

Towards a conceptual framework for understanding the ecological factors associated with talent development among football players in South Africa

by

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DECLARATION

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I, **Sibusiso Ntshangase**, declare that the thesis entitled TOWARDS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING THE ECOLOGICAL FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH TALENT DEVELOPMENT AMONG FOOTBALL PLAYERS IN SOUTH AFRICA is my own work, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



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Abstract

Based on bioecological and cultural historical approaches, the aims of this study were to identify and explore ecological factors influencing the environment's success in developing talented male football players, to identify and explore ecological conditions associated with becoming a professional football player, and to present a qualitatively derived ecological framework of the environmental conditions associated with becoming a professional football player. It followed a shift in research attention from the individual athlete to the environment in which he or she develops. A cultural praxis framework was adopted as a guiding principle and a single case study was used as a methodological approach. A successful talent development environment was the case under study, from which 17 participants were approached for data collection. The participants numbered ten young talented footballers, five of their parents and two of their coaches. Data was collected via individual open-ended and semi-structured interviews which were supplemented through unstructured observations, transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis with the focus on positive factors congruent with successful developmental outcomes. The results revealed how the developing players as active participants in their talent development process interacted with contextual factors associated with successful talent development and outline. Based on the data analysis, an empirical conceptual framework of factors playing a role in talent development is proposed.

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Abbreviations/Acronyms

FIFA	Federation Internationale de Football Associations
SAFA	South African Football Association
PSL	Professional Soccer League
CSP	Cultural Sport Psychology
ISSP	PS International Society of Sport Psychology Position Stand
ATDE	Athletic Talent Development Environment
ESF	Environment Success Factor
DMGT	Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Over time, the study of talent development among elite athletes has been of interest to the researchers in the field of sport (Boom, 1985; Ericsson, 1996; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Holt & Dunn, 2004, Henriksen, 2010; Larsen, Alfermann, Henriksen & Christensen, 2013; Culross, 2015). Widespread research first became evident in the 1970s, although by then researchers were more concerned with sport talent identification than with talent development (Howe, 1999), and the focus was on how innate factors determined the nature and extent of talent among children. An understanding prevailed that talent was a gift of a person and that, once identified as gifted with talent, one remained gifted, whether or not the gift was developed into outstanding performance (Calderon, Subotnik, Knotek, Rayhack & Gorgia, 2007). There was then a shift away from talent identification to talent development, because more needed to be known about how it was cultivated and developed (Burnett, 2003). The latter perspective focused on domain-specific abilities and how they could be developed, implying that talent was a changing phenomenon and that a talented child might or might not develop into a talented adult, depending on a variety of factors (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990a).

Among the earliest researchers to study the aspects of sport talent development was Bloom (1985), who was particularly concerned with the process in children, beginning with their early involvement and culminating in the achievement of expertise in their respected talent domains (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). Earlier, Bloom (1985) had conducted a four-year longitudinal study that found increasingly difficult stages of talent development, and that no matter how precocious during the early stages, if one did not stay within the talent development process over many years he or she would soon be outdistanced by those who remained within it. He described three stages in the development of talent. Firstly, during the early years, talented children would engage in fun and playful activities, with parents playing a key role in the development of their child's talent and often being responsible for stimulating interest in their own personal areas of activity. Parents would act as an excellent source of energy and motivation for their children. The second stage took place during the middle years, when children became 'hooked' on a particular activity and pursuits became more serious. Teachers and coaches would play an important role during

this stage because children were often more technically skilled than on the previous level. Coaches took a strong personal interest in their prodigies, and expected results through discipline and hard work. Practice time increased significantly during the middle years, and competition was used as a measure of progress. Parents also provided significant moral and financial support, and helped to restrict their children's engagement in distracting activities, such as social outings with friends. During the third stage, athletes and performers became experts in their chosen activity, which now dominated their lives. They were willing to invest the time and effort required to meet their performance goals whilst responsibility for training and competition shifted from coaches to the individual. Parents played a lesser role as individuals became completely absorbed in their actions (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005).

Bloom (1985) developed a model that provided important insights into the role, nature and extent of different factors contributing towards elite athletes becoming exceptional in their chosen sports (Ericsson 1996). His model influenced a number of researchers who confirmed the contributions of the variables to the talent development process and attempted to advance his seminal work. Subsequently, research increasingly recognised its multifaceted nature (Gagné, 2005; Strachan, 2010; MacNamara, 2011; Fonseca & Cote, 2015), with talent now viewed as a dynamic manifestation that appeared to be determined by both innate and environmental factors, with recognition that people could not change their genetic makeup but could change their environment and make it as conducive as possible to facilitation of talent development (Larsen, Alfermann, Henriksen & Christensen, 2013). Also, extensive and meaningful practice, familial support, competent coaches and teachers, and adequate physical resources were now recognised as playing a significant role in the achievement of exceptional performance (Ericsson, Krampe & Tesch-Romer, 1993). Research was now focussing on factors that influenced talent development during a long-term developmental process, transforming potential into fulfilment of talent (Calderon et al., 2007).

A literature review by Durand-Bush and Salmela (2001) showed that the 1990s were a decade in which the process of talent development was increasingly regarded as an attempt to determine the congruency among this range of factors in order to ensure the highest probability of maximum performance outcome. Recent studies (Holt & Dunn, 2004; Henriksen, 2010; Henriksen, Stambulova & MacNamara, 2011; Larsen et al., 2013; Domingues & Goncalves, 2014) have also endorsed the trend of shifting the focus away from talented athletes and strongly embracing the mutual importance of all dimensions playing a role in talent development. These researchers'

work is now directed towards exploring the nature and role of each dimension rather than focusing on the comparison between dimensions. Their efforts have seen the study of sport talent development making a significant shift towards a holistic and ecological description. In particular, researchers such as Ivarsson and Johnson (2010) and Henriksen, Stambulova and Roessler (2011) have argued that the holistic ecological approach was opening new avenues in talent development research and held the potential to change how sport psychology practitioners work with prospective elite athletes.

It is against this background that the role of ecological approach in sport studies has been increasingly acknowledged by scholars and researchers in recent years (Holt, Tamminen, Black, Sehn & Wall, 2008; Strahan, 2008, Araújo & Davids, 2009; Krebs, 2009; dos Santos, 2014; Henriksen, 2010; Taylor & Bruner, 2012; Larsen, 2013), however, a systematic literature review recently conducted by Domingues and Goncalves (2014) indicated that the ecological approach had been lacking in research on sport talent development. As a result, they made a call for more theoretically guided research, prioritising the proximal processes that unravel the process. The present study was motivated by a recognised need for more research on sport talent development using an ecological approach.

1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical points of departure for the present study were the currently most influential contextualist theories,¹ namely, the ecological perspective represented by Urie Bronfenbrenner's bioecological approach (Bronfenbrenner, 2005b; Bronfenbrenner & Morris (2006) and the cultural-historical perspective as proposed by Mariane Hedegaard (Hedegaard, 2009). Tudge (2008) defines contextualist theories as not holding that context is the main explanatory variable but rather that individuals and the contexts in which they are situated are explicitly linked. Scholars such as Wertsch (2005) have pointed to a number of striking similarities between Bronfenbrenner's approach and those that characterise the cultural-historical perspective. The main similarity is evident in the major theme shared by the two, which is that individual mental and psycho-emotional functioning has its origins in social life. This was evident in the view of

¹ The two approaches do have several weaknesses, however, as confined by the scope of this thesis, they are approached and presented only in a way I found useful. Also, due to the volume a comprehensive account of each is beyond the scope, so I introduce some of the key tenets of each which I deem relevant and adequate for the purpose.

Luria (1981), a student of Vygotsky, regarded as the forebear of the cultural-historical perspective, that:

...in order to explain the highly complex forms of human consciousness one must go beyond the human organism. One must seek the origins of conscious activity and “categorical” behaviour not in the recesses of the human brain or in the depths of the spirit, but in the external conditions of life. Above all, this means that one must seek these origins in the external processes of social life, in the social and historical forms of human existence (p.25)

In a similar line of thinking, Bronfenbrenner (2005a) asserted that “...to a greater extent than for any other species, human beings create the environments that shape the course of human development” (p.xxvii).

As indicated by the above quotes, the central premise of a contextualist view is that human development cannot be fully understood independently of either the immediate situational context or the broader cultural milieu in which it occurs (Rogoff & Angelillo, 2002). It stresses the reciprocity or duality in symmetry of organisms and their environment and holds that psychological development of individuals reflects the influence of social, cultural, political and historical contexts (Domingues & Goncalves, 2014). Developing individuals live and think in a society, and their actions and thoughts are shaped partly by its dominant practices. They actively make sense of their social world and construct different meanings in different social contexts (Thorpe, 2009).

The beginnings of a contextual approach to human development are associated with Vygotsky, whose approaches and concepts defining learning and development have been continuously systematised into new contextual frameworks of child development (Ridgway, 2010). He argued for a perspective of child development that was different from what he saw as the two dominant basic conceptions:

[Firstly], development is nothing other than realization, modification, and combination of deposits. Nothing new develops here - only a growth, branching, and regrouping of those factors that were already present at the very beginning. [The second conception is that] development is a continuous process of self-propulsion characterized primarily by a continuous appearance and formation of the new which did not exist at previous stages.

This point of view captures in development something essential to a dialectical understanding of the process (p.190).

Vygotsky suggested a perspective which was an alternative to the above two, as a “dialectical process in which a transition from one stage to another is accomplished not along an evolutionary, but along a revolutionary path” (Fleer, 2009, p.131). Vygotsky (1998) argued that a dialectical approach to development calls for an understanding of child development as a process that takes place beyond its capacities, but it occurs in ways connected with the child’s growing sense of itself within the community. This perspective encourages child psychologists to examine context as well as children’s proximal development when analysing development and when planning for development programmes (Fleer, 2009).

Both bioecological and cultural-historical theories essentially subscribe to the conceptual and the dialectical conception of child development, sharing a position that:

...understanding [human] development requires taking simultaneous consideration of activities and interactions, characteristics of the individuals involved in those activities and interactions, and the cultural setting, as developed over historical time, that gives meaning to those activities and interaction (Rosa & Tudge, 2013, p. 141).

They also provide research and explanations of development in the context of the social situation of the child and see an attempt to understand development by focusing on the level of the individual and his or her activity, or only on practice or context as being insufficient. Hence, they advocate a wholeness approach (Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

The bioecological approach focuses on child development taking place in institutional contexts inscribed in the child’s community. The cultural-historical approach goes a step further by looking at how children contribute to these contexts and by broadening the context to include the cultural and historical practices in which they live and learn (Hedergaard, Fleer, Bang & Hviid, 2008). In that sense, both approaches complement each other, firstly, by providing a holistic and systematic analysis of factors involved in child development, one that acknowledges the talented children’s role in their own development while at the same time showing that development is also influenced by broader social and cultural forces, as they have developed over historical time. Secondly, both pay attention to the everyday experiences of children. The two frameworks are therefore relevant to inform research in sport psychology as youth sport settings are important ecological and cultural contexts. They offer researchers an opportunity to explore the various

and heterogeneous influences and effects from different sources that impact on young athletes' involvement in sport as a developmental process.

1.2.1 The ecological approach

As noted, in recent years the use of ecological approach in youth sport studies has been more accepted among scholars and has been found to be an appropriate theory for studying the development of young athletes. In particular, research works by Bengoechea and Johnson (2000) and Bengoechea (2002) were among the first to warn against the sport psychology field adopting theoretical frameworks that were not sufficiently sensitive to the natural context in which sport behaviour occurs and from which individuals extract the information necessary for the regulation of their action. They saw youth sport settings as an important ecological context that the researchers should take into consideration.

Most recently, Henriksen et al. (2010) and Larsen et al. (2013) agreed with Bengoechea's (2002) idea that studying athletes in isolation from their context is a narrow outlook that fails to do justice to the various environments within which they are functioning. Larsen et al. consider the holistic ecological approach as not just a research framework but also as an important tool that could also be applied in an effort to optimise the performance of the young developing athletes. However, currently, there is a dearth of studies utilising the ecological approach and specifically Bronfenbrenner's bioecological approach as a framework for understanding sport talent development. Scholars and researchers who are advocated of this approach (Araújo, 2009; Araújo & Davids, 2009; Krebs, 2009; Henriksen, 2010) have been calling for more bioecological guided research on sport talent development, especially from developing world countries such as South Africa. In Henriksen's (2010) words, "there remains a need to develop an ecological framework and a corresponding scientific method suitable for studying talent development in sport" (p.33).

As a contextual theory, the bioecological theory recognises that the context in which the talented athletes grow is to a large extent informed by cultural factors. Bronfenbrenner himself argued that human development in general has to be understood as a cultural process (Domingues & Concalves (2014) and developed his theory to examine not only "the forces that have shaped human development in the past, but ... those that [are] already ...operating today to influence what human beings may become tomorrow" (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000, p.177). Researchers should therefore study the settings in which a developing individual spends time; an

individual's relations with others in the same settings; the personal characteristics of an individual and those with whom he or she typically interacts; the development process over time and the historical time in which an individual lives; and the proximal processes which are the mechanisms that drive development (Rosa & Tudge, 2013; Larsen, 2013).

1.2.2 The cultural-historical approach

The importance of a cultural-historical approach for the understanding of the process of human development has also been increasingly recognised and highlighted by researchers within the field of psychology (Wong, 2001; Hedergaard, 2009; Fler & Hedegaard, 2010). These researchers share a belief that human beings are situated in a cultural context, that psychological development and experiences are not the same everywhere, and that culture accounts for important variations. They view development as a relationship between the child and society, not something that exists within the child but rather as his or her interaction with the cultural community. When development does not proceed it is not the fault of the child but rather the relationship between the child and society. As such, the problem lies not in the child but in the institution (Fler, 2009).

Hedergaard (2009) acceded that Bronfenbrenner is close to her proposed idea of a cultural-historical approach, except that in the latter's theory the role of culture is considered in a narrower sense because his metaphor of nested contexts describes human development as being inscribed into a set of systems (micro-, meso- and macro-), and the society in which a developing person exists is conceptualised as a pattern that is realised within the other systems. Essentially, for Bronfenbrenner, culture is defined as societal customs and values and positioned among the distal properties of the exo-system. Inspired by Vygotsky's (1998) theory which guided her research with children, Hedergaard proposed a cultural-historical approach to conceptualising children's development that would not only look at the systems and their impact on child development but also analyse the personal activities and how they influence and are influenced by the institutional practices. In this manner, variability that can be found in children's development may be due to the practice of each societal institution and the activity of the developing person that contributes to the institutional practices (Hedergaard, 2012). She argued that the

...practice of the societal institutions and the activity of the person are the key... [and that] persons are participating in and creating activities that realize and contribute to the institutional practices that society provides while also contributing to changes in society ... [In that sense] a person contributes to his own institutional conditions and the perspective of his society; therefore, institution and person both have to be conceptualized as contributing to practice in a theory of children's development. (p.65)

As noted, there has also been a proposal highlighting the importance of historical and socio-cultural contexts in research and practice of sport talent and career development and transitions (Kostenko & Merrotsy, 2009; Stambulova & Alfermann, 2009; Ryba, Stambulova, Si & Schinke, 2013). Researchers supporting this proposal advocate a shift to culturally competent sport and exercise research. As Ryba et al. (2013) suggest, cultural competence begins with considering athletes, coaches, and sport psychology professionals as cultural beings with idiosyncratic but always contextually contained backgrounds and experiences.

A study conducted by Stambulova and Alfermann (2009) serves as a good example, grounded on the conception that "sport participants and sport researchers are infused by their historical and socio-cultural context" (p.292). It was conducted on the evolutions of career development and transition research and practice in Russia and Germany, whereby cardinal historical and social changes during previous decades illuminated the salience of the contextual factors. Based on their findings, they suggested that contemporary methodological approaches in cultural and cross-cultural psychology might help to develop more contextually sensitive talent and career research and assistance to athletes (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfied & Karnik, 2009). They postulated that the culturally competent sport and exercise psychology research

...might help researchers re-think the traditional research questions within career development and transition topics in sport psychology. In the traditional questions, we ask how children start in sport, why they often dropout in adolescent years, and how athletes make decisions about career termination. From the cultural psychology perspective, such questions can be re-articulated into: how children use cultural support and key-figures in their culture to become aware of, be curious about, and explore sport; what cultural beliefs, values, and meaning systems result in the adolescent athletes' dropout from sports; and how do cultural support, values, and beliefs facilitate or interfere with career decision making, including decisions about retirement? Such a shift from athletes' individual views to negotiated cultural meanings of their decisions and

behaviors can enrich our current understanding of the popular research questions in the career development and transition topic. (Stambulova & Alfermann, 2009, p.304)

Another important advantage of the shift to culturally competent research and practice in sport psychology is that the researchers and practitioners themselves begin to rethink sport and exercise psychology research and practice through a culturally reflexive lens (Ryba & Wright, 2010). A concern expressed by Ryba et al. (2013) is that without such a shift in mind-set, sport psychology researchers do not contest that sport has a multicultural context. Rather, they often regard it from the unchallenged position of “an ethnocentric (white, male, heterosexual, middle-class) way of knowing” (p.1), such that sport psychology research largely “continues to be about the ‘universal’ athlete, making readers infer participants’ background from the [dominant] authors’ affiliations” (p.2), suggesting that all athletes are the same.

Not only does constructed sameness subvert difference within each category, binary relationships are hierarchical, signifying that one term in the oppositional binary is dominant and normative in its meaning. Ryba et al. (2013) suggested that an alternative way of thinking about athletes should stress

...the diversity and complexity of sport and exercise participants’ behaviours and motivations through an enhanced understanding that their experiences are always contextually contained within socially and culturally available resources to make sense of the surrounding reality, including who they are and how they relate to others. (p.2).

Using the bioecological and historical-cultural perspectives as baseline for the present study was thus informed by a call for what Ryba, Schinke and Tenenbaum (2010) call the cultural turn in sport and exercise psychology. This is an idea led by scholars and researcher advocating cultural sport psychology, one of the main claims being that “cultural context creates meaning; thus, human behaviour is context-specific and should be studied within culture, rather than comparatively across cultures” (Stambulova & Alfermann, 2009, p.293).

Inherent in the cultural turn is ‘cultural praxis’, a term introduced in sport psychology by Ryba and Wright (2005; 2010), that

...challenges culture-blind theories, research and practice and it moves the sport psychology field from decontextualized knowledge to a new way of thinking about athletes and coaches as constituted by various discourses of race, ethnicity, gender,

generation, sport events, and the national sport system, leaving their 'prints' on sporting people's identities, experiences, values and behaviours (Ryba et al., 2013, p.12).

Employing praxes, people tackle issues of social justice by dismantling politics behind traditionally accepted and reinforced forms of knowledge that maintain power and privilege imbalances (Blodgett et al., 2010).

A cultural-historical framework was therefore seen as a possible response to the questions of why the universal knowledge about athletes in general seems insufficient to explain the behaviour of those from different cultures, and why what works well in one may not be suitable in another.

1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Organised talent development programmes in the form of football club academies for talented young footballers have had a substantial and growing presence in a number of countries in Africa (Darby, Akindes & Kirwin, 2007), even though in South Africa it had only begun to gain considerable attention in the previous decade (South African Football Association, 2004). Such increased participatory involvement of youth in organised sport programmes has generated a significant amount of research in relation not only to the psychological effects of youth participation but also to designing effective programmes for developing sport talent among participating youth (Brustad, Babkes & Smith, 2001). The bulk of such research however is from the Western world (Mudege, 2011), yet, regardless of the growing presence of talent development academies in Africa, the continent's players are still underrepresented in the world's top football leagues. African countries have yet to win the *Federation Internationale de Football Association* (FIFA) World Cup competition (Bale, 2004), and football club academies have not been able to address this concern. There has been no evidence of attempts to modify the strategies used to develop talent within the academies so as to account for such failure (Darby et al., 2007). Findings from studies conducted in a South African context can be helpful in assisting youth sport coaches and administrators to provide more positive sport experiences for youngsters who are still marginalised by the circumstances within the sport of football and to recognise individual difference factors in youngsters with regard to their participatory motives, sport-related goals, and developmental status. This study was therefore motivated by the scope for development of a sport-specific talent development model that might be specifically relevant to

the South African cultural context. To an extent it is intended to add another dimension to literature in this area and be useful largely as a guide for interventions with young and developing soccer players. It might also assist in the development of sport educational programmes that are sensitive to the needs of the South African young football players who are largely from low socio-economic status (Badenhorst & Pienaar, 2000).

As Burnett (2003) indicates, the life and competitive realities, socio-political and economic forces that impact on the lives of African athletes pose unique challenges for all stakeholders to provide refined programmes that account for cultural and contextual challenges, and that will facilitate the multifaceted development of athletes to equip them for international sport competitions. Most of the studies which present models of sport talent development are based on a sample of individuals from a higher socio-economic status, and are conducted on sports that are associated with high financial cost and special parental and socio-environmental factors (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005; McGannon, Curtin, Schinke & Schweinbenz, 2012). It is for this reason that scholars (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014; Gledhill & Harwood, 2015; McHugh, Coppola, Holt & Andersen, 2015) have suggested that in order to extend culturally specific understanding of talent development process the representation of the marginalised groups of athletes should be increased in sports talent development research.

Researchers investigating child development in cultural communities in developing countries have become increasingly conscious that much of what has been assumed as universal about the development of young children, and the type of environmental conditions necessary for their development, is a reflection of features of the economic, political, social, and cultural environment of European and North American white, middle-class cultural communities (Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995; Hedegaard & Fler, 2013). The study of talent development among the athletes is as susceptible to the universalist thinking as any other realm of child development research. Advocates of cultural sport psychology thus support this opinion and maintain that each environment or context in which the developing athlete grows is unique, hence the dominant universal knowledge about athletes in general seems insufficient to explain the behaviour of those from different countries with different cultural contexts (Stambulova & Alfermann, 2009; Schinke, Fisher, Kamphoff, Gould & Oglesby, 2015). As Stambulova and Alfermann (2009) state, “what works well in one cultural context with regard to athletes’ talent development may not be suitable in another” (p.292). The principal intent of cultural sport psychology is thus “to challenge the ethnocentric biases of traditional sport psychology paradigms which have long

excluded the experiences and subjectivities of various participants, such as those from minority racial and ethnic groups,” including athletes from Africa (Blodgett & Schinke, 2015, p.116). Strategies steeped in a monocultural mainstream perspective can therefore work to further marginalise and disenfranchise cultural communities and individuals rather than benefiting or empowering them (Ryba & Wright, 2005).

There has been a proposition that even the concept of talent development as well as procedures followed in developing sport talent are shaped by specific social and cultural contexts (McGannon et al., 2012; Stambulova & Ryba, 2013; Kavoura, Ryba & Chroni, 2014). Talent development conception and procedures, as Fleer (2006) puts it, have evolved routines, practices and histories, and:

...have become a tradition which is a named, reified and evolving specialist discourse. Talent is perceived differently in diverse cultural contexts and this has significances for how athletes are constituted and what associated values circulate within the respective sport system. The cultural context influences the socialisation and training methods employed to reach the talent developmental goals. For an example, in Brazil a view of talent as innate dominates, and as a result, to call a Brazilian football player a hard worker is equal to saying that the player has no talent (Stambulova & Ryba, 2013, p.242).

Such an inborn talent perspective then shapes coaching system, players’ work ethics, and the way career support services are provided in Brazil. For instance, they tend to focus more on talent detection and financial support, with the aim of stimulating athletes’ exclusive dedication to sport. Stambulova and Ryba make a comparison with what they perceive to be a footballers’ talent development perspective in Europe, where talent is mainly perceived as a developed asset (having an innate component), and a work ethic introduced and supported by coaches. Hence, to a large extent in Europe, young talented footballers are offered support systems with the aim of facilitating their dual career development in sport and studies or work. Also, in Canadian indigenous contexts, an elite athlete’s sporting career is largely a communal endeavour (Rybe et al., 2010). Ethnocentric thinking about how athletic talent development overlooks such differences and assumes that one pattern, usually the one characteristic of Western cultures, is universal (Kavoura et al., 2014). Many researchers argue that research informed by such thinking is likely to lead to the wrong universals (Nsamenang, 2008).

Studying talent development within the different contexts therefore can offer researchers an opportunity to establish some common features among the diversity of talent development environments (Krebs, 2009). Despite the growing body of ecological and contextual research in sport talent development, such as that conducted by Krebs (2009) in South America, Schinke et al. (2015) in North America, dos Santos (2014) and Henriksen et al. (2010) in Europe, Si, Duan, Li and Jiang (2011) and Ge, Schinke, Dong, Lu, Si and Oghene (2016) in Asia, when the present study was conducted no such research conducted in African context could be located.

Research also indicates that only a minority of adolescents who show early indications of talent respond to the need to increase effort and commitment to develop their talent (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathund & Whalen, 1993). It is, therefore, crucial that beyond the existing theoretical frameworks in the field of sport psychology, researchers examine factors that support commitment to talent development among adolescents who have exhibited early signs of promise to excel in sport. Such research is important because it may reveal information about early stages of talent development more than examination of the recalled perspectives of athletes who have already reached a mature level of performance (Cote, 1999). Such research is also required to determine how factors associated with becoming a successful professional wfootball player can be maximised in the lives of young athletes wishing to develop their talent to its full potential (Dwurand-Bush & Salmela, 2001; Hold & Dunn, 2004).

McHugh et al. (2015) argued that it is challenging for efficient sport programmes to be derived from communities when there is little published or documented knowledge regarding what actually constitutes talent development for those communities. It was therefore hoped that this study would contribute toward a localised understanding of South African developing football players. The conceptual framework developed in this study should contribute to expanding understanding of sport talent development as well as revealing new modes of thinking that offer possibilities for the developments and evaluation of the football talent development environment. Furthermore, it was hoped that the results could form the basis for further studies on talent and career development of football players in an African context.

1.4 THE AIMS OF THE STUDY

The aims of this research are to:

- Identify and explore contextual factors influencing the environment's success in developing talented male football players
- Identify and explore ecological conditions associated with becoming a professional football player
- Present a qualitatively derived ecological framework of the environmental conditions associated with becoming a professional football player.

1.5 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE PRESENT RESEARCH

The methodological approach to the present study was stirred by a recent call for a cultural turn within the field of sport and exercise psychology, particularly to adopt a cultural sport psychology lens when engaging in research with individuals and communities at the margins, and so to facilitate contextualised understanding of marginalised topics, cultural identities and experiential knowledge, as made by such scholars and researchers as Ryba and Wright (2005); Stambulova and Alfermann (2009); Stambulova and Ryba (2013); Blodgett et al (2014); McGannon and Smith (2015) and Schinke et al. (2015). These scholars and researchers, as advocates of cultural sport psychology (CSP), have been raising concern that research continues to constitute the dominant and hegemonic discourse in sport psychology, exerting a considerable influence on shaping future trajectories in talent development studies globally. They advocate a shift from a perception of athletes' career and talent development knowledge as universal and applicable to any culture (Schinke et al., 2015). As noted by Blodgett et al (2014), in essence, "CSP research emphasized an exploration of the unique point of view of cultural community members and psychological and performance implications that result from such cultural standpoints" (p.2).

Blodgett et al. further state:

When cultural identities and issues of diversity are overlooked in research, consequences include exclusion of minority participants' worldviews and experiences, the perpetuation of stereotyped understandings of their lives, and the reinforcing of cultural power and privilege differentials. Each of the aforementioned constitutes a social justice issue that stems from the imposition of mainstream (white, Euro-American) worldviews within contexts where diverse cultural standpoints need to be included (p.2).

The concept of football talent development using football club academies is an example of a cultural universalism trajectory resultant from the dominant and hegemonic discourse which emanates from the European heritage countries. Football academies in Africa share a similar philosophy and fundamental principles with the European heritage countries as they were constructed on the basis of European values about football and talented young footballers (Darby et al., 2007). Much has been written about how a particular social need at a particular point in Western and European history created particular institutional structures and how their legacy remains, even when they have been imported to culturally and linguistically diverse countries (Nsamenang, 2000; Rogoff, 2003; Hedegaard, 2005; Tudge, 2008). When these institutional structures are imported and enacted within the communities in foreign countries people become enculturated into the structures' practices and find themselves having to "appropriate the conceptual tools and discourses" (Fleer, 2009, p.128) available and which guide their enactment. When these structures fail it is necessary to understand that it may be that they are not rooted in the local sociocultural realities and experiences of the African players.

A set of cultural discourses and common sense assumptions embedded in social institutions, such as academies and national sport federations, enable athletes to access certain contextually contained skills and practices whilst at the same time limiting and even denying the development of others. On the other hand, as Schinke et al. (2015) postulate, athletes and sport psychology researchers are "gendered, raced, classed, sexually-oriented and able-bodied, among social locations that each operates within, dependent on context and circumstances" (p.2). Their identities are thus not unchangeable but they are "fluid and are constituted in relationships in each context" (p.2). Each cultural context thus exerts influence on athletes' careers and talent development by legitimising and determining the practices in society, as well as through individuals' culturally-based attitudes to and perceptions of talent.

Recently, Ryba, Stambulova, Si and Schinke (2013) developed the International Society of Sport Psychology Position Stand (ISSP PS) on cultural competence, which continued to challenge sport and exercise psychology researchers and practitioners to rethink research and practice through a culturally reflexive lens, and challenged the sport psychology domain's taken-for-granted assumptions and practices. Their assumption is that researchers are themselves members of cultural communities, whilst their values, motivation and

theoretical perspectives and methods of inquiry are based on the cultural and historical context of their own lives. Most importantly, the ISSP PS also provided suggestions on to how to engage in culturally competent research and practice. Their initiative was a response to a call by several sport psychology researchers who, over the years, had unremittingly lamented that culturally sensitive methodologies were still an underrepresented element of sport science research (Duda & Allison, 1990; Holt, 2002; Ryba & Wright, 2005; Schinke & Hanrahan, 2009; Stambulova & Alfermann, 2009; Henriksen, Stambulova & Roessler, 2010a; 2010b; Ryba, Schinke & Tenenbaum, 2010; Larsen, 2013; Si, Duan, Zhang & Su, 2015).

As informed by the ISSP PS, and building on the previous culturally sensitive research in sport psychology, the methodology for the present study was situated within a cultural praxis discourse which McGannon and Smith (2015, p.79) refer to as “the heart” of CSP, the overarching goal of which was to produce culturally situated and competent research which would contribute towards a sport talent development cultural praxis. It has not been long since cultural praxis was introduced into sport psychology by Ryba and Wright (2005) and its roots are in a move for a cultural turn in sport and exercise psychology. Cultural praxis, whose origin can be traced to the seminal work of Paulo Freire and his persuasive text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2005), refers to a continuous process by which theory is considered in relation to social practice, and the manifestations of that intersection are meant to contribute to meaningful social action and human progress among those marginalised (Krane & Baird, 2005; Schinke et al., 2015).

Praxis-oriented research thus aims at challenging social inequalities through knowledge production processes that empower and engage marginalised participants, seeking to be emancipative, open up multiple forms of knowledge and understanding and create opportunities for individuals as cultural beings in sport (McGannon & Smith, 2015). Through cultural praxis research, researchers are challenged to reconsider the knowledge they produce in the theoretical realm by linking it with the interests and needs of marginalised individuals and/or societies (McGannon & Johnson, 2009).

Cultural praxis in sport psychology developed out of a need to highlight how issues of power and privilege were being perpetuated in and through the practice of the domain. It problematises how traditional forms of sport psychology research and practice based on grand universal theories excluded certain individuals while privileging others (Blodgett et

al., 2014). According to Ryba and Wright (2005), the privileging of some people over others is the result of a taken-for-granted way of practicing sport psychology immersed in post-positivist, white, Euro-American, male performance-based discourse. Again, much has been written about how Africa and African communities have been marginalised through colonial oppression, and how, firstly, such marginalisation has been perpetuated by dominant theories that continue to inform and dominate knowledge production. Secondly, it examines how such historical experience of oppression reduces the African children's chances of successfully entering mainstream international activities, mainly in education, economic and sport domains (Nsamenang, 1992; Nsamenang, 2000; Serpell, 2002; Schafer et al., 2004). Cultural praxis research on African players within the African context can therefore benefit from being "rooted in the local and embodied knowledge of sport participants so that deeper understandings of diverse identities can be gleaned and more meaningful understandings of where/how inequalities affect their lives can be articulated" (Blodgett et al., 2014, p.12). It can assist in interrupting colonial tendencies in football talent development, thereby challenging the dominant ways of developing talent.

Blodgett et al. (2014) define the cultural praxis as the 'how to' of conducting cultural sport psychology research as rooted, firstly:

...in localized, participatory processes, which affirm participants as the experts of their own lives while encouraging them to provide deeper insight into the social injustices that constrain their lives, particularly in relation to their sport participation (p.5).

Secondly, it is embedded in:

reflexive processes, which bring critical awareness to the ways in which researchers actively co-construct knowledge and shape the way marginalized identities are understood. Through these processes, researchers can begin to advance a socially transformative agenda wherein issues surrounding the identities and lives of marginalized sport participants are at the fore

Lastly:

the power differentials that permeate traditional research efforts - particularly those relating to the privileging of whiteness and the researcher's perspective - are counteracted (p. 5).

Cultural praxis of athletes' talent development emphasises "the diverse ways of conceptualizing and experiencing talent development across cultures" (Ryba et al., 2013, p.4), and when developing it, it is important to "be conscientious of difference and how power operates in a sociocultural constitution" (p.4) of talent.

The advocates of a cultural praxis discourse also emphasise the need to understand the manner in which psychological processes are enacted by social institutions and cultural processes are enacted by social institutions and cultural patterns, and suggest that this requires refocusing the study of athletes' talent development on "processes and connections between psyche and context" (p.4). Mostly, traditional research designs in talent development studies stem from the assumption that concepts travel easily across borders and identities are essentially stable constructs. As Ryba et al. (2013) state:

If we wish to conduct research sensitive to cultural particularities, accounting for the complexities of fluid and contextually situated formations, traditional research designs need to be complemented by different methodological solutions (p.10).

Stambulova and Ryba (2013) give an outline of what the cultural praxis of athletes' early careers or talent development implies. Firstly, a holistic perspective in career or talent development research is required, which means considering a whole person and a whole environment. This was in line with the aims of the study to apply an ecological approach to explore factors associated with football talent development.

Secondly, the cultural praxis of athletes' careers or talent development implies "a conscientious application of career and talent development research to avoid contextual sterility and to stimulate 'reflexive situatedness' of career and talent development projects in relevant socio-cultural and historical contexts" (p.21). The contextual/cultural situatedness must permeate all the phases in a research project and include researchers' awareness and reflexivity of how research questions originate from the context of participants, providing culturally specific meanings or definitions of key concepts. It has to use culturally adapted theoretical frameworks or adopt general models as a basis for data collection, implement research instruments that are infused by meanings understandable to the participants, and ensure research results are treated and interpreted as a part of the relevant contexts, providing contextualised practical implications (Stambulova & Ryba, 2013). The two theoretical frameworks informing the present study explain human

development from a contextual perspective, with focus on the contextual systems and cultural factors that explain the development process. In this sense the contextual and cultural ‘situatedness’ was infused as the two theoretical frameworks formed a guiding principle for the selection of the aims and methods of the study.

The third implication is that the cultural praxis of athletes’ talent development values an idiosyncratic approach to research and draws attention to diversity in patterns and trajectories, which should be matched accordingly by the relevant service providers. Lastly, a cultural praxis paradigm directs the researchers away from focusing exclusively on “white male elite athletes” to studying marginalised athletic populations, such as those from African communities, who are underrepresented in “the global athlete career scholarship” (Stambulova & Ryba (2013, p. 21).

Ryba et al. (2010) suggest that a research project based on the tenets of the cultural praxis of athletes’ careers or talent development must be positioned in terms of three aspects. Firstly, a project idea should emanate from and be positioned in a relevant socio-cultural and historically specific context. This means that researchers should be aware of cultural constitution of the project participants’ and their own attitudes and behaviour in order to account for cultural and/or historical influences in athletes’ development in particular contexts. Secondly, the research project should be situated within a scientific discipline, for example, sport psychology, to match the research problem. Thirdly, the project should be theoretically and methodologically positioned. The researcher should be clear about the paradigms and approaches and perspectives they use and show that their project is methodologically congruent, that is, having the purposes, theoretical frameworks, methods of data collection and interpretations as interconnected, and culturally congruent. They should incorporate culturally relevant definitions of key concepts, cultural adaptation of existing theoretical frameworks or developing culturally specific ones, using a culturally relevant method and procedures of data collection and interpretation.

As Ryba et al. (2013) state, to conduct a competent cultural praxis project it is recommended that the researcher critically reflect on his/her cultural, professional and athletic background, and incorporate “meaningful dialogue” (p.10) aimed at searching for a sharable language with participants, and facilitate their reflections, insights and solutions related to the project. The emphasis should be on the study of meaning from the point of view of cultural members and the understanding of how identity, belonging, and culture are produced in and through

everyday practices. Hence, for cultural researchers there is no separation between subject and context as they live together, require each other, and dynamically, dialectically, and jointly make each other up. It is important to note that culture is assumed to constitute psychological worlds and give meanings to actions. The focus should therefore be not on the ethnicity of the participants per se, but on the implicit patterns of cultural meaning and social practices and artefacts, with the aim of understanding the processes through which psychological functioning is realised. The belief is that culture inhabits human psychological worlds, transforming behaviour into meaningful acts.

Information gained through such a culture-informed project offers richness to the data that correctly situates the participants in their lived reality, with part of what is important being not only one's thoughts, behaviours, or words, but also what informs such aspects of daily existence. Researchers, using a cultural praxis discourse, reconsider how participants are constituted, not as autonomous and value-free but rather as "saturated with cultural meanings and social norms", where people produce such meaning in and through their respective cultural practices" (Ryba et al., 2013, p.12).

In general, cultural researchers in sport psychology advocate qualitative methods and reflexivity in making sense of how socio-cultural context and psyche make each other up so as to infuse the research process with a cultural mind-set (Holt & Dunn, 2004; Henriksen et al., 2010; Hodge, Sharp, Ihirangi Heke, 2011; Ryba et al., 2010; Larsen et al., 2013; Si, Duan, Li, Zhang & Su, 2015). As Ryba (2005) states, it is the sustained articulation of socio-cultural foundations of sport, sport psychology and education with cultural studies that has led to a shift in emphasis from quantitative to qualitative research methods and the exploration of social and cultural difference. Drawing on past research, the present study opted for a qualitative research design, which, as Hodge et al. (2011) point out, forms an important component of cultural research and is ideal for understanding complex processes of cultural construction of the participants, the way cultural resources and social practices enable or disable emotions, experiences and action.

Tillman (2002) suggests that the most important consideration when conducting a culturally sensitive research approach, such as cultural praxis, is to utilise congruent data collection methods, for instance, interviews and observations, which provide a holistic, contextualised representation of the everyday lives of the participants. These methods allow the researcher to meet the participants 'on level ground', with practices of both the participants and

researcher becoming part of the research and participants being encouraged to speak and share openly and more thoroughly their life experiences (Ryba et al., 2013; Stambulova & Ryba, 2013). Through interviews, they have an opportunity to speak and share openly and more thoroughly their life experiences. Through observations the researcher is able to understand who the participants are in a more holistic sense. When cultural aspects are a part of how one is constituted the researcher can seek to understand, and so help affirm them on a much deeper level (Stambulova & Ryba, 2013).

Semi-structured interviews and unstructured observations were used as building blocks of this study. A semi-structured guide was based on the interview protocols developed by Holt and Dunn (2004), Henriksen (2010), Larsen et al. (2013) and Gledhill and Harwood (2015). Observations of the participants' and the club academies' daily lives were conducted and were particularly essential for understanding the organisational culture of the two club academies that participated. Again, as informed by cultural research, the notion was that "there is no separation between subject and context as they live together, require each other, and dynamically, dialectically, and jointly make each other up" (Ryba et al., 2010, p.23). Such observations included hours of being in the academy environment, making it possible to study the athletes in diverse contexts, such as at school, training, and in competition. Data collected through culture-informed study offered richness to the data that correctly situated the participant in her/his lived reality, with importance placed not only the thoughts, behaviours, or words, but also what informed such facets of daily existence (Ryba et al., 2013).

Again, in line with previous researchers, for the purpose of this study data was collected from multiple perspectives, namely the players, their parents and coaches. Data collected from all the sources was analysed collectively, capturing the specifics of each of the academies under study in terms of the factors contributing in its efforts in talent development, with organisational culture as a core.

1.6 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

For the purpose of this study the following definitions of terms were adopted and utilised.

Ecological perspective

The term 'ecology' is used to "capture the sense of individual-context interrelatedness" (Tudge, 2008, p.67), and refers to the interrelatedness between the individual and the context in which he/she is developing (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The ecological framework thus depicts:

...the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the life course, between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by the relations between these settings, and by the larger context in which the settings are embedded (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2005, p.107).

The essential components of the ecology include the setting in which a developing individual spends time and the relations with others in the same settings, the personal characteristics of the individual, and those with whom he/she typically interacts, both development over time and the historical time in which these individuals live, and the mechanisms that drive development (proximal processes).

The context or environment

The 'context' is "the complex interconnections among individual, interpersonal, and contextual aspects of development" (Tudge, 2008, p.73), here denoting the overall athletic talent development environment (Henriksen, Stambulova & Roessler, 2011), including all the social systems as described by Bronfenbrenner (1999), or "the social and material environment" as termed by Vygotsky (1994, p.345), who used the concepts 'social' and 'culture' as fundamentally having the same meaning and argued that "everything that is cultural is social and that culture is the product of social life and human social activity" (Vygotsky, 1981, p.164).

For Henriksen (2010, p.34):

A culture context can therefore be both materials, appearing in cultural artefacts such as stadiums, buildings or clothes, and non-material comprising values, beliefs, lifestyles, patterns of interactions and so on that are shared by a group of people.

Athletic talent

This study adopted an ecological definition of ‘athletic talent’, as suggested by Henriksen (2010, p.160):

A set of competences and skills developed on the basis of innate potential and of multiyear interactions with the environment – for example training and competitions – as well as the ability to exploit the strengths and compensate for the weaknesses of the environment and to contribute to its development.

Athletic talent development

For the purpose of this study ‘athletic talent development’ is defined as the progressive mutual accommodation that takes place between an aspiring athlete and a composite and dynamic sporting and non-sporting environment that supports the development of the personal, psycho-social and sport-specific skills required for the pursuit of an elite athletic career (Henriksen, 2010).

Culture

‘Culture’ is defined as more than something that is simply “out there” and observable through people’s behaviours, actions and customs, and more than something that is just “inside the head” and solely composed of people’s beliefs and ideas. It is regarded as the custom complex that honours both symbolic and behavioural inheritances. The symbolic inheritance refers to a cultural community’s “received ideas and understandings, both implicit and explicit, about persons, society, nature and divinity” while the behavioural inheritance includes a cultural community’s “routine or institutionalized family life and social practices”. Culture is a historically transmitted patterns of meanings embodied in symbols (Stambulova & Alfermann, 2009), and:

...shapes human life and the human mind... gives meaning to action by situating its underlying intentional states in an interpretative system. It does this by imposing the patterns inherent in the culture’s symbolic systems – its language and discourse mode, the forms of logical and narrative explication, and the patterns of mutually depended communal life (Taylor & Bruner, 2012, p. 392).

In this sense, culture acts as an influential factor that both legitimises and determines the talent development patterns and practices in society and through individuals' culturally based attitudes to and perceptions of talent (Ryba & Stambulova, 2013).

Culture, however, not only functions as an influential factor, but, according to Ryba and Stambulana (2013), it also operates as “a constituting factor or a discourse that generates a mapping of athletes' talent within the socio-political field. It functions like a discourse, which provides us with sets of ready-made and preconstituted ‘experiencings’ displayed and arranged through language” (p.3). The concept of a discursive culture suggests that language and cultural practices impose certain frameworks which structure how people live and devise meaning from their experiences within a particular context.

For the purpose of this study the focus was not on groups *per se*, such as Whites, Blacks, American or Africans, but on the implicit patterns of cultural meanings and social practices and artefacts, to understand the processes through which psychological functioning is realised in a particular context (Rybe et al., 2010).

1.7 OUTLINE OF THESIS

This thesis consists of eight chapters. Chapter 1 has provided the background, rationale, aims and methodological approach to the study. It also introduced the theoretical framework that informed the study and provided working definitions of the key terms that are used in the study.

Chapter 2 discusses Bronfenbrenner's bioecological approach as one of the theoretical frameworks for the study of talent development, recognising the evolution process from one of contextual influences on development to the latest phase of proximal processes and the use of the PPCT model as a guide for research.

In Chapter 3, Hedegaard's cultural-historical approach is presented as another theoretical framework that informed this study. It draws upon Vygotsky's (1998) theory of the social situation of development, with focus on the child's participation within and across several institutions and how the institutional practices influence his or her social situation of development.

Chapter 4 presents a literature review on talent development in football.

Chapter 5 describes the methodological considerations in relation to frameworks and concepts of the dissertation. It provides a description of the research design which is a case study, the sample and instruments, the research design, as well as the ethical considerations.

