Dispositions of elite-level Australian rugby coaches toward Game Sense: Characteristics of their coaching habitus

Richard L. Light[a] and John R. Evans[b]

[a] *School of Health Sciences, University of Ballarat, Australia,* [b] *Faculty of Education and Social Work, The University of Sydney, Australia*

Introduction

Identification of the influence that 'tacit' and 'craft' knowledge developed through experience have upon coaching practice has encouraged recognition of the complexity of coach development as a learning process and the influence of social and cultural contexts upon it (Cushion, 2007; Gilbert & Trudel, 1999; Coté, 2006). Within this development in the coaching literature Bourdieu's key analytic concept of *habitus* has attracted attention as a means of understanding the central role that experience plays in coach development (see for example, Cushion, 2001; Harvey, Cushion & Massa-Gonzalez, 2010; Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2004; Taylor & Garratt, 2010). The use of *habitus* in this work suggests that it provides a useful means of identifying how experience comes to form such a powerful influence on coaches' practice and their inclinations toward particular coaching approaches (for example see, Cushion, 2001; Harvey, et al., 2010). However, despite the possibilities suggested by this use of *habitus* it is yet to be operationalised in empirical research on sport coaching.

In this article we redresses this oversight by drawing on a study that inquired into how the 'coaching *habitus*' of elite level Australian and New Zealand rugby coaches' structured their interpretation and use of the Game Sense approach. In it we illustrate how *habitus* can be operationalised in research by reporting on our identification of the characteristics of the individual coaching *habitus* of four elite level Australian rugby coaches with a focus on how it structured their interpretation and use of Game Sense. We do so by adopting Lau's (2004) suggestions for identifying *habitus* by inquiring into: 1) fundamental beliefs, un-thought premises and/or taken-for-granted assumptions; 2) perception and appreciation or understanding; and, 3) descriptive and prescriptive practical sense of objective possibilities and of the forthcoming

Habitus

Habitus is the key concept through which Bourdieu strives to avoid oppositional relationships in an approach that is 'resolutely anti-dualistic' (Wacquant, 1998, p. 217). Comprising a set of dispositions and inclinations that structure action, it is constituted through the individual's participation in social and cultural *practice* over time within particular social *fields*. Structured by past social experiences, it structures our responses to particular circumstances and can usefully be seen as being: "…the embodied social history of the individual, as the cumulative somatic product of the individual's corporeal engagement in social and cultural practice" (Light & Kirk, 2000, 165). While individual life trajectories are different, those who pass through similar *fields* tend to develop a similar *habitus* that can be seen to reflect the successful negotiation of particular environments in a person's life. However, it is not coherent and may display varying degrees of integration and tension depending upon the

social settings that have shaped it (Wacquant, 2006).

Practice mediates between *field* and *habitus* with them being mutually-constituting and the activities that people, such as the coaches in this study, take part in, produced by the interaction of agency and social structure. Despite our focus on *habitus* it is considered in relation to Bourdieu's other key concepts and those of field and practice in particular. The larger study also looked into the construction of *habitus* and the socio-cultural contexts within which this occurred by examining the experiences of the participants over their sporting lives within the fields and sub-fields that they practised in. We also drew on suggestions by Mutch (2003) for considering the part that membership in communities of practice (CoP) plays in the construction of *habitus* and on suggestions for the integration of social theory and learning theory in research (Fox, 2000; Light, in press; Wenger, 1998). The use of CoP, drawing on Lave and Wenger (1991) allowed for a 'micro' focus within the more 'macro' focus of Bourdieu's concepts of field (and sub-field).

Habitus provides a pivotal means through which Bourdieu is able to avoid the oppositional relationships between the unconscious and the conscious, the body and the mind, to capture the mastery that humans acquire of their social world through their immersion in it (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Swartz, (1997, 290) sees it as being too, "difficult to specify empirically" and Jenkins (2002, 93) suggests that, "we still do not know what the habitus is". However, this vagueness is intentional because, "Habitus is in cahoots with the fuzzy and the vague…..it follows a *practical logic,* that of the fuzzy, or of the more or less, which defines the ordinary relation to the world" (Bourdieu 1982, cited Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, 22). Bourdieu uses his key analytic concepts of *habitus, practice* and *field* to capture the complexity of social existence and to help understand how individuals escape the 'absurdity

of existence' (Wacquant, 1998). For Bourdieu the relationship between the individual and his/her social world is one of mutual possession in which, "the body is in the social world but the social world is in the body" (Bourdieu, 1982, cited Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, 20).

