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Making Room for the Community Sport Coach

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Abstract

This paper examines Community Sport Coaching and its accreditation as an emerging and distinct professional identity. We explore the development of the practices and professional identity of Community Sport Coaches as vital contributors to fostering associational activity, community cohesion, health and social well-being amongst young citizens. The paper presents a spatial analysis that usefully clarifies positions and opens possibilities for growth along multiple trajectories. Our strategy has been to start from an identification and delineation of the work of the Community Sport Coach and their communities of practice; we have drawn on theory in order to interpret practice and to strengthen professional identity, and to potentially re-imagine the role of the Community Sport Coach.

In this paper we continue with our examination of Community Sport Coaching and our interest in accrediting it as an emerging and distinct professional identity. We explore the terms for the development of the practices and professional identity of Community Sport Coaches as vital contributors to fostering associational activity, community cohesion, health and social well-being amongst young citizens. This paper presents a spatial analysis that we have found useful in clarifying positions and opening up possibilities for growth along multiple trajectories. It adds to our earlier work exploring the role of the Community Sport Coach in relation to, *inter alia*, the competences of Citizenship Education, Social Pedagogy and public health promotion. Our strategy has been to start from an identification and delineation of the work of the Community Sport Coach and their communities of practice; we have drawn on theory in order to interpret practice and to expand and strengthen professional identity; and, to offer the potential to re-imagine the role of the Community Sport Coach.

The context for our work is the development of a Foundation Degree programme for Community Sport Coaches. Foundation Degrees are a relatively new HE initiative, primarily designed to accommodate work-based study, academic – industrial partnerships and the expansion opportunities for students to engage with Higher Education within Universities and through distance learning. They represent two years of first cycle Higher Education and afford an opportunity for students to progress to a third year and a BA degree.

The course was written during the academic year 2006-7 and was introduced with cricket as its focus sport in September 2007. We are in process of expanding the provision to include other sports, including basketball, rowing, football and blind cricket. We are also adding to the existing professional pathway in Education and Teaching with one focused on Public Health Promotion. From inception, the course has sought to build in competences for Citizenship Education as a value setting for the work of the

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Community Sport Coach and we have attempted to define their role as being "agents of Citizenship Education". However, the analysis we present here leads us to argue that there is a need to be clearer about the particular terms of establishment of Community Sport Coaching and its relations to the mainstream. We have become convinced that these competences cannot simply be bolted-on, but these need to be at the heart of the pedagogy of the Community Sport Coach.

In order to achieve our goal we have drawn upon a number of sources. The first priority was for us to find out from serving Community Sport Coaches how they saw their role and its demands and characteristics. In the interviews we conducted with serving coaches, contradictions between their respective roles as pedagogues in both conventional and "developmental" or "community" settings emerge. The coaches clearly saw differences between the two roles. However, in published material and documentation produced for coaches this distinction was not visible. Both the documents and interviews reinforced mainstream/elite coaching knowledges and practices as representative of the legitimised form and, by implication at least, the relative subordinacy, through its invisibility, of Community Sport Coaching.

In trying to understand this different, yet subordinated role, we found ourselves using a landscape metaphor as a support for our understanding and catalyst for how we were able to imagine the role of the Community Sport Coach and their position relative to the heartland of sport activity. The spatial potentialities of the landscape have helped make more visible the contradictions within the lives of practising coaches that we encountered in our interviews; One coach that we interviewed articulated contradictions stemming from, on the one hand, his centrality within the game as a recently retired seasoned, respected professional player (what Lave and Wenger would refer to as "an Old-Timer") and, on the other hand, his attempts to forge a career after playing that are all too frequently referenced to his personal biography and peripheral status as a product of the *inner-city* with *working class* and *minority ethnic post-colonial* roots.

