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‘Being’ in the coaching world: New insights on youth performance coaching from an interpretative phenomenological approach.

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Abstract

Since Heidegger's influential text; *Being and Time* (1927/2005), the phenomenological question of what it means to 'be' has generated a vast body of work. This paper reports data from a phenomenological study that investigated what it means to 'be' a youth performance coach. An overview of the interpretive phenomenological methods used (Van Manen, 1990) is followed by presentation of coaches and data. Data analysis resulted in the identification of three constituent 'essences' of youth performance coaching: (i) care; (ii) a commitment to educate athletes authentically for corporeal challenges to come; and (iii) working with others to achieve a specialised corporeal excellence. The three identified essences manifest themselves in a broad lifeworld that includes settings on and off the field of play. Given the very different insights into the practice of coaching that emerge from this study, we argue it would be useful for future studies of coaching practice and coach education to extend their focus to take into account coaches' wider lives both on and off the field of play. We also argue for further exploration of coaching by drawing on phenomenological concepts such as care and relationality.

Keywords: *phenomenology and coaching; youth sport; lifeworld; essences*

Introduction

The phenomenon of youth performance coaching is defined by Côté and Gilbert (2009, p. 314) as ‘*an intensive commitment to a preparation program for competition and a planned attempt to influence performance variables*’ by coaches working with young people in specialised sporting environments; e.g. youth national teams. There are few phenomenological accounts of youth performance coaching, although Christensen (2009), and Miller, Cronin and Baker (2015) provide related studies on talent identification. In addition, Cronin and Armour (2013) provide a phenomenological account of community sport coaching. The phenomenological approaches in these studies have shed light on the interpersonal nature of coaching and the reflexive influence of the lifeworld on talent identification and community sport coaching. In effect phenomenology has enabled these researchers to “look at, what we normally look through...to try to give an account of what we are (e.g. a community coach²) and how we experience our practice (e.g. talent identification)” (Martinkova & Parry, 2011 p188).

In sport research, phenomenology has been deemed a particularly promising approach due to the emphasis on subjective lived experience, consideration of the lifeworld, and focus on the *essence* rather than *incidence* of phenomenon (Kerry & Armour, 2000). More specifically, Van Manen (2014, p229) argues that phenomenology provides insight into what is “distinct or unique in a phenomenon” (essence) and does so by examining our “intuitive perceptions” which are of course situated within our ‘given’ context (lifeworld). Indeed, phenomenology has been lauded for providing insightful, evocative, and contextually vivid accounts of diverse sport experiences such as participation in golf (Ravn & Christensen, 2014), running and scuba diving (Allen-Collinson, 2011) and physical education (e.g. Thorburn & Stolz, 2015).

Why an interpretive phenomenological approach to youth performance coaching?

The youth performance coach has an influential position in the lives of young athletes (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Stewart, 2013). It is arguable however that all coaches, and to an extent physical education teachers, are influential people in the lives of young people. For example Taylor, Piper, & Garratt (2014) conclude that the discourse on coaches has tended to

² In Cronin and Armour (2013, p14), the term community coach is used to describe “an individual employed on a full time basis by a state funded organisation to deliver sport coaching in schools and the wider community of an English town”.

portray them either as predators, who enact damage to young people, or as protectors, who develop young people holistically. Nonetheless, it is asserted here that youth performance coaches are particularly worthy of study because;

1. Youth performance coaches spend much more time with athletes than participation coaches (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009).
2. As a direct conduit to sporting excellence, the youth performance coach can be a gatekeeper to elite sporting opportunities and a sporting career, that are likely to be desirable for young athletes (Cushion & Jones, 2006).

Thus, it is important that youth performance coaching practice is informed by a sound body of knowledge that acknowledges the many multi-faceted complexity of practice.

Given the influential role of youth performance coaches, it is not surprising, that there is an abundance of literature *for* youth performance coaching. Indeed, with the aim of improving practice in youth performance coaching, and avoiding the coach as predator metaphor, many authors have sought to recommend specific models *for* coaching practice e.g. Long Term Athlete Development (Bayli, 2001). Unfortunately, coaching studies have often attempted to legislate action without considering the coaching lifeworld or what it means to *be* a youth performance coach. Indeed, for some time now, coaching literature and prescribed practice have been criticised for oversimplification, reductionism, and a failure to recognise the social and cultural influences upon coaching (Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2006). Legislative literature is therefore mostly divorced from the grounded realities of coaching practice as lived by the coaches themselves, and the context in which they exist (Miller, et al., 2015; Miller & Cronin, 2013; Cronin & Armour, 2013).

