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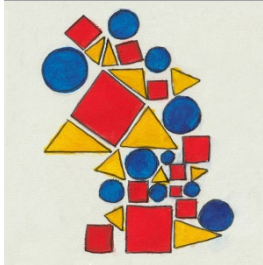
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A case study exploration into the professional duties of a Super League Academy Manager: Creating an individualised learning plan using the Talent Development Self Navigation Framework (TDSNF)

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Keywords: *Talent Development, Rugby League, Academy Management, Coaching*

Abstract

This study investigated the professional duties of a professional rugby league Academy Manager (AM) with the explicit aim of identifying bespoke development needs through the operation of the Talent Development Self Navigation Framework (TDSNF). This study adopts an original embodied pedagogy approach grounded in a critical realist view of the participant's Talent Development domain. The paper presents a full description of the framework's application as a case study example of the TDSNF in practice. Findings acknowledge how the facilitated TDSNF helped the AM reflect more fully on his 'real world' and 'foundational wants and needs' to co-create both an individual learning plan for himself and a TD development plan for his Academy team. Feedback on the framework's content, structure, process and outputs was extremely positive. Significant implications in adopting this approach more widely for coach education and learning are then presented.

Introduction

Research investigating rugby Academy Managers' (AMs) learning experiences and personal development is a relatively unexplored area (Wilkinson and Grecic, 2019; 2020). The AMs multi-faceted job description, that includes internal and external leadership responsibility, strategic and operational management activities, coupled with the requirement to deliver practical coaching sessions, renders investigation and then making recommendations for effective support and extremely complex task. Within the management and leadership development literature a plethora of tools, models and interventions have evolved to support this ever-increasing market. Despite many being targeted at performance sport our previous study in relation to Rugby League, AMs found that very few of these were perceived as fit for purpose (Wilkinson and Grecic, 2021). Indeed, even with respect to the more practical on field elements of their role, our sample of RL AMs did not see

value in the support they had been offered (Wilkinson and Grecic, 2021). Nash and McQuade (2014) highlight that this is in part due to the fact that the most effective mechanisms for educating and supporting coaches are still being contested, but this does not help the AMs who must deliver immediate results for their employers.

Debate over the content and form of best practice therefore continues in the general context of coach learning. Some studies have positioned the activity as a complex social system, where knowledge is produced on the basis of coaches' everyday interactions within a particular socio-cultural context (Cushion and Jones, 2006; Jones, 2007). Jones and Wallace (2005) have described the common, traditional basis of coach learning as a series of competency based, taught and assessed courses, that have mass appeal, are easy to administer and evaluate, that pass down information to candidates based on previous discourses. They also presented a counter position of more contemporary provision however, focussed on individualised, in-situ, needs-led, flexible content delivered through a variety of mechanisms. The debate as to which approach is most effective continues but is even more prevalent within the High Performance (HP) level of sport, the domain in which AMs operate. Regardless of the recognition in coaching research and applied development, little ground has been made in proposing an appropriate reality-based, interdisciplinary approach to take account of their complex environment (Bowes and Jones, 2006). In response, it has been increasingly argued that the aim of coach learning should be to develop practitioners' 'quality of mind' so that they are better equipped to deal with the problematic and dynamic nature of their work (Cassidy, Jones and Potrac, 2009; Jones 2000). While we are encouraged by our previous findings in the HP domain (Wilkinson and Grecic, 2021), we would argue that more work is needed to explore the most appropriate and effective methods to achieve such a valuable outcome.

As noted above the AM role is a very complex one which spans the disciplines of coaching, management and leadership. This wide scope of work coupled with the unique nature of AMs' different contexts and environments in which they can, and do operate, pose problems for large-scale, formal coach education programmes that are promoted in many countries (Mallet, 2010). We would therefore advocate the need for a more personalised methodology. One that seeks to access and integrate AMs' existing knowledge with evidence based research from their HP field in order to support their understanding of talent development, determine how best to lead and manage it, and have the most positive impact on the issues that they face. Specifically in the context of this study, we believe that the adoption of an Embodied Pedagogy (EP), grounded in a Critical Realist (CR) appreciation of the HP environment that encourages learners to solve real life problems utilising the TDSNF can offer a valuable new approach to AM learning.

As part of a wider Action Research (AR) programme, the findings from this case study will feed forward into future iterations and application of our AM development framework. AR is a methodology that pursues outcomes of both action (change) and research (understanding). It involves cycles of reconnaissance, planning, action, reflection and interpretation, including the integration of theory, leading to improved understanding and learning (Tsai, 2004). It is this learning and understanding that we hope to share by describing and reflecting on our experience of applying the TDSNF which has emerged and evolved out of our previous cycles of research.

The TDSNF

The TDSNF is a reflective and predictive professional development tool applied through a range of activities guided by an expert facilitator and underpinned by an embodied pedagogy (EP) approach. The process is split into 5 phases that take the participant on a ‘journey’ to explore, define, then identify their specific development needs which then leads into a co-created individualised and bespoke development plan and activities. A TDSNF ‘matrix’ diagram is provided to help frame, navigate and guide the phases of this process (figure 1).



Figure 1: The TDSNF Full Matrix [designed by Stuart Wilkinson]

Phase 1: This requires the AM to discuss, describe and assess themselves and how they interact with their team against the six professional duties laid out in the inner layer (figure 2). This process provides extensive situational information that is used to inform mentoring discussions and AM input. Here the participant is asked to consider each of these duties and describe their interpretations within their own club and context. The role of the facilitator at this stage is to seek additional detail, clarification of meaning and probe for examples which further illuminate the nature of the participant's understanding of their lived environment. The objective of this phase is for the AM to develop their TDE awareness so they can formulate a detailed self-assessment of their foundational wants and needs which concludes in Phase 5.

Phase 2: Here conversation is directed to the [layer 2] Talent Development Enabler / Barrier sub themes (figure 3) which are again based on our previous research with AMs (Wilkinson and Grecic, 2021). The intention here is to enable the participant to make their own connections between the layers whilst referencing back to his own needs and that of his Academy and Club. The objective being to move the learner deeper into their reflections about their knowledge and practice in order to better consider their and others' future needs. NB: linkages are not limited by direct contact, rather any layer 1 and layer 2 block can be explored if connected by the AM's perceived wants and needs.

Phase 3: Here we expose the AM to the key factors they have identified and how they are experienced and currently managed within the AM's environment. The participant is then asked to select further elements from the outer layers (figure 1) to identify the areas that need to be addressed in order for a positive impact to be made upon their own and / or their workforce's professional practice.

Phase 4: A 'learning pathway' (figure 4) is now constructed using the different helix blocks selected in the previous phases. Prioritisation of needs takes place during this phase and the participant's previous learning experiences, preferences, resource availability and motivations are discussed to inform the final stage of this process. In this phase, clarification is sought on the scope of control the AM holds over each of these selections and who else can play a significant role in facilitating any required change.

Phase 5: Once the learning pathway has been established and agreed, specific goals and actions are formulated between the AM and researcher. Here the AM is encouraged and supported to design a bespoke development plan for themselves and the workforce that they manage. The facilitators' role here is to help shape actions that will have value in the AM's specific TDE whilst also providing advice and signposting to appropriate learning resources.

