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Creating and disseminating coach education policy: a case of formal coach education in grassroots football

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ABSTRACT

By examining on-course pedagogical practices, recent research has sought to inform the development of National Governing Body (NGB) coach education courses. Coach education programmes are, however, social constructs, and are influenced by policies and socio-economic factors. To inform future provision, there is a need to understand the construction of policy and the influences affecting course design. This study examined how the English Football Association (FA) redeveloped their coach education policy in 2016. The 2016 changes are pertinent because calls for educational provision to be informed by social constructivism have been made. The FA's coach education policy (2016) claim to be informed by such a philosophical stance. This study, therefore, reports on *what* policy was created, and *how* it had been disseminated within the organisation. Twenty-eight interviews were conducted with 14 participants (staff members with different roles within the FA) across two separate points in time, 12 months apart. A thematic analysis identified three key themes: (1) Three Elements of Curriculum/Course Design (A learning strategy informed by social constructivism; a body of content for courses; a coaching competency framework and qualification specification); (2) Recontextualisation of the policy and some confusion during dissemination; and (3) A restricted code when disseminating policy. The significance of these findings extends beyond the case presented and policy makers who seek to inform course design with learning theory may wish to offer elaboration throughout the workforce via text and discourse. Future research should build on these findings and consider how knowledge is selected and legitimised by policy makers, and how coach developers implement recontextualised policies.

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Introduction

Sport coaching is a complex social endeavour. To prepare for this activity, coaches engage in a range of formal, informal, and non-formal learning opportunities (Nelson et al., 2006). Formal coach education within the United Kingdom (UK), the focus of this study, has been the subject of much critical research. National Governing Body (NGBs) courses have been depicted as a flawed means of enhancing coaches' learning (Nelson et al., 2013). Specifically, courses have been deemed ineffective, because content is 'isolated' from coaches' contexts and therefore 'decontextualized' (Piggott, 2015). In response, some research, including international studies have encouraged constructivist informed approaches to formal coach education courses¹ (e.g. Paquette et al., 2014; Paquette & Trudel, 2018a, 2018b). In coaching literature, constructivism has been referred to as a broad

epistemology that suggests learning takes place through shared knowledge, meanings, and understanding (Ciampolini et al., 2019). This epistemological position has developed from philosophers such as Kant, Dewey, and Popper (Philips, 1995). Educationalists such as Piaget (cognitive) and Vygotsky (social) have also advanced different forms of constructivist learning theory (Jones et al., 2018). Today, a gamut of 'constructivist' perspectives exist including cognitive, social, radical, and feminist (See Fosnot, 2013 for further details). To greater and lesser extents, these variants proceed from the epistemological tenets that (a) learning involves the active contribution of humans; (b) new knowledge is developed in relation to prior understanding; and (c) knowledge and learning is not independent of social context.

Paquette and Trudel (2018a) described coach education approaches informed by constructivist epistemology as those that involve facilitation, group work, localised problem solving and the sharing of ideas. Critically, in coaching, rather than coach education research, it has been argued that practitioners are focused on methods rather than the underlying philosophical positions of constructivism (Cushion, 2013; Nelson et al., 2014). To be clear, 'constructivist approaches are not prescriptions for teaching. Instead they operate as a general orientating framework for thinking about teaching and learning' (Culpan & McBain, 2012, p. 99). Failure to understand this position may result in a naive form of constructivism (Cushion, 2013), where dialogue takes place but ultimately, knowledge and power remain the preserve of the educator. Thus, at a micro-level, coach education may involve social interactions that support or thwart the construction of knowledge by learners.

Beyond courses, coach education is a wide system involving multiple stakeholders such as knowledge producers, policy makers, course designers, and coach developers (Culver et al., 2019; Williams & Bush, 2017). These key personnel have significant power and control over course design, including the theoretical perspectives informing formal educational provision (Chapman et al., 2019). Interestingly, in mainstream education systems, Evans and Penney (1995) demonstrated how policy is an inevitable compromise between inputs from different stakeholders involved in the creation and dissemination of policy and materials. Related to this, Priestley and Humes (2010) demonstrated how stakeholder interests may result in educational curriculums with different foci e.g. learner focused, content focused, or assessment focused. Further, it has been suggested that stakeholders can add or corrode coherency between objectives, content, and assessment (Sullanmaa et al., 2019). Indeed, many NGBs now position their coach education and preferred methods as 'constructivist'. Such claims need to be sceptically considered because similar to the wider education field, policy making in coach education is a dynamic and negotiated process. Accordingly, Culver and colleagues (2019) and Williams and Bush (2017) encourage coaching researchers to consider how the dominant foci of stakeholders within coach education systems influence formal coaching courses. Similarly, Griffiths et al. (2018) called for researchers to use Bernsteinian (2000) theory to explore how 'upstream' influences on policy affect learners 'downstream' (i.e. on courses). Thus, this study aims to consider *what* one NGB created as part of their policies and *how* it was disseminated. The significance of the study lies in drawing attention to the social construction of courses, opening up a discussion on the key influences on formal coach education policy, and moving beyond on-course evaluation to provide a more complete, if always partial, analysis of an existing coach education system.