Operationalising *habitus*

Criticisms of *habitus* being too vague (see for example, Swartz, 1997) suggest the difficulty in operationalising it in empirical research but Lau (2004) offers useful suggestions for meeting this challenge. With reference to the work of Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Husserl (see for example, Husserl, 1962), he proposes a framework for identifying *habitus* as it emerges from experience by suggesting that it can be illustrated in the three interconnected categories of: 1) fundamental beliefs, un-thought premises or taken-for-granted assumptions; 2) perception and appreciation or understanding; and, 3) a descriptive and prescriptive practical sense of objective possibilities ('that's not for the likes of us' and 'that's the only thing to do' respectively) and of the forthcoming (p. 377).

These categories are subject to further refinement (Lau, 2004) and, given the intentional vagueness of *habitus* and the ways in which it operates at a non-conscious level, it is unlikely that these categories could be concisely identified. However, Lau's categories are useful in indentifying its *characteristics* and this is how we have used his framework in this study.

Game Sense

Game Sense is the Australian derivative of TGfU (Teaching Games for Understanding) developed during the mid 1990s through collaboration between Rod Thorpe, the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) and local coaches (den Duyn, 1997). It is similar to TGfU, sharing

its location of learning in modified games and its emphasis on questioning but is less structured than TGfU with no model and a looser notion of how coaches interpret and use it than in TGfU (Kidman, 2001, Light, 2004). *Game Sense* is a player-centred, games-based approach in which the coach acts as a facilitator of learning rather than a director of it (Light & Evans, 2010). It has at its core an emphasis on players developing an understanding of the game and the learning of skill within contexts that resemble the full game to give them meaning and authenticity.

While other theories of learning such as information processing theory and achievement goal theory have been suggested (Griffin, Brooker & Patton, 2005), constructivist learning theory has dominated the theorisation of learning in and through TGfU and similar approaches (see for example, Grèhaigne, Richard & Griffin; Kirk & Macdonald, 1998; Light, 2008, 2009). This work suggests a break from a behaviourist-informed view of teaching and learning as a process of knowledge transmission to a constructivist-informed view of learning as being a social process of interpretation in which learners construct new knowledge. Such a perspective has lead to a repositioning of the teacher's or coach from a director or instructor of learning 'conducting the orchestra' to a facilitator of learning while highlighting the importance of the physical and socio-cultural context of learning (see for example, Light, 2006b). Research in physical education and in sport coaching suggests that this repositioning of the coach/teacher presents one of the main challenges faced in the implementation of player/student-centred, inquiry-based based approaches to coaching (for example see, Butler 1996; Rossi, Fry, McNeill & Tan, 2007; Light & Evans, 2010).

Australian coaches had long used games as part of their [1]training but the emphasis on questioning introduced by Thorpe in Game Sense represented a significant innovation in the mid nineteen nineties that research suggests has not been widely taken up (Light, 2006a; Light & Evans, 2010). Indeed, the repositioning of the coach in Game Sense to a facilitator of, or a co-participant in, learning appears to have presented a challenge for its implementation among coaches in Australia and elsewhere (see for example, Harvey et al., 2010; Light & Evans, 2010). The different relationships engendered in Game Sense coaching that require the coach 'stepping off centre stage', the shift from telling players what to do to asking them questions and the ways in which it empowers players are all features of it that can prove challenging for its uptake by coaches (Evans & Light, 2008; Light, 2004).

