Autonomy-supportive Coaching: An Autoethnographical Account of the Coaching Process.

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Abstract:
Existing literature suggests that coach behaviours can influence the motivation of an athlete. More specifically, the creation of an autonomy-supportive environment is believed to nurture the athletes' psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. Embedded in self-determination theory, the aim of the present study was to provide an in-depth examination of the development of autonomy-supportive coaching behaviours. An autoethnographical approach was adopted to explore and chart this process. Data were drawn from field notes, reflective journals, and critical conversations during the seven week study. Data are represented in three progressive stories – Athlete Input, Provision of Choice for All, and Self-Awareness of the Autonomy-Supportive Coach, which raise awareness of the contextual and social influences on the development and sustainment of autonomy-supportive coaching behaviours. Difficulties in creating a motivational climate are reflected upon (e.g., the implications of providing an A-S environment to children). A reflective examination of the process, and product of autonomy-supportive coaching is provided, bringing the unexplored and mundane aspects of the coaching process to life. To fuel the development of autonomy-supportive coaching behaviours, coaches are encouraged to adopt a research-oriented approach to practice.

Keywords: Motivation; Athlete-Centred; Autoethnography; Reflection; Behaviour

Flashback: My initial exposure to self-determination theory (SDT) felt unfamiliar and foreign. It was the distinct opposite from the autocratic coaching style I had previously demonstrated. On reflection, I had adopted this authoritarian approach as it was what I had experienced as an athlete, it was what I had been taught, and it was all that I knew.

Introduction

According to SDT, coach behaviours can influence the motivation of an athlete (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Furthermore, it is suggested the action and behaviour of a coach can create an environment that will adequately nurture an athlete's self-determined motivation (e.g., motivation becomes autonomous) (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). More specifically, self-determination theorists propose that satisfying the three psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, will drive motivated behaviour while leading to optimal development and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Consistent findings within the literature specify three characteristics of need-supportive environments (i.e., environments are autonomy-supportive (A-S), well-structured, and can facilitate coach involvement) (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Integrating these three characteristics, Mageau and Vallerand (2003) propose a motivational model of the coach-athlete relationship that translates the meaning of being A-S. Consistent with SDT and Vallerand's (1997) hierarchical model of motivation, Mageau & Vallerand (2003) identify seven behaviours associated with an A-S interpersonal style. The following behaviours are proposed: (1) the provision of choice, (2) provide a meaningful rational for tasks, (3) acknowledge athletes perspective and feelings, (4) provide opportunities for initiative taking, (5) provide non-controlling feedback, (6) avoidance of controlling behaviours, and (7) prevention of ego-involvement in athletes.

Mageau and Vallerand suggest these A-S coaching behaviours will only become beneficial (e.g., they foster the three psychological needs simultaneously) when they incorporate structure and coach involvement. For example, Jang et al., (2010) found that teacher autonomy-support and structure integrated as a complementary approach which positively correlated to predict student behavioural engagement. Like Grolnick and Ryan (1989), Jang et al's., findings suggest when those in a position of leadership (e.g., parents, teachers, and coaches) work to combine high autonomy-support with structure, they are more likely to nurture the psychological need of competence, allowing the recipient to be motivated within the environment.

Flashback: How do I provide choice? How much choice is acceptable? Are they competent to make their own decisions? How do I maintain control without being characterised as controlling? How do I provide a highly structured session that facilitates athlete input?

On closer examination of the literature, it became apparent that the process of applying A-S coaching behaviours within the sporting domain had not received concurrent attention. For example, studies illuminating the importance of creating A-S environments were from an athlete perspective (e.g., Adie et al., 2008; Amorose & Anderson-Butcher, 2007). Additionally, studies that had successfully differentiated autonomy-support from a controlling instructional approach neglect to detail how the contextual factors relate to the multi-layered nature of A-S coaching. Perhaps more pertinent to the current study, the research that does provide a coach perspective (e.g., Mallet, 2005) is outcome-focussed, excluding the process information a coach may seek when developing their own A-S coaching behaviour.

