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 'Sinking and swimming in disability coaching': an autoethnographic account of coaching in a new context

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Article

'Sinking and swimming in disability coaching': an autoethnographic account of coaching in a new context

In terms of achieving wider health and social outcomes, sport coaching promises much for young people with disabilities. Despite this promise, the experiences and practices of those coaches who enter the disability sport arena are underexplored. This is particularly so for coaches who operate in community participation rather than competitive elite environments. Accordingly, this paper uses an autoethnographic approach to explore the experiences of a basketball coach (Colum), who enters a youth club for disabled participants for the first time. Utilising observational data, reflective field notes, and interviews, five relativist vignettes are collaboratively constructed to represent Colum's (a pseudonym) experiences across 12 basketball sessions. The vignettes reveal that the disability and community context disrupted Colum's normative coaching behaviours. An emotional laborious journey is recounted that includes significant lessons, which may impact coaching practitioners, researchers and sport development officers. In addition, the post-sport context (Atkinson, 2010a) is introduced to differentiate the youth club context from Colum's normative sport context. Furthermore, the concepts of liminality and ludic, which are novel to extant coaching literature, are introduced to explain how and why Colum struggled to find structure within the context of a youth club for disabled participants.

Keywords:; disability sport; post-sport; liminal; ludic; Turner

Introduction

At the outset of this study, I (first author) wanted to stay in the 'coaching game' and a disabled sports club seemed to be an 'easy option'. As an academic, I also saw an opportunity to coach and research at the same time. Accordingly, my first journey into disability sport coaching was accompanied by a small group of academic colleagues who were committed to making sense of disability sport coaching. Such an endeavour is

worthwhile because sport coaching does not serve children with disabilities[1] well. For example, children with disabilities are less likely to participate in sporting activities after-school (Frey, Stanish, & Temple, 2008, Rimmer & Rowland, 2008; Sport England, 2016). Worryingly, for some young people with disabilities, sport, physical activity and physical education 'is not a happy place', but one of 'dread, isolation and desires to be 'normal' (Fitzgerald, 2009, p. 3). This situation is particularly remiss because sport and physical activity has been long associated with improving the physical, psychological and social wellbeing of young people with disabilities (Boddy et al. 2015; Caddick & Smith, 2014; Hassan, Dowling, & McConkey, 2014). Nonetheless, young people with disabilities disproportionately do not access sporting opportunities. The causes of this underrepresentation are multidimensional, longitudinal and complex (Braun and Braun, 2015; Grandisson, Tétreault, & Freeman, 2012; English Federation of Disability Sport, 2016). Provision of effective coaching for participants with disabilities, or lack thereof, has however been identified as one contributing factor (Beyer et al. 2008, 2009; Hammond et al. 2014; Rosso, 2016). Indeed, Schliermann, Stolz and Anneken (2014) posit that through their attitudes, social competencies, and wider understanding of sport, coaches can be positive agents in the lives of young people with disabilities. Thus, sport and sport coaching promises much for children with disabilities but currently does not deliver (Rimmer & Rowland, 2008; Townsend, Smith, & Cushion, 2015).

Literature on coaches who work with disabled participants is scarce. Some aspects of coaching practice relevant to disabled coaching, such as a need to understand motivation have been highlighted (e.g. Banack et al., 2011). To date however, research is yet to adequately capture the complex interaction between participants (with impairment), coaches, and wider contextual influences. Rosso (2016, p. 2526) argues that the limited research in this area 'tends to overlook the importance of coaches, volunteers and sport managers'. Similarly, Townsend and Cushion (2015, p. 80) recently declared 'we know very little about coaches who work in disability sport'. This lack of knowledge is even more apparent when considering disability coaching in community settings which, receives even less academic attention than elite Paralympic

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[1] This refers to physical, sensory and intellectual impairment (De Pauw & Gavron, 2005).

coaching (e.g. Banack, et al., 2011; Braye, 2016; Smith, et al., 2016; Taylor, Werthner, Culver, & Callary, 2014). Researchers have subsequently called for other studies to 'bridge the gap between coaching and disability' (Townsend and Cushion, 2015 p. 80).

Disability theory is an extensive research area that has principally adopted two distinct ideologies; the medical and social model. The medical model is underpinned by scientific authority and frames disability as a personal biological problem whereby impairment is perceived as disordered, abnormal, and deficient (Barns & Mercer, 2010). From this perspective the processes of diagnosing, treating, and rehabilitating impairment is normalised. Thus, the medical model attempts to 'fix the problem' and normalise the person back into an ablest society. In a rebuttal to the dominant understanding of the medical model, proponents of the social model have positioned disability as socially constructed (Barnes & Mercer, 2010; Finkelstein, 1980; Oliver, 1996). From this perspective, Hunt (1996, p. 146) writes 'the problem of disability lies not only in the impairment of function and its effects on us individuals but more importantly in our relationship with 'normal' people'. Disability therefore arises from a failure of society's structures to include people with impairments rather than a failure of an individual's capacities. Disability research is however, a mature field that is more complex than the two polarised positions that are briefly presented here. Nonetheless, the two models introduced could help coaching researchers and practitioners point to practices that are discriminatory or conversely emancipatory, but hitherto these models have been rarely linked to sport coaching (Townsend & Cushion, 2015).

