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Community Sport Coaching and Citizenship Education: educating the coaches.

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Abstract

The paper explores design considerations for a Foundation Degree in Community Sports Coaching with a focus on cricket. We view coaching as social practice and explore the potential for seeing Community Sports Coaches as 'agents of Citizenship Education'. Cricket's position is historically ironic in post-colonial Britain, being both the game of the colonial elite yet also woven into the habitus of many disenfranchised communities. Many of our young-adult student coaches will come from and work within these communities; this has important social and cultural implications for identity formation, meaningful social participation and the potential for children and young people to learn in and through sport.

In 2002 the UK Government legislated for the introduction of Foundation Degrees as part of its drive to increase and broaden participation in Higher Education and encouraged active partnerships between universities, industry and the post16 education sector. These degrees represent two-thirds of first-cycle HE and are designed to offer vocationally-based routes into university study. They reflect fundamental changes to economic and social realities in early 21st century Britain and force, amongst other things, a renegotiation of the post-1945 settlement between academic and vocational knowledges. Alongside expanded options for learners, Foundation Degrees provide opportunities to credential and raise the professional status and rewards for a number of existing practices and emergent professional identities. The paper will focus on our considerations of the design for a Foundation Degree in Community Sports Coaching with a specific focus on cricket.

Cricket is an important national sport within Britain and has a significant international profile that is broadly associated with Britain's colonial past. Within Britain, particularly England, it is played widely across many social groups and communities. However, underlying this apparent inclusiveness is a more ironic social reality, through the way it deploys powerful discourses on 'race' and class. Cricket's perennial claims to classlessness are reported by Williams thus:

> Cricket discourse has long celebrated club cricket as an expression of class harmony. Village cricket in particular was believed to have had a long tradition of promoting understanding between the classes. In 1922 Pelham Warner wrote that village cricket "represents the essence of the game; for the village match is the truest democracy" which encouraged' the feelings of freemasonry, camaraderie and esprit de corps. I cannot imagine a man who has been bowled out by the village blacksmith not having a fellow feeling towards him

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> afterwards. Can you imagine a cricketer becoming a Lenin? (Williams, 1999; p.132)

'Joining in the game' also clearly serves as an ideologically significant metaphor for inclusive activity across other domains, including 'race' and its relation to Empire:

> As cricket was believed to express a distinctly English morality and as apologists for the Empire stressed the moral obligation to extend the benefits of British rule, the nature of cricket as an imperial game meant that cricket and imperialism became mutually supporting ideologies. (Williams, 2001:1)

The post-colonial legacy is that cricket is a game of choice both for the social and cultural elite as well as for some of the most disenfranchised black and minority ethnic groups and communities. Moreover, this ironic condition is underlined by the significant platform that success in cricket has provided for political resistance, and for the assertion of identities for these communities through the achievements on the cricket field of now independent former colonies. For example, from the late 1950s, with the appointment of their first black Captain until the early 1990s, the West Indies team was a dominant force in world cricket, this success on the field of play was a source of great pride and was emblematic of resistance to the former colonial order, both within the Caribbean and Britain. More recently, Nasser Hussain, the first Captain of the England cricket team with Indian heritage, provoked controversy when England played Pakistan, by suggesting that British-born young people with Pakistani heritage should support England and not, as many do, Pakistan.

The Foundation Degree has been developed at London Metropolitan University in partnership with The Community College Hackney, a local Further Education institution. Both institutions have demonstrated a commitment to sport as both a central part of the curricular and extra-curricular offer and see it as an expression of their health and dynamism as progressive and ambitious educational institutions with sport as an important strategic component. The course will bring the existing sporting achievements of the Community College within the ambit of the university, but more, will enable both institutions to realise their broader ambitions for the young people at the heart of the programme and for sport in general within London. Of central importance to the realisation of both institutions' commitments to their local communities, is a partnership with The London Community Cricket Association (LCCA).

The LCCA was formed in the wake of the Brixton 'riots' of 1981. This was a time of national recession with exceptionally high unemployment, particularly amongst black youths, estimated at around 55% in this inner-London area. A subsequent enquiry (Scarman, 1981) concluded that urgent action was needed to prevent racial disadvantage becoming an 'endemic, ineradicable disease, threatening the very survival of our society', with recognition that here was a challenge that could not be tackled 'top-down', but required community-based action that was sensitive to grassroots' concerns as a prerequisite to building a more inclusive society.

These contexts, namely: the existing sporting ambitions of the University and FE college; the work of the LCCA; the opportunities offered by Foundation Degrees to

credential the emergent professionalism of the Community Cricket Coach together with their potential to legitimate existing cultural capitals within disenfranchised communities; all provided impetus and shape for the course design.

