership, you know most lads
> at the minute are waiting to be coach-led at everything that they do... So as part
> of their growing up if you like they have to make their own decisions on

occasions, so I think it could prepare them to a degree when they do come in full-time (ML, 188, 42).

Jimmy agreed with Martin and then continued to his own practice as academy manager, making key reference to the overall environment within academy practice. He described the reasoning behind repetition and the value to everyday practice, the players knew what to expect and tasks were challenging yet achievable.

> *JR: ...what I feel as though I have done from my own role is, and I know sometimes that it is boring, I go down and provide a solid environment with an opportunity for everybody to achieve. The environment is set up so that everybody can achieve, so in terms of it is repetition of skill every single day, repetition of the same things and there's clarity in what is right and what is wrong, OK but that clarity also comes in in terms of everybody can do right... Everybody can achieve, everybody can do right, whereas I think in the past we have only ever done right if it has been the absolute elite... But, where I have definitely changed is doing repetition of the same skill all of the time. So that the practices are the same and what's right and what's wrong is the same, never veer's off and all the stuff that they need to do right is achievable for everybody, hence the reason why now, if I am ever not there they will look down the session plan and set their own practice up, cos it's the same every day and they all feel comfortable enough to achieve it, some better than others... That can provide a solid environment for everybody to achieve and that has come from repetition from the same skill (JR, 189, 23).*

Matt pointed out that another improvement to practice that had aimed to facilitate player autonomy was the responsibility that Jimmy had instilled into the group as a whole, and not just based around performance on the pitch, more so day-to-day chores and routinely behaviour.

> *MC: Also I was talking about there, but for you other things is that autonomy comes in for you... there is the responsibility that the boys have been given, they control their own jobs when they come up, when they go, who they have to come*

up to the meetings and they take on hugely more roles and responsibilities than they did last year.

JR: Yeah, yeah and that would possibly come in under autonomy as well, but I've put that under positive relations.

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(see MC, 190, 40)

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There appeared to be uncertainty as to whether this was perceived to attend to autonomy or positive relations, as suggesting by Jimmy. I could see reasoning in both. Maybe this was evidence of overlap between the PWB components, or how the debate could arise:

VT: What we are saying by default it's possibly hitting levels of autonomy?

JR: Yeah.

VT: It wasn't directly done in order to drive that, but what we realize is that it's hitting it.

JR: I think that a lot of that work that has been done over the last eighteen months, since you have started talking about this. There's overlap in all of them. I would put sort of people coming up here and having Tom Lancashire does that go in autonomy him making us a cup of coffee... they value things like that. Cos we don't abuse him it is not a case of get that kettle on, he comes up and he gladly and all of them now know that, I think that is part of having positive relations. But you could say that it overlaps into autonomy because they all feel worth, it overlaps into another one...

MC: Personal relations.

JR: And purpose in life isn't to make a coffee do you know what I mean. But they feel as though yeah. We know them here they know ours and they can gladly come up here and wander about and stick the TV on.

MC: I think we possibly need to change the jobs soon, cos Rob has got the trimmings of something else there, of how he used to interact with you, and he is pretty confident and he doesn't take the piss out of you.

JR: Yeah.

MC: He gives little bit of banter back respectively.

JR: Which is brilliant.

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MC: It is superb. It shows that you are human and the other boys seeing Rob having a laugh and he doesn't take it too far. He has definitely developed over the four months that he has been doing that job.

(see VT, 193, 7)

There is recognition that the added responsibility given to players, has in this example, had a positive impact. I could understand Jimmy's point that this particular role definitely contributed to positive relations as it created interaction between the player and practitioners. Yet at the same time, it encouraged autonomy for the player to accept and take ownership of the responsibility he'd been given.

Matt and Jimmy discussed autonomy further, and indicated that with ownership the players have appeared to adopt a change in stance, they have the ability to make their own decisions and in doing so must accept an increased accountability. Although directed towards player autonomy, I also felt that when considering the bigger picture of long-term development, this may contribute to matters of personal growth and self-acceptance.

JR: ...we should provide an environment where they all can achieve that's where I think that self-determination, autonomy comes in for me.

MC: The two things that I have got out of it are creating the rules themselves, I thought that that was pretty good, you know so that they believe that they have created the rules that they now have to work under, so they must feel like they have got their own ownership and their own programme and if they do stuff up they know that they have created the rules, so surely that gives them a good sense of ownership. And also like a psychology session we did after a loss and they started bringing out all the excuses and then they changed a few things and now had to live under those changes that we have made.

(see JR, 194, 31)

This related to another example highlighted, that player autonomy was evident in their own practice both on and off the pitch. Jimmy explained that looking after an injury properly was all part of the process and reflected levels of autonomy:

> *JR: I have got this impression that if I say go and do some extra, they will think fuck me lets boot a ball to each other... it might be doing extra to improve their performance, coming in for a meeting with you or speaking to you, Tom. Do you know what I mean, it might not be doing fast feet drills like that, it might be just seeing...*
>
> *RM: It could be what he's seen on telly.*
>
> *JR: He needs to bring in to associate what you have done for them, not just injury prevention, Tom Lancashire, cos Tom has got an ankle injury, that's only cos he has done extra by icing his ankle after every session. If he doesn't do that and says it feels alright today I can guarantee that in a couple of days it would be worse. So that is as good as doing technical work.*
>
> <div align="right">(see JR, 196, 29)</div>

It was interesting to hear objective well-being (OWB) come into discussion, although I don't think Rob was aware of this when he attempted to explain the benefit in reserving judgment on players so as not to assume a player's personality and what he's about. Instead, Rob reinforced that over time a true picture would develop and first thoughts may evidently have been mistaken or misinterpreted:

> *RM: I don't know what category this comes under but like when you come across certain kids early on in their apprenticeship you don't really know what kind of people they are and Ben could have come across as a squeaky clean, good living, intelligent, boy that doesn't deal with the lads, goes home to his girlfriend, and that's him done. There is more to him than what we thought, or what they thought, and he is coming out now and that is what is getting him involved with the lads for me (RM, 197, 38).*

Once more, Jimmy made reference to there being an overlap between the PWB components and suggested that when attempting to improve one aspect that this in-turn had a knock-on effect improving other aspects. Matt appeared to praise the process of monitoring the players and indicated that with time matters are able to be resolved within a good environment.

> *JR: I think that that overlaps as well, I think in one bracket we don't separate these different titles, do you know what I mean I think we have realized that it works or it helps players improve and you get a knock on effect that can probably tick all the boxes and I think we all do that.*
>
> *MC: I think like an example, we tend to worry about some of the lads quite a lot and then when we talk again a few months later they are a lot better, and players that we have been really worried about have sorted themselves out. Like Ben Stockley now hangs around with the boys and hopefully we can create a good environment.*
>
> *(see JR, 198, 7)*

As the practitioners continued to discuss practice in relation to PWB components, self-acceptance was reviewed. This had cropped up many times in practitioner meetings, particularly with reference to individual players and their circumstances. Rob used the goalkeeper situation as an example, indicating that there could be limitations to a player's self-acceptance depending on their playing position. Goalkeepers tended not to play matches in their first year of the apprenticeship (with the exception of friendlies), making way for the second year goalkeeper, unless otherwise injured. Consequently, it was perceived as difficult for them to judge where they were at and to gain a sense of belonging to the team, when they felt that they played no significant part on match-day.

> *ML: I think not playing has a major, major impact.*

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RM: Well that is also a big problem for Ben, cos he felt that he weren't one of the lads, cos I had a good conversation with him about when you are a sub and the team have won and they are high fiving each other, I said do you feel part of it or do you feel away from it, he went I feel away from it...

ML: Yeah, so he'll have no sense of achievement there.

MC: It is worrying for a keeper though isn't it.

RM: Yeah, but I said you have to remember that you know that you have contributed to that win, because you are pushing Davenport all the way in terms of training in the week.

ML: It has been very hard for him to recognize.

RM: ...but he wants to play and when he played the game I watched, and about ten to five minutes to go he had two really brave saves that he had to make, and he got kicked in the head and we won the game, and I just looked up after the game and they were all high fiving him. I thought yeah he is definitely going to turn a corner cos he is now one of the boys. I think playing is so important.
(see ML, 198, 46)

From my perspective, I had mentioned that the reflective process of debriefs, originally introduced as mental recovery within the academy programme, also sought to encourage levels of self-acceptance, that in turn may eventually aid environmental mastery.

VT: ...more so from the psych angle after the game just giving them the opportunity to either share the responsibility as to what happened on Saturday, or reflect on individual performance, looking at what they need to do during the week, coming to their own conclusions as oppose to someone else standing there telling them this is how it was, this is what you will do doing.

MC: Cos didn't Steve used to try and sit in on the meetings?

VT: They initially started where we did pretty much to what they do now, but then Steve came in and sometimes it was positive and he'd have calmed down from Saturday and he was a lot more constructive and took things on board. But, sometimes he would then take over.

MC: Does Jimmy sit in on it.

VT: No.

Personal growth came up when referring to an example in practice where a player sought

help with a situation in his personal life, not performance related. I felt this strongly

signified the importance of good practice, placing value on positive relations and being

part of a supportive environment, where players have someone to turn to.

> *VT: So using the example of say Andy what you want him to achieve, how do you feel that you addressed that situation with him?*
>
> *ML: With Andy?*
>
> *JR: Remember that problem he came to you with at the beginning of the season. Did that improve him as a player or a person?*
>
> *ML: Oh improve as a person.*
>
> *JR: So what did you do? See I think a lot of things I don't think that you realize you are doing them... But have you been there for him. You must have done something to him to make him think, right I can now step out now and deal with that situation.*
>
> *ML: Well I thought that I was there for him in his hour of need, do you know what I mean and perhaps I am not saying that you want to be, but he saw me as the one he could perhaps talk to. I don't know, we have just got through it together, type of thing. We have gone through a procedure to help him along so I know the next step would be to see Vicki and the next step after that because he wanted to have a bit of time at home, would be to see you and we have dealt with it that way.*
>
> *JR: So you went to different people for him.*

This was evidence that practitioners are sometimes unaware of their own good practice

and the important role they play, especially when related to non-performance issues. In

this incident, Martin had not seemed to recognize the support he had provided as

invaluable. If anything, I felt this underlined the nature of support that is provided within the academy environment, it is often seen as daily practice, and therefore most practitioners appear to overlook it as a skill.

Rob acknowledged the oversight and identified that the majority of issues that the coach has to deal with as part of their remit, is a lot more than just about coaching. He stressed that it was not always about performance-related issues, and that contrary to belief, in fact it rarely was!

> *RM: ...we don't realize how much we actually do, cos you say football coach and I think you automatically go out there (points to the pitches outside)... I have to say that 75% that we probably deal with is probably not even out there, I don't know what percentage, but what I am saying is that there is a lot of stuff that I feel that I do especially with these younger ones that isn't just about the coaching (RM, 204, 17).*

This study more than supported such a claim.

Matt explained that a balanced programme was now the result of improvements and changes that had been made over the last twelve months. In doing so, he suggested that the programme was successfully able to facilitate personal growth and better prepare them to be a first team player, as players were responsible and able to apply hard work across all aspects of the programme. I wondered if access and provision to a balanced programme also helped to promote environmental mastery, through awareness and self-evaluation across different aspects of the programme:

> *MC: I think that the personal growth is for them to be a good first team player they need to be well balanced and I think twelve months ago we didn't have a very balanced programme. Seven days a week without too many exceptions was*

*spent playing football, out there, running and football, and twelve months later
they are getting probably averaging six days off a month. So they are getting a
rest which they never really got. They are now doing a strength and
conditioning programme, which is just another way to have time spent away
from Jimmy and to be with someone else, like... They do prevention
programmes so that is something else not doing the same thing and they get that
realization and the hard work there will contribute and carry over to football
and with a better education programme and having more control cos it's being
done internally... I think we have put a tremendous emphasis and value on the
education part of the programme.*

JR: Yeah

*MC: So now they have a balanced programme where as it used to be all about
football, don't fuck up at college, but really it is all about football and now
there's five or six little facets, and also there is the responsibility of doing the
job and reporting back to us and the whole thing is done, and the programme is
done better so they do have a much more balanced programme and so this will
make them better people.*

(see MC, 208, 6)

Throughout the practitioner meetings great value had been placed on induction, as

practitioners began to recognize factors that could potentially make a difference to the

settling-in period for new players, and they debated the different ways to go about it:

*MC: I think that part of the induction for the jobs, weights and injury prevention
can have a massive effect and then I got a little bit slack on that and being the
mates start to go together. And Owen Brown and Marcus end up by themselves
on opposite corners of the group, so that doesn't work so well if you do make a
good impact and try and sort out the partnerships then I think that it works
really well, and I don't think they would slack and the boys just refer back to
form and...*

*JR: Can I just say, that is not something which you have gone slack on because
I think Marcus and Owen are comfortable with each other.*

*MC: No, no what I am talking about is plan and plan and plan all year round,
Owen Brown by himself, Marcus...*

*JR: That is slack cos that then should be brought in, but we give them, they get
to know each other... if they again want to go with somebody else and*

everybody is happy with that then I think you're sort of hitting on subjective well-being.

(see MC, 210, 14)

Although only a small comment, it was interesting to hear Jimmy make reference to SWB and that he linked this to players being happy. I felt this demonstrated the benefit to practice as a result of the action research process... Jimmy appeared empowered to foster player well-being where he saw fit.

Jimmy explained the need to intervene and forcefully encourage players to forge positive relations with one another, where conflict may have previously prevented this from happening. He and Matt agreed that such methods contributed when attempting to create and maintain a good environment.