The FA context

The FA is an appropriate area of focus because their courses are experienced by a large number of coaches (i.e. circa 30,000 per annum), within the participatory domain of coaching (i.e. grassroots) (Lyle & Cushion, 2017). These coaches typically work with a team once a week for training, plus a single game over a weekend in a range of communal environments (i.e. local club, parks, youth centres). This often-voluntary coaching role facilitates opportunities for young people and adults to play football. To support coaches in these contexts, the FA mandate coaches attain a FA level 1 (introductory) qualification. They also recommend carrying out a level 2 (intermediate) qualification within this domain.

Recently, Chapman and colleagues (2019) described gradual changes in FA qualifications over a fifty-year period, from a perceived authoritarian approach, where learners would replicate coach developers' behaviours in order to pass the qualifications, to an approach, more, if not wholly focused on learners' needs. In keeping with this, in 2016, the FA relaunched their formal coach education provision at level 1 and level 2. This change was prompted by critical examination from the UK Government's Department for Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS) who highlighted issues with wider FA governance and a historic weakness in coaching (DCMS, 2011). The Commission Report 2 (The FA, 2015) identified that:

the overall numbers of coaches holding B Licence level (level 3) and above need to be increased substantially ... in particular the Commission would argue that The FA needs to provide the right encouragement to coaches below the top levels so that they are motivated to pursue higher level qualifications (The FA, 2015, p. 38).

This informed the FA's focus on learning at that time and was a response to much criticism of formal coach education (Chapman et al., 2019). Therefore, multiple stakeholders including the FA, UK Government (via DCMS), and other funding agencies committed to improving formal coach education (The FA, 2015; DCMS, 2014). Since then, the FA have made significant changes to their coach education courses, including providing in-situ support for learners at level 2, where coach developers support coaches in their own contexts (Chapman et al., 2019). Beyond this observation however, little academic research has examined *what* exactly has been created, and *how*. Such consideration has the potential to open up discussions and future research on how policy may best influence coach education provision.

Theoretical frameworks

In order to address the research objective of understanding *what* policy was created, this study turns to Priestley and Humes' (2010) three models of curriculum development. Subsequent to this, Bernstein's framework is also introduced to elucidate *how* education policy is both constructed and disseminated.

What policy is created?

For Priestley and Humes (2010), curriculum development is an amalgamation of multiple and sometimes disparate interests from within a wider system. In order to develop coherent education provision, they advocate for curriculum development to be shaped by one of three clear 'start points' or models. Firstly, Priestley and Humes describe a *process model*, as a shared and co-constructed learning 'process' between educators and learners. This approach prioritises the development of learners as individuals in their own right, with a focus on understanding their individual needs, rather than a focus on predetermined content or roles. The process model has much in common with learning relationships where teachers guide learners through topics that learners deem meaningful within their own context. In contrast to the process model, a *content model* prioritises the learning of predetermined content. Finally, a *product model* (i.e. objectives to be achieved) prioritises what a 'competent' learner *should* be doing. While a mixture of all three outputs is commonplace within any curriculum, Priestley and Humes (2010) advise that for coherency, one model should be used as a starting point to guide curriculum making by stakeholders, including educators. Accordingly, Priestley and Humes' work is used to examine and explain what policy was created by the FA. However, while Priestley and Humes provide a description of *what* is produced, it does not explain *how* policy is constructed by stakeholders. Here we turned to the work of Basil Bernstein.

How policy is created?

In order to address *how* policy is constructed and disseminated, Bernstein 'offers a language to engage in a multi-level understanding of the impact of stakeholders on pedagogical practices'

(Griffiths et al., 2018, p. 286). Specifically, Bernstein's (1990, 2000) 'Pedagogic Device' (distributive and recontextualisation rules²) and his early development of language codes (1964, 1971) are relevant to this study and are therefore introduced below.