A further prerequisite was to outline the particular role of existing Community Sport Coaches and how this might be distinct from more conventional models for coaching. To this end, we interviewed practitioners in an attempt to identify core activities associated with their role. Their responses revealed a strong desire to provide enhanced understanding in crucial areas for young coaches embarking upon Community Sport Coaching. These experienced coaches clearly felt that their conventional coach training failed to prepare them adequately for the contexts in which they would be coaching. Their work took them to places and communities with fragile social capital resources and where, in consequence, there have been few opportunities for sustained participation in organised sport. Sport development in such localities reflects a significant and growing commitment, on the part of policy makers, to the idea that sport can be an important agent in the promotion of social and community resources; it helps explain a growing demand for Community Sport Coaches as Government policy dictates that sport becomes increasingly associated with regeneration, social cohesion, crime prevention, children's care, health and welfare projects and the extension of curricular and extra-curricular school activity. Furthermore, sport governing bodies and commercial interests have seen the potential to 'develop their brand', build their audience and unearth talent through grass-roots' sporting programmes. In short Community Sport Coaching represents the executive end of a growing industrial interest and the location of much of the work necessitates cognisance of a range social factors beyond those associated with athletic ability *per se*.

Through our recognition of the necessity for Community Sport Coaches to have a socially-situated understanding of their role we saw the opportunity to construct the course along lines in which its pedagogy and content reflected and supported development of skills, knowledge and understanding to meet these professional realities. It led us to seek alternative theoretical frameworks for: a) player-coach learning encounters; b) students' preparation as coach-practitioners; c) understandings of social contexts of practice. With this in mind we undertook a survey of existing coaching materials. We found coaching manuals to be strewn with comments, such as: 'All coaches would like unlimited access to their performers. In the real world, however, very few have such a luxury' (UK Sports Coach, 2003). These comments present a predominant focus upon coaching as ideally an individualised, rationally enframed encounter between player and coach. Moreover, this construes elite coaching as the paradigm for practice. Yet even in the elite coaching sphere, a sense of straight-jacketing seemed to be felt by coaches and theorists alike, exposing significant tensions that have the effect of constructing the social as a problematic supplement to the 'real' work of the coach. This is evidenced by Knowles *et al* (2005) who have expressed the desire to expand the purview of the coaches' role by recognising the constraints deriving from a Cartesian ontology, focused on individualised skill and performance, and which continue to limit the options for manoeuvre:

> … the modern elite sports coach faces an array of demands emanating from the need to manage not only performers but also the performance environment, assistant coaches, support staff (e.g. sport psychologists) and funding agencies.
>
> … coach education programmes are faced with the difficult task of trying to cater for the broad range of educational needs that stem from the role-set of the elite coach (Knowles et al, 2005)

These quotations seemed to encapsulate the sense that the theoretical paradigm associated with conventional coaching practice was unable to capture the centrality of the social encounters and contexts in effective sport coaching. The conventional coaching encounter, which is largely based upon a *private* and *tacitly consensual* contract between player and coach, not only seemed to render the social context invisible, but also install this as the template for legitimate coaching practice. Our analysis concluded that for Community Sport Coaching, diverse social variables cannot be filtered out: the contexts of action and interaction are more *public*, *negotiated* and *insistent*, and therefore demanded that we consider a more comprehensive theoretical viewpoint. The work of Lave and Wenger (1991) on Situated Learning and, importantly, the proposition that meaning is constructed within socially-situated communities of practice, held out the possibility of a radically different take on the coaching encounter, as one that is able to accommodate the more comprehensive viewpoint.

Lave and Wenger challenge the conventional, Cartesian assumption that knowledge and meaning are constructed within the heads of individuals; rather they point to its situatedness within social contexts that the authors identify as 'Communities of Practice'. They offer a theoretical perspective in which learning is central, so that coach and learner/player are not situated *oppositionally*, but *positionally* relative to one another on the basis of their roles as 'Old Timer' and 'apprentice'. These roles are not positioned in a fixed hierarchy, rather they reflect an interactive process of increasing participation and thence, legitimacy within the community of practice. Therefore, Lave and Wenger characterise learners' position as a state of Legitimate Peripheral Participation. Implicitly this synchronic emphasis on positionality challenges a hierarchical opposition between coach and player by proposing that they are both situated within the same 'landscape' (Blundell and Cunningham, 2007).

