

REFLECTIONS ON TALENT DEVELOPMENT: ROLES, PHILOSOPHIES AND
CONFLICTS

ANDREW BORRIE

A thesis submitted to The University of Gloucestershire in accordance with the
requirements of the degree of Doctor of Science in the School of Sport

January 2021

Word Count 72405

Abstract

This study explored the philosophies have underpinned UK sporting talent development programmes using an autoethnographic approach to critique the researcher's professional career, as it related to the talent development domain. An analytical, rather than evocative, approach was taken to conducting and reporting the autoethnography.

The initial stage of the autoethnography used the systematic review of a large pool of the researcher's documents and work files to stimulate intensive reflection on the researcher's experiences in the worlds of high-performance sport and education. These reflections were subsequently critiqued in relation to literature relating to philosophy, culture and practice relating to talented athletes.

This critique identified a number of problems in the talent domain stemming from the unquestioned primacy of instrumental rationality as a guiding philosophy. Instrumental rationality places the end outcome of a process as being more important than the means to achieve that outcome. Consequently, the growth of a young athlete as a person has become secondary to sports' desire to create elite sport performers.


In looking for solutions to the challenge of instrumental rationality two alternate philosophical perspectives were explored: craftsmanship and elite *Bildung*. Both these perspectives are based on existential approaches to learning and prioritise the personal growth of the learner above specific performance outcomes. Using these as a base a 'excellence literacy was proposed as a new paradigm for talent development.

Excellence literacy proposes that the focus in talent development should be twofold. Firstly, the creation of young athletes who value the process of pursuing excellence above the outcome of that pursuit. Secondly, the development of young athletes who are able to exercise agency in creating their own identity and life narrative.

Declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed..... Date20/1/21.....

DOI: 10.46289/AP4997ZE

Professional Acknowledgements

To Dr Emily Ryall, I cannot thank you enough for walking along with me as I gradually began to understand something of philosophy. Your patience and unwavering support as I wrestled with new methods and a new way of thinking was pivotal in helping me get to the finish line.

To Professor Ros Jennings, your encouragement and support for undertaking an autoethnographic study was invaluable. Without someone in my corner who had been there, done it and believed in autoethnography as a process I am not sure this would have been possible.

Personal Acknowledgements

To my parents, and particularly by Dad, you gave me the love of sport and the love for education and learning that are the driving forces for this thesis. In so many ways it is an expression of the values and perspectives that you taught me and I only wish you were here to share this with me.

To my children, you are all unique and special people and who constantly inspire me to try and make the world a better place. Your belief in me has undoubtedly sustained me in this journey more than you will ever know.

Finally to Helen, my wife, you are simply the foundation for everything I have ever done professionally. I know how hard you worked so I could follow my performance sport ambitions and how much you sacrificed to get me to a place where this research was even possible. I know how much you have supported and believed in me during both attempts to get a doctorate. This is as much your achievement as mine and I will be forever in your debt.

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Glossary of Abbreviations

Term	Definition
ACT	Assistance in Career Transitions (model)
AE	Autoethnography
ATDE	Athletic Talent Development Environment (model)
BOA	British Olympic Association
DC	Dual Career
DCMS	Department of Culture Media and Sport
DCSP	Dual Career Support Practitioners
EIS	English Institute of Sport
ESS	Elite Sport School (Flanders & Germany)
EU	European Union
GEES	Gold in Education and Elite Sport (EU Project)
HACM	Holistic Athlete Career Model
HEA	Holistic Ecological Approach
HEI	Higher Education Institution
LU	Loughborough University
NGB	National Governing Body of Sport
NPM	New Public Management
NSL	Netball Superleague
SE	Sport England
SPLISS	Sport Policy factors Leading to International Sporting Success (study)
TASS	Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme
TID	Talent Identification and Development
TTS	Top Talent Sport school (Netherlands)
UKS	UK Sport

PART 1

In this first Part of the thesis I am establishing the foundations for this work. Firstly, I locate me as a researcher and the path I took to arrive at the aims for my research. Secondly, I outline my research process in some detail. So much autoethnographic work lacks any depth of explanation of the process by which the reflective journey was conducted. In contrast I want the readers of this thesis to be able to interrogate the process I went through to arrive at the analysis and discussion in Parts 2, 3 and 4.