The landscape metaphor enables us to play with the "locational" implications of this and so renders the simultaneous occupation of contradictory places within its space highly visible. Focused reflection upon the language used to outline the identity of this coach reveals implicit spatial dimensions that permit us to locate him within the landscape. Notions of being a seasoned, respected professional locate him in the centre as a full participant within the community of practice. However, simultaneously, the geographical (inner-city), social/cultural (working-class and minority ethnic) and historical (post-colonial) dimensions to his personal identity place him more marginally. This becomes evident as he articulates his personal commitment to seeing young people/players from the inner-city succeeding and the work he is engaged in to achieve this, but also his apparent resignation that for him to build a career after playing requires engagement with institutions, players and work in more elite locations. It was apparent that his lived-experience of the simultaneous occupation of contradictory positions is challenging, problematic and exposes a fractured professional identity.

This analysis enabled us to begin to clarify how the Community Sport Coach is positioned within the larger picture of sport development. Specifically, a work pattern that tends to take Community Sport Coaches to marginal spaces reinforces the relative

subordination of Community Sport Coach in relation to more conventional elite, club-based coaching whose position at the heartland remains unchallenged as a result.

Our initial concern was that we would be able to credential students as community-based workers, but also link them to the heartland. However, further spatial analysis has helped us to understand a subsequent and radical shift in how we imagine the potentiality of the course.

Our use of the landscape metaphor is congruent with what has been described as the "spatial turn" in recent theorising in the humanities and social sciences. Theorists point to the dominance, yet inadequacy of a longstanding emphasis on history and the temporal in explaining social phenomena. Social scientists increasingly invoke the spatial in understanding social life that goes beyond viewing space and place as a neutral medium in and on which activity occurs.

However, many of the same theorists have stressed the need for critical examination of our understanding of space. They see a poverty of explanation in conventional views of space as merely a neutral stage upon which social phenomena play out, rather than dynamic medium, produced by social processes. Amongst the seminal contributors to this spatial turn has been Henri Lefebvre (1974; English translation 1991). We have also extensively drawn upon more recent work by the geographer Doreen Massey (1999, 2005).

Lefebvre argues that space is "…more than the theatre, the disinterested stage or setting, of action" (Lefebvre, 1991:410); that every society produces its own space - for example, in capitalist societies "geographical space is spatialised as lots: always owned by someone" (Shields in Hubbard *et al*, 2004: 210) - and that understandings of geographical space are culturally determined. Space is thus seen as both generative process and outcome, within which lived experience is situated and engaged.

In his conceptualisation of the production of (social) space Lefebvre identifies three 'moments', presented as a dialectic triad, namely:

1. Social practice
2. Representations of space
3. Representational space

Social practice "embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial set characteristic of each social formation" (Lefebvre, 1991:33), it reflects "daily reality (daily routine) and urban reality (the routes and networks which link up the spaces set aside for work, 'private' life and leisure)" (Ibid:38): it is associated with day to day, commonsensical perceptions of space.

Representations of space refers to "conceptualised space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers……all of whom identify what is lived and perceived with what is conceived" (Ibid:38). These mental conceptions powerfully construct 'reality': defining, explaining and ordering the material and social world, what is conceived becomes 'taken for granted' as somehow representing a natural order. Difference between perceived and conceived space is

masked, but it is conceived space that "…is the dominant space in any society (or mode of production)" (Ibid:39).

Representational space, "embodying complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not" (Ibid:33) is associated with lived space where the richness of culture intervenes. Distinct from the more prosaic social practice, "For Lefebvre lived spaces were passionate, 'hot', teeming with sensual intimacies. Conceived spaces were intellectual, abstract, 'cool', distanciating……centred more on the mind than the body" (Soja, 1996:30). Although lived space is dominated, suppressed (in the case of the body, potentially "chastised, as it were, to the point of castration" (Lefebvre, 1991:40) by moral ideology (conceived space) and unquestioning social practice) it is also "linked to the clandestine side of social life" (Ibid:33) and "may be directional, situational or relational, because it is essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic" (Ibid:42). As such it offers radical potential to re-present space and for a multiplicity of possible simultaneous re-presentations.