Methodology

The study

The data used in this article was drawn from a larger study on the interpretation and use of the Game Sense approach to coaching by elite level rugby coaches in New Zealand and Australia. This study adopted a theoretical framework formed through the integration of Bourdieu's key analytic concepts (and *habitus* in particular) with the key concepts of the learning theory proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998), with us approaching the study from a constructivist/constructionist perspective. This article focuses on the four Australian coaches in the larger study and on the identification of characteristics

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[1] We recognise that the term 'training' is typically associated with skills based, behaviourist coaching approaches but this is the term used by all Australian rugby coaches.

of their 'coaching *habitus*' as a means of understanding how it might shape their interpretation of Game Sense.

The site and participants

This study focused on rugby coaches working at the elite levels in Australia, coaching the national team, The Wallabies, and the provincial (state) teams competing in the 2007 Super 14 competition contested between fourteen provincial teams from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. For the study on the Australian coaches drawn on in this article the head coaches from the four provincial teams in operation at the time of the study and the national team were invited to participate in the study with one Super 14 coach declining the invitation. Apart from the one coach who declined our invitation to participate our sample included all head coaches working at national and provincial levels, which are the highest levels of competition in Australia.

Data generation and analysis

Data were generated through three extensive one-on-one semi structured interviews with all four coaches conducted over a twelve-month period in Australia and noted observations made at training sessions as a means of triangulating data. This was specifically aimed at identifying any inconsistencies between what the coaches said they did and what they actually did. The second author, who is a former first grade rugby player and coach of a national rugby team, conducted the interviews and recorded observations.

Interviews taking between 40 to 60 minutes to complete were conducted before and/or after training sessions at the ground used for training. The first round of interviews focused on the participants' life experiences as players and coaches and the contexts within this

occurred as a means of identifying how their beliefs about, and dispositions toward, coaching (their coaching *habitus*) had been formed.

The second round of interviews sought to identify characteristics of their coaching *habitus* by inquiring into their beliefs about, and views on, aspects of coaching and learning but without directly asking such questions. It was aimed at illuminating characteristics of a coaching *habitus* that structured their interpretation and use of Game Sense. The third round of interviews focused more directly on their articulated views on, and knowledge of, Game Sense and how they use it in, or adapt it to, their coaching. While we make reference to some data from the first round of interviews the data used in this article was primarily generated through the second round of interviews, which were structured around Lau's (2004) three categories.

Content analysis was used to analyze the data inductively as an approach that produces a "systematic and comprehensive summary or overview of the data set" (Wilkinson, 2004, p.182). Interview and observation data were reduced by close reading and re-reading of the interview transcripts to identify and code chunks of the transcripts that could be related to, or linked to, one of Lau's (2004) three themes. We then read through the data within each of Lau's themes to identify and code sub-themes. This resulted in the emergence of themes that were strong across all four participants as *first order* themes and *second order* themes that might have been very strong with two or even three participants but not with all four (Miles & Huberman, 1994)

All names of participants used are pseudonyms used to protect their anonymity and the research was approved by the ethics committee at the University of Sydney.

The coaches, experience and the construction of a coaching *habitus*

Although we focus on identifying characteristics of a coaching *habitus* in this article we recognise the importance of the socio-cultural contexts within it is constructed for its identification. Therefore, we provide a brief outline of the four participants and of their participation in the practices of rugby as players and as coaches before moving onto identifying the characteristics of a coaching *habitus* in the results.

The participants.

Allen was in his late forties during the data generation and had a long history as a player prior to coaching and had worked as a teacher before his professional appointment as a coach. *Lance* was also in his late forties during the study having spent his childhood and the majority of his adult life in a large country centre where he had worked as a teacher. Prior to talking up his appointment as a full time coach he worked for the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS). *Evan* was in his early forties during the study and prior to taking up his appointment as a full time coach had played for Australia and worked as a town planner. *Joe* was in his late fifties during the study and prior to his appointment as a full time coach had held a management position in the freight forwarding industry. All four coaches had played rugby at very high levels having all played first grade and at higher representative levels up to and including playing in the national team.