The 'distributive rule' of Bernstein's pedagogic device involves identifying a body of knowledge to be learned. For Bernstein, this often takes place in an esoteric fashion, whereby select individuals (e.g. NGB staff) distinguish 'relevant' knowledge to distribute to learners (Bernstein, 2000). Bernstein primarily recognises the role of higher education in producing knowledge, but professions may also contribute to this. Selecting and disseminating knowledge is a negotiated act between stakeholders and reflects wider social, economic, and political influences, status, and priorities. The distributive rule, therefore, is a useful analytical aid that prompts researchers to consider who is involved in selecting *what* knowledge to develop policy.

Bernstein's (2000) second concept, the rule of 'recontextualisation', is concerned with the decoding and recoding of policy. Policy is taken from those creating it during initial production (through the distributive rule), and then recontextualised into a form of meaningful and contextualised practice. Singh et al. (2013, p. 469) commented that the recontextualising rule involves 'translation work that occurs when policy text moves from the site of policy-making to local sites in which policy is enacted'. In coach education, this may involve the production of materials e.g. PowerPoint presentations/handouts, course handbooks, and verbal discussions that clarify syllabi, schemes of work, and qualification specifications. In other words, within an NGB such as the FA, numerous personnel will influence *how* policy is constructed and disseminated through text and discourse.

To explain how relevant knowledge may be recontextualised, Bernstein introduced the concept of elaborating and restricted language codes (Bernstein, 1964). An elaborating code describes a language that is explicitly presented to the audience. Access to meaning is high because understanding is not taken for granted and meaning is elaborated (Bernstein, 1964; Moore, 2013). Bernstein (1971) explained that in an elaborating code, knowledge and policy is explained and demonstrated in order to form meaning on a wider scale.

A restricted code suggests that a more localised and internal language structure is already in operation. 'Restricted' refers to a shared understanding amongst actors (Moore, 2013). Language spoken here is predictable to the presenters and listeners. Nuanced concepts and terminology are assumed to be understood by all individuals. In this case, knowledge may be 'taken for granted'. Without elaboration however, access to meaning is restricted to those people 'in the know', who may understand one message, while others have a restricted understanding (Bernstein, 1971). A restricted code may mean that individuals are not exposed to confusing information, but they may also have an oversimplified understanding of policy. Thus, language codes are important concepts that enable us to examine *how* knowledge is disseminated and understood by policy actors.

Bernstein, like Priestley and Humes, assumes that policy is a dynamic constructed process. Both frameworks detail the influence of individuals, and organisations/institutions to shape policy and in turn curriculum making. Indeed, both theoretical frameworks offer an insight into examining policy, looking at *what* can be created (Priestly and Humes), and *how* it is created (Bernstein). Used together, these theories are useful for examining the FA's 2016 policy at level 1 and level 2. More broadly, the models and concepts within the frameworks provide important analytical contributions that shed light on the dynamics of creating, interpreting, and disseminating policy.

Methodology

Paradigmatic positioning

The research was underpinned by ontological relativism (i.e. reality is multiple) and epistemological constructivism (i.e. knowledge is constructed) (Philips, 1995). These philosophical positions recognise

that prior knowledge (e.g. theoretical frameworks) inform our sense making. As such, the findings of this study represent and value the temporal interpretations of the individuals (participants, the research team, and the reviewers) involved in this study.

Sampling, participants, and the courses

Following university ethical approval, a purposeful criterion-based sample were recruited from within the organisation (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Bowe and colleagues (1992) 'policy cycle' identified those who are influential, and those who produce/disseminate text as key participants in policy analysis research. Accordingly, the following criteria were used to select these participants: (1) active involvement in the creation of the FA level 1 and level 2 courses (context of influence); and (2) active involvement in disseminating the FA level 1 and level 2 courses (context of text production).

A gatekeeper from the FA facilitated access to the sample. An introductory email was sent to the gatekeeper who provided contact details for the sample. Following this, individuals who fulfilled the criteria above, were sent an introductory email with an information sheet and consent form. These emails ensured the gatekeeper provided permission and facilitated a purposeful sample and participant confidentiality. Fourteen participants (twelve males and two females), aged 28–66 ($M = 45.21$) responded and were involved in this study.³ For the purpose of maintaining anonymity, participants were placed into three classifications based on roles within the FA: Senior Staff (SS; $N = 4$), Departmental Leads (DL; $N = 3$), and Coach Developers (CD). Coach developers have also been split within this research as there are full time members of FA staff known as county coach developers (CCD's; $N = 4$), as well as part-time coach developers (CD part-time; $N = 3$). With reference to the courses, Table 1 provides details on the structure of the grassroots coach education courses under study. Further information, including learning outcomes, content, and prerequisites are also available for level 1 (The FA, 2019a) and level 2 (The FA, 2019b).