Chapter 6 discusses the results of the study.

Chapter 7 presents the discussion of the results in relation to the aim of the study, the two chosen theoretical perspectives, and the practical implications related to the objectives. It also presents the proposed working model for football talent development.

Chapter 8 presents the conclusion, limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ECOLOGICAL APPROACH

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The theoretical framework of this study is built on central tenets of the ecological and the cultural-historical approaches, which provide comprehensive models of the collective factors that influence the sport talent development process. This chapter discusses the ecological approach.

2.2 THE ECOLOGICAL APPROACH TO HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Psychology began giving attention to ecological principles and methods in the 1940s, when Kurt Lewin, regarded by many as the pioneer of ecological psychology (Rosa & Tudge, 2013), posed an argument that the first step in attempting to understand the behaviour of the individuals or groups is to examine the opportunities and constraints of the environment in which this behaviour takes place. Lewin introduced an equation: $B=f(P,E)$ which defines behaviour as a joint function of person and environment. He defined the environment as everything that is not us but has an effect on what we do. This can be other people, physical environment or social environment (Krebs, 2009).

During the 1970s a number of scholars became interested in Lewin's idea and a growing body of research began to argue that there may be synergy between individuals and environments that exert influence on individuals beyond individual characteristics (Spence & Lee, 2003). Scholars such as Roger Barker (1903-1991), Egon Brunswik (1903-1956), James Gibson (1904-1979) and Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917-2005) expressed discontent with the derivation of psychological knowledge of human behaviour from people's reactions to experimental conditions in the laboratory or from responses to psychological tests (Araújo, 2009). Bronfenbrenner (1979) specifically raised concern about the narrowness and inauthenticity of the research designs traditionally used in developmental psychology. He believed that "much of the contemporary developmental psychology is the science of the strange behaviour of children in strange situations with strange adults for the briefest possible period of time" (p.513).

During that time little was known about the inputs people received from their everyday environments or about how their reactions to the different environmental circumstances they encountered. The focus of many researchers in psychology was to discover the extent of 'nature and nurture' as specific influences with only a few studies designed to highlight the interactions between these, that is, an interaction between an individual's biologically based characteristics and abilities and the different contexts in which he or she lived (Tudge, 2008). The concern with the future of research in human development motivated Bronfenbrenner and his colleagues to propose the ecological approach as

...a research paradigm that can be used as a theoretical framework to support investigations capable of reflecting developmental processes as much as, the forces of the context in which development occurs, in order to understand the results of that interaction" (Krebs, 2009, p.10).

Subsequently, the scholars for the ecological, Barker and Gibson in particular, began arguing for the ecological approach to be formally recognised as a branch of psychology, termed 'ecological psychology' (Araújo, 2009).

Ecological psychology was based on the proposition that if one is to understand human behaviour one must examine the circumstances in which it takes place, then represent them in the experiment before making useful generalisations (Hammond & Bateman, 2009). In other words, researchers need to analyse and measure the environment before posing questions on how an individual may achieve knowledge about that environment (Araújo & Davids, 2009). Hence, ecological psychology is defined as the study of the interdependent relationships between the goal-directed actions of persons and the behaviour settings in which they occur (Darling, 2007).

Araújo and Davids (2009) identified two main assumptions by ecological psychology. The first was that psychologists tend to focus their attention particularly on characteristics of individuals, such as level of depression, or on processes that occur within persons, such as thinking, attitude change, or problem solving. Because they do not study the environment directly but learn about it indirectly from the people whose behaviour or experiences they study, these psychologists generally regard the environments in which human behaviour occurs as unstable and disordered. Their opinion is that different people construe their

surroundings in different ways, and the same person is likely to shift attention from one aspect of the environment to another. People's reports about their environments, therefore, are likely to be cluttered. For instance, if children were to take few minutes to write a paragraph describing their domestic environment they would reveal many different views. It would be easy to conclude or assume from such an exercise that the home environment is not orderly, and this is not amenable to scientific study.

Ecological psychologists contrast this viewpoint. For instance, Barker (1968) argued that the environment "is not a chaotic jumble of independent odds and ends, but it has more than statistical regularity. It consists of bounded and internally patterned units that are frequently arranged in precisely ordered arrays and sequences" (p.158). Barker argued that the stability and order of the environment are not simply the result of the perceiver's information processing, but that the environment is 'out there', with certain regularities in settings that may not be apparent to the people in them but obvious to an observer who is more distant and less involved. The second assumption is that psychologists also tend to assume that any environmental unit selected to study is arbitrary, extending from the person considered to be a largely undifferentiated regress without clearly identifiable boundaries.

Wicker (1984, in Arujo et al., 2009) illustrated;

For example, [a student in psychology class] may be simultaneously in a chair, in a classroom, in a building, on a campus, in a town, in a valley, in the mountains, on a continent, on the earth. These are physical features. A similar extension could be made using social/organizational features – for example, with a friend, among classmates, in psychology class, in college, and so on (p.17).

The question posed by the ecological psychologists is: "At what point should we stop and say this is the environment of human behaviour?" (Bronfenbrenner, 1999, p.6) Ecological psychologists argue that traditional psychology has provided no answer to this question, and many psychologists have discreetly assumed that cannot be answered, at least not to their satisfaction.

Ecological psychologists believe that the environment is well structured and that one does not have to be arbitrary in identifying environmental units. For instance, Bronfenbrenner (1979) argued that the careful observer of the environment may come to recognise a series of nested and hierarchically ordered, self-regulating systems that fit together like the layers

of an onion. Each system is a component of a larger one, and each contains, within its boundaries, a number of different components of the systems.

Returning to Wicker's example of a student in a psychology class, Aurojo et al. (2009) gives the following illustration of how this student's environment can be viewed as an organized structure:

The student [in a psychology class] is one level in a hierarchy of systems, one layer of the onion. At the next level down are the organs, the heart, lungs, stomach, brain that make up the student (or more precisely, the person-system). Below that are the tissues that make up the organs. Working upward and outward from our student, the next level is the psychology-class behavior setting, of which the student is a component (just as her stomach is a component of her), and above that the college of which the psychology class is a part (p17).

The illustration shows that a system that is a component at one level is an environment on another and each system has the ability to constrain and/or be constrained by the outside unit that surrounds it, as well as by the inside units it surrounds.

A student in a psychology class can influence (constrain) what goes on there; for example, she can ask a question or cause a disturbance. She can also be influenced (constrained) by the class, as when she falls silent as the lecturer begins to speak. Turning now to the inside units the person 'surrounds', she may constrain the condition of her stomach, by not eating, or be constrained by it, as when hunger pangs leads her to look for something to eat (ibid., p 17).

As mentioned above, Barker was one of the prominent scholars who advocated the ecological approach, believing that "in order to understand what behavior settings are, we must shed the perceptual bias that persons are the cause of most events and that environments are so disordered that they cause events only through luck or chance" (Barker, 1968, p.65). His popular study recorded in a book titled "*One boy's day: a specimen record of behavior*" (Barker, 1968) is an example of how predictions about human behaviour could be made from knowledge about the environment in which it takes place, rather than from personality assessment data.

In his efforts to study the influence that behavioural settings have on people, Barker spent time documenting the daily lives of children, employing observers to follow particular

children and recorded what they said and did, what was said and done to them, and where they went. An important conclusion of Barker's study was that children's behaviour could be predicted more accurately from knowing their situations than their individual characteristics (Krebs, 2009).

Although there are many typologies of ecological models they all share common features. Their consensual general message is that to sufficiently explain, predict and improve some behaviour it is necessary to study the objective properties of the environmental context in which it takes place (Nitsch, 2009). They all argue that the study of human development should examine the interactions between the developing person and the environment in which he or she lives and grows up. For the purpose of this study, Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory is given detailed attention.

2.3 BRONFERNBRENNER'S BIOECOLOGICAL APPROACH TO HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Uri Bronfenbrenner dedicated a better part of his life to developing an ecological framework for the study of child development, which he argued should be perceived as dynamic in interaction with societal conditions and understood as more complex with multiple and varied ways in which it takes place (Tudge, 2013). He acknowledged the influence of a number of scholars, such as Kurt Lewin and Barker in United States of America as well as the Soviet psychologists Luria, Leontiev and Vygotsky, and their idea of research that leads to social transformation (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). He distinguished two periods of considerable change during his effort in developing his approach, the first of which resulted in the publication of a book entitled *The Ecology of Human Development* (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the second being characterised by a series of papers in which the original model was called into question then reshaped into a more complex and dynamic structure that was eventually to be called the bioecological model (Bengoechea, 2002). However, Rosa and Tudge (2013) gave a slightly different analysis of the evolution of Bronfenbrenner's theory from an ecological to a bioecological theory, describing the evolution, extending from the time it was first proposed in the 1970s until Bronfenbrenner's death in 2005, as made up of the following three distinguishable phases:

Phase 1 ([circa]1973-1979) culminated in the publication of *The Ecology of Human Development* (1979). Phase 2 ([circa]1980-1993 saw almost immediate modification to the theory, with more attention paid to the role of the individual and greater concern with developmental processes. In Phase 3 ([circa]1993-2006), proximal processes were defined and placed at the heart of bioecological theory, and from 1998, the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model [which is described in more details below] was described as the theory's appropriate research design (p.243).

Darling (2007), Tudge (2008) and Rosa and Tudge (2013) issued a warning that, in order to avoid theoretical incoherence, scholars should be cautious about stating that their research is based on Bronfenbrenner's theory without specifying which version they are using. They further lamented that too many scholars would treat Bronfenbrenner's theory in a simplistic manner depicting "flawed concentric ring representation of context" (Tudge, 2008, p.68) as though it deals solely with the influence of context (with reference to the set of circles representing the levels of environment) on children's or adolescents' development and take no account of its core feature, which is to recognise the patterning and interrelationship of multiple determinants of development as well as the active role of the developing person.

Rosa and Tudge (2013) believed that the metaphor of "nested structures, each inside the other like a set of Russian dolls" (see figure 2 below) does not do adequate justice to Bronfenbrenner's position that each of the systems is interrelated. Also, the mesosystem is not a layer outside the microsystem but a relationship between or among microsystems. Bronfenbrenner himself recognised the limitations of some aspects of his initial contextual perspective and in Phases 2 and 3 paid greater attentions to the role played by the individual in his or her own development. He attended more to processes of development and focused explicit attention on the passage of time, revising his concepts of development and of ecological environments (particularly the microsystem and macrosystem) and formulating a new research paradigm for the study of human development called the '*Process, the Person, Context, and Time*' (PPCT) model. It is therefore important, to avoid theoretical confusion, that researchers be explicit about the specific theoretical basis for their studies (Darling, 2007).

From the inception of his theory Bronfenbrenner used the term 'ecology' to refer to the interrelatedness between the individual and his/her context, positing that the interaction is not static or one-sided but progressive, mutual, accommodative, and that it runs throughout

the life course between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives. This process is affected by the relations between these settings, and by the larger context in which they are embedded (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). The unique characteristic of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development is that the theory stresses a need to account for individual differences and the changes that occur over time with the interplay between maturation and experience (Larsen et al, 2012).

A major assumption of Bronfenbrenner's theory is that human development involves both continuity and change and that, during the course of life, development "takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving bio-psychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p.797). There is a progressive change in the person's characteristics over time and space which signifies continuity both in the person and the environment (Bronfenbrenner,1979). For Bronfenbrenner, biological factors and evolutionary processes not only set limits of human development but also impose imperatives regarding the environmental conditions and experiences required for the realisation of human potentials (Domingues & Goncalves, 2014). Therefore, the child's development will be more successful if the relationships established in ecological environments include people with whom the child has established a positive emotional attachment that is both mutual and permanent. Those environments should provide an opportunity for observation of and engaging in activities with the assistance of people who have better understanding and skill, and encouragement of the performance of skills acquired with help in other settings and relationships (Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

2.3.1 Concepts and definitions

As Rosa and Tudge (2013) state, given that Bronfenbrenner viewed the environment as intrinsically connected to the individuals within it, throughout his research he often used the qualifier 'ecological' when referring to the environment. His focus therefore was not simply on the environment, or context, but on the ecological system that included the developing individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). His line of research continued to grow and eventually

evolved into what he termed the ‘bioecological theory’ (Bronfenbrenner, 2005a), conceptualised as “more complete” (Rosa & Tudge, 2013), with definition of the ecology of human development as follows:

The scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the life course, between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by the relations between these settings, and by the larger context in which the settings are embedded (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2005, p.107).

As indicated by the above definition, Bronfenbrenner postulated that human development, particularly in its early phases, occurs through processes of complex, reciprocal interaction between an active human organism and persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate environment.

A central assumption of the model is therefore that through the life course:

...human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p.797).

He defined these interactions as “proximal processes” (Bronfenbrenner, 1995, p.629) and suggested that they must occur on a regular basis and over a long period of time. Examples of patterns of these include group or solitary play, reading, learning new skills, and athletic activities (Davids, Araújo, Vilar, Renshaw & Pinder, 2013).

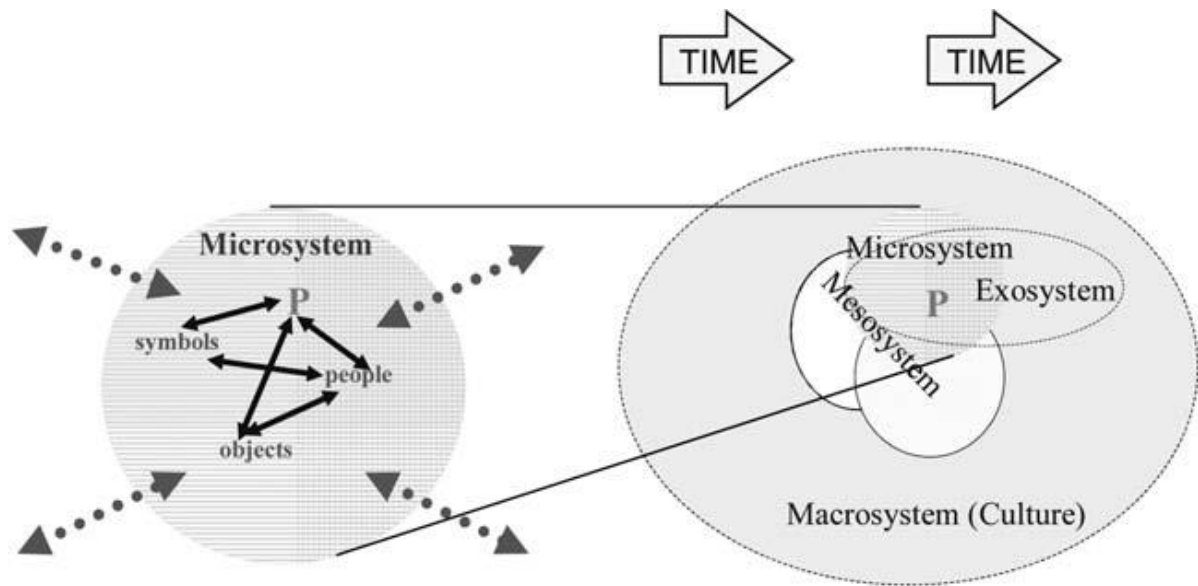


Figure 2.1: Urie Bronfenbrenner’s PPCT (*Process, the Person, Context, and Time*) model.

The active *Person* (P) engaging in proximal processes with people, symbols, and objects within microsystem, in interaction with other contexts, involving both continuity and change over *Time* (Tudge, 2008, p.69).

Bronfenbrenner (2005) described how development is affected by the complex interrelationship between the four basic elements, which are: *person, process, context and time* (PPCT). The PPCT model acknowledges that the person affects as well is affected by the context, with particular ways of interaction between person and context which operate through life and relate to the primary mechanisms that produce human development (see Figure 2.1 above).

PPCT is based on individual characteristics, such as psychosocial skills, proximal processes, such as activities and practice in the environment, contextual variables, such as the environment in which the activities are happening and the temporally evolving nature of relationships between an individual and different levels of their environment (Larsen et al., 2012).

2.3.1.1 *Process*

As a primary mechanism of human development, the *process* refers to proximal interactions between the individual and the context (objects, symbols and people on the micro-, meso-, exo- and macro-level) (Krebs, 2009). To be effective, such interactive processes must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time (dos Santos 2014). Specifically, to explain the role of *process* in the PPCT design, Bronfenbrenner (2005b) devised two central propositions for his theory, the first of which states:

Human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment. To be effective, the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of *time*. Such enduring forms of interaction in the immediate environment are referred to as *proximal processes* (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p.996)

The second proposition describes the nature of the proximal processes and defines the dynamic forces of these interactions between person, context and time:

The form, power, content, and direction of the proximal processes effecting development vary systematically as a joint function of the characteristics of the *developing person*; of the *environment* – both immediate and more remote- in which the processes are taking place; the nature of the *developmental outcomes* under consideration; and the social continuities and changes occurring over *time* through the life course and the historical period during which the person has lived (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p.996).

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) indicated that the two propositions are theoretically interdependent and subject to empirical testing. The PPCT model is designed to permit the simultaneous investigation of the proposition, therefore, in order to implement a study that is guided by bioecological theory all four elements should be present. If a research design, for whatever reason, does not permit adequate assessment of one or more of the elements this should be clearly acknowledged so as to preserve the integrity of the theory (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield & Karnik, 2009).

Essentially, altogether, proximal processes, individual characteristics, contextual variables, and the temporally evolving nature of the interaction between person and environment, along with their dynamic relationships, constitute the core of the bioecological model in its most recent formulation (see Figure 2.2) (Bengoechea, 2002).

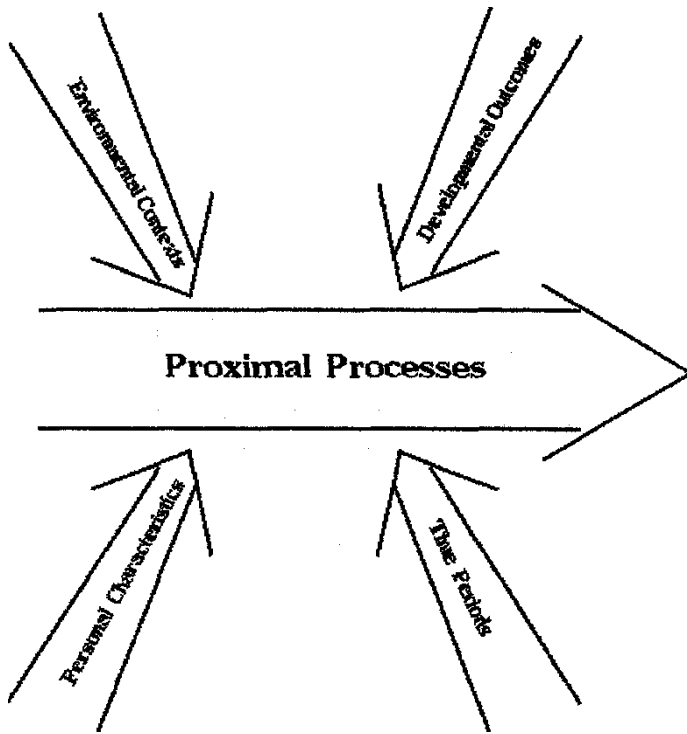


Figure 2.2: Four sources of influence moderating the form, power, and direction of proximal processes as primary engines of human development (Bengoechea & Johnson, 2000).

As indicated in Figure 2.2 (above), in a bioecological model, proximal processes are posited as the primary engines of development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Of particular importance is:

...their substantive and theoretical significance as the mechanisms of organism-environment behavioural interaction that drive development, and the profound ways in which these mechanisms are affected by characteristics of the developing person and of the environmental context in which the interaction takes place (p.626).

It is important to note that proximal processes are not restricted to interactions with people but can also involve interactions with objects and symbols. In this regard, Bronfenbrenner

suggested that for development to occur the person must engage in an activity. Furthermore, to be developmentally effective, activities have to become progressively more complex, which usually requires them to be performed on a regular basis, over an extended period of time (Bengoechea, 2002).

Bronfenbrenner conducted numerous studies and published papers discussing other researchers' projects on the study of the conditions under which children and families would thrive. Based on these studies he concluded that proximal processes would have a greater chance of promoting outcomes of developmental competence in more stable and advantageous environments. By contrast, in settings that are unstable and disadvantageous, proximal processes would function by avoiding or slowing outcomes of development. He also argued that the developmental power of proximal processes would be increased if they occurred among people who developed a strong emotional relationship (Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

2.3.1.2 Person

A *person* has the dispositions and resources of development in terms of how he or she invites or discourages reactions from the social context (Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1999). Bronfenbrenner stated:

It is true that individuals can and often do modify, select, reconstruct, and even create their environments. But this capacity emerges only to the extent that the person has been enabled to engage in self-directed action as a joint function not only of his biological endowment but also of the environment in which he or she developed. There is no one without the other (Bronfenbrenner, 1989, pp.223-224).

In other words, the characteristics of the developing person play a joint role in determining the form, power, content, and direction of the proximal processes affecting development, and it is through complex and dynamic processes that the subject establishes active (progressively more complex and reciprocal) relationships with other individuals, objects and symbols in the immediate environment (dos Santos, 2014).

For Bronfenbrenner, biological factors and evolutionary processes not only set limits of human development but also impose imperatives regarding the environmental conditions and experiences required for the realisation of human potentials (dos Santos et al., 2011).

The characteristics of the person function as an indirect producer, influencing the emergence and operation of proximal processes (Araújo & Davids, 2009). Gender, age, intelligence, personality and motivation are regarded as the most important dispositions (Strachan, 2008).

Bronfenbrenner (1989, 1995) recognised that most scholars subscribing to an ecological paradigm were providing far more knowledge about the characteristics of the environment than about those of developing individuals and was now concerned that researchers had lost the developing person in their study of context (Darling, 2007). In an effort to fill this gap he identified three types of process-relevant person characteristics which, according to Araújo and Davids (2009), are distinguished as the personal or individual characteristics that individuals bring with them into any social situation and as the most influential in shaping the course of development and power of proximal processes through the life course. These are: demand, resource and *force* (or *disposition*) structures. It is important to note that, despite being termed personal or individual characteristics, each of these types develops as the result of the complex interplay of biology and the social world and so should be thought of as co-constructed characteristics (Tudge, 2008).

He regarded the *demand* characteristics as those easily noted qualities of the developing person that can invite or discourage reactions from the social environment, influencing the way in which proximal processes are established (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Examples of demand characteristics are those that could be immediately visible and can act as a force of attraction for another person, such as physical appearance, skin colour, age and gender (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Other examples are “an agitated or calm temperament, attractive versus unattractive appearance, and hyperactivity and passivity” (Rosa & Tudge, 2013, p.253). Demand characteristics invite or discourage behaviours from others that can foster or disrupt the operation of proximal processes, such as attractive or unattractive physical appearance (Araújo & David, 2009).

Resource characteristics are not immediately apparent, even though sometimes they are induced, with differing degrees of accuracy, from the demand characteristics that are seen. They relate to mental and emotional resources, such as past experiences, skills, and intelligence. They also relate to social and material resources, such as access to good food, housing, caring parents, and educational opportunities appropriate to the needs of the particular society (Tudge et al., 2009). For Bengoechea (2002), the resource characteristics are those attributes that in themselves involve no selective disposition to action but constitute

bio-psychosocial liabilities and assets more or less influenced by physical and cognitive maturation and/or genetic factors that influence the capacity of the organism to engage effectively in proximal processes. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) divided them into those that can activate development and those that can limit or disrupt proximal processes. Examples of those that can activate development are “ability, knowledge, skill, and experience” (p.812), whilst those that can limit or disrupt the development process include “genetic defects, low birth weight, physical handicaps, severe and persistent illness, or damage to brain function” (p.812).

Force characteristics are those that have to do with differences of personality or temperament, motivation and endurance. Bronfenbrenner (2005a) considered them the most likely to influence a person’s developmental outcomes, whether in a generative or disruptive manner. The former can set proximal processes in motion in a particular developmental domain and continue to sustain their operation, whereas the latter can impede or interrupt them (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Examples of the generative force characteristics are “such active orientations as curiosity, tendency to initiate and engage in activity alone or with others, responsiveness to initiative by others, and readiness to defer immediate gratification to pursue long-term goals” whilst disruptive force characteristics are “impulsiveness, explosiveness, distractibility, inability to defer gratification, or, in a more extreme form, resort to aggression and violence” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p.1009).

Bronfenbrenner (1999, 2005) believed that two individual children can have the same resource characteristics, but their biological growing paths might differ if one is inspired to succeed and has patience in completing tasks whilst the other is not motivated but uninspired. Therefore, the role of processes of reciprocal interaction between characteristics of the person broadly regarded as biologically based and the natural context of human action plays an important role in the development process. The effectiveness of the developing individual’s characteristics in fuelling later development stems from his or her capacity to influence the emergence and operation of proximal processes. An important feature of the bioecological model is that characteristics of the person are treated not only as dependent variables or measures of outcome but also as precursors and producers of future development. They can be an influence on development and, at the same time, have a developmental outcome (Bengoechea, 2002). Individuals who have developed different demand, force, and resource characteristics will clearly experience the same environment,

engage in activities, and interact with others in quite different ways (Tudge, 2008). Those characteristics that influence future development, that is, those that are active behavioural dispositions that can set proximal processes in motion and sustain their operations, are referred to as ‘developmentally generative’. On the other hand, those characteristics that interfere with, delay or even prevent the setting up the proximal processes in motion are referred to as developmentally disruptive. The developmentally generative characteristics are regarded as important as they inspire “an active orientation toward an interaction with the environment and a conception of the self as an active agent in a responsive word” (Bengoechea, 2002, p.7).

The change can be either relatively passive or more active (Bronfenbrenner, 1999). Passive change can be that a person changes the environment simply by being in it, to the extent that others react to him or her differently on the basis of demand characteristics. More active changes can be related to the ways in which the person changes the environment, and these are linked to his or her resource characteristics, whether physical, mental, or emotional. The most active are to do with the extent to which the person changes the environment, linked in part to the desire and drive to do so, or force characteristics (Tudge et al., 2009).

In conclusion, it is important to note that Bronfenbrenner (1999) pointed out that the characteristics of the person appear twice in the PPCT model:

...first, as one of the four elements influencing the form, power, content, and directions of the proximal process and second as developmental outcomes, that is, the characteristics of the developing person at a later point in time as the result of the joint, interactive cumulative effects of the four principal components of the model. In short, in the bioecological model, the characteristics of the person are both a producer and a product of development (p.5).

2.3.1.3 Contexts

Bronfenbrenner (1999) described this component as comprising the global context in which the individual was living, and the developmental context in which the interactive processes occurred. It embraced the immediate environment in which the person in development lived, and the more remote one, in which the person had not been but which was strongly related to him/her, and had power to influence the human development (Santo, 2014). It is for this

reason that Bronfenbrenner regarded the environmental *contexts* of an individual as important, especially with regards to relationships with objects and symbols. During the early stages of his research he argued that the environmental properties were not distinguished by reference to linear variables but should be analysed in systems terms (Krebs, 2009). He adapted Brim's (1975) terminology of microstructure, mesostructure, and macrostructure and conceptualised the environment as being made up of four interconnected surrounding systems or levels of the environment, namely, microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem (see Figure 2.1). He defined the levels as both the objective properties of the context and the way in which the context was perceived.

The microsystem is defined as a pattern of activities, social role, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular features that influence engagement in interaction with the immediate environment (Araújo et al., 2014). It consists of an individual's closest context that helps shape experiences and development, entrenched in which are a number of activities, roles and interpersonal relationships that the individual experiences in location and programme of activities. As dos Santos (2014) illustrates, in the school context, for example, this level concerns the relationships between peers and adults and the child's ability to confront challenges. At home, this level may refer to parents and child relationships, or a child's relationships between siblings and other family members. Therefore, effects of the physical environment such as the degree to which the physical set-up of the home, permits exploration of the influence on development. Also, social influences such as mother- infant interaction are essential aspects of the microsystem.

During early days of the development of his theory, Bronfenbrenner (1999) classified all activities taking place at this level into two types. He called those activities perceived as having meaning or intent and in which the developing persons persist until the activity is completed as 'molar', which he called as without meaning or persistence and as 'molecular' activities. He explained the differences between molar and molecular activities as follows:

All molar activities are forms of behavior, but not all behaviors are forms of molar activity. The reason for making the distinction lies in the belief that not all behaviors are equally significant as manifestations of or influences on development. Many are so short-lived as to have minimal importance; these are referred to as molecular behaviors. Others are more long-lasting but, because they lack meaning

to the participants in the setting, have only negligible impact. The definition of molar activity thus emphasizes both some persistence through time and some salience in the phenomenological field of the developing person and of others present in the setting. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p.45)

Bronfenbrenner explained that proximal processes, whether involving solitary interaction with objects, symbols or interaction with one or more other social partners, occur within microsystems, even though the other systems of context are also influential (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). In his effort to describe the influential capabilities of the microsystem, Bronfenbrenner embraced an internalist perspective and argued that:

...the emotionally loaded patterns of interchange processes between the infant and the primary caregiver become internalized in the form of what Bowlby (1973) termed 'internal working models'. Such working models are representations of the infant in relation to others and become the basis for development of the self"(Araújo, Davids, Bennett, Button & Chapman, 2009, pp.315-316).

The mesosystem can be described as a set of microsystems in which the individual has an active role, interacting with one another continually (Araújo et al, 2009), for example, the interaction between home and a sport or social programme, home and community services, relationships between parents and educators, and parents and coaches, family and community (dos Santos, 2014). This level has an essential relationship and influences with the microsystems because the interactions between its subsystems have an immediate impact on the individual's developmental outcomes. When an individual moves from one microsystem to another a mesosystem is created (Krebs, 2009). In that manner, Bronfenbrenner (1979) saw the mesosystem as "a system of microsystems" (p.25), with one microsystem typically influencing what happens in another, as when children's good or bad behaviour at school influences the way their caregivers deal with them at home (Tudge, 2008).

The exosystem is described as a larger social system in which the child does not directly function, but whose events affect or are affected by what happens in other contexts (dos Santos, 2014). Exosystem influences are those that stem from a microsystem in which the developing individual of interest is not situated and are experienced indirectly because of their effects on one or more people with whom that individual interacts. For instance,

children do not participate directly in the parental workplace but they can influence and be influenced by it. A retrenched father may become depressed and as a result be less patient with his child. The father's wellbeing can have consequences on that of the child and can reflect on financial expenditure with the child.

The macrosystem may be considered the furthest level from the child's environment, the level defined by Bronfenbrenner as "the overarching pattern of micro-, meso-, and exosystems characteristic of a given culture, subculture, or other extended social structure" (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p.25). It consists of the sociocultural values, beliefs, customs, government policies, political ideals and the economic system, a set of social factors whose inflow is in a less visible manner in systems and subsystems, for example, the perspective through which society sees the services provided to children and families, how society deals with poverty and provides support can influence the children's education. The same is true regarding the way families solve their problems, and the quality of the sport development programmes. A macrosystem can therefore be an entire society, for instance when thinking about African values, beliefs, practices, institutions, and identity in comparison to American values and beliefs. Its effects are experienced within the microsystems in which the developing individual is situated. American children learn to become Americans rather than Africans, to the extent that their parents share American rather than African values and beliefs and put these into practice in the course of their everyday activities and interactions with their children. The same holds for groups within any society that can be differentiated in terms of their values, beliefs, practices and identities (Tudge, 2013).

The chronosystem relates to the changes that occur over time in any one of the systems. For instance, changes in family or organisational structure, socioeconomic status, or place of residence.

2.3.1.4 Time

Time was the last factor included in the bioecological model (Krebs, 2009), conceptualised by Bronfenbrenner in a broad way to include what happens over the course of both ontogenetic and historical time. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) wrote about the dimension of *time* as having three successive levels, namely, *micro-time*, which refers to "continuity versus discontinuity in on-going episodes of proximal process", that is, what

occurs during the course of some specific activity or interaction; *meso-time*, or the periodicity of these episodes across broader time intervals, such as days and weeks, comprising the extent to which activities and interactions occur with some consistency in the developing person”. It relates to how often these episodes occur over days and weeks (Araújo & Davids, 2009). Thirdly, *macro-time* “focuses on the changing expectations and events in the larger society, both within and across generations, as they affect and are affected by, processes and outcomes of human development over the life course”, that is, the developmental processes are likely to vary according to the specific historical events that occur as the developing individuals are at one age or another (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p.796). An example, in a South African context, might be two groups of children born in the same geographical area but at different times of political dispensation, one during apartheid and the other during the subsequent democratic years. Each of these groups will have had different experiences because they were born at the different point in the life course. Therefore, as Tudge et al. (2009) state, time and timing is equally important because all aspects of the PPCT model can be thought of in terms of relative constancy and change. This applies whether one is thinking about developing individuals themselves, the types of activities and interactions in which they engage, or the various microsystems in which they are situated.

Taking into consideration the aspects of *time*, Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) devised a definition of the bioecological theory which is an extension of the definition of the ecological theory presented earlier in this chapter:

...the phenomenon of continuity and change in the biopsychological characteristics of human beings, both as individuals and as groups ...over the life course, across successive generations, and through historical time, both past and future (p.793).

Of significance in this definition is that the notion of stability and change is understood to be happening within a phenomenological perspective which considers not only the objective properties of the setting in which the person is acting and interacting but also the subjective properties, as experienced by the developing person (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, in Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

Bronfenbrenner maintained that the element *time* has especial importance in research designs based on bioecological model. He wrote that to show that development has actually occurred:

...the research design must demonstrate, or at least make plausible, that the elements in the design, and their dynamic relationships to each other, have influenced the biopsychological being of the developing person over an extended period of time (Bronfenbrenner, 2005b, p.7).

2.3.2 Summary of Bronfenbrenner's approach

Bronfenbrenner's theory pays simultaneous attention to aspects of individuals, interactions, and the broader context, both spatial (immediate) and temporal (historical). This is contrary to the popular assumption made by many psychology scholars that Bronfenbrenner is a theorist whose primary interest is in various layers of context (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem). The context, as much as it is important, is only one of four interrelated aspects of what Bronfenbrenner terms a PPCT model of development.

Bronfenbrenner's theory shows that the diversity in children's development is connected to the interaction of not only a biological trajectory of development, but also of a psychological, cultural, and maternal trajectory that creates a great variety of developmental possibilities for development through variation in the way they interact in different children's development. Human development is therefore conceptualised as a chain of developmental outcomes that occur in response to specific child attributes combined with environmental requirements, characteristics, and opportunities over a period of time (Strachan, 2008). The driving factor, or the "engine" of the whole development process, consists of the proximal processes, typically occurring everyday activities and interactions in which the developing person engages. Children's play, typical interactions with parents, siblings, peers, and teachers, their daily routines and rituals, and anything in which they are involved on a regular basis, all count as examples of proximal processes. They drive development because what people typically do, how they typically do it in the company of and/or with the support of other people with whom they generally spend significant amounts of time, will heavily influence, among other things, what they come to think of as important to do, what they become skilled at, and how they think that individuals should relate to one another. The

activities and interactions that are the essence of proximal processes may be the engine of development, but it is impossible to know what sorts of activities and interactions typically occur without knowing about two key elements: the characteristics of the individuals involved in the activities and interactions and the context in which those activities occur (Tudge, 2008).

Araújo & Davids, 2009) summarised Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory in the following way:

For development to occur, an individual must engage in an activity;

- To be effective the activity must take place on a fairly regular basis, over extended periods of time;
- To be developmentally effective activities must take place long enough to become increasingly more complex;
- Developmentally effective proximal processes are initiated both from an individual and from the environment;
- Proximal processes involve inter-personal interactions; and also interactions with objects and symbols. Importantly, for Bronfenbrenner, the proximal process has the general effect of reducing, or buffering against, environmental differences in developmental outcome (p.16).

2.4 OPERATIONALISATION OF THE BIOECOLOGICAL APPROACH

Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development presented insights pertinent to the relations between behavioural contexts and micro influences on behaviour. Although he did not write explicitly about his theory in a sport setting, various scholars have expressed support for the possibility of using his model as a theoretical framework to study the process of development of sport talent (Holt, 2008; Henriksen et al., 2010; Araújo & Davids, 2009; Krebs, 2009; Larsen et al, 2012, Davids et al, 2013; Domingues & Goncalves, 2014; dos Santos, 2014). The main argument was that most of the studies in the field of sport sciences that described personal characteristics of athletes have used analytical designs, in which one dependent variable for example, motivation or anxiety, is investigated at a time (Krebs, 2009). As a result, his approach has been broadly applied to the study of developmental issues in sport and has been regarded as suitable and holding considerable promise for increasing an

understanding of the interplay of factors influencing development processes and outcomes in sport (Larsen et al., 2012; Domingues & Goncalves, 2014). The bioecological approach has been useful to the researchers in allowing them to analyse the context characteristics, beyond the power to assess the individual characteristics such as developmental assets, values, attitudes and motivation. Before it was used in sport practice research, studies were mostly conducted inside the sporting teams, thus reducing the analysis to the dynamics of a small group of teammates that represent the sport microsystem. The multiple and sometimes contradictory influences arising from other relevant sources in the life of the athletes were not sufficiently considered or researched to compare contexts and assess the potential benefits of each of the ecological settings (Larsen et al., 2012).

According to Krebs (2009), the bioecological model offers a possibility to use new research designs to conduct better investigations to assess an athlete's disposition, which Bronfenbrenner classified as developmentally-disruptive disposition or developmentally-generative. Within the sport context an athlete may experience both types at the same time and these opposite forces may generate an area of tension within the athlete's feelings and emotions. It is often hard to know if the disruptive disposition prevails as the dispositions are in constant interaction with the elements of the microsystem.

In an effort to transform the bioecological perspective into a manageable framework and methodology of development of sport talent, a number of researchers have devised working models which have been used by several other researchers of sport talent development (e.g., Larsen, 2009; Domingues & Goncalves, 2014). Among those that have developed their models are Krebs (2009) and Henriksen et al. (2010). Their models are discussed below.

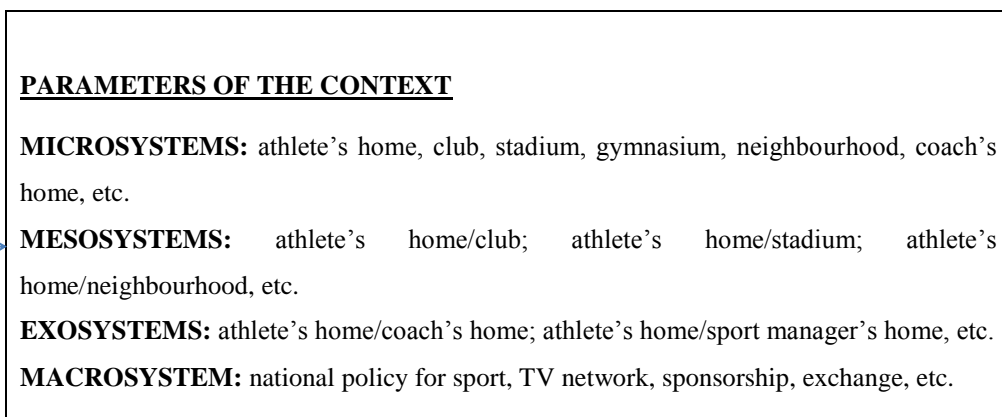
2.5 KREBS' BIOECOLOGICAL MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT OF SPORT TALENT

According to Krebs (2009), the Bioecological Model of Sport Talent Development was an attempt to develop a theoretical framework based on Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development, to create new avenues for the investigation of the process of sport talent development (see Figure 2.3, below). The arrows in the figure represent the progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between all four elements of the model represented by the four blocks.

In line with Bronfenbrenner's proposition that the proximal processes form the core of the model, the phenomenon of development of sport talent is placed as proximal processes. Krebs (2009) proposed four stages, whose level of difficulty increases gradually from stage to stage, as a theoretical structure of proximal processes. Changes in the level of difficulty are caused by the organisation and complexity of the activities experienced by the individuals participating in that setting. The first proximal process is called *sport stimulation*, the structure of which:

... has low organization and low complexity, which means that all the elements that constitute the activities in that setting have little relationship among them and the tasks are very simple (e.g., tag games). The main feature at that stage is to create a strong network with all the contexts in which the developing person actively participates and to create favorable conditions to assure inclusion in play activities for all participants of that microsystem (Krebs, 2009).

The second proximal process is called a stage of *sport skills learning*, the structure of which is therefore more complex than that of the first stage. The third proximal process is *sport practice*, in which the developing athlete has reached an autonomous phase of the learning process. The tasks involved in this proximal process are highly complex and its setting is highly organised. The fourth and final proximal process is called the stage of *sport specialisation*, which involves acquiring perfection in sport performance.



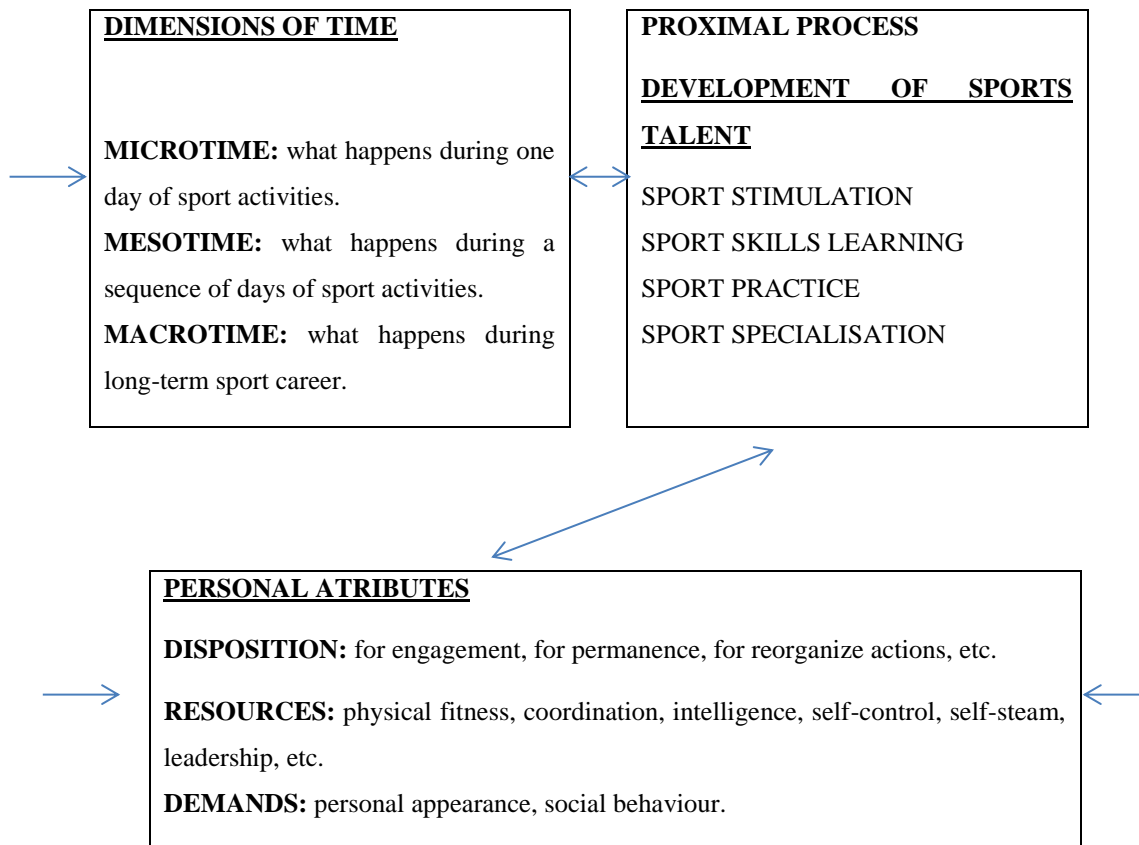


Figure 2.3: The Bioecological Model of Sport Talent Development (Krebs, 2009, p.132)

2.6 HENRIKSEN'S HOLISTIC ECOLOGICAL APPROACH TO TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Henriksen's (2010) holistic ecological approach is a notable stride towards integrating and transforming the ecological perspective into a manageable framework and methodology in talent development research. His approach highlighted "the central role of the overall environment as it affects a prospective elite athlete and mirrors the complexity of talent development in the real world", and he considered the athletic development environment holistically as comprising of "micro- and macro-levels, athletic and non-athletic domains as well as a set of factors which come together to create the [athletic talent development environment] ATDE's effectiveness, such as preconditions, process, individual development, and organizational culture" (p.10).

Henriksen's (2010) proposal was that the holistic ecological approach consists of two complementary working models, firstly the athletic talent development environment (ATDE) model which describes the environment; and secondly, the environment success factor (ESF) model that structures factors explaining the ATDE success by summarising factors influencing the effectiveness of the environment. The uses of the models are to study the ATDE, to identify common and unique features of successful ATDE, and to provide applied guidelines for those involved in creating such environments (Henriksen et al., 2010). The working models were a result of a number of studies in research that captured the specific features of each environment under study. Results of these studies revealed that:

...each environment was unique, but also that the environments shared a number of features. The major features shared by the environments emerging from the cross-case analysis were as follows: their organization in training groups with proximal role models; the integral quality of the environments' efforts' environments weighted towards sport; limitations in resources leading to compensation elsewhere; training that allowed for diversification; support for the development of psychosocial skills and competences for life; a strong and integrated group culture; and finally the environments' embeddedness in cultural and temporal contexts" (p.10).