Finally, I want to step sideways and introduce two areas of thinking, existential philosophy and craftsmanship, that had a profound impact on my reflections. These lines of thought had a strong influence on the way that I engaged with both literature and lived experience. They also had a profound influence on my conclusions in Part 4 and therefore require some explanation before a reader engages with Parts 2 and 3.

1. Locating the question and the researcher

This thesis is the product of a professional career that has brought me in to contact with talent systems and talented young athletes at every stage of my evolution as a practitioner. When I decided to undertake a doctorate, I knew it had to relate the development of talent in some way. However, whilst I would like to say that years of experience had left me with a tightly defined question that I wanted to answer that was not the case. My years of experience had left me with many questions and too few answers. Consequently the first challenge that I faced in constructing this work was to work out what I really wanted to understand and how I should approach that issue.

The path to finding answers for those two questions took some time and required much reading and reflection in equal measure. In this first Chapter I want to map out two lines of thinking that ran in parallel for me to arrive at the aims for my research and my choice of methods. These thought processes must be written sequentially but, in reality, they were intertwined.

The first section outlines my thinking as I refined my understanding of literature and practice to arrive at my research aims. The second section describes who I am and outlines my lived experience as it relates to the topic of talent development. I am indivisible from my research therefore some understanding of my location is important to a full understanding of this study.

1.1 Finding the right question

My thesis is the result of an interaction between three areas of knowledge and experience. The first area is talent development in sport and its role in creating future world class athletes. The second area concerns the impact of talent programmes on the lives of the young athletes who are on them. The final area is my professional career. A career that has afforded me many opportunities to experience the complex interaction between talent programmes and young lives.

The thesis started with an intention to create a better understanding of how we design and manage talent programmes. A focus that I felt was both relevant and contemporary given that talent development is a current ‘hot’ topic in the performance domain. With competition for world medals intensifying every effective high performance sport system is underpinned by a sophisticated talent identification and development (TID) system (De Bosscher, Shibli, Westerbeek, & Bottenburg, 2015). Countries are putting increasing level of investment in to their systems for identifying and developing their most talented athletes (Rees et al., 2016). For example, Sport England has made an investment of £85 million over the period 2017-2021 into talent programmes in 43 sports which encompass large numbers of young people. This scale of investment means that ever increasing numbers of young people are being influenced by our talent programmes.

‘there are around 60,000 selected athletes within ETP (England Talent Programmes) and 200,000 aspiring, predominantly young, athletes accessing coaching and competition as part of entry level national governing body talent programmes.’
(Sport England, 2019, p6)

The importance of the search for talent and how we can best nurture it is clear from the extensive literature base that has arisen concerned with growing our understanding of optimal talent development practices. This literature covers peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, reviews, position papers, governing body policies and popular books (Coyle, 2010; Rees et al., 2016; Slot, Timson, & Warr, 2017; Vaeyens, Gullich, Warr, & Philippaerts, 2009). In amongst this work there are multiple models and frameworks for talent development containing both popular wisdom and empirical data.

Within this literature domain researchers have focused attention on three overarching topics; the performer; the environment; practice and training. In terms of the performer many aspects of the individual athlete have been scrutinized to see which ones may predict who has greatest potential for reaching the highest levels of sport. In a comprehensive review of TID literature Rees et al. (2016) found research on individual athlete characteristics that had looked at factors such birthdate, genetics, anthropology, physiology, psychological motivation and personality. Alongside the

person researchers have also explored the influence of environmental issues such as birthplace and available social support systems (Henriksen & Stambulova, 2017; Á. MacNamara & Collins, 2015; Rees et al., 2016). Finally, a significant body of work has focused on practice construction and coaching pedagogy to identify optimal training regimes (Collins & MacNamara, 2018; B. N. Macnamara, Moreau, & Hambrick, 2016; Webb, Collins, & Cruickshank, 2016).