Table 1. FA course information for Level 1 and Level 2.

Course	Level 1	Level 2
Number of Days/ Workshops	3 and a half days (7 workshops) e.g. Workshop 2: How we coach – the coach; Workshop 5: The future player	10 days (20 workshops) split over 3 blocks: Block 1 – 4 days (8 Workshops e.g. Workshop 3: Social Corner); Block 2 – 3 days (6 Workshops e.g. Workshop 13: Managing Mistakes); Block 3 – 3 days (6 Workshops e.g. Workshop 16: Planning)
Maximum Tutors/ Candidates ratio	1:18	2:24
Contact Space	Classroom; Football Pitch	Classroom; Football Pitch; In-situ visit at coach's own football club facility.
Typical Activities carried out on- course	PowerPoint Presentations; Group Discussions; Planning; Delivery of short session; Individual or paired reflection; debates; matching tasks; scenario activities.	PowerPoint Presentations; Group Discussions; Group, paired, or individual planning; Delivery of short session; Individual or paired reflection; debates; group presentations of work/sessions; scenario-based tasks.
Assessment	Completion of Tasks inside FA Learner Journal (11 tasks) e.g. how can you, as a coach, link practice to competition? (half a page (A5 size)).	Part 1 - Completion of FA project i.e. a portfolio that explores topics such as: coaches' own philosophy, preferred styles of play, and match day planning; Part 2 - demonstration of practical competency.
Cost (range – dependent on area of country)	£155 – £185	£295 – £430

Data collection and analysis

This study utilised semi-structured interviews with individuals responsible for the courses outlined in Table 1. The first author conducted all interviews and was a 'partial insider' because of additional roles within the FA (i.e. as a part-time coach developer and coach mentor). These roles brought valuable insight but also subjective perspectives to the study. Accordingly, the positionality of the researcher is discussed in the rigour section below. Twenty-eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with fourteen participants from within the FA. It was decided to conduct two interviews with each participant across two data points in time, separated by a twelve-month gap between phase 1 and phase 2 interviews. A twelve-month gap enabled policy to be further disseminated and experienced. All interviews took place at either the FA's National Performance Centre, or within local FA facilities. This was to ensure that participants felt as comfortable as possible within a familiar setting (Kvale, 2007). Interviews lasted between 40–115 min in length.

Phase 1 interviews

Initial interview questions reflected (1) the context of influence – *who* influenced *what*, and (2) the context of text production – *who* disseminated *what* and *how* (cf. Bowe et al., 1992). Questions also reflected participants' roles. For example, schedule 1 for Senior Staff (SS) – In your view/opinion, who have been the key people that have influenced this change?; Schedule 2 for Department Leads (DL) – What control or influence did you have during these changes?; Schedule 3 for Coach Developers (CD) – Can you tell me about the new direction the FA has taken within coach education?

Phase 1 analysis

After Phase 1 interviews, a Thematic Analysis (TA) was used to identify, analyse, and report initial themes. Braun, Clarke and Weate's (2016) six-step protocol was used as part of a deductive form of analysis. The data were analysed to identify *who* created *what*, and *how*. To do this the first author began with a period of data familiarisation (step 1), being immersed in the data through listening to the interviews, transcribing the interviews, and reading back through each transcript multiple times. This presented opportunities for coding data (step 2) that were relevant to the policy cycle (i.e. *who* created *what* and *how*). As codes were developed, potential themes were identified (step 3) by mapping codes together to form meaningful insights (e.g. key influencers generating change; good intentions; assessment approach). Refinement and revision (step 4) of the codes and initial themes were then carried out through further reading of transcripts, coding maps, as well as discussions with the wider research team. The research team named the themes (step 5) in order to represent the data. In the last part of phase 1 (step 6), these themes were organised and were relabelled.

Phase 2 interviews

After a twelve-month period, phase 2 interviews were conducted. Questions were developed from both the themes identified in phase 1 interviews (i.e. Theme 1 – Influencers generating FA coach education development; Theme 2 – A pedagogic shift in FA coach education) and Bernsteinian concepts (distributive rule, recontextualisation, and language codes). Bernstein's pedagogic device was used in order to understand the social relationships that influence policy and curricula. For example, because assessment was perceived as a potential issue, questions explored *how* and *why* assessment may have been recontextualised. Again, questions were amended to reflect the differing professional roles of the participants. For example, Schedule 1 for SS – Why do you think people experience ambiguity around assessment? Schedule 2 for DL – In your opinion, does the current course content, delivery approach, and assessment process lend itself to the overall purpose of the level 1 and level 2 courses? Schedule 3 for CD – What guidance/support/training has developed your understanding of these courses? These questions aimed to gain further insight into *what* had been created and *how* these changes were being disseminated across the organisation.