Embodied Pedagogy

A related focus of this study is also to utilise an Embodied Pedagogy (EP) approach in applying the TDSNF. Our motivation being our strong belief in embodiment (i.e. the importance of representing things in a tangible or visible form), and in particular embodied pedagogy's role in joining body and mind in a physical and mental act of knowledge construction (Nguyen and Larson, 2015). EP has its roots in the work of John Dewey and his promotion of 'active learning' which encouraged students to utilise all their bodily senses to learn. EPs are described by Forgasz (2015:116) as 'holistic approaches to teaching and learning'. Whilst according to Macintyre, Latta and Buck (2008), EPs help redefine issues to relate to the mind, body and emotions. In creating the TDSNF our intention has been to embed EP to challenge participants to handle this complexity as well, to connect to the domain of empirical experiences (Raduescu and Vessey 2008) and reflect their daily interactions with colleagues and players (Wilkinson and Grecic 2020).

In this research, we also explore another key element of embodiment i.e. the embodied language system shared between humans and the predominance of the participant's mind in theories of subjectivity. Hearing what the AM has to say within the TDSNF as part of the process of learning, designing solutions and disseminating findings aims to increase engagement. The potential benefits that flow from challenging and consulting AMs within this process are described by Niemi, Heikkinen and Kannas (2012: 139) as, 'involving students in educational decision-making, and listening seriously to their stories of experiences as learners [are] essential first steps in developing education'. We would like to highlight also how during the activities and conversations we focused our attention on the ways in which the participant's emotions influence behavioural, cognitive, and conative aspects of their interactions with the tasks. Understanding these as experiences at the nexus of self-understanding and social relations that are 'dynamic, unpredictable, and co-created' (Burkitt, 2014: 19) are critical if we are to best facilitate positive change. Therefore, to summarise our use of Embodied Pedagogy in the context of this paper, EP will underpin our individual attempts to enact the TDSNF, the procedures we adopt in our data collection practices, and it will allow us to enhance the development of a collective understanding of the challenges and opportunities surrounding the use of EPs in Academy Manager engagement.

The need for the TDSNF

In our previous research we found AMs to possess socially constructed practical senses and dispositions about their expertise in daily work (Wilkinson and Grecic, 2021). It was evident however that their experience of support available to facilitate the development of this expertise was not a positive one and did not have the desired impact on their practice. Many were critical of what they considered to be a one size

fits all approach provided by the sport's governing body, its accreditation system, and 'bought in' specialists. Rather they reflected that they required bespoke programme content, shaped by specific time-sensitive pressures, reflective of the real 'lived' challenges that they faced within their own club's TDE. In response to these demands the TDSNF has been developed following our review of the TD literature, exploration in HP teams, and further investigation with 7 Super League AMs (Wilkinson and Grecic, 2019; 2020; 2021). Key findings from these studies identified that AMs are required to enact various roles (cultural architect, succession planner, life coach mentor, sports craft teacher, and character builder) to effectively complete the complex array of professional duties that their roles demand.

It was evident from our latest study in 2021, that AMs needed help to navigate the multifaceted and challenging environment in which they each existed with all of its hidden and observable structures, systems and mechanisms bearing influence on their practice (Wilkinson and Grecic, 2021). The AMs in this study all noted that only if meaningful support could be put in place would they become better equipped in managing their varied stakeholders and achieving their organisational goals whilst simultaneously supporting the development of all those around them. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to test the TDSNF in practice, utilising an embodied pedagogy approach with an AM currently active in the highest level of their sport. The aims of this study were therefore:

1. To practically apply the framework utilising an embodied pedagogy approach.
2. To gain participant feedback about the framework's usage and value.
3. To identify further modification / development of the TDSNF.

Methods

The researchers adopted a position of Critical Realism (CR) whilst conducting the research. CR is a branch of philosophy that distinguishes between the real world and the observable world in which we exist. Initiated by Roy Bhaskar's work CR promotes that the real can't be observed and exists independent from fallible human perceptions, theories, and/or events that we experience or see (Bhaskar, 1975). Critical Realists view our existence as stratified, that is, consisting of three layers – the real, the actual and the empirical (Bhaskar, 1998). It is the real but often hidden bio-psycho-social worlds and their complex interactions that promote or inhibit the actual actions, behaviours, events and objects that we empirically witness or feel (Bhaskar, 2010). From this viewpoint our study of the AM's development needs must first endeavour to fully understand the natural, social and psychological structures that bear influence upon all the stakeholders within the AM's world in order to uncover why current practices exist and why alternatives may or may not gain traction from those involved.

Reflecting on the first author’s experiences of professional rugby league and both authors’ extensive work in the Academy level of the talent pathway, figure 2 is an example CR representation of the world in which the study’s participant exists and an aid to help unravel any hidden truths that he may hold. Despite little CR research having been conducted within this domain, studies by Julian North and colleagues in the sports coaching context have highlighted three key features of critical realism: (1) ontological depth (2) layering and emergence in social practice and (3) open systems and complexity (see North, 2013; 2017). Taking this frame of reference, we were able to identify a complex, multi-layered association of the AM interactions between the tasks and their professional duties. Our adapted CR model below of the a framework by Radulescu and Vessey (2008), depicts the description by North (2013, 2017) but emphasises that the professional duties and relationships to the tasks can be understood to exist within a stratified, laminated, emergent, open system that contains an assemblage of wants and needs for the AM that have a relationship to rugby academy.



Figure 2: A Rugby Academy CR Domain Model adapted from Radulescu and Vessey (2008)

AMs foundational wants are intertwined with the academy development needs to become new entities in talent development environments, taking different forms such as physical, cultural, biological or social. These all being tightly linked to the social relations and institutional structures of the professional club they belong to. It is therefore from this CR standpoint that we applied our framework in this study.

Research Design – A case study approach

Testing the utility of the TDSNF with a single case study provided rich and detailed findings for the authors to reflect upon (Gerring 2004; Flyvbjerg 2006; Sturman 1997). This perspective enables a synthesis of the empirical domain with a critical realist understanding of the underlying reasons, mechanisms and structures that provide insight into a particular issue, and helps to develop ideas and hypotheses (Connole, 1993; Merriam, 1988; Merriam, 2009). Our critical realist approach provides us with an opportunity to analyse the causal relationships and connections in a similar fashion to the work of North (2013a) and Jones and Wallace (2005). In our case study however, we are interested in uncovering the hidden truths that bear influence upon the foundations of the AM's personal and organisational goals and wider bio-psycho-social and environmental influences that inhibit or enable the AM's professional development.

Participants

Through purposeful sampling a single British Super League AM was recruited. In line with the selection criteria applied in our previous study of SL AMs (Wilkinson and Grecic, 2021) to qualify, the participant was required to have more than ten years' experience working in this TD setting, appropriate professional coaching and management qualifications, full-time employment status at the club and possession of an AM role dedicated to supporting players in the transition stage of development. This case study's selected participant met all the above criteria. He was also a former youth international who had progressed through his club's own academy system to become a professional RL player. In respect to the participant's coaching and management career he had attended numerous TD workshops and projects thus demonstrating a strong awareness of TD theories and concepts. He had also been instrumental in developing pioneering talent development projects and partnerships. Though an initial scoping conversation the participant described the practical requirements of his role as including dedicated coaching time, such as a combination of on-field practice sessions and off-field support: leading footage of game review/previews, mental skills workshops, physical development sessions: strength and conditioning, rehabilitation, prehab: and leading individual / group planning activities with their workforce. As such, the participant met Ericsson *et al.* (2007) inclusion criteria as a high-performance professional in sport - someone working with highly skilled athletes in an environment focused on outcomes.