Consequently, though well meaning, much coaching literature has prescribed action without a thorough understanding of youth performance coaching as a phenomenon. As a result, more recently, ethnomethodological informed literature³ has gathered in-depth perspectives from coaches (e.g. Purdy & Potrac, 2014 ; Thompson, Potrac, & Jones, 2013). Such studies have accounted for the experiences of those involved; i.e. coaches themselves, and shed light on specific coaching incidents. Without a phenomenological approach however, these studies have not sought to move through subjective temporal incidents of coaching to reveal the essence of coaching itself. In effect, they have provided useful and

³ This literature has drawn on a range of sociological authors such as Bourdieu, Foucault, and Goffman to explain coaching practice.

insightful analyses of why incidents in coaching occur, rather than a description of the phenomenon of youth performance coaching itself. Thus for researchers, our understanding of what it is to *be* a coach remains incomplete. Whereas such understandings will always be necessarily partial, at present they are wholly inadequate

For nearly a century now, classic interpretative phenomenological philosophers such as Heidegger (1927/2005), Sartre (1943/1984), and Schutz (1967) have attempted to explain the essential nature of 'being'. Interpretative phenomenology has its roots in the work of Edmund Husserl (1900/1973; 1913/1982) who developed phenomenology as a philosophical discipline that could provide understanding of phenomena. Typically, interpretative phenomenological studies garner rich descriptive experiences of being, e.g. 'being' a Golfer (Ravn & Christensen, 2014). These experiences are described through systematic and conscious consideration in order to identify the primordial constituents of the phenomenon itself, rather than a single, episodic, or causal account of it (Moran, 2000). More specifically, phenomenological researchers direct their consciousness at a phenomenon by adopting a phenomenological attitude that focuses 'on the thing itself' and guards against⁴ a rush to description based on "the effects and assumptions induced by theory, science, concepts, values, polemical discourses, and the taken-for-granted prejudices of common sense in everyday life" (Van Manen, 2014 p16). This premise is the foundation of the vast phenomenological research that has been undertaken and promises much for the study of sport coaching (Cronin & Armour, 2013; Kerry & Armour, 2000). Indeed, a phenomenological approach using such an attitude has revealed that participation coaching in community settings includes much more everyday activity (e.g. relationships with others such as teachers and private sector providers) than hitherto acknowledged by researchers (Cronin and Armour, 2013). That study also revealed that community coaching includes a "delivery mode visible in the public arena and a 'hidden' largely unknown, private world used predominantly for planning and organising" (Cronin and Armour, 2013 p1). This understanding of the coaching lifeworld, suggests that many more insights may be revealed by exploring the everyday experiences and world of coaches. Accordingly, this study focuses on the situated lives of four case study youth performance coaches who exist in a very different coaching context to the coach previously studied in Cronin and Armour (2013). The study seeks to fill a void in the coaching literature by using a phenomenological approach

⁴ Note in this study 'guards against' is akin to managing these influences and does not necessarily equate to discarding them.

(Van Manen 1990), to describe the complex nature of what it means to *be* a youth (12-21 yrs) performance coach. This approach is taken in response to the challenge posed by Jones (2012, p. 3), who called for coaching research to move beyond merely acknowledging the complexity of coaching and to provide readers with ‘better, more insightful accounts of a somewhat homogenous thing called coaching’. In view of the call from Jones, this study will identify the essential constituents of youth performance coaching, and describe the lifeworld of the coaches.

Methodology

Critical reviews in areas such as Health Studies (Brocki & Wearden, 2006) and physical education (Martinkova & Parry, 2011), have illustrated the capacity of phenomenology to provide insightful and passionate accounts of individual lived experience. These reviews have also identified that the quality of phenomenological research can be inconsistent as researchers fail to consider the philosophical underpinnings that inform their work (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Earle, 2010; Martinkova & Parry, 2011). Mindful of this critique and with the aim of establishing trustworthiness and credibility, the key philosophical tenets that inform the Van Manen approach used in this study are made explicit in this section.