Yet, despite encompassing a hugely varied body of work, the talent literature has caused observers to note

‘the task for researchers, practitioners and policy makers of generating a clear understanding of what is known and what is thought to be true regarding the development of sporting talent is particularly challenging.’
(Rees et al, 2016, p1041)

We know a lot, but it isn’t clear how it all fits together. The literature becomes even more complex when you start to consider the growing body of work concerned with the holistic growth of the young performer. As with research into optimization of training holistic support for young athletes has been considered from both micro and macro perspectives. In terms of macro perspectives overarching models of holistic athlete development have been proposed to guide educational and social support for young performers along with models for support processes (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019; Wylleman & Rosier, 2016) . In relation to the impact of environment researchers have differentiated between types of athlete support system and the impact of different systems on academic and sporting performance (Cartigny, Fletcher, Coupland, & Taylor, 2019; Van Rens, Agnes, & Niels, 2015). At the micro-level researchers have explored several inter-related individual issues including the holistic motivations of young athletes, identity formation and foreclosure and the impact of simultaneously pursuing academic and sporting success on athlete well-being (Aunola, Selänne, Selänne, & Ryba, 2018; Brewer & Petitpas, 2017; Christensen & Sørensen, 2009; Coupland, 2015). To complement these lines of enquiry research has also considered the personal narratives that dominate in performance environment as well as how young athletes construct meaning from their experiences (Douglas & Carless, 2016; Ronkainen, Kavoura, & Ryba, 2016a, 2016b; Ronkainen & Ryba, 2018; Ronkainen &

Ryba, 2019). Not only is there mass of literature on optimizing athletic development there is growing volume of work on aspects of holistic support young performers.

This important yet challenging and varied world is one in which I have spent a considerable proportion of my professional career. When I made a career decision to undertake a professional doctorate it was with an intention to add to the body of knowledge around talent development. Specifically, I wanted to explore how the drive to produce world class athletes can be integrated with the need to provide appropriate holistic support to young athletes. In essence I wanted to engage in research that brought more coherence to the domain.

As I started to refine my understanding of the literature a number things became apparent. Firstly, I was inextricably linked to the literature and could not take a wholly objective view of what I was reading. Every paper I read had resonance with my lived experience within the talent domain and couldn't be analysed from an isolated, detached position. In addition, through the interaction between my experience and the literature I became increasingly aware of two elements in my career. There was a part of my career in which I was focused on high performance sport, including talent development, and a part in which I was an educator. Each of these identities could see the same experience or the same piece of research in quite distinct and sometimes conflicting ways. I came to realise that my understanding of the talent domain was a complex construct woven from the interaction between the literature, both academic and professional, and my experience in performance sport and education.

As my review of the literature evolved, I found that I was increasingly struck by what wasn't discussed more than what was discussed. What became apparent was the absence of any consideration of 'why' in any of the literature around talent systems or programmes. The race to win medals on a world stage was consistently presented as the justification for sport's desire to optimise the athletic development of young performers. Equally when I sought to understand my own position as a practitioner the issue of 'why' was also conspicuous by its absence from much of my work. So much of the work I had done within the talent domain was done to find the best sporting talent so that a sporting system could produce more medallists.

I also found this same absence in the work around holistic support for young athletes. I found myself questioning whether we were trying to provide holistic support to young athletes because we genuinely want them to develop as people or simply to avoid their ‘life’ getting in the way of their development as an athlete? I began to consider critical questions such as ‘if we have never explored why we are creating talent systems then how do we know we are making optimal operational decisions?’ Equally, if we don’t fully understand the ethical frameworks we are applying to our practice then how are we to judge when systems stop treating young athletes appropriately? Such reflections were reinforced by a growing body of work that had started to consider the philosophy underpinning talent development and how young athletes construct meaning from their experience (Aggerholm, 2015; Nesti & Ronkainen, 2020; Ronkainen, 2018). I realized I was not the only person asking some very fundamental questions about sport’s approach to its work with talented, young performers.

Rather than narrow towards a single, specific question for my doctoral research the exploration of the literature evolved my thinking so that I wanted consider talent development more holistically. I wanted to unpack and explore the gaps in the literature and the contradictions in my practice. Furthermore, I wanted to explore literature and practice in a way that considered the ‘why’ of talent development rather than just the ‘how’. I wanted to arrive at a place where I could offer a perspective that might address gaps and resolve tensions in both literature and practice.

Consequently my aim for this work was to

1. explore my experience of talent development with specific reference to the multiple roles I have held within that domain.
2. use this exploration to identify how the talent system might offer all talented young athletes a more coherent and effective developmental experience.
3. to offer the sporting community a perspective on philosophies of talent development that can support the development of better talent systems.

A fourth research aim was developed as my methodological choices crystallised and that will be introduced in Chapter 2.