Pilot Study

A pilot study with a high level ex-International and SL coach who was also experienced working in the TD area. The purpose of this pilot study was to explore any potential difficulties with the TDSNF's application. In particular our focus was on how the participant would comprehend the different concepts, use of language, and delivery mechanisms for each of the different phases, all of which had been designed to be reflective of the AM's working practices. Initial results were very favourable however some confusion was evident, and clarification sought by the participant around how to proceed in respect to Phase 2. Specifically, whether this phase could separate the sub-themes presented, into those associated with cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and conative aspects of their work, to gain a deeper insight into their emotions, behaviours and environmental needs. These recommendations were considered and reflected upon before being accepted and modification made to the procedure below. The participant also highlighted the perceived repetition and cross-over of the final two phases (4 and 5). Once again, this feedback was acted upon with a specific activity designed to allow the clear demarcation of both stages.

Data Collection Procedure

As described above the modified TDSNF was applied utilising an Embodied Pedagogy approach, underpinned by a CR perspective of the participant's environment. Institutional ethics approval was granted for this research project to proceed. To collect data workshop activity-style tasks were designed, supplemented by semi-structured interview questions, scenarios, stories, questions, prompts and probes which all linked to the TDSNF themes. This dynamic strategy sought information about the participant's expert knowledge but also how he applied and implemented such knowledge into his management practice. This approach provided an opportunity for the participant to add further information he felt important to the framework topic. During these interactions, all data were recorded through notetaking, audio recording of the interview questions and responses, photographs of on-going activities and their end points, interactions, post-it notes and activity card chains (see photo series in figure 3) which were all collected and stored in a secure hard drive but made available to the participant after the event for reflection and validation.

Where possible the participant's raw data is presented verbatim within this case study. However, due to the highly competitive nature of professional sport and the sensitivity of some of the information disclosed, many examples have been amended to ensure confidentiality. Nevertheless, great care has been taken to ensure that those data presented are still able to portray full meaning and offer a true representation of what was discussed and produced together throughout each phase.

duties by starting to relate to key TD Enablers / Barriers (Layer two items) which he would later build upon in Phase 2. The participant then had to arrange his selections to form the shape of an ideal player with each element that he had discussed corresponding to a body part in some representational way. The subtle emphasis on trying to verbalise the framework's content through the lens of creating the ideal player, stretched the perspective of the participant to think outside of their immediate needs. The activity aimed to generate a more empathic view of a players' sport experiences (Tomm, Hoyt, and Madigan, 1998) and engaging the player's body in decision his making brought to life the embodied pedagogy of the method, linking self and world in an ongoing dynamic inter-relationship (Connell,1995).



Figure 4: The Professional Duties Utilised within Phase 1 of the TDSNF

Phase 1 Results

The participant found discussing the model's 6 professional duties to be enjoyable and extremely beneficial in organising his thinking about the various elements and the connections to his lived world at his own Super League Academy. This was evident by the extensive post-it notes produced and linkages discussed from his white board jottings (figure 3). Reflecting on this initial part of the process he stated,

The advantages for the academy intaking this approach (focussing on the professional duties) in terms of its engagement with the players' entire community...erm, it's part of that virtual cycle of engaging their (academy player) community, supplying the first team and then getting more people involved. the challenge now is for the wider club to understand the importance of getting that development model right.

Once the AM felt that he had discussed and explored everything he wanted to, he was given the Build Your Ideal Player task (figure 5). Here again the AM made vivid connections back and forth from the framework to his own professional practice and that of his team. He was asked to explore his selection for Head, Trunk, Arms, Legs and link back to the professional duties and his exploratory post-it notes. An example of this during the activity was where the AM explained his selections regarding the legs linked to Philosophical Alignment and Psychosocial Nurturing because,

The ideal player is carrying the character and integrity of the academy, providing power in the same way his legs might when he's playing, ... (this) would be ideal for these more experienced academy players to pass on to the new recruits.

This process of making the connections was not easy for the participant. Often there would be long pauses in conversation and then a request for more detail or clarification from the facilitator. In order to stimulate a deeper appreciation, the facilitator would offer a range of prompts and probes. For example, when the AM was considering 'psychological nurturing of players' the facilitator asked the AM to go back to a time when he was in his players' position by asking a series of questions for reflection, for example,

- *What is your favourite playing memory?*
- *Ask yourself how did it made you feel when your mum or dad got involved in how you played?*
- *What did you mum/dad do or not do that got you frustrated?'*

The participant thought hard before sharing his feelings, more questions and ideas in order to clarify his thinking.

Whilst articulating these points the AM was again encouraged to look back at his post it notes and add any new insights or items, he wanted to discuss in more depth later. Sequentially, these conversations led to Phase 2 of the TDSNF.

Interestingly in this first phase the AM explained that discussions such as these were extremely rare, as this kind of knowledge-sharing seldom happened across his academy workforce. In fact, the participant stated that this was the first time that he had discussed coaching practices with people outside of his own group. It was fascinating to see the AM's shift in perspective during this first phase i.e. that players', coaches' and volunteers' educational processes play a significant role in establishing workforce connectivity and staff training. This was in contrast to his initial view that managing players' training and playing was all that mattered for him if he was to be successful.

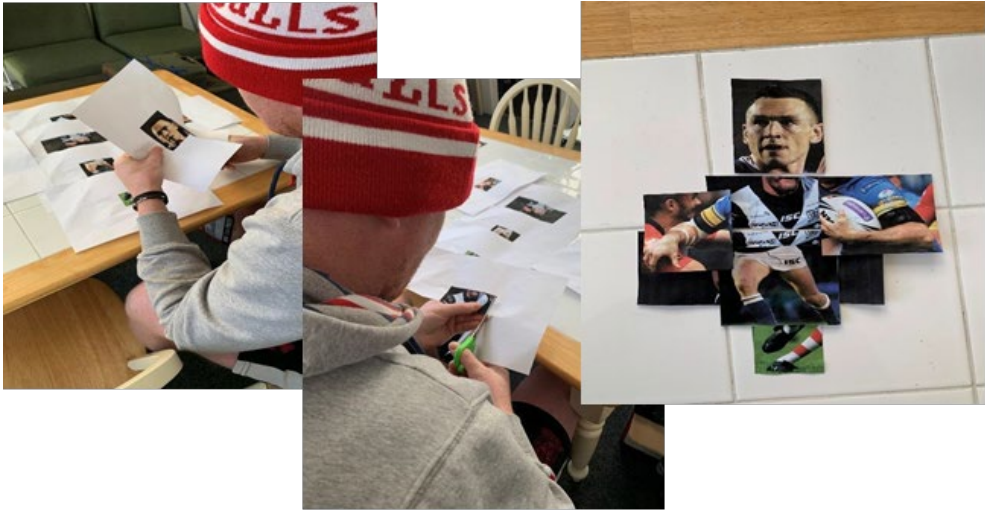


Figure 5: Build your ideal player (Photo series: S. Wilkinson)

Phase 2 Interactions

Consistent with our intentions to explore the ‘domain of empirical experiences’ (Radulescu and Vessey, 2008), we directed the conversation with the participant around the Phase 2 TD Enabler / Barrier sub themes (figure 6.) with the aim of supporting the AM to make his own connections between the layers, thus moving deeper into their personal reflections and linking forward to identifying the AM’s future needs. The participant was given a worksheet with a diagram of the matrix’s first two layers (excerpt of the TDSNF figure 6). In response to the pilot study the AM was guided through the process to see the different elements as grouped together as cognitive and emotional, behavioural and conative factors influencing their TDE. This was in three particular areas:

- The conative level served as the starting point to help them connect with the purpose (workforce development and psych-social nurturing),
- The cognitive and emotional sections were used to progress learner cognition (organisational connectivity and player transitions) and
- The behavioural section concluded with some metaphysical tenets (philosophical alignment and legacy building).

