LJMU Research Online

Rowley, C, Nelson, L, Knowles, ZR and Potrac, P

 More than meets the (Rationalistic) Eye: A Neophyte Sport Psychology Practitioner's Reflections on the Micro-politics of Everyday Life within a Rugby League Academy

http://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/8902/

Article

1 **More than meets the (Rationalistic) Eye: A Neophyte Sport Psychology Practitioner's**

2 **Reflections on the Micro-politics of Everyday Life within a Rugby League Academy**

3

4 **Abstract**

5 Despite the welcome contributions of the reflective practice literature, understanding of

6 the complexities, nuances and dilemmas of applied sport psychology practice is in need

7 of further development. For example, there remains a paucity of inquiry addressing how

8 practitioners make sense of, and subsequently write themselves into, the (micro)political

9 landscape of a sporting organization. Utilizing a reflective, ethnographic approach, this

10 paper examined the first author's engagement with the socio-political dynamics of

11 everyday life within a professional rugby league academy. Key themes identified were

12 that; a) players simultaneously collaborate and compete with one another; b) tensions

13 exist between the coaches; and c) most players end up being released. The micro-political

14 workings of Ball (1987), and Kelchtermans (1996, 2009a, 2009b, 2011) were used as the

15 primary heuristic frameworks, thus promoting the utility of these theories to inform

16 critical appreciation of the day-to-day realities of applied sport psychology practice. The

17 paper concludes by highlighting the potential benefits of researchers, educators, and

18 practitioners better engaging with the contested, ambiguous, and professionally

19 challenging demands of practice than that which has been achieved to date.

20 **Keywords:** reflective practice, ethnography, vulnerability, stakeholders

21

22 **Introduction**

23   The emergence and continued evolution of the reflective practice literature has

24 provided valuable insights into the fundamentally human (and social) elements of

25 professional practice within applied sport psychology (McDougall, Nesti, & Richardson,

26   2015). Such inquiry has shone some much needed light on the difficulties that neophyte sport

27   psychologists may experience (Huntley, Cropley, Gilbourne, Sparkes & Knowles, 2014).

28   These have included; the evolution of personal philosophies of practice (e.g. Collins, Evans-

29   Jones, & O'Connor, 2013; Holt & Strean, 2001; Owton, Bond, & Tod, 2014; Tonn &

30   Harmison, 2004), the demands of fulfilling multiple roles within an organization (Jones,

31   Evans & Mullen, 2007), adapting practice to fit with organizational routines (Rowley, Earle,

32   & Gilbourne, 2012), and changes in practitioner's perceived competencies over time (Tod &

33   Bond, 2010). Collectively, this evolving line of inquiry has portrayed how neophyte

34   practitioners come to recognize some of the philosophical, developmental, and practical

35   issues which characterize applied work (Tonn, Gunter, & Harmison, 2016). In a similar vein,

36   Knowles, Katz and Gilbourne (2012) provided a valuable insight into the 'minutiae' of

37   practice from an experienced practitioner's perspective with issues regarding communication,

38   role clarity and acceptance were at the heart of the critical reflections offered.

39   This growing body of reflective literature challenges the often straightforward and

40   technical portrayals of practice that have traditionally characterized sport psychology texts

41   and, relatedly, many educational and professional preparation programs (Knowles et al.,

42   2012; Tonn et al., 2016). Such accounts of practice have typically been produced after major

43   international sporting events, and focus on the sport psychologist's role in supporting

44   effective athletic performance, and the problematization of such rationalistic representations

45   of practitioner experience, is consistent with wider calls for more nuanced and process-

46   orientated accounts of practice (Tod & Lavallee, 2011; Tod & Andersen, 2012). Here, for

47   example, McDougall, Nesti, and Richardson (2015) have argued for the evolution of a

48   knowledge base that better reflects how;

49   Sport psychology delivery and its place, role, function, and/or influence may vary,

50   and indeed be tested, depending on the sport, sporting culture, and the athletes and

51   individuals who coexist within a particular environment. (p.267)

52

53   Crucially, such arguments (and related lines of inquiry) represent a distinct shift away from

54   the historical emphasis placed on the implementation and assessment of psychological skills

55   training programs within the discipline.

56   Despite the progress outlined above, there remains little understanding as to how sport

57   psychologists experience and grapple with the day-to-day demands of practice. Indeed, there

58   remains a lack of published literature that directly explores how practitioners build, maintain,

59   and advance working relationships with various stakeholders, thereby recognizing how

60   stakeholders (and their interests) are connected with, and relate to, each other (Eubank, Nesti,

61   & Cruickshank, 2014). It is here that sport psychology research may benefit from adopting a

62   similar focus on the dynamic and frequently contested nature of inter-personal relations to

63   that which has been adopted in the sports coaching literature (e.g. Jones & Wallace, 2005;

64   Magill, Nelson, Jones, & Potrac, 2017; Potrac, Mallett, Greenough, & Nelson, 2017).

65   Specifically, researchers within sports coaching have increasingly challenged the

66   dominant, sanitized and functionalistic representations of practice within their domain

67   (Cassidy, Jones, & Potrac, 2016; Potrac, Jones, Gilbourne, & Nelson, 2013). For example,

68   Potrac and Jones (2009a) highlighted how a coach was required to work with a diverse range

69   of individuals, who not only brought different traditions, values, and goals to the workplace,

70   but who actively sought to pursue them where opportunity permitted them to do so. Other

71   related work within high-performance sport contexts (e.g., Booroff, Nelson, & Potrac, 2016;

72   Huggan, Nelson, & Potrac, 2015; Thompson, Potrac, & Jones, 2015), has similarly

73 highlighted how organizational life is characterized by the 'dynamic and fluid process of

74 forging and re-forging alliances and working relationships' (Cassidy et al., 2016, p.60); a

75 challenge that requires practitioners to read, initiate, and respond to the inescapably political

76 demands of the sporting workplace. Within such studies, (micro)politics is conceptualized as

77 pervasive feature of all shared endeavors, including all acts of collaboration, negotiation, and

78 conflict (Leftwhich, 2005; Potrac & Jones, 2009a, 2009b). Leftwhich (2005) states that

79 (micro) politics consists of three key ingredients these are; a) people (who often have

80 different beliefs, ideas, and interests); b) resources (which may be material or non-material in

81 nature, and often limited in terms of availability); and c) power (the ability of a group or

82 individual to achieve desired outcomes).

83   Given that sport psychologists practice within these same high-performance contexts,

84 it is perhaps naïve to believe that they are somehow immune from the challenges and

85 dilemmas that accompany shared endeavors with others (Leftwhich, 2005). Indeed, McCalla

86 and Fitzpatrick (2016) have, for example, illustrated how other stakeholders, and the micro-

87 political nature of such contexts, may potentially impact upon a sport psychology

88 practitioner's attempts to integrate him or herself within a multi-disciplinary professional

89 support team. To date, however, there remains a paucity of inquiry addressing how sport

90 psychologists experience and respond to working with various stakeholders, who may hold,

91 and actively pursue opposing beliefs, motivations and goals (Cassidy et al., 2016; Potrac &

92 Jones, 2009a, 2009b). The current paper seeks to address this disparity, by offering an

93 analysis of the political context in which I (the first author) had previously practiced (cf.

94 Rowley et al., 2012); one which delves beyond the veneer of unproblematic subscription to

95 shared organizational goals and unified ways of working together (Jones & Wallace, 2005).

96 However, rather than just offering descriptive insights, this paper purposively seeks to aid

97   conceptual development within this topic area through the provision of a theoretically robust

98   scrutiny of contextual reflections. Here, the respective theorizing of Ball (1987) and

99   Kelchtermans (1996, 2009a, 2009b, 2011) are not only employed as heuristic devices for

100 interpreting personal meaning-making, but also as tools for enriching conceptual

101 understandings of the everyday 'grit' of organizational life in which applied sport

102 psychologists are embedded.