JR: Owen Brown and Andy Hart have a problem with each other. You spotted it didn't you (VT). Right, I dealt with it without them knowing about it, I am hoping so. The players knew that there was a problem, so the players started digging Hart out and Hart apologized to Owen Brown on his own and now them two are alright. So I think that we have made a conscious effort to role buddy people up who will help each other, if it is not working I think then we have got to take control again and change, or be quite autocratic, in terms of saying this is what you do, because something's are unacceptable... And I think that we do that quite well and I think that that comes from if you are talking about induction, coming down to positive relationships with others, that sometimes we're forcing them into having positive relations, do you know what I mean, which possibly doesn't hit autonomy.

MC: All you are saying is that you are trying to create a really good environment.

JR: Yeah.

MC: Which does create positive relations, you are saying you are providing a relationship, Owen Brown and Hart to have worked together for eight weeks and eventually they have sorted out their differences.

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JR: Yeah.

MC: Yeah and now they are willing to work together...You have created that environment and they have positive relations from then on... It's still you who has created that artificial environment which is exactly what you do out there coaching, so every day you create an environment to develop that is the same as putting those two together you have created an environment.

<div align="right">

(see JR, 210, 42)

</div>

In addition to positive relations, Matt suggested that the rules and job responsibilities had also contributed to a better environment, as all the players knew where they stood, what they had to do, there was no room for debate or confusion. Similarly, in terms of induction, both Jimmy and Matt believed due to the provision of a good environment, that new players or trialists coming into the academy programme was perceived as a negative experience to the rest of the squad; it was healthy competition.

JR: Yeah. The other thing with the induction as well is we are saying that this new lad has come in now and it is part of the induction process for him. David Priestley feels great doesn't he.

And Tom Lancashire, Tom you get this lad his kit, fucking big hitter here son. David Priestley in a session in the afternoon, that's my session plan David, go and photocopy it and put it on my desk and make sure everybody sets up the thing, maybe have a little game to see whoever is involved, this and that. Now the lads are welcoming him in because they run it, they run the show.

MC: So it is their programme to work around, it's not all about Jimmy Reid.

JR: Yeah, so 'you're allowed in cos I am going to let you in and you are allowed in cos...' and I think that that is a big thing with induction as well. What we have changed.

ML: I mean David Priestley has actually said to me today the big kid has done really well, so you know he hadn't seen him and he plays in a different position, but he hasn't seen him as competition he has actually seen him as a good player, you know what I mean so, he has benefited from it definitely.

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(see JR, 214, 1)

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I was slightly hesitant as to whether this would always be the case, and that maybe individual circumstances may influence perceptions over a longer period of time.

Transitions were discussed in depth also. A point that had been addressed across various practitioner meetings, was how best to manage purpose in life when seeking to maintain PWB overall, in particular, for players that would not go on to achieve professional status. It was agreed that as practitioners we could influence their perceptions of purpose in life.

> *JR: In terms of that coming back to the point of all this, psychological well-being, these lads need to know that there is a programme in place, right and when you fall off that trail, if you leave here you can still be a success and I think if we get that into their mentality we will reap the benefits. Cos they will be working to leave, do you know what I mean.*
>
> *VT: It is impacting on their purpose, but their purpose isn't just to be here for two years.*
>
> *(see JR, 219, 35)*

With regards to transitions, it was noted that particular focus had been on feedback, inclusion when injured, and performance issues. Jimmy had suggested that from his perspective as the academy manager, he felt that the environment encouraged practitioners to have more contact with players, and that this led players to have a better understanding of key messages put across by practitioners.

> *JR: I will talk about football, you speak about medical and you can speak about the schoolboys coming in. Right, from my point of view I think that we have done is that we have had more contact with the players, they understand where we are coming from there is more one to one contact and there is more contact with the staff (JR, 221, 42).*

Inevitably, this is significant to the improvement in positive relations and communication that have been incorporated into changing practice with a purpose. Jimmy acknowledged that communication and feedback would come in different forms depending on practitioner and their area of practice. For example, Jimmy understood that Matt as physio held a very different role that was less performance-based and therefore his relationship with the players would differ and was likely to cover professional and personal aspects. Jimmy also suggested that performance would naturally attend to PWB. However, although this may sound straightforward it could only be taken at face value. Performance could not be guaranteed.

> *JR: Whereas with me and Martin the majority of it will be performance, still hitting these (PWB components) but to get a performance benefit, and if you get a performance benefit they have got purpose in life, environmental mastery, self-acceptance, positive relations and autonomy (JR, 222, 36).*

Matt had indicated that my role had helped facilitate players from one transition to another, he used injured players as an example, that were now included (self-acceptance), given contact (positive relations) and encouraged to manage other areas of their programme, such as education.

> *MC: Another one I want to add, is Vic coming in as sport psych, it just puts education up another level one more person to talk to and for me, transitions, coming in and out of being injured they keep up with their education they also stay around. Where I would have been sending Andy and Ryan Jacobs home recently we have not had to and they are still interacting with the boys and they are still seeing you and they still have to live by the rules, they are improving their education you know ticking those boxes they will get time back later on and that wouldn't have happened last year would it (MC, 223, 40).*

Conversation surround the goalkeeping situation and playing-time arose again, Jimmy recognized that as the players got older, playing-time became more important, especially when considering PWB.

> *MC: JD by the way I think he has done really really well.*
>
> *JR: Yeah. Yeah cos he was so low and he was coming apart hence the reason why his development plan will change. If I see there is no room for him I am getting him out.*
>
> *MC: Yeah even if it is just for a trial. Premier league clubs will take him for a trial.*
>
> *VT: And what do you think he will gain for going on trial, just your point of view.*
>
> *JR: In terms of this. He will get self-acceptance, personal growth you hope, or it might damage that. Cos he might be going along quite alright and come back a little bit big time – right.*
>
> *VT: Right.*
>
> *JR: Self-acceptance definitely cos he has got a positive evaluation of himself cos he has been thought of in that type of character.*
>
> *(see MC, 227, 16)*

Digs were debated, and it was suggested that players living away from home had many other factors to consider when it came to levels of PWB. Jimmy had questioned whether digs players get access to the same positive support outside of the academy environment that home players may have, as he believed this is where others would gain confidence from a strong social support network such as family members etc.

All practitioners agreed that it was more challenging to meet the PWB of a player in digs than a player that lived at home, it put further strain on each of the PWB components for

a player to manage when away from the academy environment. Furthermore, it was disputed in terms of performance. Could digs be a debilitating factor to performance? It was likely that every situation would be different and that matters would depend on what was going on at the time. Peter Strachan was used as an example, having seen a recent slump in performance despite having been training in and around the first team:

> *JR: Why hasn't he kicked on? We have not changed our approach, have we? He hasn't had any injuries, has he? So he hasn't had any injuries to halt his progress or he hadn't had any changing feedback or the psychological well-being that we have been giving so why has he changed?*
>
> *VT: The situation changed.*
>
> *JR: What situation?*
>
> *VT: Of him being with the first team.*
>
> *JR: Yeah right so why has he not taken the confidence from that and batted on?*
>
> *VT: I think he did for a while and then it phased out.*
>
> *JR: What I am saying is there must be a reason.*
>
> *ML: I wouldn't put it solely down to the digs.*
>
> *VT: I wouldn't, because we have got Kevin and JD underperforming also*
> *(see JR, 238, 43)*

Within this example digs were definitely worthy of consideration, however in comparison to other players also underperforming, it seemed illogical to attribute blame to that one factor.

Again, this prompted practitioners to reflect on the positive changes and improvements to practice that they had made in an attempt to facilitate player development in terms of

PWB factors, when compared to last season. There appeared to have been significant differences, and clear benefits, in how the players now interacted with the practitioners. Positive relations seemed better and stronger within the working relationships, in both player-practitioner and player-player interactions.

So, in the final stages as this study comes to an end, it seems appropriate to ask the question... *has PWB helped in academy practice?* I believe it has. Not only from the perspective of seeking to improve the facets of player PWB in an attempt to better players experience within the professional football environment, but also from a practitioner perspective; if they are to help the players, it is evident that practitioner PWB is also important.

Using PWB as a framework for practitioners to drive change in academy practice has proved both challenging and beneficial. It has increased practitioner understanding and awareness to the role they play, or can chose to play, in supporting the professional and personal development of elite youth football players. The PWB framework encouraged practitioners to concentrate on different areas of practice (induction, recovery and transitions) to enhance player PWB that may contribute to player development and progression.

The progression towards action and change has been gradual, possibly slow at the start due to conflict and friction between practitioner beliefs, but then as momentum built with less friction, the wheel of action turned faster with consistent effort. On reflection of the

action research process as a whole, it has evidently driven to advance practitioners knowledge and understanding of PWB in practice, engaging practitioners to interact and support each other within the same environment, and overall could be viewed as succeeding to change and improve aspects of academy practice that have had direct impact on the culture and experience within the academy environment. Within the process of the action research cycle, all eight collaborative group meetings have had significant relevance and played a fundamental part.

This study has replicated the primary ideas of the action research cycle first put forward by Lewin (1948). To begin with collating interview data (Pre-reconnaissance discussions) that would act as a platform to initiate the first step of action, then to learn, assess and evaluate new insight (Reconnaissance phase) before planning the next step and allowing the collaborative practitioner meetings (Action phase) to take hold and provide momentum to drive the wheel of planning and action. Consequently, as a result, the collaborative group of practitioners was able to work together in areas of practice, with the same knowledge and understanding that would help drive change and action towards achievement.

Over the 18-month period of action research it became apparent that it was inevitably the characters around the table that really mattered. It was the practitioners' engagement and commitment to guide change and improvements that made this study possible. I related this to Ragland (2006) as she too had made reference to her experience, having created a work culture and a *way of being* inside a juvenile institution:

We have done this simply by showing up, by doing our best in a difficult environment, sometimes with the help of others, often despite them. I have been able to participate in and to observe the creation of this culture 'from scratch'. Having experienced this first hand, I now believe that workplace cultures are constructed by the people who inhabit them on the basis of moments of common reference. In the environment my colleagues and I share, such moments tend to be events that happen *to* us (p.175).

I found myself questioning, *how well do we actually get to know people? Within the context of research, how well do we get to know the people within the research process, and in this case the practitioners? How much bearing does that have on the findings and end result?* I felt that this type of questioning challenged the way in which research is carried out. This places emphasis on relationships and interactions, bringing about the process of engagement and the individuality that each practitioner brings to the table and their *own* way in which they practice. Consequently, if we are theory-bound within the action research process... *does the opportunity exist to get to know people? Or, does this holistically critique the whole profession?*

<u>**Cautionary note:**</u>

Theory and action research aside, here is a snapshot of practice in the workplace...

It had seemed a short break from the end of last season until now, and yet it was already the second week into pre-season. On my way out to training, Andy came over in reception and asked if he could come and see me later on. As others were hovering around, I quietly asked if he preferred the coach to be in on it. "I'm not bothered about the coach being there, I'm quite happy to come and see you on my own, if that's ok?" "Yes that's fine" I replied, surprised he was so forthcoming. I was still getting to know the new apprentices. Andy has always come across fairly quiet when around the boys in a group situation, seemingly happy to follow the crowd. I suddenly saw him as a confident individual.

Andy came up at lunchtime and began by explaining what had happened at the beginning of the week. I was aware that he had split up from his girlfriend as there had been a bit of banter going around from the boys. That's generally how you tend to find out what's going on! Andy started... "We were traveling down to Burton on the coach and I got a text from her dad, saying she'd tried to slit her wrists and was now in hospital. It was awful I completely lost focus and couldn't think of anything else. When it came to the game I just wasn't there, I wasn't in it, my head had gone... I was all over the place and had a really bad game. After the game I asked Martin if I could have a word and told him what had happened. He was really good and told me that I shouldn't feel guilty for what's happened and it's not my fault."

I felt I needed to know some of the background, in order to fully understand the situation and if I were to advise Andy how best to deal with it. "Well me and me girlfriend finished a couple of months ago but we did see each other now and again. I think she still had high hopes but I kept telling her I didn't want to be with her because I just want to focus on my football. I know if I stayed with her that wouldn't happen. You know, it wasn't the best relationship, we were always arguing and stuff... I just can't be doing with it. I kept getting texts from her friends having a go at me, saying it was my fault. It just really winds me up... I'm even bothered that her dad might come round, cos he's the type to be like that". At this point, Andy had seemed very mixed up and confused.

He then went on to add... "Anyway we've spoken and stuff and she has said sorry for trying to blame me. I managed to block things out in Tuesday's game and didn't think about her at all, I played much better, had one of my best games yet. That's how I want it to be. Although now something else has happened and I haven't told anyone..." There was a pause before he continued. "She says she might be pregnant and that she's going to keep it. I mean I just don't know what to say? I mean I'm not going to have a say in the decision if she is.... I'll just have to stand by her, but I know it wouldn't be good for either of us... not for me and me football... and she can't bring a kid up on her own... then she says even if she decided to keep it, she wouldn't let me have anything to do with it".

I deliberately remained silent. I wanted to let Andy off-load everything that he seemed to have had bottled-up. "I just want go back to the old Andy, that was happy and stuff. Even

me mum and dad have commented... they said that they thought I'd changed and I wasn't myself since I started going out with Kate... I don't have time for anyone else cos she's quite controlling. Cos like, I went to Florida on holiday with me family to see my brother whose on a scholarship out there. I was always on MSN talking to her... and me mum and dad said me brother was really disappointed in me as he hadn't had chance to spend any time with me. I was gutted when they told me that once we got home... and I kind of realized it was true. I just want to go back to how I was before, not always wanting to be with her and dropping everything else. I just can't do anything now until I know whether or not she's pregnant".