The chunking of sections was used as a reference point for discussion, with specific focus on how the framework elements were only visible to the AM and others working closely within the academy.

Aligned with the aim of applying the framework by utilising an embodied pedagogical approach we adapted the famous party game of Twister, where the

participant was asked to place two or more of his limbs inside 3 or 4 individual shapes (figure 7). Similar coloured shapes were spaced out on the floor. It was made clear that when discussing a theme, the participant must have one foot in their ‘main theme’ and the other limb in a ‘foundational personal need’. For example: psychosocial nurturing of players (foot), mental skills (hand) and creating self-sufficient players (hand).

Where the AM perceived a connection between themes, he was asked to describe how and why he had made those choices. In order to develop this activity and check for learning (meaning making) the AM was then given a hypothetical scenario in which ‘one of their academy players was substituted out of a game for the reserves for poor play and criticised harshly by the senior coaching staff.’ Based on this scenario, the participant was asked to describe what they thought their immediate words and actions might be.



Figure 6: Talent Development Barriers and Enablers in the TDSNF

Next, the participant was asked to consider one of the above sections and think about what their own thoughts and feelings might be in the scenario as well as how this might potentially influence their actions. The AM was then asked to place his limbs onto what he perceived as relevant themes within the model. Finally, he was asked to consider where he saw relationships and associations between the framework and the scenario, and to think about the themes within the model and his understanding of his club's real world - and what he could do to prevent something like this happening through his own actions and/or his academy programme.

This complex task's objective was to have the AM fully engaged in the activity where his embodied reactions to the tasks could reach a state in which his attention seemed effortless (Allen-Collinson, 2009). This task was designed to facilitate an increased understanding of the importance of the talent development factors within the academy as well as the relationship between the work groups (academy manager and their workforce) which were highlighted in the discussion about their behaviours, emotions, thoughts and wants. This method for deriving knowledge is perhaps better described as a phenomenological attitude, an orientation to the world, a way of looking, or 'an attitude of attentiveness to the things of immediate experience' (Van den Berg 1972).



Figure 7: Twister Embodied pedagogy in action (Photo series: S. Wilkinson)

Phase 2 Results

The first discussion in Phase 2 followed the AM receiving and looking at the diagram in figure 6. This allowed the participant to make some early connections between the themes within the model. This was emphasised when the AM said,

So the challenge from here is... well, erm...what does being an Established Super league Player look like? We'll (academy workforce) have a look at our programme and now we have broken that down into three aspects that we are going to really focus on getting right as well as the continuous unfolding and rolling out the whole player development bits that will run underneath that, erm...we already three areas in terms of our reserve grade programme, our scouting system and our embedding the pathway strategy, those are the three areas...erm, but now we (academy workforce) focused on connecting to these to the inner 5 and making our 3 fit within these 5.

Then upon receiving the Twister (Phase 2) instructions the AM was directed to physically make the connections whilst exploring each TD Enabler / Barrier in his own specific context. The facilitator noted each selection, and additional content from the discussions and these additions were added to the Post-It notes on the wall. The AM was then given the scenario to test his understanding. Upon listening to the scenario and looking at the shapes spaced out on the floor, the participant started by reflecting on their own game day/in-match behaviours. They described a range of coaching behaviours, from verbal aggression to encouragement, care and support. The participant was instructed to list the different words and actions they noticed within themselves. These too, were then added as Post-It notes on the wall. These personal insights were key points of reference as the participant moved their limbs into the themes (Phase 2). This enabled a deeper probing into how the themes on the floor connected with some of the behaviours on the Post-It notes. In these discussions, the AM attempted to describe both his own thoughts, feelings and foundational wants as well as considering which behaviours of his workforce might be associated with these. This activity ended with a discussion about what he had uncovered and how this new awareness corresponded to the framework themes.

This AM's feedback about this activity supported our hopes for the framework's utility and that value of EP to raise the participant's sensory systems in order to replicate his daily working conditions, particular the part where he was able to visualise how his workforce would need to respond to the TD challenges he had discovered. A closer inspection of the AM's Phase 2 results highlighted his own process of becoming an effective AM over time, but he explained that this could be hampered markedly by his lack of organisational connectivity. This was clear when the participant said,

Without discussing it with other people (senior and volunteer coaches) erm...I just believe in not bothering them, erm...just get on with my job, whatever it is and just getting that understanding that actually no! it is all you know about rugby coaching,

erm...if we don't discuss it and we don't agree a way forward in each of us (academy, senior and volunteer coaches) then it's not linked together, then we are always going to be pulling against each other'.

The AM then reflected on the task and his discussions and explained, *I think there was a bit of that (lack of alignment and connection) going on previously whereas this (task) could help knit that together a little bit more.*

Moving onto the present scenario, the participant considered how his desire to see his players be successful in the senior teams might cause him to feel frustration and could have caused him to act in a way that might not have necessarily have been productive for helping the player succeed:

I openly rubbish this type of coach, and his views both during and after the game, erm... in actual fact if I knew more about a number of things (psych-social, welfare, mental toughness) I could of helped prevent this.

In addition, the scenario prompted the participant to consider the priority that he would give to designing appropriate challenges with high levels of support for the academy players. However, he also noted a clear disconnect between this 'foundational want' and his coaches' current behaviours i.e. providing confused messages, delivering poorly considered coaching sessions, portraying a stressed and pressured persona. The AM expressed his desire to change future coaching behaviours to be more congruent with his players' and his team's training needs.

In summary, results from this Phase demonstrated that the labels, classification and organisation of data required in relation to the TDSNF's main themes, concepts and categories were all necessary for the participant to immerse himself in the activities. Moreover, it also demonstrated that our aim on the use of the EP approach and the framework had the desired effect which included '*I am knackered, but this is ideal for me and my staff... fun too*'.

Phase 3 Interactions

The title for this task was Blockbuster. Two ideas from the sports coaching research literature were important in the design of this workshop activity. First, that coaches in youth sport operate as part of a system (Werthner and Trudel 2006) and second, that expert coaches adapt their involvement and support based on the development of their players (Sherwin, Campbell and MacIntyre, 2016). The purposes of this task was to generate discussion about how the AM's actions reflected his Player TD progression role i.e. supporting the coach-athlete-succession triangle with players moving between the different environments in the club's talent pathway, and in particular, how the AM's role changes as their academy players and coaches develop. This phase was for the participant to consider which of the framework's themes and categories needed to be addressed for a positive impact to

be made upon his practice, and/or that of their workforce and ultimately their players. Here the active-with-narrative methodology was once again expanded upon by drawing on the participant's personal coaching biography: his empirical, actual and real worlds of practice.