Van Manen’s (1990) human science is a hermeneutical phenomenological method. It is phenomenological in that it encourages researchers to direct their consciousness towards the intentional object (in this case coaching), and draws upon description of experience as a means of understanding an object (Finlay, 2009). Human science, similar to typical phenomenological studies, involves the researcher adopting an attitude, which rises above existing understanding and sees the phenomenon ‘afresh’ (Finlay, 2014). Such an attitude is deemed necessary to identify the *essential* rather than *incidental* nature of phenomenon.

The human science method is simultaneously hermeneutic in that researchers are encouraged to consider and manage their pre-conceived ideas to add value to the research process. Thus, although it contains systematic guidelines, the Van Manen approach is cognisant of the researcher in the research process and is open to flexible interpretation (Van Manen, 1990; Van Manen, 2014). Similarly, the interpretative influence of those who experience a phenomenon is embraced during data collection and analysis. Human Science is therefore characterised by a double hermeneutic; i.e. the researcher makes sense of the participant, who makes sense of an experience of a phenomenon in temporal, spatial and

contextual environments. Thus, in keeping with Cronin & Armour (2013), who used a similar process, it is not claimed that the experiences in this study are representative of all coaches. Instead, it is argued that the experiences of these coaches are interesting in their own right because they provide insight into the essence of youth performance coaching as lived by the practitioners, and as interpreted by the researchers. Nonetheless, if the process of identifying essences has been thorough, they should be recognisable as key features of youth performance coaching.

Sample

Phenomenological studies typically involve the recruitment of a small purposeful sample that facilitates in-depth reflective and idiographic accounts of experience (Finlay, 2009).

Consistent with this convention, and following institutional ethical approval and informed consent, four participants with experience of the phenomenon were recruited. All four coaches were engaged in youth performance coaching at the time of the study. They volunteered to be participants by responding to a call to share their experiences over a period of 24 months. A 24 month period was selected in order to capture a range of the temporal, spatial and contextual incidents of youth performance coaching. For example, the coaches described incidents of coaching in preseason, during competition, and post season. All of the coaches were provided with pseudonyms.

- **Jane** (in her 40s) is a practising coach in endurance running and long distance events. She has a wealth of experience including coaching athletes in universities, national teams, international camps, and competitions. She works as a national selector (under 20's), as an individual coach to athletes (under 21's), and as a coach for a national governing body (under 18's, under 20's, and seniors). She has also been an international athlete (retired early 2000s), primary school teacher, and has worked in sport business.
- Although **Julie** (in her 50s) was coaching prior to and during the study she is currently on a break from coaching. Julie is a former distance runner who returned to athletics through her children's participation. She has experience of coaching a range of young people including primary school children, talented adolescent and university runners. She has also worked with national running teams and a governing body in a developmental role dedicated to elite adult sport.

- **Terry**, (soon to turn 70), describes himself as an old school, ‘classically educated’ coach. This refers to his training and years of practice as a physical educator and drama teacher in secondary (high) schools. He has now retired from teaching and works as a coach mentor for a national governing body. Alongside this role and during his years of teaching, Terry has coached young (14 years upwards) athletes in sprint events. In the past, some of Terry’s athletes have performed at the highest levels of national and international competitions; e.g. Olympic Games
- **Dave** (early 30’s) coaches basketball in an inner city school. This involves coaching all the pupils (12-16 year olds) during and after school lessons. In addition to this participation focused role, Dave coaches a club team, a regional team, and a youth national team which involves working with athletes between 12 and 18 years old. Thus, throughout the period of investigation, Dave alternated between coaching basketball to beginners (participation domain) and coaching at a youth European Championship (performance domain).

Role of researchers

Van Manen (1990) urges researchers to acknowledge and record their pre-conceived notions of a phenomenon by keeping a reflective diary. A reflective diary may be reminiscent of the Husserlian concept of bracketing (epoche) but Van Manen (1990) argues that it is impossible to bracket away pre-conceived ideas and that, instead, they must be managed in order to add value to the study. The first author completed the reflective diaries prior to, and after the data collection process. The resulting vignettes identified pre-conceived ideas regarding the role of competition and teaching in coaching. They also identified a concern about the impact of coaching duties upon family life. Undoubtedly, these issues and questions reflected the experiences of the first author who has juggled (with varying degrees of success), coaching activities with a career in academia and a young family. In this sense, the reflective diaries served as a medium for the first author to locate himself ‘in the world’ of the youth performance coach. Thus, the diaries served as data and informed the interview schedule with questions on competition, teaching, and family life.