103   The significance of this paper therefore lies, therefore, in its response to calls for a

104 micro-political analysis of high-performance sporting contexts (Potrac & Jones, 2009a,

105 2009b). By scrutinizing my experiences, observations and reflections in this way, this study

106 contributes to an evolving body of knowledge, and related educational provision, addressing

107 how applied practice frequently occurs in settings that are characterized by varying degrees

108 of ideological agreement, co-ordination, and actual, or potential for, conflict (Cassidy et al.,

109 2016). Furthermore, this paper responds to ongoing calls for further ethnographic research

110 within sport psychology (Krane & Baird, 2005; Wagstaff, Fletcher, & Hanton, 2012),

111 promoting the utility of such inquiry as a vehicle for critical reflection (Knowles &

112 Gilbourne, 2010). Rather than seeking to unproblematically generalize the first author's field-

113 based experiences and interpretations to other practitioners however, the reader is, instead,

114 invited to critically reflect upon the material, issues, and ideas presented in this paper. In

115 particular, practitioners working in various amateur, professional, and elite contexts are asked

116 to consider how, why, and to what ends they practically read, understand, and ultimately

117 respond to the political dimensions of practice (Jones, 2009; Potrac et al., 2013).

118 Accordingly, we encourage others to consider the merits of this piece in terms of both its

119 naturalistic and analytical generalizability (Smith, 2018).

120

121   **Method**

122   **Ethnographic Inquiry and Knowledge**

123   At the heart of ethnographic inquiry is the study of relational practices, and the common

124   values, beliefs, and shared experiences that feature in particular cultural or social settings

125   (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). As Hamersley and Atkinson (2007) summarized,

126   ethnography involves a researcher;

127   participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of

128   time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions

129   through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts – in fact,

130   gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the

131   emerging focus of inquiry. (p3)

132

133   Within the context of sport psychology, ethnographic inquiry provides a valuable tool for

134   developing empathetic accounts of organizational life, reflecting the experiences of athletes,

135   coaches, and other stakeholders, and permitting practitioners to try and hear the voices of

136   those with whom they work (Krane & Baird, 2005). Such explorations may not only help

137   deepen our understandings of organizational life in sport, but they can also provide an

138   important avenue for enhancing the interconnections between theory and practice within the

139   applied domain**.**

140   The ethnography presented within this study was conducted from an interpretivist

141   perspective (Krane & Baird, 2005; Whaley & Krane, 2011), with its central focus being to

142   develop empathetic understanding of the participants' lived experiences. Accordingly, this

143   research was informed by a 'relativist ontology' which assumes the existence of multiple,

144   subjective realities, and 'epistemological subjectivism', where knowledge is seen to be

145   constructed through interactions with others and the social and cultural environment (Smith

146   & Sparkes, 2016a). The current ethnography also provided a framework through which my

147   critical reflections on practice could be examined in juxtaposition with wider contextual

148   factors. Micro-political theorizing had subsequently allowed for a critical introspection of my

149   own applied practices throughout the data analysis process, but my time in the field had

150   initially sought to further enhance my contextual understanding as both a researcher and

151   neophyte sport psychology practitioner. Indeed, the combination of personal reflection-in-

152   and on-action (Schön, 1983, 1987) and ethnographic inquiry, permitted a prolonged, critical

153   engagement of my professional self, and my connection to the relational complexities of club

154   life (Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010).

155

156   **Contextual Underpinning: The Academy and the Corresponding Participants**

157   A prior publication (cf. Rowley et al., 2012), provided a reflective account of practice from

158   the academy of this same Super League rugby league club. In keeping with the approach

159   adopted previously, the current paper offers a reflective account of applied practice; one

160   where the author's 'voice' is utilized as a tool to convey lived experience (Rowley et al.,

161   2012). As is documented within the preceding publication, my initial responsibilities at the

162   club had been to provide weekly workshop sessions for the academy players to assist their

163   respective development towards a potential first-team future. Over time, I had increasingly

164   sought to adapt my practice in accordance with my increased understanding of the day-to-day

165   organizational functioning, and as a result, I had come to spend an increased amount of time

166   with the players and coaches outside of the scheduled workshop sessions. Following the

167   completion of my formal sport psychology support contract with the club, and the

168   corresponding cessation of any formal applied workshops, I obtained permission to undertake

169   the ethnographic work reported in this study. Here, my already established effective working

170   relationships with specific 'gatekeepers' at the club, greatly facilitated my access. When

171   combined, my applied work and my subsequent research within the organization spanned a

172   period of three years. Specifically, this comprised of eighteen months of applied practice, ten

173   months of observational data collection, and four months of interview data collection. A

174   timeline portraying the changing nature of my association with the club can be seen in Figure

175   1 below.

176   At the onset of data collection, the club had introduced an Elite Development Scheme

177   (E.D.S.), which aimed to help a select group of players to progress from the academy to the

178   first-team squad. As with any top-level professional sports club, the demand for success at a

179   first-team level was highly apparent. However, the desire to see the first-team populated with

180   academy graduates was a vision that was seemingly shared by figures in the club's coaching

181   staff and boardroom alike. As such, the E.D.S. provided selected players with the opportunity

182   to train with the first-team whilst remaining part of the academy setup. Accordingly, the

183   introduction of the E.D.S. had impacted on the roles and identities of the players and coaches

184   involved within this study in a number of significant ways suggesting that some individuals

185   were closer than others to potentially achieving their dreams of playing first-team rugby.

186

187   *INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE*

188

189   Following ethical approval granted from an institutional Ethics Committee, players,

190   coaches, and other stakeholders (e.g., administrators and support staff) were informed of the

191   purpose and processes associated with this research study. Opportunity sampling (Patton,

192   2015) was utilized, whereby I engaged in dialogue with individuals with whom I had already

193   established a rapport, and the data reported here is largely comprised of my observational

194   data, and interviews conducted with; a) four academy players (aged 16 to 18, three of whom

195   were in the E.D.S.); b) the Head of Youth Development (HoYD) whose role was manage the

196   academy and scholarship system as a whole; and c) the Player Performance Manager (PPM)

197   who was tasked with youth player recruitment and development across the academy system.

198

199   **Data Collection**

200   Krane and Baird's (2005) ethnographic recording process was utilized within this

201   study, with field notes being translated into a detailed research log within a 24-hour period. A

202   reflective journal was also kept which sought to make links to wider issues of research and

203   practice. Field based discussions and interactions with participants in turn helped to inform

204   the interview guide used in a series of semi-structured interviews (cf. Gobo & Molle, 2017).

205   These interviews allowed further exploration of the meaning-making that key stakeholders

206   ascribed to the everyday events and incidents that I had witnessed. Further detail regarding

207   each stage of data generation is provided below.

208

209   **Participant Observation and Field Notes.** Considered to be the 'backbone' of

210   ethnographic research (Krane & Baird, 2005, p.94), observation aims to provide 'thick

211   description' of the events and interactions that occur in a social setting, as well as the

212   meanings attributed to them by participants (Thorpe & Olive, 2016, p.125). In keeping with

213   the subjective epistemology of this study, observational data collection focused toward social

214   interactions and conversations, capturing the 'seemingly mundane' (Krane & Baird, 2005,

215   p.95) day-to-day functioning of the organization. Field notes usually took the form of brief

216   text typed up on my mobile phone, with these notes serving as the basis for my research log,

217   which provided a detailed account of context, and the interactions between stakeholders. I

218   also kept a separate reflective journal (comprised of 300 to 500 word extracts), which sought

219   to advance my critical analysis, and support my ongoing process of staged reflection

220   (Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010). This journal also encompassed my researcher-orientated

221   reflexive notes, as suggested by Krane and Baird (2005). In total, 11 observational visits were

222   recorded over a 10 month period, including attendance at training sessions and occasional

223   competitive fixtures when the coaches had granted me permission to travel with the team to

224   collect data. My prior role within the field had allowed for participant observation (cf.