Phase 2 analysis

Braun, Clarke and Weate's (2016) six-step protocol was then repeated. Deductively, the first author used Bernstein's 'distributive rule' (i.e. who decides what is to be known), and 'recontextualisation rule' (i.e. how is policy interpreted and cascaded to practice). Phase 2 analysis was either added to existing codes from phase 1 or new codes were generated (e.g. new code: A 'learning model'). Development and refinement of themes continued through the mapping of codes and discussing these with the research team (e.g. subtheme – confusion around assessment). During these discussions, Priestley and Humes' (2010) curriculum models were used to refine and support the final themes that we felt best represented the data. This refinement process occurred all the way through and into the writing phase of this present article, where the themes presented in this study offer a final product of a messy analysis phase. Table 2 provides an illustration of the development of themes across the two phases of analysis.

Rigour

Member reflections were used post phase 1 interviews to enable participants to consider interview transcripts and the initial insights identified by the research team (Smith & McGannon, 2018). This provided additional data. Ten participants engaged in the member reflections, and these provided support and clarification (e.g. SS 'the themes felt really good. I just want to make sure that we ...'). A reflective journal was used by the first author to manage his positionality and note down thoughts and feelings that may influence further processes e.g. data collection and analysis. This reflection led to discussions within the research team that managed the subjectivity of the first author, without losing the enriched perspective that a partial insider brings. To further manage subjectivity and provide a form of credibility, data analysis were also read by 'critical friends' (co-authors and a colleague outside of the research team) (Smith & McGannon, 2018). These processes were put in place to enhance the rigour of this study. Nonetheless, being mindful of the epistemological stance of the paper, readers should themselves consider to what extent the findings are relevant to their own context.

Findings and discussion

This section demonstrates three themes from the data. Theme 1 provides an insight into *what* was created as part of the 2016 FA policy for level 1 and level 2. Theme 2 focuses on the recontextualisation of the policy and confusion. Finally, Theme 3 describes a restricted code when disseminating policy.

Theme 1: three elements of curriculum/course design

The first theme identified three elements produced as part of the 2016 policy: (1) A 'learning strategy' that was informed by individuals' understanding of social constructivism; (2) a body of content for

Table 2. Development of codes and themes over two phases of analysis.

	Phase 1 Analysis		Phase 2 Analysis	
Influencers generating change (physical, personnel)	FA coach education has been positively influenced by physical and cultural developments	Key Influences Impacting Change	A Learning Model Developed	Three Elements of Curriculum/Course Design
Good intentions		Social Architects Impacting Change		Recontextualisation and Confusion of Policy
Assessment Approach	FA coach education has a clear social constructivist pedagogy, but assessment is more ambiguous	Assessment is ambiguous	Ambiguity Around Assessment	A Restriction in Disseminating Policy

courses (e.g. PowerPoint slideshows, unit specification); and (3) a coaching competency framework (CCF) and qualification specification. These changes came from a number of key stakeholder inputs.

The first 'element' – a move towards a 'socially constructivist' informed pedagogy

The first element produced was an explicit written learning strategy used to inform the development of the level 1 and level 2 courses. This strategy was reportedly designed by a small group of staff at senior levels, who consulted with individuals in different roles across FA education.

We set up a coaching learning group and we began to develop a learning strategy. In that learning strategy that I eventually wrote was in two parts really. The first part was the how and why. Basically, the philosophy behind why we do what we do, so [social] constructivism. That was what we have nailed our hat on in terms of basis for our learning philosophy. (SS)

If you look at the official line from the FA education strategy, it is a [social] constructivist approach to learning. (CCD)

Consistent with the participants above, the learning strategy, which is detailed through an internal only document, explicitly refers to social constructivist principles. The strategy recognises 'learning as an active constructive process', where coaches build upon their prior knowledge, and make sense in relation to their own social context. Such principles are broadly consistent with the tenets of constructivist epistemology (Fosnot, 2013). Further, the internal FA document encourages coach developers to embrace problem-based learning and 'other active methods as they challenge learners', which again has been associated with constructivism (Paquette & Trudel, 2018a). The approach also echoes Priestley's and Humes' (2010) *process model* that advocates for a collaborative process, involving both learners and educators to inform future knowledge.