Data Collection

In addition to the reflective diaries, semi-structured, in-depth interviews took place with each of the four participants. Interviews typically took place at 6-month intervals across a two year

period. In total 12 interviews were conducted. Interviews took place at informal settings and lasted a minimum of 50 and a maximum of 120 minutes. The interviews varied in length as they were collaborative in nature and were in keeping with Kvale (2007) who recommends that interviewers should adopt the role of a traveller being guided through the lifeworld and experiences by their participants. This metaphor is evident in the interview schedule that began with questions reflecting conventional descriptive Husserlian phenomenology and focused consciousness on the phenomenon; e.g. 'What is a typical coaching experience?' and 'What is it like to walk in your shoes?' These questions provided opportunities for participants to describe their experiences and direct the beginning of the interviews. Following this, participants were asked to describe their lifeworld. During this phase of the interview the researcher adopted the role of the 'fool' and asked obvious questions to gather rich description (Muller, 2011). Examples of lifeworld questions included; 'Who is there when you are coaching?'; 'What are their roles?'; 'What do they do?'; 'How are they different to a coach?'; 'Can you describe where you coach?'; 'What is there?'; 'What does it sound like?'; and 'What does the atmosphere feel like?' Each interview focused on describing the experiences of coaches and involved in depth description of specific archetypal coaching moments.

As interviews progressed, questions that reflected a more hermeneutical approach were also posed, such as 'How do you see yourself as a coach?' This resulted in a collaborative discussion in keeping with the concept of an 'inter-view' (Kvale, 2007). It was at this point that the first author asked questions about competition, teaching, and family that were derived from the reflective vignette. Examples included 'How do you judge success as a coach?' and 'Do your family see you coach?' These questions served as a means of creating dialogue between participants and researcher, which facilitated meaning making and led to examination of idiosyncratic coaching experiences (Earle, 2010).

Data Analysis

The first stage of data analysis involved revisiting the reflective diaries, the literature on coaching, and the interview transcripts. Following re-reading and in keeping with human science procedures (Van Manen, 1990, p. 93) selective unique statements that were 'particularly revealing about the phenomenon' were identified in the participants' descriptions and summarised as a constituent theme e.g. the following statement was summarised as 'care for athlete'; forming part of that theme;

I reduced the volume and intensity of the work for the athletes because of what happened last week. They were way to battered and tired for week one. I said, look, if we do the same volume and intensity this week as we did last week, some of you are going to get injured or more likely ill.

Once selected, the constituent themes were subject to two Husserlian procedures, which aimed to move beyond the *appearance* of the phenomenon to the *essence* of coaching for the participants (Van Manen, 1990). Firstly, Horizontalism involved examining data from all four coaches. This procedure had the aim of determining the prevalence, commonality, and full qualities of each constituent theme without creating a hierarchy of data or of coaches' experience. For instance, 'securing regular sport facilities' was a major part of Jane's coaching practice. Once this theme was identified, all other transcripts were examined for related data. Upon examination, it was apparent that the act of securing facilities (negotiating, booking, etc.) was not common to **all** the other coaches, although it is important to note that facilities (e.g. training venues) were.

Secondly, once the constituent themes were examined across all episodes of coaching and fully characterised, Imaginative Variation took place. Imaginative Variation involved considering whether the constituents are an essential feature of coaching as a phenomenon, and in what form, or whether they are merely an incidental occurrence in an episode(s). For instance, the question remained whether 'securing regular sport facilities' is an essential constituent of the phenomenon and could youth performance coaching possibly occur in the absence of coaches performing this role. Using Imaginative Variation it was decided that coaching could occur without the coach actually negotiating and booking facilities; thus 'securing regular sport facilities' was deemed incidental rather than an essential constituent, although facilities were identified as part of the coaching lifeworld.

Once essential constituents were identified, the second author acted as a sounding board to question the role of the first author in the classification of constituents. Thus, with due consideration and following Human Science procedures, three constituents that described a general essence of the phenomenon, as lived by the participants, were eidetically identified (Finlay, 2009).

Findings

In the following composite sections, each of the three constituent 'essences' of youth performance coaching are introduced and briefly discussed. The section also includes a discussion of the coaches' lifeworld that serves to illustrate how the essences manifest themselves in context. This is in keeping with the aim of the paper to identify the essences and describe them in context. Theory that is relevant to the essences and lifeworld will also be identified, although as the paper is largely focused on providing rich contextual description of the essences it is envisaged that each essence will be further problematized in future papers.