Such results were in line with a study conducted by Martindale, Collins & Abraham (2007) in a British context. According to Larsen (2013) their study suggested that effective talent development environments are characterised by:

1) a clarity and consistency of philosophy, objectives, and methods, which includes that aims and methods must be long term and coherent; 2) wide ranging and coherent message and support, which includes that links to the senior level must be clear and that communications with outside influences such as parents are promoted; 3) systems facilitating the promotion of players development, which includes the promotion of flexible programs to suit the individual athlete and a focus on developing ownership, autonomy, motivation, and goal-setting skills in the athletes; and 4) an emphasis on age-appropriate development rather than age group success (p.192).

2.6.1 Athletic talent development environment model

The athletic talent development environment (ATDE) working model is based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model of human development (Henriksen, 2010; Larsen et al., 2013). According to Henriksen et al. (2010), ATDE is a framework for describing a particular athletic environment and for clarifying the roles and functions of the different components and relations within the environment. They defined ATDE as:

...a dynamic system comprising a) an athlete's immediate surroundings at the micro-level where athletic and personal development take place, b) the interrelations between these surroundings, c) at the macro-level, the larger context in which these surroundings are embedded, and d) the organizational culture of the sports club or team, which is an integrative factor of the ATDE's effectiveness in helping young talented athletes to develop into senior elite athletes (Henriksen 2010, p.160).

In line with Bronfenbrenner (1975), ATDE considers the environment as "a series of nested structures with the developing athlete positioned at the center of the model, and other components of the ATDE structured into two levels (micro- and macro-) and two domains (athletic and nonathletic)" (see Figure 2.4, below) (Henriksen et al., 2010, p.344).

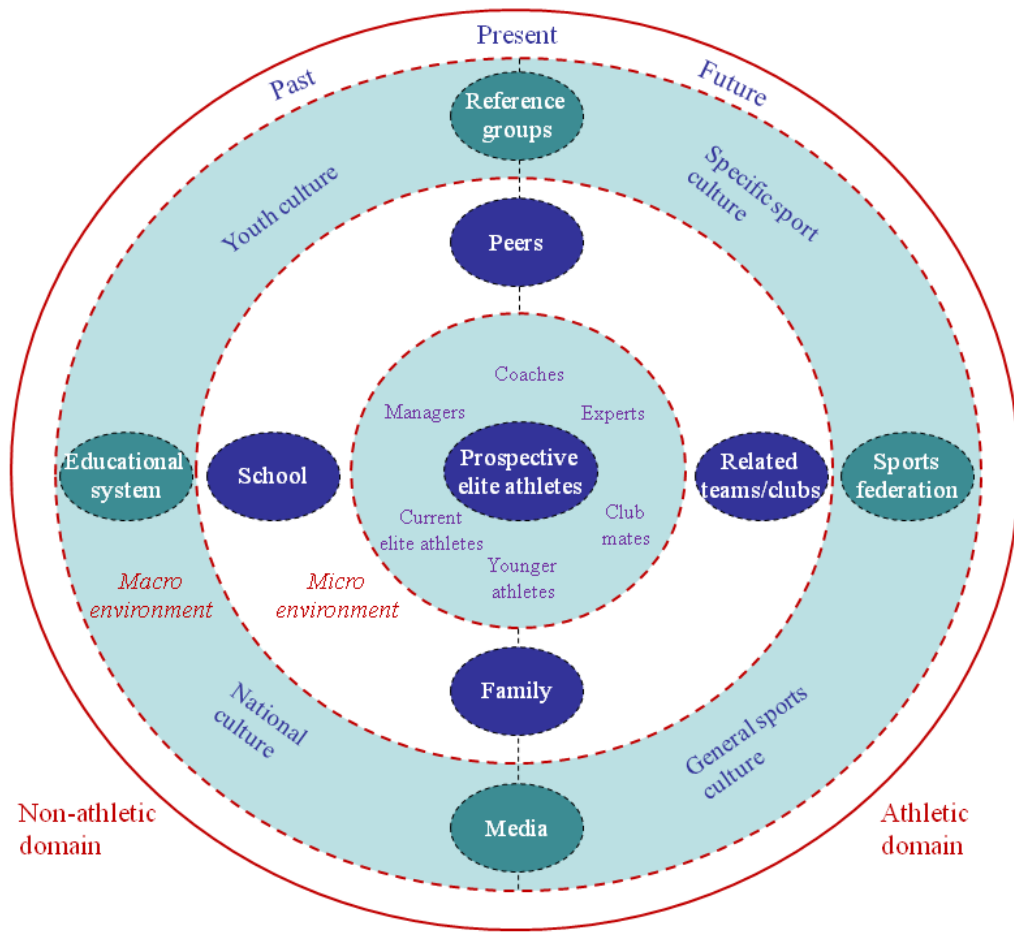


Figure 2.4: Athletic Talent Development Environment (ATDE) working model (Henriksen, 2010, p.39)

2.6.2 The environment success factor working model

The ATDE model provides a framework to guide the description of the environment. The ESF As outlined in Figure 2.5 (below), the ESF provides “a framework for analysing why the environment is successful” (Henriksen, 2010, p.41), which regards the *preconditions* provided by the environment as its starting point (e.g., human, financial and material resources), which are necessary but, on their own, do not guarantee success. The model then illustrates how the athletic environment’s *daily routines* or *process* (e.g., training, camps and competitions) have three outcomes which are highly interrelated and influential to the environment’s success. Its first outcome is *individual development and achievements*, notably an athlete’s

acquisition of psycho-social competences and athletic skills, and to the way the combination of these two lead to sporting success. The second outcome is *team achievements*, which is defined as the team's athletic success and is thus mainly relevant to team sports such as football. Team achievements are a result of the deliberate training and practice which is part of process. The third outcome is *organizational culture*, which forms the core of the ESF model and comprises three levels, which are: cultural artefacts (e.g., visible manifestations such as stories and myths told in the environment, clothing, buildings and organisational charts); espoused values (e.g., the social principles, norms, goals and standards that the organization shows to the world, including what the athletic club's members say they do); basic assumptions, which are regarded as underlying reasons for actions that strongly affect what the club members actually do but that are no longer questioned and are taken for granted (Henriksen, 2010; Larsen, 2013).

Organisational culture is therefore:

...characterized by the integration of the key basic assumptions into a cultural paradigm guiding socialization of new club members, providing stability and adapting the organization to a constantly changing environment. The ESF working model therefore predicts that the ATDE's success (i.e., effectiveness in producing senior elite athletes) is a result of the interplay between preconditions, process, individual and team development and achievements, with organizational culture serving to integrate these different elements (Henriksen, 2010, p.43).

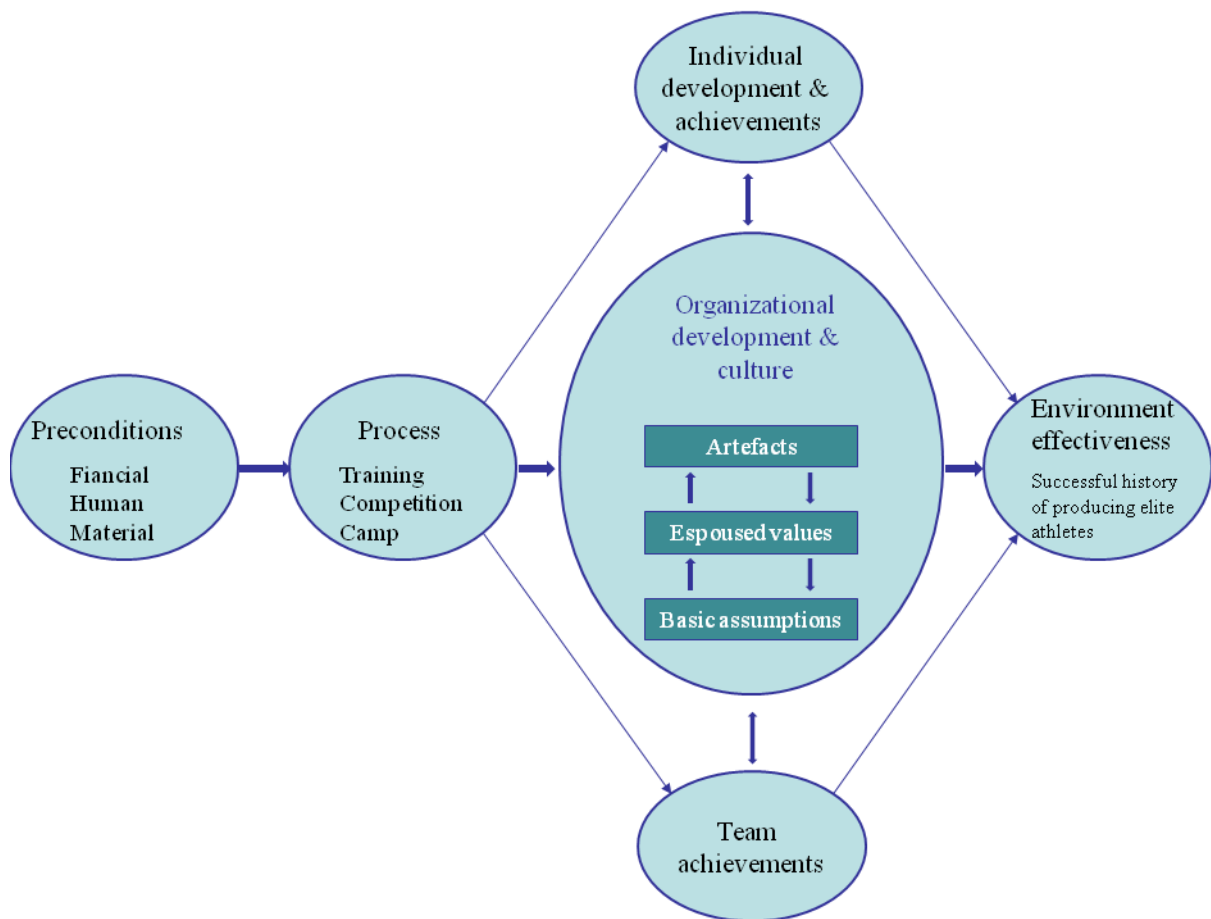


Figure 2.5: The Environment Success Factors (ESF) working model (Henriksen, 2010, p.42)

Larsen (2013) highlighted two prominent shortcomings of Henriksen’s holistic ecological approach which differentiate it from Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) early work and later version (Bronfenbrenner, 2005a). The first shortcoming is that the ATDE and ESF models do not integrate elements of the meso- and exo- levels in the development of talented athletes, as depicted by Bronfenbrenner. This is regardless of the two levels being implied in the description of the ESF when the process and person are integrated as necessities for successful athletic talent development. Secondly, Henriksen’s working models are based on the early work of Bronfenbrenner (1979) and do not integrate the PPCT model which was formed the foundation of Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) later work. According to Larsen (2013), this is because the ESF model is based on the organisational psychology and thus centres on the emergence of an organisational culture in the environment that allows it to provide

insight into whether values are espoused and/or enacted in the specific talent development environment. Larsen, therefore, concludes by suggesting that the combination of the ESF and the PPCT models “describe the deeper theoretical understanding of development and provide a tool for analyzing the characteristics of a specific talent development environment in professional football” (p.46).

2.7 SUMMARY

Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model can be a starting point to comprehend the indirect influences that constrain sport and exercise behaviour in various contexts (Domingues & Goncalves, 2014). Bronfenbrenner focused on proximal processes and the way in which they were influenced by both characteristics of the people involved in those processes and the contexts (microsystems) in which the processes occurred, but he largely ignored the macrosystem. He did not expand on cultural or subcultural sets of values and practices, or the ways in which they influence processes of development, even though it was a visible theme in many of his earliest writings which referred to the process as that which could explain the connection between such aspects of the context as culture or social class. (Tudge et al, 2009). There is no indication in his writings that:

...cultural groups with values beliefs, lifestyles, and patterns of social interchange different from those found in North American middle-class communities would necessarily value different types of proximal processes or that what counts as more complex to one group might be viewed as less complex by another (Tudge, 2008, p. 73).

Secondly, although Bronfenbrenner acknowledged that many studies that applied his theory were failing to explain why processes differ across contexts. For instance, he was not interested in whether the developmental consequences of parenting vary as a function of context (he knew they did), but rather he was interested in why (Darling, 2007). He himself did not get a chance to explain through his theory as to why and what role the cultural aspect played in those variations.

Thirdly, Bronfenbrenner largely wrote as though optimal development could be characterised by the best practices of white-class North Americans (Tudge, 2008). His theory falls short because, as much as it emphasises the role of the context within which

development takes place, it does not show the dialectical nature of the development process (Fleer, 2015). Bronfenbrenner conceptualised how children's everyday life takes place in institutional contexts inscribed in society but he did not address how children contribute to these. His metaphors of nested contexts do not foster analyses of children's interactions with peers, schools, communities, or cultures that do not come through their parents (increasingly likely as adolescence begins) or how families, schools, or cultures themselves change (Cooper & Denner, 1998).

Based on this argument, the next chapter presents a cultural-historical approach as a framework for understanding the dialectical nature of the development process. It is argued that the cultural-historical theory can set new challenges for sport psychology practitioners and researchers and that adopting may help them become more sensitive to the athlete's active role as he/she interacts with his/her environment during the process of talent development.

CHAPTER THREE

A CULTURAL-HISTORICAL APPROACH

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter, firstly, presents a brief background to a cultural-historical approach to human development. Secondly, some of the key tenets of a cultural-historical theory as conceptualized by Lev Vygotsky are discussed, followed by a brief presentation of a traditional African ontological perspective to child development, as advocated by Bame Nsamenang. It is beyond the scope of this study to give an expansive explanation of the two scholars' seminal work, Only a selection of their theories' concepts are briefly presented in this chapter, as they act as tools for explaining child development and, it is argued, form the baseline for Mariane Hedegaard's cultural-historical theory. Thirdly, this chapter discusses a cultural-historical perspective as proposed by Hedegaard (2009). Lastly, it presents an illustrative argument that Hedegaard's cultural-historical approach can provide a meaningful framework for exploring sport talent development within the field of sport psychology.

3.2 A CULTURAL-HISTORICAL APPROACH TO HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The beginnings of a cultural-historical approach are associated with the Soviet psychologist, Lev S. Vygotsky, whose approach to human learning and development (Vygotsky, 1978, 1987) was, over time, systematised into a new theoretical framework that focused on explaining how children learn, grow up and develop in particular social, cultural, and historical settings (Kontopodis & Newnham, 2011). A cultural-historical approach is essentially based on the concept that human activities take place in a cultural context, mediated by language and other symbol systems, and is best understood when investigated in their historical development (John-Streiner & Mahn, 1996). As Vygotsky (1997) explained "In the process of historical development, social man changes the methods and devices of his behavior, transforms natural instincts and functions, and develops and creates a new forms of behavior – specifically cultural" (p.18).

Its task is to explicate relationships between human action, on one hand, and the cultural, institutional and historical contexts in which action occurs on the other. The emphasis is on the interdependence of the individual and the cultural factors in the construction of knowledge by integrating history and culture as part of the whole process of childhood development (Ridgway, 2010). It thus criticises the hegemonic Western psychology for defining the person as an independent and autonomous individual whilst ignoring the ways in which cultural context and social practices permeate and constitute the individual psyche (Ryba et al., 2013). Advocates of this approach argue that the dominant child development theories developed by and for Western and most European heritage countries implicitly assume that the conditions of children represent, or at least approximate, the optimal environment for individual development in humans, in terms of parental commitment, health care, nutrition, living space, domestic facilities, physical protection, emotional warmth, cognitive stimulation, communicative responsiveness, and social stability (Pence & Marfo, 2008).

Lee and Johnson (2007) refer to Piaget, psychoanalysis, and learning theory as some of the grand theoretical systems that have dominated the field and, as a result, developmental psychologists and other scholars of child development have not been attentive to the centrality of culture in children's development (Ogbu, 1993; Vygotsky, 1998; Rogoff, 2003; Hedegaard, 2005; Flear 2006; Nsamenang, 1992). Within these grand theories, child development is described as occurring in linear and universal stages and is considered lawful and, with minor adjustments, the same for everyone across time and place. Also, development is perceived as an individualistic process that occurs through children's direct encounters with the world rather than as mediated through vicarious encounters with it in interacting and negotiating with others (Lee & Johnson, 2007; Nsamenang, 2000).

Another reason for a call to challenge the dominant theories is that, where they are left unchallenged, the educational systems, including the policy, research, and curriculum implementation literature and approaches used in the educational and training settings, end up being constructed on the basis of these theories and values about children and childhood (Nsamenang & Dawes, 1998; Rogoff, Paradise, Arauz, Correa-Chaves & Angelillo, 2003; Nsamenang, 2008; Flear (2009). Subsequently, what becomes valued within the profession of childhood development is essentially a view of child development that is embedded within Western and European institutionalised thinking of childhood development and

education (Nsamenang, 2008; Fler & Hedegaard, 2010). That the selection of materials, instruction practices, concepts of learning and development, and the beliefs that underpin centre-based environments remain largely uncontested, is problematic as many of the communities which have since appropriated Western education and developmental strategies are culturally and linguistically diverse (Fler, 2009; Nsamenang & Dawes, 1998). Scholars such as Nsamenang and Dawes (1998) and Fler (2009) have argued that examining some of these taken-for-granted practices, views and concepts of learning and development that are perpetuated by the dominant theories requires a broad cultural-historical analysis, hence embarking on extensive research exploring the cultural-historical construction of childhood and child education within a social context. Their research has informed recommendations that the legacy of the dominant cultural belief and assumption about how children develop in all contemporary societies is in need of constant review. Such a review may also help to make visible some of the Western institutional theories and practices that may no longer be relevant to the diverse communities they are serving.

3.3 VYGOTSKY'S ACCOUNT OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Vygotsky (1998) contended that the dominant perspectives on child development emphasise a linear path, with deviations from the normal path considered diseases of development. In this manner, child development is a naturally evolving process producing particular behaviours, and, when such behaviours are not forthcoming, concern is expressed about the individual in question. Vygotsky argued for a different perspective of child development and proposed a dialectical process in which a transition from one developmental stage to another is accomplished not as an “evolving process” but as a “revolutionary process”. He argued that “a dialectical approach to development invites [us] to be continually projecting learning [and development] beyond the child’s current capacities, but will do so in ways which connect with the child’s growing sense of themselves within their communities/institutions” (Fler & Hedegaard, 2010, p.150), thus emphasising the point that one needs to study context when making judgments about children’s development processes and planning for learning.

According to Vygotsky (1998), the development process is localized and specific to the community in which the child is living, learning and developing. Vygotsky talked about

development as being a process of the “unity of material and mental aspects, a unity of the social and the personal” (p.190). He regarded this unity as being “localized and experienced in the everyday life conditions of children as they take part in day to day activities at home, in preschool, and in their community” (Fleer, 2015, p.22), hence the content of development is localised and specific to the community in which the child is living, learning and developing.

Vygotsky’s theory of child development conceptualises the process of development as “not just an ‘adding on to what is there’ but rather a qualitative change in the child” (Fleer, 2015, p.33). Rather than conceptualising child development from an evolutionary or maturational perspective, where the child proceeds along a particular pre-determined path benchmarked by age, Vygotsky’s perspective is that development is a qualitative transformation from one form to another which can be understood through the metaphor of a caterpillar’s transformation into a chrysalis and butterfly (Bozhovich, 2009).

Vygotsky (1978) argued that to study history is not to study the past, but to study something historically is to study it in motion. He proposed that:

To study something historically means to study it in the process of change; that is the dialectical method’s basic demand. To encompass in research the process of a given thing’s development in all its phases and changes – from birth to death – fundamentally means to discover its nature, its essence, for it is only in movement that a body shows what it is. Thus the historical study of behaviour is not an auxiliary aspect of theoretical study, but rather forms its very base (pp.64-65).

As Ridgway (2010) explained, when practices arise in relation to historical needs, their role in childhood development may be better understood if a dialectical methods approach is used to make visible complementarity, contradictions, continuities, discontinuities and reciprocity of different practices over time. In cultural-historical theory, to study the historical dimensions implies a need to study practices dialectically, in motion, in iterations and in transformations. When these are understood as driving forces for development, temporal practices and activities expressed in them can be used methodologically to examine how child development may have proceeded over time within particular cultural communities. In other words, the conceptual tools provided by cultural-historical theory can

be used as a methodology for understanding development over time within communities and institutions, including the family.

3.3.1 The social situation of development and the concept of crisis

Vygotsky (1998) defined the concept of the child's social situation as the system of dialectical experiential and motivational relations between a child of a given age and the social conditions for his or her activity. Bozhovich (2009) gave an expanded definition when he wrote that the social situation of development denotes:

...the special combination of internal developmental processes and external conditions that are typical of each developmental stage and that condition both the dynamic of mental development for the duration of the corresponding developmental period and the new qualitatively distinct psychological formations that emerge toward its end (p.66).

In other words, what changes is not the child nor environment, but rather the child's relationship to the environment. Vygotsky made an attempt at characterising the qualitative nature of the structure of children's psychological features at different ages, even though his untimely death did not permit him to complete a psychological characterisation of developmental stages based on his theory of child development. He suggested that the child's relationship to social or environmental reality is related to specific age periods (Kravtsova, 2006) and that during the transition from one age to another, not only do separate mental functions grow and qualitatively change, but also children's relationships to one another and structure change.

Vygotsky further indicated that the different mental and social functions do not grow and develop at an even pace, but each have their own period of optimal development, and during this period through which all of the other functions develop. Each developmental period is characterised by a special structure of consciousness as a whole, that is, a special structure of inter-functional connections and relationships, which in turn conditions the special nature and special role of each mental function that is incorporated into the structure of consciousness (Bozhovich, 2009). It is when the child's social situation of development changes that his or her consciousness of the environment changes. The child's social interactions have to be seen as the mediating link between biological maturation and

demands in the social situation. This interaction can thus lead to conflicts and to crises for the child in everyday activities. As the child's competence changes and capacities are restructured, new competences are demanded (Vygotsky, 1984; 1998).

The social situation of a child is dependent on the society and cultural context in which he or she is embedded. Different cultural contexts foreground particular social situations, which in turn position children to actively engage in and take up particular participation structures. Vygotsky (1997) defines this as a revolutionary changing process that results in socially defined crisis points, with development viewed as "a transformation of participation in cultural activities. Through this transformation, individual roles change, and developmental transitions in communities become evident" (Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010, p.151). Vygotsky (1998) argued that it is not easy to determine the onset of crisis as it arises indiscernibly. For instance, even day-to-day routines can become contested spaces for power relations between children and their parents. Crisis manifests itself as problems or difficult moments during which children are thought to become 'difficult'. Fleer (2015) argues:

Children are thought to become difficult, and this is perceived negatively in relation to a child's development. But this is not Vygotsky's reading of the child, because this view assumes development is something that is simply an internal process in the child. This view does not consider the social relations between the child and the adult. For instance, the toddler or the teenager who has gained competencies in being socially responsible and capable, but who when treated as a "baby" or as a "child" respectively, will become resistant or "difficult", if they are not treated as someone with competences who can do things. The problem is not with the development of the child or the teenager, but rather the social relations in which the child or the teenager are participating at that time. These critical points are potentially indicators of the progression of the child's development. However, these critical moments could also be situations where development is intensified due to some major life transition, such as when children begin school or enter the workforce (p.24).

Fleer (2015) explains a dynamic crisis or critical moment by giving an example of a child who is starting school, as this constitutes a major change in life. Getting up every morning to meet the demands of arriving at preschool or school on time constitute an unremarkable everyday microscopic movement, but one which changes the life conditions for a child

because he or she must now eat, dress and prepare for a journey to school within a specified time.

Vygotsky's concept of social situation and development helps explain how children experience the same situation differently and how they come to the same everyday situations in life and in school settings with a different social situation of development. Fler (2015) gives an example of a situation in a school and class setting in which one child may be oriented to play and another to learning. This influences the possibilities for child development in the same situation in different ways. According to a cultural-historical theory, what each child takes from the same situation is different seen through Hedegaard's concept of motive orientation, to be discussed later in this chapter.

3.3.2 Zone of proximal development

Vygotsky's (1987) concept of 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD) is regarded as being fundamental in the conceptualisation of the importance of social relations for children's development. Vygotsky defined this concept as the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. It is thus determined by what the child can do with the assistance of adults or other competent children. In this way, the ZPD highlights the importance of children's relation to the world mediated through tools, demands, and support from others in everyday settings.

Bredikyte (2011) and Hedegaard (2012) were concerned that the ZPD has been so widely used as a learning concept relevant to a classroom learning context that this has concealed its real potential and neglected the importance of the qualitative change that learning should provide, not only in terms of the child being able to master a new subject, but in order to promote children's development. Vygotsky (1998) cited play as another context which introduces different challenges of learning and development. He described ZPD in play as follows:

Play creates a zone of proximal development of the child. In play the child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behavior; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself. As in the focus of magnifying glass, play contains

all developmental tendencies in a condensed form and in itself is a major source of development (p.220).

When describing the ZPD in play context, Vygotsky changed the focus from higher psychological functions to the relations between functions and psychological systems as units of analysis development. He used such concepts as personality and psychological age as developmental concepts, instead of higher mental functions (Bredikyte, 2011).

Bredikyte (2011) argues that the ZPD should be understood beyond being problem solving, but rather as child-initiated social experimentation and development of qualitative, system level change. He argues that this step is lacking in the ZPD problem solving in a school context, because in many interpretations problem solving is an individual enterprise and the teacher is just a helper, not a learning partner. Vygotsky (1994) saw qualitative change as related to age periods in children's development and formulated the idea of age periods as connected to the different demands that children meet in their life trajectories. Such age periods are historically constructed and should not be seen as reflecting a child's actual age. At each age period a child has a specific zone connected with his or her actual period of development, each of which puts new demands on the child and caregiver. Through interaction with others, the child firstly acquires understanding of and competences to perform activities then also influences and changes the settings in which he or she participates in the different practices, placing new demands on the caregivers (Hedegaard, 2012).

3.3.3 Interaction between ideal and real forms

For the activity settings to be the source of a child's development then what is to be developed must already exist in his or her environment (Fleer, 2015). Thus, Vygotsky noted the importance of relations between the ideal and real forms of children's development, with development described as drama unfolding around the relationships of real and ideal forms, their mutual transformations and transitions. The creator of and the actor in the drama is the developing child and the stage is the child's life (Bredikyte, 2011).

Learning to talk is an example of the relations between the ideal (language of the child's culture) and real form (what is possible for that child at that moment) of a child's development. In order to learn to talk, children must be in a rich language

environment specific to their society. Infants are not expected to begin speaking in an ideal form, but are surrounded by people who engage them meaningfully in social situations where the ideal form of language is available to them. Having the ideal form in the child's environment affords development of exactly that which is valued and needed to successfully participate in a particular community (Fleer, 2015, p.30).

According to Fleer (2015), the relations between an ideal and real form of development as a concept help explain how children enter schooling with different values, beliefs and competencies. This also explains why entering school for some children will be a major crisis, because their home experiences may be very different to the schooling practices that they meet.

While there may be some similarities, what constitutes the ideal form and how families and communities orient their children to these values and beliefs in relation to the child's real form of development will, to a large extent, be different. What children experience in their environment is based on what that particular community values, and that will be different from one community to the next. In other words, an ideal form could be viewed as human culture in general that the newborn child finds in the world. It is an invitation for the child to act, respond and enter into a dialogue. If the child accepts the invitation an act of development might take place, that is, the child will appropriate the ideal form, master it, then see it transformed into the real form of the behaviour (Bredikyte, 2011).

A cultural-historical view of child development acknowledges that the ideal form of what is valued by families and the community at large must be available in the child's social and material environment. It acknowledges that:

...the relations between the ideal and real form of a child's development on entering school must be conceptualized as part of the pedagogical practice. This means understanding the social situation of development, the child's motive orientation, and finding out what might be the relations between the child's real form of development in relation to the ideal form of development expected for that particular community (Fleer 2015, p.30).

In conclusion, Bredikyte (2011) captures the essence of Vygotsky's approach to child development as follows:

The general sequence of the cultural development of the child could be schematized in the following way: (a) other people act on the child, (b) the child begins to interact with those around him, (c) the child begins to act on others: adults, peers, toys and environment, (d) finally, the child acts on themselves regulating their own behavior (p.27).

Over the years, Vygotskian theory has influenced many scholars who have taken up the continuous development of its tenets. For the purpose of this study, it is argued that Vygotsky's notion of dialectical approach to child development can be comparable to the traditional African perspective of child development.

3.4 NSAMENANG AND A TRADITIONAL AFRICAN ONTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Over a period of time scholars in the field of child development have been arguing for theoretical alternatives to the universal models of child development because the universal models have not been empirically demonstrated to occur in all cultures, therefore child development should not be defined in universal terms but within the cultural and historical contexts in which children develop. African scholars in particular (e.g., Nsamenang, 1992), argue that the concepts of childhood is socially constructed, rather than a merely universal biological stage in the life course. As a social contract, childhood is understood to be "historically and culturally produced and determined" (Alasuutari & Karila, 2010, p.101). It is a reflexion of the "specific social, political, and cultural purposes of the unique time and space" (Zhao, 2011, p.241).

Nsamenang (1999) argues that it is important to view childhood development across these differences and that one cannot run away from the reality that the dominant modern discourse on childhood is projected onto a map of histories, cultures, institutions and practices that informs the study of childhood development. In other words, what has been evolving and becoming established as a science of childhood development is "the story of efforts to understand the child as defined by a particular culture" (Nsamenang, 1999, p.160). What most researchers and practitioners now know about child development is based primarily on one cultural point of view, the individualistic, child-centred idea and practices

of the Western or Eurocentric culture (Serpell, 2002). The Western developed theories are value-laden and influenced by the culture in which they are embedded (Collins, 2010).

Knowledge in the study of childhood, therefore, cannot be decontextualised from cultural meanings, otherwise the result would be that students of developmental psychology, acquire knowledge structures about development that are incomplete, inappropriate and, in many respects, reflect and reproduce alienation of those children who are not of Western origin (Nsamenang & Dawes, 1998; Schafer, Ezirim, Gamurorwa, Ntshonyane, Phiri, Sagnia, Salakana & Bauru, 2004). Nsamenang (1992) set out to support his argument for the recognition of indigenous African perspectives and cultural aspects on childhood development, with empirical evidence obtained from his research with children from the Nso tribe in his native Cameroon. He explored how these children acquired cultural competence and his conclusion affirmed that Nso children were actively involved in their own socialisation, the emphasis of which was on obedience and social responsibility, not on verbalisations and individuality as the dominant theories promulgate (Ngaujah & Dirks, 2003). Nsamenang (1992) refers to the socialisation process as “social ontogeny” (p.144), defined as the process of becoming a fully-fledged social being within the socio-cultural context. The self in African children is distinguishable from the body or a biotic structure and it undergoes a developmental process.

From birth the human body is a temporary habitat for the manifestation of human presence, referred to as a “spiritual self-hood” and a “social self-hood” (Nsamenang, 1992, p.144). Social self-hood is not initially there at birth but occurs in the process of social experience and activity which begins when the newly born baby is assigned a name. As children grow up they are assigned different roles and responsibilities based on their perceived level of social competence rather than age. As they progress towards adult maturity and responsibility they construct and modify their social identities through successive interpersonal encounters and autobiographical experiences that make up their ontogenetic history. During the developmental process they are constructing a gender and ethnic identity consistent with the cultural scripts and gender demands of their worldviews. Within these worldviews, socialisation and education are organised to gradually integrate children from an early age into responsible roles through guided participation in valued cultural and economic activities at different stages of life, adapted to fit together with children’s

emerging abilities. The desired end state is not cognitive competence, per se, but responsible social development or cognition in service of social ends (Ngaujah & Dirks, 2003).

Nsamenang (2005) uses the metaphor of the seed to explain the children's gradual ontogenetic progress to maturity, relatedness and competence:

The seed is typically nursed into maturity and responsibility in a sociological field in which roles are shared among the young and the old. The [West] African conception of person centres on the image of the "unfinished child" Thus, the African worldview visualizes the infant in terms of its "becoming" more and more humane through enculturation, socialization, and education. Becoming fully human person is thus a matter of incremental maturation throughout ontogeny. The African concept of being is dynamic and rooted in the belief that personhood is attained not only as one grows old, but also in direct proportion to the enactment of one's status roles and social insertion in the community (p.276).

The allusion therefore is that, through ontogeny, children are co-partakers in social and cultural life and the societal goals of child development become fundamentally pro-social and group-based (Zimba, 2002). This implies that African notions of individuality and autonomy are relational and interdependent rather than individualistic and self-contained (Nsamenang, 1992). Likewise, a frame of reference that focuses on the individual does not come easily to the African, because the individual gains significance from and through relatedness with others (Dawes, 2006). This, however, does not annihilate children's individuality. As they grow up, they remain individuals but in relation to others. This is what Mbiti (1970) refers to as a form of being in which people say to themselves: "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (p.106). When raising children, caregivers normally facilitate the movement towards this endpoint by providing interactional environments that are characterised by family warmth, love, encouragement, commitment, responsiveness, concern for the welfare of the children, undivided attention and social security (Zimba, 2002).

A central dilemma for the psychology of child development has been how to keep a scientific approach to the study of children while including the specific conditions for their development. The question is how to combine general concepts within research of the individual child in all its complexity in everyday life activities (Hedegaard, 2009). African

scholars, particularly Bame Nsamenang, have devised a useful critique that highlights the important complex nature of child development and illustrates how collective social practice influence child development. Such a critique is useful towards developing a theory of children's development that includes more directly than it has in the past the practice in children's everyday communities and the conditions the society give children for development, whilst at the same time attempting to grasp their perspectives.

Such an effort by Nsamenang and other African scholars is, in principle, in line with Vygotsky and some of the Western psychologists in the 1970s, such as Klaus Riegel (1925 - 1977) and Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917 – 2005) who criticised the dominant “one dimensional conceptions of development” (Hedegaard, 2009, p.64) and argued that children's development should be seen as dynamic interaction with societal conditions, thereby a much more complex understanding is possible of the multiple and varied ways children develop.

3.5 CRITIQUING VYGOTSKY'S AND NSAMENANG'S APPROACHES TO CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Over the years, the alternative views of child development, as represented by Vygotsky and Nsamenang in this chapter, have not been spared from wide critiquing. One critique of Vygotsky's theory that has relevance to this study, as highlighted by Flear (2015), is that his concepts do not describe particular forms of development per se, but rather they act as tools for understanding the process of child development. Flear therefore calls for a theory that will use Vygotsky's concept to yield a theory. Hedegaard (2009) also felt that Vygotsky's theory should be expanded to include different perspectives on children's social situations of development so that it can consider the diversity of conditions and everyday activities. She felt that a diversity of traditions and values for a good life is central for outlining a cultural-historical approach to development and important for the conceptualisation of children's development through their participation in a variety of institutional practices.

Hedegaard (2005) argue that Vygotsky was not specific about institutional influences on learning, the latter noting that his ideas on development were focused on the individual within a social situation rather than on the relationships with institutional practices and how these might also shape development. They argued that Vygotsky did not actually study

concepts in their systematic relations and took insufficient account of the meaning for development of societal practices and situations from which they were generated. This limitation, I argue, also applies to Nsamenang's perspective, which does not give adequate recognition to the role of the school towards the process of child development. Even though the family institutional practices still play an active role in children's development process, nowadays children, even in the remote parts of developing world countries, spend more time at school.

3.6 HEDEGAARD'S CULTURAL-HISTORICAL APPROACH

One of the eminent scholars of cultural-historical approach, Hedegaard elaborated upon Vygotsky's seminal work and provided further research and explanations of child development by specifically examining the contemporary context of cultural diversity features (Fleer, 2009). Her theoretical point of departure is also, arguably, within the premises of Nsamenang's (2005) ontological perspective. In line with Vygotsky and Nsamenang, she sees development not as a process within the child but rather as a process that takes place as the child participates in practices within the cultural community or society (Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010). However, she has taken a step further than Vygotsky's concept of the social situation of development (Hedegaard (2005), and Nsamenang's concept of ontology, by introducing the concept of institutional practice. She regards her theory as being a step further in that it "combines the ideas of childhood theories with the central concepts of practice norms and values of a cultural-historical approach to psychology" (Hedegaard, 2005, p.5), perceiving child development as being about the relationship between the child and the social institutions.

To accomplish this, Hedegaard's theory firstly highlights the concepts of institutional practice and its activity settings, and secondly proposes that a conception of children's development has to include the perspective of the child, consider practices and their traditions within institutions, and look at the societal conditions of these practices. Her extensive research with children has indicated the importance of understanding the dialectical processes that happen between the child and the institution as they negotiate the practice transitions within and across these institutions and how those negotiations provide the dynamics for development (Hedegaard, 2008):

I see society, institutions, and person as three different perspectives in a cultural–historical theory of development: (a) society’s perspective with traditions that implies values, norms, and discourses about child development; (b) different institutions’ perspectives that include different practices; and (c) children’s perspectives that include their engagements and motivations (Hedegaard, 2009, p.65).

Hedegaard (2005; 2009; 2012), displays the key concepts of her theory in a form of a model (see Figure 3 below) that shows how children participate in different institutions as well as how the changing relations between the child and his/her environment facilitates the process of development.

In Figure 3.1 (below), the *societal perspective* depicts the conditions for institutional practice as political material conditions, cultural traditions, and values. In essence, this perspective reflects historically evolved traditions in a society that are formalised into laws and regulations as conditions for the existence of an institution, in the model depicted as cultural traditions in a society for different institutions, reflecting different value positions (Hedegaard, 2012). For example, in many schools, there will be a classroom teacher, a certain number of children, and particular kinds of materials available for participants to use. At the same time there are also specific procedures for participating in school practice, as well as a set of values about what is a good practice for children’s learning activity (Fleer, 2014). Hedegaard argues that the theory of development gives conditions for how to realise the values held by society, hence the different cultural traditions of families and their interface with schools and community practice are shown in her model (see Culture 1 Tradition; Culture 2 Tradition; and Culture 3 Tradition).

The *institutional practices* in the model depict family practice, school practice, and day-care practice, but in principle institutional practice can also refer to after-school clubs, for example, at work or in church. They are places and spaces organised within a society that have their own procedures, rules and traditions for daily practices. This plane reflects informal conventional traditions and demands (i.e., related to school and home), taking form as practices (in the model depicted as, respectively, home, school, and day-care practice) (Fleer, 2014). The three institutions may or may not be aligned for a particular child in a particular society. In an ideal culturally homogeneous community the values that are seen in relation to a society and what is deemed to be a “good life”, also supported in the school and

family. However, as Flear indicates, in more culturally and linguistically diverse communities a societal institution such as an early childhood centre does not always represent, or is not reflective of, all family values. When educators use evolutionary models for child development, and focus on milestones that are representative of one culture (namely Western heritage communities), the institution privileges this culture and silences other cultural groups. Hedegaard (2004) thus argues that the cultural-historical perspective is important for child development professionals in that it draws attention to the significance of the conceptual framework adopted for child development and the central place it holds within the institution in Western heritage communities. When a school, for instance, foregrounds only one view of development, such as the dominant ‘Western perspective’, then teachers expect and accept one developmental trajectory. This may be problematic for culturally and linguistically diverse communities as development does not proceed. It may not be the child’s fault but rather a result of the relationship between the child and society (Flear, 2006). Finally, the *person’s perspective* (as shown in the model) is reflected in a child’s activities in different institutions. This plane reflects the shared activity settings of persons in a specific institution, that is, a specific home or a specific school, depicted as activity settings in the model.

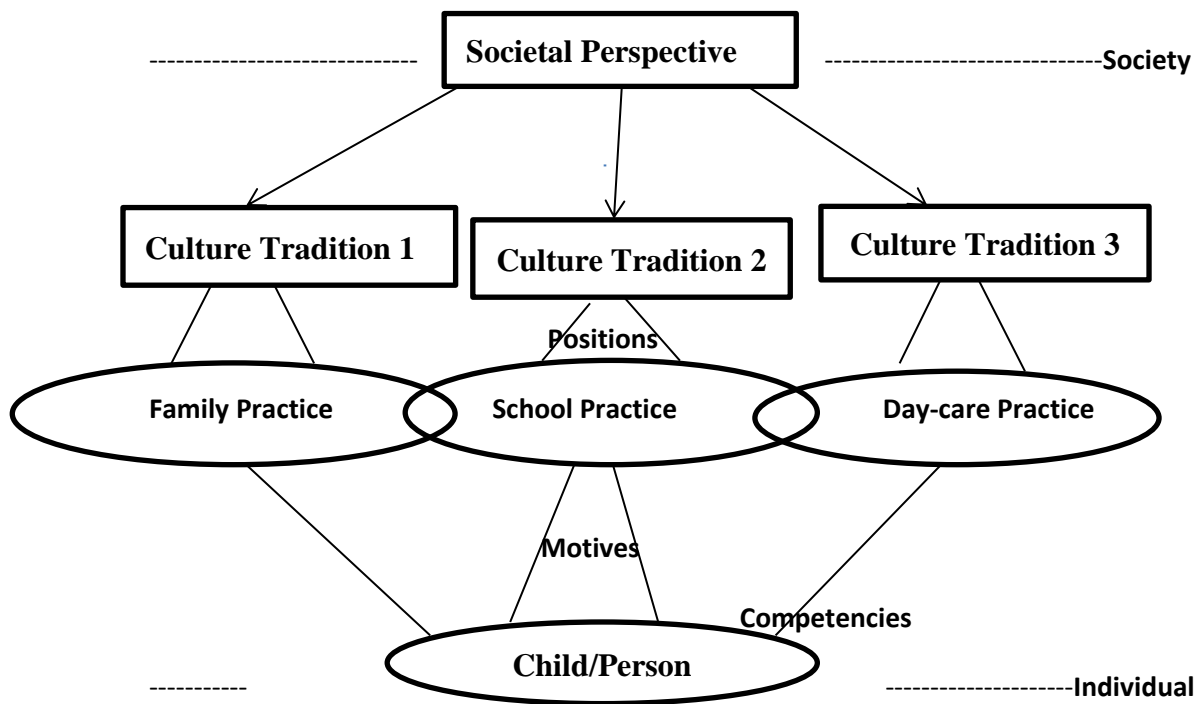


Figure 3.1: A model of children’s learning and development through participation in institutional practice (Hedegaard, 2009, p. 73)

Children’s projects, intentions, everyday practices, and interactions with other persons in everyday practice are vital to Hedegaard’s theory (Fleer, 2009). Children participate in and create activities that realise and contribute to the institutional practices that society provides while also contributing to changes in society. Their activities are not systems but processes, and therefore not concrete manifestations of institutional practice. Nor are they inscribed into each other but influence each other dialectically (Hammond & Bateman, 2009). Through their motivated activities in different settings in institutional practices, children acquire culture as competences with tools but also as values and motives for activities. Their actions also influence the settings in which they participate, thereby contributing to the conditions for their own development. The child can also put demands on his or her surroundings that are not only related to the child himself. Such demands can be seen as

reflecting the parents or the caregiver's need to live up to expectations in a society for their responsibilities as parents or caregivers (Fleer, 2015). Therefore, a child contributes to his/her own institutional conditions and the perspective of society. For instance, from the first moment the child enters school he/she brings his/her own influences. Simultaneously, the school brings practice traditions that are different from those at home, imposing different demands and expectations on the child, thus influencing activity and social situation of development and creating crises in the social situation. This can be indicated by the demands that the child begins to impose on the caregivers and/or parents at home. Therefore, according to Hedegaard (2009), both the institution and a person have to be conceptualised as contributing to practice in a theory of children's development.

3.6.1 The role of a crisis situation

Enthused by Vygotsky's theory and research, Hedegaard identified crisis points in children's lives which, she suggested, provide the context for development. In drawing upon her own research findings she established that when children enter a new societal or institutional context, where expectations and practices are unfamiliar, they experience demands which can result in a crisis in their social situation (Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010). This could be because school expectations are normed against particular developmental milestones and, on the other hand, learners' behaviours are normed against societal expectations. For instance, the child's orientation to a school activity (possibly based on home, family, peer, or neighbourhood) expectations may influence activity in a new school and thus the social situation of development (Hedegaard, 2012).

Dissonances in practice between or within institutions therefore contribute to the creation of a developmental crisis. Hedegaard suggests that all types of influences depend on the institutional traditions as traditions can differ in different societies and change over a generation in the same society. Therefore, when learners are experiencing problems it could be that their problem is not a learning problem but one of finding strategies to survive in a new societal context (Hedegaard, 2005). The task is to find a way to characterise children's development such that crises are included in a child's social situation of development without their being characterised as mentally ill or disruptive. Crises need to be connected to change in the relations of the child's social situation with other persons

and within different institutional practices. In other words, crisis can be connected with a child's appropriation of a qualitative new orientation. Appropriation of new competences and motives leads to revision or disappearance of earlier competences and in that manner a crisis arises (Hedegaard, 2012).