This offered two important perspectives: first, it suggested a framework within which we could construct the students' 'apprenticeship' to Community Sport Coaching as a community of practice; second, it challenged the assumption that there is an 'authentic' form of coaching practice, based upon a consensual encounter between coach and players and a form that occurs in less felicitous contexts where this, as an ideal, would constantly be challenged by the exigencies of the social situation, at an extreme the players might be far from 'consensual' and, at times, disruptive. Lave and Wenger's insight is that learning, including the more consensual encounter, is always situated: so that Community Sport Coaching does not, in a Platonic sense, represent a degraded image of the 'real thing'. Authenticity derives from the practice norms of the community, so that, just as Wittgenstein averred that the meaning of a proposition is not intrinsic to it, but is found in the method of its verification; so the legitimacy of the work

of a community sport coach derives from the community of practice and its associated norms.

This offered us an agenda within which we could construct our course and meet the needs of students as apprentice community sport coaches. In effect we sought to consolidate the norms of the community of practice as the building blocks for the content and processes of the course and through which the students' credentials as apprenticed Community Sport Coaches would be verified. To this end we proposed four Key Dimensions around which the course could be structured. These are:

KD1 – Personal performance This Key Dimension is devoted to the preparation of the students as players of their game and provides students with a working grasp of traditional sports science disciplines. However, it also provides a context within which they are able to reflect on the processes that support the development of their own knowledge, skills and understanding and the role that coaching pedagogies play in this. We have sought to locate this learning within the community of practice by building peer support and evaluation into an Action Learning methodology. Students review, evaluate and set targets for their own development as players in cooperation with peers. They are also required to present analyses of their work to their fellow course members and tutors. Both of these approaches reflect the emphasis placed upon providing access to a professional discourse – a frame for the social construction of effective coaching practices. Furthermore, one assessment within this KD requires students to undertake a biographical study of one of their coaches, or what, in Lave and Wenger's terms, would be an 'Old Timer' within the Community of Practice.

KD2 – Coaching practice and performance The second Key Dimension is concerned with the preparation of students as confident, competent, employable Community Sport Coaches with a body of experience to reflect and draw upon . Practical sessions at the University and college seek to model and explore effective coaching practice and address emergent challenges and problems. These are supported by taught sessions that focus upon pedagogical possibilities, including an exposition of the work of Lave and Wenger and their notions of Situated Learning. These 'sports-hall' and 'seminar room' sessions are complemented by periods of coaching placement that will be shared between school and community education settings. During their time on placement, students will maintain e-presence with their tutors and each other through the University's online learning environment.

KD3 – Professionalism and the Community Sport Coach This Key Dimension is concerned with the development of Community Sport Coaches as employable, responsible community builders with knowledge, skills and understanding from across a range of appropriate socio-cultural and educational domains, including inclusive forms of Citizenship Education as a 'value-setting' for the work. In short, it seeks to situate the professionalism of the Community Sport Coach within a range of theoretical and practical policy, ethical, educational and industrial contexts and make these languages available to them. This Key Dimension is also of strategic significance, in that it is here that the course principally seeks to fulfil its aspiration to legitimate Community Sport Coaching as a fully professional practice and to raise the status of, often hard-pressed and undervalued practitioners as a result. This is also the area where the course engages

most directly with the potential of Citizenship Education to inform, evaluate and enlarge the practice of Community Sport Coaches.

KD4 – Academic and intellectual contexts An important provision within the FD philosophy is that students, depending upon their performance, should have an option to progress to the final year of a first cycle, bachelors degree qualification. This KD offers students knowledge of academic, intellectual and disciplinary practices associated with Education in order to make sense of current issues and offer opportunities for academic progression.

These Key Dimensions provided a framework within which we could not only design the course, but also identify and support the development of a number of 'Coaching Standards'. These are the competences that we expect students to attain over the period of the course, and that serve as an indication of their competence to perform as professionally appropriate, confident and effective Community Sport Coaches.

As we explored these Coaching Standards we gained a clearer sense of their significance as a value setting for the course and as positional markers for the students' Legitimate Peripheral Participation in Community Sport Coaching. This value setting, because of its emphasis on community-based associational activity seemed to have significant congruencies with the competences for Citizenship Education (see Ross 2005) that are premised by democratic ideals of equality, liberty and fraternity and reflect relational concepts including fairness, justice, tolerance and respect. That is not to say that we 'discovered' Citizenship Education as an essence at the heart of Community Sport Coaching but rather, that it could be deployed to shape, critique and add value. We came to see this as offering strategic possibilities for the design and expansion of the course and, in turn, potential constructions of Community Sport Coaching and its professional identity; since as Svoboda (1994) suggests, sports participation has the potential to develop citizenship skills and attitudes and Putnam (2000) highlights the important role that associational activity can have in building social capital – in short, we came to see that Citizenship Education offered the following potentials: an established body of knowledge that could inform the professional identity of the Community Sport Coach; a critical agenda that *we* could use in the design and evaluation of the course and that our *students* will have available to monitor their own professional development during and after the course; and, importantly, the production of an intellectual space within which the course and its participants can find 'room for growth'.