Essence 1 – Care

To identify caring as an essential constituent of youth performance coaching is perhaps uncontroversial. Indeed, the act of caring is so inherent to coaching that it often 'goes without saying'. Thus, the proclamation of caring as an essential constituent of coaching, as lived by these coaches, is an attempt to make apparent and explicit, that which is abundant, yet inconspicuous (Inwood, 1997). Jane illustrates the abundance of caring in the following description of her everyday coaching activity;

I will bring chocolate milk to the finish line so the athletes can have it as soon as possible. To be honest, if they had a really bad race I have to mop up tears, or sometimes they are hyper and I have to calm them down. They are either crying or laughing and I deal with that. I don't know why but there are a number of boys in that squad who will always come to me if they are emotionally upset. After I deal and comfort them, I have to get them back to the tent and get them recovered quite quickly. We will do the cool down as soon as we can and I run a bath for them at the hotel. If there is a pool, we get them swimming, and we see to all that kind of stuff for them. In the evening, we don't want them doing much so we get them to put their feet up and rest.

The vignette above provides evidence of a devoted and caring coach and this is consistent with examples from the other coaches in this study and a handful of coaching studies which also describe 'maternal like' devotion and concern for athletes (Annerstedt & Eva-Carin, 2014; Jones, 2015; Jones, 2009). The question remains however as to whether these prevalent accounts of care are incidental or essential to the phenomenon of youth performance coaching. To answer this, the author drew upon the phenomenological process of Imaginative Variation (Dowling, 2007) to consider coaching without care. An activity, which involves directing athletes in sport without care, is certainly possible. It is argued however that, at best, this type of activity is not coaching, but perhaps management, organisation, or an impersonal

and dispassionate form of instruction. At worst, without care, directing young athletes in intense performance sport is potentially harmful and could be considered abuse rather than coaching.

Having acknowledged that caring for athletes is essential to youth performance coaching, it is important to recognise that the coaches also cared *about* their sport. Heidegger (1927/2005) famously declares that 'we are thrown into this world'. By this, Heidegger posited that humans are entwined and embedded within a given social context, which existed before them, and will exist after them (Brook, 2009). Moreover, Heidegger sees care *for* others (Sorge) and concern (care) *about* the world in which we are thrown (Fursorge) as fundamental aspects of being human. Consistent with Heidegger's notions of care and thrownness, the coaches are thrown into a coaching world and are not isolated entities within it. Similarly, the coaches' in this study both cared *for* athletes and are also concerned *about* their sport, fellow coaches, and the coaching world in which they are 'thrown'. This brings both opportunities and distractions for them e.g. coach education work.

I see myself as the last of the old brigade. I am the last of the athletic coaches that were trained as PE teachers in the good old days. When PE teachers were trained at teacher training college and the three year course was very practical and we were taught how to teach PE. If you look at the history of most sports that were steeped in amateurism. The great coaches were PE teachers. I see myself as the end of that, and I have to pass on my experience and my knowledge to as many coaches as possible.

(Terry)

Given the extent that coaches are involved in caring *for* athletes, and caring *about their world*, it seems imperative that care is acknowledged as an essential constituent of youth performance coaching. Care is so embedded in the experiences of these coaches that it should not be perceived as an additional skill or act that they perform. For these coaches, to coach without care (*for and about*), is not to be a coach at all. Indeed, care is an implicit ontological essence of coaching and future research may find much value in exploring the work of Heidegger and considering how coaches care.

Essence 2 - Commitment to educate athletes authentically for corporeal challenges to come

All four coaches in the study, in keeping with the first author's reflective vignettes, saw teaching as a fundamental part of their experiences. This is not surprising given that two (Terry and Jane) are former teachers and one (Dave) currently works in a school. Even the coach with no teaching experience (Julie) placed great value on teaching skills (instruction,

demonstration, behaviour management, planning, and reflecting). Julie argued that through the deployment of these skills, the knowledge of the athlete should eventually *'match and surpass that of the coach'*.