3.6.2 Institutional practice and activity settings

Children participate in different institutional collectives in their everyday life, with home and school the institutional contexts that most children share. Even though they share a common core framed by societal conditions, each institutional collective has its own practice traditions which are brought to bear on any given situation. How a child engages and participates in these institutions influences how he or she develops. Children's motives and competences for participating in family and school are dialectically related to the family's and school practice and the values for helping children to grow up in these institutions (Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010). Hedegaard (2012) defines activity settings as recurrent events located in practices based on traditions in a society's different institutions in daily life:

The concept of activity setting is central for conceptualizing how institutional practice and a person's activities change historically both in the form of children's development and in the form of change of societal practice. A person can participate in several different activity settings within the different institutional practices that a person participates in. An activity setting can be compared to a scene in a theatre where both the materiality and the way of interaction reflect tradition in an institutional practice. Activity settings are not the single person's settings, but an activity setting is conceptualized as societal traditions realized within an institutional practice as concrete historical events. Seen from a specific person's perspective, an activity setting is a person's social situation. Different persons in the same activity setting can experience different social situations (Hedegaard, 2012, p.132).

From a child's perspective, when he or she participates in several different activity settings through a day the social situation changes in relation to them. Therefore, as Vygotsky (1998) suggests:

...the social situation of development represents the initial moment for all dynamic changes that occur in development during the given period. It determines wholly and

completely the forms and the path along which the child will acquire ever newer personality characteristics, drawing them from the social reality as from the basic source of development, the path along which the social becomes the individual. Thus, the first question we must answer in studying the dynamics of any age is to explain the social situation of development (p.198).

Hedegaard (2005) wrote:

Children develop through participating in everyday activities in societal institutions, but neither society nor its institution (i.e. families, kindergarten, school, youth clubs etc.) are static but change over time in dynamic interaction between persons' activity, institutional traditions for practice, societal discourse and material conditions. Children's life and development is influenced by several types of institutional practice in a child's actual social situation. But at the same time children's development can be seen as socio-cultural tracks through different institutions (p.3).

A child's motive orientation relates to the goal of the settings as well as to his social situation of development. His or her social situation of development, that is, which type of motive is the child's leading motive, is reflected in each of his or her social situations in a specific setting, but the child's social situation of development transcends the specific settings (Fleer, 2012):

Tensions and conflicts between demands in an activity setting (with its traditions introduced by more competent participants) and children's intentions and motives may lead to learning and development. Children meet demands and put demands on others in their everyday activity settings. Their activities reflect how they integrate these demands. Children in different age periods have different requests and put different demands on their caregivers, and instead of looking at it from outside, as what care children need, I argue that this should be conceptualised from the child's perspective of his or her social situation (Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010, p. 152).

According to Hedegaard, the dialectic between the child's orientation within an activity setting and the demands from the setting and other persons influence the child's activities within the child's ZPD (Fleer, 2015), thus triggering development. An example given by Fleer is that development can be seen when a child who starts formal schooling makes a

transition from the motive for play, which was dominant during his/her times in crèche, into a learning motive so that learning in school becomes the child's new leading activity within the school setting. The reality is that when children begin school they are faced with the new demands of reading, writing and mathematics, which are the practices that constitute schooling. Such practices require them to move on from a motive orientation of play to the one of learning.

3.6.3 Motive orientations

According to Hedegaard (2012), motives are not internally developed but culturally shaped as a result of a child's participation in everyday life. Central to the relationship between the child's social situation and activity settings is motive orientation and demands that he or she puts on others. The dialectic relationship between the child and the environment occurs as demands and support from the concrete setting and its participants and affects the child's motive orientation. This becomes evident through the child's action and experiences which eventually lead to development (Hedegaard, 2012). Children's motives are related to what is meaningful and important for them so motives are connected to children's intentions in specific situations. An activity is therefore only motivating for a child if the activity setting is linked with the already developed motives. Vygotsky (1994) used a case of three children whose mother was a substance abuser and experienced their dysfunctional family environment in different ways. Two in the same situation might experience it completely differently because of their motive orientation.

Fleer (2015) suggests that a person's motives surpass the specific situation and can be seen as the dynamic that characteristics specific activities across different situations. She uses Hedegaard's (2012) two notable examples to explain her point. Firstly, children who have a motive orientation to learning, but who are in kindergarten where the focus is play, negatively experience their environment when only play opportunities are offered to them. Quoting from Fleer (2015):

Hedegaard (2009) gave an example of a Danish child attending a kindergarten where the child's social situation is gradually changed by his parents' expectation that he will soon be entering school. The child himself acquires an orientation towards being a school child, who will do school learning. This orientation does not fit within the

everyday activities of the kindergarten, and this creates a conflict for the child. The child becomes angry with his kindergarten teacher because she positions him as a kindergarten child who should engage him in story reading in a warm and cuddly manner. His behaviour changes when the teacher takes a nonfiction book that appears more school-like. The new competences and orientation that this child had acquired, and demonstrated through being angry at how he was being positioned, signifies a new relation (a neo-formation in his relations) to his surroundings (p.35).

The second example given by Fler is that of children who move from kindergarten into school and who only want to play, finding the environment difficult with its focus on learning to read and write.

Hedegaard examined children's motive orientation, considering perspective in the process of development. Within an activity setting, this requires focus on the child's social situation of development to discern how the dialectic between the orientation within an activity setting and the demands from the setting and other persons influence the child's activities. Development occurs when the demands and support within the concrete situation, and demands and actions from the child her/himself, lead to a new motive orientation. In the context of early childhood there is a development when the child's motive for play makes the transition into a learning motive so that learning in school becomes the child's new leading activity within the school setting (Fler & Hammer, 2013; Fler, 2015).

Even though one may know that play may be the dominating motive when children begin school, little is known about how institutional goals become children's personal motives. According to Hedegaard, as children enter an institution, such as a school, often the motive behind the school activity is hidden from the child. The motive a teacher has for the particular activities s/he creates and in which the child may participate may be different from the motive the child has for entering into that particular activity. Therefore, for the teacher to support the transition from a play to a learning motive as part of the child's development, s/he must not only be aware of the child's actual motive but must keep in mind the ideal motive that "should develop through the school activity" (Hedegaard, 2002, p.66). This view was also highlighted by Vygotsky (1998) when he referred to an evolutionary gaze by the teacher which may see the child becoming "relatively difficult" when "the pedagogical system applied to the child does not match the child's projected developmental pathway" (pp.193-194).

On the other hand, Hedegaard felt that a revolutionary gaze by the teachers foregrounds the cultural context, the institutional context and the specific child's lived experience (Fleer, 2009). Fleer maintains that Western heritage communities have tended to utilise an revolutionary perspective in their education institutions. She sees a revolutionary gaze as an option that can allow teachers to foreground the social situation of development and can provide an alternative conceptual frame for teachers and may also help the child psychologists to move beyond the present dominant developmental conceptual frameworks. Fleer gives an example that in many Western heritage communities verbal language is privileged. However, in other communities, such as Mexican heritage communities, non-verbal competence is mastered much earlier and represents an important mode of communication. According to her, these different communication trajectories highlight the social nature of development, and foreground how cultural communities shape development by what they value and need.

A summary of Hedegaard's formulation of children's development

Children develop through participating in everyday activities in societal institutions, but neither society nor its institutions (i.e., families, kindergarten, school, youth clubs, etc.) are static; rather, they change over time in a dynamic interaction between a person's activities, institutional practice, societal traditions and discourse, and material conditions. Several types of institutional practices in a child's social situation influence that child's life and development. At the same time children's development can be seen as sociocultural tracks through different institutions. Children's development is marked by crises, which are created when change occurs in the child's social situation via biological changes, changes in everyday life activities and relations to other persons, or changes in material conditions.

The important conceptions in a cultural–historical theory of child development of children's everyday activities are then:

Child development takes place through a child's initiating or entering into activities in societal institutions.

A child's everyday activities in different concrete settings in an institutional practice, seen from the child's perspective, are the child's different social situations. In these social situations the

child's personal motives and competences are realised when his or her activities meet cultural traditions and values.

Each person's development takes place as a sociocultural trajectory through different institutional practices. A track has multiple ways depending of the child's biology, the material conditions, and the cultural traditions and norms of the society and its institutions.

How a child's trajectory is realized in a life course in local settings can lead to crises in the child's social situation.

When the dominating practices of the child's everyday life changes, the leading motive of the child will change; this change can be seen as a stage in the child's development.

Norms that guide institutional practices and children's development are connected to conceptions of a good life and these conceptions can vary within the different types of institutions. The most central for children in Western societies are family, day care, school, and youth education.

Box 3.1: A summary of Hedegaard's formulation of child development (Adapted from Hedegaard, 2009, p.72).

3.7 CULTURAL-HISTORICAL APPROACH IN SPORT PSYCHOLOGY AND FOOTBALL TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Over the years, various theoretical and conceptual frameworks have found much purchase among the scholars in the research and practice of athletes' sport talent development. All these frameworks draw on the set of integrating factors believed to be of most influence in the study of sport talent development. For instance, there is the developmental approach which was mostly popular during the 1990s (e.g., Ericsson, 1996); a biopsychosocial model (e.g., Bailey & Morley, 2006); and most recently a holistic ecological approach (e.g., Henriksen, 2010).

Scholars such as Ryba and Wright (2005), Schinke and Hanrahan (2009), Stambulova and Alfermann (2009), Heriksen et al. (2010) and Schinke et al. (2015) responded to a call made by Duda and Allison (1990) during the 1990s and lamented that sport psychology research is still sparse with respect to the study of culture as an important context that mediates

psychological processes within the sport psychology field. Stambulova and Alfermann (2009), in particular, acknowledge the importance of historical and socio-cultural contexts in the study of athletes' talent and career development, and "stressed that not only sport participants, but also sport psychology researchers and consultants, are infused by their historical and socio-cultural contexts" (p.292). They then proposed several ways in which contemporary methodological approaches in cultural and cross-cultural psychology may help to develop more contextually sensitive talent and career development research of assistance to athletes.

Contributions by sport psychology scholars such as Tatiana Ryba, Natalia Stambulova and Robert Schinke have dominated scholarly literature on cultural sport psychology, however, their contribution is to a discussion pertaining to the study of diversity and the inclusion of cultural reflexivity, at the heart of which is cultural praxis (Ryba & Wright, 2005). The goal is to "develop a discourse that brings issues of sociocultural difference, enmeshed with power and ethics, to the fore of psychological analysis in order to facilitate a contextual understanding of marginalized voices" (Ryba & Schinke, 2009, p.266), which has resulted in an increased awareness that sport and exercise psychology offerings must be made in relation to the intended clients and participants, including their cultural identities. Sport and exercise psychology happen in a culturally diverse world, and practitioners, researchers and participants from diverse backgrounds possess unique experiences that affect how they relate to each other and the issue at hand.

A cultural-historical approach arguable offers a useful alternative to the dominant theoretical framework within the field of sport psychology and, as Kaminski (2009) argues, can help to make visible some practices that may no longer be relevant, particularly when Western theory and middle-class sport psychology practices are not representative of the culturally diverse communities they serve.

For the purpose of this study, Hedegaard's cultural-historical perspective was proposed as an alternative framework that puts culture at the centre of the study of football talent development and takes into account the diversity of talented footballers' cultural experiences. Inspired by Vygotsky, Hedegaard presents a "dialectical process in which a transition from one stage to another is accomplished not along an evolutionary, but along a revolutionary path" (Fleer, 2009, p.131). The dialectical approach invites sport psychologists to be continually projecting learning beyond the footballers' current capacities,

but will do so in ways which connect with the footballers' growing sense of themselves within their communities and/or institutions (academies).

This approach encourages those involved in developing footballers' talent within the academies to examine context as well as the footballers' ZPD when making judgments about them and designing programmes for learning and training. According to a cultural-historical approach, academy personnel who have an evolutionary rather than revolutionary gaze on the footballers they are developing will enact a programme that is static and not dialectical. An evolutionary gaze by these personnel sees the footballers becoming "relatively difficult" when the programme does not match the individual footballer's projected developmental pathway (Vygotsky, 1998). On the other hand, "a revolutionary gaze by the personnel foregrounds the cultural context, the institutional context, and the specific footballer's lived experience" (Fleer, 2009, p.132).

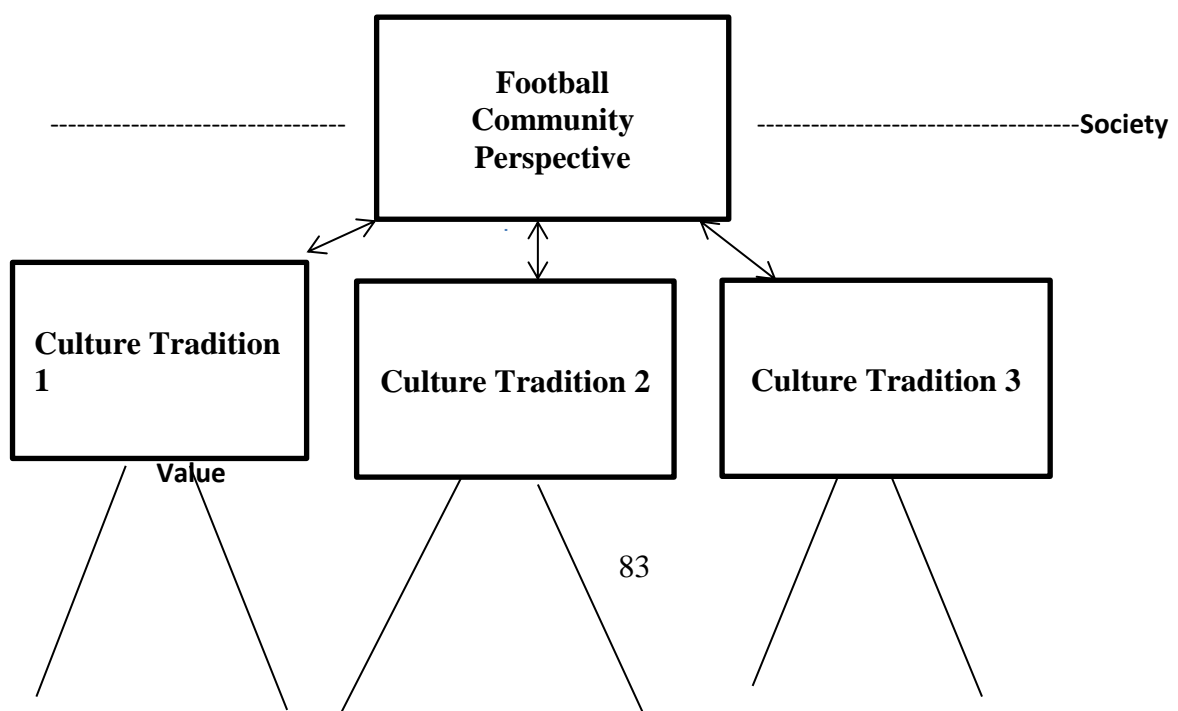
Having a revolutionary perspective allows one to foreground the social situation of development, hence in order to understand the developing talented footballers one must be cognisant of the social, cultural and historical practices in which they live and learn (Hedegaard, 2009). To understand the social situation one should understand the activities of the athletes as they engage in a dialectical interaction with the practice traditions in the football club academies they are attending.

In drawing upon Hedegaard's theory, it becomes apparent that there is a need for a cultural and institutional form of inter-subjectivity for talent development in academies. Similarly, one needs to problematise dominant cultural assumptions about what happens in the home, schools and academies as one is raising young footballers. Fleer (2009) makes an example that:

In many European heritage communities verbal language is privileged. However, in other communities, such as Mexican heritage communities, non-verbal competence is mastered much earlier and represents an important mode of communication. These different communication trajectories highlight the social nature of development, and foreground how cultural communities shape development by what they value and need (p.132).

3.7.1 Adapting Hedegaard's model to sport talent development

Hedegaard (2005) has proposed the construction of childhood and development within the framework of the institution. If adapted to football talent development her model can be presented as in Figure 3.2 below:



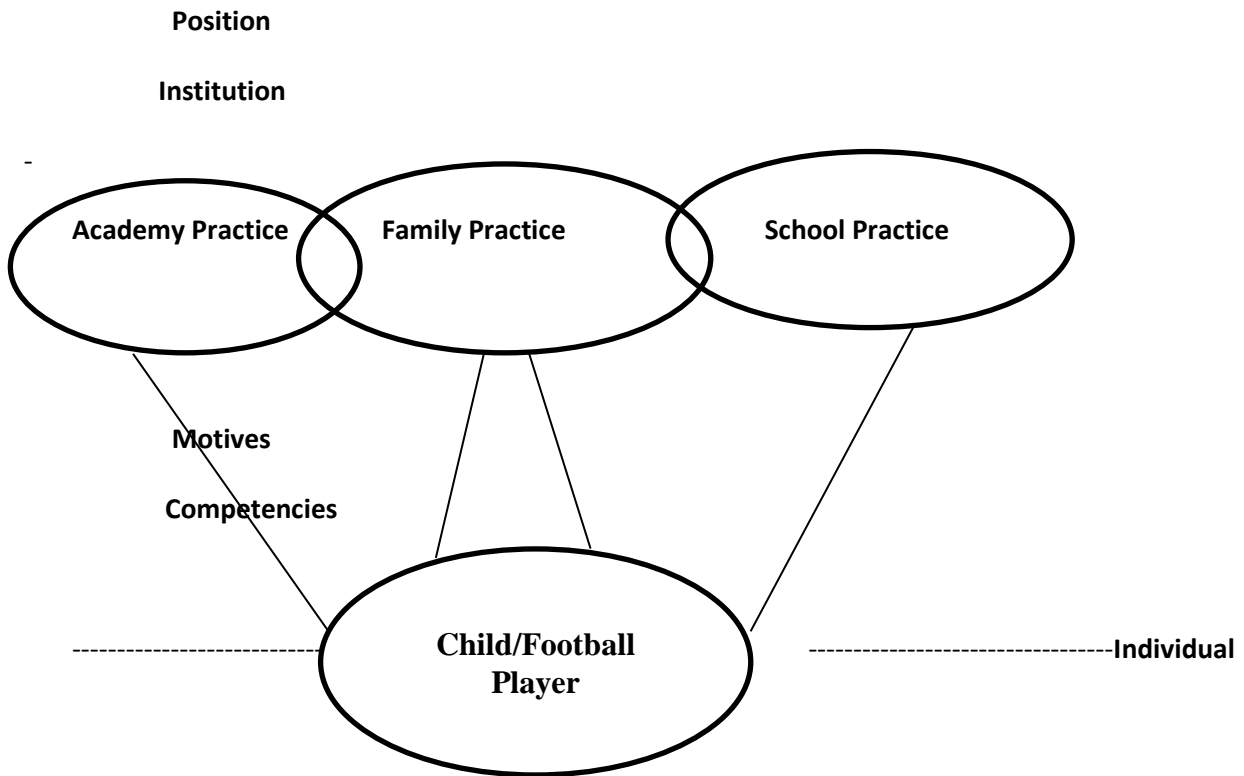


Figure 3.2: Hedegaard’s model applied to sport talent development (adapted from Hedegaard, 2009, p.73).

The football community perspective as depicted in Figure 3.2 (above) represents the historically evolved traditions in a football community that are formalised into laws and regulations as conditions for the existence of football institutions such as football club academies and other relevant institutions in the developing footballers’ environment. In the model these are depicted as cultural traditions in a society for different institutions, reflecting different value positions (Hedegaard, 2012). For example, in a typical football club academy there will be a coach, classroom teacher, a certain number of young footballers selected on the basis of their football talent, and particular kinds of materials available for participants to use, such as footballs, training kits and books. Also, there are specific procedures set by an academy practice, as well as a set of values about what is a good practice for footballers’ learning and training activity (Fleer, 2014). Examples are respect, obedient behaviour and punctuality. Hedegaard argues that the theory of development gives conditions for how to realise the values held by a society, hence the different cultural traditions of families and their interface with schools and community practice are shown in the model (see Culture 1 Tradition; Culture 2 Tradition; and Culture 3 Tradition).

The institutional practices listed in the middle plane of the model are family practice, school practice, and academy practice. Practically, football players are, however, in one way or another in contact with many more institutional practices than those three presented in the model. For instance, some may have church as one of the institutional practices to which they are exposed. Institutional practice are places and spaces organised within a society that have their own procedures/rules and traditions for daily practices. The three institutions may or may not be aligned for a particular footballer in a particular society. For instance, there may be cases when what is valued within the family practice is not the same as what is valued within the football academy. That will be a case when parents are not happy with their child joining an academy as they prefer him/her to focus on education. In an ideal culturally homogeneous community the values that are seen in relation to a society and what is deemed to be a “good life” are also supported in the school and family (Hedegaard, 2012). However, as Fler (2014) indicates, in more culturally and linguistically diverse communities the football academy may not represent or be reflective of family values. When educators use evolutionary models for child development and focus on milestones that are representative of one culture (namely Western heritage communities), the institution privileges this culture and silences other cultural groups. Hedegaard (2004) thus argues that a cultural-historical perspective is important for child development professionals in that it draws attention to the significance of the conceptual framework adopted for child development and the central place it holds within the institution in Western heritage communities. For instance, when a school foregrounds only one view of development, such as the dominant ‘Western perspective’, teachers expect and accept one developmental trajectory. This may be problematic for culturally and linguistically diverse communities as development does not proceed. It may not be the child’s fault but rather the relationship between the child and society (Fler, 2006).

Finally, the *person’s perspective*, as shown in the model, is reflected in a child’s activities in different institutions. This plane reflects the shared activity settings of persons in a specific institution, that is, a specific home or school, depicted as activity settings in the model.

Children’s projects, intentions, everyday practices, and interactions with other persons in everyday practice are vital in Hedegaard’s theory (Fler, 2009). They participate in and create activities that realise and contribute to the institutional practices that society provides

while also contributing to changes in society. Their activities are not systems but processes, and therefore not concrete manifestations of institutional practice. Nor are they inscribed into each other but influence each other dialectically (Hedegaard, 2012). Through their motivated activities in different settings in institutional practices, children acquire culture as competences with tools and values and motives for activities. Their actions also influence the settings in which they participate, thereby contributing to the conditions for their own development. The child can also put demands on its surroundings that are not only related to the child itself. Such demands can be seen as reflecting the parents or the caregivers' need to live up to expectations in a society for their responsibilities as parents or caregivers (Fleer, 2015). Therefore, a child contributes to his/her own institutional conditions and the perspective of society. For instance, from the first moment the child enters school he/she brings own influences and simultaneously the school brings practice traditions that are different from those at home. Such practice traditions impose different demands and expectations on the child, thus influencing activity and social situation of development and creating crises in the social situation. This can be indicated by the demands that the child begins to impose on the caregivers and/or parents at home. Therefore, according to Hedegaard (2009), both the institution and person have to be conceptualised as contributing to practice in a theory of children's development.

3.8 SUMMARY

Ryba et al (2016, p.2) offer a summary of what the cultural historical approach entails, based on Vygotsky's position that stipulates that:

...psychological processes are the emergent outcome of the transactions between an individual's ontogenetic history in a particular sociocultural framework, and characteristics of the immediate tasks confronting the individual. Emphasizing historical development, cultural mediation and practical everyday activity, this approach considers individual traits as constructed by and also entwined with a specific medium of human development, which includes language, norms, customs, values, and artifacts.

In keeping with the aforementioned understanding, Hedegaard captures and analyses the dynamic processes through which the ontogenesis of psychological functioning is enacted, occurring through an examination of the perspectives of the child (the family) and the teacher (school). She draws attention to the significance of children's participation in different institutional contexts for shaping their development and discussed how practices in these institutions create sociocultural pathways for children. In gaining understandings of how children participate in different institutions it is possible to gain greater insights into children's changing relations with reality (Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010).

Hedegaard's conceptions of development have implications for methodological considerations in child-development research in that when conducting research with children one should consider, *inter alia*, firstly, the practice tradition of the institution in which the child lives his or her everyday life; secondly, the norms and values of caregivers and educators in the everyday practices they share with children; thirdly, demands in upbringing and education and how children meet in these shared activities and; lastly, the interaction and conflicts between the child's goal-oriented activities and parent/educators' demands, pointing to what is happening developmentally for the child (Hedegaard, 2009).

CHAPTER FOUR

LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an overview of the current body of research into talent development in general, in sport and more specifically in football. It begins by reviewing literature that defines the concepts talent and development, and then presents a selection of talent development models which should be considered. Thereafter, a review of literature on the elements of sport talent development is presented, and the chapter concludes with literature on talent development systems in football.

4.2 LOCATING THE TERM ‘DEVELOPMENT’ WITH REGARDS TO TALENT

The term “development” is ubiquitous within the field of childhood studies (Lee & Johnson, 2007), reflecting the field’s long history of analysis of human development. During the 1990s this effort began to focus on critiquing the field’s reliance on the dominant theories within developmental psychology (e.g., Burman, 1994), with their argument mainly being that developmental psychology has maintained loyalty to the dominant but out-dated and limited grand developmental theories, such as that of Piaget, psychoanalysis, and learning theories, that need updating and broadening (Fleer, 2015). For instance, Lee and Johnson (2007, p.234) argued that “developmentalism based on the dominant experimental psychology has focused on biology and universality and ignored how culture enters into the process of human development”, and they believed that a cultural psychological lens may enable developmental psychology scholars to see development as “the process of growing into a culture”.

From the cultural psychological perspective, the aspects of the developing child are dependent on opportunities provided by the culture into which the child is born (Stambulova, 2009), hence, all development, including that of talent, occurs within a socio-cultural context and is influenced by the facilitating transactional processes. The development of talent among gifted children thus has a cultural significance across many religions and appears in numerous legends and myths across time and space (Jung & Kerneyi, 1993; O’Connor,

2012). Communities and families do what they believe is best, at that time, to nurture and enhance their children's talent in a manner that makes sense in their culture (Stambulova, 2009).

4.3 CONCEPTIONS OF "TALENT"

What is talent? Many definitions and interpretations have been given to the term 'talent', with some researchers even suggesting that, like giftedness, it might be a misnomer, mistaken for the results of endless practice or social advantage. The long history of the study of talent in the United States of America goes back to the early 18th century when talent was equated with intelligence as measured by IQ tests. Over time the view broadened both from an emphasis on mental ability to one of talent within different domains, including physical performance, artistic ability, and applied domains such as entrepreneurship, as well as a view of talent as fixed the growth of ability through the support of others and the psychosocial development of the individual (Culross, 2015). Interestingly, outstanding physical performance was among the latest to be considered as talent, and as Culross (2015) indicates, it was only in 1972 that it was included in the definition promulgated by the U.S. Department of Education. As a result of a broad conception of talent, not a single definition can claim to be universally acceptable (Trankle & Cushion, 2006; Buekers, Borry & Rowe, 2015).

According to Calderon, Subotnik, Knotek, Rayhack and Gorgia (2007), the modern definition of talent is derived from two identifiable traditions, one of which rests on a description of a person, who when identified as talented will remain so, whether or not the talent develops into outstanding performance. Another tradition focuses on domain-specific abilities and how they can be developed, viewing talent as a changing phenomenon over time. The implication is that a talented child may or may not develop into a talented adult and that it is impossible to identify with confidence characteristics or abilities that talented adults revealed in childhood. Literature indicates that, over time, there has been a shift away from the former to the latter tradition, with the argument being that the former is a narrow-minded definition that looks at talent as an exclusively innate entity that is static and permanent rather than movable and dynamic (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1990b; Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993; Howe, Davidson & Slobada, 1998; Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius & Worrell, 2011; Romann & Fuchslocher, 2014). The shift has been towards a more open-minded

definition which looks at talent as involving a combination of genetic and environmental factors, such as social opportunities, social support and rewards (Csiksentmihalyi et al., 1993).

Despite attempts to clarify the concept 'talent', researchers have continuously acknowledged that it cannot be assumed to be a simple concept and agree that talent and talent development are part of a complex and dynamic system made up of a variety of influential factors which are unique to each individual (e.g., Coleman, 2006; Henriksen, 2010; Chan Oi Lan, 2012; Romann & Fuchslocher, 2013; 2014). Particularly within the field of sport psychology, researchers argue that this complexity is increased by a number of factors unrelated to talent, such as age and place of birth, recognized as likely contributory factors towards determining the likelihood that a talented athlete would make a successful transition to a professional level (Henriksen (2010). Regarding the age factor, a recent study by Romann and Fuchslocher (2014), conducted on junior football players in Switzerland, confirmed that the relative age factor may be a vital predictor of the players' success. Their findings indicated that players who are older than the rest of their groups because they were born in the beginning of a selection year are more likely to achieve athletic career success.

A study by Turnnidge, Hancock and Côté (2014) indicated that the place of birth may also have an impact on talent development, with successful players being overrepresented in cities with a larger population than in smaller cities. They postulated that large cities provide such favourable conditions as ample opportunities to engage in a variety of sports, fewer safety concerns and less competition for leisure time, which results in more players successfully engaging in sport careers. Their study may be relevant in a South African context, which although lacking in studies on birthplace bias in sports talent development, has shown in Statistics South Africa (2015) that large cities attract more youth as they are perceived to be addressing their needs more than rural areas, thus increasing the chances of engagement in a variety of career opportunities. This may be one of the reasons that, on average, 80% of the teams in the South African Professional Soccer League (PSL) are based in large cities (South African Football Association, 2009).

Increasing cultural awareness within the field of athletic talent development has prompted the researchers to realise that talent and giftedness are not necessarily construed in the same way in every cultural group and can therefore not be considered universal constructs with the same meaning everywhere (Ryba et al., 2012). Recent literature on talent development

has been inundated with studies that look at developing models with new ideas for thinking about talent or giftedness and embrace expanded beliefs that highlight the importance of nurturing talent in children from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds as early as possible (e.g., Horn, 2015; Olszewski-Kubilius & Thomson, 2015).

According to Horn (2015) conceptions of talent or giftedness are actually grounded in culture, which shapes beliefs and values about ability and talent development. Therefore, understanding the mission, goals, and models of gifted education in one context requires some knowledge of the local culture and contexts in which talented children are taught. This suggests that a talented person is perhaps best thought of broadly as an individual who is more able than most others with regard to a culturally valued ability in any given population.

4.4 TALENT DEVELOPMENT MODELS

Talent development models are based on key research findings and part of the scientific evidence that researchers use to explain its nature and process (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2001). Numerous sport-specific talent development models have been developed over the years, though are globally accepted (Reilly, Williams, Nevill & Franks, 2000; Subotnik et al., 2011). A literature review by Subotnik et al. (2011) on contemporary models of talent development analysed 14 models with regard to the developmental range addressed by each model, core abilities, supporting psychosocial variables described, and desired outcomes of the talent development process described. Their findings indicated that talent development models can be divided into three groups, the first of which contributes to the field by identifying key components of the talent development process without discussing which variables play important roles at distinct points in the talent development process (e.g., Sternberg, 2005; Henriksen, 2010). The second group describes the variables that play key roles at different points in the talent development process (e.g., Gagnéé, 2005; Piirto, 2005). The third group, in addition to describing a trajectory of variables, notes the stages of talent development with different roles for mentors to play at each (e.g., Bloom, 1995; Subotnik & Jarvin, 2005). Due to the scope of this study, only one model within each group is presented in this chapter.

With regard to football, literature shows that most of the talent development programmes in professional football are informed by the scientific approaches supported by talent

development models, for example, the United States Youth Soccer coaching education Department (2012). Therefore, talent development models are part of the scientific evidence that has been used to explain the nurturing of talent in sports such as football (Mudege, 2011).

4.4.1 Bloom's model of talent development

Bloom's (1985) seminal work is regarded as one of the major efforts to shift the focus on the definition of talent away from an exclusive genetic domain to domain-specific ability (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2001). In his own words, he postulated that "unless there is a long and intensive process of encouragement, nurturance, education, and training, talented individuals will not attain extreme levels of capability in these particular fields" (Bloom, 1985, p.3). Bloom was among the first to study the influence and role of such variables as the family, school, and community on the development of eminent levels of talent in academic areas such as mathematics and science, arts domains such as piano performance and sculpture, and the athletic domains of tennis and swimming. He was thus among the first to examine disparate areas of talent simultaneously and identify the commonalities and differences among them (Olszewski-Kubilius, Subotnik & Worrell, 2015). He proposed three stages of talent development, as indicated in Table 4.1 (below).

Table 4.1: Bloom’s stages of talent development model (Morgan & Giaccobi, 2006, p.296).

STAGE 1: ROMANCE PHASE (EARLY YEARS)	STAGE 2: PRECISION PHASE (MIDDLE YEARS)	STAGE 3: INTEGRATION PHASE (LATE YEARS)
Performer - Joyful - Playful - Excited - „Special“ - Fun/social oriented	Performer - Hooked/committed - Potential identified - More serious - Task/achievement oriented	Performer - Obsessed/dominates life - Personally responsible - Independent - Willingness to dedicate time and effort required for highest standards
Mentor - Process centred - Kind/cheerful/caring - Notice child’s “giftedness”	Mentor -Superior technical knowledge - Strong personal interest - Respected - Strong guidance and discipline - Expected quality results	Mentor - Master coach - Feared/respected - Love/hate relationship - Successful/demanding
Parents - Positive - Shared excitement - Notice child’s “giftedness” - Sought mentors	Parents - More moral and financial support (to maintain mentor relationship) - Restrict other activities -Concerned for holistic development	Parents - Lesser role
General - Little or no emphasis on competition	General - Competition used as a yardstick for progress	General - Fine tuning

The first stage, initiation or romance, is typified by playful engagement with a topic or domain of interest that elicits rapid progress on the part of the child and is reinforced by parents and teachers. However, over time, playful interaction becomes insufficient and parents search for the best possible teachers or coaches to provide school-based or outside-of-school instruction in technique, content, and skills while continuing to provide emotional support. Thus, during the second stage, or middle years of learning, the learner increasingly

invests time and effort perfecting technical skills with a teacher. Should talented children's interest and commitment persist and they choose to make the domain a life choice, a third type of teacher or mentor is needed to guide them to develop a unique personal niche or approach for their adult creative work (Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2015).

The third stage to which Bloom referred, integration, is one of perfection, when the athletes become experts and are expected to be autonomous and extremely knowledgeable, with emphasis placed on the development of high level skills. Even though the parents' contribution may still be recognised they play a lesser role because the participants are completely immersed in their actions and assume total responsibility for them (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2001).

The implication of Bloom's model for researchers is that it can be useful in understanding the necessary role of outside-of-school learning opportunities for the development of talent as well as the importance of teachers and mentors in providing the right kind of instruction and emotional support at different stages of talent development. Bloom's findings have since been supported by several researchers, for instance, Chua, (2015) among talented dancers and Johnson, Tenenbaum, Edmonds and Castillo (2008) on the developmental experiences of elite and sub-elite swimmers, who provided evidence of highly homogeneous developmental experiences and perceptions.

4.4.2 Gagné's differentiated model of giftedness and talent

Even though Gagné's (1995) model, originally developed for the domain of education, has been used by researchers in the field of sports to be present a comprehensive conceptual framework applicable to sport talent development (Burton et al., 2006; Vaeyens, Lenoir, Williams & Philippaerts, 2008; Chan, 2012; Mills, Butt, Maynard & Harwood, 2012). The Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT), as depicted in Figure 4.1 (below), is the most recent version of Gagné's model (1995), made up of five distinct elements: aptitudes, talents, learning/training/ practicing processes (LTP), intrapersonal catalysts, and environmental factors. According to Gagné (2009), the developmental process is influenced by the action of the two types of catalysts that may facilitate or hinder the process, namely, interpersonal and environmental. The former are subdivided into physical, psychological, and behavioural factors, the latter taking in wider milieu, such as cultural, social and familial,

a variety of individuals such as parents, teachers and peers, and provisions such as curriculum, programmes and services. These catalysts constantly interact with and impact upon the developmental process and, vitally, can be examined with regard to their direction (i.e. positive or negative influence) and strength of causal impact (Mills et al., 2012).

What differentiates this model from other talent development theories is that it recognises that chance can influence development. For instance, it may be the chance of favourable genetics, and an individual's environment, such as birthplace and socio-economic status, and uncontrollable events such as accidents and injuries (Gagné, 2005).

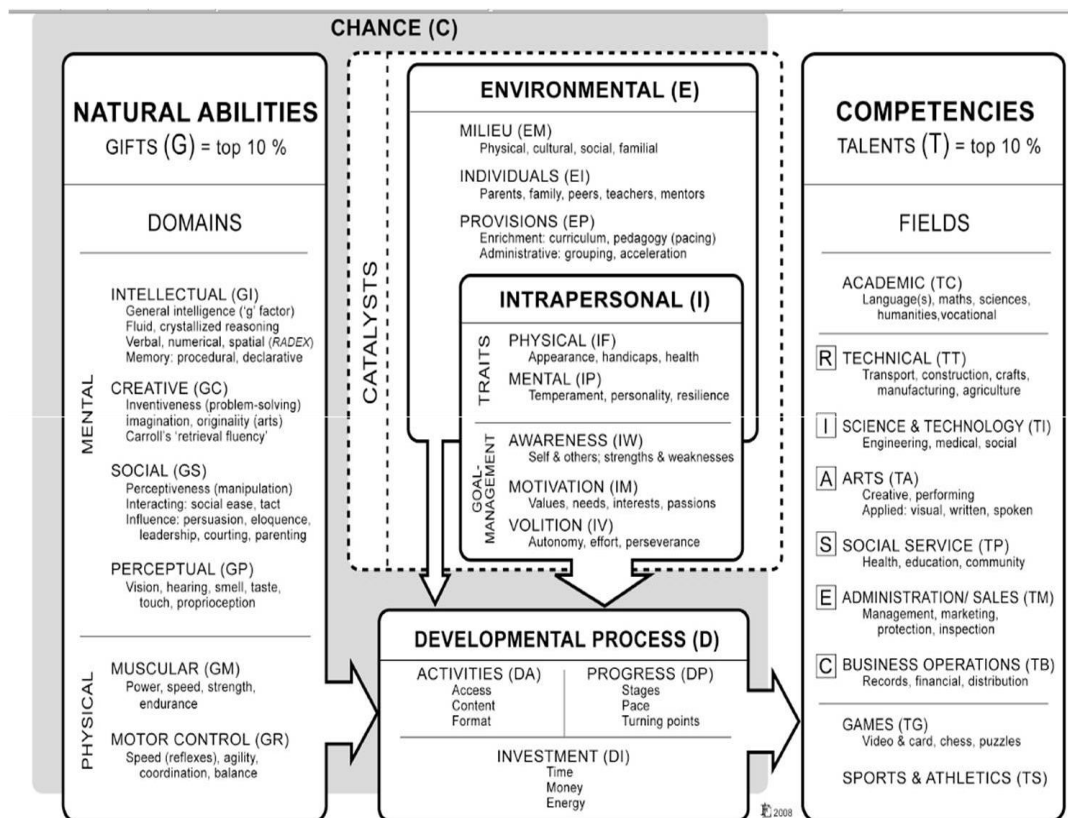


Figure 4.2: Gagné's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) (Gagné', 2005, p.109)

Gagné's model has been used by several researchers as a conceptual framework to study talent development in sports (e.g., Gagné et al., 2000; Burton, Van Heest, Rallis & Reis, 2006; Chan, 2012; Mills et al., 2012).

For instance, Burton et al. (2006) conducted a qualitative study with coaches, athletes, and physical education trainers from Canada in which they used the DGMT as a framework to examine the importance of various factors attributed to talent development. Findings

indicated that natural ability was the most important aspect, Followed by perseverance and intrinsic motivation (love of sport). Learning, practice and training were next in terms of importance, followed by parental support, encouragement and influence. Finally, chance was perceived as the least important ability to develop talent in sports.

Mills et al. (2012) also conducted a study based on Gagné's developmental model, which identified factors perceived to be influential in the development of elite youth football academy players. Their findings revealed six interrelated higher-order categories that represented the factors perceived to either positively or negatively influence player development, namely, awareness, resilience, goal-directed attributes, intelligence, sport-specific attributes, and environmental factors.

4.4.3 Henriksen's models of athletic talent development environment and the success factors

In response to several sport psychology researchers' (e.g., Araújo & Davids, 2009; Krebs, 2009) call for the integration of an ecological perspective into talent-development research, Henriksen (2010) devised a model that aimed at transforming the ecological perspective into a practical framework and methodology in sport talent research, which he named an 'athletic talent development environment' (ATDE). As an accompaniment to the ATDE model, he further developed a working model known as the environment success factor (ESF), which centres on the emergence of an organisational culture in the environment.

Henriksen defined ATDE as:

A dynamic system comprising (a) an athlete's immediate surroundings at the micro-level where athletic and personal development take place, (b) the interrelations between these surroundings, (c) at the macro-level, the larger context in which these surroundings are embedded, and (d) the organizational culture of the sports club or team, which in an integrative factor of the ATDE's effectiveness in helping young talented athletes to develop into senior elite athletes" (Henriksen, 2010, p.160).

Using the Danish environment as an example, Henriksen identified eight common characteristics of a successful ATDE and their descriptors (see Figure 4.3, below).

Henriksen’s model has since been applied in both the individual sports, such as sailing (Henriksen et al., 2010), as well as in team sport, such as football (Larsen et al., 2012b). Henriksen et al (2010) found that, even though the environment in which the sailing athletes were developing did not have adequate resources, it was compensated for by a strong organisational culture, characterised by values of open co-operation, individual responsibility and a focus on performance process. Larsen et al.’s (2013) study indicated that the young football players’ environment was centred around the relationship between players and a staff of coaches, assistants, and managers that helped the players to focus on a holistic lifestyle, handling dual careers (sport and school), developing the ability to work hard, and being self-aware and responsible for their own training. Also, the environment was characterised by a strong, open, and cohesive organisational culture based on integrated values concerned with the balance of the players’ daily lives in school and sport.

Figure 4.3: Features of successful athletic talent development environments (Henriksen, 2010, p. 157-158)

Features	of Descriptors	Opposite Poles
successful ATDEs		
Training groups with supportive relationships	Opportunities for inclusion in a training community; supportive relationships and friendships within the group, despite performance level; good communication.	Individualised training programmes at an early stage; training alone; low cohesion in the group; inter-group rivalry; performance
Proximal role models	Community of practice includes prospective and current elite athletes; opportunities to train with the elite athletes; elite athletes who are willing to pass on their knowledge.	Airtight boundaries between athletes at different levels. Elite level athletes keep their secrets and regard prospects as future rivals.
Support of sporting goals by the wider environment	Opportunities to focus on the sport; school, family, friends and others acknowledge and accept the athletes’ dedication to sport.	Non-sport environment shows lack of understanding of elite sport and the demands involved.

Support for the development of psychosocial skills	Opportunities to develop skills and competences that are of benefit outside the sporting domain (such as autonomy, responsibility and commitment); considering athletes as ‘whole human beings’.	Focus solely on sport and winning at any cost; excessive control from coaches; focus not on personal improvement but on relative performance level, which devalues learning and development.
Training that allows for diversification	Opportunities to sample different sports during early phases; integration of different sports in the daily routines; appreciation of versatile sport profiles and basic sport skills.	Promoting early specialization; focus solely on developing sport specific skills; considering athletes’ interest in trying different sports to be rivalry and a potential threat.
Focus on long-term development	Focus on long-term development of the athletes rather than early success; age-appropriate amount and content of training.	Focus on short-term success; kids are seen as miniature elite athletes; no time to heal when injured.
Strong and coherent organizational culture	Organizational culture characterized by coherence between artefacts, espoused values and basic assumptions; culture provides stability to the group and supports a learning environment.	Fragmented culture in which espoused values do not correspond to actions; uncertainty and confusion among coaches, athletes and others; lack of common vision.
Integration of efforts	Coordination and communication between sport, school, family and other components; athletes experience concordance and synergy in daily life.	Lack of communication; conflicting interests; athletes experience many and contradicting pulls in daily life.

4.5 THE ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL TALENT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

A review of literature on talent development in sport shows that the development of player’s abilities and potentials is a complex process that seems contingent on an intricate assortment of elements within the athletes’ micro-environment. The elements that are commonly cited

in literature, in no particular order, include innate abilities and personal characteristics (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde & Whalem, 1993; Coutinho, Mesquita, Fonseca & Cote, 2015; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2010); psychological skills and attributes (e.g., Burkers, Borry & Rowe, 2015; Larsen et al., 2012); parental support (e.g., Gut, Reimann & Grob, 2013); coaching (e.g., Adie & Jowett, 2010); and deliberate practice (e.g., Ericsson et al, 1993).

4.5.1 Innate factors

Early research on sport talent development was mostly devoted to examining the nature of genetic or personality attributes that contribute towards success in sports (Coutinho et al., 2015). Even though there was later a significant shift towards a holistic description of talent development, research on the role of innate factors did not stop, as researchers continuously tried to define athletes on the bases of anthropometric and physiological attributes (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990b; Monks & Mason, 2000; Miah & Rich, 2006; Elferink-Gemser, Visscher, Van Duijn & Lemmink, 2006; Ivarsson & Johnson, 2010).