Lefebvre's dialectic triad has strategic potential. It helps disrupt binary oppositions, as Soja (1996:60) notes:

> "For Lefebvre, reductionism in all its forms ... begins with the lure of binarism, the compacting of meaning into a closed either/or opposition between two terms, concepts, or elements. Whenever faced with such binarised categories (subject – object, mental- material, natural – social, bourgeoisie – proletariat, local – global, centre – periphery, agency – structure), Lefebvre persistently sought to crack them open by introducing an-Other term, a third possibility or "moment" that partakes of the original pairing but is not just a simple combination or an "in between" position along some all-inclusive continuum."

Lefebvre's theorising is useful to us, because:

1. Through disrupting the binary opposition it opens up multiplicity of spaces and a multiplicity of possibilities for Community Sport Coaching beyond the *conceived space* of sport governing bodies et al;
2. The triad reminds us that spaces are produced and subject to power and infused with the relations that power differentials engender, that mainstream centres and "community" margins are valorised in these terms;
3. It allows difference to be more visible when theorised in explicit spatial terms

The spatial emphasis in our work has also led us to the more recent work of the geographer Doreen Massey whose work on development in the context of Globalisation has offered helpful insights to understanding the developmental logic that structures the role and purpose of Community Sport Coaching as seen by interested institutions, including sport governing bodies, University course providers and others.

Massey seeks to radicalise of our view of space through three propositions; namely:

> "*First*, that we recognise space as the product of interralations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny ...

> *Second*, that we understand space as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity ...
>
> *Third*, that we recognise space as always under construction . Precisely because space on this reading is a product of relations-between, relations which are necessarily embedded material practices, it is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed. Perhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far." (Massey, 2007: 9)

Like Lefebvre, Soja, Foucault and other key thinkers on space, Massey (1999, 2005) encourages a challenge to the dominance exerted by the *historical* imagination in the construction of radical understandings of social phenomena. She wishes to assert the radical potential offered by spatialised understanding of these phenomena. She exemplifies this via an examination of global economic development, identifying the subordination of space to time and what she sees as an intrinsic temporal logic that connects differences in space through the idea of progression and sequence. In Massey's analysis: globalisation proceeds upon the working idea that political, economic and social progress have a uniform temporal trajectory; moreover, that this is identical to the Western economic historical model, predicting that all will follow the same path and that all can be located at some point along that path. The temporal and sequential provides the logic that laces the development system together. However, spatialised qualities, such as separation, dislocation, locality and the *genius loci* render difference not merely more visible, but also pose challenging questions about the legitimacy of this systemic, temporal account for development.

Her analysis has purchase upon developmentalism at scales other than the global. For us it helps to it identify ways in which sport development places and rationalises the Community Sport Coach and their "natural" habitat in marginal spaces of outreach as part of the whole. This positioning with its temporal logic again reinforces the dualism between the mainstream sport coach and the community sport coach; moreover, it privileges the former at the expense of the latter. In a previous paper (Blundell and Cunningham, 2007) we articulated difference between the role of the Community Sport Coach and the elite coach in terms of what we found when examining coaching manuals.

This survey of coaching manuals revealed a view of sporting performance as a single-minded activity. Although recognising that performers do not operate in a social vacuum, the wider social environment is seen as a problem, an obstacle to commitment, an external stress, something that the coach needs to '*anticipate and deal with*' with lifestyle management programmes that '*almost always require a sacrifice in some other area of life (often social or career)*'. This endeavour to abstract the body from the social, necessitates the production of a single-minded space in which coach and performer ideally have unlimited access to one another. It is a space that seeks closure from the wider social world. However, for Community Sport Coaches, diverse social variables cannot be filtered out: the practice is more porous and the contexts of action and interaction more *public*, *negotiated* and *insistent*.

What is at issue is not simply difference in degrees of spatial openness but the terms by which that openness/closure is established (Massey 2005:179). If we understand space as a product of inter-relationships, then the terms by which these spaces are produced and maintained raise questions as to their reducibility to one another. How can a space that pushes the social to the margins be reduced to one that is established on the terms of the social? These spaces are clearly separate, if not oppositional.