The extant chasm between disability theory and coaching research suggests that disability coaching is partially understood at best. For example, how coaching practices and beliefs are challenged and refined when coaches' step into the disability arena and which model they adopt (medical or social) is just one area that coaching research does not currently illuminate. In direct response to this gap, this study provides a grounded account of a basketball coach's experience of working with disabled participants for the first time. This first-hand experience is significant because as identified above there is a) a dearth of research exploring the experiences of coaches in disability sport; and b) coaches are potentially positive influences in the lives of young people with disabilities and may have a profound influence on their socialisation into sport. Moreover, this study makes a significant contribution by exploring disability coaching, not within the

rarefied context of elite sport, but within a popular yet understudied context; the community based disability youth club. Such studies are worthwhile because they provide first-hand reference points for coaches to support their own development. Ultimately, this may lead to enhanced experiences for those who access sport in community recreational settings rather than elite environments. Indeed, it is in these recreational settings that the potential benefits associated with sport participation (e.g. health, social, leisure) may occur for individuals such as those with disabilities.

The Setting

The 'Free Time Youth Club' (a pseudonym) is situated within a small town in the North of England. The town could be characterised as 'in decline', and the population suffers from deprivation in comparison to more affluent areas of the UK. These inequalities manifest themselves in socio-economic indicators that are below the national average in health, employment, and education levels. The youth club is based in a welcoming building that is owned by a local municipal authority, and jointly managed by a community-based charity. During daytime hours (9-5), the building serves as a venue in for advice on housing, jobs, and health issues. Every Thursday night between 7 and 9 pm, the Free Time Youth Club provides opportunities for circa 15 young people to partake in table tennis, pool, computer games, dance, arts, and cooking. These activities occur within the main youth clubroom, which is supervised by parents and two members of staff. The young people have a range of characteristics including mixed ages (12-25) and genders. All the young people who attend have personal and diverse needs and disabilities including various mild learning disabilities, dyspraxia, Down's syndrome, severe epilepsy, and autism. The building contains a small sports hall (3 badminton courts) in which the young people can access coaching in a variety of sports such as football (soccer), basketball, cricket and volleyball.

Towards a Post-sport Coaching Context

Thus far, the Free Time Youth Club has been described with reference to tangible static structures such as buildings. Recent literature has however, argued that coaching contexts are dynamic and reflexively constituted by the actions of individuals (Author 1, 2015; Jones, et al., 2014; Evans, 2017). With this in mind the Free Time Youth Club is also characterised by drawing on Pronger's (1998) concept of 'post-sport': that is, those

contemporary and fluid physical cultures that lie in binary opposition to traditional/modern sport. To elaborate, post-sports refer to activity in those non-mainstream sports, such as parkour, skate boarding and fell running, which have emerged in postmodernity (Atkinson, 2010a; Wheaton, 2013).

Post-sports are said to have grown in line with an increasing disillusionment and subsequent disengagement from institutionalised sports by youth sub-sets in Western nations, as a means of subverting modern rule-bound sports practices. They are characterised by spiritual, physical, and emotional expression through athleticism rather than hierarchical structure, discipline, competition, and performance-based outcomes (Pronger, 1998; Atkinson, 2010a, 2010b). Herein, the authors draw upon the concept of post-sport to frame the 'free-time youth club' as a subaltern coaching context that is set apart from the neoliberal managerialist orthodoxy that prevails within the performance coaching domain (Cassidy, Jones & Potrac, 2016). In so doing, the authors adapt the concept of post-sport to describe an 'alternative-coaching' setting, which eschews the performative coaching genre characterised by competitions (e.g. leagues), institutions (e.g. national governing bodies), and coaching behaviours that are consistent with a view of coaches as powerful 'calculated, dispassionate, and rational' technicians (Nelson et al., 2013, p. 235). In contrast to this normative view, sport at the Free Time Youth Club embraces a more discursive platform of inclusive and informal activity. To clarify, whilst adult staff ensure a safe environment and provide opportunities, the youth club is also characterised by young people casually defining, engaging in, and evaluating their own activities e.g. pool, art, basketball. Thus, the youth club exists in a juxtaposed space that straddles both normative sporting clubs where adults are powerful decision-making influences, alongside informal participant led 'post-sport' contexts that have been typified by areas such as skate parks. As such, the Free Time Youth Club is a novel and valuable setting that provides an opportunity to:

1) Describe what it is like to coach people with disabilities in a community context that is between normative performance sport, and post-sport settings.

2) Critically consider the experiences of a coach, who for the first time, works with children who have disabilities.

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Methodology: a Co-constructed Autoethnography

For some time now, researchers have utilised qualitative approaches to explore sport coaching. For example, coaching research has emphasised first person lived experience through hermeneutical phenomenology (e.g. Author 1, 2015), narrative research (Jones, 2009), and ethnomethods (e.g. Evans, 2017). After considering these approaches, a co-constructed autoethnography, within an interpretivist paradigm[2], was undertaken to examine the lived experience of an individual coach, and to also explore a unique coaching culture in context. Co-constructed autoethnography involves the research team working together to examine the experience of one individual. Specifically, it 'requires the researcher – the situated individual – to write about themselves and then be open to interrogation by their co-author, creating a co-constructed narrative' (Kempster & Iszatt-White, 2013, p. 320). Accordingly, co-constructed autoethnography involves a critical focus on first person lived experience, critical consideration of specific cultural contexts, and representation through first person accounts. In this study, co-constructed autoethnography took place when one person (the first author), called upon others (fellow authors), to help make sense of a personal coaching experience.