The AM was now asked to select themes from any of the outer layers of the TDSNF, which he would like to discuss and explore. The different colours in the outer layers being used as a means to group related areas of TD practice (tenants of TD) that had been established from our previous exploration of rugby league AMs work (Wilkinson and Grecic, 2021). This also served to simplify the search process and move towards a co-created learning pathway in TD (figure 8).

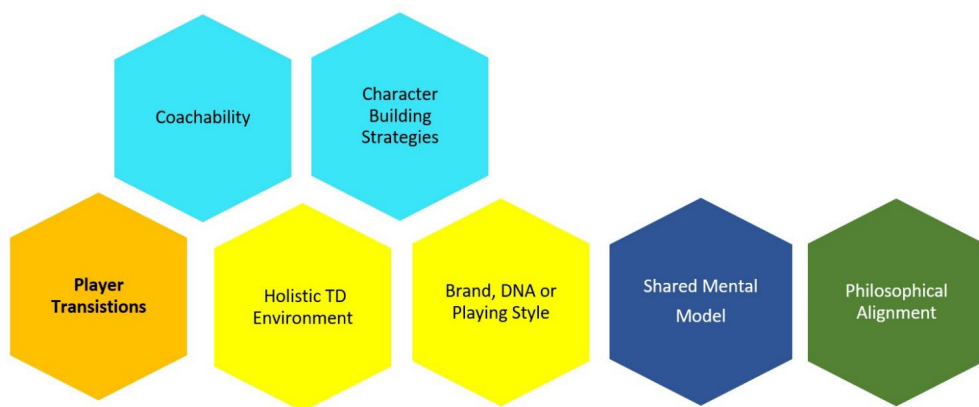


Figure 8: An example of a co-created learning pathway in Talent Development.

Next, the participant received several small index cards that corresponded with the links they had made in the Twister activity, the facilitator having recorded all interactions and listed all the various elements discussed. The AM was then asked to prioritise the cards based on his 'foundational wants' that had emerged from Phase 1. This required the AM to rank order the Layer One professional duties he had engaged with, select those which he identified had most scope to have a positive impact on his world, and then by using the additional cards provided by the facilitator, map out how to get from this 'foundational want' starting point, to the specific areas of impact (TD tenants).

This process involved the AM arranging, re-arranging, discussing and discarding various matrix elements in order to plot their own route to the mastery of either sub-theme or professional duty which would have the desired final effect. During this activity the role of the facilitator was to highlight all potential influences, knowledges and change agents that would be needed to have an impact in the AM's world (see photo series in figure 9).

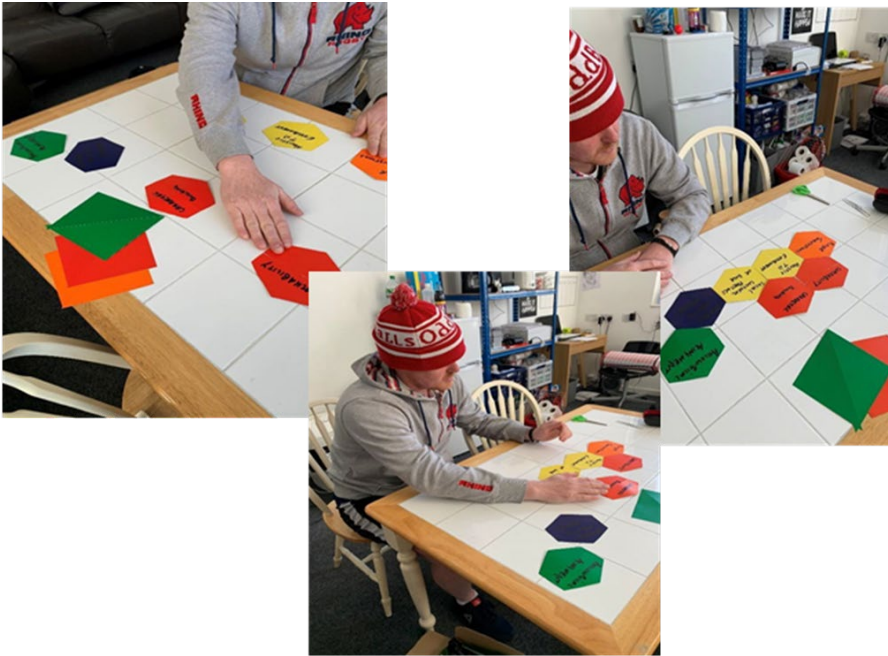


Figure 9: AM prioritising ‘foundational wants with professional needs.
(Photos: S. Wilkinson)

Phase 3 Results

An indicative example of how the Blockbuster activity provoked AM learning was when the selected the professional duty of philosophical alignment to explore with the facilitator. After considering the different layer 2 TD enabler / barrier sub-themes and TD tenant elements (outer layers), combining, removing, rearranging, and looking back over the Post-It notes and connections from the previous phases, he concluded,

This requires supporting our staff development and learning, which in turns needs a culture of continuous learning, it must reflect the club’s traditional values and technical alignment to the clubs playing models...erm, all these are physical models, erm... more than just a paper exercise or a mental blue print (shared mental model).

The participant then combined his collective index cards and sorted the newly attained cards into the categories so that links above, below and side to side were made in relation to how he perceived each had importance or influence in his search for the desired outcome. During this process he paused a number of times which prompted the facilitator to ask if he could help. The AM explained that although he placed great value in his choices, he did not feel that he had complete control over the successful application of the card’s topic and thus whether he should include it. To enable the activity to progress the AM was asked to consider his previous notes again and whose responsibility it was to complete each part of the objective. Continuing this example, the AM then described,

Sharing mental models is a sport-craft coaching need (foundational want) and should be developed and delivered under the senior coach's guidance, whereas club brand or playing style should be developed and delivered by the senior management or board of directors.

This ownership theme was developed further in the next phase of this study.

When reflecting on the results from Phase 2 and Phase 3, it was clear that the participant found the activities and probes thought provoking. An example of this can be seen when he asked hypothetical questions about the differences between how their academy coaching workforce may respond in terms of how their responsibilities might change once they have attended a bespoke training workshop,

This is a really important process, erm...this has helped me, erm...to see differentsides of the clubs staff, erm... so, in the past I might have only seen like one side of the senior coach or CEO whereas this taught me to look a little bit different and maybe use them (clubs workforce) in a different kind of way, so that is definitely opened my eye up to that and making sure that my coaches are not all going to have all of the attributes that you might want but just fill in the gaps in what they need and what they've not got but...erm, I like it... we have to create the environment where you can see that, erm... definitely. [Phase 3].

He concluded with a reflection on staff appraisals and determined that the academy's staff workload model is an ideal space for them to take on new challenges and roles.