I realized that this was a massive weight for a young boy to be carrying around with him no matter what the circumstances. This was more than a distraction whilst trying to remain focused in the football environment. Andy was very open to talking and he recognized that this helped him to be able to block things out later on. I was conscious not to give direction, rather to get him to address his own thoughts and feelings, formulating his own answers. He had spoken with his dad but didn't want to tell his parents about the possible pregnancy, therefore he felt comfortable speaking about it at work. With limited time, only 10 minutes before afternoon training started, Andy asked "Would you mind if I came to see you when I find out what's going on or even just for someone to talk about it with, just reckon it'll help me?" I welcomed the suggestion.

A few days later, on a Friday afternoon following a pre-season friendly that morning, Martin and I had a meeting with Andy. I had suggested to the coaches that he be allowed

to take the morning off to go to the clinic with his ex-girlfriend. We also needed to reassure Andy that he would get support from all staff at the academy, in particular from the academy manager, Jimmy. Albeit good, I was slightly surprised that Martin sat him down and launched into the fact that Jimmy knew, without giving him a chance to say whether he would be ok with that. Andy had confided in Martin, as this was his old coach from last season. However, confidentiality was still paramount. Martin explained that he had had to make Jimmy aware of the situation, but the way in which he did this had been taken out my hands and addressed without tact. I suddenly felt like I had let Andy down as everything was supposed to be confidential. Fortunately in this case, Andy saw the benefit of Jimmy knowing and expressed his appreciation of our support. As he left the room knowing he could have Monday off, I still felt he looked deeply troubled but felt I was compromised in saying anything else whilst the coach was there.

Before I left I was able to speak with Jimmy and explained that I was worried Andy may feel confidentiality was broken, in particular from my role perspective, which I had hoped that I would be able to address any concerns the following week.

Over the weekend, I received a text from Andy: *am not having any luck, am not allowed anything to do with the baby if she has it, as I'm not allowed to go tomorrow (to clinic). Just don't know what to do anymore?* (Sunday 6th August) I tried to ring Andy straight away upon reading his message. He didn't pick up. So I replied via text: *Ok, try not to worry about it and unfortunately you will have to accept that as Kate's decision. If you're*

in tomorrow morning we can have a chat to see where you can go from here. Any

concerns let me know. Hope all ok.

The next day, Monday lunchtime, Andy came up to speak further about his current situation. He explained how he had asked to go to the clinic with his ex-girlfriend but she would not let him. Understanding that things were on his mind and still uncertain as to the outcome, I suggested he ring her to find out how the morning had gone at the clinic. I left the room so that he could ring from my office in private.

Reflecting on the conversation he repeated what had been said "she said she definitely is pregnant, she's having it and it's a boy". "Ok and how do you feel about that?" I curiously asked. He was pretty shocked and looked bewildered. We talked over his options and what his next move would be. He would have to come to terms with the pregnancy claims from his ex-girlfriend. My main concern now was that he had to make the decision to tell his parents. I spoke with him at length discussing all his options. If he told his parents, was he worried about how they would react? After much deliberation Andy felt it was best to let his parents know and get their support, as they may influence the decision. I was relieved and pleased that he had come to this decision himself.

From my personal perspective, I found the whole situation difficult to comprehend, or believe may be a better word for it. After all, Andy had no concrete evidence that his ex-girlfriend was pregnant. He had exhausted all possible routes in order to provide support and get confirmation. Maybe playing devil's advocate, although I felt someone had to, I

weighed up the possibility that his ex-girlfriend could be lying. It may have sounded harsh, but too many things do not add up; there was no proof that the scan had taken place (photo evidence should be available), she was reportedly only 5 weeks pregnant yet the sex of baby had been determined, she had refused to let Andy go to the clinic with her and furthermore, threatened to have an abortion at the thought of Andy telling his parents.

Maybe understandably, Andy didn't seem to appreciate my suggestions that this may not be true. I felt awful having to say it, but felt someone had to hint towards it tactfully. Based on his reactions I realized he did not and was unlikely to believe his ex-girlfriend would put him through this if it were not true. Therefore I felt I had no option but to encourage the fact that he brings his parents on board as they would be in a better position to act on the accusations. *I was conscious as to whether I was doing the right thing? Should I just come out with it and say what I think? But then could that mean that I was jumping to conclusions and being judgmental? Do I accept what Andy believes and let him waste more time trying to get clarification?*

I allowed him to find his own answers, probing and asking questions that triggered an honest response. "I know it's selfish but I really think I'm too young to have a kid at 16. I don't want her to have it?"

At lunch a well-respected first team player had pulled him aside and asked how he was (again, news travels fast at the training ground, it's hard for the players to have any secrets between themselves). Andy was taken aback that others knew of his situation,

however he seemed to appreciate his concern and supportive advice, which possibly gave him more confidence in knowing what he wanted.

His football had been affected so far. In training that morning, his reactions had been negative, showing a lot of frustration at his own performance, he had been aware of this and so were the coaches. From my own perspective I found it frustrating to know that he was spending so much time caught up in this matter, and being able to see the direct impact it was having on his football, distracting him from what he was here to do and ultimately affecting his chances in his second year of the scholarship programme.

He left the room confident in his mind that he would speak to his parents, with the security that he had full support from the academy. Only time would tell as to whether he would follow this through...

The following morning, I decided to go into the dome to observe an injury prevention session with the physio. The boys were in pairs whilst moving round the different stations. Certain pairs got on with it, some chatted whilst talking part and a few looked like it was too much effort. As Andy passed he practically whispered, whilst nobody else was listening "Would I be ok to come and see you at lunch today? Will you be around?" I nodded without saying a word.

"Been up til 2am on the phone to her... she's lost the baby", he said with his head down. Curiously "Ok and how did you find this out? What exactly happened?"

"She went to the hospital on Sunday morning with stomach pains. They decided to do a bit of ultrasound and found no heartbeat. She lost the baby... I was really shocked, didn't think this would happen. She's really upset and just been crying on the phone most of the night, just wanting someone to talk too. I've told her I'll give her any support she needs. Apparently she was asking for me in the hospital, she didn't want to speak to anyone else. That hurts knowing that... that I wasn't there".

"So who told you this?" I felt my original suspicions had now been confirmed and yet again Andy seemed to be taking on further responsibility. "Who went to the hospital with her?" "Her mate went with her". I was aware that I was firing questions at him, having to contain my own frustration. How could he not see what was going on? Did he simply *want* to believe it was true, not wanting to imagine that his ex-girlfriend would be so cruel as to make it up? Did he enjoy the attention, as Jimmy had suggested? Or did he enjoy the responsibility of the situation? I was very confused how to diplomatically approach matters from here.

I attempted to gage his stance. "So what happens now? How do you see things moving?" There was a silent pause. "I'm aware that this is difficult to deal with for both her and yourself, however from an outside perspective it has taken the decision out of your hands. There is now no hold and deliberation over whether to keep the baby or not. Do your parents know yet?"

"No I haven't told my parents and there isn't much point now, is there?"

"Well I believe there is. You still need their support and previously you were worried over them finding out from some of the others… won't that still be the case?"

"Well yeh, but I'm not sure whether to now, whether I need to. Do you think I'd be able to get some time off to go and see her, and just sort it all out?" I was surprised at Andy's response. Asking for time off was already frowned upon in this environment, and now I couldn't understand what purpose it would serve. "What do you hope to gain by taking more time off?" He quietly added. "Well I just feel I need to before she goes away again… and she's asked me to".

Quite frustrated that Andy seemed to be letting things take up more of his time, I suggested that he or I would need to speak with Jimmy or Martin to get approval. It was decided that Andy would come up at lunchtime to ask permission. I remember feeling puzzled as Andy left the room. I couldn't understand his actions. His actions did not reflect his earlier comments. Was there an underlying motive? Had he simply been paying lip service when discussing where things go from here and how he takes things forwards, with no real intention of seeing them through?

At lunchtime Jimmy called me into the meeting with Andy. Jimmy's approach was very blunt, not harsh but in a confronting manner. I felt Jimmy wanted to make sure Andy understood there wasn't a sense of doubt and uncertainty in the current situation, it was black and white from where he stood. Jimmy continued to question why he felt the need to find out more details? Where would that get him if he really did want to walk away from his girlfriend and focus on his football as he had originally indicated? This is where

Andy's actions and words appeared to differ. He left the meeting with a clear idea of where his focus needed to be.

A few days on, and still in pre-season, I managed to catch up with Alex regarding his work on improving concentration. He felt it had helped but was still practicing and monitoring his progress during games. He was aware that he was most likely to 'switch off' in the final 10-15 minutes of a game, and as a result he always asked the ref for the time to make sure he stayed switched on, conscious of knowing when his concentration was likely to dip. So far this season, he felt his progress had improved considerably. Ironically, due to one major factor, that he had finished with his girlfriend. He hadn't been focused last season because of this and found himself in trouble a lot, having to report to Jimmy on many occasions. He now felt that he was in a good place, and was getting plenty of feedback, highlighting what he needed to do to improve. It was great to witness this positive change in attitude and behaviour. Alex was enjoying training and had been given the opportunity to train with the first team also. He claimed that he was looking forward to the league starting... "I'm a lot happier within meself, happy with me progress and everything".

That Saturday we played Sunderland. It was a poor performance in the first half, although better in the second half. Jimmy felt players were not giving enough consistency. Harty was brought off at half time, he hadn't been having a good game. As the rest of the team walked out of the changing room for the second half, Harty sat with his head in his hands

and didn't move. I looked over to Andy Robinson (assistant coach) to acknowledge Harty was upset and he indicated for Kevin and I to leave and he that would deal with it.

When Andy Robinson came back out for the game, he came over and explained how Harty had been. He's really upset, there's other things' he's upset about other than being brought off today. "Go on, like what?" I asked with concern. "Well he's just mentioned that he hasn't seen his mum for 6 weeks but he's going home today so he will". "But he goes home every weekend... oh but then again I think his mum and dad are split up, so maybe he doesn't get to see his mum all the time?" We were unsure of the facts.

Jimmy questioned what was up with Harty. "He can't have an arm round him every time something like this happens, he's got to get used to it". Andy attempted to defend Harty, "no he's ok, he was just upset, disappointed with the way he's played". Jimmy looked displeased.

Now in August, and going into the next week, I had attempted to conduct a player focus group with first year apprentices. It hadn't got off to a good start. I had sensed Alex and Peter were in a giddy mood and itching to get out as soon they arrived; they knew everyone had the afternoon off and so wanted to make the most of it before the reserve game. Strangely, I empathised with how they felt as they rarely got time off. However, on the other hand, I felt extremely frustrated from what I needed to get done. I had wanted to get through an important focus group in order to collect data within the action research process to meet an intended timeline. Yet the more I tried to bring the boys to a level, the

more this seemed unlikely to happen. I had to act quickly and was thinking on my feet. I was faced with two options; 1. Complete the focus group, yet knowingly aware that I did not have the full attention of certain players and therefore their response could be half-hearted, or 2. Quit the focus group, in the hope that I would be able to pick it up again at a more convenient point that week. I thought over it before making a snap decision... *somehow I had come to feel incompetent, useless and with little respect from the players. What did I want from the session? Was I getting it? Why am I here? What's the point?* My thoughts began to escalate. I felt under pressure and one thought appeared to lead to another. Disappointed, I began to feel upset and angry. *Why couldn't things just go to plan?* I quickly stopped the session and announced to the players we would have to do it another time because I needed their full attention and commitment to the group. They appeared shocked at my abruptness. Suddenly there was silence! I left the room feeling the need to escape.

I needed to gather my thoughts and calm down as I could feel myself getting worked up, and my emotions heightened. I was about to get upset. As there was nowhere to go, other than my office, and with an open-door policy people would simply walk in regardless, I headed for the toilets to get some air and vent my frustrations. After a few minutes, I was able to gather my thoughts and decided to face the outside again. As I walked through the corridor to my office, I saw Priestley stood at Jimmy's door. I chose to do other things in order to occupy my mind and regain a sense of calm, as my emotions were still running high. I knew what was coming... Jimmy called me into his office. "Vic, have you got a minute?" I had a sneaky suspicion Priestley would have told him what had happened, and

he had. I actually agreed that he did, because if there was to be any backlash, he had been sat in that group, willing and waiting to take part. "Yep, hold on" I shouted back, really not wanting to face Jimmy right now, not at this very moment.

I walked into Jimmy's office, knowing that I needed to compose myself in a professional manner. "What's gone on? I've just heard the focus group didn't go well?" I paused for a moment, thinking how best to respond, but my emotions got the better of me. I broke down in tears. It had been so important for me to get the meetings done on a strict time schedule, or so I had convinced myself. The boys had not been bothered, they just wanted to get off as soon as possible, so that they could have the afternoon off before the reserve game in the evening. Maybe it was my fault. Maybe I had picked the wrong time. It was asking too much from the boys.

Jimmy reacted straight away, "What's up? You're not upset about it are you? If you are don't be". I couldn't look up. I didn't want Jimmy to see me upset. It would look like I couldn't handle it. I quickly attempted to compose myself, aware that this was hardly the professional way of dealing with things. I took the opportunity to explain what had happened "they just wanted to get off, knowing that they've got the afternoon off, so it was obviously a big inconvenience... they just pissed about... and in the end I couldn't be doing with it... so I stopped the session and walked out. I'm sorry, I know it's my problem, cos I know it's my stuff".

"Why's it just your problem?"

"Cos it is… it's my research, so otherwise there wouldn't have been a problem", I consciously made an effort to diffuse the situation. I really didn't want there to be any comeback on the boys as a result. That would only make things worse in my view! Jimmy continued, "hold on, those research meetings aren't just for you. Those meetings play a part in this academy. When we have staff meetings held by you, you only ask for an hour but why do you think they go on for over 2 hours?"