225   Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) to occur, whereby a 'typical' day of data collection involved

226   me arriving in the morning to speak with the coaches and/or support staff, observing first-

227   team training from the touchline, and interacting with any players who were injured or not

228   involved in the specific drills. I would then remain at the club until late in the evening when

229   academy training took place. Here, I would spend time with the coaches, and talking with

230   individual academy players.

231

232   **Ethnographic- and Semi- structured Interviews.** The informal conversations which

233   took place during the observational period of this study are akin to what Gobo and Molle

234   (2017) termed as 'ethnographic interviews'. Such discussions were often recorded, with

235   verbal consent being provided by the participant, and sought to clarify the meanings that key

236   stakeholders attributed to any events and incidents that I had observed. These interactions

237   informed a series of more formal, semi-structured interviews, each of which were recorded

238   and transcribed verbatim by the first author during the ongoing data collection process. These

239   interviews were comprised of; 'questions of practice' and 'questions for practice'. 'Questions

240   of practice' related to the interviewees' own interpretations of their respective roles with the

241   club, for example 'What do you feel are your primary responsibilities at the club?' In

242   contrast, 'questions for practice' served to make more implicit links to my own applied

243   practice, for example; 'What do you feel have the club done to try and nurture your talent and

244   enhance your development?' My prior work with the club had allowed me to develop a

245   degree of trust, rapport, and empathy with the interviewees, qualities that are deemed to be

246   beneficial for effective interview data collection (Smith & Sparkes, 2016b). These interviews

247   took place in a private room at the club, typically lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. In an

248   attempt to ensure sufficient depth and richness of data, follow-up interviews were conducted

249   in each instance, allowing time and space to reflect on what had already been told (Smith &

250   Sparkes, 2016b), with specific questions being developed based around the transcripts of

251   prior discussions. In total, six ethnographic interviews and eight semi-structured interviews

252   were recorded with the four identified players, with two interviews also being recorded with

253   both the HoYD and PPM respectively.

254

255   **Data Analysis**

256   The various data that comprised the ethnographic record were subjected to an iterative

257   process of analysis (Tracy, 2013), focusing on the identification of critical incidents, phases

258   and persons amongst both participant and researcher sourced data. Specifically, Tracy's

259   (2013) process model for the etic and emic reading of data was utilized. The first stage

260   entailed the organization and preparation of the data, which was all stored electronically.

261   During the following data immersion and primary-cycle coding phase, my supervisory team

262   were often used as critical friends (Patton, 2015) to aid the rigor and quality of the analytical

263   interpretations developed (Smith & McGannon, 2017). In this instance a manual coding

264   approach was adopted, whereby inductive, in-vivo coding (Patton, 2015) was utilized to help

265   ensure that the vocabulary of the participants remained apparent. During secondary-cycle

266   coding, hierarchical codes were then generated to help organize, synthesize, and categorize

267   data. Finally, prior to commencing the writing process, analytical memos were utilized to

268   ensure that the emerging higher order themes provided a logical, conceptual and

269   theoretically-robust account of the ethnographic record (Tracy, 2013). Indeed, the utilization

270   of analytic memos represented a key intermediary step between coding and analysis, serving

271   to define the codes and explicate their properties, provide examples of raw data that illustrate

272   the codes, and examine the relationship between the generated codes.

273   Throughout the analytical process, the interpretive creativity of the research team

274   allowed for a process of 'prospective conjecture' (Tracy, 2013, p.194), permitting the first

275   author to consider novel theoretical juxtapositions and seek relevant theorizing from other

276   fields of study. More specifically, the micro-political writings of Ball (1987), and

277   Kelchtermans (1996, 2009a, 2009b, 2011) were identified as particularly productive

278   explanatory tools. At the heart of their respective theorizing is the challenging of long held

279   and unrealistically functional accounts of working life. Importantly, rather than subscribing to

280   a view of organizational relationships that are characterized by authority (i.e. a hierarchical

281   organizational structure), goal coherence (i.e. the collective pursuit of shared organizational

282   goals), ideological neutrality (i.e. agreement upon the strategies which are deployed within

283   the organization), consent (i.e. an acceptance of organizational policies) and consensus (i.e. a

284   conformity in relation to organizational rules or ideologies), both authors articulate how

285   individuals and groups are, instead, actively engaged in varying degrees of negotiation,

286   conflict and collaboration. In particular, this corpus of theorizing acknowledges that power

287   (i.e. the influence which one individual or group may look to establish over another), conflict

288   (i.e. disputes or differences in opinion between organizational members), control (i.e. the way

289   in which individuals aim to influence policy decisions) and goal diversification (i.e. the

290   pursuit of alternative objectives by individuals within the organization), are inherent and

291   dynamic features of life within organizations.

292

293   **Ensuring Quality**

294   As qualitative research within sport psychology has continued to grow and develop,

295   critical discussions around concepts of rigor and quality have emerged (cf. Burke, 2016;

296   Smith, 2018; Smith & McGannon, 2017). Such dialogue encourages researchers to reflect on

297   the methodological strengths of their work, and challenges traditionally held notions of

298   validity and trustworthiness within qualitative research (Burke, 2016). In this instance, a

299   relativist approach to conceptualizing validity was adopted (Burke, 2016). Here a variety of

300   evaluative criteria that reflected the assumptions and beliefs of the interpretive paradigm were

301   employed. Accordingly, this investigation seeks to demonstrate *credibility* via the first

302   author's prolonged engagement with the research participants, and *transparency* through the

303   rich description of the multi-method approach employed, inclusive of the utilization of

304   critical friends to support the rigorous analysis of a substantive data set (Patton, 2015).

305   Furthermore, this study seeks to make a *substantive contribution* to the advancement of

306   contemporary knowledge by examining issues of practice through the adoption of a novel

307   theoretical lens. As such, the *resonance* of the paper is best judged by way of readership

308   response to the paper, and in relation to the timeliness and prevalence of the issues discussed

309   in relation to applied practice. Accordingly, we invite the reader to actively judge the *impact*

310   of this paper by reflecting upon their own understandings of applied practice, and to consider

311   whether the contextually-bound reflections and accompanying theorizations offered here

312   serve to disturb the rationalistic and descriptive accounts that have typified the sport

313   psychology literature to date. In short, we invite the reader to consider both the potential

314   naturalistic and analytical generalizability of this piece (Smith, 2018).

315

316   **Results**

317   Following the completion of data analysis, three key hierarchical themes were

318   generated to illustrate the contextually-bound experiences and realities of players and coaches

319   at the club, as well as my own critical reflections regarding the potential implications of these

320   occurrences for applied practice. These themes were; a) 'players simultaneously collaborate

321   and compete with one another'; b) 'tensions exist between the coaches'; and c) 'most players

322   end up being released'. Each of these themes are discussed below.

323

324   **Players simultaneously collaborate and compete with one another**

325   Throughout my time at the club, I always felt that the players were a generally

326   cohesive group, and their interactions at training, and occasional social events which I was

327   invited to, served to illustrate this. Nevertheless, there were occasions when the underlying

328   competition amongst them to try and progress to the first-team became an apparent source of

329   tension and personal vulnerability. This was highlighted in a reflective journal entry:

330   I didn't speak to the coaches as much as usual today, but I did get to spend time with

331   the players, and it is clear that there is an apparent degree of anxiety amongst them

332   regarding their respective futures at the club. I overheard a number of conversations

333   about; the amount of playing time they are getting; who is involved with the E.D.S.