The construction of a coaching habitus

The participants' experiences of sport and rugby in particular profoundly shaped their desire to coach and the development of their beliefs about coaching. They began participating in the practices of the sub-field of rugby from very young ages as 'newcomers' where their

enjoyment of participation within a particular social environment lead to long lasting attachments to rugby and to the learning of its culture and its class-specific values. They had all played rugby in schools where it was highly valued and moved into playing rugby in strong clubs where they worked their way up to first grade over years of membership in them. As they developed their rugby playing ability they became increasingly engaged with the larger rugby community of the cities and states within which their clubs were located with Evan a member of the national team for many years.

Employing the concept of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) illuminated how their rugby clubs operated as CoP that they entered as newcomers and moved towards becoming fully established mature members as players and captains where they gained leadership experience. They nominated significant people in their clubs that they saw as mentors and who had influenced their beliefs about coaching. In the case of Allen and Lance these were teachers who provided links between their school rugby and club rugby. Allen and Lance were also educated as PE teachers and went on to teach and coach in schools for several years.

Their movement from players into coaching was facilitated by membership in their rugby clubs that fostered a desire in each them to maintain involvement in rugby as their playing careers drew to an end and could be considered from the perspective of Lave and Wenger's (1991) work as being entry into an apprenticeship. This was assisted by prior leadership experience as captains and of coaching as senior players in their clubs. This is apprenticeship involved learning the culture of the club and reproducing approaches to coaching within it as a CoP located within the larger rugby communities that constitute elements of the sub field of rugby in Australia.

The participants not only developed their knowledge, ideas about, and skills in, coaching, but also sets of dispositions toward it shaped by the social and cultural contexts that they moved through over long periods of time. Viewing their clubs as communities of practice allowed us to see how this included the influence of significant people within the CoP of their

clubs and/or the larger rugby communities of their city, region or state such as the coaches or senior members of clubs that they nominated as having exerted pivotal influences on their coaching (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

Results

Fundamental beliefs, un-thought premises and taken for granted assumptions: Views on good coaching.

The questions asked of the participants in the interviews were aimed at identifying their unquestioned, taken for granted assumptions and beliefs about coaching reflected in their views on what makes a good coach. They were asked to suggest what they thought the characteristics of a good rugby coach were with us taking this to reflect their beliefs about coaching. Analysis of the coaches' responses produced the one strong theme of, a) the importance of a coach being respected by his/her players and a lesser theme of, b) the need to have good people management skills. Their responses suggest some tension between the dispositions of the coaches toward coaching and the position the coach assumes in Game Sense.

The emphasis placed on learning respect from the players and of the importance of coaches displaying of moral and personal characteristics suggests a disposition toward a coach-centred and directive approach to coaching. In doing so it also suggests the likelihood of tension between the coaches' beliefs about good coaching and the pedagogy of Game Sense where the coach is more of what, in reference to teachers, Davis and Sumara (2003) describe as a co-participant in learning rather than a director of it. The positioning of the coach suggested as a manager is also a little at odds with the positioning of the Game Sense

coach in that it requires distance from the players with the implication that the coach controls them.

a) Earning respect from players

The participants most consistently saw the capacity of a coach to engender respect from players as being the most consistent mark of a good coach and it underpinned the importance they placed on other characteristics of good coaches such as having knowledge that was superior to that of their players, a good work ethic, commitment and enthusiasm. They felt that a good coach leads through example and that he/she had to display the very characteristics that he/she expected his players to show in training and in matches to earn their respect.

Joe's emphasis on demonstrating strong and decisive leadership reflects the views of all participants when asked what he thought was the most important characteristic of a good coach:

> I think just respect. I guess the players have to respect the coach. And as I said before, I said working with the players to get a result. The coach has to be the one leading the show and the players have to go down the path that he wants them to go down. But the players also have to be sitting beside him in the driving seat to get there, if that makes sense. (Joe, Interview 1, 09/02/2007)

All four coaches nominated the need for a good coach to have superior levels of knowledge about rugby, have a good work ethic, commitment and enthusiasm as being characteristics of a good coach but the importance they placed on these qualities was underpinned by their

belief in how the display of them generated respect from players. For example, Allen suggested that, *"I think you have to have knowledge. I think players want to come to a coach and be sure that they know what they're talking about in most parts of the game"*. They all also valued being enthusiastic, working hard and having a passion for rugby and felt that these traits were essential for success, not only in elite level rugby coaching but also in life in general as Lance suggests: "I reckon you know, in anything you do in life, if you're really passionate about that, particularly about being successful, doesn't matter if it's rugby or something else, then you're half way there" (Lance, Interview 1, 09/02/2007).