"Well I know but…"

"They go on for that long because it gets us thinking and talking about how we run things in this academy and if we're doing right by those players… It's because of your work that we were able to address the situation with Steve and improve the academy. You know if it wasn't for those meetings Matt Cullen would never have asked the question about whether we're meeting Ben Stockley's social needs. So don't think that that's just your stuff to deal with, cos it affects this academy… what do you think will happen when you've finished your studies… is that it?"

"Well obviously I would hope not…"

"No cos I'll still employ you to continue what you're doing now with the players', and staff". I was taken aback with Jimmy's response.

It was now coming to the end of pre-season and I eventually managed to catch up with David Jolley, who had recently stepped up with the first team. Jimmy had also asked that I check-in with him to see how he's finding things and monitor how he's doing. David was like a giant, as he walked into my room only 17 years old but extremely tall. He's very modest about his ability and approaches pretty much everything from a laid back

perspective, sometimes to his own detriment! I began to ask how he was getting on, delving further into his experiences so far within the first team setup. He seemed to take things in his stride, he'd had good feedback from the first team coaches and could cope in training sessions. Although given the opportunity, he would prefer to be training with the U18's, "with his mates" as he would put it. David continued to talk around his new experiences. I was slightly alarmed to hear the odd doubt in Jolley's mind…"I don't just want to be with the first team as a kind of favour?" This statement said it all. Clearly, David did not attribute his progress and opportunity, to his own ability and performance.

As the season moved on and autumn came, a number of weeks had passed since the league had started (it was now October 15th). I had conducted two player focus groups, one with each year group. I was interested to find out how, from the players perspectives, they felt they were getting on and I wanted to get an idea of where they sensed they were at so early on in the season, what if anything, affected their judgment or evaluation. During the focus group held with first year apprentices, the key areas of concern were revealed and I began to get a sense of the group dynamics.

Marcus and Ben were not from England and so both had different experiences from the rest of the boys. Marcus had come over from Sweden, along with his family. Whereas, Ben had come over from southern Ireland, however he arrived two months late into the season, and so technically was deemed to be two months behind the rest of the players. As I touched on issues that required the boys to relate to their experience(s), I noticed that Ben had started to look agitated and his emotions were reluctantly beginning to show, he

was starting to get upset. Something had struck a chord and triggered his emotions and I quickly realised the topic of discussion was likely to be at the forefront of his mind. Luckily Marcus was able to explain that he had gone through similar things and it had taken time to overcome. I didn't want to push Ben in asking him further questions that may cause further upset in front of the others... I knew I would be able to speak with him when he was on his own and felt that this would be more appropriate.

On a different day...

Today I felt frustrated, incompetent, useless and not respected... What do I want from this session? Am I getting it... no. Why am I here? What's the point? I left the room.

There's nowhere to go to just get away from everyone and gather my thoughts on my own. I went and sat in the toilets to get some air and vent my frustration. After a few minutes I decided to face the outside again. As I walked into my room David was stood at Jimmy's door. I chose to continue to do other things in order to occupy my mind and regain composure as my emotions were still running high. Jimmy called me into his room. I really didn't want to speak to him, hadn't had enough time to calm down from the incident.

"What's gone on? I've just heard the focus group didn't go well?" On that note I just broke down in tears. It was so important for me to get the meetings done on a strict time schedule. The boys just weren't bothered, they just wanted to get off as soon as possible

cos they had the afternoon off before the reserves game in the evening. Maybe it was my fault that I'd picked the wrong time and asked too much of the boys.

Jimmy reacted straight away, "What's up? You're not upset about it are you? If you are don't be". I couldn't look up, as I was trying to hide the upset that would be written all over my face. I quickly attempted to collect myself together, aware that this was hardly a professional way of dealing with it. I took the opportunity to explain what had happened "they just wanted to get off, knowing they've got the afternoon off, so it was obviously a big inconvenience... they just pissed about... and in the end I couldn't be arsed with it... so I stopped the session and walked out". "I'm sorry I know it's *my* problem cos it's *my* stuff".

"Why's it just your problem?"

"Cos it is... it's my research, so otherwise there wouldn't have been a problem" attempting to diffuse the situation not wanting there to be comeback on the boys as a result.

"Hold on, those research meetings aren't just for you. Those meetings play a part in this academy. When we have staff meetings held by you, you only ask for an hour but why do you think they go on for over 2 hours?"

"Well I know but..."

"They go on for that long because it gets us thinking and talking about how we run things in this academy and if we're doing right by those players... It's because of your work that we were able to address the situation with Steve and improve the academy. You know if

it wasn't for those meetings Matt Cullen would never have asked the question about whether we're meeting Ben Stockley's social needs. So don't think that that's just your stuff to deal with, cos it affects this academy... what do you think will happen when you've finished your studies... is that it?"

"Well obviously I would hope not..."

"No cos I'll still employ you to continue what you're doing now with the players and staff."

5.0 Discussion

The discussion to follow aims to explore the key findings from this thesis. It includes a combination of theoretical and cultural themes and these reflect both deductive and inductive insights. Critical reflections are provided, based on my own research journey (from an insider-outsider perspective and a practitioner-researcher perspective also). The discussion draws from many forms of analysis that involved continuous reflection-on-action, shared reflection and multi-staged reflection, and continued use of staged reflection.

As a result of immersing myself in the research environment for an extended period of eighteen months, I was able to experience the ups and downs of academy life. I was fortunate enough to explore such experiences through the lens of three different angles; that of the players, other practitioners and my own as practitioner-researcher. The discussion is structured around the four central research aims outlined earlier on page 106.

Aim 1. To reflect upon the role of research-facilitator within the action research process with specific reference to role conflict and strategy

5.1 An insider's tale – reflections on the research journey

The action research process itself provided a platform for staged, layered and shared reflection to take place, formally from one meeting to the next, but also as a reactive form of reflection in and on action (as it happened). The process of reflection occurred on a daily basis. However, a couple of months into the reconnaissance phase, I began to

recognize challenges in the intensity and emotionality of reflection and the level of

reflective skills that I required to provide a fair representation of my thoughts and

experiences:

> *...what was becoming more and more apparent was my overriding focus on coach well-being. Something I had originally not accounted for as a presenting issue to the research project. Initially I was apprehensive as to where I was 'allowed' to stray from the research path (one that stressed player well-being) I had not previously envisaged that I would go off on a tangent, and so soon in the research process (see Reconnaissance p.156).*

At this point I was able to relate to the writings of Carr and Kemmis (1986). The incident

involving Steve and Kevin, now seemed even more significant than first realized, as I

believed that if the research journey had gone forward without dilemmas, then I may not

have been (almost) forced into reaching a higher level of reflection. Instead, I went

beyond simply highlighting problems with aspects of practice but faced up to contested

processes and actions that caused distortions in my own estimations of what was

acceptable and brought me directly to the challenge of understanding practice of which I

could approve. This reinforced sentiments from Carr and Kemmis (1986) and reference to

Habermas on the psychoanalytical method of reflection. Consequently, I related to points

raised by Jan Meyer in the 2006 Educational Action Research Editorial:

> Meyer also addresses issues of quality; but her focus is somewhat different. She argues that debate in health and social care about becoming critical needs to be widened by including the value and concept of being caring. She traces changes, not only to practice, but also in her own thinking as she has progressed through her career, and argues that we need to settle for a more pluralistic and inclusive conceptual framework when addressing matters of quality. She has a particular concern, beyond that of social justice as espoused by Kemmis, which is to consider the emotional ramifications of professional work and life and how these emotions can impact upon the ways in which practice is understood and improved (p.452).

I embraced these sentiments in my efforts to, firstly, face-up to my own boundaries of acceptable practice, and secondly, to understand the unacceptable in a way that avoided undue condemnation.

So, 'the incident' between Steve and Kevin in the early stages of the season had been a wake-up call (for me) on the boundaries of working practice. Both motivational and consequences related to human process (what it meant to be a player and what it meant to be a coach) and consequently involved both emotions and dilemmas. *Should I have thought it would ever go smoothly?* Forewarned that action research may get messy, as Denzin and Lincoln (2005) had suggested in reality the process will be untidy as the stages overlap, and having now experienced 'the mess' first-hand, I appreciate that this is possibly more reflective of real-life situations in the workplace. I saw value in chaos which probably brought with it some sense of authentic tension, and that the many different personalities, working relationships and interactions that take place on a daily basis must be taken into account.

> It is, however, unrealistic to expect all workplace settings to be so functional; and where working relationships are less harmonious, it follows that the instigation and maintenance of any reflective process may be more difficult (Gilbourne, 2001; p.190).

The more I appreciated this notion, the more I began to question what the role of theory might be and move towards a critical-form of reflection. This was evident after the first collaborative group meeting, where I began to reconsider the potentiality of theory for the first time:

Now the first meeting was complete, I was left questioning... *the role of theory? What role does it play? And inevitably, what role WILL it play? This research is just not about me identifying the theoretical threads embedded in the narrative, so how does this help me, to help them?* I had to be mindful of the meaning and utility of theory throughout this process (see p.248).

I attempted to understand the role it had played (SWB introduced in the first collaborative group meeting) and could play, in the action phases that lay ahead. The theory used here was not embedded in the narrative of the practitioners', I introduce it (PWB introduced at a later point). I also questioned how theory was to be of any meaning and utility within the professional football environment. As the collaborative group meetings progressed I began to recognize theory as something to be used to be utilized; rather than something that might confirm or explain:

The theory to practitioners has acted like stabilizers to a bike, supporting the practitioners until they became confident and comfortable to ride with the notion of well-being in their own practice (see Reconnaissance p.312).

Theory played a major role within this study, in particular in assisting the fusion between craft knowledge and professional knowledge and, later, in practice. PWB was introduced to practitioners as the cyclical process of action research developed and moved forwards, when they were confident with the notion of well-being in their practice. This informed practitioners' knowledge and understanding of how aspects of their own practice could attend to player PWB, and therefore enabling them to integrate both craft knowledge and professional knowledge to drive improvement and change within academy practice.

Although within my role as psychologist it felt pretty natural to have an antenni tuned into how people were, I was aware that I needed to be cautious as not to assume and convince myself or others that I could actually "see" well-being. I noted that it was commonsensical to a degree (anyone can see a good day from a bad day). I would not, however, necessarily make that decision in an instant. I was not, for example, in a position to be able to say that a person has a well-being problem. Instead, and reiterating sentiments from Ryff and Singer (1996), that:

> ...understanding who does and who does not possess high levels of well-being requires closer examination of the actual substance of people's lives, that is, their life experiences (p.19).

I intentionally sought to pick up on the highs and lows experienced on a day-to-day basis, through observation and interactions. Overtime I began to see patterns in people, and in doing so, felt it was more viable to question well-being at that point, after repeated exposure, I was more sure footed about taking a view of ways to smooth-out highs and lows and to 'build-in' practices that might empower.

On reflection I feel that the research was assisted rather than being overpowered by theoretical knowledge. As the components of PWB became introduced within Collaborative Practitioner Meeting Six I sensed I was driving a more direct 'professional-knowledge' phase, however, this was late in the action research process and the decision to emphasize PWB was based on a perceived pragmatic connection between the tenets of PWB and the on-going conversations with practitioners. I was able to bring the outsider-

researcher world closer to the insider-practitioner world and began to realize that the notion of well-being could be related to everyday happenings. It appeared to be a sense of logic - intuitively logical.

I was able to relate with earlier suggestions from Sankaran, Hase, Dick, and Davies (2007; p.296), based on teaching action research, as they described the sudden dealings of having to cope with the *non-linear* world of action research and the methods and action involved. They believed this to be the excitement attached to this kind of research and that most studies testified to the undeniable personal experience that occurs, placing large emphasis on the *doing* that changes attitudes and not the other way round.

In a similar vein, Grant (2007) alluded to her own experience of the action research process and indicated the importance of reflection in her research journey, and that it was only until she appreciated this that she recognized she was actually learning through *doing*. Consequently, learning through doing could be viewed as more meaningful as there is a direct association for the learner (researcher) to the experience at hand (Sankaran et al., 2007).

Knowles and Gilbourne (2010) referred to reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action as part of the process of reflective practice within action research. I felt the research journey within this study demonstrated critical engagement through critical reflection, and illustrated the emotionally challenging process, as previously described by Morley (2007).

I found myself questioning my thoughts, feelings and actions, or more so no actions to be precise. At no point did I feel it acceptable. *Morally and ethically, why did I not say anything, attempt to intervene, act on my feelings?* Instead I chose to be a passive observer. *Surely this was a conscious decision?* I seemed to flit between the two stances, one of myself as a person, and the other as a researcher keen to engage in the action research process (see Reconnaissance p.160).

Aim 2. To explore the capacity of psychological well-being (PWB) themes to inform practice-change, in an applied youth football context

5.2 Considering the practical utility of theory

Within this study, the utility of theory became more prominent as the process of action research developed and moved forwards. The first Collaborative Practitioner Meeting introduced practitioners to the concept of subjective well-being (SWB) and raised awareness within practice, using examples from the reconnaissance phase, along with player feedback i.e. how players felt when injured. The utility of SWB continued as the main point of reference to evaluate practice (observation and player feedback were also collected), and served purpose in Collaborative Practitioner Meetings Two, Three and Four. However, during this time, I also became interested in psychological well-being (PWB) as my observations in daily practice and insight into practitioner perceptions appeared to reflect the tenets of PWB, creating visible deductive links between theory and practice. Therefore, having monitored this development, between theoretical deductive links and on-going practice, it seemed logical to move towards PWB.

Steve had begun to question himself, not only did Steve appear low, but maybe he sensed he lacked purpose, and possibly what he perceived to be his own environmental mastery could never be achieved as a result of the quality players he was working with. After all, he had come to the conclusion that none of the players would make it as a pro... *"the standard of players is not good enough... you're just wasting your time with that lot"* (see Reconnaissance p.181).