During the 1990s, Csikszentmihalyi was one of the researchers who devoted efforts towards studying the effects of genetic attributes on the development of talent among athletes. For example, Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993) and Csikszentmihalyi (1998) looked at thoughts, behaviour, and experience as important dimensions in sport talent development, guided by an assumption that the development of talent requires a peculiar mind-set referred to as “complex consciousness” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998, p58). Later, Durand-Bush and Salmela (2001) defined complex consciousness as the “flow model of optimal experience” (p.280), based on habits cultivated in one’s early environment that eventually become so ingrained that they eventually form a personality trait. The most significant finding of Csikszentmihalyi et al.’s (1993) study was that when players experience the consciousness or flow of optimal experience they will probably continue to develop their talent.

Further research in this area has also focussed on an attempt to determine the genetic base of health and behaviour (personality, intelligence, psychosocial, and others) with implications for early detection and possible modification of less than desirable genetic structures that are likely to affect talent development (e.g., Kazemi, Casella & Perri, 2009; Baker, Cobley & Fraser-Thomas, 2009). To an extent, such research endeavours do have a link to the pursuit of understanding the realisation of sport expertise, even though, so far,

there have been no convincing results indicating that genius in sport expertise is manifested in a lineage. Based on existing observations, sport expertise cannot be predicted in any meaningful manner based on the sport accomplishments of one parent, even if both parents have been successful at that sport (Baker et al., 2009). Of apparent significance is that adaptability to and trainability with practice is an individual matter, influenced considerably by genetic factors related to biological and psychological markers (Baker & Cote, 2003). People with serious intention of improving substantially in performance in a specific sport have unequal probabilities of success. The more favourable the genetic disposition the more likely that dedicated practice will result in intended outcomes. Practice of many years does not ensure expertise or even near-expertise (Singer & Janelle, 1999).

Several other studies have adopted an information-processing conceptual approach in an attempt to understand the role of innate factors towards sport talent development. For example, Ericsson et al. (1993) found that successful athletes are thought to acquire knowledge and skills that enable them to adapt to the constraints inherent in their task. To reach an expert level of performance is, therefore, to adapt maximally to a task. Such adaptation reduces the processing demands on limited capacity, and basic visual or neural systems. Individuals could overcome limits on speed processing capacity by acquiring new cognitive skills that circumvent these limits by qualitatively different processes. The successful performance of athletes appears to be predominantly due to rapid and efficient access to relevant previous experiences and knowledge stored in their memory, thus eliminating the need for time and effort-consuming problem solving.

4.5.2 Psychosocial factors

Over time awareness that psychosocial competences represent a critical hurdle that needs to be crossed by the athlete to become a high-level competitor has also been gaining ground. Several studies have indicated that the development and maintenance of psychosocial skills in sport are important for the evolution of talent and they proposed that athletes who experience higher psychological need satisfaction would experience more positive developmental experiences than their counterparts who experience lower psychological need satisfaction (e.g., Larsen et al., 2012a; Solorio, 2015). In literature, psychosocial skills are often associated with terms such as life skills, positive youth development, social-

emotional growth, psychological skills, psychological characteristics, and psychosocial competencies and assets (Larsen et al., 2012a).

Many of the studies on psychosocial competence among the athletes were conducted with the aim of developing sport psychological skills inventories (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993; Gould, Dieffenbach & Moffett, 2002a; Gould, Greenleaf, Chung & Guinan, 2002b). On the other hand, most of the studies conducted during the new millennium have focused on studying various psychosocial factors with a view to resolving the question of how to increase athletes' performance through psychological factors such as motivation (e.g., Johnson, Tenenbaum, Edmonds & Castello, 2008; Phillips, Davids, Renshaw & Portus, 2010; Barreiros, Cote & Fonseca, 2013; Barkoukis, Lazuras, Tsorbatzoudis, & Rodafinos, 2011; Larsen et al., 2012a).

In response to a call by Durand-Bush and Salmela (2001), who recommended that psychological variables should be given special attention in future research, several studies explored psychological competence with regard to a number of aspects, such as athletes' competitiveness and orientation (e.g., Lochbaum & Gottardy, 2014); personality (e.g., Allen, Greenlees, & Jones, 2013); anxiety and emotions (e.g., Abrahamsen, Roberts, & Pensgaard, 2008); mental toughness (e.g., Solorio, 2015); self-efficacy (e.g., Nicholls, Polman, & Levy, 2010); positive belief (e.g., Blecharz, et al., 2014); Petrie, Deiters & Harmison (2014); and confidence (e.g., Gould et al., 2002b).

A study by Larsen et al. (2012a), one of the few available on football players, used an ecological approach to explore psychosocial skills among Danish youth football players, and their important findings were that psychosocial skills in the youth football academy could be divided into those that were explicit (being practiced and talked about) and those that were implicit (indirectly practice and talked about). Important explicit psychosocial skills were motivation, self-awareness and the ability to work hard. Implicit psychosocial skills identified were managing performance and process outcomes and the ability to utilise team skills and general social skills.

A literature review by Lochbaum and Gottardy (2014) followed by that of Durand-Bush and Salmela (2001) also recommended further investigation of the psychological factors because, in their opinion, little was yet known about how the psychological skills are cultivated and developed, and no one successful athlete is characterised by all the factors identified. They believed that, on the bases of the research in general psychology, one would

assume that successful athletes would be characterised by high levels of such behaviours as optimism, perfectionism and hope, and found studies on these particular skills were still sparse. A study by Potgieter, Grobbelaar and Andrew (2008) among rugby players in South Africa indicated a concern that, even though the players themselves indicated a great need for psychological skills training as it could hold value for performance improvement within the sport, no information existed on the sport psychological skills of South African junior players' athletes.

A study conducted by Badenhorst and Pienaar (2000) on South African football players recommended that investigation into the athletes' psychological characteristics should begin as early as possible during careers, as it is possible to classify soccer players as having high or low performance ability according to differences in their psychological abilities as early as at the age of 14.

4.5.3 Deliberate practice

The concept of deliberate practice was introduced by Ericsson et al. (1993) during the early 1990s and has since permeated the sport talent development literature (Ward, Hodges, Starkes & Williams, 2007). Ericsson et al. (p.364) defined deliberate practice as a "highly structured, goal-oriented, supervised training designed to improve performance and requiring cognitive or physical effort". Such training comprises practice activities that are challenging, effortful, low in inherent enjoyment, and purposefully designed to address current areas of weakness (Charness, Tuffiash, Krampe, Reingold & Vasyukova, 2005). It is not simply any form of training and can be contrasted with other activities that could erroneously be considered practice, such as play, work and observing others performing the skill (Helsen, Hodges, van Winckel & Starkes, 2000). Instead, deliberate practice is designed to improve key aspects of current performance through repetition and feedback. It is also predicted to be challenging, effortful and not inherently enjoyable (Coughlan, Williams, Robert & Ford, 2014; Ericsson, 2008).

Ericsson et al. (1993) developed a theoretical framework detailing how deliberate practice can lead to improvements in performance and the attainment of expertise. Through an extensive review of the expertise literature, they argued that it is not simply the accumulation of deliberate practice hours that leads to superior levels of performance, but the accumulation of such hours must coincide with crucial periods of biological and cognitive

development. They further argued that early specialisation was important for future success because the earlier one began adhering to a strict training regime the quicker one would attain the desired level of skill. In other words, all other things being equal, an athlete who starts a deliberate practice routine at a later age would be unable to catch up to the one who began earlier.

Ericsson et al.'s (1993) theoretical framework proposed that, firstly, the “monotonic benefits assumption” (p.368) holds that the amount of time invested in domain-specific deliberate practice activities is positively, even monotonically, correlated to the attained performance level; secondly, the individual requires resources, including good teachers and suitable facilities in order to optimise practice; and thirdly, individuals who engage in deliberate practice are predicted to rate it as more relevant to improving performance, more effortful, and less enjoyable than other activities (Coughlan et al., 2014).

Subsequent to Ericsson et al.'s (1993) proposal, there was a resurgence of interest in the area of practice in sport with several other researchers attempting to explain and expand on the conceptual framework and its intention to explain how expertise is developed (e.g., Helsen et al., 2000; Charness et al., 2005; Baker, Deakin & Cote, 2005; de Bruin, Smith, Rikers & Schmidt, 2008; Ericsson, 2008; Ford, Yates & Williams; 2010; Hambrick et al., 2013; Coughlan et al., 2014; Diogo & Goncalves, 2014).

Helsen et al. (2000) tested the model of deliberate practice by reviewing the results of studies of expertise in football and other sports that assessed the progress of international, national and provincial players based on accumulated practice, amount of practice per week and relative importance and demands of various practice and everyday activities. A positive linear relationship was found between accumulated individual plus team practice and skill. Helsen et al. also noted that in some of the sport domains, such as football, age plays a significant role in the amount of deliberate practice executed. As football players develop they routinely devote more hours of practice each week. About five years later, another study conducted by Ford, Yates & Williams (2010) corroborated the assumptions of the deliberate practice framework. They found that the quality of deliberate practice is a key factor in differentiating the young soccer players from their peers.

Recent studies by Coughlan et al. (2014) and Diogo and Goncalves (2014) among football players are among those that aimed to test the predictions of the deliberate practice theory. They noted that, prior to their study, the predictions of deliberate practice theory had

typically been tested using the retrospective recall methodology, including a study by Ericsson et al. (1993), in which participants were required to evaluate activities in which they had engaged previously, and they argued that ratings of deliberate practice in these studies might have been confounded by a number of factors, such as lapses in memory between engaging in practice and retrospectively rating it later. Their findings provided support for the theory of deliberate practice and indicated that engaging in deliberate practice appeared to facilitate improvements in athletes' performance over time.

Another study by de Bruin et al. (2008) and Ford et al. (2010) agreed that the extended periods of deliberate practice led to more efficient acquisition of sport expertise, especially motor expertise. Ford et al. further indicated that deliberate practice in the face of competitive internal and external stressors, such as anxiety, visual and auditory distracters, was critical for the realisation of expert performance. They both recommended that competitive pressures and conditions must be an integral part of the practice setting to effectively prepare the young athlete for eventual real world competition. This can be developed through extensive exposure to competition-like practice in which the athlete is advised on how to handle competitive pressures.

Hambrick et al. (2013) conducted a study that moved a step beyond Ericsson et al.'s (1993) monotonic benefits assumption, which only speaks about a relationship between the amount of deliberate practice and the level of achievement by the athletes involved. Their study aimed at addressing differences in the quality of the deliberate practice engaged in which might be expected to explain the significant proportion of difference in eventual achievement. The results indicated that the amount of deliberate practice alone accounted for only 30% of the difference in the level of achievement. A study by Baker et al. (2005) with athletes in the kinds of sport that requires both mental and physical efforts domains found that ratings for both measures were higher for deliberate practice than with other activities, such as social interaction.

The deliberate practice model raises an important issue to sport psychology research, hence it has led to the sport organisations responsible for the development of young sport talents increasing and regulating the number of hours spent in organised practice, under the supervision of specialised coaches at increasingly lower ages. The recognition of the role of deliberate practice remains essential, not only due to lack of studies that disprove the theory but also due to the substantial case study evidence that support it (Helsen et al., 2000). With regard to football, the crucial role of deliberate practice was highlighted by Culross (2015)

when he found football players play in games where split-second decisions as much as physical skill could determine the outcomes of games. The ability to make such decisions is honed over thousands of hours of deliberate practice, when decisions become second nature and players are able to consciously take note of the consequences of a choice and receive feedback from an objective third party in the form of a coach.

4.5.4 Situational and environmental circumstances

Researchers have also devoted time to determining and examining the characteristics and nature of situational and environmental correlates of athletes' developmental experiences in different sport domains. Their hypothesis is that positive situational and environmental circumstances and the players' perception thereof are positively related to adaptive developmental experiences in youth athletes (e.g., Holt & Dunn, 2004; Sagar, Busch & Jowett, 2010; Leff & Hoyle, 1995; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005; Stambulova & Alfermann, 2009; Taylor & Bruner, 2012; Henriksen, 2010; Larsen 2013; O'Rourke, Smith, Smoll & Cumming, 2014; Chua, 2015). These studies agree that certain situational factors tend to be common to the development of athletic expertise and that talent cannot be successfully developed unless it is valued and supported by society.

Researchers such as Stambulova and Alfermann (2009), Henriksen (2010) and Larsen (2013) have been particularly prominent in suggesting that when developing sport talent one should be sensitive to and analyse not only the individual player's athletic development but also the overall strategies and organisational settings in the talent development environment. Their studies, using a holistic ecological approach, have shown that, as they develop, young athletes consciously engage with the social context and therefore the social environment is of primary importance when considering the satisfaction of basic psychological needs. They advocate an approach that firstly moved beyond focusing on the micro-environmental factors such as coaches, parents and peer to identifying national culture and the national sports systems as important factors in athletes' development, and secondly an approach that moves beyond athletic sport domain to non-athletic environment to the overall environment in which athletes exists. For instance, a recent study by Larsen (2013) provided support for previous research findings in the applicability of the holistic ecological approach in studying and working in and with environment in soccer, which indicated that the transition from one

developmental stage to another can be facilitated or hindered by external or non-athletic factors such as the media, and athletics' academic challenges.

A recent study conducted by Chua (2015), among young Finnish and Singaporean dancers, confirmed what previous studies had indicated, that for athletes to realise potential talent they require certain types of support from the family environment at each phase of development. Chua's findings were that the girls, more than the men, perceived emotional support from family as being important for them and this was said to be due to the girls' experienced injuries which rendered them vulnerable in their self-confidence. On the other hand, Taylor and Bruner's (2012) study with male football players aged between 11 and 18 years who were attending academies underscored the role of the academy environment in facilitating positive youth outcomes.

Recently, Schaillee, Theeboom and Van Cauwenberg (2015) and Gledhill and Harwood (2015) also highlighted the role of peers and group composition in sport. Schaille et al.'s study of the relationship between peer group composition in sport programmes and positive youth development in disadvantaged girls indicated that the extent to which disadvantaged girls derived benefits from their participation in sport depended on group composition, and that the interaction effects between the group composition and individual characteristics suggested that when girls participated in a group of similar peers those from non-intact families derived more benefits than their counterparts from intact families.

4.5.5 Parents and talent development

Parenting is considered to be one of the most influential factors, especially during their children's childhood years, hence, for the last few decades researchers in the field of sport have been interested in understanding the involvement of parents in the development of talented children. Many studies have reported that parental involvement influences children's performance and achievement in sport, whether it is in positive or in negative ways (e.g., Bloom, 1985; Woolger & Power, 1993; Cote, 1999; Gould et al., 2002a; Fredricks & Eccles, 2004; Wuerth, Lee, & Alfermann, 2004; Gould, Lauer, Jannes & Pennisi, 2008; Holt, Tamminen, Black, Sehn & Wall, 2008; Wu, 2008; Lauer, Gould, Roman & Pierce, 2010; Omli & LaVoi, 2012; An & Hodge, 2013; Clarke & Harwood 2014; O'Rourke et al., 2014; Dorsch, Smith & McDonough, 2015). It is however interesting to note that, regardless of such an increased interest in parent-athlete relationships, in their

survey of the PsychINFO search facility in 2013, O'Rourke et al. (2014) revealed that there were far more published studies on coach-athlete relationships, perhaps because, from a breadth-of-influence perspective, a coach might influence ten to 30 children, whereas parental influence is typically restricted to their own and long-term relationships with their own children. They pointed out that what parents lack in breadth of influence may, however, be dwarfed by the intense and long-term relationships they have with their own children within both sport and non-sport contexts.

O'Rourke et al. (2014) further found that parents interact with their children in a variety of ways related to the sport experience, including giving technical advice, providing transportation, and covering equipment costs. Parents also had strong influences in relation to non-sport achievement and competence domains, such as school and social settings. They concluded that, as a result of these interactions, many of which happen outside of sport, parents can significantly shape their children's level of internalisation of ideals, motivations, and attitudes as they relate to sport.

Studies by Omli and LaVoi (2012) and Clarke and Harwood (2014) agreed that three principles characterised the phenomenon of being a parent of an elite youth footballer, namely, parent socialisation into elite youth football culture; enhanced parental identity; and increased parental responsibility. According to Clarke and Harwood (2014), parents' socialisation into the football academy culture was facilitated by their interaction with coaches, parents and peers, highlighting the social nature of parenting. Being the parent of a child identified as talented meant that parents experienced enhanced status and a heightened responsibility to facilitate his development. Although parents were compelled to support their child in football, their protective instinct meant they experienced uncertainty regarding the commitment required to play at an academy, given the potential for negative consequences. These findings illustrate that parents experienced a transition as their child progressed into the specialisation stage of football, and Clarke and Harwood postulated that formal recognition of a child as talented contributed to this transition, and that knowledge of sport and perception of the parent-child relationship shaped how parents adapted. Similarly, Omli and LaVoi (2012) found that, through their child's selection to an academy, parents' identity was improved and became closely linked to football participation. They, however, explained such parents' identity as something that did not reside within parents as individuals, but rather as something which develops through social interaction. The findings

indicated that parents' identities were formed through their relationship and interaction with their children in the football setting.

Wu (2008) conducted a case study with three Chinese American families and found that parent's relationship with their talented children played a vital role in talent development. Findings of his study include evidence of parents' sense of responsibility and a high level of confidence over their children's future. Studies by Fredricks and Eccles (2004) and Bailey and Morley (2006) in sport contexts, and by Gut et al. (2013) in an education context, found that the presence of talented children required the parents and family to make special adaptations to accommodate their needs. They all found that there were three family-based variables that were not only predictors of children's success in pursuing their careers but also predicates of parents' perceptions of their children's competence. These were the family structure, such as relatively small family size and two-parent family structure; the family's socio-economic status, such as whether parents owned a car; and family migration. Gut et al. (2013) found that children whose parents were less educated were from a particular ethnic background and of low socio-economic status were less likely to be successful with their academic careers. Bailey and Morley's (2006) study concluded that talented children altered the normal roles in the family, with the talented child assuming a 'third parent' role in the family system.

Fredricks and Eccles's (2004) findings suggested that parents' involvement in their children's sport can be structured into three major roles: provider, interpreter, and role model. As providers, parents make physical activity opportunities available to their children by, for instance, providing transportation to practices and games, as well as by providing the financial support needed to sustain the long-term effort to develop talent. As interpreters, parents influence their children's perceptions of competence and the value they place on sports involvement. As role models, parents may influence their children's sport behaviour by modelling responses to situations and circumstances, demonstrating how to perform sport skills and committing to vigorous training, as well as in how they interact with those involved in sport, such as coaches, officials, athletes and other parents. This finding was supported by Wu (2008) and Holt et al. (2008), who also found that parents can enhance children's enjoyment of their sport by demonstrating positive attitudes towards losing or poor performance. It also supported the findings of the previous studies, such as Bloom's (1985), which indicated that parents' modelling of values such as work ethic, commitment, sportsmanship and respect are essential contributions to their children's talent development.

Several studies have also reported the role of various parental behaviours in the development of talented children, ranging from nurturing their children's academic performances to facilitating their socio-emotional development. For instance, in their study of young soccer players, Holt et al. (2008) established that parents' verbal reactions to their children's performance were ranging from supportive to more controlling comments and included remarks such as praise, encouragement, instruction, and derogatory remarks. Studies by Gould et al. (2002), Fish and Magee (2003), Wu (2008) and Lauer et al. (2010) also found that parents provide emotional support by encouraging them in good or bad times and by supporting their high level of commitment. These studies also found that parents also play an important role in instilling a sense of balance between sport and life, thus limiting the pressure and enhancing their children's satisfaction. For instance, in Gould et al.'s (2002) study, parents illustrated the importance of balance during the developmental process by prioritising their children what was important, including emphasising academics and family. They were also instrumental in deciding what their children would not do, such as social activities.

Lauer et al.'s (2010) study also raised a question: "What is appropriate parental push?" (p.493), or at which point can parents be regarded as following or not following a stable behavioural pattern of pushing and pressurising their children while providing support? Their study indicated two distinct possibilities for the differences:

First, parents may be defining push differently, with some perceiving it as a negative, pressuring behavior while others seeing it as a necessary, challenging one. It is hard to find the fine line between motivating and challenging a child and pressuring them. This fine line is based on the player's perceptions of his or her parents' behaviors and attitudes. Thus, one athlete's optimal push is another athlete's controlling parental behavior. Second, it is likely that elite athletes can be developed either through pushing or not pushing, which is dependent on individual difference factors such as intrinsic motivation and the personalities of the parents and children involved (p.493).

Studies by Abrams (2002) and Gould et al. (2006) indicated that a large percentage of parents interfere with or inhibit development. The result of these studies also indicated that parental beliefs and expectations were related to athletes experiencing stress, anxiety and burnout. For instance, the way in which parents think about sport situations, such as losing, making mistakes or being cut, and general coach-athlete and athlete-athlete relationships,

causes stress and anxiety for the young athletes (Abrams, 2002) and can create a situation in which children feel entrapped in sport (Wuerth et al., 2004). However, in justifying parental negative behaviour, Lauer et al.'s (2010) suggested that since sport is a highly popular activity that provides tangible measures of success, parents possibly feel the need to invest tremendous resources, such as time and money. This emotional and financial investment often results in parents becoming overly involved and acting in ways that interfere with health development, such as constantly reminding their children of the parents' sacrifices which are seen as an investment for which they should receive a return.

The results of a study by Lauer et al. (2010) also indicated that stress and anxiety may, however, still exist, firstly, even if parents are not exhibiting the negative behaviours, and secondly, even if parents mean well in their intentions. For instance, in their study, several players admitted that they felt pressure because of their parents' involvement but when reflecting on it their parents were not exhibiting any negative behaviours. Thus, their experiences revealed that parents do not necessarily feel pressure but the child may feel pressure to make parents proud because they recognise how much effort, time and resources it takes from the parents to provide them with opportunities. Other players also indicated that a reason for the unintentional pressuring from their parents was that parents did not understand how their behaviours affected their children. Parents began making decisions, such as sending their children to an academy, based on bad advice and/or without truly understanding the consequences. What was mentioned as the reasons for such parental behaviour was that some parents were not sure how to handle transitions from home to academies or in making the decision on the importance of academic work versus sport, and some were seduced by the status of having their children as elite players.

Integrating the findings of their study, Holt et al. (2008) provided a useful illustration of the overall parental involvement which places parents' behaviour on a continuum moving from more supportive to more controlling comments that they make (See Figure 4.2, below).

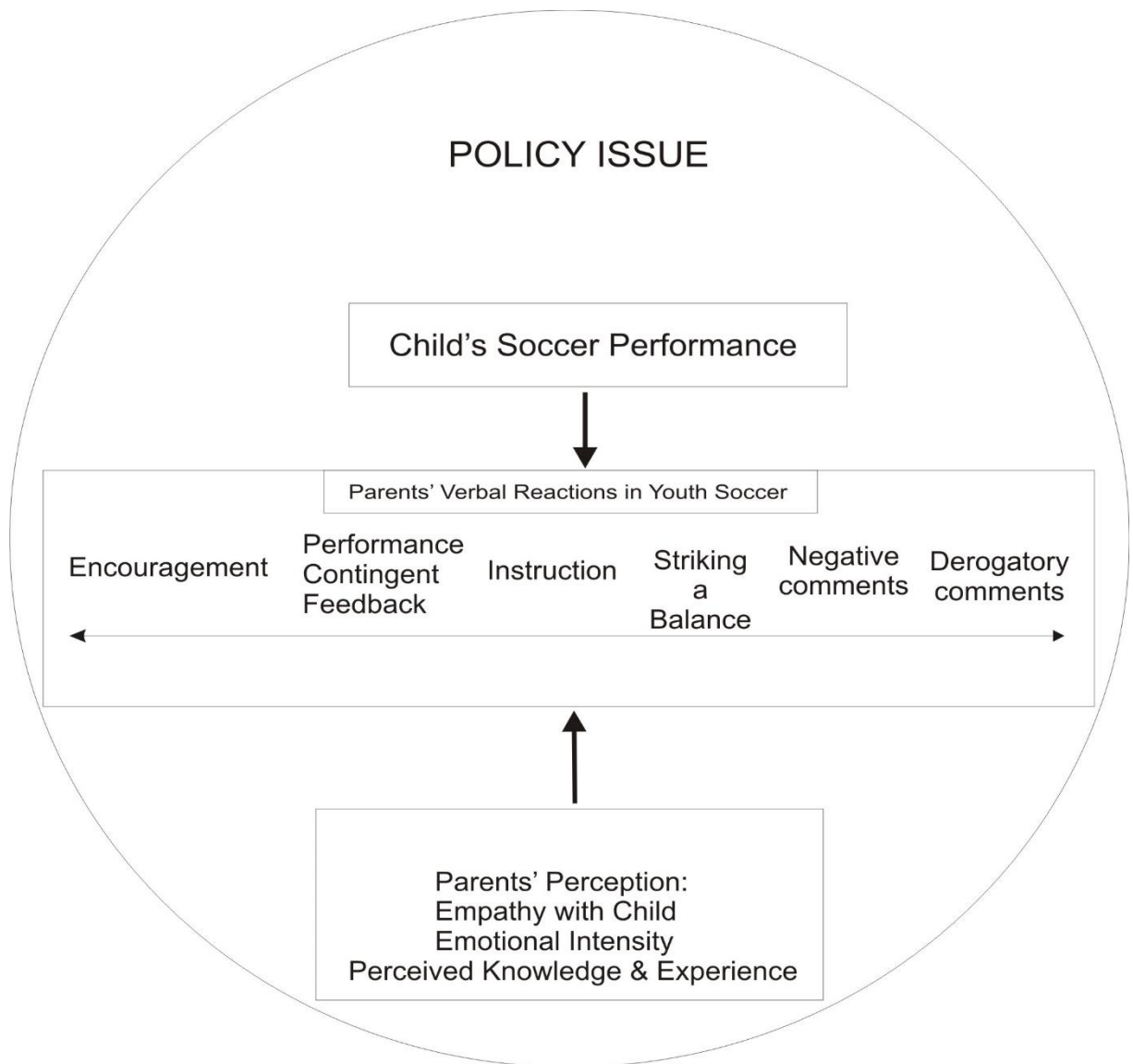


Fig. 2. Grounded theory explanation of parents' involvement in competitive soccer

Figure 4.4: Parent's involvement in their children's sport, using competitive football as an example (Holt et al., 2008, p.681).

In Figure 4.4 (above) the first suggestion is that policy issues influences parental involvement and behaviour in youth sport settings. In particular, parents' attitudes and comments about referees may be constrained by specific rules to punish such attitudes and comments. Secondly, parents' verbal reactions may be predicated on children's performance behaviours, with the continuum of parental responses representing reactive rather than proactive statements. Figure 4.2 (above) presents supportive comments on the far left of the model. Given the potential developmental benefits of parental support rather than control, the implication is that parents should make more supportive and fewer controlling statements

to their children in relation to sport performances. Holt et al. further suggest that parents' verbal reactions are influenced by contextual and personal factors such as empathy, emotional intensity, and perceived knowledge and experience.

A recent study by Dorsch et al. (2015) used Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model to study parent sport socialisation over the initial period of a first child's sport involvement and how parents make sense of how youth sport shapes family relationships and parenting practices. Their findings showed youth sport to provide new opportunities for family interaction and to shape family communication. Consequently, parents became behaviourally and emotionally engaged in youth sport, began to use sport as a vehicle to teach their children life lessons, and assimilated what was expected of parents into their behaviours in the organised youth sport setting.

4.5.6 The role of the coach

The coach-athletics relationship is one of the most explored areas of youth sport research (O'Rourke et al., 2014), defined by Adie and Jowett (2010) as a unique interpersonal relationship in which the emotions, thoughts, and behaviours of the coach and the athlete are mutually and causally interconnected. They identified three dimensions that reflect these interconnections as well as act as indicators of the quality of the relationship, namely, closeness, commitment, and complementarity. Closeness is defined as feeling emotionally close in the coach-athlete relationship, reflecting mutual trust, respect and appreciation, as well as a predilection towards liking one another. Commitment is characterised by the intention to maintain a long-term athletic partnership. Lastly, complementarity refers to complementary or cooperative coach-athlete interactions, especially during training. They referred to these dimensions as the 3Cs model.

In literature, the studies on coach-athlete relationships began with those conducted during the 1990s (e.g., Barnett, Smoll & Smith, 1992; Smoll, Smith, Barnett & Everett, 1993). The prominent findings of these studies were that when compared to untrained coaches, those who were well trained were better liked; created a more enjoyable atmosphere; created more team unity; and had lower dropout rates than untrained coaches. Recent studies have also confirmed the results of the previous studies and made several attempts to give a better understanding of the components as well as to extend them (e.g., Riley & Smith, 2011;

Malete, Chow & Feltz, 2013; O'Rourke et al., 2014; Isoard-Gauthew, Trouilloud, Gustafsson & Guillet-Descas, 2016; Erickson & Côté, 2016).

Outside the family, coaches are a crucial influence in nurturing talent in sport, particularly through adolescence. They are responsible for designing practices, encouraging their athletes to train on a long-term basis, and giving instructions (Barreiros et al., 2013). Coaches and managers need know how the players perceive and interpret their own paths to specialisation and how they cope with the pressure put on them in order to improve plans, structure, and management of programmes for potential talent. Research (e.g., Smith, Smoll & Cumming, 2007; Adie, Duda & Ntoumanis, 2012; Christianson, Breker & Deutsch, 2012; Taylor & Bruner, 2012; Prichard & Deutsch, 2015) also unremittingly extend a proposal that athletes who have a psychologically satisfying relationship and who are made to feel efficacious, valued and autonomous by their coach are more likely to regulate their emotions and thus experience positive development.

Prichard and Deutsch (2015) particularly concurred with previous studies by indicating that coaches' behaviour during training and games influence the nature and the quality of the athletes' sport experiences. They contribute to the creation of the motivational climate by the goal priorities they promote, the attitudes and values they transmit, and the way they treat athletes in their teams. They also play a determinant role in regard of the opportunities given, which ultimately contributes to favouring or inhibiting athletes' development. Also, the degree to which players perceive coaches to build rapport with them has been found to be positively related to their psychological need satisfaction (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Adie et al., 2012). Their findings also showed that coaches who are seen to be approachable and trustworthy and who demonstrate concern for their players were likely to satisfy the psychological needs of young players, thus creating a foundation for positive youth development. Cushion and Jones (2006) suggested that coaches can achieve this by including all players in regular evaluative discursive team meetings, as well as promoting emotional engagement through shared personal insights during teambuilding activities. By enhancing cohesion, players may be more likely to experience psychological need fulfilment (Taylor & Bruner, 2012).

A study by Malete et al. (2013) conducted in Botswana confirmed the results of the study conducted by Riley and Smith (2011), that the quality of the coach-athlete relationship was related to players' self-determination and motivation, and that coaches played a determinant role in regard to the opportunities given, which ultimately contributes to favouring or

inhibiting athletes' development. As Riley and Smith (2011) indicate, it is known that coaches often privilege early matured athletes or those born at the beginning of the year of birth. As O'Rourke et al. (2014) suggest, coaches play a critically important role in youth talent development. They are in a position of power and have direct contact with athletes, hence there have been efforts to develop coach training interventions that focus on encouraging coaching behaviours known to be effective in producing positive outcomes in young athletes.

4.5.7 Cultural factors

Recent literature on sport talent and career development appears to be increasingly highlighting the notion that athletes' talent and career development and transitions are culturally situated (e.g., Stambulova & Alfermann, 2009; Subotnik et al., 2011; Agergaard & Ryba, 2014; Schinke et al., 2015; Blodgett & Schinke, 2015; Ronkainen et al., 2016; Ryba, Stambulova & Ronkainen, 2016). In order to highlight this view, researchers have been predominantly conducting cross-cultural studies with a view to gaining an "insight into the processes of how individuals produce their own development through work and relationships in shifting cultural patterns of meaning" (Ryba et al., 2016). This research indicated both differences and similarities between athletes' talent and careers in different communities within single countries (e.g., Subotnik et al., 2011) as well as between different countries (e.g., Stambulova & Alfermann, 2009). Beside the cross-cultural studies, a literature review conducted by Ronkainen et al. (2016) within the field of sport psychology shows an increasing in a number of researchers who are opting for a shift away from one-dimensional categorical understandings of culture and are now re-conceptualising it as part of shifting discourses that produce situated meanings. They are also studying culture as an internal process, more than an external entity that fundamentally shapes athletes' sense of self and the way they create meaning around their experiences and transitions (Blodgett & Schinke, 2015).

The general notion is that culture and other societal forces influence the development of talent through providing a framework and meaning for the purposes and goals of talent development. For example, cultures that value certain fields and domains and make them more available to children via access to instruction and programmes (e.g., chess, football) will produce more prodigies and champions in those fields. A study conducted by

Stambulova and Ryba (2013) among Danish athletes illustrated this notion, with their findings indicating that, unlike cultures in countries such as USA and Russia, where the goals of sport appear to comprise an “I want to be the best” attitude, Danish culture embraces equality and the idea of productive citizenship in which everybody is expected to contribute to communal welfare.

Other studies on talent development conducted by Borland (2003) and Gaztambide-Fernandez, Saifer and Desai (2013) among the United States population pointed out the extent to which educational programmes were informed by the dominant culture which served White and upper-middle-class children to a degree disproportionate to their numbers in the population, while poor and non-White children were disadvantaged. Gaztambide-Fernandez et al. (2013) pointed out that, without a consideration of the crucial role of culture, researchers within the field of talent development were struggling to account for the majority of the children who were most likely to benefit from talent education programs being those who were already advantaged by social positions and privileges.

Ryba et al. (2016) pointed to a cultural transition as another issue that often has a significant impact on young athletes’ developing careers. Their study indicated that a cultural transition, whether across or within different countries, has important implications for athletes’ adjustment to new sport processes, such as playing style, team interaction and the coach-athlete relationship, and may also create difficulties for the players in their lives outside sport (Ryba et al., 2016). The indication was that the migrant athletes have to confront a challenge to navigate the shifting meanings of sport context from those in their home countries or regions to those of their host countries or regions. This could be an explanation as to why Schinke, McGannon, Battochio and Wells (2013) found that a large number of young players decide to return to their countries and regions before completing their contracts with foreign clubs. The contextual contingency of meanings present obstacles in their attempt to adapt within new cultural and sporting communities. Ryba et al.’s (2016) findings identified three underlying mechanisms of the transition process that assisted athletic career adaptability, namely, social repositioning, negotiation of cultural practices, and meaning reconstruction.

These findings concurred with previous ones by Roderick (2012), that, firstly, poor or incorrect expectancy of the cultural differences which awaited athletic migrants in their host environment and neglected to expand on normalised ways of being were linked to confusion, resentment, emotional disconnection, and social withdrawal as the subsequent stage of their

career. Secondly, athletes who were unable to establish an affective and cognitive connection with the new locality by integrating new cultural meanings, and consequently expanding their own mode of being, were dissatisfied with their professional development and had to look for new possibilities of constructing the life-course. Thirdly, athletes who considered themselves psychologically adjusted to the new culture reported higher levels of satisfaction with non-sport related aspects of everyday life. Their last finding was that the migrant athletes' abilities to continuously reposition themselves in transient contexts, calibrating their social relations and practices while navigating shifting meanings, further highlighted the constitutive link between the developmental tasks of cultural transition and career adaptability.

4.6 TALENT DEVELOPMENT IN FOOTBALL

Stemming from initial research in the education domain, sport researchers have conducted a variety of studies exploring the development of talent among the athletes, comprising the exploration of the developmental experiences of young athletes (e.g., Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2010); analysis of the factors that contribute towards talent development, such as innate issues and deliberate practice (e.g., Bloom, 1985; Baker & Horton, 2004; Coughlan et al., 2014), and the influence of the family context (Calderon et al., 2007). Recent literature shows an increase interest in the study of talent development in football (e.g., Williams & Reilly, 2000; Holt & Dunn, 2004; Martindale, Collins & Abraham, 2007; Sagar, Busch & Jowett, 2010; Christensen, Laursen & Soerensen, 2011; Larsen et al., 2012; Taylor & Bruner, 2012; Elferink-Gemser, Huijgen, Coelho-E-Silva, Lemmink & Visscher, 2012; Mills et al., 2012; Larsen et al., 2013). However, a literature review indicates that whilst much research has been conducted in European and Scandinavian countries there is a dearth of such in South Africa.

The definition of football talent is not different from that used in any other sport domain. The general notion is that talent development in football is interlinked in such a manner that the purpose is to build up the athlete's resources to cope with the demands of career transitions inside and outside sport (Larsen et al., 2012). Hence, in football, talent is described interchangeably or inclusively with a footballer's preconditions for success, that is, innate potential, and as an outcome of the development process, that is, athletic excellence during youth (Henriksen, 2010).

Generally, talent development researchers have outlined two main ways of developing talent, the first of which advocates sampling a range of sports before choosing to specialise in one, with the choice being accompanied by a gradual move away from deliberate play which is low in structure but high in enjoyment, towards deliberate practice as a more healthy route to top-level performance. The second is the one that is adopted for talent development in football academies, which advocate early specialisation and deliberate practice that is high in structure but low in enjoyment, leading to elite performance (Darby et al., 2007; Henriksen et al., 2011).

4.6.1 The enhancement of talent development in football players

Researchers such as Williams and Reilly (2000), Sagar et al. (2010) and Csaki et al. (2014) share an opinion that the components of football talent are similar to those in various team sports. Similar to other sports, a successful talent development environment in football is defined as a club environment that manages to continually produce top-level players on the basis of their junior players, and provide them with resources for coping with future transitions. Resources for coping are football-specific skills as well as “broader set of psychosocial skills that help the athletes handle dual career and in general develop as a person that ease the often stressful transitions to senior level, and facilitate the entrance to professional sport” (Larsen, 2013, pp.190-191).

Figure 4.5 (below) provides an example of a holistic description of the common components of talent development.

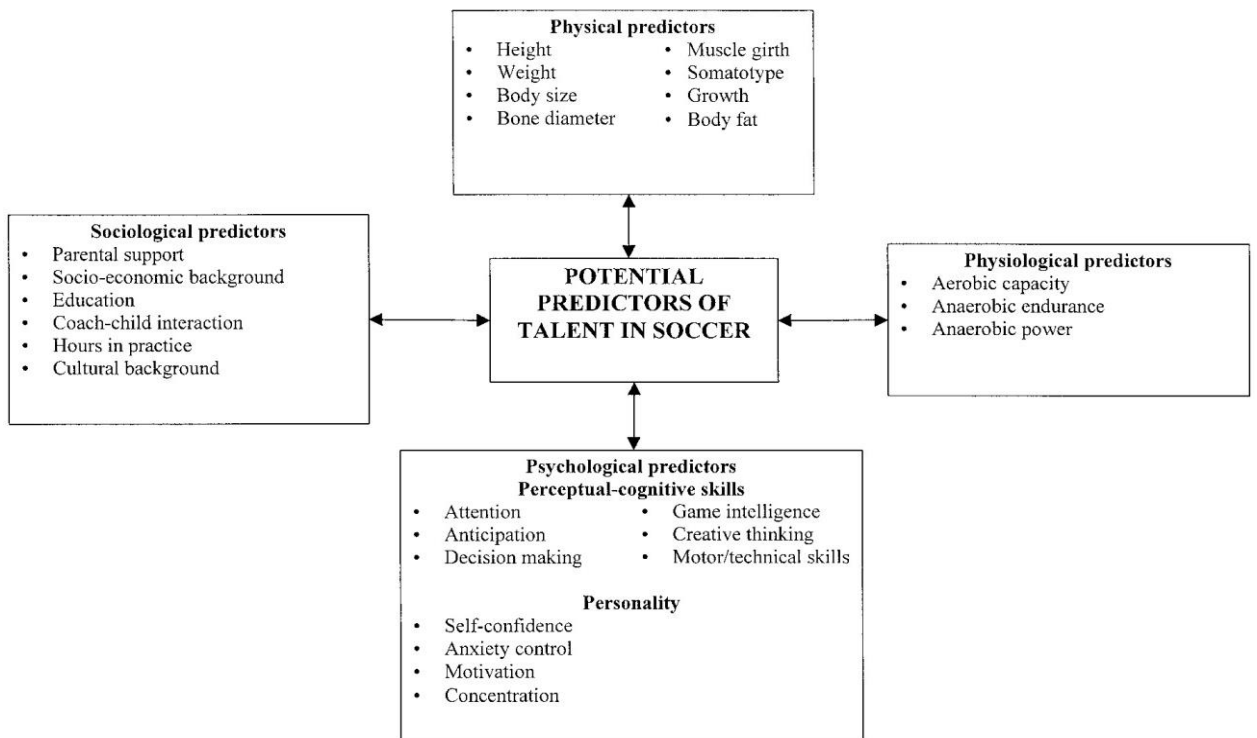


Figure 4.5: Holistic representation of the components of talent in football (Williams & Reilly, 2000, p.665)

A holistic understanding of talent is a pathway towards rendering a holistic football talent development, which according to Mudege (2011) has to address issues relating to:

- The amount and quality of practice required to achieve elite levels of performance
- The roles of coaches and family in the lives of developing athletes
- The provision of an appropriate environment for developing athletes
- Specialization in specific sports at appropriate ages; and
- The establishment of appropriate competitive structures and planning (p.14)

An example of a holistic football talent development is the one offered by the United States youth coaching education department. The United States Youth Soccer Coaching Education Department (2012) in their project aimed at helping youth soccer coaches and football clubs raise the level of talent development across the USA, also emphasising that the clubs have to provide daily training and playing environment that is consistent and of the highest quality. As indicated in Figure 4.4 (below), they developed a Player Development Pyramid that gives broad direction to football environments while impacting the development of youth players.

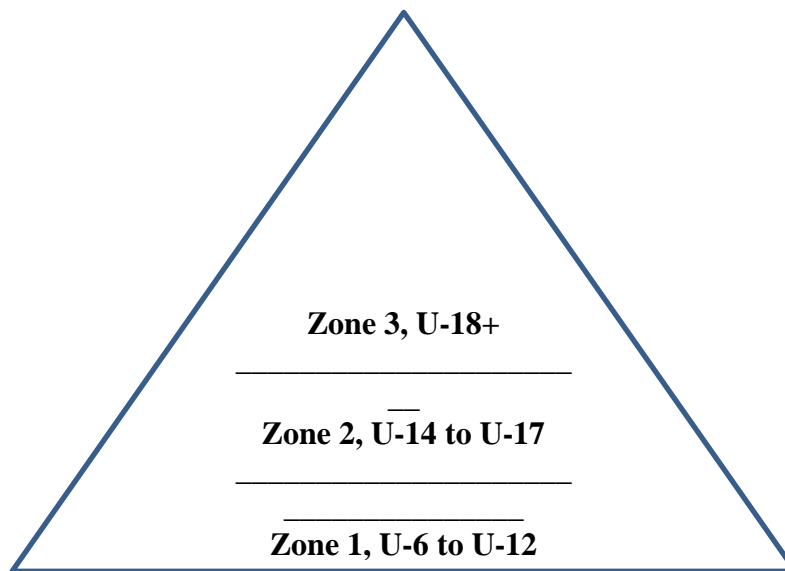


Figure 4.6: Player Development Pyramid depicting a holistic football talent development programme (The United States Youth Soccer Coaching Education Department, 2012, p.9)

Zone 1 has a technical emphasis that is accomplished by focusing on player development instead of match outcome. The intent is for coaches, club administrators and parents of the players to spotlight the process of playing the game, rather than the score. The measurement of success in Zone 1 is the players' improvement of ball skills, understanding of the rules of the game, playing fairly and learning general game principles. Zone 2 puts emphasis on the club culture and daily training atmosphere. There must be more training sessions and fewer matches so the players can learn the details of tactics, team formation and game strategies. Zone 3 takes the player towards professional player development. It is the age to focus on the outcome of the match as well as the quality of performance.

Beside the abovementioned aspects, the other enhancement factors listed by Culross (2015) were intense preparation and careful application of techniques from the fields of nutrition, sport psychology, and sport medicine. Attention should be paid to the players' diet, working with the advice of nutritional experts. Regarding sport psychology, players can benefit from the established psychological techniques to maximise their performance and deal with such aspects as managing the pressure of competition, handling distractions, and dealing with underperformance. In South Africa, one example of a football talent development programme that addressed all of the issues highlighted by Williams & Reilly (2000) and Mudege (2007) is 'Project Ithuseng', currently offered by Draper, Forbers, Taylor and

Lambert (2012) to selected professional football clubs in the South African PSL, first division and women's national teams.

Research examining the development experiences of elite young athletes and the talent development systems which serve them plays a vital role in evaluating the effectiveness of youth systems and providing suggestions for continuing programme improvement (Holt, 2002; Mudege, 2011; Larsen, 2013). For instance, the study by Mudege (2011) drew a useful conclusion that talent development in South African football is a multifactorial and complex process and highlighted such factors as training environment, a motivational climate, family support, coaching support and 'cultural' support as some of the crucial factors characterising football talent development.

4.6.2 Football talent development systems

The concept of organised football talent development programmes as a system in the form of club academies originated in European countries (Holt, 2002). Recently it has had a substantial and a growing presence in countries around the world, including South Africa (Maradas, 2001). Among the reasons for such growth in Africa has, firstly, been the growing profile and status of African national teams in the international arena since the mid-1980s, and, secondly, the programmes have become increasingly important in football due to the increasing internationalisation of football, resulting in international competition for talented youth players (Darby, 2002).