334   and who is not: and how their respective contract negotiations were progressing.

335   Every player is subjected to a continued state of flux, and paradoxically, their peers

336   are the people who they can relate with the most, but yet they are the same

337   individuals with whom they are competing to obtain opportunities to progress into

338   the first-team. An increasing number of players are now starting to disclose their

339   frustrations and concerns with me, and whilst I can offer a sympathetic ear and

340   compassionate support, I cannot directly appease the tension and uncertainty that

341   exists amongst them. **Field note: 8ᵗʰ December**

342

343   Competition amongst youth-level players with a view to progressing into the first-

344   team is not a revelation within professional youth sport. Naturally, I appreciated that not all

345   the players who I worked with would be fortunate enough to achieve their 'dreams' of

346   playing professional rugby at a Super League club. The manner in which some players

347   seemingly embraced the competition with their teammates had always interested me though,

348   reflecting an apparent marker of industrial culture, whereby players were required to

349   collaborate effectively, whilst at the same time attempting to prove their work in comparison

350   to others. This was particularly apparent within my interviews with one player, who stated:

351   I come to training with a competitive outlook, like I know he's on my team but I

352   want to beat him you know? I don't care if he's my mate, my best mate, my

353   brother...when they pick that 17, you want to be in it don't you? **(Participant 3,**

354   **Interview 1 of 2**)

355

356   During particularly turbulent periods of a given season though, such as periods of contract

357   negotiations, even the most assured players were left to feel vulnerable, with the same player

358   further recalling:

359   I was getting a bit worried because they don't really tell you much, they keep it in

360   the dark and I heard {one academy player} signed so your head starts thinking 'Oh

361   shit' and then I kept asking {P2} if he'd heard out [anything]. **(P3, I1)**

362

363 With players feeling as though they were being left 'in the dark', it was unsurprising that they

364 would seek any updates or further indications of progress from each other, aware of the

365 potential ramifications that their teammates' contract negotiations may have for them

366 individually. It was in these periods where every appraisal from a coach, and inclusion or

367 exclusion on a match-day team-sheet, seemed most pertinent.

368   Throughout this ethnography, this competition amongst the players was accentuated

369 further by the introduction of the aforementioned E.D.S. For those players who were on the

370 scheme, they could understandably take their status as a positive indication of their chances

371 of progressing, with one such player recalling:

372   When you got picked you were like 'Yeah I'm better than him' you know what I

373   mean?'…that's the way we were meant to think about how good it was...all the other

374   players think you're big headed and think you're first-team if you get on it. **(P3, I2)**

375

376 In contrast, those players outside of the scheme were left to reflect on their seemingly bleak

377 prospects of further progression, and accordingly, ruptures gradually emerged within the

378 academy. This was heightened by the fact that the players outside of the E.D.S. were left to

379 train separately on an evening. These individuals would often complain that they 'weren't

380 getting any progression' and were 'doing drills that we'd done when we first joined which are

381 shit.' **(Participant 4, Interview 2 of 2)**. Having observed such training sessions from the

382   side-lines, I had witnessed this discontent amongst the players, and was left to consider how I

383   might try to support the players within these different sub-groups.

384   To my mind, the introduction of the E.D.S. had inadvertently created a chasm

385   between the different groups of academy players. Whilst I was not running scheduled

386   workshops during this ethnographic study, I still found myself talking to players about their

387   training and match-day performances, as well as their own perceived prospects of progression

388   towards a potential first-team contract. Such conversations with those players outside of the

389   E.D.S. had gradually become more focused around their lives and aspirations outside of the

390   club itself. In contrast, my conversations with the E.D.S. players had a different focus. The

391   time they had spent training with the first-team squad had left them feeling confident about

392   their prospects, but my discussions with the coaches also meant that I was aware of how they

393   rated each of the E.D.S. players, and the apparent likelihood of them receiving a professional

394   playing contract. The dilemma that arose from these interactions was concerned with how a

395   practitioner might balance performance-orientated objectives and wider welfare needs with

396   players, who may have little understanding of, or may misread, their own standing within the

397   organization. My personal objectives though, were to support the players throughout their

398   athletic development, attempting to adopt a holistic perspective which accounted for any

399   aspects of their sporting, or non-sporting lives which seemed important to them at a given

400   time. As such, my dialogue with them shifted over time in accordance with what *I felt* might

401   be most beneficial for them.

402

403   **Tensions exist between the Coaches**

404   As I spent time moving between the first-team and academy training sessions, it had

405   also become apparent that the coaches did not always share the same views or beliefs in

406   relation to their goals and objectives within the club setting. The academy coaches aspired to

407   see the first-team populated with academy graduates, and there was an apparent belief

408   amongst them that some of the players were talented enough to make that transition. This

409   view did not seem to be mirrored by the newly appointed Head Coach however, as was

410   highlighted in a reflective journal entry:

411   In my recent interviews with the coaches they have mentioned an incident where the

412   Head Coach allegedly went in to the changing rooms after the academy team had

413   suffered a heavy defeat, and told the players that they were 'all shit' and that he

414   would help them to look for other clubs to play for. A number of the players have

415   also mentioned this to me, which suggests that some form of lasting impact has been

416   felt. For those players who are not involved in the E.D.S., it may not have come as

417   a great surprise that the Head Coach did not see them necessarily having a first-team

418   future. But some of the players effected are part of the E.D.S., and have supposedly

419   been earmarked as having the potential to progress, which now seems increasingly

420   unlikely. **Field note: 28th May**

421

422   The appointment of a new Head Coach is always likely to result in a certain degree of change

423   within an organization. Prior to his arrival, there had been a genuine sense of anticipation

424   amongst the academy, as he had come with a reputation for developing youth players when

425   working as an Assistant Coach at his previous club. Following the frequently cited 'you're all

426   shit' incident, this anticipation quickly dissipated however. As the PPM recalled:

427   Myself and [HoYD] tried dealing with it [the incident]…I tried to sit down with a

428   few of them who took it quite personally...It kind of, it popped the bubble so to

429   speak, we had this team ethos and it kind of felt like the fella who sits at the top of

430   that totem pole, who pulls all the strings and can say yes or no to your future has

431   turned around and said 'you're all shit'. Some of them was on that E.D.S. and just

432   fell even further behind because they were thinking, 'he don't rate me anyway' and

433   where do you go from there? **(Player Performance Manager, Interview 1 of 2)**

434

435 Similarly, the HoYD suggested that 'there was no pulling that situation round…The lads felt

436 disillusioned, the coaching staff at that age group felt disillusioned' **(Head of Youth**

437 **Development, Interview 1 of 2)**. In expanding upon his reaction to this incident, he also

438 depicted himself as being a 'long-term analyst', a position which he viewed as being in direct

439 contrast with the new Head Coach's number one priority of 'self-survival'.

440   My discussions with the academy coaches, had suggested that they held an

441 appreciation of the 'pressure' which the Head Coach was under. As part of these discussions

442 though, they also highlighted the importance of 'putting ourselves in the players' shoes', and

443 the 'duty of care' **(HoYD, I2)** that they felt they held as part of their roles. In expanding upon

444 this, and highlighting another conflict between the academy coaches and their first-team

445 counterparts, the PPM recalled:

446   There were a couple of lads who [the first-team coaches] wanted in during school

447   time…and it was a case of 'no chance' they're in their last year of education and we

448   scrapped it totally. They wanted them in because they are potential first team players

449   and its results based, they want the best players...on the flipside there's me pulling

450   my weight saying we've got to look out for what's best for the individual. **(PPM, I1)**

451

452 This particular incident suggested that tensions between the coaches extended beyond the

453 athletic potential of a given player, incorporating the holistic well-being of academy players

454   also. Interestingly, my discussions with the academy coaches allowed me to gain an insight

455   into their own sporting backgrounds, with both of them acknowledging that they had been

456   left without an education when they were released as former youth-level players from their

457   respective clubs. In that regard, I could understand why they contested the wishes of the Head

458   Coach in some instances, attempting to ensure that the players' non-sporting development

459   was taken into account.