Observations of training sessions conducted by the coaches suggested that Allen, Lance and Evan were indeed overtly enthusiastic and even passionate in the ways in which they approached their coaching. Joe adopted a more reserved approach in his interaction with the players and a more distant, hands off, managerial approach. Given his emphasis on his role as a manager of his staff more than that of a 'hands on' coach this is not surprising.

b) Having Good Management Skills and Showing Leadership

Although less evident with Lance than the others, there was a belief among all participants in the need for a good coach to be a good people manager. Evan was very clear in his emphasis on the need for management skills in coaching claiming that, "Coaching's all people management" but Joe emphasised effective management skills the most. He said that working with players requires understanding the type of person that the coach is working with to get good results. He said that a good coach needed to be aware of the different traits and personalities of players to be able to effectively manage them and get the best out of them:

I think being very conscious that you are in the people business.

Understanding the different traits of personalities of a person to get the best

out of them. Understanding the strengths and the weaknesses of a player's

ability, so he plays within those boundaries at times. (Joe, Interview 1,

09/02/2007)

Perceptions, appreciation or understanding: Views on What Makes Good Players

The four participants were asked for their views on what made great rugby players to inquire

into their perceptions and appreciation as a characteristic of their *habitus.* They most

consistently suggested three major characteristics of great rugby players as, a) being born

with natural ability, b) being tough and resilient and, c) having a strong work ethic and

passion. Their views reflect a belief in the importance of naturally occurring capacities that

separate good players from the rest. This included physical capacities such as speed and

strength as well as having a highly developed 'sense of the game'. While they felt that

physical capacities could be improved through coaching they did not feel that a sense of the

game could be significantly developed through coaching. This has clear implications for their

dispositions toward Game Sense with its emphasis on developing this 'sense of the game'.

The value they place on toughness, resilience, having a strong work ethic and passion also

further reflects a belief in the importance of naturally occurring qualities that cannot be

significantly developed by coaching. We also note how there was little mention of the

importance of intellectual capabilities in players or of the "thinking players" that Game Sense

aims at developing (den Duyn, 1997).

a) Having "God-given" natural ability

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All the coaches believe that what distinguishes great players most is capacities and abilities that they were born with as Joe clearly articulates: "…the great players have got all the talent that god gave them, strength, speed, skills, all that stuff." They felt that these capabilities tended to be naturally occurring rather than being learnt and that, indeed, they were difficult to change significantly through coaching:

> Well I think there's a sort of innate skill, like athleticism I guess, and capacity to, it doesn't have to be just in rugby, but just in sport generally, that they've just got balance, yeah, those sorts of things, I reckon it's balance. …But I think you've got to have a basis of god-given or inherited athleticism, balance: those sorts of things. (Lance, Interview 1, 06/03/2007)

Allan, Lance and Evan, felt that outstanding players had a deep understanding of the game that they saw as being as an "inherited" quality. Allen called it "instinctiveness", Evan said it was 'game sense' and Lance said that it was just, "being in the right spot at the right time". The more specific qualities that the four coaches specifically identified as distinguishing great players from the rest included having vision, creating time and space for themselves in attack and the ability to read the game.

The participants varied in their ideas on to what extent these capacities could be coached. Joe was least convinced, saying that: ``Some players you can help by always being a crutch for them, reinforces them sort of, but I don't think you can ever turn, that person will never be a great player" (Joe, Interview 1, 09/02/2007). Allen was most inclined to believe that this capacity could be coached, saying that is generated through playing games at a young age and playing with good players. Significantly, for this inquiry into their dispositions toward Game

Sense, he felt that it could be developed through coaching that provides a context resembling match conditions through the use of games:

> …if you have to rank it from A to E, some players can become A level, but I think it's possible to develop and E level player into a D or C level player. By manipulating the environment and putting them in situations where they start responding to patterns or start responding to cues (Allen, Interview 1, 06/02/2007)