An evocative autoethnographic stance, are justified as a methodological choice because it can lead to the production of emotive texts that firstly provide a first-hand perspective on lived experiences. Secondly, these texts can situate lived experiences in rich descriptions of social contexts (Ellis & Rawicki, 2013). When this is achieved, readers may vicariously connect the personal experience of the autoethnographer with their own wider cultural and theoretical insights. For example, Purdy, Potrac and Jones (2008) detailing an individual experience within a culture of elite rowing in an evocative manner, which serves wider audiences as a means of sharing insights into power dynamics in sport. In this journal, similarly insightful analyses of coaching have

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[2] In doing so, we also adopted a social constructionist epistemology which assumes 'disability coaching' is a socially constructed phenomenon (Crotty, 2015).

been derived using autoethnographic approaches e.g. McMahon & Penney (2012), Zehntner & McMahon (2014), and Mills (2015). These authors have used storied forms of writing (graphy), to detail the personal experience of coaches (auto), and the social contexts they inhabit (ethno). Storied forms of autoethnographic writing have therefore been recognised as a useful means of connecting readers to research (Smith, Latimer-Cheung, Tomasone, & Martin Ginis, 2015). Accordingly, autoethnography may be an effective method of understanding first-person experiences of complex phenomenon, and a useful format for sharing sense-making with readers. This rationale is particularly pertinent for those, such as us, who are interested in sport coaching and disability because both phenomena are complex, relational and socially constructed (Jones & Ronglan, 2017; Barnes & Mercer, 2010).

Notwithstanding the arguments for an autoethnographic approach, it is pertinent to recognise that autoethnography has been criticised. Typically, criticisms concern a lack of rigour, analysis and critical reflexivity (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). In response, we employed *co-constructed* autoethnography because this may facilitate additional critical reflexivity of first-hand experiences[3]. More specifically, co-researchers who provide critical questions and dialogue, may help autoethnographers to explore their hitherto unquestioned practices (Ellis & Rawicki, 2013). For example, analysis from one researcher may prompt further discussion, introspection or comments from others (Baker, Zhou, Pizzo, Du, & Funk, 2017). In so doing, co-researchers and autoethnographers can collaboratively and rigorously analyse the everyday 'taken for granted' aspects of lived experience. This approach has some similarities to that of critical friends (Costa & Kallick, 1993), and the process of member reflections (Smith & McGannon, 2017) i.e. a shared critical dialogue. Thus, to greater and lesser extents similar approaches may or may not be present in other individual, subjective and immersed methodologies. Nonetheless, interactions with fellow authors through co-constructed autoethnography may aid the researcher/participant to rigorously derive new knowledge, and thus was accordingly used here (Kempster & Stewart, 2010).

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[3] The conception of rigour here occurs within a relativist ontology and constructionist epistemology that values subjective meaning rather than universal truths, and sees reality as local, social and constructed.

In sum, the co-constructed autoethnography was deemed an appropriate methodology because it; a) builds upon prior qualitative research that produces rich situational descriptions, which help readers to connect with coaching research (Hamilton, Smith, & Worthington, 2008; Smith & Sparkes, 2008; Gilbourne, et al., 2014); b) provides first-hand accounts of experience that have previously been shown to be an effective means of understanding sport coaching (e.g. Purdy, Potrac and Jones, 2008); and c) adds a collaborative means of data collection and analysis (with co-researchers), that can enable autoethnographers to rigorously question their practices and derive new knowledge (Ellis & Rawicki, 2013; Baker, Zhou, Pizzo, Du, & Funk, 2017). For readers, who are further interested in these considerations of co-constructed autoethnography please see Jones, Adams, & Ellis (2016) or Baker, Zhou, Pizzo, Du, & Funk (2017).

Data Collection

Data collection began with the lead author (Colum) detailing prior coaching experiences, current understandings of disability sport, and expectations of the forthcoming experience. These thoughts were explicated through a reflexive dialogue with the second author, in which the position and conventional aspects of Colum's coaching practice were acknowledged and challenged. It is important to clarify key biographical details as a means of transparently informing the reader of factors that may have influenced study (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Accordingly, some salient details of this process are presented below;

The Participant: Colum writes:

> I am a level two qualified coach and have coached youth basketball in competitive local and county contexts for 15 years. My experiences have typically involved coaching male performers as a means to winning competitions and developing skills. In addition to basketball coaching experience, I have a degree in Sport Management (BA.), a Post-Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE), a post-graduate degree in Sport Coaching (MSc.), and at the time of immersion was near completion of a PhD in coaching.

I use knowledge from these courses in my work as a coach educator at a Higher Education Institution where I teach pedagogy and coaching practice to students at undergraduate and postgraduate level. Thus, I brought academic and sport specific knowledge which may not be common to all sport coaches, to the youth club. Nonetheless, I was an able bodied coach, working in disability sport for the first time.

Following the explication of these details, I (Colum) was immersed in the Free Time Youth Club to provide basketball coaching[4]. I fulfilled the role of *total participant* (Gans, 1994) during 12 basketball sessions. During the sessions a member of the youth club staff, Alan (a pseudonym), accompanied me. I was pleased that Alan was in attendance because of my limited experience of working with individuals with disabilities. Rapport was primarily established with Alan in a pre-meeting (Jachyra, Atkinson, & Washiya, 2015), social conversations prior to and after the coaching sessions, and by including Alan in some of the basketball activities; e.g. shooting games. Rapport was also established with some young people by playing games, use of humour and engaging in everyday social conversation; 'How was school today? Did you watch the football last night?' To a degree, trust and acceptance was confirmed after three weeks, when I was invited to the 'pool room' by the children, and to the Christmas Party by the staff. While illustrating a degree of rapport, these invitations simultaneously confirmed that the pool room was the domain of the children, and I would be a guest at the Christmas Party.

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[4] The authors accept that others may argue this type of work and setting is more akin to sport instruction or sport leadership than sport coaching. Nonetheless, the author is a qualified sport coach and was recruited as such by the centre who 'wanted a basketball coach'. Furthermore, we would argue, that meeting the complex, multi-disciplinary needs of children involved in sport is youth participation coaching (Côté, Young, North, & Duffy, 2007) as recognised by the International Council for Coaching Excellence (2012), and would qualify as sport pedagogy (Armour, 2011).