Consistent with this, Terry decreed;

I can honestly say being a PE teacher is a big advantage. When I was a PE teacher I planned every day. I looked at people perform right in front of my eyes. I developed a coach's eye. I reflected on how well they are doing as they were doing it. I had five lessons a day. So there were five coaching sessions a day where I honed my art as a person that gives instructions based upon what I saw. It is an advantage to be a PE teacher because you are honing your art five times a day before you do a coaching session in the evening. Some of the best coaches in any sport have been trained as PE teachers, and that's what helped them become expert coaches.

Interestingly, although very much an advocate of teaching/instruction, Terry and indeed the other coaches, made a distinction between teaching (instruction) and educating authentically;

When you have an inexperienced athlete then you would be in the warm-up area with them and teaching them a lot. Then as they get more experienced, they should go off to warm up on their own. They don't know you are watching them from a distance to check that everything has been done correctly. You feedback to them about how they did later and reflect. That is good coaching practice.

It is bad coaching practice if they become experienced athletes and the coach is still trying to be in there supervising the warm up and interfering. The anxiety, stress, and tension of the coach are heaped upon the athlete. Micro-managing is bad coaching practice. You get situations when you go to major games and the personal coach is in a complete lather, "oh I've got to be in the warm up area, my athlete needs me". No! Your athlete does not need you to instruct. Or yes! You have made the athlete need your instructions. You have failed that athlete! You should have got to the point where the athlete can go to a major games and go through the whole 45 minutes preparation, which is a long time, on their own. You have not prepared them for the loneliness. You are a poor coach.

The above quotation illustrates how Terry cares about the loneliness of competition and both teaches and educates his athletes for the challenges to come. At times, this will require instructional behaviours while at other times, it will require the coach to resist from assisting and 'interfering'. The aim is to ensure that athletes are gently exposed to difficult experiences that will educate for, and inoculate against challenges to come. In this sense, the coaches placed an emphasis not solely on teaching, but primarily on the provision of authentic education wherein the well-rounded athlete is aided by experiencing the 'right challenges' in different settings, at the right time.

An emphasis on personal and independent growth through experience is reminiscent of the work of John Dewey (Dewey, 1916/2011). Like Dewey, the coaches saw the provision of educative experiences as a potentially painful but key part of the long-term growth of the athlete. Once again, this is not to say that the coaches did not value formal teaching, instruction or the rehearsal of skills on the practice field. Rather, they saw teaching sport-specific skills to large groups as just one incidental part of a broader attempt to prepare athletes for the challenge of operating in unfamiliar and dynamic sport contexts. Indeed, as part of their commitment to educate athletes authentically, the coaches also described developing reflective skills among their athletes, facilitating challenging competitive experiences, developing cohesion and motivational climates in training groups, providing classroom sessions on planning, and also discussing a range of social issues such as diet, commercial work and higher education. This education work occurs not just on the field of play but across the varied temporal and spatial interactions between coaches and athletes. Thus, a commitment to educate athletes authentically for difficult challenges to come, pervades the practice and lifeworld (both on/off the field of play) of all four coaches, and is identified as an essence.

Essence 3 – Working with others to achieve a specialised corporeal excellence

As illustrated above, coaches are thrown into the coaching world (Heidegger, 1927/2005). This lifeworld contains other entities including athletes, parents, assistant coaches, performance directors, managers/agents, and administrative staff. While some of these interactions may have been incidental, interaction with a young athlete is essential to youth performance coaching. Youth performance coaching is, therefore, essentially a social activity that focuses on a relation with athletes but also includes relations with other entities. For example, Dave listed staff with whom he has a working relationship:

I have two assistant coaches, performance analyst, and a team manager and a physio. Everybody gets involved in the coaching, because they're all basketball coaches in their own way right - except for the physios and conditioning coach. These guys have been very helpful to me, and I'm trying to develop them as well.

Van Manen (1997, p 104) defines relationality as “the lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space that we share with them”. For Van Manen, relationality is one of four features of being. The others being spatial, temporal, and corporeal. In this study the

relations between coaches and other entities in their lifeworld were mediated by the desire to achieve excellent sporting standards and develop corporeal excellence in athletes;

Over the course of the campaign I'm trying to get us to win. I want us to be a success in Europe. We want to get back to Division A. We are currently in European Division B, which has some very good teams such as the Bosnians but we are trying to get back to Division A. That is the ultimate goal... but I am very aware that I have a key responsibility to develop each and every player, not only for under 16 but for also for GB senior teams.