The creation of the learning strategy reflects Bernstein's (2000) distributive rule as those in powerful positions were able to provide direction from knowledge producers. Without detailing specific sources, in interviews, participants acknowledged that Higher Education (HE) research had some influence in the group's decision to take a social constructivist approach.

What do we feel is the latest research in terms of how you could and should design and deliver learning? Constructivism came as a result of that. (SS)

While not explicitly identifying coach education research, the learning strategy document does make one reference regarding Malcom Knowles' (1973) work on andragogy, which characterises adult learners as self-directed and focused on learning from personal, situated experiences. This view of learners is consistent with the social constructivist epistemology espoused in the strategy, but the inclusion of this solitary reference does raise a future research question of why certain research might explicitly influence policy (Lyle, 2018). Nonetheless, the strategy provides a clear starting point for the construction and dissemination of curriculum, and materials (Priestley & Humes, 2010), but is just one part of a larger coach education system (Culver et al., 2019).

The second 'element' – a body of content for courses

Illustrating how different stakeholders can influence policy production as part of Bernstein's (2000) distributive rule, another group at the FA developed a second element within the policy; the content that made up the level 1 and level 2 courses. This second element emphasised subject matter knowledge considered useful to learners. This included the England DNA, which is the FA's position on how they view the game, and how they prefer the game to be played (e.g. intelligently dominate possession), and coached (e.g. use games whenever possible) (The FA, 2020). This content was deemed important to inform coaching practice and is an integral part of the seven workshops on the level 1 course (The FA, 2019a), and twenty workshops on the level 2 course (The FA, 2019b) (see Table 1.). Within these workshops, predetermined topics, learning outcomes, and resources/materials were created (e.g. schemes of work, PowerPoint presentations, videos, posters, session plan ideas). Those participants who deliver the courses met this revised content with some positive perceptions:

Session plans, the PDF's, the videos, I think the candidates are now getting much more value for money and they're getting better resources (CD part-time)

I feel I've got much more information to give to them, so I feel more knowledgeable personally so I can talk to them about what St George's Park [National Performance Centre] is, what the England DNA [Organisational football philosophy] is, and what the coaching fundamentals are, but I feel like I've got more stuff to back it up (CD part-time)

The data does, however, reflect a tradition of coach developers 'giving' content to learners, as opposed to learners constructing knowledge meaningful to them and their context. The data also continues a trend where knowledge lies with coach developers.

[We are] trying to make sure that you're [the coach developer] on message with the workshops and delivering the outcomes and not deviating too far from the truth ... (DL)

The quotation above, for example, encourages coach developers to stick to the 'truth'. This somewhat contradicts the constructivist learning strategy designed by the first group, which advocates for a more personalised 'process model' (Priestley & Humes, 2010) to meet the relevant needs and context of the learners. In doing so, the content demonstrates how different stakeholders may shape the development and dissemination of coach education policy (Bernstein, 2000).

The third 'element' – the coaching competency framework (CCF) and qualification specification

The third element produced during the development of policy was the CCF. The CCF is a list of 16 competencies for coaches from level 1 (introductory) to 5 (elite). This was created to provide constructive alignment where coach developers build on the prior experiences of learners. It was reported that the CCF was developed by senior members of FA staff. One declared:

We developed a cross football group of people to help design that and, eventually, developed a set of coach competencies (SS)

Throughout the interviews, participants associated these competencies with the assessment process at level 2:

At level 2, there are no tasks; it is the project. So, the project has to wrap around something that aligns with the standard and the standard is the competency framework. (DL)

The competency framework is a reference point for assessment (DL)

The CCF appeared to be treated somewhat akin to Priestley and Hume's (2010) outcome driven approach where learners achieve a predetermined set of competencies. That said, the FA and an awarding body (an external stakeholder) also collaborated to produce the qualification specification including predetermined aims, learning outcomes, mandatory content, and grading criteria to be delivered as part of each course (1st4Sport, 2017a; 1st4Sport, 2017b). Such documents are typical of quality assurance (QA) processes regulated by the government that aim to ensure consistently high standards of education provision. Once more illustrating how different stakeholders provide different inputs into a large coach education system. These publicly accessible documents are reminiscent of narrow predetermined competency-based assessments that have a long history in football (Chapman et al., 2019; Twitchen & Oakley, 2019). The use of predetermined criteria and methods is potentially in contrast to the sharing of knowledge and power and the notion of self-directed learners as advocated in other parts of the learning strategy (Element 1). Interestingly, none of the participants interviewed explicitly referred to the qualification specification from an assessment perspective. Instead, participants tended to focus on the CCF. This demonstrated that policy continued to develop as discourse, despite the text developed with an external party (i.e. awarding body).