Data Analysis

In co-constructed autoethnography, data analysis is a collaborative process wherein individuals work together to make sense of one individual's experience. It has been likened to a sandwich in which **a)** the primary researcher(s) lays bare their thoughts and experiences (the filling), to co-researcher(s) who **b),** subsequently interrogate the evolving analysis through their theoretical lenses in order to interpret the observed social practice (the bread) (Kempster & Stewart, 2010). In the present study, **a)** was achieved by Colum recording his thoughts, feelings, and field notes about the session. This was done by overtly using a dictaphone, immediately after the session at the side of the basketball court (Jachyra, Atkinson, & Washiya, 2015). In addition, more detailed and contemplative notes were recorded once the researcher left the building. The note taking therefore varied in length up to 45 minutes and involved Colum describing incidents in the sessions, making sense of what just happened, and (re)considering future sessions. The researcher (Colum) therefore juxtaposed roles as both a participant and observer 'in the culture - that is, by taking field notes of cultural happenings, as well as their (the authors) part in and others' engagement, with these happenings' (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 275). In the study, **b)** was achieved through recorded field notes completed by the first author as part of **a)** and by a co-author who observed the coach on two occasions. These notes were transcribed verbatim and disseminated to all the authors (May & Pattillo-McCoy, 2000). Each author independently examined the data and brought their own insight and subjectivities to the process. For example, author three recognised a journey of discovery in the following field notes:

> I didn't feel that we really achieved much in terms of development. I was probably quite nervous about the disability… Nervous about saying the wrong thing and nervous about challenging people too much and how I'd make them feel, nervous a little bit about who would be there … I didn't really enforce the playing expectations that I'd intended. I didn't really enforce the coaching points, I didn't really enforce the knowledge of the rules that I'd intended, which is really, a bit surprising. I'm a bit disappointed in myself.

As a researcher and coach in Paralympic sport he was aware of the potential for disability sport to disrupt normative practices. Author three therefore recognised that Colum's normative coaching practices were being challenged (Depaw & Gravron,

2005) as he attempted to include participants into his way of coaching. In a similar vein, all three other authors interrogated the transcripts, and then discussed the data and shared meanings across three meetings. These meetings resulted in the identification of 12 heuristic commonalities (see column 1 in table 1.). At subsequent meetings, these heuristic commonalities were further scrutinised by asking each other 'do you see what I see' (May & Pattillo-McCoy, 2000, p. 72). Inevitably, this dialogue was informed by the data presented but was also influenced by the contrasting autobiographical subjectivities of each researcher. Thus each researcher questioned the interpretations of the other (Baker, Zhou, Pizzo, Du, & Funk, 2017). Upon completion of the collaborative scrutiny, a series of five pertinent and relativist vignettes that represented the situated experiences of the first author were collectively identified (see column 2 table 1.) (Ellis, 2004; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011).

Insert Table 1 Here

Ethics

Following agreement with the youth club organisation, ethical approval to undertake the activities was gained from an institutional ethics committee. Consistent with the institutional approval, informed consent was sought and gained from the stakeholder organisation. In addition to these formal processes, the researchers were also mindful of ensuring ethical practice outside of normative and audited ethical processes (Hall, 2015). Specifically, an aspirational approach was taken, in which the researchers aspired to ensure justice and beneficence for participants. This was achieved in accordance with the Sport Coach UK code of practice (2016) by including all participants in the youth club; 2) providing coaching services on every occasion; 3) performing services to the best ability of the practitioner by planning and evaluating each session and; 4) ensuring participant autonomy and the right to participate or not to engage in a session.

Due to the relational nature of ethnography, there is a need to be sensitive to ethical interactions of self, others, and the pragmatic situations that occur. Hall (2015) suggests the need to be aware of the power laden scenarios ethnography can produce.

Therefore, the researchers adopted a moral stance to ensure and respect participant dignity, safety and autonomy (Ellis, 2007). This was achieved by, 1) utilising a co-researcher to observe the relationship between the participant and the researcher on two occasions; 2) all sessions were supervised by a member of the youth club staff (Alan); 3) providing anonymity for the participants in this paper through pseudonyms (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011); 4) Recognising the representation of others within the paper as relativist in the data presentation section to come; and 5) utilising the co-authors as a means to consider the ethical representation of others within the article e.g. examining the descriptions of participants (Lapadat 2017). Finally, it is also important to consider the ethics of self (Lapadat, 2017). To that end, a care ethic was ensured by, 1) conducting a preliminary visit wherein Colum observed the environment and participants prior to commencing coaching; and 2) utilising a co-author to observe the sessions on two occasions. In these instances, the second author not only collected field notes but also checked on the ethical relations between those involved including participants, staff and the researcher (Colum); 3) the authorial team held meetings during the study to support the researcher make sense of the experience.

Limitations

The limitations of co-constructed autoethnography are similar to other research framed with an interprevist paradigm and where knowledge is socially constructed. For example, although we do not see subjectivity as automatically a limitation, it is important to acknowledge that the four researchers in this study brought their own education, values and experiences into the interpretations of the phenomena (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). In so doing the authors may add value or obscure findings. These vignettes therefore do not contain a realist and objective truth about coaching participants with a disability in a community setting (Smith & Sparkes, 2008). In fact, co-constructed 'autoethnography is not neutral but selects specific events and ignores others[5] (Hernández, Maria Sancho, Creus, & Montané, 2010, p. 12). The vignettes are creatively constructed to represent an interpreted account of coaching in a youth club at

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[5] For example, other readers may have chosen to emphasise and explore the emotional labour of coaching in this setting.

a specific temporal and spatial context. Generalising from the vignettes should therefore be a cautious endeavour, and thus we urge readers to act as connoisseurs when considering the relevance and applicability of the data and analysis (Sparkes & Smith, 2009). Similarly, although presented in a more formal tone, we also accept that the theoretical discussion is just one subjective lens from which to consider the vignettes. Other perspectives are available to readers. Nonetheless, the vignettes and discussion presented herein are *our* temporal co-constructed and critical account of what we 'experienced, what it meant for us, and how we positioned ourselves' (Hernández, Maria Sancho, Creus, & Montané, 2010, p. 12).