To begin to bridge the gap, the aim of this study was to provide an in-depth examination of the development of A-S behaviours, by providing what Sparkes and Smith (2014) refer to as an inside-out perspective. Like Jones (2009), this paper challenges the dispassionate third person stance commonly found within the sporting domain by creating an opportunity to place the person back into the study of people. What follows is a reflective account of my personal experience as coach. To complement previous literature grounded within SDT, I present an autoethnographical approach to provide a personal perspective, charting the complex and murky reality of the process I, the principle author, experienced on my journey to becoming A-S. Combining the characteristics of ethnography and autobiography, autoethnography provided me with an opportunity to widen the lens of autonomy-support (Ellis et al., 2011), and in doing so, make the characteristics of this process available to a wider audience (Richardson, 2000). Similar to Tessier et al., (2013), I detail 'how' my interpersonal style and associated behaviours relate to the satisfaction of the three psychological needs.

Flashback: Do I really need to control everything? My philosophical stance is changing. My introduction to SDT (through my sport coaching degree) had provided an alternative approach; I could adopt the role of facilitator. Through continued exposure, I developed a sound understanding and began applying this theory to my own coaching practice. My suitability in occupying a coaching-researcher role throughout this study will be underpinned by my ability to

develop critical awareness – something in which I, as a coach, had begun to practice.

Autoethnography: my chosen method of research and representation

Following institutional ethical approval, I began a seven-week professional development placement within one UK primary school. Throughout this period I occupied a dual role (e.g., the researcher and the subject), delivering weekly coaching sessions to replace the primary 6 core Physical Education class. Participants were aged 9-10 years old. Informed consent was collected from all participants (and assent from parents or guardians).

In the promotion of a need-supportive environment, each coaching session was designed to incorporate the seven associated A-S behaviours outlined by Mageau and Vallerand (2003). To monitor my A-S behaviours I drew from the SDT evidence base, specifically, an autonomy-support rating sheet (see Reeve et al., 2004) when designing each coaching session. Two initial observations of the environment I would become immersed in as coach and researcher, acted as an early familiarisation phase to establish trust with the participants (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Reflective journals were used throughout the seven-week period to document my observations and experience as coach. Reflecting on experience facilitated an opportunity to makes sense of what was happening while encouraging the development of analytic thoughts, a technique said to benefit the ethnographer (Bryman, 2012). My period of reflection followed a structured process as I made use of diaries, reflective conversations with other coaches and mentors, and the on-going analysis of critical incidents (Anderson et al., 2004). The six stage model of reflection offered by Gibbs (1988) provided the structure for each reflective journal. I reflected on field notes, session evaluations, and memories to assist the reflection process.

My fieldwork was flexible, facilitating an emergent process of data collection. My final analysis drew from all of the reflective journals collated, acknowledging insights and patterns I had identified across the seven-week period. Each reflective journal entry was subject to thematic analysis following the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Similar to Scarfe and Marlow (2015), I engaged in on-going discussions with my co-author who acted as a critical friend. Discussions throughout the seven-week period centred on my process of analysis and provided an opportunity to explore alternatives in my

interpretation while facilitating reflective functioning, generating a greater breadth, depth and richness in the data (Morrow, 2005).

For the purpose of this paper, and to increase our empathetic understanding of the coaching process (Jones, 2009), my experience as coach is exemplified in three separate but progressive stories. Each story represents a theme that emerged during thematic analysis and is constructed verbatim from my reflective journals. Pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of all student participants. Like Purdy et al., (2008) each story is theoretically complemented by drawing from existing literature to explain my autoethnographical account. The first story, 'athlete input' draws directly from my observations during the early familiarisation phase. Here, the story is critiqued and contrasted with my first coaching session as an A-S coach while documenting the process I experienced as I introduced the students to an athlete-centred environment. The second story, 'provision of choice for all,' draws specifically from a critical incident involving significant others. Here, the plot of the story hinges on the impact of contextual and social influences on the provision of A-S behaviour. The final story, 'self-awareness of the autonomy-supportive coach' illuminates the importance of reviewing the effectiveness of my coaching practice. Specifically, the story highlights the necessary processes I engaged with on my journey to becoming A-S.