460   For me, such insights were significant in helping me to recognize that the

461   organization was not the unproblematically cooperative and collaborative environment

462   that I had previously assumed it to be. Over time, I came to recognize how the first team

463   agenda, and the performance discourse in which it was enshrined, permeated the day-to-

464   day interactions, relationships, and culture at the club. This contrasted starkly with the

465   developmental ethos that I had observed in the academy, and as such, the academy

466   coaching and support staff (including myself) were left to reflect on the extent to which

467   they were willing to sacrifice or bend their personal beliefs, in order to conform with the

468   dominant performance discourse of the organization. Indeed, my own focus on player

469   well-being could be seen to be in conflict with the objectives and needs of the first-team

470   coaches and, arguably, the organization as a whole. This was a chastening and very

471   uncomfortable experience and is an issue that remains unresolved in my mind. Who am I

472   there for, those who pay me or those who I am asked to help? What should I be doing?

473   Where do my loyalties and obligations lie? Over time, I also came to recognize my

474   emotional and political connection to some members of the organization. Specifically, as

475   some of the players and coaches started to share their reactions to the 'you're all shit'

476   incident, I found it increasingly hard to remain impartial and refrain from harboring

477   negative feelings towards other figures, such as the Head Coach. For me, that incident had

478   significant repercussions for the individuals with whom I had previously worked, and, in

479   light of my own vested interest in their progression and well-being, I had found it

480   increasingly hard to emotionally detach myself form the fall-out which emanated from this

481   incident.

482

483   **Most Players end up Being Released**

484   Whilst the players all strived to obtain first-team contracts, there understandably

485   remained an implicit understanding amongst all stakeholders that opportunities to progress

486   to the first-team would ultimately be limited. The introduction of the E.D.S. had intended

487   on facilitating this transition for some players, but the Head Coach's overall appraisal of

488   the academy squad suggested that the E.D.S. players would still face a considerable

489   challenge in attaining a squad number for the following season. My discussions with the

490   coaches had served to reiterate this point. For example:

491   I talked with the coaches for a while about their thoughts on the 'you're all shit'

492   incident, as well as which players will be in the squad for the next match. [C7]

493   suggested that two particular players were 'pissheads' and were not trying hard

494   enough to get into the starting line-up. The coaches also spoke about all the players

495   being 'out on their arses next year', with the term 'shirt-fillers' being assigned to

496   those players whose futures have seemingly already been determined. For some

497   players, the writing has been on the wall for a while now, and regardless of whether

498   they have admitted it openly, I would assume that the 'shirt-fillers' have already

499   accepted that their futures lie outside of the club. For others, it would be fair to say

500   that they have received positive indications from various key figures at the club

501   regarding their chances of progressing to the first-team level. As such, I am

502   increasingly concerned about what the lasting impact may be if their contracts are

503   then not renewed for next season. **Field note: 27th June**

504

505   As part of my subsequent interviews with the academy staff, I had been keen to ascertain

506   exactly what they meant by the term 'shirt-fillers'. Although the HoYD stated his displeasure

507   at the use of the term, he did offer some elaboration, stating that:

508   There's no way in an academy Under 20's, have you got 25 players who are going

509   to end up being first-teamers...I don't like the term but everybody uses it, they're

510   shirt fillers. Because you've got to put a squad out there every week. **(HoYD, I2)**

511

512   This unfortunate group of players were largely comprised of those outside of the E.D.S. who

513   were left to train alone on the evenings. As a result, there seemed to be a pragmatism

514   amongst them in relation to their futures at the club, with one such player recalling:

515   We were just going through the motions. The majority of us didn't wanna be

516   there…we'd often say at the end of training 'Oh that was shit, get us home'.

517   **(Participant 4, Interview 2 of 2)**

518

519   Given that apparent acceptance shown by these players, I often pondered why they still

520   invested their time and effort at academy training, assuming that they were attempting to hold

521   on to their dream for as long as possible. For other players, their futures were seemingly

522   much less predetermined however, and ironically, it was often these individuals who

523   appeared to be the most vulnerable on account of this uncertainty. As one player stated:

524   We've kind of committed a part of our lives which we'll never get back you know?

525   Being 16, 17, 18 are probably the best years of your life aren't they?...and we've

526   dedicated it to rugby and given up loads for it, and at the end of it we get kicked out

527   because it's out of our control, it just doesn't seem fair **(Participant 2,**

528   **Ethnographic Interview 1 of 3)**

529

530 That player did indeed end up being released, and he subsequently highlighted how he had

531 been told by the Assistant Coach three weeks previously, that he would 'definitely be there

532 next season' **(P2, Interview 1 of 2)**. He had voluntarily chosen to study a University degree

533 alongside his rugby commitments, expressing his thankfulness that he had left himself with

534 an alternative career path when he had been released by the club. Worryingly though, I was

535 aware of other players who had turned down programs of education or trade apprenticeships

536 in an attempt to focus solely on their rugby, and unfortunately, they too were left to share the

537 same fate of not having their contracts renewed.

538   During the prolonged periods of uncertainty that preceded players being released, the

539 consensus amongst them was that the coaches were directly avoiding discussing their contract

540 renewals. When I spoke to the HoYD about this, he offered his perspective, stating:

541   You've got to take into consideration, long term, what the Head Coach wants…and

542   it is very difficult and you have a lot of sleepless nights… and I've found that really

543   difficult this time round. Because you know, after two games he was saying 'well

544   you can get rid of him, you can get rid of him' you know and that ain't the way I

545   work. **(HoYD I2)**

546

547 Accordingly, the academy coaches were also left in an uncertain position, as the contract

548 negotiations they were engaged in with players were ultimately dictated by decisions made at

549 a first-team level. As a result, they were required to withhold information and prolong the

550   periods of uncertainty for a number of players, based upon the needs and requirements of the

551   first-team squad. My discussions with the coaches helped me to understand their role within

552   these negotiations in a more empathic manner, but ultimately the fact remained that the vast

553   majority of the players who I was working with would end up being released once the season

554   had concluded.

555   My increased understanding of the coaches' perspectives, and the way the club

556   functioned in general, meant that I was becoming more aware of issues behind-the-scenes

557   that had implications for the academy players. Within this complex and inherently political

558   context, I had become increasingly convinced of the significant role which applied sport

559   psychology practitioners might play by offering unconditional support to these players as and

560   when they seek it. I appreciated that my role in helping them to actually progress to the first-

561   team was always likely to be limited, and so instead, I increasingly believed that I needed to

562   simply be there for them; assisting them in their efforts to cope with the highly scrutinizing,

563   unforgiving and ever-changing sporting environment that they found themselves in. As such,

564   I think it is important for practitioners to spend time standing on the side-lines during

565   training, or waiting around after matches have finished, so that players and/or coaches can

566   approach them if they wish to do so. Somewhat frustratingly however, I also realized that no

567   matter how closely I might work with a player, there was always a distinct probability that

568   they would not be at the club for the following season. The label of an 'elite level athlete'

569   was likely to only be temporarily applicable for the vast majority of those who I was

570   affiliated with. Indeed, in this instance, the reality was that the majority of the academy

571   'players' I had worked with were young men who played professional youth rugby on an

572   always-temporary basis.