In South Africa football club academies began to receive attention in the beginning of a new millennium (South African Football Association, 2004). Defined in the broadest terms, football club academies are structured facilities or coaching programs designed to guide talented youth players towards professional status in adulthood (Elferink-Gemser et al., 2012; Darby et al., 2007). Club academies around the world share a similar philosophy with typical youth football academies found throughout Europe, where that they provide young talented players with football education alongside academic education in mainstream schools (Holt, 2002). Literature, however, shows that different countries have different systems that they follow in helping players deal with football and school demands. For instance, as Stambulova and Ryba (2013) explain, in USA football players, as other athletes who are going through development programmes, are school-based. In contrast, in Australia and some West European countries such as France, UK and Germany, players are club-

based and hence special arrangements between football and schools are necessary (Holt, 2002). In other countries, such as the Netherlands, there is an example of the Ajax youth academy in which players are not club-based but live within a radius of Amsterdam in which the Ajax football club is based. Some of the players have moved into the area to attend the academy (Sokolove, 2010), but while they are expected to continue with their education, sport involvement tends to be intense and football represents a meaningful part of the young footballer's lives. They have to balance the contradictory demands from the education establishment and football clubs (Mudege, 2011).

Typically, club academies provide top-notch coaching input, contemporary sport science support and life skills programmes that ensure players gain balanced development in all walks of life. They have similar objectives to those of schools, namely to give children an education for life (Satta, 2015). Hence, Satta refers to academies as “a place where a culture of sports, education and citizenship is constructed” (p. 281). In this regard, Satta raises concern that the education intention of the staff of the football academy demonstrates the ‘double colonization’ (p.279) to which the young players are subjected through organised sport facilities that are managed by adults. According to her, in their learning of football techniques, the players are viewed as subjects to be socialised rather than as participants. Football academies thus subscribe to an incomplete conception of children which view them as ‘becoming’ (p.297) and maintaining an adult-centric organisational culture that leaves little room for the participation of children or for the collaborative construction of inter-generational knowledge.

The players, for their part, find themselves not only in a subordinate position but in the crossfire of interference from other sources of knowledge and other powers. These sources are, for instance, the players' parents and the advice that they offer their children which frequently contradicts the ‘legitimate knowledge’ (p.297) transmitted by the coach. For instance, as noted by Douglas and Carless (2006) and Carless and Douglas (2012), a dominant sport academy model in European heritage countries has been developed upon a strong tradition of a performance narrative. This has become a challenge as many of the countries and communities who have since appropriated the sport academy model are culturally and linguistically diverse. Hence, even though one sector views the concept of academies as representing an opportunity for organised and concerted grassroots development for the African game, the other sector is sceptical about the primary aims of this talent development system (Darby et al., 2007). Much has been written about how a

particular social need at a particular point in Western and European history created particular institutional structures and how the legacy of those remains even when they have been imported to culturally and linguistically diverse countries (Nsamenang, 2003; Rogoff, 2003; Hedegaard, 2005; Tudge, 2008; Satta, 2015). When the foreign institutional structures are imported and enacted within the communities in foreign countries, people in inheriting countries become “enculturated into the structures’ practices and they find themselves having to appropriate the conceptual tools and discourses” available to them which guide them in their enactment of those foreign structures (Fleer, 2006, p.128).

According to Darby et al. (2007), football academies in Africa can be classified into four categories. The first are African academies, organised and run by African clubs or African national federations, which operate on the surface at least in a manner similar to those existing in Europe. This category is common in South Africa where all clubs affiliated to the PSL are obliged to institute their own youth talent development programmes. It is a PSL regulation that for the affiliated clubs to receive a monthly grant from the league they are co-ordinate youth academies, maintain talent development structures, improve club facilities and ensure that their coaches at all levels have a minimum required coaching qualifications (Mudege, 2011). Such a regulation is similar to the one stipulated by the English Football Association’s (EFA) charter for excellence, which gives professional clubs a mandate to develop talented young players through club football academies (Holt, 2002).

The second category are Afro-European academies which involve either a partnership between an existing academy and a European club or an arrangement whereby a European club takes a controlling interest in an African club then either subsumes the club’s existing youth structures or establishes new ones. This partnership typically takes two forms. Firstly, European clubs set up academies or training centres or invests in existing ones and in return they have first claim on the best players that are produced. The Ajax Cape Town’s Ikamva Academy is one notable example of such a partnership that exists in South Africa. Ajax Amsterdam bought a 51 % controlling stake in a Cape Town club, Cape Town Spurs, subsequently renamed Ajax Cape town (Darby et al., 2007). The third category can be classified as private or corporate-sponsored academies, which have well-established foundations and operate with the support and sponsorship of private individuals, usually former high-profile African players, national football federations, or the corporate sector. In South Africa there are few examples of such academies that were established by former professional football players (Darby et al., 2007). The fourth type are the non-affiliated,

improvised academies, which are set up on an ad hoc basis and involve poorly qualified staff and lack proper facilities. These academies often operate in an uncoordinated manner but have attracted interest and sponsorship from some national and regional corporations. They are largely initiatives on the part of individuals who see the training and education as a business venture. In South Africa this type of academy has shown some success in grooming players from the remote rural areas to the professional clubs, and even to European clubs (Darby et al., 2007).

Mills et al. (2012) found that for every elite-level adult soccer player there are hundreds of young players engaged in sport at a different level of challenge. In the USA it has been estimated that, at one point in time, 20 million children between the ages of 6 and 18 years participate in some form of organised sport programme (Mills et al., 2012). Precise data on the number of youth involved in organised soccer programmes in South Africa are difficult to obtain (Mudege, 2011). In South Africa there exist a number of SAFA accredited soccer centres of excellence in South Africa, though few are fully fledged soccer academies. Some are mostly run by the soccer clubs affiliated to the PSL, while others are run by independent organizations (SAFA, 2009). Talent scouts appointed by these centres are normally responsible for identifying talented youth for recruitment to join the academies. The normal procedure to identify talented players is for young players from the age of 10, and sometimes younger, to be observed by academy scouts during schools' or regional competitions. At the club, talent training days are organised in which players are given the opportunity to convince a team of coaches that they should be selected to join their talent development programme (Elferink-Gemser et al., 2012).

As an international phenomenon, the primary aims of the soccer centres of excellence are, firstly, to identify and develop young talented soccer players with potential. Development is mainly in the key areas of technical and tactical play, physical fitness and strength, motivation discipline and mental strength. Secondly, they aim to provide a professional support service to assist coaches, soccer players and technical officials in the sport of soccer, and thirdly, they provide a proper balance between education, development of talent in soccer and leisure. Players who finish the programme in these centres are either signed onto a professional contract or released. William's (2009) study showed that in England about 90% of those who join an academy fail to make it as professionals.

An increased participatory involvement of young football players in organised football academies has generated significant research, not only in relation to the psychological

effects of youth participation but also in relation to their impact on football talent development (e.g., Darby et al., 2007; Mudege, 2011; Mills et al., 2012). On one hand, there are studies conducted in Western African countries that have found some of the academies to be involved in nefarious practices, exploiting the poverty and aspirations of young players and impoverishing the game of football (e.g., Tataw, 2001).

In his publication that analysed the trafficking of football players from Cameroon to Europe, Tataw suggested that the primary concern surrounding the eruption in the number of academies in Africa is that these facilities are, in essence, nothing more than fronts for the systematic deskilling and exploitation of Africa's football resources. The concern is that, despite all the investment, only a fraction of players successfully make the transition to adult professional football players (Holt, 2002), yet few, if any, of the academies concern themselves with preparing the young players for a life outside football. Therefore, the fate of those players who fail to secure a professional contract on completion of their academy training, a group whose number far exceeds those who actually go on to earn a living from the game, is largely at stake. As Darby et al. (2007) state:

Although many of the academies provide a general schooling and cater for the all-round development of the student, the majority concern themselves primarily with the provision of intensive football training. This emphasis on football, combined with the dreams of young African players of "making it" in Europe, often leads to a disregard for academic or vocational training, and when the vast majority leave the academy at 18 with their aspirations of a professional contract unfulfilled, their prospects are often bleak (p.156).

The concern is therefore that for every player who makes it to professional football there are thousands of others investing millions of hours of practice, time that could be spent on school work or learning another trade without even reaching the first hurdle. Only a handful out of each year's intake to the academy will make a living from football. The rest are destined to be turned loose at 18 to fend for themselves (Maradas, 2001).

On the other hand, some academies have been found to be contributing positively to the development of African football. As Darby et al.'s (2007) findings indicated, such academies, firstly, were found to be providing proper training facilities and a coordinated and systematic approach to youth player development and consequently improve the level and abilities of young African players. Secondly, they were found to be contributing toward

the development of the international game in Africa, with youth and senior teams benefiting from the superior technical training that young players receive as part of their academy education. Lastly, they were also found to be contributing to broader development within African society. For instance, those players who successfully graduate from African academies to European clubs earn salaries that are far in excess of average incomes in their country of origin. This benefits not only the individual players but also their extended families, with part of their salaries typically being sent home. This reinvestment of money earned in Europe often extend beyond family circles, and a number of returning migrant players have used part of their incomes in business, social, or football-specific projects. In South Africa, two of the most successful businessman and football managers, Kaizer Motaung and Jomo Sono, invested their earnings from the times when they were playing abroad to start up their businesses.

In club academies, talented youth players go through extensive physical training, play practice and competitive matches at regular times (Holt, 2002). A study by Gould et al. (2002a) found that in the United States academies youth players spent an average of 12 hours a week engaged in sport over the course of an 18-week season, with a large proportion of a youngster's free time devoted to sport participation.

4.6.3 Features of a successful sport academy

According to Larsen et al. (2013), in order for the academies to be regarded as successful they must manage to continually produce top-level players on the bases of their youth players, and provide them with resources for coping with future transitions. Furthermore, as Perkins and Noam's (2007) findings indicated, some of the common features listed in literature are, firstly, physical and psychological safety. For instance, the environment must be free of health and safety hazards, clean and must have easily accessible drinking water. The emotional climate within the talent development environment has to be predominantly supportive, mutually respectful, and characterised by inclusiveness. Secondly, the structure must have clear communication, developmentally appropriate flow and pace of sessions, and unambiguous rules and expectations. Thirdly, there must be supportive relationships between all. Fourthly, the culture of the environment must involve conventionally positive social norms and good sportsmanship. It must be a positive peer group culture that establishes social norms that reduce social alienation and allow for the acquisition of

improved social skills. Lastly, the environment must emphasise the athletes' improvements in their athletic abilities rather than focusing on their superior abilities as compared to those of peers. In as much as players are essentially competing with each other to secure one of the few professional contracts clubs offer, the emphasis should not be on competition. The emphasis on completion was actually pointed out by Sokolove (2010) as the downfall of football academies in USA, where coaches could not break the habit of trying, first and foremost, to win rather than focusing on the goal of developing talent. As Mills et al. (2012) state, the players need to be made to understand that being a team player would actually enhance their chances of becoming a professional.

4.7 SUMMARY

An overview of literature reviews in this chapter provided a description of talent development, including the models and elements of a typical successful talent development process. Literature on football academies was also reviewed with focus on the background of the academies as well as the philosophy behind them. It is important to note that the literature review indicated a dearth of published work on football talent development in South Africa.

The next chapter presents the methodology that was used to collect data for this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

METHODOLOGY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study aimed to identify and explore contextual conditions associated with becoming a professional soccer player; to identify and explore factors influencing the environment's success in developing talented male soccer players and; to present a qualitatively derived ecological framework of the environmental conditions associated with becoming a professional soccer player. This chapter presents the research design, the participants, the methods through which data was collected and analysed data for this study, and the ethical considerations that were observed by the researcher throughout the process.

5.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

As noted in Chapter 1, the major assumptions for the present study were those of culturally sensitive research, hence its methodology was situated in a cultural praxis framework proposed by Ryba and Wright (2005) as a guiding principle for research on talent and career development in sport. Those engaged in culturally sensitive research recognise that research is not an innocent exercise, but “an activity that has something at stake; the power to produce knowledge about people and represent their lives in meaningful or marginalizing ways” (Blogett et al., 2014, p.347).

Culturally sensitive research approaches put value on individual and collective knowledge derived from the life experience of the participants, and this knowledge is placed at the centre of inquiry (Secor-Turner et al., 2010). In this study the focus was on issues of sociocultural differences in order to situate the research in the “glocal” culture of football (Kavoura et al., 2014, p.2). As Kavoura et al. suggest, by situating this research in the “glocal” culture of football the researcher presumed that the young footballers who participated in this study practiced and understood football talent development in a unique way due to the juxtaposition of the football's globalized culture and the local South African culture. Stemming from this core doctrine, a culturally sensitive methodology was employed with an acknowledgement that centralising of the cultural protocols, values, and practices of

the community was an integral research component that was to lead to the development of locally relevant knowledge (Blodgett et al., 2014).

The research design that was used in this study was a single case study design, which Researchers such as Henriksen et al. (2010a) and Larsen et al. (2012) regard as an adequate methodological approach to the holistic ecological study of sport talent development, mainly because it allows for the retention of the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events. Henriksen (2010) particularly suggested that “the complex and dynamic nature of the environments and the objective of developing a rich and detailed insight into actual existing environments called for a case study approach” (p.45). A case study aims to develop a deep understanding of the holistic meaningful characteristics of real-life events, persons, or contexts (Larsen et al., 2013). The distinguishable feature of a case study design is that while the researcher is unable to control the environment, the researcher’s own preconceptions, awareness and sensitivity to the environment is essential for the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Larsen et al. (2013) acknowledge that one of the critiques of the case study that is relevant to this study is that it cannot provide a basis for generalisation. Their counterargument is that choosing a case strategically may significantly add to the generalisability of a case study. In line with this argument the case that was selected for this study was expected to be high in information content since it was one of the most successful clubs in developing young football talent in South Africa. In selecting a single case, the researcher was not aiming for “a statistical generalization, but rather for an analytical generalization” (Larsen et al., 2013, p.193).

Another critique relevant to this study is that case studies “contain more bias towards verification (confirming the researchers’ preconceived notions) than other research”. To refute this critique, the researcher read previous research on sport talent development “not to replicate its findings but to become aware of his preconceived notions” as a researcher and a sport psychologist, “in order for him *not* to be seduced by them” (Larsen et al., 2013, p. 193). Consistent with previous research on sport talent development which was positioned as cultural praxis (e.g., Blodgett et al., 2010; Schinke et al., 2009; Ryba & Wright, 2010; McGannon & Smith, 2015; Ronkainen, Watkins & Ryba, 2016), the present study utilised a qualitative research design. Ryba and Wright (2010) are among the first in the field of sport psychology to argue that a qualitative research design aligns well with the central tenets of cultural praxis, more than any other research tradition.

Qualitative research design is typically oriented to the inductive study of socially constructed reality, focusing on meanings, ideas and practices as well as taking the research participants' point of view seriously (Blodgett et al., 2014). It allows for the personal and contextual aspects of a phenomenon to be examined by offering an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences. It thus allows for access to the meaning in their lived experiences and provides vivid descriptions nested in a real context (Silverman, 2013). Researchers who adopt a qualitative research design employ a naturalistic or interpretive paradigm that seeks to understand a phenomenon in specific, real-world settings in which the researcher does not attempt to manipulate it. In that manner, researchers understand how participants explain a phenomenon in a particular context within which they function, as well as the impact of this context on their functioning (Maxwell, 2013).

The major critique of qualitative research that is relevant to the present study is that, firstly, unlike in quantitative research, research rigor tends to be a challenge to maintain, assess and demonstrate. Secondly, research quality is heavily dependent on the individual skills of the researcher and is more easily influenced by the researcher's personal biases and idiosyncrasies. The researcher was thus aware that, since the researcher is the primary tool in qualitative research, it was necessary to have good rapport with the participants, possess superior interviewing techniques, and be able to ask questions in such a way that the interviewee would speak freely during the interviews (Clark & Harwood, 2014). The researcher had more than 15 years' experience in conducting qualitative research.

5.3 PARTICIPANTS

The football club academy owned by one of the professional clubs affiliated to the PSL was chosen as a case for this study, on the basis of the following criteria. First, it was conveniently accessible to the researcher; second, the club academy had a successful history of producing elite football players in the country and abroad. In line with Henriksen (2010), the indicators of a successful history were that many players from this chosen club's development structure had gone on to play for professional clubs and some in top international football leagues such as the English Premier League. Over the previous two decades the academy had been represented by more players in the senior national teams, compared to other clubs in South Africa. A large number of young prospect players have had a successful transition to the senior elite level than is usual in other football

environments in South Africa. The precise formulation of these criteria was undertaken with the assistance of a senior sports journalist who had 31 years' experience as a football journalist in South Africa. As Henriksen (2010) postulated, this made it probable that the selected club environment at the time of the study was similar in structure and culture to earlier, when it was known to have been successful, and that it still would be.

The participants for this study were connected to the microenvironment and were derived from a target population of young football players, their parents and coaches. It is, however, important to note that, as a result of the ecological approach, the population of players in the academy was included either as interviewees or during observation. For the purpose of the interviews, ten young male footballers in a football club academy were recruited as purposively sampled as primary participants, having been identified by the club as talented and thus included in the development programme designed as a transition from talented junior to elite senior football players. Players in the Under 17 group and who were in the age group of 15 to 17 years were preferred for this study because all had spent at least a year with the academy and their early experiences were assumed to be fresh in their memories.

Parents and coaches were preferred as key informants in line with previous researchers (e.g., Holt & Dunn, 2004; Schinke et al., 2009) who have recommended interviewing an athlete triad of player, coach, and parent in order to allow for deeper and richer insight into the developmental experiences of the athletes and also to aid the trustworthiness of the results of the study. As Holt and Dunn (2004) postulated, parents and coaches are the essential elements in the players' micro-environment, providing additional insight into the athletes' developmental experiences that corroborate or refute data from the players' interviews. Data collected from parents and coaches was therefore used to triangulate and confirm or repudiate information obtained during interviews with the players in order to further strengthen the trustworthiness of the results of the present study.

Five parents of the players who were participants to the study were recruited to participate in this study. Letters requesting them to do so were given to them to hand on to their parents (See Appendix III). Two players had their biological fathers agreeing to participate, two their uncles (one uncle was a biological father's younger brother and another uncle was a brother to a biological mother) and one his biological mother. Two of the participating players' residential coaches, both males were invited, having been former professional football players with a coaching qualification obtained from FIFA and more than five years'

experience in a football talent development academy, during which they coached players who subsequently progressed to senior and international football.

In total, 17 participants were interviewed for the purpose of this study. A sample larger than this was not preferred because, as Silverman (2013) states, it is likely to preclude the kind of intensive analysis usually preferred in qualitative research.

5.4 INSTRUMENTS

The data collection instruments used to collect data for this study were in-depth interviews and unstructured observations, as recommended by cultural researchers (e.g., Ryba et al., 2010; Stambulova & Ryba, 2013).

5.4.1 The interviews

An in-depth, open-ended, and semi-structured interview guide was compiled by the researcher based on protocols developed and utilised by previous football-specific talent development researchers (i.e., Holt & Dunn, 2004; Henriksen, 2010; Larsen et al., 2013; Gledhill & Harwood, 2015) (see Appendix 1). In-depth interviews are preferred by researchers as the primary data collection method because the more open format allows researchers to flexibly follow up on the participants' feelings and ideas, to probe responses, and to pursue unexpected or promising lines of inquiry (Silverman, 2013).

A guide was used, firstly to provide a chronological framework and as a flexible, supportive tool for the interviews (Ryba et al., 2016), and secondly, to allow reflection on the part of the interviewees and to make sure they commented on pre-selected issues derived from the research questions (Henriksen, 2010). During the interviews, the researcher and the interviewees could diverge from the questions to deepen understanding, based on the information provided or until saturation was deemed to have occurred on a particular topic. Three types of qualitative questions were utilised in order to assure depth of participant responses: (a) open-ended main questions; (b) probe questions; and (c) follow-up questions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Patton, 2014). Main questions were in English and constituted the interview guide. Questions were open-ended, allowing the participants to use their own words to describe their experiences. Probe questions aimed to clarify responses to these

questions. When necessary, follow-up questions were also asked in order to investigate new issues that arose during the interview process.

The guide covered four main aspects: (a) *Introduction and players' initiation into football*; (b) *Players' ambitions and personal development*; (c) *The club environment culture*; and (d) *Overcoming obstacles*. The questions explored the factors contributing to the environment's success and comprised questions about preconditions, process, players' individual development and organisational culture (Holt & Dunn, 2004; Henriksen, 2010).

The parents' and coaches' interviews covered the same aspects as those covered by the players' interviews. In line with Larsen et al. (2013), coaches and parents were interviewed to find out how they ensured that the immediate environment was conducive to the talent-development process, how they assessed its effect on the development of the players' football talent, and what was done to optimise this.

5.4.2 Observation

Unstructured observation was used to shape the researcher's comprehensive understanding of the context of the lives of the young football players in a club academy by providing an additional lens for the understanding and interpretation of the players' experiences. As Tudge and Hogan (2004) postulate, observation fits well within an ecological, contextual paradigm since it captures participants' activities without separating them from context. Unstructured observation provides insight into interactions between the participants and their environment, shows the whole picture, captures context/process and informs about the influence of the environment (Maxwell, 2013):

Listening to the myths and stories, watching rites, customs and traditions, and seeing buildings, logos and styles of clothing (cultural artifacts), gives the researcher an impression of how the environment creates and maintains its culture. Sharing these experiences is often the only way to access themes that interviewees would never mention, either because the themes are too obvious or unimportant from their perspective or simply because it is too difficult to verbalize (Henriksen, 2010, pp 55-56).

When conducting unstructured observation, the researcher does not follow the approach of trailing a list of fixed behaviours such as would happen in structured observation. Instead, he or she enters the research field with no predetermined notions as to the discrete

behaviours that they might observe (Maxwell, 2013). Some researchers may have some notions as to what to observe, but these may change over time as data is gathered and experience is accumulated in the research setting. A loosely structured observation guide consisting of several areas of interest derived from Bronfenbrenner's (1985) PPCT and Henriksen's (2010) ESF models. Guiding questions that were adapted from Henriksen (2010) included:

“Who do the players interact with and what characterizes these interactions?”

“Who initiates these interactions?”

“What characterizes interactions undertaken to promote the players' development but of which the players themselves are not a part?”

Additionally, based on the ESF model, focus was put on such areas as: the state of the material (preconditions); the content and organization of daily activities (process); and enacted values, communication patterns, rituals and stories told in the club environment (organizational culture).

The researcher's participation in observations was overt, commencing at the same time as individual interviews and extended to three months after the individual interviews were completed. Participants were aware when they were being observed, because the researcher was introduced and therefore known to them. However, an effort was made to minimise intrusion so as not to impose undue influence on the participants. The researcher conducted observations for two to three hours on three days a week, as recommended by Ryba et al. (2009). Observations were made during training and competitive games and of all other daily activities.

As suggested by Henriksen (2010) and Larsen et al. (2012), the researcher had to be aware of the social reality and the perception of the reality by the participants. Interpretations of actions, relations between parts of the environment, and the interests in the environment were the key focus. The researcher was largely interested in observing the nature of daily activities, including the enacted values, rituals and stories told in the environment, with whom the players were directly or indirectly interacting, who was directly or indirectly interacting with them, and what was the nature of the interactions. Furthermore, observations went beyond describing content or the nature of activities and looked at the meaning of various activities, paying attention to how the participants behaved in relation to others and

their environment (Tudge, 2008). Field notes were taken by the researcher to collect data during observations.

5.5 PILOT STUDY

To ensure the appropriateness of the interview protocol, a pilot study was carried out by the researcher with two players, two coaches and two parents of the players in a club academy that did not participate in the study. Results helped the researcher refine the interview protocol, interviewing skills as well as other steps and procedures.

5.6 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

The football club was identified through a contact in the professional football fraternity, after which acceptance was gained through the club manager with coaches helping make initial contacts and gaining the confidence of the players. The researcher was introduced by the coaches to the players and once the players were informed about the aim of the study as well as the research ethical considerations they were asked to indicate their willingness to participate in the study on a first-come-first-served basis. The first ten players who indicated willingness were then given a letter of consent for their parents to sign to give permission for them to participate in the study. Two days later, on a day for training, all the ten players brought back the signed consent forms from their parents, indicating their willingness to allow their children to participate in the study. The parents were approached as they were in the grounds coming to watch and support their children during training. Five parents were also selected on a first-come-first-served basis.

In line with Henriksen (2010), the Environment Success Factors (ESF) working model specifically “served to guide the researcher’s attention in data collection phase” (p.43). The interviews were conducted in English by the researcher, with each lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. All interviewees were fluent in English, although it may have been their second language. The research, however, informed them that they were free to use their first languages when they felt they needed to. This allowed them to use culturally relevant terminology whenever they needed to, as a way of expanding on their opinions (Schinke et al., 2009). When necessary, only the quotes that are presented in this thesis were translated into English with the help of the professional translators. The location of the interviews varied from a private room in the residences of the club academy to a quiet site at the training

grounds and in the researcher's car. Three interviews with parents were conducted telephonically because parents were staying far from the club sites.

All interviews were audio-recorded with prior consent then transcribed verbatim. Audio-recording of participants' responses can provide a more objective source of data, to be analysed and used to foster understanding of the interview data (Chan, 2012). These transcripts were provided to the interviewees, allowing them to make any changes they deemed necessary. In three cases changes were provided by the participants and were incorporated into the data analysed. These changes amounted to the rewording of four sentences. Coach and parent interviews were completed following the players' interview. They were not to know what the players said during their interviews specifically so as to allow for an additional perspective regarding a large part of the participants' developmental experiences. The interviewer took great care not to reveal this information.

The time spent during observations was three hours a day over a period of ten days. Interpretations of actions, relations and meaning between the parts of the environment and the interests in the environment were the main focus (Larsen et al., 2012). Participants were probably aware when they were being observed because the researcher was already known to them. However, during observations an attempt was made to minimise intrusion so as not to impose undue influence on the participants.

During the observations the researcher used descriptive field notes to record relevant information. Notes were written using a cellular phone note book with focus on interpersonal interactions between parents, coaches and players, checking whether the types of comments reported by the participants during interviews were representative of comments actually made during observations, to be assessed if and how verbal reactions changed in relation to the game circumstances. All data collected during observations was later transcribed and saved by the researcher as electronic files on a laptop computer.

5.7 DATA ANALYSIS

Data was analysed following previously established procedures (Ryba et al., 2013). The interviews and observation notes were transcribed verbatim by the specialist transcriber. Data analysis did not formerly begin until all of the interviews were conducted, transcribed, and verified. Data from the interviews and observations was analysed by the researcher using thematic analysis. For the purpose of this study, a theme was anything that captured

something vital about the data in relation to the research question, representing some patterned response within the overall data set (Patton, 2014). The aim of conducting thematic analysis was to identify patterns across the data.

Thematic analysis is not wedded to any pre-existing theoretical framework, and therefore it can be used within different theoretical frameworks and to achieve different aims. (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Particularly, as confirmed by cultural sport psychology researchers such as Ryba et al. (2013), it can be used as a “contextualist method” (p.81) which acknowledges the ways research participants make meaning of their experience, and, in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings, while retaining focus on the material and other limits of reality (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Based on recommendations by Denzin and Lincoln (2011), the analysis procedure consisted of five main steps: familiarising oneself with data and preparing the data. This involved reading and re-reading of the data transcript; creating meaning units (i.e., separate pieces of text containing one idea, concept, or piece of information that could be interpreted on its own); importing the data into the (Non-Theoretical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching, and Theorizing 4.0 (NUDIST 4.0) computer software qualitative data analysis programme for data organisation and storage; creating and conceptualising categories and sub-categories that captured the essence of the ideas or concepts being discussed within the meaning units; and coding each meaning unit under the appropriate categories and sub-categories. The process of capturing meaning resembled interpretivist philosophical assumptions, especially when interpreting the organisational culture and inferring their basic assumptions (Henriksen, 2010).

Although all data was analysed simultaneously, each participant was represented as an independent case. Analysing individual cases enhanced the researcher’s ability to represent each participant’s constructed reality in the final results of the study, although a substantial overlap existed in participants experiences. Within categories, similar themes were clustered into sub-categories. Constant comparison was used so that theme and sub-category labels were evaluated across participants and time throughout analysis.

5.8 Enhancing research quality

In order to determine the accuracy and credibility of the research findings for this study, the following methods for establishing rigor were instituted.

5.8.1 Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of this study was assured through a number of ways. Firstly, in line with Holt and Dunn (2004) and Henriksen (2010), the researcher assured that the interview guides were designed using open questions to allow for the perspective of the interviewees to be clearly stated. The degree of specificity of the questions evolved from broad general questions to more specific ones. Likewise, the observation was loosely structured around a few predetermined areas of interest to allow for the unique qualities of the everyday life and organisational culture to be observed. Secondly, as suggested by Creswell (2014), participants were asked to review their interview transcripts for verification, and were allowed the opportunity to add, delete, or rework any data they felt did not accurately reflect their intended communications. None of the participants indicated concerns with the draft of the interview manuscript and no adjustments were made. Thirdly, trustworthiness was assured because independent data was also collected from each player's parent and coach, allowing for deeper and richer insight into their developmental experiences (Creswell, 2014).

Fourthly, as recommended by Silverman (2013), the researcher presented the players with results as was presented in the first draft of the research chapter (Chapter 5) and asked them to openly and critically comment on the findings with regard to whether the quotes displayed what was significant. Only three players and one parent availed themselves for this process and all confirmed that the quotations reflected what mattered to them. This process was particularly useful with regard to the basic assumptions of the environments' organisational culture, as analysis of these involved a degree of interpretation on the researcher's part (Henriksen, 2010). Fifthly, during the data analysis phase, the researcher asked a colleague who was an experienced researcher familiar with qualitative research analysis to categorise units of data into themes and categories provided. Mostly, she indicated close agreement with the researchers, suggesting that meaning units of data were accurately represented by themes and categories. Discrepancies were overcome through further discussions by the researcher and the colleague and minor refinements were made where necessary.

Burnette, Sanders, Butcher and Rand (2014) have also come up with specific criteria or guidelines for enhancing rigor in qualitative and more specifically culturally sensitive research, whose roots they acknowledge in earlier work of scholars such as Lincoln and

Guba (1985), Tillman (2002) and Milner and Oberle (2005). These guidelines were also highlighted by Hays, Wood, Dahl and Kirk-Jenkins (2016) in their recent publication as the most common foundational criteria for trustworthiness to determine quality in qualitative research. The highlighted guidelines were *credibility*, *transferability*, *triangulation*, *dependability*, and *confirmability*. These strategies were also used for the purpose of this study, as discussed below.

5.8.2 Reflexivity

Being reflexive means acknowledging a researcher's involvement and awareness throughout the research process, as well as being cautious of own assumptions so that meaningful analysis can be constructed (Couture, Zaidi & Maticka-Tyndale, 2012; Schinke et al., 2012). In being reflexive, researchers consider what Schinke et al. refer to as their insider/outsider status. An insider is defined as someone who shares similar characteristics, roles, and/or experiences with those being studied. An understanding is that as an insider one is able to easily establish rapport with participants and have an enhanced understanding of their lived social realities. An insider can thus provide insight, inner meaning and subjective dimensions that are likely to be overlooked by outsiders. On the other hand, outsiders are researchers who are not seen as similar to their participants (Ryba & Schinke, 2009; Schinke et al., 2012).

Reflexivity is an important strategy for ensuring rigor and forms an essential component of a cultural sport psychology research (McGannon & Johnson, 2009; Ryba, 2009; Schinke et al., 2012; Kavoura et al., 2014). In conducting reflexive cultural sport psychology research, researchers must recognise their own experiences and subjectivities, as well as their influence in the research process (Kavoura et al., 2014). According to Guillemin and Gillam (2004) reflexivity in research is not a single or universal entity but an active, continuing process that saturates every stage of the research. It is thus a process of critical reflection both on the kind of knowledge produced from research and how it is generated.

During this study, a meaningful point of reflection for the researcher was considering how subjectivity, experiences and epistemological position influenced the production and interpretation of the data for this research. The researcher was a South African citizen by birth, more or less of the same age group as the participants' coaches and parents. The participants, being aware that they were talking with a person of more or less the same age

as their parents were more likely to be free to provide the researcher with detailed accounts of their experiences.

The researcher was a licensed psychologist with extensive experience in applied sport psychology, particularly with regard to working with young footballers, and had experience as a coach of a school football team as a teacher in a boarding school. He could recall times when young players would share their experiences in career aspirations as football players. The researcher was therefore familiar with the South African football culture, including jargon, and shared the language and understanding of social practices in football. What could have been subjectivity on the part of the researcher with regard to the assumptions of the environmental and organisational culture was therefore largely constructed through the negotiation of the cultural discourse that had similarities with the one presented by the participants. The researcher was also an experienced qualitative researcher and therefore needed to be aware of how the research expertise in the field developmental psychology may have had an influence on establishing rigor for this study. The researcher was therefore able to be “detached from taken-for granted cultural understandings; and to interrogate the dominant discourses and social practices that exist” (Kavoura et al., 2014, p.2) in the culture of South African football.

5.8.3 Triangulation

As recommended by Patton (2014), the researcher employed triangulation, specifically of data audiotapes and observations field notes as well as theory triangulation whereby theories on culture and talent development were triangulated with data. A combination of multiple sources brings forward multiple perspectives and allows the researcher to have a better understanding of the essence of the participants’ experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Triangulation was conducted with a colleague who was an experienced researcher as well as with the supervisor for this research, who was also an experienced researcher.

5.8.4 Credibility

Credibility, similar to internal validity in quantitative research, refers to the overall believability of a study or the degree to which research outcomes seem accurate based on the research process (Hays et al., 2016). During this study credibility was mainly realised through participant observations. Through persistent observations the researcher had

prolonged engagement with participants and the club academy, allowing the researcher to “better able to understand and capture the context” (Patton, 2013, p. 262). Prior to data analysis stage, a copy of the interview transcripts was given to the participants to validate that the information correctly reflected their perceptions. They were requested to give their comments on the transcripts, but no changes were suggested.

5.9 Ethical considerations

Guillemin and Gillam (2004) suggest that, as may be the case in all research, there are at least two major dimensions of ethics in qualitative research, which are procedural ethics as well as ‘ethics in practice’ (p.263). Procedural ethics usually involve seeking approval to undertake research from a relevant ethics committee through a submission of an application that reassures the committee that one is a competent and experienced researcher who can be trusted. This study received ethical approval by a research ethics committee of the College of Education at the University of South Africa (see the ethics clearance certificate attached as Appendix VI).

Guillemin and Gillam (2004) refer to “ethics in practice’ as the day-to-day ethical issues that arise in the doing of research. The development and maintenance of respectful relationships are central to engaging in ethical research when conducting a cultural research (Ryba et al., 2013). Hence, relationships played a central role in this study. The researcher used the first few contact days to work on developing the trust and rapport that was necessary for a meaningful relationship with the players and the coaches.

The purpose of the study was communicated to all participants, who were informed of the voluntary nature of their participation. Parents were given an opportunity to decline participation on behalf of their children. Participants were informed that refusal to participate was not going to lead to any negative consequences. To show that they agreed to participate, the participants were asked to sign an informed consent form in a language of their choice, stating that they were participating voluntarily. Consent was also obtained from the interviewees for using the audiotape recorder during the interviews. Parents/guardians were requested to sign a consent form on behalf of the participating players since they were younger than 18 years.

Before each interview the ethical issues, as indicated above, were reiterated. Each interview began with an introduction explaining the purpose and the rationale behind the study,

interview process, and the assurances of confidentiality. Participants were informed that there was no right or wrong answer to the questions and they were encouraged to speak at length on issues they found integral to their experiences.

Due consideration was also given to the participants' possible perceptions that this research was an evaluation exercise. To alleviate any preconceptions or anxieties related to the above, the researcher reassured participants that they were to remain anonymous for the purpose of this study, and that all responses were to be confidential. One-on-one interviews provided them with an opportunity to share their personal or individual experiences in privacy (McHugh, Coppola, Holt & Anderson, 2015).

5.10 SUMMARY

This chapter has outlined the research design and described the methods and procedures used to collect and analyse data. Cultural praxis formed the basis and the case study design was used as data was collected using two qualitative methods, which were interviews and observations.

The next chapter presents a qualitative analysis of data collected in this study.

CHAPTER SIX

RESULTS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the results of the study. Since the theoretical point of departure was a holistic ecological and cultural approach it starts by presenting a holistic description of the club academy environment which was a case. Thereafter the dominant themes that emerged from data highlighting the most important components of the environment are presented using the four categories of Bronfenbrenner's (2005) PPCT model. Process comprised the sub-themes of an interactive engagement between the players and their coaches, their parents, as well as their peers, looking at players' characteristics as well as their psychosocial predispositions. Context included micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-system aspects. Time included micro-level and macro-level influences on development.

6.2 THE CLUB ACADEMY ENVIRONMENT AS A SOCIAL SITUATION OF TALENT DEVELOPMENT

This professional football club was founded in the early 1990s, located in a large city in South Africa which has the highest concentration of talented and elite football players. The club has a well-defined football talent developmental structure which consists of groups ranging from under 13s, under 15s, under 17s, under 19s, under 23s, up to the senior and the reserve senior teams. The club arranges special trials across the country with the club coaches selecting the talented players and recruit them to join each of the youth teams. Once the players have outgrown their age group they have another chance to be selected for the next age group, based on their perceived talent. Each age group has a full-time first team coach and an assistant coach, all of whom were former football players and most former professional players in the club. All the coaches formed a team that dictated the strategy for talent development for each of the age group teams. As one of the interviewee coaches attested;

“We [coaches] are a team on our own and... [the club owner] makes sure that we share a common idea of the kind of players we are raising. We come together, meet, share ideas and ...learn from each other and then come up with the common

principles that we use as guidelines for our work. That's what [club's name] stands for..."

Another coach gave a similar description:

"It is important for us coaches to work as a team and share common culture, you know, the same mentality and so on, ... so that we know we are working towards the common goal."

The club owned and was based in its football precinct where there were training facilities as well as the stories and traditions of the club. Within its short history the club has a proud record of success which included winning several cup competitions as well as professional league championship titles. The club had a history of success in grooming talented players then selling them to other clubs locally and abroad, where most enjoyed successful football careers. Some of the club's players and former players have been selected for national teams. It was notable that one of the coaches and two of the participating parents mentioned that at one point in the club's history its current and former players formed 80% of the senior national team, and about 50% grew up in the club academy.

The theme that emerged from the players' and their parents' interviews with regard to facilities was that the academy provided optimal football development facilities which made it a favourable environment for players to develop. This was epitomised by one of the parents:

"When I came here for the first time I said, 'Wow, this is good facilities. The training grounds are not like you FNB stadium but they are much better than the grounds on which my son started playing football. What I like is how secured is this place... Very safe for my son... And then you talk about the qualified coaches who know their stuff... All I can say is that I am very impressed."

6.2.1 Core values

Thematic analysis of data from both the interviews and the observation indicated that the club's environment was characterised by a number of values that formed an important part of its discourse. Social order and interpersonal relationships were essentially monitored by these values which were infused into the day-to-day functioning, some of which was talked

about by the coaches regularly and some not, though they were implicit in their behaviour as well as the senior players in the academy.

Threaded through most interview transcripts was a strong theme of interdependency and team cohesion, *ubunye* in the words of most of the players, which translates as 'togetherness'. This was evident in the positive ways in which the players talked about other players, irrespective of whether they were in competition for the same position on the field of play, as well in the way they were encouraging and supporting each other. When the players were asked to share their understanding of the value of team cohesion and togetherness within the academy, one of them said:

" ... to me it means is that this place [the academy] teaches you to take your arrogance out of the door, yeah to just throw it away for good and learn to be humble to not just other players but everyone in life, in general."

Another player said:

"... what I learnt since I joined the academy is that we are one big family. We have to work with each other, you know, help each other towards our common goal which is to become superstars one day."

Some of the players who shared a similar sentiment saw team cohesion as involving a sense of empathy and the responsibility to be of help to others. For example;

"... Being here feels like I am with my family. We all pull together and that's what the club is instilling in us every day. When I am down I know my brothers will pull me up...in fact there is no time for being down when we are pulling together...at the same time I feel it is my responsibility to protect my mates from falling down...and I need to be always there to pull them up when they fall. That is what being a family is about, yeah it is. Actually, that's how I grew up. I learnt that from my grandmother..."

Supporting the players' sentiments one of the coaches said:

"We teach and demonstrate connection to the players in this club. The very first thing we tell is that guys look here; this is not a place for competition, you know... if you are here to compete that you must stand up now and say goodbye because things are not going to work for you..."

Humility and respect were other values that emerged in all the participants' interview transcripts. Data from the observations also revealed that the culture of respect was evident in the academy's day-to-day activities. Players showed humility and respect towards each other as well as towards those within the environment from the security guards at the gates to the ground staff right up to the club management. They were also respectful to time as they strove to be on time for the meetings, training and matches. During the interviews, parents also said they had witnessed a growing culture of respect among their sons since they joined the academy, as evidenced by one of the parents' commentary:

"...as a parent you notice...I can say, I have noticed that [player's name] has changed since he became part of this club. My son is now very respectful even at home. Whenever I am here to support him I witness how this place is teaching them respect..."

Discipline and professionalism were other significant themes in this study. For instance, one of the players said:

"I just remember the first day I was here after I had been selected to join the academy. I almost did not bring my football boots because I thought, since it was the first day, we were just gonna have a welcoming meeting and have fun while being introduced to each other, but hell no... we got down to serious work and that's when I saw how professional is this place. Just no time to play around like it used to be the case in my previous club at home... This incidence taught me to be discipline right from my first day in this place"

Commitment was another value highlighted in the results. Most of the participants felt that it was instilled not only by the academy but also by their families who were looking at their fledgling football careers as an economic security. One of the players said:

"When my grandmother heard [that I have been selected by the club]...she said, 'thanks God,' now I can die peacefully knowing that you, my grandson, you will look after [his younger siblings]my grandchildren will never go to sleep on empty stomachs"

The importance of practice was also emphasised, with structured training sessions taken seriously and forming the core of activities.

6.3 THE COMPONENTS AND STRUCTURE OF THE CLUB ENVIRONMENT

Themes depicting the factors contributing to the environment's success are discussed within the four categories of the PPCT model, extracted from data which portrayed the interconnectedness of the components of the environment. These are therefore not as rectilinear as they seem to be as presented by the results. The process included sub-categories of formal and informal interactions taking place between all factors involved the talent development process. Individual characteristics and predispositions were highlighted by the participants as being crucial in successful development of the football players in this study. The players formed the spine of the club academy environment and the process of development was fundamentally dependent on them.

The context included micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro- system factors, whilst time included micro-level that is life course, and macro-level, that is historical, influences on talent development.

6.3.1 Process

The results showed that both formal and informal interactions were playing a role in the development. Formal interaction between players and coaches was regarded as a key supportive role within the academy and took place on the training and match days. The players were not encouraged to be self-reliant but rather to exist in a collective manner. Formal player-coach interactions mostly happened during training days, on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and were about two and half hours long. During these days there were on-the-field practice sessions, regular scheduled team talks, match evaluations, age group meetings as well as the club meetings. The researcher had an opportunity to attend some of these activities during observations and found them to be well-planned and structured with the primary objective being to instil the club culture into the behaviour and minds of the players. Highlighting the importance of these interactions, one coach explained:

“Oh year, that’s how we groom this boys. Through these meetings we try to instil the right thinking into them. Like, if we talk [about] discipline, we say that repeatedly through these meetings...each meeting we shout ‘discipline guys!’... and each team talk we shout ‘discipline! We have to make ourselves louder and louder in each and every meeting... yeah that’s what we have learned to do over the years.”

Match days were normally on Saturdays, during which they interacted with the players in a group as a team as well as on a one-on-one basis. During match days, interactions were mainly for the purpose of giving instructions on how to approach the match on the day.

Players and coaches reported that informal interaction was also taking place and players were encouraged to initiate it when they feel it is necessary. As the following coach explained, coaches were available and telephonically accessible to their players:

“I always encourage my players to feel free to contact me. I even invite them to my home for dinner.”

During observations, various informal interactions were also witnessed by the researcher between the players themselves, the players and the coaches, as well as the players and the parents or family members. Players were witnessed sharing ideas and giving each other instructions regarding an approach to particular training exercises.

6.3.2 Players’ personal characteristics

The sub-themes that emerged with regard to the relevant developmental characteristics were intrinsic characteristics and psychosocial predispositions. Psychosocial predispositions related to the players’ interpersonal skills and their cognizance of the social milieu in which they operate. These sub-themes are outlined in a coding framework in Figure 6.1 (below). An explicit discourse within the club was that players in possession of these characteristics were more likely to reach the professional level and be successful in their careers as footballers.