Story 1: Athlete Input
Journal entry 1: 18th February 2014

I completed non-participant observation sessions to allow the students and myself to become familiar with each other. When observing the student-participants I made reference to their collective engagement using the rating sheet. I made notes consistent with the seven suggested A-S behaviours, structuring my field notes accordingly. As the session unfolded it became evident the structure of the session would not adequately challenge the students – as James shouted "Miss, why are we doing the same thing again and again? Did we not do this all of last year and the year before?" The teacher replied "This is what we are doing, shh." Throughout the session I made mental comparisons between the teacher and myself, contemplating what to embed into my forthcoming sessions. As the teacher initially addressed the students: "Sit down, legs crossed, arms folded and mouths shut," she successfully set the dictatorial tone she intended for the session. The teacher's refusal to address questions in an appropriate manner (e.g., one that did not patronise the students), seemed to deter future questions. "I'm not asking her, you do it. She'll just shout at us" said

Ryan. A lack of rationale for tasks was consistent in advancing the confusion throughout the session. Students had no choice, no input and one piece of advice – "You're not doing what I did. You must do this." Student questioning was the ideal opportunity for the teacher to encourage a sense of involvement in today's session. Questioning the students could have confirmed several things for the teacher while allowing the students to feel heard. Providing appropriate challenge could have increased the dwindling interest and persistence from students. Before my next observation, I will consult existing literature on the controlling environment I witnessed today to ensure my observations are informed for the forthcoming session.

The suggestion that teachers on average are more likely to show controlling behaviours (Reeve, 2009) had shaped my initial preconceptions of the motivational climate I had expected to witness within the school setting. Reeve (2009) defines a controlling style as a manner in which students may feel pressured to adopt the teacher's perspective, a manner that permits teachers to pry forcefully into thoughts or feelings, and a manner that enables teachers to force a specific etiquette upon their students. Research has demonstrated when a person perceived as a leader combines their perspective with one or both of the behaviours described above, they are believed to thwart the three psychological needs and consequently become conceptualised as highly controlling (Deci et al., 1981).

Following this line of thinking to the first story, the effort portrayed by the students can be interpreted as a key indication that the controlling interpersonal style of the teacher had begun to interfere with the psychological needs of the students (Reeve et al., 2004). Bartholomew (2010) suggests that a noticeable decrease in effort may be linked to the facilitation of non-self-determined extrinsic motivation (NSDEM). This was evident throughout the session as I noted the students' persistence in tasks decreased over time. Ryan's work in the 1980s (see e.g., Ryan, 1982; Ryan & Connell, 1989) offers perspective by underpinning the differentiated states of extrinsic motivation. Developed specifically to distinguish between the identified variations of extrinsic motivation, organismic integration theory (OIT) – one of the five mini theories embedded in SDT, proposes a continuum that reflects each motivated state from the least amount of autonomy, namely, external, introjected, identified, and integrated regulation. The continuum suggests that NSDEM is comprised by external and introjected regulation which results from obligation or coercion (Deci et al., 1994). Here it is believed the locus of causality is external to the self. For example, an athlete may need to cover excessive miles in pre-training and

does so as a result of coach pressure (external regulation). This athlete may generate feelings of guilt if they do not undertake the additional training, and will therefore continue with the training to perhaps please their coach (introjected regulation). Fortunately, research has shown those in a position of leadership (e.g., the coach) can work to promote self-determined motivation by facilitating movement along this continuum (Deci et al., 1994).