Lance, Evan and Allen spoke of creating a training environment where practice closely replicates game conditions, which is a basic characteristic of Game Sense coaching. Although they suggested possible ways of developing these capacities they held a deep belief that they were essentially what Joe's described as being 'god given'.

b) Mental toughness

Although the participants suggested the importance of physical capabilities such as power, strength and endurance they emphasised the need for players to have mental 'toughness'. They all felt that players needed this attribute to deal with the violence and physical aggression that characterises elite level rugby and to stay on top and dominate. Joe was most convinced of the need for mental toughness, saying that great players had to be, " so mentally strong and tough to stay at the other guy's throat. The great players have got that". (Joe, Interview 1, 09/02/2007). Indeed, he valued mental toughness enough for him to use it as a core criterion for recruiting new players.

c) *Good work ethic and passion*

As much as all four coaches valued natural ability they felt that hard work was essential for making the most of this ability: "They have to be prepared to do the extra three percent. So they always have to be able to do extra training, whether that be physical fitness or skill". (Allen, Interview 1, 06/02/2007) They were emphatic about the need for players to have the natural drive and commitment to be able to do 'that little bit extra" at training to become better players. Again, relating rugby to life in general, Lance said that; "I think (rugby) it's like succeeding in any other field of endeavour then, it's about hard work".

Descriptive and practical sense of objective possibilities and the forthcoming: Attitudes to innovations

The coaches were asked about their opinions on innovation in rugby coaching to gain a sense of their practical sense of possibilities in coaching with clear implications for their interpretation of Game Sense. There was ambivalence toward, and cynicism about, innovation in coaching and, with the exception of Allen, the possibilities for coaching innovation.

Allen was the most inclined to experiment with his coaching and to use games in training and was looking at changing his coaching by introducing an innovation that he called the, "*flow approach*" which he thought would improve the game sense of his players. This involved using game as the central activity for training and encouraging a flow of learning, stopping only for the coach to provide feedback to players. The other three participants felt that no coaching innovation could offer any significant and lasting advantage to a team. As Evan suggested: "I don't think there's anything dramatically new. I mean you do spot things. I think everyone's got fundamentally the same broad structures but the devils in the detail"

(Evan, Interview 1, 28/02/2007). Finding an edge in coaching was seen to be "enormously difficult" due to rugby's professionalization and the speed at which opponents would pick up any successful innovation.

Physical preparation. All the coaches saw need for advances in the physical preparation of players but felt that the major advances in this area had already been implemented by all elite level teams. For example, Lance felt that his players lacked power and speed compared to other teams in the Super 14 competition and saw this as an important area for improvement:

> We need to look at different ways of improving ourselves physically so we're looking at specific power, lower limb power generation in locks, back rowers and our backs and looking at upper body power generation for our props, so getting, trying to get more specificity in our athletic development. (Lance Interview 3 09/08/2007)

The importance they placed on making advances in physical development can be seen in Joe's ideas on what he saw as being and important area for future innovation: "Mate, I see the big advancements in rugby at the moment is the development of the athlete. Speed and strength are the way forward". (Joe, Interview 1, 09/02/2007)

Decision-making and flexible playing style. Allan and Lance suggested a need for advances in coaching that could develop player decision-making with Lance looking at rugby league for new ideas on how to improve the decision-making ability of his players in attack. Allen felt that any coaching innovation that could better develop player decision-making would be of

immense value: "If someone was able to develop coaching system that improved decision making remarkably, then that would be a massive innovation" (Allen, interview 1, 06/02/2007). In particular, he was interested in developing new approaches to enhancing player decision-making and flexible playing style. His views on innovation in coaching suggest an affinity with the *Game Sense* approach that was evident in his belief that good training methods produced a transfer from training to the match on the weekend and that successful coaching involves, "how you transfer what you do on the field, the training field, to the game."