This opposition, and attempts to resolve it, became clear in one of the interviews we conducted with a serving coach. He rationalised the dualism by contrasting being a "coach" on one context and "teacher" in another. Seeing himself as a cricket *coach* reflected his experience as a professional cricket club coach and the way in which this is characterised by a *private* and *tacitly consensual* contract between player and coach. In contrast, when using the "teacher" metaphor he drew on its connotation of pedagogic practices that transcend the merely instrumental, enabling him to embrace a range of social variables that demand attention.

However, when the terms of establishment are not identified as different, conflation leads to the dominance of one over the other. In this case the dominance of the elite ideology, which locates the Community Sport Coach solely in peripheral places, with peripheral communities; meaning that the Community Sport Coach will always be marginalised.

Drawing on Massey, *Sport Development* implies and requires according to its terms of establishment a steady movement and connection between margins and centre as young players are drawn into the embrace of legitimate sport. This requires a process identified by the significant metaphor as "Outreach". This reinforces the systemic subordination of the Community Sport Coach as "Other" to the mainstream activity who necessarily operates at the point of "outreach", because the work of the Community Sport Coach is rationalised as both the first and the furthest step in the developmental sequence.

So for example, the England and Wales Cricket Board (Cricket's Governing Body) recently added the strap line "From playground to Test* arena" to a development programme, in which the Community Sport Coach could only be located at the furthest end of the continuum from the centre because the terms of establishment of elite practice and coaching are not reducible to those of the Community Sport Coach. Lefebvre's triad is helpful here in identifying the power of representational space and the hold it exerts over social practice and the construction of imagined realities – the stadia of the Test arena are representational spaces that always subordinate the playground (or housing estates, youth clubs and other "community" spaces within which our coaches work) as a degraded image.

A spatialised imagining challenges the developmentalist ontology because it refocuses our attention away from the sequential and temporal towards the multiple possibilities found in places where coaching happens and coaches operate. The coach can be released from the systemic, structural constraints of development and scope for greater agency is opened up (e.g. in relation to their role in health promotion, community cohesion and other imaginings).

We feel that this analysis opens up important possibilities, however, it is important to be clear about what we are not attempting to do. We are not seeking to replace or improve existing theories or practices of coaching in either mainstream or community, nor are we seeking to challenge their legitimacy. However, we believe that space points us towards their respective ontologies or their *terms of establishment*, allowing us to see that each is different – they are not reducible to one another in ways that the temporal logic of development suggests and that, as we have argued, inevitably lead to the dominance of one over the other.

The potential that Lefebvre's triad offers in "Lived Space" and "thirding" and Massey's notion of the simultaneous multiplicity of spaces confirms our strategic approach to the development of Community Sport Coaching as a distinct and progressive social profession, to which we have consistently sought to add "room (space) for growth", with the openness and multiple trajectories implied by that. As an example, in attempting to open up growth spaces, our *story-so-far* has led us to encounters and collaborations with colleagues working in the field of public health promotion. This has opened up a potential to re-imagine a vision of Community Sport Coaching that is dislocated from the sport development continuum discussed above. This re-imagining brings possibilities to attract students who wish to promote public health, community cohesion and associational activity through sport and develop professional equipped to realise these goals. This challenges a narrow, instrumental "taken-for-granted" view of pedagogy and chimes with our earlier (Blundell and Cunningham, 2007b, c and d) ongoing interest in connecting Community Sport Coaching with the broader European conception of 'Pedagogy as a discipline [that] extends to the consideration of the development of health and bodily fitness, social and moral welfare, ethics and aesthetics, as well as to the institutional forms that serve to facilitate society's and the individual's pedagogic aims' (Marton and Booth, 1997, in Mortimore, P., 1999: 2).

In our *story-so-far* we realise that we have always sought to pursue this approach to developing Community Sport Coaching and professional possibilities for our students. We have been clear that we should avoid merely "bolting-on" social theory and practice to existing domains and have sought to legitimate, validate, reflect and develop the work of the Community Sport Coach through the course. Spatial analysis has provided us with metaphors and vocabulary through which to make our intuitions explicit, communicable and materially visible with the potential for further imaginings.

Note:

*"Test" is a term used to describe international matches in a number of sports, but especially cricket and Rugby football.

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