(Dave, on his aims)

As detailed above, corporeal excellence is externally enabled by staff such as physiotherapists (above) and coaches themselves. Dave also illustrates that corporeal excellence is measured by and in comparison to others (e.g. competition such as 'the Bosnians'ⁱ). Similarly, Jane describes her targets, which are also externally set;

One of our targets is five athletes in the top twenty at the junior world championships. We reached that this year and we reached our target last year as well. There is another target about how many athletes transfer from the talent development programme to elite development, and the other is how many we bring in to the talent development programme.

Working with others to achieve corporeal excellence is an essence because success is made possible and assessed through collaboration with entities including support staff, competitors, coaches themselves, athletes themselves, and parents. In this sense, the 'relationality' of coaches does not occur in isolation from Van Manen's other 'existentials' (spatial, temporal and corporeality). More precisely, the relationality of coaches is reflexively indexed to the development and assessment of athlete corporeality.

What do these essences tell us about the Lifeworld of a youth performance coach?

This section includes a description of the coaches' lifeworld which serves to illustrate how the essences manifest in context. Given the importance of corporeal excellence, it is perhaps inevitable that a core part of the lifeworld of the youth performance coach centres on the field of play (FOP). In the case of the coaches in this study, the FOP consisted of running tracks, cross-country courses/fields, sports halls, gyms, and basketball courts. These environments have been the setting for many previous studies of coaching. In particular, a significant body of work has drawn on coach observation instruments to describe the practice of coaches in

environments such as playing fields and courts (Becker, 2013; Cushion, 2010). It is important to note however, that while training venues are an environment in which coaches care, educate, and work with others to achieve corporeal excellence, they do not constitute the entirety of the lifeworld. Being a coach does not stop with the final whistle at practice or competition. The essence of youth performance coaching (caring, education for future challenges, and working with others for the development of corporal excellence) occurs in varied temporal and spatial environments off the field of play. Terry, for example, illustrates the importance of considering interactions with athletes off the field of play during warm weather training;

Taking athletes abroad for warm weather training is a very stressful time because there is too much reflection. There is too much time on your hands for athlete and coach to talk. When a training session hasn't been as great, you can talk yourself into a crisis. You are probably sharing the same accommodation, so you have instant reflection and it lasts all bloody day. In fact, most breakdowns between coach and athlete relationships happen when you are away warm weather training. You are in each other's space too much. Planes, hotels etc. I always put a health warning on warm weather training when I talk to other coaches. Are you sure you want to do this?

Off the field interaction can be a precarious challenge for coaches and this aspect would benefit from further research and specific coach education. Off the field coaching interactions are also productive sites to care, educate, and develop corporeal excellence. Dave describes how getting to know athletes away from the field of play at a European Basketball Championship was paramount to sporting success;

On the first day we arrived at the European Championship, we sat around in a circle at the hotel, and I said, "Round one; tell each other one thing we don't know". Then I said, "Round two, now say something about you that will make someone laugh. It might make you a little bit vulnerable, but it doesn't matter, we're here together". We went around the group and told some funny stories. Then I said, "Right, round three! We are all going to share a personal battle we have had to overcome in our life". I wanted them to feel a little bit vulnerable in this moment. I led it, and gave them my story, and we went around the circle. The coaches went next, and one talked about his divorce. Then it went on to the players. The captain went first. He told us about his father passing away when he was seven years old and how his life has been a struggle since. Another person talked about his grandfather dying, and he's the one who would come to watch every single game. Tears were shed. Oh, a lad told us about how his brother was beating him up. He started telling us "this is why I don't like it when people shout at me". All I could think was, "Jeez if only we knew this months ago we would have coached him differently." He's the one with the most potential, and I used to really bust his balls.

Anyway, going into the Bronze medal game, which we won, we had the pre-game changing room talk. I said to them, "Lads, two weeks ago we sat in the hotel and we

talked about stuff we've overcome in our lives, challenges we've overcome," I said, "think about those challenges. Some of you are sitting here nervous because there's a promotion game but it's just another challenge that is nowhere near as difficult as the challenges you've had to overcome in your life. So go out there now, and meet this head on like you met that challenge and you'll walk out of here with an easy win." You could feel the energy. Everyone's sitting up straight, ready to go.