Phase 4 Interactions

The main aim of this phase was for the AM to confirm the various 'action pathways' he had co-constructed with the facilitator and gain clarity on how to ensure they would have the most positive impact on improving their players' potential for progression. First the AM was asked to assess himself against the selections he had made in Phase 3. In particular he was encouraged to identify any gaps in skills or knowledge and consider on how these could be best resolved by himself or others. Linking directly to this task was a more detailed exploration of each pathway and who could best support the elements he'd selected. The AM was also asked to articulate his own role in achieving each pathway's objective. The hope here was that this would also provide the AM an opportunity to reflect back on his thoughts (via being directed to the Post-It notes again) and provide time and space to plot his own bespoke developmental needs by assessing himself against his environmental needs and especially the 'gaps' that he identified which would have to be filled if his Academy team were to be successful.

This activity was supported by the facilitator acting as a critical friend to check and challenge his selections. A probe designed to help with deeper investigation

which certainly helped was a Task-Role-Sort activity, introduced to help the AM establish a deeper understanding of his ‘foundational wants’ for his academy environment, building upon that which he started to establish during phase 2. Here the AM was asked to group the Post-It notes collated from the previous phases together, to represent the different tasks that would need to be completed if the pathway objectives were to be achieved. It was hoped that this would also help the AM allocate tasks to specific people and groups within in his club and team.

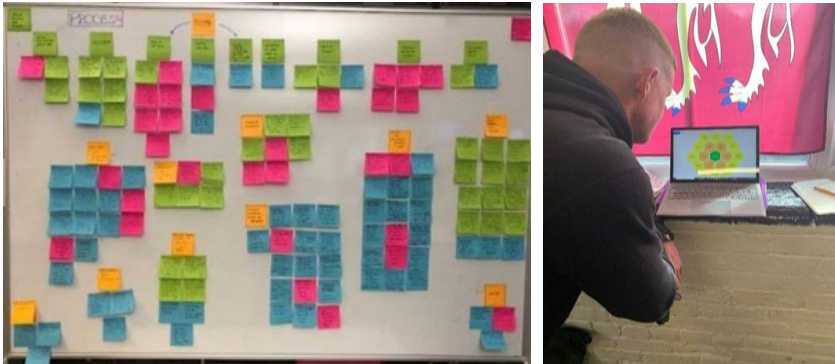


Figure 10: AM analysis of task. Probing Task – Role – Sort activity
(Photos: S. Wilkinson)

Following this Task-Role-Sort exercise the AM was asked to return to the question of his own part within the action pathway. Here the AM found the questioning confusing on what was being asked for. To help clarify the information needed the AM was given two further tasks to complete. First the AM was asked to provide a mission statement for his Academy and club. Second, based on the responsibilities and qualities he came up with, the AM was instructed to think of a name other than ‘academy manager’ that would define how they saw their role. Examples of roles brainstormed by the AM included:

- The Facilitator
- The Chief
- The Orchestrator
- The Holiday Camp Director and
- The Support System

Phase 4 Results

The conversation in phase 4 generated good discussion on how the AM’s role fitted into player TD progression whilst also fostering consideration of the changing roles he faces throughout the development of the academy player. During the Task-Role-Sort activity the participant struggled to definitively link tasks with appropriate staff roles (senior coaches, academy sport science support, academy coaches or

CEO). The follow up tasks really helped the AM make sense of his own purpose (mission and role) which then allowed a clearer allocation of responsibilities to other members of his club. Discussions covered a range of related topics but always circled back to help the AM confirm his own identity and role. As an example, when talking about athlete autonomy the AM asked, ‘am I the Facilitator?’. This was an explicit reference to him exploring his job as providing both support as well as agency to his players and staff. Developing this point, the AM modelled what this could / should look like in his context. He further described his surprise at how many of his current tasks and responsibilities could be passed along to his coaches, and he noted how he could modify and flex the specifics as his players developed,

This is never ending for me, erm... I must continually improve; the programme must continually evolve, and the coaches can either do the same or become experts with an age group by growing their knowledge in that range.

The focus of this phase was on preparing the AM to consider bespoke learning activities for their academy to achieve his desired outcomes. This was welcomed with mixed emotions by the participant. The timely intervention from the research of ‘drafting their own personal mission statement based on the role’ provided them with a great opportunity to reflect and subsequently develop a greater understanding of their respective leadership beliefs and behaviours. In particular, the participant admitted,

It was good reflection, and sometimes you think that maybe it’s just a box ticking exercise that you’ve been doing over and over again for years, but now you’ve actually got to formulate it, erm... and do it. I’ve been doing this for all this time, but I’ve never had to actually tell anybody or demonstrate it in that respect...erm, god knows how I am going to sell this to our CEO so he can support it.

Phase 5 Interactions

The objective of this final phase was to utilise the results from the AM’s experiences in the previous 4 phases to co-create an effective and bespoke training course for the AM and his academy team. This process started by the AM being asked to check his own summary of needs and wants against his phase 4 card selections and the extended body of work he had created throughout the workshop (Post-It notes, white board notes and linkages, build an ideal player, blockbuster sheets etc). This review helped the AM and facilitator compare the themes and sub-themes with each other and clarify any last points of interest. Lastly, the descriptive summaries that were generated during the activities were aligned with the selected cards and incorporated into the conversation that not only justified the selected actions but provided detailed explanatory accounts for the required interventions both personally and for the AM’s academy.





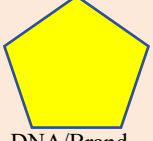
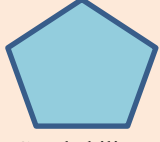
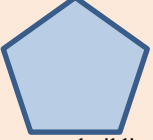
Priority Areas Identified during TDSNF Activities	AMs Foundational Wants	Academy Foundational Needs	Agreed Actions
 Player Transitions	Manging up and down the pathway. Building relationships with senior staff, designated staff to manage.	Senior staff to mentor academy, junior and volunteer coaches. Moderation of essential skills.	Phase 1: scoping meeting with a sample of entire workforce to agree essential environmental needs. Phase 2 to follow outcomes.
 Shared Mental Models	Developing a Sports-craft CPD Programme design and management	The entire club’s rugby workforce using the same coaching, training and performance methods.	Head coach to run a series of moderated workshops
 Philosophical Alignment	Multidisciplinary leadership skills and interdisciplinary management	Central language used by all staff, playing, training, coaching and TiD recruitment terms need to be agreed,	Scoping meeting with leading delegates and seek external leadership mentor or valid training course.
 Holistic TD Environment	Aligning evidence-based research to all activities, including senior management down to volunteers.	Coaching workforce having the ability to articulate and agreed TD model in their coaching, grading and programmes.	Contact University partner for ideal delegate to train staff or raise awareness of TD models and applications methods
 DNA/Brand	Programming all activities that is aligned to the club’s artefacts and culture	articulation of the club’s brand and constant alignment to the club’s social cultural reputation.	Conduct research project with senior staff and ex-players on ideal player model
 Coachability	Developing tools and methods to engage the academy population that is receptive to feedback, to receiving constructive criticism and will use that feedback and constructive criticism to improve their performance.	Personal development goals that is underpinned to a culture of continuous learning	Design a TD tracking criteria and monitoring tool. Consult key coaching staff.
 Character building	Articulating values into programmes of humility, charity, authority, and inclusion principles.	Workforce charter design and management, including code of conduct.	Scoping meeting with key leading staff and build a staff charter. AM to manage

Figure 11: Individualised Leaning Plan [example] developed from the TDSNF

Phase 5 Results

Following final discussions about the AM's selections the prioritised 'action pathways' were set into a clear development plan for the Academy. Figure 8 above offers an indicative example of how one area would be represented. In addition, an individual learning plan was co-created for the AM (see figure 11). For each of these TDSNF outputs each matrix element (professional duty, TD enabler/barrier, TD tenants) is considered against how it can be best applied, improved or learned about in the case study's specific context. Short term aims have been identified with follow up actions agreed. In the learning plan, clarity has been provided over who will take overall responsibility, when a positive change will occur by, and importantly what training will be actioned to achieve the action pathway's desired outcome.