Data Presentation

Over several weeks, the 5 outlined vignettes were (re)drafted through a series of writing and critiquing cycles. During these cycles the authors further collaborated, interrogated, and considered the verisimilitude of the vignettes. The processes of analysing and writing were therefore intertwined with collaborative dialogue (Kempster & Iszatt-White, 2013). This resulted in five vignettes, which shed light on the coach in question, the culture of a disability community club that he experienced, and wider theoretical understanding of disability coaching. VOnce these are addressed then feel free to send it to Dave. ignettes were deemed an appropriate form in which to represent the data. If structured appropriately vignettes have been demonstrated to evoke emotion and prompt consideration of practice (Gilbourne, Jones, & Jordan, 2014; Smith, Latimer-Cheung, Tomasone, & Martin Ginis, 2015). In order to structure the vignettes appropriately, the authors refined the text to elucidate character, scene and plot (Holley & Colyar, 2009). These edits aimed to prompt consideration of readers' own coaching practice. Thus, the vignettes are a creative analytical practice designed to be somewhat towards the evocative end of the spectrum (Ellis & Bochner, 2006).

In the data analysis section that follows the vignettes, a theoretical discussion is provided in order to explore each vignette. This discussion draws upon the work of Turner (1969). We are aware that readers may not be familiar with Turner's work and thus, this is introduced at the beginning of the discussion section. We are also cognisant that readers may struggle to delineate the academic voice from Colum's lived

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experience. To aid readers we follow Sparkes' (2004) practice and title each vignette in *italics*. In the Data Analysis section, we provide a **bold** sub heading for each theoretical discussion that notes the 'academic voices'. Furthermore, we signpost readers to the informal tone of the vignettes and the italics that contain Colum's inner voice which are present in the indented vignettes as directed by Mills (2015). This formatting and style contrasts with the more traditional third person writing in the theoretical discussion and is another delineator of the personal and academic voice.

Vignettes

''I'll teach them'; My constructed coaching norm'

'Yes I am a basketball coach'. My cold winter breath seemed to punctuate the assured response. James, the organiser at the Free Time Youth Club proceeded to provide an enticing opportunity; 'We heard that you are a good basketball coach. Would you like to coach a group of disabled kids at our youth club?'

I was still 'grieving' after recently stepping down as a voluntary coach at my local basketball club. I had been there for 15 years but the demands of full time work, a part-time PhD, and a young family had proved too much. My daughter. Erin, was now two years old and I could not make a commitment to coaching 6-10 hours per week across, 40 weeks of the year, which a team at that level demanded. With a heavy heart, I reluctantly decided to stop coaching. I still missed it though.

'*How hard can it be?*' I mused. I had never coached basketball to disabled participants before, but James was only asking for an hour a week for 10 weeks. I enquired; 'so what kind of disabilities do the guys have? 'A range of sensory and learning disabilities…actually there are a few with physical disabilities too', he replied. He added, 'All they need are basketball activities that develop basic motor skills and get them fit. Just an hour a week, working on the basics'. I did not know much about these disabilities but given the levels I had previously worked at, I thought; '*this is not too much of a challenge. It will help me plug the missing coaching buzz*'. It was not a major time commitment, and I thought I could make a big difference to these young people in a small time. I could fix

some of the motor skill problems. 'Yeah sure James, I look forward to starting in a couple of weeks'. My mind began to wander as I got into my car. Two weeks to plan a 10-week basketball course seemed straightforward. I started to work out the programme in my mind on the motorway home:

My plan will be progressive. I'll introduce some new skills each week. We'll do this through small sided games. They will have fun, but more importantly will learn new skills and get fitter. By the end of the 10 weeks, they will all know how to dribble, pass, and shoot. We will have a competitive game by the end. I know about the social model of disability so it will be fine. We'll use smaller balls for those who need them. We will have a match to finish on the last week. Maybe invite the parents as spectators. Brilliant, this has worked before with primary school children, and it will work again here.

Week 2: Fish Out Of Water One

In my (Colum) mind, I thought:

For the second week running the structure of my session has gone out of the window! All this planning is wasted. My ten-week schedule is already two weeks behind. I am not sure what we will achieve if it keeps going like this? Is there any value in this? Am I just babysitting here? We are nowhere near being able to play a competitive game. I'm so annoyed! How dare they behave this way? I can't believe they come one week and not the next! Even worse, some just leave half-way through the hour, or turn up half-way through the session. Why are they dipping in, and dipping out, of my session? This wouldn't happen at my club! There are no distractions, more commitment, and more engagement at my club. You have to make a choice at our club, you sign up for the season or you don't. Obviously, I want as many people as possible to come but if you turn up, you turn up for the whole session. How else will you get anything valuable out of the session?

Week 4: Fish Out Of Water Two

Ten minutes into the fourth session and a screeching wail comes from Trevor's frail frame. The ball hardly touched him, and so his cry was an unexpected

sound. Trevor is very small, but this was surely an overreaction. Out of duty, I utter the words; 'are you okay, Trev?' I feel my body tense as he makes a beeline towards me. He is 'all snot and tears'. He is upset and emotional. He is getting closer and closer; looking for compassion. I think; 'he is looking for friendly fatherly support'. Now, he is in my space, right in my face. This is uncomfortable because he clearly wants a hug. Child protection courses and horror stories that I have heard come to mind. I recoil and think; *'keep a clear boundary. Comfort him with words. Don't touch! People might see it the wrong way'. Time feels as if it is standing still, 'okay, what do I do now?'* I get him to calm him down by talking to him; 'Oh don't worry. You're a big boy and we can go and get the ball and bounce it hard to get it back'. I cajole him back into the session, but at the same time, I patronised him. *He looks like he is 8, I am acting as if he is 8, but he is actually 14! Is that right, or is it terrible practice?*

Week 8 and 9; Treading Water

Trevor was here again. He is a regular while others are casual attenders. I have a little bit of a relationship with him now. He has been practicing his 'ball handling tricks' during the week. At the end of the session, he was keen to show me his progress. He ran up to me and demonstrated his new skills. After that, we gently played some one on one basketball for three or four minutes. He had a great time and I was joking with him while also letting him win. Then Hassan joined in. We ended up having a good 15 minutes after the session with just three of us playing. There was no structure. We just had 15 minutes of fun, and this seemed to work.