Both Terry's and Dave's stories illustrate the richness of the coaching lifeworld beyond the practice or competition venue. Julie also describes how her coaching lifeworld includes activities at home such as reviewing athlete-training diaries;

I looked through training diaries in my own time. I made more work for myself by doing that, but coaching is my passion as well as my (pause) job? Well, I guess, I did view it as a job even though I was not being paid. I wanted to coach as best I could. I do think though as a female coach with children you are making a bit of a rod for your own back. I felt guilty for looking at athletes' training diaries when I should have been cooking supper.

Julie's training diary incident is just one illustration of many across all four coaches and the reflective diaries that show the lifeworld of a coach not only extends beyond training or competition venues but that it might influence other aspects of a coach's life. Dave, for example, describes how coaching permeates his whole life, including his relationships, and is not just a part of his lifeworld but is essentially a part of him.

I married a woman who hated sport and I'm the complete opposite. Basketball is in my heart. I'd never leave basketball. She didn't want to share me with basketball. We went our separate ways because I was involved with the national team at the time and it was a constant battle, every day. Even going out to practice on a Saturday morning was a battle. She couldn't and she didn't understand our culture. She didn't understand our way of life. She had never been exposed to it. You know my mum told me that "this is not the woman for you because she's not accepting you for who you are. If she really loved you, she would not put pressure on you about what is a big part of your life, she will support you and help you do what you truly love".

Off the field coaching environments e.g. staff offices, have previously been identified as an important, yet unseen part of the 'community coaching' lifeworld (Cronin and Armour, 2013). Although, the outcomes in community coaching (fun and health improvements) are very different to the pursuit of corporeal excellence that characterises youth performance coaching, it appears that both community coaches and youth performance coaches inhabit lifeworlds that are broader than the field of play. This is not to say that the off the field environment in community coaching is identical to the lifeworld of youth performance coaches. The entities that inhabit both the community coaching and the youth performance

coaching lifeworld (e.g. parents, fellow staff and technology) are both similar and different. Rather, the point is that like community coaching, youth performance coaching occurs partially in off the field environments (e.g. in cafés and homes) and unfortunately coaching that occurs within that world remains largely unexplored. Indeed, youth performance coaching research has mostly portrayed coaching as a discrete systematic act that occurs within defined training and competition parameters. For Heidegger and fellow phenomenological philosophers, beings (human) are situated amongst other things within a temporal and spatial lifeworld (Moran, 2000). Given this, future studies of ‘being’ a coach should account for a varied temporal and spatial off the field coaching lifeworld.

Conclusion

Using the phenomenological tenet that those best placed to elucidate a phenomenon are those that experience it, this study sought to explore the lived experiences of four case study youth performance coaches. The study builds on a growing body of qualitative accounts that have analysed incidents of coaching, and some work that has moved beyond incidents of coaching to the essence of being a coach (e.g. Cronin and Armour, 2013). The study adds to this literature by identifying youth performance coaching as a caring act, which aspires to educate young people through a commitment to the development of corporeal excellence. This description contains three structural constituents, which following analysis are deemed essential rather than incidental to the phenomenon of youth performance coaching;

- 1) Care
- 2) Commitment to educate athletes authentically for future challenges
- 3) Working with others to achieve specialised corporeal excellence

These essential constituents permeate a variety of temporal and spatial environments inhabited by the coaches. Indeed, the lifeworld of the youth performance coach includes a range of contexts both on and off the field of play; e.g. warm weather camps, homes, cafés, and gyms. Such conclusions may not appear particularly abstruse or rarefied; indeed, they should not appear so if they are essential to the practice of youth performance coaching. Nonetheless, in keeping with the phenomenological aim to make apparent what is usually inconspicuous, this study draws the attention of researchers ‘back to the thing itself’ and

suggests literature (e.g. Heidegger, 1927/2005) and concepts (e.g. relationality) that may shed further light on coaching.

Given this, we urge coaching researchers to follow up on the essences identified here (care, authentic education, and working with others for a specialised corporeal excellence) and to explore these across a broader view of the lifeworld which incorporates both the person and the process of coaching. This route may provide more insightful accounts of coaching as called for by Jones (2012). This approach will not lead to the identification of universal ‘truths’ about coaching, but it may bring us closer to understanding ‘the thing itself’, as lived by coaches themselves (Inwood, 1997). This, in turn, could inform the future design and content of more effective forms of coach education.

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ⁱ This term refers to the equivalent underage international team from Bosnia that also competed at the European Championships.