In sum, different stakeholders, each with their own experiences, perspectives, knowledge, and wider social, economic, and political considerations (i.e. HE research; industry knowledge; quality

assurance procedures) influenced the new policy. Although the learning strategy relates to Priestley and Humes' (2010) process model, other stakeholders appeared to emphasise content (workshops) and outcome (assessment criteria) models. Thus, the FA coach education policy is, like others (Bernstein, 2000; Culver et al., 2019; Evans & Penney, 1995), the result of complex negotiated acts between internal and external stakeholders.

Theme 2: recontextualisation and confusion of policy

Throughout the interviews, participants also reported challenges with the 2016 policy. To greater and lesser extents, the policy was recontextualised (Bernstein 2000). For example, the learning strategy argued for knowledge that is relevant to the learners' contexts and experienced through problem-based approaches. This appeared to be clear to some participants:

Social constructivism ... it's explicit in all our course material ... how we intend to interact, how the courses are made up. That wasn't clear at first, but hopefully, it is now. (SS)

I think it's trying to tailor how you can plan to meet the needs of the individuals on the course. So where is each learner at on that particular journey, what do they need? What have they got? Is there anyone that can help them? Can they help anyone else? (CCD)

In contrast, some coach developers commented that the key point of the 2016 policy was the transmission of predetermined content and 'organisational messages':

With the scheme of work, we had PowerPoints and the instructions were that we don't alter the PowerPoints, which means we use the PowerPoints we were given ... I just feel there's almost an influence on how we'd [the FA] like you to deliver ... (CD – part time)

These different approaches reflect the influence of multiple stakeholders (theme 1) as policy is disseminated. Griffiths and colleagues (2018) commented that policy develops via discourse, as stakeholders select and share information across education systems to inform pedagogical practices. During this dissemination, recontextualisation occurs, and potentially causes confusion. For example, participants reported confusion about the use of the CCF and its primary function. Staff members commented the CCF was:

Only to lead the design of the content of the courses (SS)

People who were driving the review of the Level 2 project made a call that the competency framework [CCF] shouldn't be shown to learners because they wanted to get away from the idea of tick sheets and they also made the call that the word 'assessment', essentially, should be banned (DL)

Another senior staff member, however, described how the CCF was a good learning development tool and should be used collaboratively with learners:

The competency framework is a developmental tool that you can go, 'yeah, I think we can develop you in these areas ... we can work on that' and I can chart the progress. (SS)

Through recontextualisation other participants suggested that individuals have used the CCF as a means of assessment:

Individuals have taken that [CCF] and created almost a competency-based assessment on some courses, others not. (SS)

Recontextualisation and confusion can occur when policy makers, course designers, and coach developers relay messages that have been interpreted in relation to their own biographies, experiences, and subjective understandings (Bernstein, 2000). For example, the historical dominance of competency-based assessment within the FA (Chapman et al., 2019), may mean that individuals interpret the CCF in relation to assessment. Moreover, the extent to which a recontextualised message is further cascaded may reflect the power, vertical and horizontal network, and perspectives of

individuals, rather than the completeness of their understanding. This has previously been observed in coaches (Stodter & Cushion, 2017), but the study herein finds a similar process amongst policy makers and coach developers. Thus, when disseminating policy, confusion can be enabled by a myriad of dynamic social factors such as the power of different stakeholders, and the prior experiences of individuals. Of course, confusion can also occur if policy makers and course designers do not fully understand theory, such as constructivism, prior to dissemination.

Theme 3 – a restricted code when disseminating policy

When considering the three new elements produced, coach developers reported a desire for more training:

Just all new stuff and then no real training, I would say' (CCD)

I don't think training really told us about it [the changes]' (CD part-time).

The desire for further training is understandable given the complex philosophical tenets of social constructivism, which require education to avoid a naïve form of implementation (Cushion, 2013; Nelson et al., 2014). That said, the learning strategy, which details how the FA conceive social constructivism, was somewhat restricted from large parts of the workforce. The learning strategy remains an internal document and has not been widely disseminated to the part time workforce. As a result, full-time FA staff seemingly communicate via a restricted code, which offers a particularistic understanding to those 'in the know' but offers limited understanding or elaboration for those across the wider workforce (Bernstein, 1971). Furthermore, one department lead claimed:

The content that underpinned the theory, and research that underpinned the content of the courses was never shared. And, therefore, there is a gap between the full-time staff who designed the learning strategy and part-time tutors running around on the ground making it happen. (DL)

From a Bernsteinian (1990) perspective, effective recontextualisation requires elaboration of policy. In the absence of elaboration, policy may be subject to multiple (mis)interpretations. To examine this further, future research should explore how educators on the ground practice the policy.