Reeve et al., (2004) suggest the use of pressuring language from a teacher can interfere with the congruence of students' self-determined motivation and their persistence within the present activity or task. Research has also shown a lack of challenging activities to facilitate student enjoyment and interest can account for a drop in task persistence (Ferrer-Caja & Weiss, 2000). Therefore, in the current example it is anticipated the teacher put her needs before the needs of her students in this typically coach-centred environment. For example, James' outburst could be attributed to the familiarity of the session – it appeared a well-rehearsed routine. The response James received from his teacher produced a negative effect as he set about his task in a demotivated state. Work by Reeve (2009) suggests the lack of acknowledgment for James' perspective in this instance would contribute to his motivational concerns. Had the teacher acknowledged James' perspective, she may have warranted some degree of understanding or empathy for the concern James had voiced.

Findings from an experimental study by Deci et al., (1994) can help to explain what happens when the psychological needs of an individual are not met. The authors conducted a study on motivation and three A-S behaviours, namely, providing choice, providing a rationale, and acknowledging other's perspective. Children participating in the experiment were asked to pin-point a dot on the screen of a computer, and several conditions were made available (i.e., one, two, or all three of the A-S behaviours were implemented). It was concluded that the children's motivation was more self-determined when more A-S behaviours were included. Thus it is suggested that teachers should explain or rationalise their strategies while acknowledging the student's feelings towards the demands of the task. Perhaps if the teacher responded differently in the current example by acknowledging James' perspective, she might have influenced some positive re-engagement in the session (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

Kidman (2005) suggests that those in a position of leadership can nurture student's intrinsic motivation by using effective questioning. In doing so, it is believed leaders will encourage student input by facilitating a level of engagement at a conscious level while positively affecting concentration and task

persistence levels. Therefore, the combined lack of questioning and acknowledgement of student perspective in the current findings are suggested to have contributed to the disengagement shown by the student participants. This was evident as the students active involvement in tasks decreased over time (Reeve, 2012).

Story 1 continued: Athlete Input
Journal entry 2: 4th March 2014

Two initial observations of the Physical Education environment shaped the aims of this first coaching session. Understanding the degree of autonomy-support I could apply to this educational setting had played heavily on my mind. The first test came in the early stages of the warm-up and stretching routines. I encouraged the students to input on the warm-up movements by implementing the provision of choice. I asked for a volunteer and selected Billy to demonstrate a stretch to his peers. He complemented his demonstration by explaining the technique of the stretch while talking it through step-by-step. Billy's ability to self-initiate is what had surprised me most – he began offering informative feedback to his peers on how to improve their stretching technique. I encouraged Billy to choose a classmate to demonstrate next. During the session I felt prepared as practical ideas emerged on how to introduce my A-S coaching, stimulated by my previous coaching experience. My preconceptions of how the students would react were misplaced – at least for the majority of them. Some of the quieter students struggled initially with the concept of having a choice. Delivering this approach to a new group of students was daunting, I wondered if they could make decisions or input into the session in the way I had hoped. I accepted it was not something they were used to and instigated a mental debate over their ability to make decisions based on my previous non-participant observations. During the session students responded with a level of engagement that was missing from the initial two observations I had made. Students began asking questions, and not the ones I had witnessed previously such as - "can I go to the toilet?" or "can I sit out?" They were asking questions that related to the tasks they had been given or the choices they had to make. My acknowledgement of student perspectives played a key role in the development of their positive tone, indicating increased levels of interest and enjoyment. I had witnessed an improvement. At the end of the session I posed questions to the students about how things had gone, what they had learned and what they liked or disliked. The opportunities presented throughout the session had an impact on the confidence of students. Some strived on the choices they were given, showing signs of competence whilst

others perhaps felt intimidated or found the experience daunting. Changing the mind set of these particular students will be a gradual process.