We found Faulk's dimensions of citizenship strategically useful to add detail to these three potentials of content, evaluation and expansion. Faulks (2000) defines citizenship as having four interrelated dimensions: *extent*; *content*; *depth*; and, *context;* these helped in setting an agenda for our thinking about Community Sport Coaching and helped us to clarify how the course could meet its aims both to promote access and participation for its students and also to equip them with the knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes to promote the community participation of others.

For us, *extent* helped reflection on boundaries that both confer and limit the legitimacy of participation and what our graduates' role would be in extending enfranchisements. This is explicit in theoretical constructs in Key Dimensions 3 and 4 where issues of

equity and inclusion are addressed in earmarked sessions relating to, for example, Special Educational Needs, 'race', gender and class and education. Students also reflect on how their lived experience impacts upon personal performance (Key Dimension 1) and how in Coaching Pedagogy (Key Dimension 2) they are expected to draw upon understanding of these factors in relation to learning and teaching.

In interpreting *Content*, with its emphasis on rights, duties and obligations we focused upon the coaches' ethic of responsibility towards the individuals and the communities they are working within. To this end at a theoretical level they consider a wide range of, for example, child welfare issues and then explore the practicalities of working within policy and with key agencies as part of their coaching placements (Key Dimensions 2 and 3).

Depth requires reflection upon the fullness of both coaches' and participants' involvement in the community. The Coaching Standards, through which the students demonstrate their developing competence as Community Sport Coaches, are crucial here, because they require students to consider the *quality* of their engagements with the communities amongst whom they are working. Here are examples of standards drawn from 'KD3 – Professionalism and the Community Sport Coach':

S3.1 *Recognise tolerance and preconceptions in their own and others' behaviour and attitudes and be able to develop strategies to promote greater acceptance and understanding;*

S3.2 *Acquire skills to develop children/young people and adults' understanding of their identity through sporting contexts;*

S3.3 *Have a critical understanding of political, social, economic, educational and physiological justifications for the value of sport within society and of policies aimed at its development*

Additionally, we also consciously seek to develop a community of practice within the practical elements of the course (Key Dimensions 1 and 2), so that, for example, students are encouraged to work together as critical friends.

In preparing the students for their professional role, questions of extent, depth and content can only be understood as contingencies of the *contexts*. However, we were anxious to avoid essentialism and the production of a stereotyped set of contexts, based on deficit models that Community Sport Coaching merely served to entrench and reify. Therefore, a broad thrust of the course is to equip students with theoretical languages within and through which they can read contexts and construct an understanding of their role within them. The emphasis upon the professional role of the Community Sport Coach found in Key Dimension 3 is intended to challenge such lapses into 'shorthand thinking'. Furthermore, it is our intention that the critical discourses situated within Education Studies and offered in Key Dimension 4 increase the stock of critical resources at the students' disposal.

In conclusion, Community Sport Coaching is not a new activity and Community Sport Coaches have long worked in professional ways. However, their status, rewards and the contribution they make to the construction of sustainable, community-focused social

capital resources have been under-recognised and undervalued. Our principal concerns in the construction of the Foundation Degree have been twofold: to develop genuine opportunity through sport for some of the most socially and politically disadvantaged communities within London and the UK; but also, to raise the visibility, professional identity and opportunities available to this group of sport coaches – many of whom come from the communities they work within. The design of a course with appropriate knowledge, skills and understanding has clearly been vital in this endeavour. We feel that Lave and Wenger offer us a perspective that brings together theory and practice, and the related but distinct roles of being both a student and a practitioner, through common emphasis on the centrality of learning and on positioning within a community of practice. However, more than this, we have been concerned to construct and affirm Community Sport Coaching as an emergent professional identity. Therefore we have advanced the strategic proposition that these coaches be seen as 'agents of Citizenship Education' with a conscious commitment to the promotion of associational activity and to building the social capital resources through which community participation can be sustained. This, we believe, not only lends intellectual, moral and political substance to their role, but also offers both a critical agenda for evaluation and action and, crucially, creates 'room for growth' in the coaches' professional and personal lives.

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