The following week I turned up with a game in mind but without a structured session plan. I've decided, *'hang on, let's not teach. The plan will be abandoned anyway so let's just shoot about, join in, show them how to have fun with a basketball and let's play some killer'.* Killer is a popular basketball shooting game. I grew up playing it in the park with my friends. It is what you play when there is no coach and you can play it for hours. It's actually one of my favourite games and the kids really enjoyed it. In fact, it went really well. I amended it so that some people had to get the ball in the net, some had to hit the ring, and Trevor just had to hit the bottom of the net to score. It worked really well, and

the time went fast. The unstructured 'let's play' approach was great. *It was just like playing with my mates in the park, when I was fourteen. We had no teacher, no teams, no drills, no leagues, but it was fun and it worked here as well.*

Week 10; Starting to Swim

The usual participants did not come to the centre tonight. It was a hot summer evening and they were probably playing outside. I went up to the main club room and there were still seven or eight kids there. They were playing computer games, they were watching TV, listening to music, and playing pool. I cajoled a few down. One was a young kid who I didn't know; Josh. It is the first time I worked with Josh. He has some coordination and behavioural issues. Not in a negative sense, but he struggles to concentrate, and struggles with behavioural boundaries i.e. knowing what is and is not socially acceptable.

Because some new people were down, I thought; *'this is maybe the chance to do something a bit different'.* Trevor was there again and so I asked him what he wanted to do. He said badminton! I set up a couple of badminton nets. It turns out Trevor has played some badminton before and he's quite good at it. Josh, on the other hand, really struggled with hand-eye coordination. As a result, I got him playing one-on-one basketball with another kid. The big ball was much easier for him to catch. Meanwhile, I noticed a few of the kids who had come down were wearing football (soccer) shirts. I lowered another badminton net and got them playing football tennis. In the end, we had three sessions going on for people with very different abilities. It was effective. There were no drills and not even much basketball. It was very much unplanned and was unstructured initially. I turned up expecting to do some four on four basketball, but we ended up with one-person shooting basketballs on their own, two playing badminton, and four playing football tennis.

I've always known this is where we need to get to. As a coach, you need sessions within sessions. Today we had that. We had the sessions within the youth club on computer games and pool that kids could play for a bit. And in the sports hall we had sessions on badminton, basketball, and football tennis that

they could also play. Not everybody did every option but people did the activities that were appropriate for their abilities and when they wanted. It worked really well because they know what works for them and they could choose their activity. As a coach, you'd have to be very skilled to be able to do that week after week with multiple-sports. It requires you to juggle emotions, listen to their voices and give them some ownership; 'What sports do you want to play? Do you want to try this? Do you want to try that?' That was possible tonight because I had a small number of participants. I am not sure I would have done it if we had bigger numbers. I think: *'perhaps a superb disability coach can do it, but I am certainly far from that'*.

Analysing the Data (Academic Voices)

During the data analysis meetings a variety of theoretical explanations of the vignette were shared between the research team. Denison, (2016) argues that if data are presented without accompanying theoretical consideration then an opportunity is missed to connect theory with practice, to derive insight, and to explain the 'why and how', rather than merely account for the 'what, when and who'. Therefore, this discussion will begin by introducing a consensually identified theoretical heuristic which resonated with the research team, and was deemed to add insight, whilst also maintaining the verisimilitude of the vignettes.

For us, the first vignette represent the start of a coach's journey as he 'boundary crosses' from a performance genre to a non-performance almost 'post-sport' orientated context. Atkinson (2010a; 2010b) explains that post-sport experiences immerse participants within liminality inducing environments. Accordingly, this discussion will utilise Victor Turner's (1969; 1974; 1982; 1985) framework of *liminality* to explore Colum's experience. Liminality was originally used within the study of cyclical and obligatory ritual processes that were enacted to promote social stability and establish membership within preliterate, agrarian, and tribal societies. Liminality therefore refers to a tripartite process that an individual is said to transition through as they pass from one stable sociocultural condition to another (Turner, 1974). As Turner (1969) sets out, the process of moving from one (comfortable) condition to another (uncomfortable) context consists of three consecutive phases: separation (pre-liminal), transition (liminal) and reaggregation (post-liminal). Turner's work and liminality as a concept is

appropriate here because it is consistent with the 'journey' of the coach. While this literature is new to coaching research, Turner's work is considered seminal in fields such as education, leisure, events, tourism, theatre, film, television, and more recently sport-for-development contexts (Turner, 1982; Meyer and Land, 2005; St John, 2008; Sterchele and Saint-Blancat, 2015; Author 4, 2017). Such applications of liminality to explore a diverse array of contemporary performance genres has allowed researchers to understand how liminars[6] experience, navigate and habituate to 'troublesome knowledge' which is alien to them. Crucially, Turner (1982) presents sport and play as modern day opportunities for liminality in an increasingly secular world, and as such, the concept enables important insights into how coaching pedagogy is shaped.