Making a change, I implemented the provision of choice into my session purposefully encouraging student engagement and creativity (Mageau and Vallerand, 2003). Conclusions from a study by Adie et al., (2008) offer support to my findings. In a test of Basic Needs Theory (BNT), the authors envisaged that the perception of A-S would predict positive nurturing of the three innate needs which in turn would create feelings of advanced vitality -- an increased feeling of energy. Furthermore, the researchers made predictions on the positive and negative welfare of the athletes in relation to the autonomy-supportive environment. It was found that athletes who were given choice perceived their coach to be A-S, relating to greater satisfaction of autonomy, competence and relatedness. It was concluded that when the athletes perceived themselves as the source of their action their vitality increased with positive signs of engagement.

Incorporating choice into the present study created an opportunity for the students to self-initiate (e.g., the student discovers solutions to tasks and choices). Mageau and Vallerand (2003) state that the coach-athlete relationship created in the A-S environment should support opportunities for self-initiated behaviour by combining non-controlling feedback and independent work. Mallet (2005) extends support to this claim in his example of creating a training environment for elite athletes. Mallet provided opportunities for the athletes to self-initiate by encouraging athletes to take personal responsibility for self-learning. Athletes were encouraged to work both independently and interdependently offering each other feedback to promote a sense of autonomy and belonging which provided opportunities for athlete input. In the present study, and similar to Mallet (2005), opportunities which facilitated student input encouraged the development of self-initiated behaviour. For example, in the early stages of a coaching session, students were asked to work in pairs concentrating on a basketball pass they felt needed improvement; I noted some of the students had begun to provide feedback to their partner. I encouraged students to be informative (e.g., encouraging them to rationalise why improving the hand positioning might be of benefit to their peer) when giving feedback to develop this behaviour. Collaborative feedback became a theme that we progressed in each coaching session.

Questioning was another tool used throughout the session to purposively develop student collaboration and allow students to reflect their understanding of tasks. Potrac and Cassidy (2006) claim that questioning can lead to self-

initiated behaviour. Questioning throughout my session drew primarily from scaffolding techniques (e.g., providing hints) which can be associated with offering explicit guidance on what knowledge may be required to succeed at a task (Vygotsky, 1978). Posing appropriate questions was an indirect way of guiding the students in a meaningful direction while creating a space for their understanding of tasks to develop. Using scaffolding techniques increased the student's ability to work confidently in the environment and was evident in their ability to answer questions with a variety of responses. Student's willingness to respond to questions appeared to increase with time. Engagement response from students can be an indicator of increased self-determined motivation (Mallet, 2005).

Story 2: Provision of Choice for All
Journal entry 1: 11th March 2014

To develop student input, half of the students created a warm-up game whilst the remaining half chose the cool down practice. The behaviour of the students reflected their positive emotional tone and led me to think that motivation had increased. Providing choice throughout my session created multiple opportunities for the students, including, the initiation of team work and self-initiated behaviour. As the session emerged I noted some students appeared to have a controlling effect on their peers. Specifically, when provided with the opportunity to make a choice, I noticed that instead of working equally as a group, the 'dominant characters' had taken charge to direct the decisions themselves. Had I simply allowed the dominant characters to control the session?

On observing the dominant characters taking control, I took the opportunity to develop my involvement. I began working in close proximity to the groups when they were provided with choice. It was here that I noticed the controlling behaviours of some of the students. I switched my attention to the 'quieter' students and quickly realised I had silenced them by creating a situation where their peers could dominate, thus reducing their autonomy. The A-S environment that I was creating was not integrating effectively with the structure of my session. Consequently, the majority of the quieter students were left with the opposite of what I was trying to create: no choice, no input and seemingly reduced confidence. My session had failed to incorporate an appropriate structure (e.g., one that portrays leadership from the coach, clear organisation and plans, and an appropriate challenge). I could have ensured all group members were contributing by immersing appropriate guidelines or requirements into the session.

It is suggested adopting A-S behaviours may be more difficult to employ in some circumstances. Cowan et al., (2012) demonstrate that providing choice to nurture the psychological need of autonomy is based on the assumption that students have both the ability and confidence to make meaningful decisions. My observations initially highlighted the 'quieter' or non-dominant students appeared withdrawn and disengaged from the session. Specifically, my non-participant observation of the controlling environment offered support to the suggestion that these students lacked the belief that they could make a choice effectively. Kutnick et al., (2008) shed some light, suggesting that students are known to show high levels of dependency on their teacher who, for the majority of the time, direct students on what to do. The non-dominant students in this example had transferred their dependency to their peers.