The deductive *tide* had turned from SWB to PWB.

Practitioners were presented with the notion of PWB in Collaborative Practitioner Meeting Five, as I sensed that PWB had a more pragmatic feel and can relate to everyday practice, and so sought to drive the components of PWB within the process of practice-change. The practitioners welcomed the concept of PWB, as they appeared to view it as a reliable framework that they were able to turn to when considering practice-change, to them, it was a useful point of reference. Consequently, practitioner professional knowledge was enhanced with regards to PWB in practice, which practitioners could then utilize, along with practitioner craft knowledge to facilitate the practice-change process.

With the combination of professional knowledge and craft knowledge, practitioners were encouraged to consider individual player needs. Therefore the utility of theory (in this case PWB) was able to increase practitioner professional knowledge and inform practice via means of the action research process in order to assist practice-change. Although this was important, it must also be noted that practitioner craft knowledge should not be understated, as it is only with practitioner craft knowledge within the action research process that practice-change strategies can be successfully applied. This also supported the notion put forward by McFee (1993) that both craft knowledge and professional knowledge were fundamental to the epistemology of action research.

The practitioners grew in confidence, as they were able to demonstrate greater awareness and understanding of the PWB components within practice, and that in turn triggered the process of action research to gather momentum. Each practitioner was able to link craft knowledge and everyday practice to newly found professional knowledge based around the components of PWB. Practitioner engagement illustrated the transparency and commitment to the themes and processes of action, and related to Gilbourne's (2000) earlier sentiments, as this research was able to demonstrate that emancipatory action research *had* taken place through the empowerment of practitioners. This resulted in different practitioners able to apply their professional knowledge and craft knowledge to meet the needs of their own practice, whilst at the same time, all practitioners were committed to the same goal... towards improving PWB within academy practice.

Practice-change associated to PWB and core themes:

Induction

- Induction was perceived to play a significant role in the early stages of a first year apprentice. Increased player responsibility facilitated levels of autonomy and encouraged environmental mastery. This was also perceived to support personal growth and self-acceptance. In addition, player self-confidence was seen to strengthen aspects of PWB, more specifically seen to facilitate self-acceptance within the environment, as in certain cases first year apprentices appeared more vulnerable to this.

Recovery

- Debriefs were conducted consistently on a weekly basis, on a Monday following the game, irrespective of whether the team had won or lost. This provided players with the opportunity to reflect on both the positives and the negatives of match performance, which helped to foster player self-acceptance within the environment.

- All players were encouraged to voice their opinion to promote learning and understanding of team and/or individual performance. In doing so, this was perceived to contribute to player PWB, in particular, seen to facilitate autonomy, self-acceptance, personal growth, and purpose towards training.

- Within the process of action research, the introduction to debriefs has been positive. Debriefs have been perceived to play a constructive and important role towards mental recovery following games, not only for the players, but for the coach also.

- The change in structure to the programme helped support the purpose of physical and mental recovery strategies that in turn were perceived to benefit player subjective and psychological well-being.

Transitions

- The variation to training allowed players to experience a change in environment. It encouraged them to work alongside different practitioners and to develop new positive working relations. The change in environment also facilitated player

autonomy. This also invited daily feedback from practitioners in different forms that was welcomed by players and perceived to better inform players of where they were at.

- Injured players were encouraged to continue learning, and to remain involved and in contact with practitioner and team-mates, in order to maintain aspects of PWB, in particular, positive relations and self-acceptance, and along with subjective well-being.

- Overall, a task-oriented motivational climate was adopted to support player levels of self-acceptance, environmental mastery, personal growth and autonomy, this was also applied to the treatment of injured players and seemingly provided players with a purpose to train independent of the result or scenario of where they currently found themselves to be.

Subsequently, the components of PWB became the main focus and largely the theoretical standing that was returned to most, and although theory-led at the beginning (SWB followed by the introduction to PWB), the role and utility of theory came into question. *Was the role of theory to interpret or to help the people?* I believed the original use of theory was used to interpret, and then only with a matter of time was that then taken to the next step in an attempt to help those involved.

Practitioner engagement was evident as the cyclical action research process progressed. Practitioners appeared to take ownership towards driving change within their own practice. Overtime, changes in practice seemed to become less reliant on theory and more practitioner-led. Although with the use of PWB components as a point of reference, practitioners were able to return to this as a sense of security. It became apparent that some PWB components appeared more useable than others in terms of practice:

MC - With purpose in life, do you think we miss out with a few players because...I know this is really dicey but, a couple of players, second years don't have a chance in hell of getting a pro but they're doing really well at the moment and they're enjoying themselves, helping the team. But, do they still think they've got a chance of being a pro? What can you do about it? Cos purpose in life, if they think they're getting a pro, we're not ticking that box? (see Data file, p.335).

However, action research as a process and catalyst to change practice remained constant.

Residing with the notion that the action is with the PWB components and that well-being will follow based on those factors, it could be assumed that to take care of the PWB components leads to well-being taking care of itself. The PWB components have a pragmatic feel and intuitiveness about them that helped to encourage practitioners to engage in the action research process as they too latched on to the six components, even the hard-nosed practitioners that initially had their reservations about the process as a whole, were not fearful of these terms and their use. This supported earlier descriptions offered by Warr (1978) that PWB was perceived as a concept that concerned people's feelings about daily life activities (Bradburn, 1969; Warr and Wall, 1975; Campbell, 1976). Consequently, it could potentially be proposed that by enhancing the components

of PWB that this increases the capacity of the player to achieve and attain success i.e. to perform.

The applied context of theory was difficult for certain practitioners to grasp and took time. However, with constant referral to the PWB components framework, and after providing relevant examples in practice, the applied context of theory was able to align within the day-to-day context. Admittedly, this sometimes neatly fit and other times more untidily. Both McMahon (1999) and Winter (1998) explained:

> ...the action research process is often motivated by theoretical standpoints as well as grounded in participatory practice. Contextual factors as well as the people involved determine the extent to which research projects are theory-driven, practice-driven, or carried out in a theory/practice balance (Drummond and Themessl-Huber, 2007; p.431).

In addition, and in support of previous claims by McFee (1993) and Gilbourne (2000), the combination of craft knowledge and professional knowledge brought together and discussed within collaborative practitioner group meetings, proved central to the epistemology of action research that took place. Inevitably, the utility of theory in this study and within the process of action research was able to affect thinking and practice in a complex elite sport context. Albeit the context cannot be replicated, but the same questions can, and can be applied in a similar manner yet in a different context.

Aim 3. To reflect upon and discuss the personal-contextual dynamic of a practice-change process within youth football

<u>5.3 The realpolitik of practice-change in context</u>

Changes in practice only represent an outline or map for change. However change in practitioner, and change in context involves much more detail than what can be put onto paper. This type of change consists of interaction and social constraints. For example, within this study there were a number of contextual difficulties that arose. For example, the *micro-politics*, having to fit in with the dynamics at the club, in particular practitioner changes when the academy manager (Bill) and U18 coach (Steve) left the club. There were difficult dynamics at times, due to practitioners having a philosophy to practice, reflected in their morals and beliefs. It could be an emotional environment and sometimes people were difficult. There was a formal structure to meetings, however the reality was unpredictable e.g., friction between practitioners.

Consequently, the interaction is between individuals, and in this case, the interaction lies between the practitioners and players. How they interact with one another, when and on what basis will often decide the usefulness of such interaction. So change may be seen to reside with the individual and their motives. Kemmis and McTaggart (2007) pointed out, the purpose of participatory action research is social and if social interaction between participants is significant within practice, then changing practice is a social process:

> To be sure, one person may change so that others are obliged to react or respond differently to that individual's changed behaviour, but the willing and committed involvement of those whose interactions constitute the practice is necessary, in the end, to secure and legitimate the change. (p.277)

When individual cases of workplace practice and well-being have been highlighted within this study, it is relationships and interactions that have seemingly been key. Ragland (2006) indicated that recognizing similar experiences within practice can not only facilitate further understanding of the practice carried out, but also that it encourages practitioners to find common ground through shared or similar experiences:

> It seems clear to me now that no single person, no matter how that person is situated, can positively impact on a workplace culture, except as she engages others at the level of the practice. (Unfortunately, it appears that one person can often negatively impact on the workplace culture.) (Ragland, 2006; p.180).

I was able to relate this to experiences within this study, where Steve had sometimes been in conflict to others, and reluctant to support and drive change for the same reasons that others did.

> *MC: ...I would be very, very scared about saying training 7 days a week. I'm sort of the opinion that you always have a day off a week, and I know that most Olympic level athletes and any sort of injury excellent athletes you have a day off a week and...*
>
> *SJ: But what about... as I'm saying they get time off through the week with college don't they?*
>
> *MC: They get half a day, but they're always in that day though aren't they?*
>
> *SJ: Erm, yeh Mondays and Fridays, and Wednesdays they have a chance. I mean again I'll put that down on my discretion, cos I think there's times where they need to come in for whatever reason... as regards work on a Sunday, it wouldn't be working on a Sunday it would be actually to come in and have a recovery session, as regards stretches and stuff like that and then have the chat...*
>
> *MC: Hmm...*
>
> *SJ: So Sundays is off, you're not physically working. I mean you're coming in...*
> *(see Data file, p.271)*

Although it was only one practitioner that did not seem in agreement with certain suggested changes or improvements, this became very difficult for others to manage, as it appeared to create friction and alter the group dynamics. Evidently, as soon as that friction was removed, the process of change and positive impact appeared to exchange at a quicker rate.

Theory, people and culture... their true selves and characters are what had driven the agenda e.g. differences between Steve and Jimmy. All practitioners were listening and working around the theory that brought them round the table BUT the utility of the theory is determined by the people within that culture – interaction and relationships between practitioners. It is the people that past research has never let the reader get to know before.

Consequently overtime, longitudinal action research allows the reader to see people in a true context, how people start to react to things and/or each other. How people change is not something you can expect a theory to do on its own. In doing so, this research appeared to support the argument put forward by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) that participatory action researchers will explore how changing *objective* circumstances shape and are shaped by participant *subjective* circumstances. Therefore, who they are as people, in essence, seems to matter as much, if not more.

> The opportunity to speak with Steve on a one-to-one was interesting. It wasn't that his views necessarily changed (though his actions seemed to have adjusted a little), nevertheless I had begun to understand him better. I recognised that his reasoning, his motives behind his actions, suggested that he cared. However,

this was often marred (or somehow lost in translation) by the way he chose to react in situations, actions that on the surface could be deemed as misleading from his original motives. *Maybe Steve was just misunderstood?* (see Data file, p.256).

This could turn it into critique of methodology or theory. Therefore raising questions on the way we do research and the training people go through. However, it seemed worthy to note, that this research also confirmed the views of Drummond and Themessl-Huber (2007) that whilst being grounded in participatory practice, the process of action research can often be motivated by theoretical standpoints.

Within this study, I have got to know the practitioners AND the players, so I don't ask does this relate to theory, but instead... *how do these characters demonstrate any allegiance with the tenets of theory?* That way, I place *people* in the foreground and *theory* in the background, and I look at theory and the utility of it, and I question how the literature based sport psychology has so little of this. *How often do we ask these questions in our training, research, and in our profession?* It prevents us seeing people and learning about people. *So how does the relationship between theory-people-practice interplay?* The notion that people have theories of their own, for example, Steve's views on mental toughness may differ to others sat around the table, brings me to question... *what is a theory? And how is it defined as theory?* There are so-called theories on the ground, that are practical in nature, and there are those we use knowingly because they are labeled theory.

This confusion led me to realize what critical social science is all about, as I had started

to contest it. As a result, I even began to question my own training. Conducting action

research within this study has liberated me from past thinking, and I feel I can now go out

better prepared and move away from the restrictions of the *linear* world.

Aim 4. To reflect and critically comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the deployment of action research design within a sports-based context

<u>5.4 Efficacy of method</u>

When beginning to consider the qualitative location of the action research, I began to

think about how I would like the thesis to be judged. In relation to criteria, The

Educational Action Research Editorial (2006) had explained that questions must be asked

when attempting to examine the quality of action research:

> ...criteria with respect to quality must first and foremost meet an ethical test;
> that the work is directed towards positive change, or in Lewin's words 'research
> leading to social action' (1946, p.203) – that is, that is has a positive and
> generative impact on practice, that it is transparent and accountable to the field
> of practice and it is trustworthy in its nature and enactment (p.451).

Having come to the end of the action research journey I recognized the value in Lewin's

(1946) comment. Looking back, I remember at the outset, at the beginning of the research

journey and in relation to the Evans et al.'s (2000) and Gilbourne (2000) debate,

considering whether action research naturally took place as part of day-to-day practice

within the academy environment, as new ideas were often discussed and practice

reviewed. However, over time, with commitment to the action research process within

this thesis and on the ground, have I come to realize, in agreement with Gilbourne's (2000) earlier sentiments, that action research did not take place as a matter of process within everyday practice prior to this study. I now understand and appreciate the meaning of transparency and accountability in practice.

As a result of the research journey, I am confident in my own judgment that the action research conducted within this study met the above criteria described by Lewin (1946). There had been a positive impact on practice, evident through observation and feedback via practitioner engagement and commitment to the repeated cycle of collaborative practitioner meetings, where craft knowledge and professional knowledge were brought together, discussed and acted upon.

In addition, I considered Smith's (2009) comments on the changes in the way the good is sorted from the not-so-good in social and educational research. He had pointed out that method was often the referent point for judgments about research quality, and that although this did not necessarily confirm the *quality* of the research in terms of knowledge, it did confirm the research was valid and reliable:

> The overwhelming majority of social researchers at that time and a significant majority to this day were/are convinced that they are engaged in a science of the social that mirrors the science of the physical... In any event, any form of research that did not embrace the scientific method was/is thought to lack rigour and, at best, only could be a source hypotheses for the more rigorous approach of real researchers (from Abel 1948 to Schavelson and Towne 2002) (p.93).