As a final review of the whole TDSNF process, the AM provided this invaluable feedback.

Having done these (tasks) I have more depth to our gaps in knowledge, which probably made engaging with the tasks (and scenarios) easier. Had we just talked about me and the academy in an interview, then I would have been a little bit nervier, erm...thinking what's going on here? ...Now I am into that mind set of identifying what would need to be done to solve these (the tasks) ... a lot of that information that we'd discussed and re-discussed, ...now, at first hand I could apply this to my list of priorities.

Figure 12 below is the AM outcomes from the entire task; the Academy Ecological Development Programme, from the Phase 5 tasks and subsequent discussions, which is based on the AM's priority action intended to improve the philosophical alignment of all Academy coaches and staff with regard to what is needed for positive player transition to occur at this club. The AM prioritised areas selected from Phases 1, 2 and 3, short term actions and key actors / stakeholders, follow up actions from discussion in Phase 4, all linking back to Role-Sort task which helped construct this learning system.

Summary of Findings and Discussion

In this study, the aim was to assess the potential for the TDSNF by exploring the dynamics of the talent development environment in professional rugby league academies by focussing on the key decision maker – the AM. Feedback from our participant indicated that he identified with the themes within the TDSNF matrix and that he perceived the tasks and the interview conversations to be relevant to his current AM role and enhancing of his professional knowledge. In addition, the AM appreciated the flexible nature of the workshop tasks which he felt really supported and reflected his complex, dynamic environment. In all phases of the case study, the AM identified that the learning conversations that took place during and following the framework activities were highly compelling opportunities to receive valuable formative feedback.

Priority areas for development	Short term AIM	Follow up ACTIONS	Who supports the NEED	By when	How is this achieved
Player Transition	Meet with senior coaches	Design Programmes for coaching staff and a Workforce Education Programme	Head of High Performance, Senior Coaches	ASAP	Collaboration with Senior Coaches
Shared Mental Models				Dec 21	Workshop booked
Philosophical Alignment				Jan 22	Workshop booked
				Feb 22	Workshop booked
Holistic TDE			CEO and Board members	ASAP	Collaboration with CEO and Board
Brand or community reputation	Meet with CEO and Board	Academy Coach Programme	National Course Information, Coaching Consultant, and Head of Coaching	Nov 21	Training by Head of coaching
Coachability	Collaboration with academy coaches				
Character Building	Collaboration with academy coaches			Mar 22	Training with Coaching Consultant

Figure 12. Academy Ecological Development Programme [example]

The AM explained that he quickly realised that the intent of the learning conversation was not to unpick or critique his previous actions, ‘foundational wants’ or the management and leadership strategies applied in the academy environment, but rather to engage in the process of creating new knowledge together. The participant noted, *‘I was pleasantly surprised. I really liked the way it went. I was challenged, able to exchange ideas and learn from that process’*. Reflecting on the workshops and tasks outlined above, learning from social interaction, the nature of the guided tasks, participation in collaborative problem solving, and the process of reflecting on previous experiences proved to be extremely valuable. This contributes to the existing body of literature and understanding that values the multitude of experiences that influence how coaches learn (Gilbert and Trudel 2001, Chelladurai, Haggarty, and Baxter 1989, Lyle, Jolly, and North, 2010).

Building on our previous studies this case study investigation into the application of the TDSNF has once again uncovered data that show how an AM operating at Super League level must manage a large number of variables whilst planning and executing numerous management and leadership skills. The data from the study's participant demonstrated how an AM must aim to fulfil various roles in order to effectively execute a range of professional duties. This supports our previous findings on the roles that AMs must play if they are to succeed in this most challenging of environments e.g. *cultural architect*, *succession planner*, *life coach mentor*, *sports craft teacher*, and *character builder* see Wilkinson and Grecic, 2021 for a fuller description of each role). From this study however it appears that the success with which an AM perceives their ability to succeed depends on their knowledge of their sport, knowledge of their individual performers and appreciation of the skills necessary for elite performance in their specific academy setting. Additionally, an AM's interpersonal skills, that will enable them to effectively engage with players, coaches, teams and the ever-increasing numbers of support staff, are also seen as key determinants of their success. Clearly the challenge for any AM involved in the initial stages of a player's development is to put himself in a position where he can help the player quickly acquire the specific skills required for them to progress. Knowing exactly what these are in the player's lived world, communicating this effectively and getting all those involved to be aligned to the same TD tenants would seem the most pressing challenge.

Throughout this paper, we have consistently highlighted the use of Embodied Pedagogical concepts that link to our methodological challenge - how to gain more depth in our own understanding by enticing deeper thinking from the participant in order to help us and him, connect the most relevant theory to his personal world and the invisible but real structures that underpin it? (Radulescu and Vessey, 2008). From our experience as researchers we promote EP's value in shining a light into the AM's real world and that in future, this should be considered when exploring all areas of learning, and how this particular facet can be best constructed in the High Performance domain. The success of the EP activities illustrates the propensity for these concepts to support AM's in their learning journey. When viewing these unique individuals through an embodied pedagogical lens we have begun to acknowledge how an AM's experience is an inherent feature of learning, how cultural influences enter and become part of the learning process and how power relations (the organisation's workforce infrastructure) shape their learning experience.

As noted in the Introduction EP emphasises the holistic, social nature of learning and the role of experience, the body and its senses within it. It encourages the development of the social skills involved with engaging in purposeful dialogue, a willingness and ability to negotiate and compromise and the understanding of

democratic processes involved in making and enacting collective decision making all whilst making learning enjoyable. Additionally, EP in the form that has been applied here can truly support learning how to learn, providing a more positive inclination towards learning as well as the valuable social skills that are likely to be carried on further into life away from the training field. The process by which we have planned and delivered this TDSNF is an example of these pedagogical concepts synthesised into a practical delivery model that couples the AM's empirical experiences with key events and actions, and the often hidden influences of the AM's real world. The importance of deliberately planning activities to encourage active learning is clearly supported by the current findings and the positive feedback from the AM in this case study. The selection and implementation of the activities and key tasks was very important for us. We strove to make informed choices on what would work from both our and the participant's perspective. These activities were based on our own experiences existing in the AM's world and upon our previous literature reviews and empirical studies into the TD domain. This combination of physical and cognitive activities, supported by mutual questioning, discussion and theoretical exploration assisted the AM in constructing his personal learning and will hopefully help optimise his delivery of his professional duties.