The controlling environment the students had previously been exposed to may have shaped their disbelief and feelings of low efficacy. These students struggled to psychologically thrive in an environment that did not meet their basic need for competence (Brown & Ryan, 2007).

Story 2 continued: Provision of choice for all
Journal entry 2: 18th March 2014

After much consideration in relation to the literature and critical friends, I adapted the structure of my next session to increase the perception of autonomy-support for all student participants. I chose the spokesperson for each group, adopting a different approach from last week. Firstly, this was to encourage other students to input into the session but, more specifically I wanted to guide them to interact meaningfully with their peers. To further facilitate this interaction I created smaller groups. In particular, a critical conversation with my supervisor prompted an idea on how to provide an opportunity for everyone's psychological needs to be met – by specifically targeting the two dominant characters. As the group work got underway I asked Ryan and James (the two dominant characters from the previous session) to work on an additional task I had purposefully created. Providing each group with specific guidelines to incorporate into their plans offered a better structure and direction for the session. I felt in control of the session while adopting my A-S behaviours. I noted that collectively the input from each group had increased. Students were becoming determined to add their perspective to the group decisions as they continued to provide informative comments to each other. I observed an improvement in the manner in which they set about tasks (e.g., they became active quicker with an increased intensity).

However, on closer inspection of the 'quieter' students, I noted that some of them still appeared uncomfortable with the perception of choice. Although they were integrating more effectively as a group, some individuals appeared passive during the session. Increasing the confidence of these students will be a lengthy process.

I noted several differences in relation to the two dominant characters. Firstly they were beginning to work together as a team, and secondly they were acknowledging each other's perspective. Although the students were acting autonomously (e.g., they were in control of their choices), I had created a scenario where I could facilitate a specific outcome. The environment was becoming mastery-oriented, creating the optimum opportunity for peer learning. Students were now working together to achieve goal-related outcomes while the ego-involvement that the dominant characters previously displayed was lessened. Excluding the two dominant characters from the group worked today, but may not be an appropriate long-term solution. I will continue to engage in critical conversations with my supervisor and coaches to gain additional perspectives to make sense of my observations and advance my coaching practice further.

Reeve (2009) argues that in order to facilitate a specific student outcome it may become appropriate to integrate high autonomy-support with a highly structured coaching session. Structure can be defined as the clarity of instruction or guidelines set by those in a position of leadership to direct students in the achievement of desired outcomes. Mageau and Vallerand (2003) propose that in the absence of structure, tasks may become chaotic, creating confusion for the students involved. Furthermore, the authors claim a coach who provides structure whilst portraying behaviours of involvement can nurture the psychological need of relatedness facilitating a feeling of connection with others. Adopting this perspective in the present study initiated a change in behaviour from the non-dominant characters who had shown signs of withdrawal from the previous session. For example, during a basketball session, each group of students were provided with three specific guidelines to be incorporated into the drill they were asked to design. This helped to direct the students toward a specific outcome, but more importantly it provided students with the necessary information to allow them to act confidently in an autonomous situation. As a result, students appeared to integrate as a group effectively during this specific task. A mastery climate began to evolve as the students tried hard to develop their skills by working together as a team (Papaioannou & Kouli, 1999).

Pensgaard and Roberts (2002) claim that a mastery motivational climate can be achieved when the context of a coaching session facilitates the

opportunity for students to become task involved. In contrast, an ego-orientated environment encourages students to narrow the focus to the outcome of the task while fundamentally steering them to compare their performance with respected others. Standage et al., (2003) add that a mastery-oriented environment can be perceived when the structure of a session facilitates learning, hard work and vicarious experience. Integrating high levels of structure and autonomy support in the current example encouraged the two 'dominant' characters to begin to work together. This change in behaviour could be attributed to a shift in focus from outcome to process related goals (Ryan & Deci, 2008). The present study supports suggestions that a mastery-oriented climate is associated with enhanced engagement and self-determined motivation when the A-S behaviours are accompanied by structure and involvement (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Cury et al., 1996).