Some additional considerations

The themes above illustrate that policy makers need to elaborate the underlying philosophical assumptions of constructivism. This may lead to considerations about what is conceived as social constructivism within a specific NGB, how stakeholders may thwart or enable policy informed by this epistemology, and how content and assessment processes can support coaches to socially construct relevant knowledge. The findings also illustrate that coach education is not an easy task, limited to on-course provision. Rather, policy makers operating within this system are faced with some complex challenges that researchers may wish to support. Firstly, while advocating courses meet the needs of learners in local situated contexts, NGBs such as the FA are also concerned with the consistency and quality of courses across large geographical areas. Secondly, as evidenced above, NGBs need to work with external stakeholders such as awarding bodies, who may have different perspectives on content and assessment. Thirdly, elaborating to a large, part time workforce can be difficult. Indeed, one participant summarised the challenges facing NGBs:

We're talking about learning, which is complex. We're then talking about it in the largest NGB in the country, which is even more complex. We're then adding in 600 people being involved in delivering it, even more complex. Then we're adding in staff changeover, there's more complexity. Then we're adding in digital platforms that work and how we want them to work, so there's even more complexity. (DL)

Conclusion

This study offers an original contribution by exploring *what* components made up the policy created by the FA. Secondly, the study examined *how* the current policy was created and disseminated. This is significant because research has called for formal coach education to be examined as a system (Culver et al., 2019), which in the context of the FA, is influenced by Government, senior NGB members, policy makers, course designers, department leads, and coach developers. Therefore, this study contributes by detailing how stakeholders interact to influence coach education policy.

Findings suggest that:

- (1) A small group within the FA have produced a learning strategy informed by their understanding of social constructivism. Further internal and external stakeholders have also contributed to elements of the policy (e.g. content and assessment) and thus policy creation is not a simple act, but a negotiated and dynamic process.
- (2) Notwithstanding the guiding learning strategy, recontextualisation had inevitably occurred and some confusion was evidenced in relation to areas of the policy (e.g. the CCF)
- (3) This confusion may be confounded by concepts such as a social constructivist epistemology, which would benefit from further elaboration by sharing texts and adequately timed dissemination events.

The FA has continued a clear move towards coach education informed by social constructivism (Chapman et al., 2019), but understanding of the learning strategy and indeed, the theory that informs it, remains varied. Policy makers, who may have different economic, social, and political perspectives, including and beyond the FA, need to share an elaborating code with each other, to ensure that there is coherency between a learning strategy, content, and assessment (Sullanmaa et al., 2019). Appropriately timed dissemination events may help elaborate key concepts throughout the workforce. This elaboration is particularly needed when exploring concepts such as constructivism that have many variants (cognitive, social, critical) (Philips, 1995), and are not simple prescriptions for teaching but complex epistemologies (Culpan & McBain, 2012). This does not, however, require a top-down approach to policy development and dissemination, but rather an iterative approach to sharing knowledge between people across a NGB. This encourages decisions to be made at all levels from positions of explicit, rather than assumed understanding (Sullanmaa et al., 2019).

Future research could support NGBs and wider educational institutions who seek to implement a pedagogy informed by learning theory, such as social constructivism. Indeed, social constructivism is an area that requires greater levels of clarity if it is to be used as a central learning theory to develop coaches. Researchers could also explore which knowledge is selected and legitimised by policy makers. To this end, immersive methodologies such as ethnographic and collaborative action research approaches may provide analytical value. Conversely, while this study has examined how policy has been created and disseminated, there is a need to consider how coach developers and coaches experience the 2016 policy. Related to this, pedagogical research may need to recognise that on-course practices are likely to be recontextualised practices. Thus, coach education research should build on the insights provided here and critically connect policy to practice in order to provide a more complete understanding of coach education as a system.

Notes

1. Terminology such as: social constructivism, constructivism, progressive or learner-centred is often used interchangeably within research and yet there are differences between these concepts. For further details, readers should see Philips (1995) or Fosnot (2013).
2. For those interested in the third 'evaluative rule' please see Bernstein (2000)
3. Participant information is kept purposely vague to protect the anonymity of participants.

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