Discussion

The powerful ways in which *habitus* operates at a non-conscious level (Bourdieu, 1990) make it difficult to specifically identify. However, by drawing on Lau's framework for operationalising it we have been able to identify characteristics of a coaching *habitus* of the four coaches in this study that are likely to shape their dispositions toward Game Sense. Most of our data was generated through interviews meaning that most of what the coaches said was logically considered and this could be seen as being no more than expressions of consciously considered coaching 'philosophy' or even an ideology because *habitus* is most powerfully expressed in action at a non-conscious level (see for example, Bourdieu, 1977, 1990). We do, however, suggest that their responses to our questions reflect *characteristics* of their *habitus* as the embodied experiences of rugby over their lives and particularly when considered within Lau's (2004) framework.

The coaching literature recognises the influence of embodied knowledge and dispositions on coaching and has theorised this in a range of ways. For example, the concept of 'folk pedagogy' and 'theory-in-use' has been used in the coaching literature (Brookbank & Magill,

cited, Harvey et al., 2010). Research on teacher education has identified how tacit knowledge is rarely explicitly articulated but shapes what pre-service teachers "come to understand, value and use from courses in education" (Torf, 1999, p. 196). 'Folk pedagogy' is a term that originates in teacher education research and refers to sets of common sense ideas about learning and teaching that predispose individuals toward thinking and teaching in particular ways (for example see, Bruner, 1996; Torf, 1999). Along with tacit knowledge, it has equal relevance in coaching and coach education and, we suggest, can offer useful insights into coach development and education and particularly when, as Kirk (2010) argues, learning needs to be seen as a fundamental part of enhancing sport performance at any level.

However, we suggest that *habitus* offers a more powerful concept for understanding how this embodied knowledge and sets of dispositions are constructed through experience in particular fields, sub-fields and CoP and how it shapes practice (Cushion, 2007; Harvey et al., 2010). It also locates the development of knowledge, dispositions and inclinations toward coaching operating at a non conscious levels clearly within social contexts to explicitly see it as a social process and a product of experience.

The common characteristics of the *habitus* identified among the four coaches such as the need for a coach to be respected, were characteristics that they respected in teachers and coaches over their lives. They were also characteristics, which were valued in their rugby clubs and in the larger rugby community that they entered into as they moved into higher levels over their careers. In particular, their coaching *habitus* seemed to be learnt through their experiences as players who moved into positions of responsibility such as being captains, part of a leadership group, or moving into doing some coaching while they were still playing. Our identification of these characteristics suggests a common collective *habitus*

constructed as they moved through the same fields, sub fields and similar CoP (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

We also identified a range of dualisms such as mind/body and the idea that players with outstanding game sense are born and not made (nature/nurture) reflected in what could be seen as opposing pedagogical ideas such telling versus asking and focussing on the game as a whole or on the technique as a part of it. These are ideas that Davis and Sumara (2003) suggest arise from Western philosophic traditions and common-sense assumptions about learning and which profoundly shape teaching and coaching (Davis & Sumara, Light, 2008). This, we suggest, reflects the influence of larger social fields such as education and sport on the *habitus* and which shapes the CoP that they move though in their journeys toward becoming elite level coaches.

Habitus is produced through the interaction of structure and agency and, despite the strong influence of structure, we were also able to identify some individual variation between the coaches and tensions within their *habitus* arising from the interaction of agency and structure. This attention to agency and our phenomenological slant in the application of Bourdieu's work is more evident in his early work (see for example, Bourdieu, 1977) that has strongly influenced our use of his concepts in this paper.

Our inquiry into the 'descriptive and prescriptive practical sense of objective possibilities' of the participants is particularly informative due to the ways in which it provides insights into their common sets of dispositions toward Game Sense as a coaching innovation and the variation between them. The lack of consideration of pedagogy, possibilities for developing tactical knowledge and decision-making and the coaches' cynicism toward innovation suggest dispositions that would be at odds with a Game Sense approach but there was variation that was particularly significant with Allen.

Game Sense has a particular capacity to develop decision-making (see for example, Kidman, 2001; Light, 2004) which is an area of coaching that typically presents a challenge for directive coaching and which Allen and Lance identified as an aspect of play in need of coaching innovation. This is evident in his suggestion for the use of games as a vehicle for its development through his *flow* approach. He also made reference to the relationship between coaching and learning and the ways in which decision-making could be enhanced through manipulation of the game environment as a feature of Game Sense.