Story 3: Self- Awareness of the Autonomy-Supportive Coach
Journal entry 1: 1 April 2014

It's while I write this reflection that I realise my on-going development throughout this study has been shaped significantly by my reflective and critical routine. My self-awareness as a coach to the ever-changing environment and to the needs of the students has continued to increase with each reflection or critical conversation I engage in. This process of development has at times, offered a means of escaping feelings of isolation. Importantly, when issues surfaced that I had yet to experience, it forced me to ask 'why?' Striving to provide solutions, I often sought the help of others – turning to my critical friends. It created an opportunity to produce and critique my ideas with knowledgeable others, gaining multiple perspectives which prompted more reflection and discussion. My reflective routines provided a valuable opportunity to make connections to both my past and present experiences. Critical conversations in relation to peer-coach observations prompted an opportunity to ensure I explored what I had interpreted whilst immersed in the world I was studying.   In a sense, autoethnography has opened my eyes to aspects of my practice I have previously overlooked. For one, I have never looked close enough to witness the issues that arose in relation to the dominant students. Existing literature guides you as an autonomy-supportive coach to provide choice, but it's what it doesn't say that may have cause for concern. There is no guideline on how much choice I should provide to a class of 10 year olds, nor is there direction on how to facilitate such choice effectively when you become responsible for 22 students. Fortunately, this experience has facilitated a front row view to my practice, guiding me to the little things that seem to make a big difference. Reflective practice and critical

conversations have facilitated a new way of knowing. It is through this process that I have been encouraged to continuously evaluate my effectiveness as a coach. It has provided depth to my interpretations creating a whole new learning experience for me as both a researcher and a coach. As my self-doubts begin to ease, I feel more confident in the process of sharing and discussing my experience with others. As my involvement draws to an end I will continue to embed this critical reflective practice into my professional development. I now appreciate the advantages of constantly working to raise my self-awareness in a complex profession.

With the need for a more authentic portrayal of the coaching process, many researchers have become increasingly interested in providing holistic accounts of coach education and development (Cushion et al., 2003; Nelson & Cushion, 2006; Abraham & Collins, 2011). Underlying this rise in attention, is the need to understand, as coaches, 'why' we practice the way we do. Ahlberg et al., (2008) offer a case-study solution aimed at capturing changes to a coach's practice. Using a research-oriented approach, the authors suggest that action research facilitated an increase in coach awareness and developed personal coaching behaviours whilst illuminating processes that assist the on-going development of the coach. Similarly, and while arguing the case for autoethnography, Jones (2009) offers support by suggesting that a reflective approach to research (e.g., writing from a personal perspective) can generate potential in creating an innovative way of bringing the everyday and unexamined aspects of coaching practice to life. The present study aimed to provide empirical evidence for this assertion.

The acceptance of autoethnography as method continues to rise within the sport and exercise science domain (e.g., McMahon & Dinan- Thompson, 2001; Jones, 2006; Purdy et al., 2008; Jones 2009). Allen-Collinson (2012) argues that autoethnographers must develop critical awareness and reflexivity in order to manage the demands of occupying a dual-role (e.g., coach and researcher) throughout the research process. As a result, researchers are encouraged to reflect upon their experience to successfully capture the unique nature of this approach. Consequently, the reflective and critical routines I engaged with throughout this process became central to my on-going coach development. For example, as I became increasingly interested in the effect that my coaching behaviours had on the students psychological needs, my reflective journals provided a means to ask 'why?' Continuous reflections created a space to draw upon previous work as I searched for ways to move forward in current and future sessions.