573

574   **Discussion**

575   The results presented reflect how my time-in-context within this particular 'arena of

576   struggle', was typified by ideological diversity, poor coordination, and conflict between key

577   stakeholders (Ball, 1987, p.19). The players all held a shared goal to progress into the first-

578   team, but this effectively required them to compete amongst themselves, whilst

579   simultaneously trying to harbor a cohesive team dynamic. Furthermore, the continued

580   uncertainty regarding their future prospects meant that they were often left to seek assurances

581   from the appraisals offered to them by their coaches. However, while the academy and first-

582   team coaches seemed to share an apparent desire to promote youth players into the first-team,

583   they had disagreements about how best to nurture a player's overall development, and

584   simultaneously manage the needs and expectations of a results driven industry. Furthermore,

585   the lack of influence perceived by the academy coaches during important periods of

586   organizational change had seemingly led to further rifts developing between them and their

587   first-team counterparts. Such reflections depict everyday organizational life as a negotiated

588   and contested activity for these key stakeholders, the roots of which can be traced back to

589   their respective ideological standpoints (Ball, 1987). As Ball (1987) suggests, life within the

590   club was found to be far from 'mundane', with a degree of power, conflict, control and goal

591   diversification typifying some of the day-to-day interactions.

592   Here, Kelchtermans' (2009a, 2009b, 2011) workings around professional

593   vulnerability can also be used to exemplify the passivity and uncertainty which both the

594   academy players and coaches experienced. Kelchtermans (1996) acknowledged how the

595   narrative biographies of teachers highlighted the impact of critical incidents as sources of

596   professional vulnerability, with such incidents serving to question the normal daily routines

597   of teachers, provoking emotions of distress, unease, doubt and uncertainty (Kelchtermans,

598   1996). Given that 'critical incidents' such as the introduction of the E.D.S. and the 'you're all

599   shit' episode had generally typified my time-in-context, I was left to reflect on the apparent

600   vulnerability of the players and coaches with whom I worked. Kelchtermans (2009a, 2009b,

601   2011) depicted vulnerability as a structural condition, as opposed to a purely emotional

602   experience, with a perceived lack of control, uncertainty regarding the efficacy of one's

603   actions, and the thoughts and opinions of significant others, all serving as apparent

604   antecedents. Furthermore, Kelchtermans (1996) stated that the social recognition of technical

605   skills, competences, and moral integrity, was a crucial element of one's professional self

606   (self-esteem and task perception), with appreciation from other key stakeholders constituting

607   as a highly valued, non-material, social workplace condition. As such, the vulnerability

608   experienced by the players stemmed from the continued requirement for them to try and

609   impress the academy and first-team coaches with a view to ensuring a first-team future at the

610   club. This structural vulnerability also extended to the professional lives of the academy

611   coaches however, in that their own professional competencies and moral integrity were, at

612   times, challenged in their interactions with their first team counterparts. My prolonged

613   engagement with this micro-political context, and my continued dialogue with key

614   stakeholders had led me to reject any previously held conceptions of assumed authority, goal

615   coherence, consent and consensus within the club (Ball, 1987). Instead, I was left to reflect

616   on the critical implications that this may hold for applied practice, and whether or not other

617   practitioners found themselves battling with similar issues of practice.

618

619   **Applied Implications**

620   Whilst I was no longer delivering scheduled sport psychology sessions during the

621   ethnographic study presented here, my time spent with key stakeholders throughout the data

622   collection process had left me wanting to understand them more as *people*, as opposed to just

623   *coaches*, or *athletes* (Gilbourne & Priestly, 2011). Such a sentiment echoes the

624   acknowledgement made by Gilbourne and Priestly (2011) that;

625   The people we study are complex. They have fears, worries, weaknesses, and needs;

626   they are vulnerable, just like other people. In fact, they are *just people*. (p.230).

627

628   Within this context, the vulnerability that typified the professional lives of the players and

629   coaches, often extended beyond their role-related performances. In a similar manner, my own

630   emerging understanding of their perceived complexities, had led me to recognize how my

631   own professional vulnerability was always likely to be moderated by my ability to

632   successfully maintain effective relationships with any number of key stakeholders; a finding

633   increasingly highlighted within recent research (e.g., Eubank et al., 2014; McDougall et al.,

634   2015). Upon recognition of vulnerability as a structural condition (Kelchtermans, 2009a,

635   2009b, 2011), the realization that practitioners are not immune to the day-to-day functioning

636   of their applied contexts, highlights how social recognition from key stakeholders can be seen

637   to be a key antecedent of a practitioner's own professional self-understanding (Kelchtermans,

638   1996, 2009a, 2009b, 2011). Kelchtermans' (2009a, 2009b, 2011) work addressing

639   professional vulnerability and professional self-understanding has much to offer the

640   discipline, both in terms of analyzing the thoughts, emotions and behaviors of athletes and

641   coaches, and also in stimulating critical reflection on the work and careers of applied sport

642   psychologists.

643   During my initial period of professional practice at the club, my interactions had

644   always been restricted to the players and coaches within the academy. As such, I had always

645   judged my own accountability in relation to how my practice aligned with the interests, hopes

646   and needs of these individuals alone. My subsequent ethnographic study, and my

647   corresponding reading of the (micro)politics literature however, had provided me with a more

648   rounded insight into how the club's primary need to win matches regularly at the first-team

649   level, permeated all facets of organizational life. Accordingly, I can now understand why

650   some colleagues continuously challenged me to consider the following questions; how would

651   I seek to demonstrate the effectiveness of my practices to key stakeholders at the club?; how

652   would I justify my evolving approach to practice to a prospective new employer?; how

653   flexible might I need to be in terms of my applied practices to ensure that I can achieve the

654   necessary 'buy-in' from numerous key stakeholders?; how would I try and initially seek a

655   better contextual understanding when starting work within a new organizational setting?

656   Whilst my extensive time-in-context has permitted me to reflect upon some of the

657   factors which impacted upon my applied work there, comprehensive answers to the

658   aforementioned questions of identity and practice have remained elusive. As such, the research

659   team have purposefully refrained from offering any definitive recommendations for practice.

660   As a research team however, we would encourage readers of this paper to also consider their

661   responses to the questions above with respect to the critical reflections offered within this

662   paper, as well as their own encounters and their approaches to applied work. Furthermore, we

663   would encourage readers to reflect upon the fundamental suggestion made through the paper

664   that applied practice within sport psychology may be facilitated by a degree of *micro-political*

665   *understanding* and activity on the practitioner's part. Such emergent messages highlight the

666   need for practitioners to develop and utilize their micropolitical literacy when attempting to

667   develop, maintain and advance their working relationships with various organizational

668   stakeholders (Kelchtermans & Ballett, 2002a, 2002b). From our perspective, such an approach

669   to research and practice is essential if we are to bring into sharper focus the vulnerable and

670   often ideologically contested nature of sports work, as well as its connection with, and to,

671   applied sport psychology practice. In light of this, the current paper seeks to encourage further

672   academic debate within the domain, as to what a social analysis of applied contexts might mean

673   for the enactment of sport psychology practice.

674

675   **Strengths, Limitations and Future Research Directions**

676   Notwithstanding the potential implications of the multidisciplinary approach to understanding

677   applied contexts adopted here, the current study represents reflections from a single setting,

678   and as such, the experiences accounted are not necessarily representative of the experiences

679   of other practitioners. However, the key strength of this paper is in the adoption of a novel

680   theoretical lens to illuminate and examine applied practice issues within sport psychology, in

681   a manner that disturbs the rationalistic and descriptive accounts that have typified the

682   literature base to date. Consequently, we call for practitioners to not only reflect on whether

683   the issues highlighted here resonate with their own experiences and training, but to also

684   consider how they would address some of the everyday challenges and dilemmas which are

685   documented within this paper. Furthermore, we hope that this paper acts as a stimulus for the

686   development of critical and rich, reflective accounts of sport psychology practice, that allow

687   the profession to better consider issues of power, interaction, agency, ambiguity and

688   vulnerability, in a more contextually-informed manner than has been achieved to date.