Therefore it was these opinions that approved the long-standing, fixed criteria for research to be judged as either good or bad. However, Sparkes (2002) had suggested that there should be no fixed standards, historical or contextual, on which judgments are allowed to be based. Instead, he proposed that as we go along with these enquiries we construct reality, and should also construct our criteria for judging them. In agreement, the Education Action Research Editorial (2006) argued that action research was able to take different forms in different contexts and therefore suggested that quality cannot be created as if from a common standards checklist:

> ...For example there would be some who argue 'If there is no second cycle, it is not action research' or that 'If the steps of this or that model are not followed in the given order it is not Action Research'. Guidelines in the form of instrumental models and rules are important and very helpful indeed, but in the end quality is more than a matter of following rules in a correct way and being corrected when the rules are misunderstood (p.453).

They suggested that guidelines and rules were important and extremely helpful, yet strongly advised that quality is more than a matter of following rules in a correct way. In a different vein, and although deemed impractical, Smith (2009) made reference to a picture theory of language that involved the use of descriptive language and evaluative terms.

Consequently, Smith had attempted to explain that it is the meaning of a word and how it is used that helps to create an accurate picture, as the same word can take a different meaning at a different time and in a different context. This understanding of language encourages less rigid criteria for judging research. Smith (2009) strongly argued against

the idea that all observation is theory-laden or that there is no possibility of theory-free knowledge, suggesting the core idea to be very simple, in that there can be no separation between the researcher and researched or the observer and observed, indicating that who we are, is imperative to how we see the world around us.

Previously, Kerlinger (1979) had commented that it was the procedures of science that were objective and not the actual scientists themselves, and pointed out that scientists were people and so like all men and women, they too are 'opinionated, dogmatic, and ideological'. Kerlinger (1979) indicated that researcher's objective selves could be protected from their subjective selves if the correct methods and methodology were to be applied. In support of this notion, Smith (2009) attempted to illustrate the debate between the researcher as a person and the person as a researcher. He poignantly concluded:

> Storytellers and tattlers, novelists and poets, artists and composers play very important social roles in that they enlarge the social conversation and very often present us with new and different ways to think about lives. This is no small accomplishment and it is one we should embrace and strive to attain. This is not the accomplishment of prediction and control that seems so possible for the physical sciences, but I can think of no good reason why those particular successes should be the benchmark by which we judge the successes and failures of the craft of social and educational enquirers (p.99).

Interestingly, Fisher and Phelps (2006) strongly advocated the view of action research as a *living practice* (Carson, 1997). They indicated, along with others (Bradbury and Reason, 2001; Winter et al., 2000) that the question of what constitutes *quality* action research has resulted in:

....important paradigmatic debates across the humanities and social science disciplines, debates that problematize the nature of 'knowledge' and question the need for uniform criteria of validity (p.144).

Consequently, due to different forms of representation, some reflected within this study, I chose to reject the notion of rigid paradigms and methods, as I believe there is a valid permeable approach that suggests flexibility between paradigms can exist. In the same way Weed (2009) had contested the utility of paradigms and argued that existence of competing paradigms as merely a contradiction in terms, this research supports similar sentiments. In accordance and agreement with Lincoln and Guba (1994), a paradigm represents the researchers most informed world-view based on ontological, epistemological and methodological questions. However, this research also contests the notion to adhere only to a single paradigm (Weed, 2009) and instead has suggested the need move between paradigms, at times in search of personal insight and theory-free knowledge as proposed by Collinson-Allen (2009).

Within this thesis, the literature review is theory-led, therefore reflecting post-positivism. However in study two, with particular reference to the reconnaissance phase and the action research process, findings are represented through day-to-day research dialogue that aim to represent the participatory paradigm, and critical social science via means of self-reflections and critical reflective practice. Consequently, participatory action research, *how it works on the ground*, may help to close the gap between pragmatic day-to-day doing research and the often view taken on paradigms.

5.5 Concluding summary

The present thesis has demonstrated the utility of action research as a workable method of inquiry within an applied sports setting and the utility of psychological well-being (and the well-being literature more generally) when considering ways of improving day-to-day practice. It demonstrates how an established theory, such as PWB, can be considered from the tenets of a different paradigm. Something which might be replicated with different theories, and in different settings. Across this research, theory and people have been described alongside the contexts and culture within a professional football environment.

This thesis supports the notion of further action research as a methodology that opens 'windows' into the everyday events of practice. Therefore, in this thesis, well-being may be best understood in macro (workplace) terms rather than just individual terms, so for example, the well-being of *all* inputs on the well-being of the individual. Consequently, this thesis has not necessarily sought to unpick the individual factors that derive each players state of mind but has considered the workplace community in more detail, and concluded that the interactions across such communities is worthy of study.

In addition, this thesis, rather than promoting singular strategies for all to use, focuses more on *how* strategies might unfold as individuals talk and begin to trust and share with one another in their experiences and within practice. It is often hostile within the professional football environment, yet within this study, practitioner engagement in

participatory action research has encouraged and facilitated significant changes to *everyday* practice within the academy environment.

Although, at times, the action research process appeared untidy, this thesis has managed to capture real-life situations, different personalities, relationships and interactions on a daily basis. With different people, whether that is different players and/or practitioners, the personal-contextual dynamic within a practice-change process will always be different. In addition, when considering the role of theory, this thesis has illustrated (via the value of method) that the practical utility of theory (in this case PWB) can exist and has shown that theoretical knowledge *can* be practical on the ground.

Future directions

This research has not only contested the utility of theory, but also the rigidity of paradigms, and in doing so has proposed the need for flexibility across paradigms in order to provide an accurate and informed view as researcher.

Large emphasis has been placed on the importance in theory, people and culture. The act of getting to know people has been recognised as an invaluable process when attempting to capture the epistemology of action research and to accurately reflect critical thinking. More specifically, as the researcher, getting to know people has proved instrumental in being able to present detailed and critical insight within academy practice, in particular when analysing the relationships and interactions between practitioners and players. This

act provides the reader with an opportunity to get to know practitioners and players better, which may lead them to form their own interpretations.

The method of action research within the academy environment has been invaluable to the practice-change process. Evidence has demonstrated that through practitioner engagement and commitment to regular collaborative practitioner meetings that encourage reflection-on-action and critical thinking are essential to an effective practice-change process. Findings from this study would suggest that via this process, practitioners are able to positively monitor and evaluate player PWB within the environment. Consequently, this method has been significant to everyday practice and has the potential to become a permanent fixture within academy practice.

This has also highlighted an area of concern when considering player PWB when make the transition to step-up to first team football. Agreeably, the practice-change structures that have been put in place within academy practice are primarily to support the player and their long-term development to professional status. However, the transition from the academy football to first team football is a large one, comprised of different challenges with less, if any, caring support. Although a first year professional is still viewed as developing, there is little provision in the way of continued help and support within the professional environment. Therefore all aspects of PWB that are fostered within academy practice may cease to exist when in a different context, i.e. the first team environment.

Consequently, it would seem logical for such support to continue on some level, at least during the initial stages of transition.

During this thesis and the study of PWB as a concept has helped shape the practitioner that I am today, I've developed through the process and I feel it has added to my career and skill set. I felt the study kept true to action research and as it is conceptually-specific it does not generalise. As a result, I feel well-being is for everyone, not just players, there is a need to consider the well-being of all in the workplace. There's also a need to support players after the academy as they make the transition to the first team. I continued to track the young professional's from this study.

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APPENDIX 1

Well-being...

Defined as:

"Physical and mental soundness"

Why...

- Little evidence to explain how educational and social welfare practice influences football performance and development

- Well-being is likely to be affected (to greater or lesser degrees) as players evaluate their progression within the academy system

- Performance-Well-being relationship

Meeting aims to...

- Discuss current issues for debate

- Inform my practice

- Inform your practice

- Collectively working towards change in practice

Induction
(Time line for change = July 2006)
- Team bonding, experience, rules

Recovery
(Time line for change = Now)
- Physical and Mental

Transitions
(Time line for change = Now)
- Reserves, injury, college, out on loan, new players

Action:

"Its easy to make yourself prepare better, show eagerness and good attitude and be enthusiastic"

"Anything to do with not kicking a football you can do something about..."

"Above technical and tactical... You might not be an England player but you can be an England player standard when your preparing cos that comes down the individual"

"Habit – jog out to training in a morning instead of walking, look more focused and ready for the session"

"Train yourself to be mentally prepared for the game"

Coach observations:

"Unprofessional, sloppy attitudes to training, not preparing for the job in hand (training, matches)"

"Don't look eager to train, looks like its hard work at times, body language"

"They can do something about sloppiness, that's the easy part of the game. You can prepare better"

Communication:

"Players that don't (speak up) keep themselves to themselves"

Enjoyment:

"I haven't enjoyed it anywhere near as much as last year even in pre-season"

Year groups:

"None of em' will do their jobs… they shouldn't need that instructing to them cos that's just the way it goes"

"Everything was slack with the 1st years"

INDUCTION

Performance issues:

Work rate/work ethic

Player responsibility

Belief in ability

Belief in ability:

"We had a problem preseason that we never had the same side out that we were going to have out first date of the season"

"A lot of 1st years that are playing and its taken them time to get used to how we're expected to play in the U18's"

"Didn't think the 1st years were good enough that were coming in…thought we're not going to play well this season"

"We weren't together the same as we were last season"

RECOVERY

Physical recovery:

"Being away from the training ground"

"Waking up on Sunday, and staying there thinking 'I haven't got to go in' so sometimes you can switch off a bit"

"A few of the lads this week have said they've felt a lot better after Wednesday, from having a rest"

"You're just a bit sharper when you come back...and enthusiastic to go again"

Players:

"If you're winning then it makes a difference"

"Everything's different when you win"

Staff:

"That might hopefully, when they've got to come back in and gearing up for next Saturday... that little break/change from the norm might do them some good"

"Having a day off may help you to recharge your batteries a little bit"

Debriefs:

"Come in and talk about it on Monday rather than after the game"

"Once it's done that week you just concentrate on your next game"

"That way you know what you've done right and what you've done wrong"

"It's fresh in your mind, you're still thinking about what's happened"

"Everyone talks about the match on a Monday, then as the week goes on everyone talks about last weeks match less and less"

"You can then work on things throughout the week that you weren't doing to improve for the next game"

"Gives you more time to prepare for the next game"

"sometimes say if we lose on a Saturday and if you made a mistake you try and forget about it, then by the end of the week you might have got your confidence up a bit, but then you talk about it on a Thursday and you think 'god, it were actually that bad' and then it might just put back down again… and you might not be able to get your confidence back up for Saturday's game"

TRANSITIONS

Performance:

"Some of us haven't played as well as we should have"

"Just think we're never gonna score… we're gonna have to defend"

"Frustrated during the match"

"I feel a lot better when we win…"

"We've scored one one goal if you take 3rd years out of the team… How are we going to win if we've only scored one goal?"

Injury:

"It's frustrating watching and if they're losing… you just want to go on"

"I don't feel I'm treated any differently cos I'm injured"

"I'm injured and you don't even get spoken to, you just get completely ignored… its shit"

"I think that we have to be sympathetic, very tough, understanding, but I don't think, but I also think it's perceived as a bit of a cop out"

"Yeah, it's gotta be the physio's job, hasn't it, to keep in touch with that and making sure that he looks after their welfare"

"They're going through a slump because of something happening in their personal life, going through a slump because they're not good enough, some kind of injuries. It's very difficult to manage that"

College:

"Nobody's bothered about the work we have to do, we don't mind. Its just the other 2 hours is spent doing nothing"

"On a Monday they egg him on to do the quizzes and stuff"

"Its annoying cos my other studies are harder but its more enjoyable, cos at least I feel like I'm learning something"

"College isn't a rest or a day off"

Reserves:

"I'm more nervous cos you're playing with pro's… although less pressure on us, more pressure on the pro's"

"You know what's expected of you cos the same standards are set for the U18's"

"A lot of players think its harder playing the U18's than the reserves"

"I feel more confident when I play for the reserves… cos you're playing with better players"

"Stepping up to reserves should be, is something that we say to the kid, that's what you're there for, what you should be, that's what you're here for, it's not just playing under 18's football. It's for being in reserves"

<u>**Academy Meeting Review**</u>

<u>**December 12th 2005**</u>

Aim of meeting was to discuss and agree on adjustments / changes towards improving academy practice

Address player comments on recovery, transitions and induction

Agreed that focus on recovery and transitions can have immediate effect and induction can be revisited throughout this season

<u>Mental recovery:</u>

Structure of debriefs – can be used to motivate players and promote a purpose to training, able to set appropriate goals, encourages coach-player dialogue

Concern that the same players speak in debriefs every week and would prefer that others speak up:

- Introduce smaller groups
- Large team debrief and then sub unit work (eg. one sub unit per week)
- Opportunity to link match analysis (within sub units)
- Alternate the approach eg. One player reporting on another player's performance

Expect players' to start thinking about their next game Tuesday/ Wednesday

To create task-oriented environment performance is praised in debriefs for enthusiasm and hard work rather than results. Aims to encourage supporting players to think *'well I want a bit of that'*

Players learning to be a leader and a team player (in prep for 1st team)

<u>Physical recovery:</u>

Structure of physical recovery – involves Sunday as rest day, with the possibility of players' taking responsibility of own stretching and fitness routine eg. Getting into Sunday habits as part of recovery

<u>Injured players (transition phase):</u>

Injury impacts physical well-being, also need to consider mental well-being:

Suggest that injured players are treated differently so they don't become comfortable. This can be achieved through completion of other tasks that can be incorporated into their timetable whilst not training full-time. For example,

working with John on match analysis. Such activities can help to maintain and improve understanding as a player eg. Providing players with extra work (football education) so they'll want to get back into training

Although injured players are not involved in the game, if involved in the debrief able to test them as to whether they are able to stand back and watch the game differently as oppose to when they're playing, as they may have a different view point

If not in the debrief meeting then could be doing something else constructive and football lead (possibly analyzing academy games to generate information for next academy game)

Points to review in next meeting:

Structure for injured players:

Indicate time available (spare time when not in rehab) for injured players to do other work

Induction:

We've got to be part of the induction but so have the other players. Do we treat players differently whether they are a 1st or 2nd year scholars?