Academic Voices: I'll teach them

For the coach, the 'I'll teach them' vignette is consistent with the first stage of liminality (i.e. the preliminal phase), whereby the individual is separated from a context that is familiar to him or her and in which the cultural conditions are known and recurring. The preliminal phase is activated when the coach agrees to take up a short-term coaching role at the youth club. This separation is illustrated in the first vignette whereby he repeatedly highlights his extensive experience of coaching basketball and places emphasis upon the ostensibly advanced 'level' of participant that he has trained in the past. This then sits in contrast to the young disabled participants that he had agreed to coach at the 'Free Time Youth Club', a group with which he had no prior experience. With a medical model of disability in mind, the coach aspired to fix the athletes and then questions, 'how hard can it be?' given the 'abilities' of performer that he had previously worked with.

Once the neophyte is set adrift from their familiar structures, they are said to enter an undifferentiated 'anti-structure' wherein their role and status is ambiguous as they pass through a symbolic domain that has little or none of the attributes of his/her previous or future states (Turner, 1967; 1974). This intervening period is known as the transitional or liminal phase of liminality, and is characterised by feelings of profound

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[6] Those undergoing liminality

uncertainty (Turner, 1969) as described in the vignettes. In the re/aggregation phase (post-liminal/starting to swim) the passage from one social structure to another is consummated as the liminar (passenger) is incorporated into the norms, customs and ethical standards of their new status, and his/her condition becomes stable once more (Turner, 1969). As the subject re-enters the social structure they do so with new knowledge and novel understandings that reshape their identity in a manner that is compatible with their new status in that community. The process of liminality therefore provokes an ontological and epistemic shift in the neophyte. Assimilated with new understandings, the neophyte begins to deconstruct what they know and question the common sense assumptions they once held (Turner, 1977). As Cousin (2006, p. 4) highlights, 'we are what we know' and once liminars learn something new it begins to shape their perspective, and redefines their past, preconceived notions, thought processes, and behaviours.

Academic Voices: Fish out of Water One

Once engaged in coaching at the youth club, the coaches' reflections are indicative of the onset of liminality, marking a separation from the hierarchical, structured and process-orientated practice of coaching that is often said to be culturally and institutionally imbued in practitioners within the realms of mainstream sport (Turner, 1969; Atkinson, 2010a). Immersed within his early coaching sessions, an increasingly frustrated coach reviews his current setting by listing the key precepts of his previous club: 'there are no distractions, more commitment, and more engagement at my club', thus reinforcing the stark contrast in cultural conditions between the two.

Seeing very little improvement in his second week, the coach demonstrates his sense of estrangement from the familiar and stable coaching context with which he is used to, explaining that the behaviour and engagement of the youth club's participants poses a threat to his pre-planned schedule as well as his intentions to introduce competition. At this stage of the programme, the coach reutilises mainstream practices as barometers of participants' 'achievement', and this causes him to internalise a perceived lack of progress. Once again, reflecting a medical model of disability, he considers the fact that he may not be able to 'fix them' in ten weeks. According to Turner's (1967; 1969) conceptualisation of liminality, in this scenario, the coach found himself within anti-structure, a limbo-like space whereby he was 'betwixt and between'

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his immediate expertise and the new knowledge he required to effectively operate within this novel environment. The sporadic engagement of participants appeared to be a key source of Colum's frustration. Such behaviour served to contravene the standards expected of participants' conduct and etiquette within the coaching setting, and was ultimately perceived by the coach as uncommitted and disrespectful towards an authority figure. This once again reflects a medicalised understanding of disability where an authority figure is seen to possess cures and participants should be grateful for this. The participants' disregard of formal coaching structures was therefore counterintuitive to Colum, reinforcing a liminal disconnect with the discipline-specific norms of practice that he valued (Turner, 1967; 1969; 1974). The dynamics at play within this youth club setting therefore provoked both uncertainty and doubt and such feelings are crystallised within the 'week two' vignette when Colum questions, 'is there any value in this? Am I just babysitting here?'

Academic Voices: Fish Out Of Water Two

The coach's liminality is further highlighted in 'week 4', when a young boy, Trevor, hurts himself. This scenario causes anguish for the coach. In this example, the coach infers he is unaccustomed to and uncomfortable with participants openly seeking comfort, tactility, and emotional support from him. In addition, and keenly aware of the public nature of his role, the coach is mindful of child protection procedures which strongly discourage physically comforting young people (Öhman & Quennerstedt, 2016; Piper, 2016). This event makes the coach very uncomfortable to the point that it induces a somatic symptom of emotion whereby he felt his 'body tense'. In a situation characterised by anxiety, the coach consciously instructs himself to '*keep my boundary… don't touch*'. Instead, the coach deflects Trevor's attempts at a hug and opts to verbally 'cajole' him to carry on with the session. Upon reflection, the coach considered his language towards Trevor on this occasion to be 'patronising'. The moment in which the coach managed Trevor's accident caused him to question whether the way he dealt with the situation was correct or 'terrible practice', and marked his transition into the reaggregation or third phase of liminality.

Academic Voices: Treading Water

As the coach moved forward into weeks 8 and 9, he commented that he had developed

somewhat of a rapport with Trevor, and the formation of social relationships are an indicator of the reaggregation phase (Turner, 1982; 1985). The burgeoning relationship with Trevor encouraged the coach to work one-on-one with him, and this served to draw the attention of another participant (Hassan) that saw Trevor having fun with the basketball. This provided an important point of reflection for the coach as he started to develop an understanding of how to reach these children through sports. The key point of feedback relayed to the coach here was that there was 'no structure' in the classical sense to the activity that he, Trevor and Hassan engaged in together. The coach then, in making a decision to 'not teach', proceeded to run the sessions without a plan or only a very loose idea of potential activities to involve the children in. This move demonstrates the de-emphasising of structure and the emphasising of play in a change of tact that would have previously been counter-intuitive to the coach.