Intrinsic characteristics

Themes	Raw data
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Appropriate physique	Resilient muscle construction
	Strong legs to carry you
	Right height for your position in the field of play
	Physical and mental fitness
	Speed and jumping ability

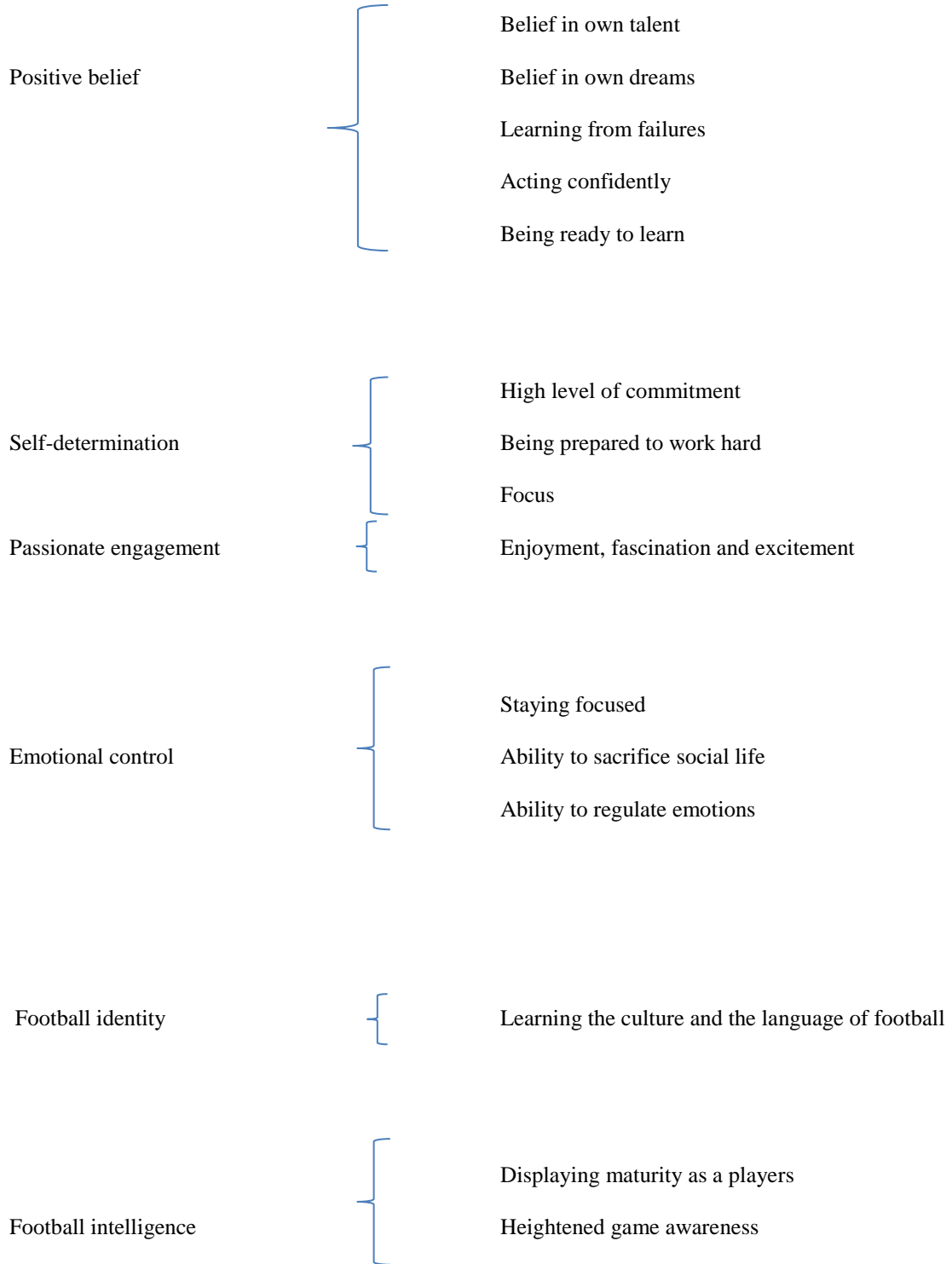
Technical competence	Concentration or an ability to focus
	Becoming proficient at the positional play (Understanding the role of attack and defence)
	Mastering transition
	Becoming proficient at the systems of play and team formations
	Mastering ball skills and the match application of them (First touch, shooting, passing and dribbling)

Tactical competence	Thinking skills and decision making (knowing when to shoot and pass)
	Anticipation
	Awareness of strength and weaknesses of the opponents

Psychosocial predispositions

Themes	Raw data
--------	----------

Internal predispositions



Interpersonal predispositions

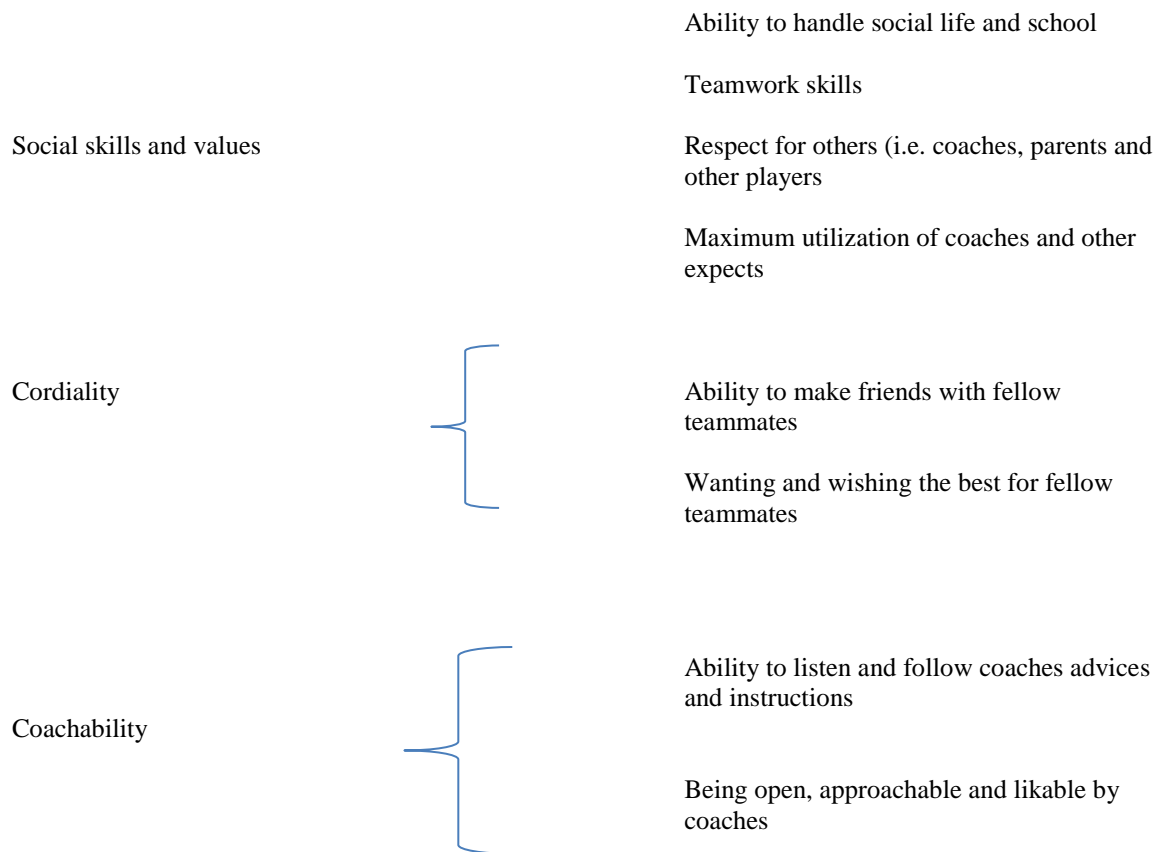


Figure 6.1: Coding framework for the reported vital players’ personal characteristics (Adapted from Larsen et al., 2013, pp. 60 - 61).

As indicated in Figure 6.1, the sport-related intrinsic characteristics that emerged as positive facilitators of progression to the professional level were: physical fitness and healthy physique, technical and tactical competences. Two of the players exemplified the importance of these characteristics:

Player 5: *“I know how important is my body shape for me be successful. I need to maintain my fitness always.”*

Player 2: *“Mastering ball skills in in me... I was born with it...no one can take it away from me...and I know it’s my strength”*

The psychosocial predispositions as identified from data were internal and interpersonal predispositions. All participants and the observation data revealed the predominant

recognition of the interpersonal predispositions over the intrapersonal ones. In particular, each of the coaches said the more successful players were those who showed competence in interpersonal predispositions.

The dominant themes that emerged from data with regard to the internal psychosocial predispositions were positive belief and self-determination. The other themes were coachability, self-determination, passionate engagement, cordiality, motivation and football identity and football intelligence.

One of the players said with regard to the importance of having positive belief:

“You see... come rain or shine, I know I will make it. That’s what I told myself from the beginning and this attitude is not going to stop till I see myself as a professional player. I am confident I will make it.”

Football intelligence and coachability appeared to be more related in that a player shows intelligence in completing the demands of a game successfully increases his chances of being likeable to the coaches. With regard to coachability, one of the coaches said:

“I can tell you about players who were with us here and have now graduated to the first team...you know what?... they were always willing to listen and learn from us. In that way, they made things very easy for us”

Another coach said:

“A player that makes us to love our job because they are not difficult to us...That’s the player who is more likely to make it. You tell him to do something and he does it twice or even three times more. Here I am talking about an ability to go an extra mile with a smile in your face....That is what I call my favourite player”

Passionate engagement also emerged as a factor associated with success in football talent development. It was reflected through words such as ‘enjoyment’, ‘passion’, ‘fascination’, and ‘excitement’. For example, with regard to enjoyment, one of the players said:

“That’s what I told myself that I just need to come here and enjoy my stay in this place. In fact, that’s what my mother told me... she said I mustn’t stress”

One of the coaches reiterated:

“From the first day they are here we tell them to just relax and enjoy themselves. Everyone here want to see them happy, yeah,... even when they loose on the field of

play, we say 'guys, don't take it into your heads...and then they start to sing their famous songs, next we see them dancing...and we say, 'yeah that's it''

Regarding the importance of cordiality, one of the players expounded:

"One player was always putting up a fight with everyone. Yea he was fool of anger that guy and ended up creating enemies all over the place and u don't need to guess that he is no longer with the club."

With regard to the development of football identity all players mentioned how support from parents, families and siblings was the source of their interest in playing football. In this context the word 'football' was used to represent the cultural practices found in a football context. All the players said they had begun showing natural talent in football when they were younger than 10 years. Later they soon came to excel in playing football and began to identify football as priority in their lives. The participants further said their early successes fed and nourished their identities as footballers and all they wanted to do was to play football and play it well. For example, one of the players said:

"Since I was about eight years old, everyone was saying, 'wow this boy is something else'. My father started calling me E'to and was encouraging me to play more and more football and to learn more about it... I then started telling myself that I want to sacrifice everything in order for me to become a professional footballer one day and I must work hard towards it... Who knows, maybe one day I will follow E'to's footsteps and find myself playing for Barcelona..."

All participants also described how important it was for the players to have self-determination, as shown by the following quotations from raw data of two of the players' comments:

"For me to succeed I know I need to be a hard worker. I need to work very hard in training and add extra practice session".

"I know I have to be strong and overcome any obstacles that I come across..."

The coaches also emphasised the need for the players to be determined to handle pressure presented by being in a development programme, as evidenced by the following coach's commentary:

“You [the player] commit one mistake and it is fine as long as you learn from it. What is important for me is that you don’t get discouraged by your mistakes and start to give up. Rather let your mistake make you stronger and cleverer...”

6.3.3 Context in which processes were occurring

Figure 6.2 (below) uses Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) four nested levels of the environment to present an ecological representation of the significant themes depicting the influencing factors that stem from a variety of contextual sources as well as the relationships between and within these sources that serve to sustaining that environment.

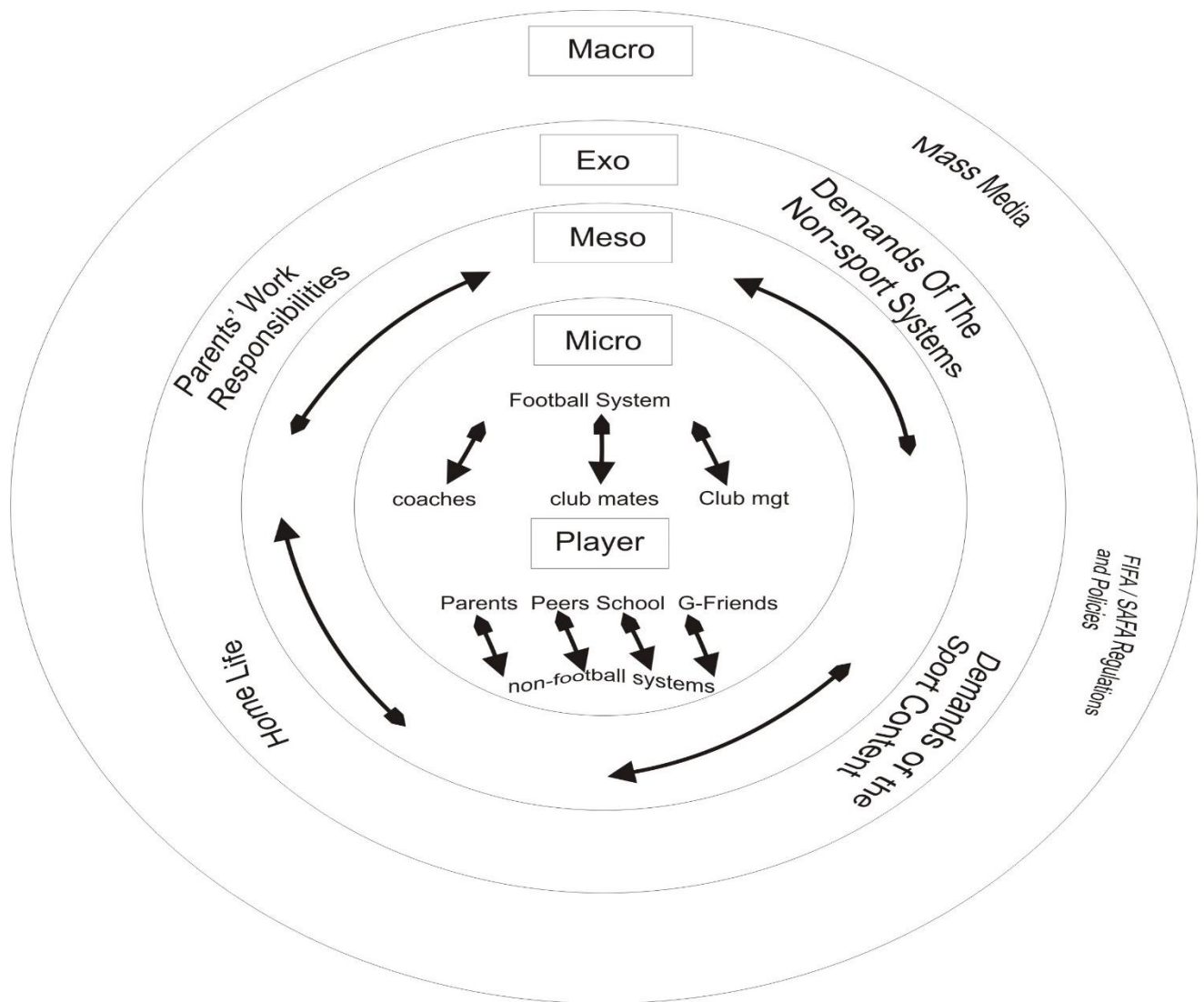


Figure 6.2: An ecological representation of the significant themes depicting the influencing factors stemming from contextual sources.

6.3.3.1 *Microsystem*

As depicted by Figure 6.2 (above), at the centre of the ecological model are the close and most important relationships between the players and their immediate environment. The themes that emerged on this level comprised a number of relationships that were mentioned as having a significant role towards player development. These relationships are categorised as the football relationships and the non-football relationships. With regard to the football relationships, the most cited raw-data themes to emerge centred on club management and

stuff, club mates and coaches. The most cited categories within the non-football relationships were parents, coaches, teachers, peers and girlfriends.

The club management did not feature largely in the raw-data from the players' interviews, essentially being mentioned by parents and coaches and regarded as the core of the club academy activities and practice traditions. Both coaches emphasised that the managing director or owner of the club went to great lengths in offering all the resources that were necessary for player development. Data from the observations alluded to the coaches' responses as there was evidence of the material resources such as suitable training grounds and facilities, the entire training and match day kit, and transport facilities. Both coaches and parents said the club management was responsible for the running of the entire club, as they set the rules and defined its core values. One of the coaches, also a member of the club management committee, gave the following description of the functions of the club management:

“The club executive set the rules that guide this place. Also, they are the ones who discipline those that go against the rules. They fire, and they hire us...everyone in this club. Most of all they pay salaries for everyone...not just us coaches.. I mean, starting from the security guards, grounds men, physiotherapists...everyone. They also provide financial support for the boys and... make sure that the boys get all what is needed to support them...I mean, what more do we want?... starting from the balls, kit, transport, you know, ...everything....”

One of the parents said:

“I am very happy with what the club is doing to make sure my boy will make it. All this support for free and for the love of football. As I say... everything is provided by the club.”

During observations it was evident that, within the club academy, the coaching staff were the closest to the players, the most visible, and had direct interactions with the players. They were the leading figures at the operational level of the club academy and were the ones who conducted the selection of the players into the club academy. The most cited sub-themes to emerge with regard to the coaching staff were very positive and centred on the coaches' supportive behaviour. The participants felt that the coaches were playing a crucial role in creating a cultural space that facilitated learning and co-construction of shared experiences and norms within the academy. Coaches' supportive behaviour was also reported by both

parents and players to be in a form of reinforcing desirable performance and effort, building the players' self-esteem and providing emotional and concrete support. The coaches were describes as cultural guides. As one player explained;

“My coach set down with me and told me about how things are done in the club...you know, he introduced me to usiko [culture of the club]... and also things like the history of this club...”

Some of the players and parents regarded the coaches as fathers to the players. One of the players said:

“I can say my coach is a father to me. This is because he also treats me like his son. Our relationship is not just to do with football...yeah football is the main thing...but my coach, I am free to talk to him about my life and everything that is going on in my life. He has given me good advice that I was not going to get from anyone else.”

One of the parents said:

“What makes me happy is that my son's coach has been like a father to him... you know, like the father that he has never had. They even talk over the phone... even when my boy is at home and needs some advice... The other day my son was not well and was sleeping at home. The next thing I saw his coach coming to ask if he can take him to the doctor. That is the kind of fatherhood that I am talking about here...”

Moreover, the coaches were perceived by all players and parents as being technically and tactically competent. One of the parents explained:

“... let me tell you, I cannot claim to be an expert in football but every time I am sitting here and watching the coaches doing different things with the players...I can tell you these coaches know what they are doing and they are very good in doing it”

However, as much as the coaches were perceived as being technically and tactically competent they felt less competent when it came to the psychosocial development of their players, as the following quote demonstrates:

“Right now one of the boys is having problems and misunderstanding with his family at home and his mother called me and was hoping that I could help but I could not...she did not know that I am not competent in those things”.

The players spoke at length about not only the significant influence of their club mates in their lives but also the impact that their peers had on their success. They were perceived by

most of the participants as having a motivational and supportive role. The players' responses to the cultural transition tasks were seen to be embedded within player to player's relational contexts. Motivation and support were describes as either direct through advice and words of encouragement, as well as non-direct means through what the players described as health competition for places in the first eleven players that are selected to play the matches they have. The importance of the role played by teammates was epitomised by the following player:

“There is no better support I can mention than the one that I am getting from my team mates. I look up to them. When they are always in time for the practice sessions, I also make sure that I am always in time. As I am saying... what I see them doing also builds me in a way. I can say, they are very supportive to me in many ways.”

The club regarded school attendance by all players as a high priority in the development of players' football careers. One of the club's rules stated that it was compulsory for all players to attend school. Although it did not have a formal relationship with any particular school it was compulsory for all the players to attend school. The club had structured procedures on how to support the players in balancing their schooling with the academy commitments. Raw-data themes relating to the club's effort to balance school and football included the club allowing players enough time to write their homework and excusing them from partaking in the activities of an academy when they had to write school tests and examinations. One of the players said:

“My coaches are very supportive to us when it comes to our school commitments. I do not have to worry when we are writing exams. I just say, ‘Coach please, I am writing exams next week’, and the coach says, ‘No problem, I will see you when you are done’... something like that...”

With regard to the non-football relationships, the players' families featured prominently, with all participants mentioning ways that parents had a positive influence on development. The role of parents in the lives of the players as supporters and facilitators of talent development was described by all participants as being very significant. With regard to an important role of the family, one of the coaches said:

“We take the players families as an extension of this club... I mean, we need these players health and happy... No one but their families can make them health and happy. Therefore we do our best to draw them close to us... I mean, to the club and

its activities. We always make sure we send them formal invitations to our matches and we make them feel welcome to our premises day and night. I can say that I have never had a case of parents that were not supportive to their children. They all try their best...even in cases where the only parent in the boy's life is a grandmother, that grandmother does her best"

The players' involvement in football was reported by both the players and their parents as having shaped family interaction and became a context for the families to instil teachings and encouragement on the developing footballers. Families were defined as inclusive of the extended family and their neighbourhoods. Participants reported increased communication about football in their families and families facilitating the players' involvement, in some cases through verbal and financial incentives. For instance, one of the parents said:

"There is that excitement at home ever since [player's name] started playing for such a big club as [name of the club]. We now talk a lot about what he is doing...like we discuss the training... and the games that they play...talk about what he could have done differently...yeah, and we suggest how he should approach things next time and in future, and so on.... Somehow, I can say, football has become a culture of our family."

Another parent said:

"You know, I have even changed the ways to cook. I went into Google and found out the type of food that is good for footballers. That is the kind of food that we now eat in my family."

Furthermore, a sense of obligation to the family was seen by both players and parents as an important encouraging factor. As the following parent explained, players were seen as having an obligation to look after their families:

"From the moment my son told me he has been selected by this club, I knew that the light is now shining in my family. My son is going to be able to take the family to another level. He knows that he is the only hope that we now have."

It was also interesting to note that most of the participants mentioned the role played by peers and the players' girlfriends. Each player emphasised the importance of being around people who were just as ambitious as ambitious and driven as they were. For example, one of the players said:

“[laughing sheepishly] ...I can say my girlfriend is helping me a lot in my football career. She is the one who send me encouraging cell phone messages before and after the game... also, makes sure that I don’t miss practice, even when sometimes I feel like I am very tires and I do not want to go to practice.”

However, both coaches expressed a concern that the influence the players’ peers and girlfriends could exert is an area that is problematic to control. As one coach explained:

“That is a difficult part for us. The best that we do is to emphasise to the players that it is to their best interest that they avoid associating themselves with people who are a bad influence. We try and encourage them to be open about their girlfriends so that we can be able to give them advises.”

Another coach described a scenario that illustrated the complexity of the player-girlfriends relationships:

“The other day one of our players had problems with his girlfriend. He completely lost focus... he lost form and I could see he was losing interest in the game... I said no, we can’t keep this going on and I suggested that he be referred to a psychologist. Now you see, if we did not know and did not let these boys talk about their girlfriends, how was I going to know the root of this boy’s problem?”

6.3.3.2 Exosystem

On the exosystem level the prominent themes were the demands of non-sport systems on the developing players, the players’ home life, their parents’ work responsibilities, and the demands of the sport context.

Most of the players in the club, particularly in the Under 17 group had poor family backgrounds. Four mentioned that no one had a stable job in their family and some of the parents were working long hours with no time to spend supporting their children at the academy. Due to these conditions, some of the players struggled to buy football boots, which the coaches mentioned were not provided as policy, though in some cases the coaches had to provide limited financial support to the players.

The pressure to balance football with school demanded that the players did not have enough time to deal with the demands of their teenage stages. Most expressed concern that their commitment to a football career was sometimes challenged by the pressures of the

developmental stages. Typical challenges prevalent during the adolescent stage, such as peer pressure, were mentioned by most of the players. This is illustrated in a response of one of the players:

“Sometimes it is very hard when your friends start calling you names just because you can no longer spend time and do things together with them. When they want to join them and have a nice time together and you just can’t, because of your commitment to your career... they just don’t understand....and then they start calling your names.”

It is however important to note that the players did not report themselves engaging in the normative social behaviours of their peers who were not playing football, such as going out drinking alcohol with friends. Coaches and parents did not report incidences when they witnessed players engaging in maladaptive lifestyle choices, such as showing signs of being drunk or having a hangover during the academy activities.

Participants also described the challenge facing the players with regard to reconciling the role of being learners and academy players. Coaches and parents were mentioned by all the participants as playing a crucial role in reinforcing the learner role as important for long-term career planning, economic stability and quality of life. As stated by one of the players:

“Coaches always ask us if we are doing fine at school. If we say we are not doing fine he advises us to seek help at school.”

Participants also reported the changes that they had to deal with as they become part of a new club’s cultural context and how overwhelmed they were at the prospects of having to navigate their new world alone. Some also said that the players’ transition process as they enter a new era in their football careers was underscored by a loss of belonging and connectedness within their communities. They said some of their community members regarded the changed behaviour of the players in the academy as a form of cultural betrayal as they were confined by the values of the academy the players no longer engaged in the common activities in which other teenagers were engaging. Some of the players said they had to navigate their transition process with little support as they are perceived as outsiders who had to prove themselves to their communities. As one player explained:

“In my neighbourhood and at my school other guys have started getting negative attitudes towards me. They say I think I am better than them and I am looking down

upon them. I wish I can tell them that I have not changed... I am still the guy they knew.”

Participants also described how the challenges from the sport context were impacting on their talent development. This theme emerged via most of the participants, who talked about the importance of balancing football with social life for the developing players. Demands of the sport context were largely described as the competition for a position on the field was quite stressful to the players and their parents. However, the culture of teamwork was encouraged by the club academy and made the players use this pressure to encourage them to work even harder. The players also mentioned the challenge they faced when they had to learn the ways of navigating, negotiating, and evolving their own understandings within cultural patterns of a new socio-cultural context which was their club academy. The challenge of negotiating daily practices on and off the field, trying to understand the club norms and practices was attested by one of the players;

“Adapting to this place is not easy... There are times when I just don’t know whether I am coming in or going and I ask myself; ‘What do I want here?’”

One of the coaches shared a similar description regarding this challenge:

“It is not an easy road for these boys. They have to change all that they were used to, starting from the behaviour to the skills on the field of play in order to meet our [the club academy] expectations and cultural norms.”

6.3.3.3 Mesosystem

All participants understood the importance of collective responsibility between contexts in which the players are directly situated. Specifically, a direct interaction between the club and the players’ families were seen as having an influence on the players’ developmental trajectories. This was evident in one of the coach’s comments:

“We are all in this together. As soon as accept a boy into our academy, we also accept his family. In other words we are saying, ‘The club and this boy’s family are now one big family as we both carry the responsibility to produce a responsible adult out of him’. It is not always easy, especially because most of these boys are not from your typical mother and father family structures... As I am saying, we need to avoid a situation where there is a clash between the messages that the boys are getting

from us as well as from their homes. ... We need to make sure that we are singing the same song... I mean, us and their families.”

6.3.3.4 Macrosystem

The raw data themes that emerged at the level of macrosystems were: opportunities created by SAFA serving as an incentive, the positive influence of the regulations imposed by football bodies, and the challenging role of the mass media.

The potential incentives which are provided by the football system as an enticing factor for the players emerged as an important one. In this context, the potential incentives related to an opportunity to represent the country and possibly play in the world cup tournament. One of the players explained its importance in the following way:

“I see myself as a Bafana Bafana player in the near future. That is my dream and it is pushing me through all the challenges that I may be facing. That will be my ultimate success...”

One coach also explained:

“The opportunities are there for the boys. Amongst them is an opportunity to represent South Africa one day. To me, that is the dangling carrot for the boys to put their heads down and do their best to eat it one day... Our records speak volume in this regard... I mean, which team has had more players representing the country that us?”

Coaches also mentioned that their activities were sanctioned by the football bodies such as PSL, SAFA, and FIFA and that an academy’s success rested firmly upon the quality of support and endorsement received from its environment. As the following coach explained:

“The quality of the policies that are guiding us surely help us to be successful with raising these boys. Let me make an example, it is stipulated by SAFA that the coaches for these boys must have accredited qualifications... You see, that does not only protect these boys, but it also ensures that they get the right input. Also, what do you think the age limits are for? They are stipulated by SAFA, and by FIFA so as to make sure that these boys get correct development procedures...And we make sure that we follow all those stipulations.”

Mass media was also considered to have an influence which could either be positive or negative. Positive influences reported by the coaches included mass media assisting with advertising the good work of the academy, which might assist in attracting the sponsors and in enticing parents to allow their children to join the academy. As one coach explained:

“Who doesn’t want to be in the newspapers? I mean, if you are there for a good reason that obviously enhances your image. Rich people can read about you and then say, ‘This is the club that I want to associate my business with...That is how you get good sponsorship’”.

With regard to negative influence, the same coach said:

“The policy of the club is to protect these boys from exposure to the media because, as you know, it is not only that newspapers can distract the boys, but it can also break them down, you know, they can destroy these boys. With us as a club or as an academy,...we always say we need to turn the bed to the good. How do we do that? If they write bad things about us, we sit down and look at the way to learn from that so that we can turn things around”.

This view was endorsed by another coach who also implied that an academy’s success is enticed by the opportunities availed by SAFA:

“The club has a clear vision that feeds into the national vision advocated by SAFA, which is that of developing talent where the priority is to guarantee that players can develop to, and successfully perform at, the highest senior international level”.

6.3.4 Time

Emerging form data with regard to the micro-level of ‘time’ was that, in principle, the Under 17 group was treated as a feeder to the Under 19s. Hence, the amount and type of training that the players were put through became more advanced and complex as they were assumed to be about to graduate to the next age group. This means that the development programme for the Under 17 cohort was designed to advance over a period of two years. As one coach explained:

“The club has a long term focus and is not looking for successful result on the sport field for these boys. The results on the field are only used to monitor progress and to

reveal areas where more focus is needed. We do not use the results to judge our players performance or talent.”

The coaches also mentioned how timing related to the chance factor in the players' development process. Their explanation mostly indicated how being 'in the right place at the right time' could have an influence. Examples that came up were: getting injured, getting a chance due to an injury of club mate, and performing well when club management are present. As one of the players explained:

“Sometimes it a matter of getting a chance that you did not expect. We need to be able to notice such opportunities and be able to grab them with both hands. Let's say my team mate who is doing very well suddenly gets injured. Our coaches encourage us to grab such opportunities... Who knows? Maybe one ends up being the first choice for that particular position...Even when it happens to me.... Let's day I unexpectedly pick up an injury and I now have to wait for my next chance. Who can predict an injury?... It's just a bad timing that is beyond our control”.

6.4 SUMMARY

The findings as presented in this chapter depict the significant themes that emerged from the data collected during this study. These are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISCUSSION

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a discussion of the results in relation to the aims of this study. As part of it a resultant empirically derived conceptual framework for understanding the ecological factors associated with talent development among football players in a South African context is proposed. The aims of this study were: to identify and explore contextual factors influencing the environment's success in developing talented male football players; to identify and explore ecological conditions associated with becoming a professional football player; and to present a qualitatively derived ecological framework of the environmental conditions associated with becoming a professional football player. Consequently, in line with previous research that followed an ecological approach (e.g., Henriksen, 2010; Larsen, 2013), this study was particularly concerned with how the context in which the players were immersed generally influenced their development in a positive way. In other words, the focus was on those contextual factors which may be supportive towards successful football talent development process. These were factors that had been identified by previous research as having a potential to facilitate talent development. Informed by the bioecological (Bronfenbrenner, 1985) and the cultural-historical (Hedegaard, 2008) theoretical frameworks, and drawing upon the experiences of the players, their coaches and their parents, combined with the researcher's direct observations, this study has identified various factors which may be supportive in player development as a vital period in the progression to the professional level.

The distinctive features of this study were that, firstly, it was conceptualised within the cultural praxis (Ryba & Wright, 2010). It was designed to generate knowledge that resonates with the cultural realities of the South African youth football players in club academies, with a view to add to the understanding of these players. Secondly, studying developing players in a South African context was intended to contribute to the literature on talent development through the inclusion of the country's developing football players, a group which, as pointed out by literature review (e.g., Stambulova & Ryba, 2013), has not featured within the currently existing sport talent development research.

7.2 CONTEXTUAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE ENVIRONMENT SUCCESS

The results of this study were in accordance with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) suggestion that the environment is characterised as a pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by individuals or group of individuals in direct and indirect settings in which they were embedded. This was revealed when the participants discussed how relations and interfaces between different components, both within football sport social context and non-sport daily practices, contributed toward the developing players' adaptation to the club academy environment. Such results were also in line with several other that also found that successful sport club environments encouraged effective social relations between the resources (whether human or object) involved in the development of the player (e.g., Fler & Hammer, 2013; Ryba et al., 2015). Similarly, there were indications that through repeated messages from their social context, players received positive encouragement, guidance, emotions, and ability to create an appropriate mind-set.

As revealed by the findings, over the years, the club had built a coherent self-reinforcing environment with common identity. This was confirmed by the participants when they talked about *ubunye* and a strong family feeling that was prevailing within the academy. Larsen (2013) found similar results in his study with the players in a Danish football club. According to Vygotsky (1998), such environmental conditions can assist in inspiring real forms of development, noticeable when children are surrounded by people who engage them in meaningful social situations as it helps them to realise the ideal form that they came with when they first joined the environment. Having the ideal form in the child's environment affords development of exactly that which is valued and needed to successfully participate in a particular community (Fler, 2015).

The results were also in line with Satta (2015), whose study portrayed successful club academies as typically places where not only a culture of sport is cultivated but where education and citizenship is constructed. Such tenets were similar to those found in clubs academies in United Kingdom, as indicated by Holt et al. (2008).

7.3 ECOLOGICAL CONDITIONS ASSOCIATED WITH BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALLER

The ecological conditions associated with becoming a professional footballer as revealed by the results of the present study are discussed using Henriksen's (2010) ESF model (see Figure 7.1 below). As Henriksen suggested, the ESF is useful in providing a framework for analysing *why* the environment is successful. The discussion covers the components of ESF model which are: preconditions for a successful club environment; the club's daily routine or process; organisational culture of the club; the effects of the players' individual development and achievements; and the club's effectiveness. According to Henriksen (2010), preconditions and process work through the organisational culture to yield outcomes such as individual/team development and achievement and the success of the academy environment.

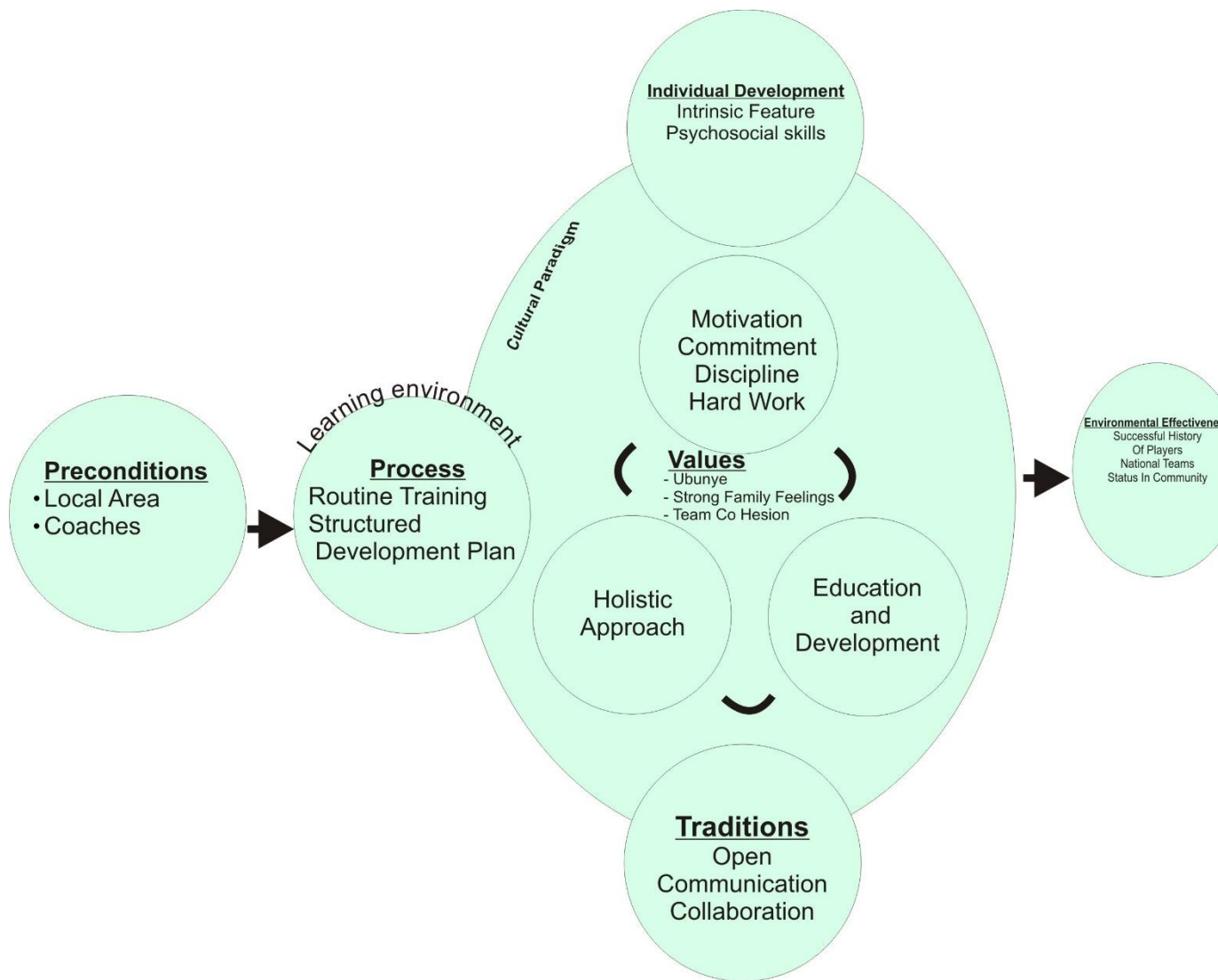


Figure 7.1: The ESF empirical model of the club academy (Adapted from Henriksen, 2010)

7.3.1 Preconditions

The club was situated in one of the large cities of South Africa which are regarded as the country's business hubs. Many youths flock to the large cities for opportunities (Statistics South Africa, 2015) therefore it may be assumed that a club based in a large city stands a better chance of having the best of football talent as many players will be willing to go where there are better opportunities. This explains why about 80% of the professional football clubs are based in the large cities (SAFA, 2009), and why, in line with Larsen et al. (2013), the present results indicated that the staff regarded its geographical location as a huge resource with an abundance of talent from which to choose.

Even when they went out to the rural areas to identify talented players, players were looking forward for opportunities to ‘go to the big city’ and, hence would not hesitate to grab the opportunity. Although clubs in the cities might face stiff competition from each other, the present findings revealed various factors that have put the present club at an advantage in comparison with the others. Firstly, the present club had a well-known record with regard to successful talent development. Secondly, unlike some of the clubs in the vicinity, the present one had a relatively small following and thus was less in the limelight. This would have given the players less pressure to perform and less public attention. Thirdly, in general, football in South Africa is one of the most affordable sport codes, compared to the other popular sports, such as rugby and cricket. The present club, therefore, did not need to have large sponsorship for it to be able to run a successful academy. This was possibly the reason that, despite not having a major sponsorship, the findings did not mention financial resources as possible threat to the players’ success. These findings were in line with what Larsen et al. (2013) found in a football club academy in Denmark.

Another possible precondition for success was that, due to prevalent migration from rural areas to the cities, most of the present club’s players moved from rural areas to join the club academy and were staying with their extended family members and relatives. Few were staying with their parents or relatives who had homes both in rural areas and in the cities as a way of getting close to their work places. As Ryba et al. (2016) indicated, being away from their comfortable home settings might have been a valuable source of encouragement for the players who would have wanted to work harder to succeed and become a pride of their rural communities.

The club also had the two basic resources that are necessary for a successful talent development environment, namely, good training facilities and sufficient skilled and well-qualified coaches. These resources were similar to those previous research mentioned as preconditions for success (Larsen et al., 2013; Csaki et al., 2014). In addition, the present findings also showed that, in the present club, the coach-player relationship comprised all the three quality dimensions as outlined by Adie and Jowett (2010), namely, closeness, commitment, and complementarity.

7.3.2 Daily routine

The club had a structured routine for the Under-17 development players that ran from Mondays to Saturdays of each week. Deliberate practice was on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays afternoon, and match days were on Saturdays. Training sessions lasted two and a half hours. Monday sessions were made up of brief preparation talks that were about ten minutes long followed by 11-a-side full football pitch practice and another ten to 15 minutes talk before the end of the session. Wednesday sessions were a combination of routine strategic movements in which a ball was routinely moved from the back right up to the scoring positions, and position-specific training for goalkeepers, defenders, midfielders, and strikers. On Fridays they had full pitch practice with focus on preparation for the match to be held on the following day.

In line with Larsen et al.'s (2013) findings, the training sessions were generally high on informative and motivational feedback and dialogue with focus on learning. The present results indicated that players did not only enjoy deliberate practice but did their best during the sessions. This could have been either because they were trying to impress their coaches or they knew that their efforts would eventually pay off. In the present study it was common for the players to voluntarily give themselves extra hours of practice, contrary to the findings of Ericsson (2008) and Coughlan et al. (2014), who found that deliberate practice was inherently not enjoyable. A possible explanation for such a contradiction could be that players in the present study joined the club with the motive orientation to be successful and were not indications that they were compelled or persuaded by their parents against their will.

Since the players were not residing on the club's premises, most were using public transport to and from the club premises. As much as this might have been a challenge to the players it could imply a commitment by those who had to rely on public transport and still be able to make it in time for training and matches. Such commitment is in line with what Bloom (1985) found to be the case during the second phase of talent development stage, when the players make their chosen sport their life choice and show commitment to it and can be explained as being due to players having joined the club with positive motives with regard to their new careers as footballers.

Congruent to the findings of previous research, most of the players in the under 17 group joined the club academy at the age of 13 and thus started with the under 15 group (Larsen, 2013). There were however few cases of players who were recruited to the club when they were already in the under 17 bracket.

With regard to the football-specific skills, the findings of this study was also in accordance with Mills et al. (2012), who emphasised the importance of players being able to exhibit a variety of self-regulatory skills as well as coping with several competitive and organisational challenges such as injuries and de-selection.

The whole programme, including the training sessions, was highly educational and the club highlighted an optimal learning environment in which players strove to develop and the club discouraged competition. Such findings shows that the club's environment was similar to a typical environment expected in a successful academy (Mudege, 2007; Draper et al., 2012). Also, the players were not only willing to learn from their coaches but they were also dedicated to learning from each other.

7.3.3 The club's cultural paradigm

Academies can influence the individuals involved in the club through their organisational culture (dos Santos, 2014). The findings of this study were in line with previous research findings with regard to the typical cultural paradigm for a successful club academy, both in individual sports (e.g., Henriksen, 2010) and in team sports such as football (e.g., Larsen, 2012). Similar to Larsen's study, the core findings indicated that the present club academy environment had similarities with the European format in that it encouraged the culture and values that were found by previous research conducted in European countries (e.g., Stambulova & Ryba, 2013). Larsen (2013) found that values of respect, passion and self-belief were prevailing in a Danish club. The findings in this study indicated that such values were part of the discourse in the club and were directly and indirectly inculcated into the players' minds.

Similar to the findings of previous research, the findings revealed that the club was committed to a social practice that promoted a holistic approach in talent development (Larsen, 2013). The focus was not only on developing players' football skills and abilities, but also on developing players as responsible citizens. Interestingly, there were no indications that, for this to happen, the club provided resources for optimal environment for development of each player as individuals, such as psychological care, physical projection and cognitive stimulation (Garcia, Pence & Evans, 2008; Lee & Johnson, 2007). Instead, in line with what Nsamenang (2000) referred to as the cultural-historical constructing of child education, the holistic approach appeared to be mediated through vicarious encounters with

it in interacting and negotiating with the microsystems. Hence, it was important for the whole environment, including the senior players, that the coaches and staff within the club were expected to be exemplary to the players. In Vygotsky's (1998) terms, this process implies that development is a unity that is localised and experienced in the everyday life conditions of children as they take part in day-to-day activities in their environment, centred on the relationship between players and coaches that helped the players focus on a holistic lifestyle, handling dual careers (sport and school), developing the ability to work hard, and being self-aware and responsible for their own talent development process. Also, the environment was characterised by a strong and cohesive organisational culture based on integrated values concerned with the balance of the player's daily lives in school and sport. These results were in line with Riley and Smith's (2011) findings on the importance of a quality coach-athlete relationship.