Consider approach to instilling work ethic within full-time scholars eg. Responsibility players do / don't have

The first 6 months are the most important from coming in as a 1st year scholar. We need to understand the environment that 1st year scholars have come from in school *(Also family/social background etc?)*

APPENDIX 2

Well-being...

Defined as:

"Physical and mental soundness"

Why...

- Little evidence to explain how educational and social welfare practice influences football performance and development

- Well-being is likely to be affected (to greater or lesser degrees) as players evaluate their progression within the academy system

- Performance-Well-being relationship

Research aims...

- Discuss current issues for debate

- Inform my practice

- Inform coaching practice (and other practitioners)

- Collectively work towards change in practice

Current issues...

Recovery
(Time line for change = Now)
- Physical and Mental

Transitions
(Time line for change = Now)
- Reserves, injury, college, out on loan, new players

(See sheets)

Inside the training ground...

"Say if you've had a bad game, and you come to training, your confidence is low and you're not doin' very well in training, coach will just shout at ya, come on you're just havin' a shit day, or somethin' like that and you feel even worse"

"When you're injured you don't even get talked to.....they don't acknowledge you, they just walk past ya, without even saying 'ought to ya, they'll say that's what happened before"

Outside the training ground...

"I think it's different when you're in digs, I don't speak to hardly any of my mates anymore, cos they always think 'oh he's at football', so they don't bother anymore. What you've got here is what you've got"

"I'd probably take it home with me because me mum and that always come and watch me and they just tell me the truth. If I played crap, I played crap and they'll tell me, they won't just like say whatever, so I'd probably get it from me parents as well"

Moving on...

"When you look back, it's a good experience, like you're enjoying it, you have good times and bad times, like all life, it's good, you get a lot out of it...even as a person in football... You just grow up quicker than say someone our age in normal everyday life. You've got to be strong as well because you get like slated every day..."

"Sometimes if you're not enjoyin' it, like if you're doing a different job, you might not be enjoying it, but you know at the end of it you're guaranteed a good job, whereas chances are you're probably not gonna have one. It's just like I've been wastin' two years"

Benefits so far...

- Communication tool that provides practitioners with insight into the:

  - Perceptions/experiences of academy players'
  - Perceptions/experiences of other academy practitioners'

- Enhance coach knowledge and awareness of the contributing factors that are perceived to influence players' well-being

- Address current issues in academy practice and seeking to facilitate change towards best practice

<u>**Academy meeting**</u>

<u>**January 19th 2006**</u>

Evaluate and reflect current progress on changes in practice / procedures

- Mental recovery – Debriefs
- Physical recovery – Player responsibilities
- Injured players – Extra responsibility / work in gym / competition

Player feedback has been very positive. Players find the feedback given in debriefs to be constructive and provides them with further knowledge of coach perceptions. It allows them to put forward their viewpoint of the game and assess / evaluate their own performance. Players leave the meeting with knowledge of what they need to work on in training. Also players imply that one to one meetings experienced with the coach are helpful and meets their needs.

Aim to discuss

Induction programme to address:
- Pre-season
- Player responsibilities (year group)
- Performance issues / maintaining standards

Knowledge of players:
- Family / social background
- Digs
- Support

Maintain and develop player understanding:
- Link points from debrief with Tuesday / Wednesday training session and continue daily session plan. This may increase players' understanding (i.e. purpose to training) and ability to monitor improvement from previous game to the next (putting debrief points into action).

APPENDIX 3

OBJECTIVE WELL-BEING

- Physical
- Social
- Emotional
- Material
- Development
- Activity

PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

- Autonomy
- Personal growth
- Positive relations
- Self-acceptance
- Mastery of performance environment
- Purpose in life

1

AUTONOMY

A sense of self-determination

Psychological well-being

PERSONAL GROWTH

A sense of continued growth and development as a person (not just a player)

Psychological well-being

POSITIVE RELATIONS

To have quality relations with others

Psychological well-being

SELF-ACCEPTANCE

Positive evaluations of themselves

Psychological well-being

ENVIRONMENTAL MASTERY

The capacity to manage their environment effectively

Psychological well-being

PURPOSE IN LIFE

Believe that their life is purposeful and meaningful

Psychological well-being

1

SELF DETERMINATION

2nd year scholar:

Greater self-determination when you're a 2nd year, cos you've got to get other people going too

You know its more important in you're 2nd year, so you have to try hard

Injured:

Its hard when you're injured, cos it's a drag, its boring

When you're injured you're just not part of the team you're on your own

Positives:

When you see tommy going with the first team that affects it, cos it makes me want to do it. It makes you want to train harder, achieve what they have

When someone in your position goes off with the first team you wonder what is it that they're doing and it makes you more determined

Asking the coach what you need to work on

Match-specific:

Feedback is important at half-time

If you've had a bad game mentally it can affect your determination

It can put you under pressure in training

Easy to keep determination up when winning and playing well. You know when you've played well or you've played bad.

At derby last week when we were 3-0 down. You know whatever you do its not going to make a difference (during a game).

Post-match:

If its been a hard week or you have to come in on a Sunday morning… nothing to look forward to

Need to have a day to reflect on things for Monday

Getting no feedback can affect your determination

General:

Sometimes it can be day-to-day

Depends what mood you're in. You know if you're tired or fresh. How games and training has gone. Stuff away from the ground as well as at the ground, personal problems

If you're not motivated then you're not going to be determined are you

Team determination affects your own determination

POSITIVE WORKING RELATIONS

Player – coach relationship:

Relationship goes up and down

Could be improved if we win every week

You can't get too comfortable with the coaches, it's like there's a boundary

Player – player relationship:

We just got bullied for the first 2 months

This year everyone gets on with each other

We're more on the same level as the 1st years

Feedback:

There's not much one-to-one contact really

One-to-one feedback good or bad would definitely help

We're treated like a team, all the same. We're not treated differently as different people

No one wants to hear it straight after a game, that they're no good. So it makes a lot of sense speaking about the game on Sunday / Monday

We had a debrief today about what was good

End result:

First team manager doesn't know our names

When they come and watch reserves they're never watching

Player – player communication:

You cannot like someone but you could respect them on the pitch

You've got to understand what people are capable of

When you're on the pitch its different, when you step over the line you forget about it

Certain people you know who to shout at and not to shout at

Current progress:

Come on leaps and bounds

Understanding the game more

More tactically aware

Got more confidence to speak out to people (e.g. debriefs)

Coping:

Our character's have developed as we have to take a lot of criticism

You can't take it to heart

Everything affects you as a person, cos if you ain't happy you're not going to do your best

1st year scholar:

Quite nervous when you come in at July

At first you were looking forward to it, just now its not exciting

Feel better within yourself now compared to when first came in

PERSONAL GROWTH

2nd year scholar:

I'm more maturer, grown up a lot more because of things we've gone through over the 2 years

I won't go away feeling I could have tried harder. If I don't get anything it won't be anyone else's fault

Outside the academy:

You've got more time to reflect on it. If you're in digs less likely to be able to switch off, cos you're always thinking about the game

Or if your at home its likely that your parents come and watch, so kind of know what you're going through

PERFORMANCE ENVIRONMENT

Pressures / expectations:

When you don't have a day off

Feel under pressure

Need a day off, it takes it's toll

It's all about winning

College:

College is annoying but it's easy

College is a waste of time, cos you don't learn anything

Physically and mentally tired at college. Too tired at home to do more work

Post-match:

We come in on a Sunday cos we play shit on Saturday

We come in cos we get battered on a Saturday

Get's at you mentally. Doesn't achieve anything as you can do it on a Monday

What's going to change from a Sunday to Monday?

(Debriefs) just talking about the same thing, gets you down more

Debriefs on a Monday, then you can think about it on a Sunday by yourself

Sometimes if we've been battered getting it out of the way on a Sunday is possibly a good thing

Action points to consider:

In debriefs need to try and take positives out of the game as well as what we need to do

(Injury prevention) some players have seen benefit yet some don't put in 100% anymore

Instructions put up on the wall during the week are good as it reminds you

Variety in training eg. Going swimming

COMPETENCE

Feedback:

Positive feedback – you know that you're doing stuff right.

Tell us what's going on?

Ideal situation - to at least know what the coach thinks

Confidence:

You can doubt yourself

If your coach says it, it affects your confidence

If you think you're playing well and someone tells you your not, it knocks your confidence

Expectations for every game

1st year scholar:

Getting used to it in 1st year, takes a couple of months

Quite exciting at first

Post-match:

Feel most fatigued if you come in on a Sunday

When you play reserves and that, you don't feel fresh for Saturday

If in on a Sunday it affects you for the rest of the week as it affects you mentally

Maybe the odd Sunday not as much as we do

When we play badly may deserve to come in (e.g. When lost 6-2).

Positives:

Improved since start of the season – gained experience, reserves

APPENDIX 4

PLAYERS EXPERIENCE AND PROGRESS...

SEASON 2006/2007

WELL-BEING...

Defined as:

"Physical and mental soundness"

RECAP...

- Self-determination
- Self-acceptance
- Mastering performance environment
- Positive relationships
- Personal growth
- Purpose

INDUCTION

- What happened?
- Was it different from last season?
- What was put in place?
- Eg. Preseason, Team bonding

RECOVERY

- Is physical recovery important?

- Is mental recovery important?

- What has changed?

- How do you benefit?

TRANSITIONS

- What has changed from last season? (better or worse)

- How do you benefit?

- What would you improve?

- Eg. Reserves, injury, out on loan, new players

OVERALL...

- Performance vs results?

- Does performance affect well-being?

- Does well-being affect performance?
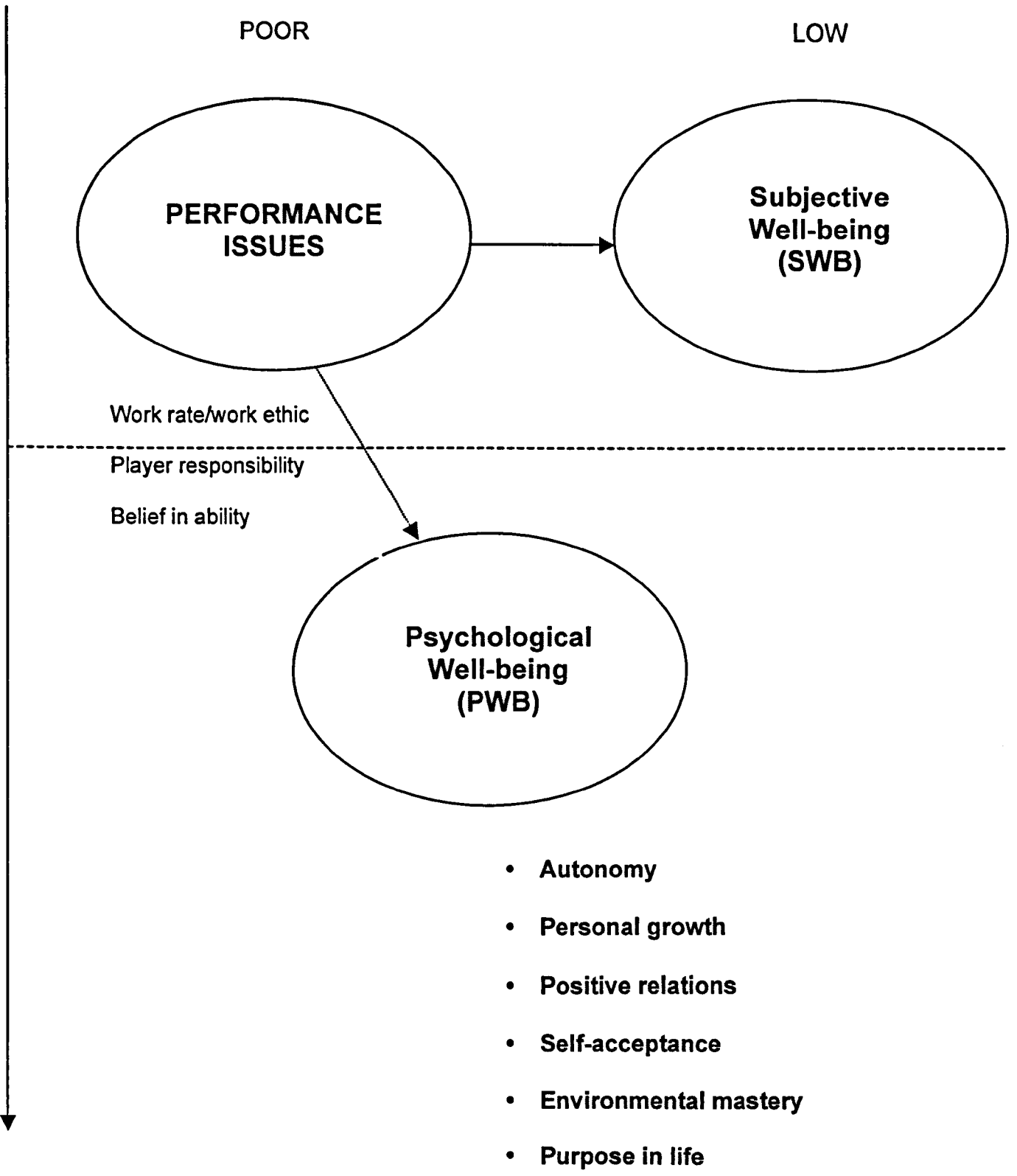
- Your well-being (player/person)