The strategy incorporated by the coach to focus upon forms of play reflects a post-sport character that, despite rejecting rule-bound constraints and didactic instruction, stills maintains 'residual' elements of mainstream sports. What is more, to facilitate play, as opposed to sport, engages the 'ludic' essence that Turner applies to his framework of liminality. Deriving from the Latin verb 'ludere' ('to play'), the ludic represents the playful nature of liminality (Turner, 1985). Unrestricted by rules and conventions, and characterised by playful experimentation, opportunities for ludic experiences are often opened up in recreational and sporting milieus and enable individuals to fashion new associations and perspectives towards activities and each other (Turner, 1982; 1985). This is not only enabling of the coach to entice participants to engage with derivative forms of sport, but also for the coach to establish himself with the group, especially when he participates in the play himself. As Turner expounds, ludic moments release participants from their cultural mores, reveal the irrefragable genuineness of human nature, and serve as a potent mechanism of personal and social potentiality (Turner, 1982; 1985; Rowe, 2008). Turner (1982) asserts that a ludic recombination takes place during the playful/sporting milieu, and to this end, by incorporating unstructured play activities and getting involved himself, the coach is able to establish a 'foothold' amongst the group.

Academic Voices: Starting to Swim

Moving into week 10 and the coach has 'found his bearings' at the youth club, as he

exits liminality and embraces a new play-based almost post-sport structure (as opposed to anti-structure) (Turner, 1967; 1969; 1974). Now the coach feels more comfortable in this setting, has a vision about how to move forward, and gives off a sense that he is more established amongst the young participants. Out of the anti-structure then, the coach has been able to piece together a loose workable structure, or at least a formula by which to engage the participants in some form of activity. He has started to swim. Colum has exhibited features of practice more associated with a post-sport setting, as opposed to those akin within mainstream sport. For example, the coach developed an egalitarian approach rather than an authoritarian one, and this caused a shift away from rigid process-orientated drills towards a holistic and socially inclusive play-based activity that gave a level of 'ownership' to the children (Atkinson, 2010a; 2010b). To achieve this, and as observed within post-sport domains, the coach's sessions became cooperative and co-constructed according to participant interests and abilities. In practice, and to cater for the diverse needs of the group, the coach, was able to facilitate several concurrent 'sessions within sessions', and thus internally differentiate the coaching session. The social context was constructed with and by the participants to meet their needs. By this stage, basketball became only a peripheral activity within the coaching sessions. It was just one social construction, which allowed some participants to flourish, while other activities were now incorporated to meet the needs of other participants. As a coach educator, Colum was knowledgeable about the social model of disability and adjusting environments to meet the needs of individuals. It had however, taken a liminal and ludic experience for him to live (to some degree), rather than merely profess, a social model.

Conclusion

This co-constructed autoethnography documents the liminal journey of an experienced sports coach as he delivered a short-term basketball programme to young disabled children for the first time. Initially hamstrung by an established coaching philosophy fashioned in the sphere of performance sport, the incongruence between the coach's 'pre-packaged' expectations of the youth club participants and the reality he discovered, rendered the expert a neophyte at his 'own game'. Both the challenging disabilities and the novel 'post-sport' environment he encountered at the youth club thrust him into a liminal state, an anti-structure wherein he experienced self-doubt, frustration and a

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disconcerting lack of control (Turner, 1969; 1967; 1974). As Atkinson (2010a; 2010b) explains, post-sport environments present liminal zones, and such liminal sites should be enriching to the participant. It is then, the contention of this paper that, via a process of reflexivity and adaptation brought about by the transitional process of liminality, the coach exhibited in his practice characteristics reflecting those within post-sport environments and began a shift from a medical to social model of disability. For Turner (1982), the essence of liminality is that it presents a primary mechanism for the participant to self-reflect and fashion new understandings and new processes. More specifically, the ludic and play elements adopted within the coach's practice presented 'baseline points of social connection for participants', which encouraged co-operation as a catalyst for cohesion and inclusion between the coach and participants (Atkinson, 2010a, p. 113).

It is the argument of this article therefore, that those coach-practitioners working in the field of disability sport, or those transitioning from a mainstream sporting background, should consider adopting what Atkinson (2010a) refers to as a de-territorialised approach. De-territorialisation would involve the coach moving away from imposing a rigid medicalised structure within their practice and re-orientating their expectations away from those culturally mediated by mainstream praxis (Atkinson, 2010). Instead, coaches might seek to embrace a social model whereby they co-construct sport-based activities with disabled children that provide context and audience specific arrangements. In time, this may lead to unique structures and formats of activity with which to provide important sporting opportunities for young children with specific needs. The data and suggestions of this study are thus congruent with Atkinson's (2010a, p. 121) recommendation that athletic and sporting institutions should pay greater attention to the 'diverse nature of people's expectations, uses and preferences for athletics and leisure' to facilitate rather than constrain socially integrative sporting sites. To this end, the authors advocate that coach practitioners operating in disability contexts which are towards post-sport, aim to build an egalitarian and socially inclusive environment together with young people along a social rather than medical model. We recognise that such a suggestion is easy to write, but as Colum's vignettes illustrate, taking the step from medical to socially considered practice is a taxing and challenging emotional labour.

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Column 1: Individually derived categories	Column 2: Co-constructed Narrative Themes
Normative performance narrative	I'll teach them
Neo-liberal approach to coaching (managerialist/positivist)	
Medical model of disability present within coaching	
Journey from rigid/fear/uncomfortable to Freedom/dynamic/responsive	Fish out of water
Post-sport Activity	
Sessions (basketball) within sessions (youth club)	
Experiencing disruption to the norm	
Emotional Labour	Learning to swim
Multidisciplinary needs	
Search for outcomes/motives	
Benefits of the experience	Treading water
Living the social model	