The use of the TDSNF, and the AM's outputs it enabled, demonstrates a positive shift in the manner in which researchers can gather, analyse and produce data about coach development or in this case AM development. Our study supports the recent calls for the design of learning programmes to move from the traditional top down approach, largely apparent in national coaching awards, to a more naturalistic, bespoke and ecologically valid alternatives (McCarthy, Allanson and Stoszowski, 2020). As our TDSNF employed an EP approach to solve tasks directly related to the AM's specific environment, that reflected the thinking skills regularly utilised within the Academy setting, and produced meaningful outcomes that had value in regards to the AM's specific challenges, we feel that this case study has demonstrated how this change is indeed possible in the HP and TD domains. This transfer of focus is not surprising however, especially considering that this method is closely linked with more contemporary teacher education programmes (in both structure and pedagogy). This shift may also signal further support for reconsidering the provision and examination of national coaching awards as a contextual, situational, and personal endeavour. If, as Cushion, Armour, and Jones (2003: 83) contend that working in this area is a 'complex, interrelated and interdependent process that is firmly embedded within the specific social and cultural contexts', then to support the individual development of those that exist here requires a different set of approaches and resources of which our TDSNF would seem to be of merit.

Finally, related to the potential for any such formal and specific AM

Development Programmes (AMDPs) to interface with researchers (and vice versa) it would be prudent for research to determine the effectiveness of the current AMDPs on offer and the outcomes achieved by the AMDP graduates. The ability to study the products of an AMDP would provide ‘real world’ insights and data invaluable to broadening our knowledge base and that of the clubs and NGB, assuming all would be willing to cooperate in such an investigation.

The findings from this case study can help those who design, implement, and administer a club’s CPD portfolio in ensuring that the products and resources being promoted and delivered are fit for purpose and actually fulfil the participants’ foundational wants and needs. With reference to the club’s AM, this will only be possible if time is taken to learn more about the AM’s background, instructional practices, thought processes, and motivation for leading and managing their TD programmes. The findings of this paper suggest that the biographies, viewpoints, and beliefs of participants are vital to the design of quality academy workforce education programmes. Furthermore, in consulting the related literature in the design of personal and workforce education programmes, embodied pedagogical practices could offer academy managers some assistance in structuring their own Academy Ecological Development Programme, underpinned by research and applicable to their team’s visible and hidden realities.

Finally reflecting on our own experience as researchers and facilitators as well as that of the participant, it is evident there are a number of lessons to be learnt from this case study which will help shape and guide future interventions by ourselves or others keen to utilise this framework. Firstly, a number of different mediums could be utilised to better disseminate the framework’s philosophy, content, process and activities so that others can develop their expert knowledge in their own lived worlds. Perhaps in future a tutor resource book or website with a variety of activity guides and extension tasks could be provided. This resource could also be targeted at AMs across other sporting domains to equip them with the appropriate tools, rationale and confidence to address their sport or organisation’s own learning needs in the TD space. Crucially, such a resource, coupled with the TDSNF itself could supply a bespoke personal development programme that validates their views on their own identified TD gaps. However, it should be noted that the key to this framework’s success, according to these findings, is collaboration with a skilled and experienced coach developer who has the skills and knowledge to help draw out and articulate the AM’s ‘foundational wants’ for that specific environment. It is an incredibly complicated yet fascinating act, to explore the performance of an AM and their workforce, to uncover hidden truths, challenges, barriers and enablers, all with the purpose of adding value to their own and their players’ experience and future progression. With the addition of such a book or collection of online resources, AMs

could also self-administer such an intervention and become much better prepared to harness their own knowledge to suit their unique contexts to produce a robust, bespoke development programme for their teams. Ultimately, all such actions would enhance the dynamics of Talent Development within environments such as a professional rugby league academy and beyond.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to assess the practicality and efficacy of the TDSNF and its activities that had been created with an Embodied Pedagogy approach and Critical Realist view of the TD environment. A single case study method was utilised through the purposeful sampling of a Super League AM with which to trial the 5 phases of the framework's application. Feedback from the AM and our own reflections were positive over the ease, relevance, enjoyment, value, and ultimately the learning that took place through each phase of the framework's implementation. The most impactful aspect of the framework, however, was the final outputs (ILP and AEDP) and the perceived value to the AM. This value was in terms of not only the tangible development plans that were created, but also by the learning and knowledge that had been shared and developed to reach such a worthwhile end point. Key to this was the physical nature of the activities themselves, and the EP that underpinned them which activated thoughts, feelings and recollections that helped uncover the previously 'hidden truths' that existed in the AM's world.

Of course, this case study is just the starting point for future process refinement and framework amendments BUT what is clear is that such a process of uncovering the lived reality through the AM's embodiment provided an incredible impetus for learning. If the TDSNF can be enhanced through future experience and revision, it is hoped that it will be able to provide a viable alternative to the continued professional development currently offered to AMs by many sports' National Governing Bodies. The key to this being achievable, however, is the willingness and openness of future participants to fully embrace the ethos that underpins this framework. A limiting factor may well be the ability to secure and train experienced facilitators who can utilise the framework tasks and resources to enable such expertise-based training to occur. With that in mind the development of bespoke training for the trainers and the publication of high-quality supporting resources must become the next natural stage of our framework's evolution.

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JQRSS Author Profiles

Stuart Wilkinson¹ is currently a Lecturer in High Performance Coaching, Course Leader and PhD student at the University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK. Previously Stuart had a career as a professional Rugby League player in the UK and Australia (Barrow, Carlisle, Wests in Australia and Workington) a professional coach (Leeds Rhinos, Wigan Warriors, Widnes Vikings, Salford City Reds and The RFL) manager (England Schools, Great Britain Academy, England, Wales, France, Russia and Serbia) and High-Performance consultant (Italy, Germany, Sale Sharks, Wakefield, Newcastle).

David Grecic² is a Professor in Sport, Health and Physical Activity at the University of Central Lancashire. His work in talent development spans both physical education and amateur / professional sport.

Reviewer Comments

Embodied learning – we can't get by without a body! This paper has got me thinking. The decisions which we make as humans are born within our bodies, and communicated to others by means of our bodies – especially in the case of teachers or coaches. The responses to a teacher's decisions to do this or that, are imparted and hopefully carried out by other bodies too; the learners. Thus, teaching could be an activity where there is some embodied transmission of understanding to the learner, but is more likely to be based on their interpretation of the teacher's message, but reinforced by their physical actions to learn. In education, it seems to be the last bit that is often left out – the physical reinforcement of learning. Coaching, especially in the context of sport, is an embodied process which >90% of the time may go beyond words... that is, actions speak louder than words. In a sports context, the player is judged by the effectiveness of his actions on the field as a result of being coached, i.e. his new physical behaviour exhibited in context, which may arguably be intelligent (or not). As David Best pointed out in the 1970s, the action is the thought. What comes across in this exciting research is a means to impart messages and decisions in a manner that the person being coached, in this context the Academy Manager, takes on that learning in an embodied sense. That is, his physical actions reinforce his decisions to do this or that. The learning seems to be more deeply engrained and invested in by him, even valued as a learner. It also seems that this approach to learning, the 'embodied pedagogy' of physically connecting decisions, is entirely in keeping and appropriate to the people whom the researchers hope to influence. It would appear to date, that academic scientising about 'coaching theory', has had little impact upon the playing fraternity it relates to. Based on this research, I am confident that those who play, will benefit enormously from this vital work.