Contrary to previous research (e.g., Holt & Dunn, 2004; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2010; Henriksen et al., 2011), the present findings revealed that the culture of corporation and learning together, instead of competition and performance outcomes, also prevailed within the club academy. The reason for such results could be that, except for Henriksen's (2010) study, the previous studies were conducted on the teams of senior players and not the Under 17s, for whom the focus is still on learning and development. In this study the players were encouraged not to see each other as a threat or competition but to support and learn from each other. This was in line with previous research, such as a study conducted by Schaille et al. (2015), which indicated that the extent to which athletes from disadvantaged backgrounds succeeded in their sport careers depended on their interaction with their sport mates. Also, Perkins and Noam (2007) found that successful sport development depends on developing an environment that highlights supportive relationship among the players. Mills et al. (2012) emphasised the importance of making players understand that a team player is not in competition but would enhance one's chances of success.

The findings of this study also replicated those from previous studies which found that successful clubs create a culture that focuses on player education and development (Larsen et al., 2013). The focus was on balancing the players' football development with their education. Although this club did not have formal working arrangements with the players' schools, the analysis of the results indicates that it showed commitment to the players' education. For instance, attending school was declared as compulsory for all players within the academy and players were given time off from academy commitment when writing tests

and examinations. Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993) and more recently Larsen (2013) shared similar findings that school was an important resource for talent development and that school and sport can complement each other well and be pursued without a problem if developing athletes effectively manage their time.

As previously mentioned, the findings of this study also replicated Larsen's (2013) that highlighted the importance of adopting the values that uphold *ubunye* or a strong family feeling within the club. The club's values also emphasised team cohesion. On the other hand, the present results expanded on Larsen's in that the family feeling was extended to the whole context of the environment. Through the lens of Hedegaard's (2012) cultural historical approach the depicted *ubunye* or strong family feeling can be described as comprising the society, institution and individual. Among the prominent conditions for institutional practice within the club academy was the role played by the coaches, the club mates and the management staff. Beyond that, the other institutional practices were families or home practice and school practice. A family feeling implied that it permeated the institutions and the society in that, for instance, the values deemed appropriate for talent development were also supported within the players' families and were reflective of their values. Such a perspective has been supported by studies that found the presence of talented children within the families required the families to make special adaptations to accommodate their needs as the talented children altered the normal roles in their families (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004; Bailey & Morley's, 2006).

This study also showed similar findings as previous studies (e.g., Mudege, 2007; Chan, 2012; Larsen et al., 2013) in that within the club there was a culture that considered commitment, hard work, motivation and discipline as significant markers of future excellence compared to the players' innate potential. Henriksen et al's (2011) study, however, found that motivation, discipline and autonomy were more important than innate potential. The results of this study indicated that motivation and discipline and innate potential were equally important and that success depended on balancing the three. Another notable finding for this study was that, contrary to Henriksen's finding that autonomy is one of the features of successful athletic talent development environment, it did not feature among the participants' responses. Instead, the emphasis was on teamwork or collaboration. This was in line with Nsamenang's (1992) and Serpell's (2002) suggestion that African notions of autonomy are relational and interdependent, rather than individualistic and self-contained.

The club's tradition of open communication and collaboration was also evident, not only among the players and coaches but also infused into the clubs' daily functioning. The club's culture of success was explicit through data from both interviews and observations. The stories of the club's success in talent development infused in most conversations among the individuals, the social institutions and society around which the club were evident. These stories were characterised by references to successful players who emerged from the club's development structures and were part of the successful senior national teams, who were now successful coaches as well as those who were sold to other clubs locally and abroad and became successful in their clubs.

7.3.4 Individual development and achievement

The results of this study showed that the players presented with a number of characteristics that were reported as being helpful for them both as developing football players and as responsible citizens in general. The main clusters of personal characteristics that were revealed by the present study's results as being helpful for the players both in sport and life were intrinsic characteristics and psychosocial skills. Similar to previous studies (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1990b; Williams & Reilly, 2000; Miah & Rich, 2006; Elferink-Gemser, Visscher, Van Duijn & Lemmink, 2006; Ivarsson & Johnson, 2010), the anthropometric and physiological characteristics that came prominently were physical fitness as well as healthy physique. Williams and Reilly's (2000) study revealed that healthy physique with such features as body size, body fat and muscle girth were predictors of talent among football players.

Similar to Larsen et al.'s (2012), data analysis for this study revealed that the players had a combination of internal and interpersonal psychosocial skills. However, the discrepancy between the present study and what Larsen et al. found was that, in their study, the players did not spontaneously talk about internal psychosocial skills and mention of these skills was often initiated by the researcher's interview questions. In this study it was vice versa in that the participants were more spontaneous in talking about interpersonal skills and mentioning of the internal skills were often prompted by the researcher. As Larsen et al. suggested, this result may be explained by the amount of interview text skewing towards external skills. From a cultural historical perspective, spontaneity in interpersonal skills could be explained as an expression of a sociocultural trajectory that was a result of the cultural traditions and

norms of the participants' society and its institutions, with the African cultural traditions and norms emphasising inter-dependence of the individual and society. The African tradition does not define the person as an independent and autonomous individual (Nsamenang, 1992; Ryba et al., 2013). Also, contrary to Larsen et al (2012), whose results were said to be highlighting interpersonal psychosocial skills as gradually fewer and less practiced among Danish football clubs, this result indicates that in a South African context such skills are given priority.

The present results also indicated that through their involvement in the club, the players gradually became imbued with the organizational culture and consequently their positive individual characteristics were consolidated and expanded. This result confirmed Holt and Dunn's (2004) findings with youth football players in English and Canadian contexts, and Henriksen's (2010) findings in a Danish context. From Hedegaard's (2012) perspective, the gradual consolidation and expansion of the players' positive characteristics may be explained as a product of the challenges and demands of the academy activities which are crisis points in the players' lives. Such perspective confirms Holt and Dunn's (2004) findings that, with regard to discipline, soccer organisations impose strict institutional demands, in terms of lifestyle and training, on their young players. As a result of these institutional demands, players learned to display appropriate disciplined and dedicated behaviours.

As the players encounter unfamiliar expectations and practices imposed by the academy environment, it results in a crisis in their social situation (Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010) and development takes place as they strive to deal with a crisis. For instance, players who had slightly positive belief when they entered the academy might feel encouraged to strengthen it as they encounter a situation when survival depends on stronger personal belief within the academy. This result highlights the crucial role of the cultural characteristics of the club in the players' effort to acquire the psychosocial skills essential for successful talent development. This may imply that when players are experiencing problems and struggling to cope with the demands in a club academy it may not always be an indication of less football talent. Rather, it could be that they are struggling to find strategies to align themselves with the cultural characteristics of the club.

7.3.5 The academy environment's effectiveness

Two of the main indicators of environmental success in the present club were similar to those that came out in the findings of previous research (e.g., Holt & Dunn; Henriksen, 2010; Larsen, 2013). The first similar indicator was the club's successful history of helping a large number of athletes to make a successful transition into elite football, the second that the club had also been successful in developing players that made it to the national teams. This study, however, transcends the research by Henriksen (2010) and Larsen (2013) in that it came up with another indicator that, due to its history of success, the club was held in high regard by its community. This may be explained as a possible indication of the presence of cultural homogeneity within the club's larger community. As Fleer (2014) indicates, this could mean that the present club was to a large extent reflective of the community values. Such results were in line with what Nsamenang (1999) referred to as a collective social practice contributing towards the player's development. Also, such results may be an indication of the extent to which the club academy concept has been adapted to fit the South African context in which it is taking place.

Overall, in line with Stambulova's (2009) suggestion, the findings of this study indicated that success was so much infused into the club's culture that there was no concern about counting the actual numbers of the successful players who went through the academy.

7.4 THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SUCCESSFUL FOOTBALL TALENT DEVELOPMENT

The proposed empirical and integrated framework as presented in Figure 7.2 (below) is based on the significant findings of this study and is informed by a combination of the two theoretical frameworks that formed the foundation of this study which were the bioecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1985) and the cultural historical framework (Hedegaard, 2009).

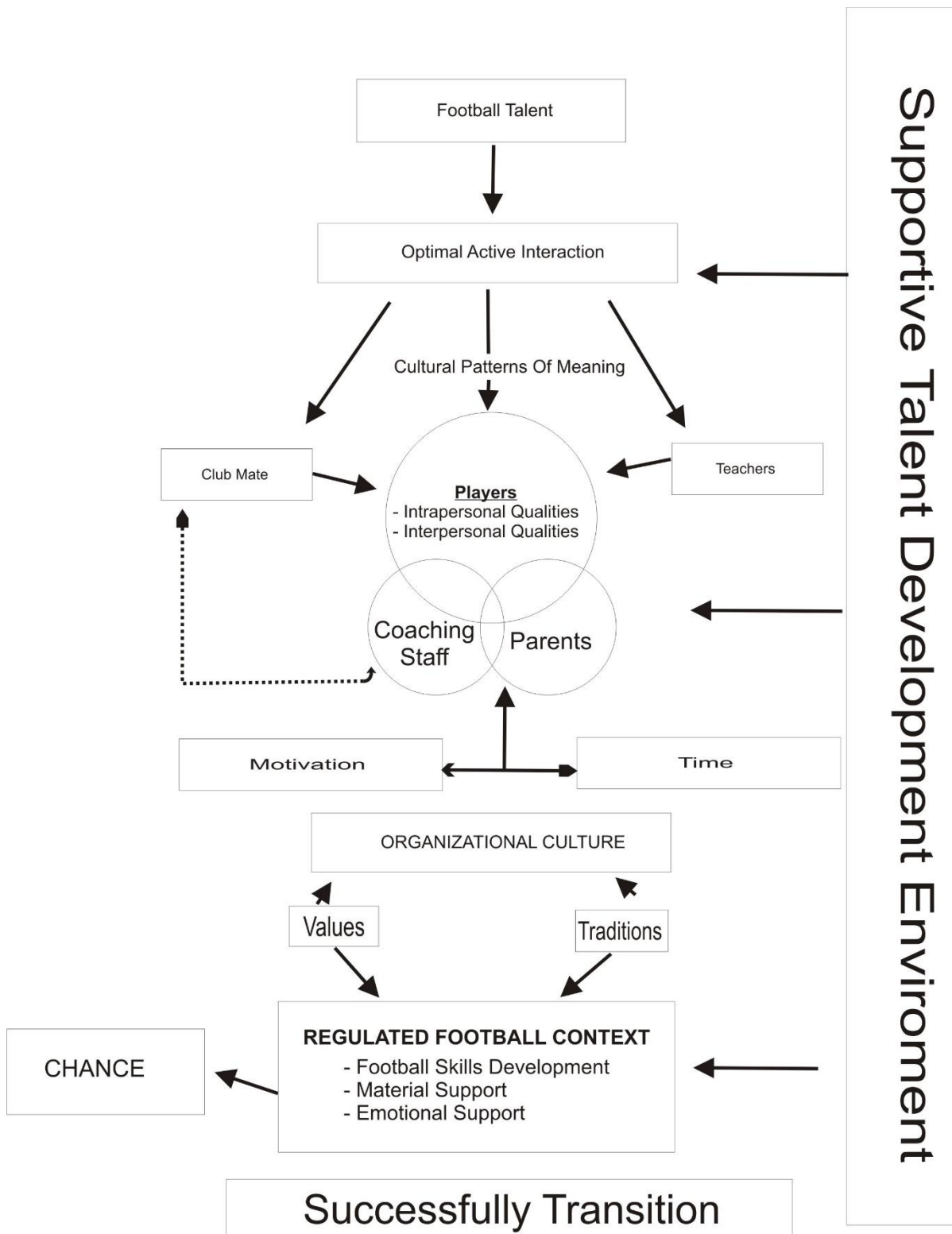


Figure 7.2: The conceptual framework of factors associated with football talent development²

² The structure of conceptual framework was constructed using some of the elements from Bronfenbrenner (1986), Hedergaard, 2009, and Gledhill & Harwood (2015).

The talent development environmental factors and relations as depicted from the top to the foot of Figure 7.2 (above) are not meant to be in a sequential progression and should not be viewed as unfolding in a linear manner. Instead, they must be understood as being interconnected and affecting one another in a holistic manner. Factors are assembled in a particular way so as to allow for a flow of the discussion of the nature and the role of each factor.

As informed by previous research (e.g., Hold & Dunn 2004; Gagné, 2005; Gledhill & Harwood, 2015), this conceptual framework proposed that talent development begins at the point when young talented football players are identified as having a natural football talent (Burton et al., 2006) and are recruited to join a talent development programme in a club academy, thus entering into the activities in a club.

The first significant proposal is *optimal active interaction*, which is the key driver of the social construction of players' development. As they enter the programme, the players are not passive objects but, through optimal and active interaction with the academy and other institutional collectives (Hedegaard 2009), or social systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1998), a dialectic influence takes place through which they develop. Both Bronfenbrenner and Hedegaard agree that active interactions are the primary mechanism of human development. Bronfenbrenner (2005b) refers to interactions as proximal processes that must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time and have to be progressively more complex in order for the development process to take place. The results of this study showed that the routine interaction between the players and the coaches particularly was the core of talent development in the academy.

The club academy and the players' parents were the main contributing systems in the context of the players under study. The indications were that the players brought their own influences and, through their motivated activities, the young players put demands on the surroundings and in that manner their actions influenced the settings in which they participated, thus contributing to the conditions for their own development (Fleer, 2015). In the context of this study, players appeared to have entered the academy with a clear motive orientation to be successful which originated when they were young. At the point when they entered the academy there were no indication that the players felt compelled to pursue football as a career. The implication is that, as a starting point, both the academy and the

players have to be conceptualised as contributing to practice in talent development (Hedegaard, 2009). The entry is the crucial point which, if the academy staff are not aware of the demands that the players begin to impose on the academy and the microsystem as a whole talented players with a potential may end up dropping out of the system. However, for the players, entering an academy resulted in football activities now being the dominating practice in their everyday lives and their motives becoming more informed than merely being the wishes they had since their childhood. According to Hedegaard (2009) this change can be seen as a recognisable stage in the players' development.

The developing players need to present with and in the process develop and strengthen a variety of characteristics that have been proven helpful to them coping well with their developmental challenges, both as football players and as responsible citizens. The main collection of characteristics identified by previous research are intrinsic characteristics and psychosocial skills.

In line with Bloom (1985) and Holt et al. (2008), the present results suggest that parental involvement is not problematic at the stage of the Under 17's. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, the results also showed the coach-player and the parents-player relationships as being intertwined and as being the primary engines of the development process. However, contrary to previous research (e.g., O'Rourke et al., 2014), in this study the player-coach interactions were not only formal during training and match days but also extended beyond the formal hours as players and coaches were interacting whenever and wherever there was a need.

This conceptual framework thus regards an adaptive interaction as important for optimal talent development environment to happen. As a parallel process, optimal active interactions need to happen between players and the teachers, the club mates and the peers (Gledhill & Harwood, 2015). The significant role of the relationship between the players and the coaches (Smoll et al., 1993; Riley & Smith, 2011; Maleté et al., 2013; O'Rourke et al. 2014; Isoard-Gauthew et al., 2016; Erickson & Côté, 2016) and the parents (Bloom, 1985; Woolger & Power, 1993; Cote, 1999; Gould et al., 2002a; Fredricks & Eccles, 2004; Wuerth et al &, 2004; Gould et al., 2008; Holt et al., 2008; Wu, 2008; Lauer et al., 2010; Omli & LaVoi, 2012; An & Hodge, 2013; Clarke & Harwood 2014; O'Rourke et al., 2014; Dorsch et al., 2015) on sport talent development has been infinitely confirmed by studies in the field of sport psychology. Another interesting finding by Schaille et al. (2015) supported this proposal when they found that athletes from disadvantage backgrounds benefited from

support received from peers of similar background in that, among other aspects, the social support located inside the culture the athletes are residing in helps them to cope with the demands of transitioning to a new environment. The findings of this study provided a different perspective in that all the players reported that their girlfriends were also found to be creating an effective motivational climate for them. Social support might have been even more important to those players who relocated from their home regions when they came to join the academy, as it might have allowed the players to engage in various practices of belonging with their home communities, rather than focusing only on their immersion in the new club culture (Blodgett & Schinke, 2015).

Optimal active interactions are also determined by the cultural patterns of meaning that is shared by the systems involved. As Fleer and Hedegaard (2010) explain, in a more culturally homogeneous communities the values that are seen in relation to a society and what is deemed to be a 'good life' are also supported in the education sectors and family. When the development of the child within his or her cultural community does not match what is expected or accepted as the "normal" development trajectory by the social systems or institutions, conflict may arise. The findings of this study indicated that the club academy and the family institutions were not having conflicting ideas with regard to development of the players' football talent and this may be an explanation to its history of success. The implication is that, in principle, the concept of club academies for male football talent development in South Africa has adopted culturally adaptive format of talent development that seems to be suitable for the South African context.

The second significant proposal is that at the centre of the development process the pillars that guide optimal active interaction as well as inform the organisational culture are *motives* and *time* frame. In order to create an environment of success, every role players in the players' development process needs to share the same motives. Motives represent the reasons why players and everyone else were involved enhancing the developing football talent. Similar to Hold and Dunn's (2004) study, the summarised motives reported in this study were love of the game, determination to succeed, perceived social status, and financial reasons. Hedegaard (2012) regards the developing individual's motives as a driving force in the dialectic relationship between the developing individual and the environment. She sees the developing individual's motives as providing meaning that either motivates or demotivated him. Engaging in talent development process would therefore be only motivating for the developing players if the activity setting, which is the club academy, is

linked with the players' already developed motives. Arguably, Bronfenbrenner also talked about the dynamic forces of interactions between the person, context and time, as determining the form, power, content and direction of the proximal processes affecting development.

Bronfenbrenner (1985) suggested that the proximal processes must happen on a regular basis and over a period of time. As Tudge et al. (2009) explained, time and timing is important because the whole process of development can be thought of in terms of relative constancy and change. It was interesting that regarding the success of the academy, time was kept constant by the historical successes of the club's talent development process. This could have been to the advantage of the club in that it probably kept the motivation and level of confidence high among both the developing players and the staff.

The third significant proposal is that optimal active interaction takes place within the contextual characteristics such as *organisational culture* (dos Santos, 2014). Organisational culture can, arguably be equated to what Hedegaard (2009) refers to as the societal perspective. Holt (2002) established that typical football club academies are built upon the traditions of the original concept emanating from Europe countries and that the basic features of a club academy are that an academy exists under the professional club which provided all the basic resources for talent development, such as: an appropriate training and playing grounds and necessary kit; it has qualified residential coaches; players are grouped according to their ages and the training received is structured and designed for their age. All these features were present in the present study, which implies that the academy was also a typical artefact of the original European concept. However, on top of the standard features, the academy had designed its own specific procedures. For instance, its specific training programme ran over three days a week. Also, as previously mentioned, the academy had a set of values providing guidance with regards to good practice, such as discipline, respect and team cohesion or *ubunye*. Success in talent development therefore was dependent on the values that the academy promoted, the position that they adopt as well as the traditions that were prevalent in the institution. As Henriksen (2010) indicated, organisational culture provides the groundwork for the environment's success and it permeates the daily routine and has a major influence on the players' development of the competencies that are necessary for success.

The fourth significant proposal is that successful talent development depends on *regulated holistic football context*. In line with Hold and Dunn (2004) and Mudege (2007), the findings

of this study revealed that developing players benefited from a regulated context in several ways. Firstly, they benefited from a context that provided opportunities to develop their football skills. As Charness et al. (2005) suggested, quality planned regular practice that was challenging, effortful, low in inherent enjoyment, and purposeful designed to address current areas of weakness results with better success for the developing players. Secondly, the developing players benefit from being exposed to more opportunities to develop. These include opportunities to play with other local and international clubs and for national teams. The present results revealed that the club had a history of players from its academy dominating the national teams in terms of numbers. Thirdly, the developing players must be provided with suitable material support such as playing and training grounds, football kit and money. Fourthly, the context in which the young players are developing needs to provide them with emotional support. In particular, the parents and the coaches are the closest to the players and therefore should be able to provide them with comfort and security during times of stress and make them feel cared for (Holt & Dunn, 2004). In this study, the coaches indicated that, at times, they felt they were not adequately qualified to provide players with emotional support. This implies that specialist support by professionals such as sport psychologist may be beneficial to the players.

Previous research has identified that *chance* factor also may play a significant role in talent development (e.g., Gagné, 2005; Burton et al., 2006). The ability to recognise and grab chances as they appear during the development process has been identified as a characteristic of successful players (Burton et al., 2006). It seems reasonable to suggest that, in particular, players were able to recognise and grab the chances if they appeared. This is supported by, for example, the coaches' revelation that when players grabbed positions in the field due to other players getting injured they ended up establishing themselves as first options in those positions..

The last proposal is that, for successful talent development to happen, all processes should be taking place within a *supportive holistic talent development environment*. The collective results of a supportive environment is that, firstly, it help players overcome obstacles and develop resilience (Hold & Dunn, 2004), and secondly, the players have a better chance to develop key intra-individual psychosocial assets (e.g., self-regulation), to experience enhanced psychological wellbeing, and they display more adaptive psycho-behavioural characteristics such as training adherence, and lifestyle management (Glenhill & Harwood, 2015).

7.5 SUMMARY

In this chapter the findings were presented highlighting the significant factors associated with football talent development. Based on the results, an empirically derived conceptual framework is proposed.

The next chapter presents the conclusion of the thesis.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the conclusions to the thesis. It also discusses the limitations and the implications of the study and then gives various recommendations for future researchers.

8.2 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the ecological factors associated with talent development among football players in South Africa, with a view to presenting a conceptual framework as it emerged from the results. It followed a shift in research attention from the individual athlete to the environment in which he or she develops. Within the field of sport psychology, support for the need for this shift, coupled with the need for understanding how athletes are developed within social contexts that are culturally infused, has recently been growing. Recently, a shift has been evident in several contemporary lines of research and practice, such as social psychology of sport (Stambulova, 2009), athletic career development (Gledhill & Harwood, 2015), and athletic talent development (Larsen et al., 2013).

Viewed through Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological and Hedegaard's (2008) cultural historical frameworks, the present study extends previous football talent development research by exploring the ecological factors that play a role in the optimisation of the process of developing youth with football talent into elite senior players. Similar to previous research (e.g., Holt & Dunn, 2004; Henriksen, 2010, Larsen, 2013), it acknowledged that the players were embedded in an environment and thus it considered the views of coaches and parents alongside the players within the Under 17 group with the aim of presenting a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to success at the early stage of the development of the aspiring football careers. The emphasis was therefore on the contextual factors in which the process of talent development unfolds (Ryba & Stambulova (2013).

A single case study of a successful football talent development environment was conducted and interviews and observation were preferred as data collection procedures to provide a qualitative

account of the players', coaches' and parents' experiences. This case study demonstrated the potential of a simultaneous combination of interviews and observation as data collection strategies. Drawing upon data from these two strategies, the researcher was able to link the players' subjective experiences with the larger social structures in which they were produced, thus producing a rich, multi-level understanding of the ecological factors that impact on talent development. The thematic analysis of data strove to elucidate the positive factors that were congruent with successful developmental outcomes.

The proposed conceptual framework that emerged from the results highlights the crucial role of the social and task-oriented interactions occurring within the club academy's family-like environment in shaping the development of young football players. It also showed how correspondence between the symbols of the organisational culture, such as motives, values and traditions produced cultural patterns of meaning, help create a supportive talent development environment.

In some respects, as has been previously described, the present findings confirmed those that have been revealed by several other studies conducted in different countries abroad. However, this study brings several additions to the area of football talent development. To the researcher's knowledge, no other study on young footballers, for example, was conceptualised within the cultural praxis of football players' talent development paradigm (Ryba & Wright, 2010). This study was designed to generate knowledge that resonates with the cultural realities of the South African youth football players in club academies, with a view to facilitate an in-depth and culturally meaningful understanding of football talent development within the country's context. For instance, as mentioned in the discussion of the results of this study, the cultural factors that were revealed in the current study were, firstly, appreciation of collective interests and team cohesion as the strong cultural value embedded in South African young talented footballers in club academies. Secondly, more value was attached to the interpersonal skills when compared to those skills that are useful for intrapersonal survival. Thirdly, mutual survival was regarded as more important than the values of competition among the club mates. Such findings were in line with findings from research conducted in the Far Eastern countries (e.g., Si et al., 2015), and were contrary to the findings of research from European countries (e.g., Holt & Dunn, 2004) which highlighted individualistic values such as intrapersonal qualities.

To the researcher's knowledge this study was the first to apply the ecological approaches to the study of athletic talent development in a South African context. The wish was to create possibilities for enhancing the development of talented players who were underrepresented in existing football talent development research. The researcher argued that, although Bronfenbrenner's (1985) PPCT model

captures the full range of contextual influences, the inclusion of a cultural historical approach in the conceptualisation of this research allowed for the teasing out of potential contributions of institutional collectives in the players' everyday lives. It was possible, for instance, not only to recognise that cultural factors may have an impact on the numerous factors involved in talent development (Larsen, 2013), but also allow for the incorporation of the dynamic processes within the players' families through which talent development was afforded, thus foregrounding an understanding of the players' development as changes in their activities and in their relations to reality across institutional practices (Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010).

Another strength of this study lies in its adoption of a cultural approach which not only allowed the researcher to understand a constitutive dynamic between the participants' experiences and their socio-cultural context (Ryba & Stambulova, 2013), but also guided the researcher in putting value on individual participants and collective knowledge derived from their life experiences (Secor-Turner et al., 2010). To date, cultural research in the area of footballers' talent development, particularly in a South African context, is rather limited.

This study also makes its own contribution to an empirical ecological framework that future researchers may consider as baseline for their research. This is following a suggestion that, for research on the applicability of ecological approaches to sport psychology and talent development to grow, more research of this nature is needed in different sport codes and different contexts (Krebs, 2009; Henriksen, 2010).

8.3 LIMITATIONS

The current study generated a number of important findings regarding the development of football talent. Nevertheless, certain limitations must be discussed and should be taken into consideration for future research.

Firstly, this study was explorative in nature and, therefore, was not designed to either confirm the presence of the developmental factors nor to establish the impact that these factors might have on the young players successfully making a transition to professional football. As previously mentioned, it was a response to a suggestion that, since research on the applicability of ecological approaches to sport talent development is still new, more research on the field should have an exploratory rather than confirmatory design and aim to develop more concrete versions of conceptual frameworks for the holistic ecological study of athletic talent development environment. Like previous studies, this study was based upon the views of developing players who may or may not

progress to a professional level. It may thus be seen as giving no proof that these factors have lasting impact on eventual success of talented players and the conclusions drawn may remain somewhat tentative.

Secondly, cultural sport psychology researchers are currently presented with the challenge of deciding what methodology may capture a socially constructed and nuanced analysis of culture and experience (McGannon & Smith, 2015). In line with previous research, this study used a single case study method, regardless of the possibility that this might limit the generalisability of the findings due to the small sample that had to be used. It is therefore important to acknowledge the limitations of this research in terms of the small sample. In this sense, the findings from this study are not intended to be generalisable to other cultural and social contexts as they describe how football talent development is framed and undertaken in the case under study at a specific point in time.

The third limitation is that only the positive factors that related to successful talent development were explored. The inclusion of factors that contribute negatively towards talent development, or perhaps a comparison of contribution made by the two, could have resulted in findings that are different from those of the present research.

Fourthly, despite seeking variation in the sample of players for this study, the players volunteered to take part in interviews and may have shared common qualities that were different from those of players who did not respond to research invitations. More research into different populations of young players may therefore help to define the essence of the players' experiences in a more complete way. Furthermore, regarding the sample for this study, the absence of teacher data was also a limitation of this study. The role of the school and teachers featured prominently as an important part of the players' contextual environment, yet the researcher was only dependent on the views of the players and the coaches with regard to the impact that the school had on the players' development process. The main reason for not including the school as part of the sample was that those approached did not want to take part for logistical reasons.

Fifthly, another limitation is related to 'culture' as a term. This limitation has also been mentioned by previous cultural sport psychology researchers (e.g., Larsen, 2013; Ryba et al., 2016) who acknowledged that the term is so multifaceted that describing it thoroughly is beyond the scope of a thesis. The main focus was to highlight the connection that has been recognised between culture and research and how culture can broaden the conceptualisation of the methodology for the study.

Lastly, previous research has indicated that environmental factors may be subtle and only observable after years of exposure, or effects may be dramatic, resulting in rapid contextual changes. Since the present study was not longitudinal this may be recognised as a possible limitation.

8.4 IMPLICATIONS

The implications of present study can be understood from a theoretical, methodological and practical perspective.

With regard to a theoretical perspective, it adopted a cultural approach which, to a large extent, invites the researchers to become conscious of the taken-for granted practices of Western talent development programmes and to re-appraise their ideologies and practices, recognising the need for multiple perspectives rather than adhering to universal truths about talent development.

Methodologically, as mentioned above, this study also adopted a cultural praxis framework as a guiding principle for research on talent career development in sport with a view to challenging culture-blind research and conduct research that recognised that the participants are made up of various discourses. These may result in what works well for others not being suitable for them. In this sense, this study provides a valuable base on which future sport talent development research, and intervention for young African players could be further advanced.

Also, the findings indicate that to better understand the complexities of developing young talented athletes we need to consider the dynamic sociocultural and historical context. Advocating broader socio-cultural contextual analyses and more systematic and holistic analyses of the young athletes' behaviour and performances are thus essential requirements for those running club academies where these young players are being groomed. They need to consider that the players are actively making sense of their social world and construct different meanings in different social systems with which they engage. Therefore considering the players in isolation as singular individuals in a way that the dominant conventional sport psychology has tended, the ecological approach proposed by this study has the potential to help in understanding that each player is engrossed in a particular socio-cultural and historical context (Ryba & Wright, 2005).

Furthermore, this study emphasised the need to recognise the socially and culturally constructed nature of the players' talents. The present study reveals the presence as well as the contributions of various systems. It is therefore the players' changing relations to their environment, including home and school institution

Practically, the findings of the present study are significant for those involved in football talent development, particularly in the South African context. It is hoped that the findings can contribute to helping those engaged in the development of young football players recognize that the contextual factors can have significant impacts upon the success of players. It could thus be suggested that young players entering the academies should receive support that allows them to develop the psychosocial skills that will assist them to engage effectively with their environment. The absence of such support for the players is a source of concern and is an issue that requires serious attention in the future.

8.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

This study reveals that the ecological factors associated with successful talent development in structured sport environments are complex and need further exploration. As much as the findings showed that the young football players were carefully managed and socialised in a system whereby emphasis was placed on strong family feeling, the role of each of the family members could have been explored more profoundly. In particular, the role of the parents and mesosystems was shown to be crucial and therefore needs to be explored, for instance, with regard to how such factors as poverty, disintegrated families as well as the interaction of parent responsibilities at home and at work may impact on the parents' contributions towards their children's success. Given these findings, future research on each of these areas would provide further understanding regarding the South African approach to the development of young footballers.

Also, as Dorsch et al. (2015) suggested, capturing the full range of Bronfenbrenner's (2005) contextual influences future researchers could be a challenge to accomplish in one study. Future researchers could therefore attempt to explore the influences of various systems, such as home, school and sport, on talent development.

Since this study was based upon the views of developing players who may or may not progress to a professional level, it is recommended that future researchers consider using either retrospective data from the players who are already at the professional level or longitudinal data collection. More so, because non-retrospective data may have captured contextual situations that may have temporal features or may take long to manifest themselves, it may be ideal for ecological studies to be longitudinal so as to target the development of players across different stages of the developmental process.

Lastly, while the researcher believes that the proposed conceptual framework represents the factors that are common to talent development process in different context and may be also be applicable across different sport codes, it is hoped that it will spur further dialogue within sport psychology researchers in order to further explore and expand understandings related to the emerging cultural sport psychology research, focusing particularly on athletic talent development.

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APPENDIX I

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

A. Interviews with the players:

- *Introduction and Background:* How did you get started in football? When did you join the club academy? How? What grade are you doing at school? What can you say of the role of education in your football career development? How do you reconcile your situation of being a club academy players and a school learner at the same time? How does the academy help you with this situation? Who influenced the decision to concentrate on football? How do you feel about being a part of the club academy?

- *Ambitions and Personal development:* What are your ambitions in football? What motivates you to pursue these dreams? Who helps you in your efforts to make it to the elite level? Who hinders you?
- *Environment's culture:* How does being in an academy help you become a good football player? Do you think the environment is a successful talent development environment? What tells you that it is successful? What do you consider the secrets of its success? Which aspects of the club environment do you think are the most helpful to you? Which ones do you think are hindering? What can be done to make the club environment even more successful?
 - *Training Environment:* How would you describe your typical week in the academy? How would you assess the level of challenge you are getting from the training? What can you say is helping/not helping you fit into the club environment?
 - *Parents' role:* How would you describe the kind of support you are getting from your parents? What does the club do to maintain good working relations with your family?
 - *Coaches' role:* How would you describe the kind of support you are getting from your coaches?
- *Overcoming Obstacles:* What obstacles have you had to overcome as a player? Who or what helped you overcome them?

B. Interviews with the coaches:

- *Introduction:* How did you get started in coaching? What coaching qualifications do you have? What experience would you say you have as a football coach for the development sides?
- *Players Qualities and Ambitions:* What are the most important qualities a player needs in order to make it as a professional? What can you say is the role of education in your players' football career development? What qualities does your current crop of players possess? How do you help your players reconcile your situation of being a club academy players and a school learner at the same time?

- *Environment's culture:* How does being in an academy help your players become good football players? How does the academy prepare the players for professional demands? Do you think the environment is a successful talent development environment? What tells you that it is successful? What do you consider the secrets of its success? Which aspects of the club environment do you think are the most helpful to your players? Which ones do you think are hindering?
- *Training Environment:* What is the structure and aim of the academy? How would you describe your players' typical week in the academy? How would you assess the level of challenge you are getting from the training? What can you say is helping/not helping your players fit into the club environment? How would you describe the kind of support that your players are getting from their parents? What does the club do to maintain good working relations with the players' families?
- *Overcoming Obstacles:* What obstacles do your players have to overcome as players? Who or what helped your players overcome them?

C. Interview with the parents:

- *Introduction:* How did your child get started in football? Who influenced his decision to concentrate on football?
- *Players Qualities and Ambitions:* What do you think makes a good football player? Why has your child been successful? What do you think he needs to become a top player?
- *Environment's culture:* How does being in an academy help your child become a good football player? How does the academy prepare him for professional demands? Do you

think the environment is a successful talent development environment” What tells you that it is successful? What do you consider the secrets of its success?” Which aspects of the club environment do you think are the most helpful to your child? Which ones do you think are hindering?

- *Training Environment:* What is the structure and aim of the academy? How would you describe your child’s typical week in the academy? How would you assess the level of challenge you are getting from the training? What can you say is helping/not helping your child fit into the club environment? How would you describe the kind of support that your child is getting from you as a parent? What does the club do to maintain good working relations with the players’ families?
- *Overcoming Obstacles:* What obstacles does your child have to overcome as a football player? Who or what helped him overcome them?

APPENDIX II

A LETTER TO THE FOOTBALL CLUB REQUESTING FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH WITH THE PLAYERS AND THEIR COACHES FROM THEIR ACADEMIES

University of South Africa
Department of Psychology of Education
Office 6-99 AJH building
Preller Street
Muckleneuk Ridge
Pretoria

0003

15 April 2016

The Manager
_____ Football Club

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: Request for permission to conduct research with the football players affiliated to the club academy and their coaches.

I hereby request for permission to conduct research with your academy players and their coaches.

I am registered as a Doctor of Education student in the Department of Psychology of Education at the University of South Africa. As part of the requirements for my studies, I will be conducting a research project entitled: **Towards a conceptual framework for understanding the ecological factors associated with talent development among football players**. This research project will be conducted under the supervision of Professor N. Naidu, a Professor and Chair of the Department of Psychology of Education at the University of South Africa. The aim of the project is to identify and explore environmental conditions associated with becoming a professional football player, as well as to explore and identify factors influencing the environment's success in developing talented male football players. The main benefit for this project is that it will present a qualitatively derived ecological framework of the conditions associated with becoming a professional football player. This requires collecting data from 15-17 years old players who are affiliated to a football academy, their parents and their coaches. A sample of ten learners and two of their coaches from the academy will be interviewed by me individually. Each interview will last for about 45 minutes.

The players' assent and their parents' consent will be sought prior to conducting the interviews. All participants will be briefed as to the exact nature and purpose of this research project. The manner in which interviews are to be conducted will be discussed and explained to all participants. Participants will be assured of utmost confidentiality and anonymity. In addition they will be informed that their participation is voluntary and that they will have the right to withdraw or discontinue participation at any time. They will also have the right to refuse to answer certain questions if they choose to do so. All interviews will be audio recorded. Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of South Africa (Unisa). There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study.

The results of the research will be shared with the football club.

Thanking you in advance.

Kind regards.

.....
Sibusiso Ntshangase
Tel. 0824354141
Email: ntshas@unisa.ac.za

REPLY SLIP FOR THE FOOTBALL CLUB OFFICIAL

I, the manager for
.....football club hereby grant permission for our
players and coaches in our football academy to participate in the above mentioned study.

Signature:.....

Date:.....

APPENDIX III

A LETTER FOR OBTAINING AN INFORMED CONSENT FROM THE PARENTS OF THE PLAYERS PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY

University of South Africa
Department of Psychology of Education
Office number 6-99 AJH building
Preller Street
Muckleneuk Ridge
Pretoria
0003

15 April 2016

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: Request for permission to involve your child in a research project

I am registered as a Doctorate student in the Department of Psychology of Education at the University of South Africa. As part of the requirements for my studies, I will be conducting a research project entitled: **Towards a conceptual framework for understanding the ecological factors associated with talent development among football players**. This research project will be conducted under the supervision of Professor N. Naidu, a Professor and Chair of the Department of Psychology of Education in University of South Africa. The aim of the project is to Identify and explore environmental conditions associated with becoming a professional football player as well as to explore and identify factors influencing the environment's success in developing talented male football players. The main benefit for this study is that it will present a qualitatively derived ecological framework of the environmental conditions associated with becoming a professional football player. This requires me to interview or ask questions to the players who are in a team of the under 17 year old players in football academies.

A sample of ten players from the _____ FC academy will be interviewed individually by me and each interview will last for about 45 minutes. The players' permission and their parents' consent will be sought prior to conducting the interviews. These players will be briefed as to the exact nature and purpose of this study. The manner in which interviews are to be conducted will also be discussed and explained to the participating players. All interviews will be audio recorded. Participating players will be assured of utmost confidentiality and anonymity. In addition they will be informed that their participation is voluntary and that they will have the right to withdraw or discontinue participation at any time. They also will have the right to refuse to answer certain questions if they choose to. Participating players will not be compensated for participating in this study.

I hereby ask for permission to interview your son for the purpose of this study. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study.

The results will be shared with the academy and with the parents of the participating players.

Kind regards

.....
Sibusiso Ntshangase
Tel. 0824354141
Email: ntshas@unisa.ac.za

REPLY SLIP FOR A PARENT

I, parent/guardian
of..... hereby grant permission/do not
grant permission for my son to participate in the above mentioned study. Also, I hereby give
permission for the interviews to be digitally recorded.

Signature:.....

Date:.....

APPENDIX IV

**A LETTER INVITING THE COACHES OF THE UNDER 17 TEAM TO PARTICIPATE
IN THE STUDY.**

University of South Africa
Department of Psychology of Education
Office 6-99 AJH building
Preller Street
Muckleneuk Ridge
Pretoria

0003

15 April 2016

Dear Parent

RE: An invitation for the coaches of the Under 17 players to participate in a research project.

I am registered as a Doctor of Education student in the Department of Psychology of Education at the University of South Africa. As part of the requirements for my studies, I will be conducting a research project entitled: **Towards a conceptual framework for understanding the ecological factors associated with talent development among football players**. This research project will be conducted under the supervision of Professor N. Naidu, a Professor and Chair of the Department of Psychology of Education at the University of South Africa. The aim of the project is to identify and explore environmental conditions associated with becoming a professional football player, as well as to explore and identify factors influencing the environment's success in developing talented male football players. The main benefit for this project is that it will present a qualitatively derived ecological framework of the conditions associated with becoming a professional football player. This requires collecting data from 15-17 years old players who are affiliated to a football academy, their parents and their coaches. A sample of ten learners and two of their coaches from the academy will be interviewed by me individually. Each interview will last for about 45 minutes.

The players' assent and their parents' consent will be sought prior to conducting the interviews. All participants will be briefed as to the exact nature and purpose of this research project. The manner in which interviews are to be conducted will be discussed and explained to all participants. Participants will be assured of utmost confidentiality and anonymity. In addition they will be informed that their participation is voluntary and that they will have the right to withdraw or discontinue participation at any time. They will also have the right to refuse to answer certain questions if they choose to do so. All interviews will be audio recorded. Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of South Africa (Unisa). There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study.

I would like to invite you, on your capacity as a coach for the Under 17 team, to participate in this study.

The results of the research will be shared with the football club.

Thanking you in advance.

Kind regards.

.....
Sibusiso Ntshangase
Tel. 0824354141
Email: ntshas@unisa.ac.za

REPLY SLIP FOR THE COACH

I, the Under 17 coach
forfootball club hereby agree to participate in the
above mentioned study.

Signature:.....

Date:.....

APPENDIX V

A LETTER INVITING THE PARENTS OF THE PARTICIPATING PLAYERS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

University of South Africa
Department of Psychology of Education
Office 6-99 AJH building
Preller Street
Muckleneuk Ridge

Pretoria
0003

15 April 2016

Dear Parent

RE: An invitation for the parents of the participating players to participate in a research project.

I am registered as a Doctor of Education student in the Department of Psychology of Education at the University of South Africa. As part of the requirements for my studies, I will be conducting a research project entitled: **Towards a conceptual framework for understanding the ecological factors associated with talent development among football players.** This research project will be conducted under the supervision of Professor N. Naidu, a Professor and Chair of the Department of Psychology of Education at the University of South Africa. The aim of the project is to identify and explore environmental conditions associated with becoming a professional football player, as well as to explore and identify factors influencing the environment's success in developing talented male football players. The main benefit for this project is that it will present a qualitatively derived ecological framework of the conditions associated with becoming a professional football player. This requires collecting data from 15-17 years old players who are affiliated to a football academy, their parents and their coaches. A sample of ten learners and two of their coaches from the academy will be interviewed by me individually. Each interview will last for about 45 minutes.

The players' assent and their parents' consent will be sought prior to conducting the interviews. All participants will be briefed as to the exact nature and purpose of this research project. The manner in which interviews are to be conducted will be discussed and explained to all participants. Participants will be assured of utmost confidentiality and anonymity. In addition they will be informed that their participation is voluntary and that they will have the right to withdraw or discontinue participation at any time. They will also have the right to refuse to answer certain questions if they choose to do so. All interviews will be audio recorded. Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of South Africa (Unisa). There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study.

The results of the research will be shared with the football club.

Thanking you in advance.

Kind regards.

.....
Sibusiso Ntshangase
Tel. 0824354141
Email: ntshas@unisa.ac.za

REPLY SLIP FOR THE PARENTS

I, hereby agree to participate
in the above mentioned study.

Signature:.....

Date:.....

APPENDIX VI

A LETTER FOR OBTAINING INFORMED ASSENT FROM THE PARTICIPATING PLAYERS

University of South Africa
Department of Psychology of Education
Office 6-99 AJH building
Preller Street
Muckleneuk Ridge
Pretoria
0003

15 April 2016

Dear Player

I am a student at the University of South Africa. I have to write a long essay which will be like a project that will be aiming to identify and explore the environmental conditions associated with becoming a professional football player. The title of the research project is: **Towards a conceptual framework for understanding the ecological factors associated with talent development among football players.** This requires me to interview or ask questions from 15-17 years old players who are affiliated to football academies. About 45 minutes are needed for the interview with each player.

I would like you to give me permission to interview you for the purpose of this project. I have also asked for your parent's permission. If you are willing and sign the reply slip, I will provide your parents with a copy of it. Your name and the name of your club academy will not be used in my essay. If there are some questions that you do not want to answer, then you can tell me that you do not want to answer them. If you feel uncomfortable or unhappy about taking part in my project you can stop at any time. All interviews will be confidential and private. Your coaches and other players will not know about what you said during the interviews. I will treat you with the utmost care and respect. Interviews will be audio recorded. Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study. You are welcome to discuss this with your parents prior to signing the reply slip.

Kindly feel free to ask me should you have any question related to your participation in this project.

The results of the project will be shared with you.

Kind regards

.....
Sibusiso Ntshangase
Tel. 0824354141
Email: ntshas@unisa.ac.za

REPLY SLIP FOR THE PLAYER

I, a player at
_____ football club academy agree to take part in the above mentioned project. Also, I
hereby give permission for the interviews to be audio recorded.

Signature:.....

Date:.....



Research Ethics Clearance Certificate

This is to certify that the application for ethical clearance submitted by

S Netshangase [07607652]

for a DEd study entitled

Towards a conceptual framework for understanding the ecological factors
associate with talent development among football players.

has met the ethical requirements as specified by the University of South Africa
College of Education Research Ethics Committee. This certificate is valid for two
years from the date of issue.



Acting Executive Dean:
CEDU

CEDU REC (Chairperson)
mcdtc@netactive.co.za

Reference number: 2015
MARCH
/07607652/MC

18 MARCH 2015