Allen and Lance's experiences as teachers prior to moving into coaching may have predisposed them toward seeing, or having a sense of, player development as a process of learning and toward the use of games to develop decision-making. Lance had a feeling that it could be enhanced but Allen seemed far more convinced that coaching innovation could address this issue and this seems to be influenced by his own experiences of rugby when young. Their teaching background seems to have made them more amenable to the idea that decision-making could be coached but it also seems that the emphasis on sport science and advances made in scientific approaches to conditioning dominated the discourse of rugby coaching sub field they practised in. However, with Allen there seems to be tension and some contradiction in his beliefs about coaching. Like the others he valued taking responsibility, being in control and managing his players but also believed in the capacity of his 'flow approach' to develop and enhance decision-making within game environments. He could not, however, let go enough in his pedagogical approach by 'stepping back' and empowering his players in their learning.

Despite his inclination toward games-based coaching Allen's dispositions toward the position of the coach limited the extent to which he could adopt Game Sense pedagogy. His 'flow' approach was based on the use of training games to foster a flow of understanding and

learning but it did not involve the use of questioning. Instead, he provided direct feedback. As other research conducted on the use of Game Sense in rugby coaching in Australia suggests is common among coaches, Allen used and valued games-based training but did not (or could not) adopt its player-centred pedagogy (Light & Evans, 2010) and we see this as his *habitus* in operation.

Identification of how his *habitus* operates to prevent Allen taking up Game Sense pedagogy suggests what being able to identify it (or its characteristics) has to offer in inquiring into how coaches' interpret and use Game Sense, and innovations. While coaches often value the use of games-based coaching they typically do not adopt the player-centred pedagogy of Game Sense because it does not fit with their unquestioned beliefs about coaching and how players learn (Harvey, et al., 2010; Light & Evans, 2010). Research on TGfU in schools also indentifies this resistance to its pedagogy by physical education teachers due to the ways in which it does not fit with their beliefs about good teaching (Butler, 1996; Rossi et al., 2007).

Conclusion

Identifying the characteristics of a coaching *habitus* as we have done here can make a valuable contribution toward the use of the concept in understanding how experience influences coaching practice (see for example, Cushion, 2001; Harvey et al., 2010; Light & Evans, 2010). More specifically, in relation to the implementation of Game Sense, it offers a valuable means of understanding why this approach has not been more widely taken up. The identification of characteristics of coaches' *habitus* that our use of Lau's (2004) framework enabled us to undertake emphasises how the decisions coaches make about practice and the ways in which they interpret innovation is not just a conscious, logical process and how it is

structured by their *habitus*. The existential phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty (see for example, 1962) forms a significant influence on Bourdieu and according to Merleau-Ponty, perception is not merely a process of inputting information but is, instead, an interpretative process based upon prior experience. From this perspective, the ways in which coaches interpret Game Sense is shaped by their *habitus* because it shapes their perception of it.

Given that the ways in which coaches use Game Sense (or any other innovation that challenges their beliefs or sets of dispositions towards coaching) is largely dependent upon their interpretation, this suggests that changing coaches' practice may, to a large extent, constitute an ontological issue and be far more challenging and complex than it first appears to be. Research that can add to our understanding of this complexity and the socially situated nature of coach development by actually inquiring into aspects of an individual or collective coaching *habitus* can provide for better understanding what its characteristics are, how they can shape coaching practice and how they influence coaches' interpretation of innovation

It is however, imperative that the complexity and 'vagueness' of *habitus* is maintained and that researchers not give in to the temptation to reduce it to make it easier to work with. What makes *habitus* appealing for inquiry into coach development also makes it challenging to work with and it should not be reduced to an instrument used to quantify and check coaching 'capabilities'. In the quest to recognize and make sense of the complexity of coaching as a socially and culturally situated practice researchers should avoid reducing it to being nothing more than a set of capabilities that can be check-listed and measured yet which do not represent what coaching and coach development actually is.

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