689   Further research, which seeks to recognize the inherently (micro)political nature of

690   the high-performance contexts and, relatedly, the sport psychologist's role within such social

691   milieus, offers the potential to significantly advance our collective understanding of some of

692   the more tacit and understated challenges that practitioners are likely to encounter. More

693   specifically, scholarship which offers a critical insight into the relationships that practitioners

694   seek to forge and re-forge, and the strategies that they adopt in order to survive, thrive and

695   learn within these settings, holds significant implications for the discipline. Furthermore, by

696   considering the utility of organizational analyses and theorizing from outside of the sport

697   psychology domain (cf. Ball, 1987; Kelchtermans, 1996, 2009a, 2009b, 2011), future

698   research might also seek to examine how a practitioner's self-understanding is impacted upon

699   by the social recognition and engagement that they (may or may not) receive from key

700   contextual stakeholders within a given applied setting. Such multi- and inter-disciplinary

701   inquiry may provide a fruitful avenue for enhancing our knowledge of applied practice and

702   the preparation and development programs put in place to support it.

703

704   **Conclusion**

705   The current paper has offered a reflective, ethnographic analysis of everyday life within a

706   professional rugby league academy, with the goal of not only illuminating the micro-political

707   nature of organizational life, but also highlighting how such understanding could be

708   connected to applied sport psychology practice. By depicting how the issues of power,

709   conflict, and vulnerability featured in day-to-day organizational life, this paper problematizes

710   the rationalistic portrayals of practice that have traditionally dominated the literature base.

711   Arguably such accounts of practice have much to offer in terms of encouraging a

712   phenomenology of practice that includes (as a central component) reflection on the reflection-

713   in-action of practitioners within sports clubs and organizations (Schön, 1987). Such dialogue

714   and debate may also help the field to productively embrace the complexity and uncertainty of

715   applied practice and provide conceptual insights that better reflect the 'grit' of organizational

716   life in which applied sport psychologists are embedded.

717   **Reference List**

718   Ball, S. J. (1987). *The micro-politics of the school*. London, UK: Methuen & Co.

719   Booroff, M., Nelson, L., & Potrac, P. (2016). A coach's political use of video-based feedback:

720   A case study in elite-level academy soccer. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, *34*(2), 116–124.

721   https://doi.org/10.1080/02640414.2015.1039464

722   Burke, S. (2016). Rethinking "validity" and "trustworthiness" in qualitative inquiry: How

723   might we judge the quality of qualitative research in sport and exercise sciences? In B.

724   Smith & A. C. Sparkes (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of qualitative research in sport and*

725   *exercise* (pp. 330–339). Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

726   Cassidy, T. G., Jones, R. L., & Potrac, P. (2016). *Understanding sports coaching: The social,*

727   *cultural and pedagogical foundations of coaching practice*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

728   Collins, R., Evans-Jones, K., & O'Connor, H. L. (2013). Reflections on three neophyte sport

729   and exercise psychologists' developing philosophies for practice. *Sport Psychologist*,

730   *27*(4), 399–409. https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1123/tsp.27.4.399

731   Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Historical*

732   *Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung*, *36*(4), 273–290. Retrieved from

733   http://www.jstor.org/stable/23032294?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

734   Eubank, M., Nesti, M., & Cruickshank, A. (2014). Understanding high performance sport

735   environments: Impact for the professional training and supervision of sport psychologists.

736   *Sport & Exercise Psychology Review*, *10*(2), 30–36.

737   Gilbourne, D., & Priestly, D. (2011). Epiphanies and learning: A rejection of performance-

738   based myopia. In D. Gilbourne & M. B. Andersen (Eds.), *Critical Essays In Appled Sport*

739   *Psychology* (pp. 217–230). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

740   Gobo, G., & Molle, A. (2017). *Doing ethnography* (2nd ed.). London, UK: Sage.

741   Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (2007). *Ethnography: Principles in practice* (3rd ed.).

742   London, UK: Routledge.

743   Holt, N. L., & Strean, W. B. (2001). Reflecting on initiating sport psychology consultation: A

744   self-narrative of neophyte practice. *The Sport Psychologist*, *15*, 188–204.

745   https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1123/tsp.15.2.188

746   Huggan, R., Nelson, L., & Potrac, P. (2015). Developing micropolitical literacy in professional

747   soccer: A performance analyst's tale. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise & Health*,

748   *7*(4), 504–520. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2014.949832

749   Huntley, E., Cropley, B., Gilbourne, D., Sparkes, A., & Knowles, Z. R. (2014). Reflecting back

750   and forwards: An evaluation of peer-reviewed reflective practice research in sport.

751   *Reflective Practice*, *15*(6), 863–876. https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2014.969695

752   Jones, L., Evans, L., & Mullen, R. (2007). Multiple roles in an applied setting: Trainee sport

753   psychologist, coach, and researcher. *The Sport Psychologist*, *21*, 210–226.

754   https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1123/tsp.21.2.210

755   Jones, R. L. (2009). Coaching as caring (the smiling gallery): accessing hidden knowledge.

756   *Physical Education & Sport Pedagogy*, *14*(4), 377–390.

757   https://doi.org/10.1080/17408980801976551

758   Jones, R. L., & Wallace, M. (2005). Another bad day at the training ground: Coping with

759   ambiguity in the coaching context. *Sport, Education and Society*, *10*(1), 119–134.

760   https://doi.org/10.1080/1357332052000308792

761   Kelchtermans, G. (1996). Teacher vulnerability: Understanding its moral and political roots.

762   *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *26*(3), 307–323.

763   Kelchtermans, G. (2009a). Career stories as gateway to understanding teacher development. In

764   M. Bayer, U. Brinkkjaer, H. Plauborg, & S. Rolls (Eds.), *Teachers' Career Trajectories*

765   *and Work Lives* (pp. 29–47). Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-

766   2358-2

767   Kelchtermans, G. (2009b). Who I am in how I teach is the message: Self-understanding,

768   vulnerability and reflection. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, *15*(2), 257–

769   272. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540600902875332

770   Kelchtermans, G. (2011). Vulnerability in teaching: The moral and political roots of a structural

771   condition. In C. Day & J. C.-K. Lee (Eds.), *New Understandings of Teacher's Work:*

772   *Emotions   and   Educational   Change*   (pp.   65–82).   Springer   Netherlands.

773   https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0545-6

774   Knowles, Z., & Gilbourne, D. (2010). Aspiration, inspiration and illustration: Initiating debate

775   on   reflective   practice   writing.   *The   Sport   Psychologist*,   *24*(2006),   504–520.

776   https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.24.4.504

777   Knowles, Z., Katz, J., & Gilbourne, D. (2012). Reflective practice within elite consultancy:

778   Diary extracts and further discussion on a personal and elusive process. *The Sport*

779   *Psychologist*, *26*, 454–469.

780   Krane, V., & Baird, S. M. (2005). Using ethnography in applied sport psychology. *Journal of*

781   *Applied Sport Psychology*, *17*(2), 87–107. https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200590932371

782   Leftwhich, A. (2005). The political approach to human behaviour: People, resources and

783   power. In A. Leftwhcih (Ed.), *What is politics?* (pp. 100–118). Cambridge, UK: Polity

784   Press.

785   Magill, S., Nelson, L., Jones, R., & Potrac, P. (2017). Emotions, identity, and power in video-

786   based feedback sessions: Tales from women's professional football. *Sports Coaching*

787   *Review*, *6*(2), 216–232. https://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2017.1367068

788   McCalla, T., & Fitzpatrick, S. (2016). Integrating sport psychology within a high-performance

789   team: Potential stakeholders, micropolitics, and culture. *Journal of Sport Psychology in*

790   *Action*, *7*(1), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1080/21520704.2015.1123208

791   McDougall, M., Nesti, M., & Richardson, D. (2015). The challenges of sport psychology

792   delivery in elite and professional sport : Reflections from experienced sport psychologists

793   personalizing the experience of challenge. *The Sport Psychologist*, *29*, 265–277.