JULY TO OCT/NOV 2005:

OBSERVATION, EXPERIENCE, MONITORING PLAYER SWB
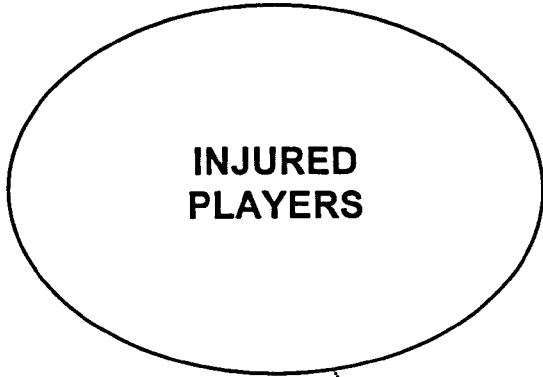
PRAGMATIC ISSUES (IN RELATION TO CONCEPTS)
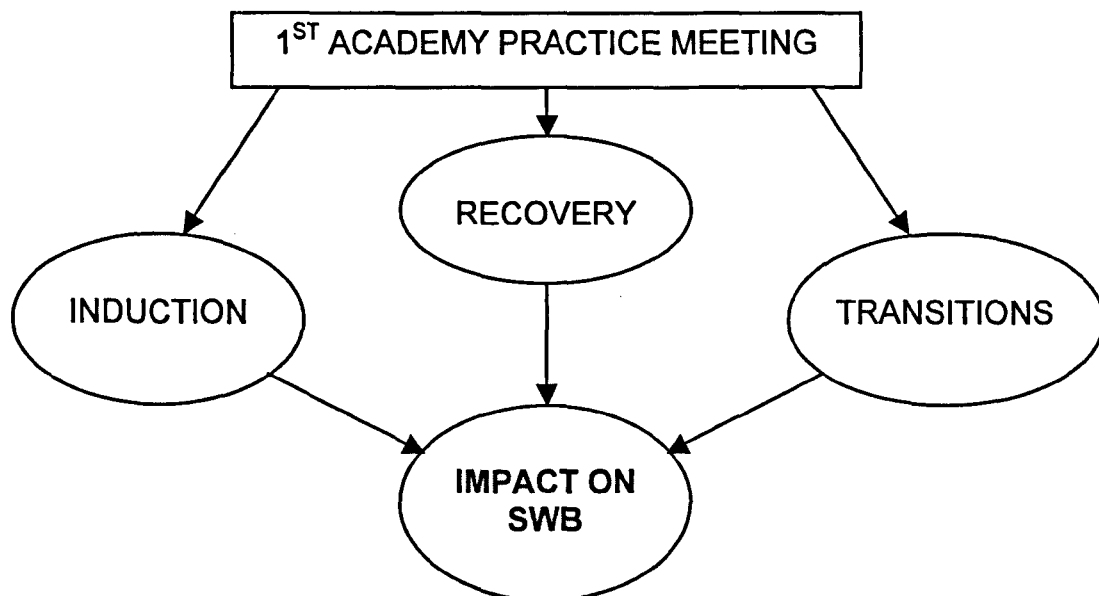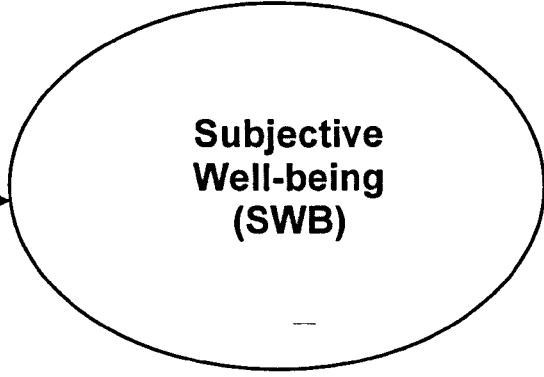
1ST ACADEMY PRACTICE MEETING

RECOVERY

INDUCTION

TRANSITIONS

IMPACT ON SWB

PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

POOR   LOW

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   (  PERFORMANCE  )──────────▶   (  Subjective  )
   (    ISSUES      )               (  Well-being  )
    ⎝_____⎠                    (    (SWB)      )
              │                      ⎝_____⎠
```

Work rate/work ethic
- -
Player responsibility

Belief in ability

```
        ⎛‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾⎞
       (  Psychological  )
       (   Well-being     )
       (      (PWB)        )
        ⎝_____⎠
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- **Autonomy**

- **Personal growth**

- **Positive relations**

- **Self-acceptance**
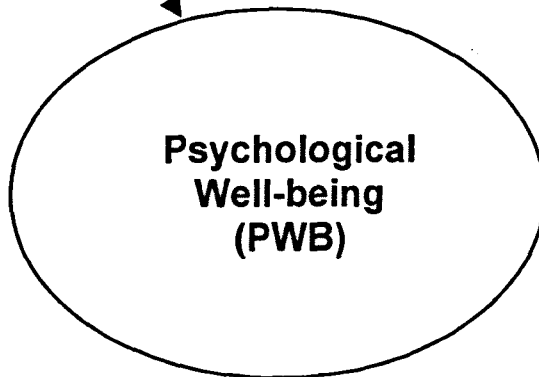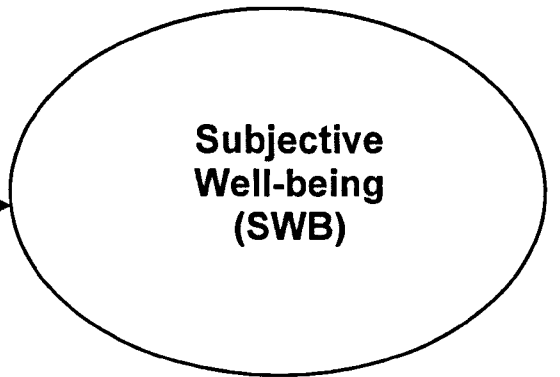
- **Environmental mastery**

- **Purpose in life**

INCLUSION   LOW

INJURED
PLAYERS

Subjective
Well-being
(SWB)

"I'm injured and you don't
even get spoken to, you
just get completely
ignored... its shit"

Psychological
Well-being
(PWB)
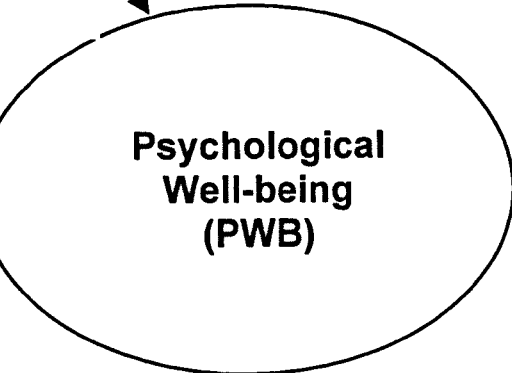
- Autonomy

- Personal growth

- Positive relations

- Self-acceptance

- Environmental mastery

- Purpose in life

MENTAL   LOW
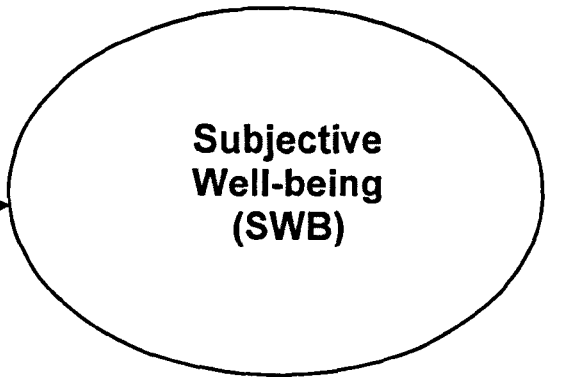
RECOVERY

Subjective
Well-being
(SWB)

"You can then
work on things
throughout the
week that you
weren't doing to
improve for the
next game"

"That way you know what
you've done right and what
you've done wrong"

"It's fresh in your
mind, you're still
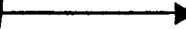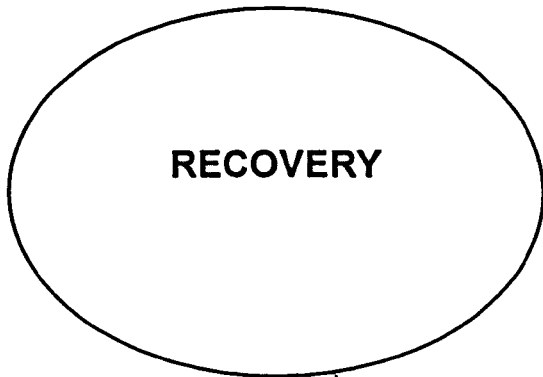thinking about
what's
happened"

Psychological
Well-being
(PWB)

- Autonomy

- Personal growth

- Positive relations

- Self-acceptance

- Environmental mastery

- Purpose in life

PHYSICAL   LOW

RECOVERY

Subjective
Well-being
(SWB)

"Being away from the
training ground"

"Waking up on
Sunday, and staying
there thinking 'I
haven't got to go in'
so sometimes you
can switch off a bit"

Psychological
Well-being
(PWB)

- **Autonomy**

- **Personal growth**

- **Positive relations**

- **Self-acceptance**
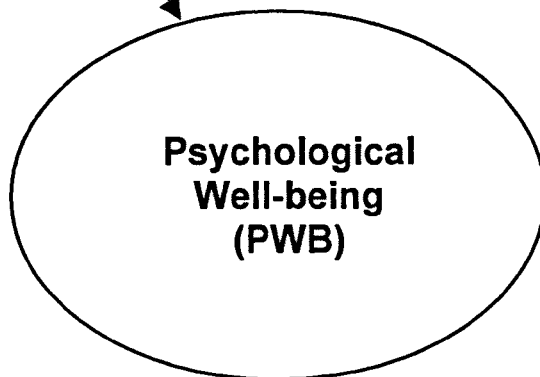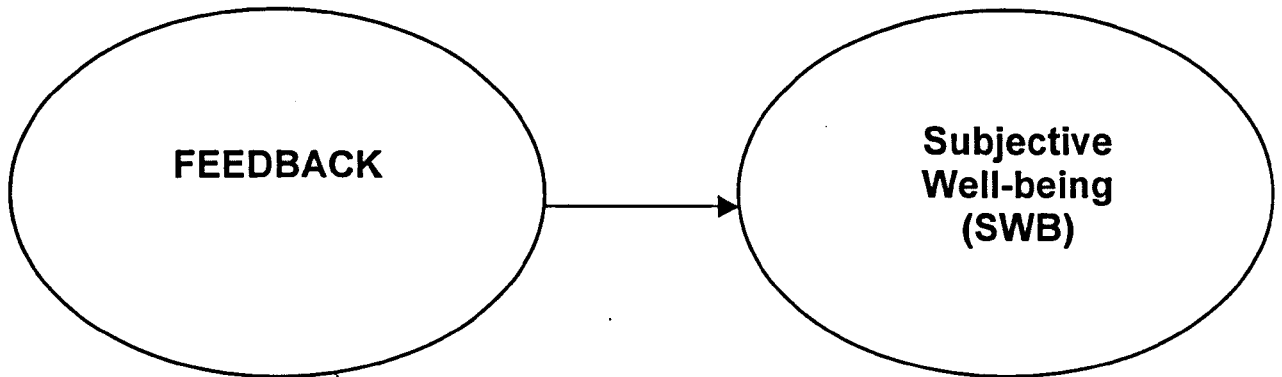
- **Environmental mastery**

- **Purpose in life**

DIRECTION   LOW
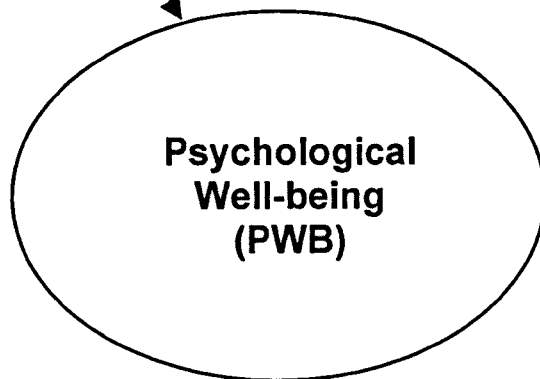

FEEDBACK

Subjective
Well-being
(SWB)

"I'd prefer one-to-
one feedback, as I
don't have a clue
where I'm at now"

"Just 5 or 10 mins
talking it through
with me"

Psychological
Well-being
(PWB)

- **Autonomy**

- **Personal growth**

- **Positive relations**

- **Self-acceptance**

- **Environmental mastery**

- **Purpose in life**

ACADEMY PRACTICE

IN STAFF MEETINGS WE HAVE DISCUSSED PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING (PWB) IN RELATION TO IMPROVING OR CHANGING PRACTICE WITHIN THE ACADEMY ENVIRONMENT.

1. INDUCTION
2. RECOVERY (PHYSICAL & MENTAL)
3. TRANSITIONS (INJURY, RESERVES, COLLEGE, DIGS)

PLEASE EXPLAIN THE ASPECTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING (PWB) THAT ARE YOU HITTING IN ACADEMY PRACTICE AND HOW?

AUTONOMY

PERSONAL GROWTH

POSITIVE RELATIONS

SELF-ACCEPTANCE

ENVIRONMENTAL MASTERY

PURPOSE IN LIFE