Reflective practice, now commonly associated with the professional development of a practitioner, can help to illuminate the processes and factors that influence the effectiveness of service delivery (Anderson et al., 2004). For example, the incident with the 'dominant students' was brought to my attention as I began to reflect in-action. This process of reflection encouraged me to look closer at my interpersonal style, specifically how I could integrate my A-S behaviours more effectively to meet the psychological needs of all students collectively. My reflections provided an opportunity to make sense of the decisions I made as coach that day.

Anderson et al., (2004) state that embedding reflective practice into the training and practice of practitioners can help to illuminate and explore the decisions we make in order to increase our understanding of practice. As such, it can be suggested that the knowledge gained from my critical reflections may have served a particularly useful role when exploring the constraints that the social environment may have on the application of A-S behaviours. Anderson et al., suggest that when dealing with complex practical situations such as coaching, a theory to practice approach is insufficient. Alternatively, practitioners are encouraged to develop a knowledge-in-action approach (i.e., a combination of research based knowledge and tacit knowledge) which will better facilitate our ability to identify good coaching practice. Schön (1983) argues that this may be achieved through the reflective examination of both research based knowledge and our own knowledge-in-action, helping to develop the characteristics of a competent practitioner. This became evident in the current study as I began to engage in critical conversations to assist my reflective capacity.

Knowles et al., (2001) assert that dual-stage reflection can initiate both immediate and delayed reflection on-action by encouraging the practitioner to share their experience. Klein and Hoffman (1992) describe this process of storytelling as a direct way of developing our cognitive-perceptual skills as a practitioner. In the current example, my critical conversations with my co-author and respective coaches enabled me to verbalise my thinking. In a sense, it encouraged me to generate a new depth of understanding as I began to gain insight in the knowledge and methods used by other practitioners. This was achieved in the present study by reframing problems through reflective questioning. I gradually became aware of the intricacies of A-S coaching as I began to access my tacit knowledge. Consistent with an autoethnographical approach, Knowles et al., (2007) claim that our ability to draw upon tacit knowledge can facilitate an opportunity to rationalise our approach and therefore, is integral to a practitioner's professional development. Reflectively,

and like Mallet (2011), it is suggested that the adoption of a research-oriented approach fuelled the development of my coaching practice by increasing my understanding of 'how' to effectively implement A-S coaching behaviours.

Concluding Remarks

The existing literature on the provision of autonomy-support within a sporting context has focused exclusively on the product of A-S behaviours, while overlooking the process information a coach may seek when creating an A-S environment. The aim of this study was to provide an in-depth examination of the development of A-S coaching behaviours. The study raises awareness to the contextual and social influences on the development and sustainment of A-S coaching behaviours. Specifically, the findings illuminate the significant role that peers can hold in the provision of an A-S environment. Furthermore, findings illustrate that a research-oriented approach to practice may provide the necessary processes required to excel current coaching practice through engagement in reflective conversations, exploration of decision-making, and the evaluation of alternative approaches or strategies that may be implemented into coaching practice. Like Purdy et al., (2008), an autoethnographical approach helped provide an insight to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the coaching process. Findings from the present study highlight that an autoethnographical approach can be a beneficial tool for coach development. This process of research has made the characteristics of A-S coaching available to a wider audience, and in doing so has provided a developmental coaching tool along the way.

To further develop our knowledge of the coaching process, similar methods could be used with different age groups. The degree of autonomy-support provided may differ by age, and the student participant's ability and confidence to adapt to the environmental change. For example, had the present study captured the process of adopting A-S behaviours with older participants, my experiences and perceptions may have been somewhat different. Future research is needed to examine the contextual and social influences on the development and sustainment of A-S coaching behaviours. Specifically, an inside-out perspective may provide a clearer picture of 'how' coaches adapt their A-S behaviours to meet these challenges. Autoethnography offers one approach to explaining the development of A-S behaviours but to generalise, a quantitative approach could generate further breadth to the area. For example, a controlled intervention offering observational analysis of participant behaviours with an A-S and non A-S coach would appear merited.

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