794   https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.2014-0081

795   Owton, H., Bond, K., & Tod, D. (2014). "It's my dream to work with Olympic athletes":

796   Neophyte sport psychologists' expectations and initial experiences regarding service

797   delivery.   *Journal   of   Applied   Sport   Psychology*,   *26*(3),   241–255.

798   https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2013.847509

799   Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks,

800   CA: Sage.

801   Potrac, P., & Jones, R. (2009a). Power, conflict, and cooperation : Toward a micropolitics of

802   coaching. *Quest*, (61), 223–236. https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2009.10483612

803   Potrac, P., & Jones, R. L. (2009b). Micropolitical workings in semi-professional football.

804   *Sociology of Sport Journal*, *26*, 557–577.

805   Potrac, P., Jones, R. L., Gilbourne, D., & Nelson, L. (2013). "Handshakes, BBQs, and bullets":

806   Self-interest, shame and regret in football coaching. *Sports Coaching Review*, *1*(2), 79–

807   92. https://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2013.768418

808   Potrac, P., Mallett, C., Greenough, K., & Nelson, L. (2017). Passion and paranoia: An

809   embodied tale of emotion, identity, and pathos in sports coaching. *Sports Coaching*

810   *Review*, *6*(2), 142–161. https://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2017.1367067

811   Rowley, C., Earle, K., & Gilbourne, D. (2012). Practice and the process of critical learning :

812   Reflections of an early stage practitioner working in elite youth level rugby league. *Sport*

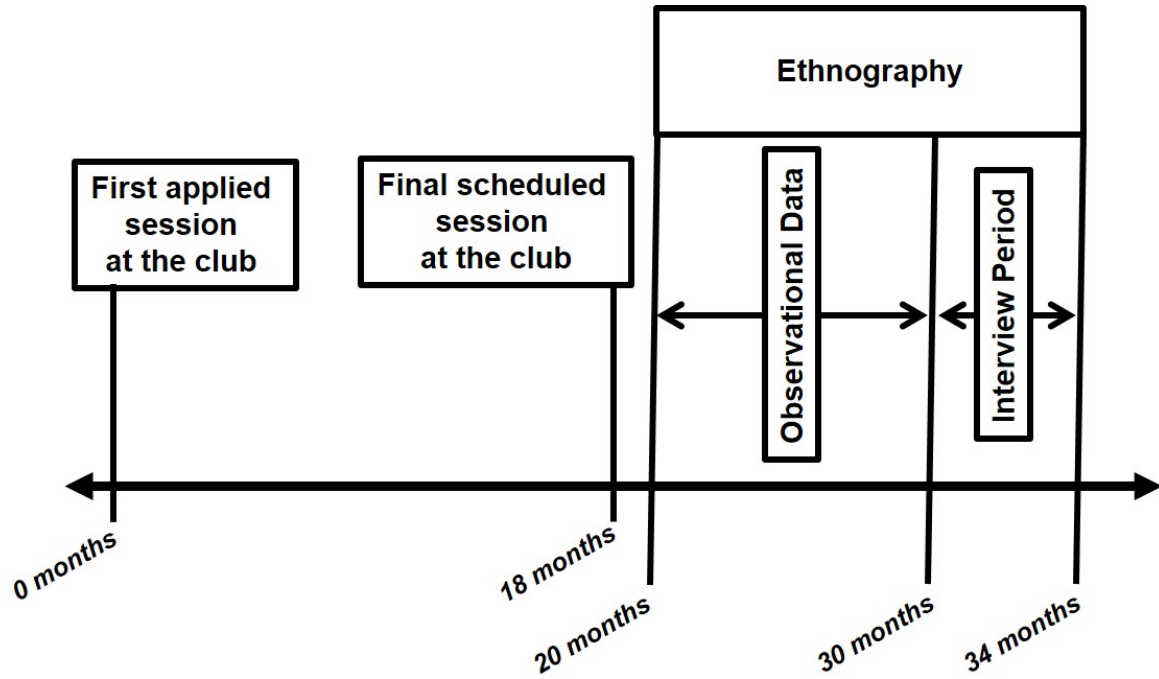813   *& Exercise Psychology Review*, *8*(2), 35–50.

814   Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

815   Schön, D. A. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner: Toward a new design for teaching*

816   *and learning in the professions.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

817   Smith, B. (2018). Generalizability in qualitative research: Misunderstandings, opportunities

818   and recommendations for the sport and exercise sciences. *Qualitative Research in Sport,*

819   *Exercise and Health*, *10*(1), 137–149. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2017.1393221

820   Smith, B., & McGannon, K. R. (2017). Developing rigor in qualitative research : Problems and

821   opportunities within sport and exercise psychology. *International Review of Sport and*

822   *Exercise Psychology*, *0*(0), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/1750984X.2017.1317357

823   Smith, B., & Sparkes, A. C. (2016a). Introduction: An invitation to qualitative research. In B.

824   Smith & A. C. Sparkes (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of qualitative research in sport and*

825   *exercise* (pp. 1–8). Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

826   Smith, B., & Sparkes, A. C. (2016b). Qualitative interviewing in the sport and exercise

827   sciences. In B. Smith & A. C. Sparkes (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of qualitative research*

828   *in sport and exercise* (pp. 103–123). Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

829   Thompson, A., Potrac, P., & Jones, R. (2015). "I found out the hard way": Micro-political

830   workings in professional football. *Sport, Education and Society*, *20*(8), 976–994.

831   https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2013.862786

832   Thorpe, H., & Olive, R. (2016). Conducting observations in sport and exercise settings. In B.

833   Smith & A. C. Sparkes (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of qualitative research in sport and*

834   *exercise* (pp. 124–138). Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

835   Tod, D., & Andersen, M. B. (2012). Practitioner-client relationships in applied sport

836   psychology practice. In *Professional practice in sport psychology: A review* (pp. 273–

837   306). New York: Routledge.

838 Tod, D., & Bond, K. (2010). A longitudinal examination of a british neophyte sport

839   psychologist's development. *Sport Psychologist*, *24*(1), 35–51.

840   https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1123/tsp.24.1.35

841 Tod, D., & Lavallee, D. (2011). Taming the wild west: Training and supervision in applied

842   sport psychology. In D. Gilbourne & M. B. Andersen (Eds.), *Critical Essays in Appied*

843   *Sport Psychology* (pp. 193–216). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

844 Tonn, E., Gunter, K., & Harmison, B. (2016). Initial experiences in practica: Foundations,

845   experiential learning, and insights. In M. W. Aoyagi, A. Poczwardowski, & J. L. Shapiro

846   (Eds.), *The Peer Guide to Applied Sport Psychology for Consultants in Training*.

847 Tonn, E., & Harmison, R. J. (2004). Thrown to the wolves: A student's account of her

848   practicum experience. *The Sport Psychologist*, *18*(3), 324–340.

849   https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1123/tsp.18.3.324

850 Tracy, S. J. (2013). *Qualitative research methods*. Chichester, UK: John Wiley.

851 Wagstaff, C., Fletcher, D., & Hanton, S. (2012). Positive organizational psychology in sport:

852   An ethnography of organizational functioning in a national sport organization. *Journal of*

853   *Applied Sport Psychology*, *24*(1), 26–47. https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2011.589423

854 Whaley, D. E., & Krane, V. (2011). Now that we all agree, let's talk epistemology: A

855   commentary on the invited articles. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise & Health*,

856   *3*(3), 394–403. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2011.607186

857

858

859

860   Figure 1: A timeline portraying the first author's changing association with the rugby league

861   club in question over time