1.2 Locating ‘me’

Many factors contributed to creating the person I was when I came to start this thesis and many other strands of experience have further refined me during my research journey. Some key influences in my life have occurred in a neat chronological order whilst others have happened to me simultaneously. Consequently, it has not been easy to present who I am in a way that is succinct yet also gives some sense of the integrated whole that has been my professional career. In essence I am responding to the central question of

‘who am I, why am I here ...’
(Steinman, 1993)

1.2.1 Family

I was born into a family where my Dad was passionate about sport. As a young man my dad was a great athlete in the fullest sense of the word excelling in multiple sports. He played soccer at the highest amateur standard in the country to a level where if he was playing now he would possibly in the lower divisions of the Football League. As a family radio and television gave us a sporting ‘fix’ on a weekly basis. Soccer was the mainstay of our armchair spectating but if almost any major sporting event was being broadcast then it was watched, discussed, reflected on and then discussed again in our house. I was never forced into liking sport, but we were always listened to and encouraged if we showed interest or aptitude. Sport was quietly, but very definitely, a central part of my early family life.

Within this environment winning was also seen to be important, my Dad could get really intense when watching something. He wasn’t a magnanimous and even-handed spectator either, he clearly wanted his ‘team’ or player to win. As children we weren’t ever told that winning was important, in fact we were always told the opposite, but my Dad’s behaviour told us another story. Sport was intense, winning mattered and it wasn’t just about the joy of competing.

1.2.2 Education

For my secondary education I attended a large grammar school that had unspoken aspirations to be a public school. Boys only, heavy on tradition (a 100-year history), high academic standards and big on sport.

Academically I was reasonably gifted, above average in terms of the school but not a high-flyer. I simply didn't have the discipline or desire to study effectively. The most important part of my secondary education was the school sport. Sport was a major part of school life and representative sport for the school was taken very, very seriously. The school had a huge tradition of pupils gaining representative honours (county, region or country) whilst at school or in later life and we were all made very aware that current pupils were expected to admire and emulate their predecessors. I can remember one incident where an exam for my whole year group was moved so that I, along with two friends, could be available for the School's 1XI hockey match against an 'Old Boys' team.

The ambience of my secondary school life just reinforced and cemented my perception that sport was important and that winning at sport was important. It wasn't a school in which taking part was the most important thing, playing to win was important. If you lost then you were expected to lose with grace, but you had to play to win. The attitudes towards sport in the school fanned the flames of my desire to play sport and be a success. Every sporting attitude and thought that my dad had started to develop in me at home was taken on and taken further by my school life. In the seven years I spent at school competing at sport became the centre of my life.

So, moving on to University presented a challenge. Firstly, I wasn't going to get the grades I ought to have been getting because I was too busy playing sport. I was a truly lousy academic, I simply couldn't be bothered. Secondly, whilst there was an expectation I would go to University, there was nothing I wanted to study other than sport. However, the fly in the ointment here was, having made a choice to study sport, I was determined not to become a PE teacher. My dad was a headmaster, my mum had been a teacher, my sister was doing a PGCE and teachers weren't my favourite section of the human race. This meant that PE courses were out and that rather narrowed my

choices. I arrived at a decision to do a Sport Science course by eliminating alternatives rather than by actively choosing it and that set the course for the rest of my life.

I had no idea when I started studying Sport Science that I was becoming involved with it right at the start of its birth as a profession. When I started my studies there were only three sport science programmes in the whole country but for the first time I had found a subject that inspired me academically. I didn't become a model student overnight, but I enjoyed the reading and, above all, I enjoyed the way that we were taught to think about sport.

Passionate lecturing staff gave the course substance and meaning so I came to love the subject and I still do. The staff also focused massively on applied sport science and changing performance. How do we make someone move faster, score more frequently, develop a better skill base more effectively? These questions fascinated me and I related to them in a way that I hadn't related to academic study before. The course was also really strong on developing interdisciplinary thinking especially in final year. I found I was good at starting with a problem and working back to how different disciplines could relate to that topic rather than starting with the discipline and taking a restricted look at a problem from one perspective. The course and its focus on interdisciplinary applied science laid the foundation for my career.

What I wasn't aware of at the time was that the course unquestioningly adopted an ontological and epistemological position that was positivist. Research methods was solid positivism with nothing but quantitative method and statistical analysis, numbers ruled. So when I graduated I was a positivist sport scientist with a leaning towards applied, inter-disciplinary work. My scientific skills were solid but the emphasis in my thinking was still on the word 'sport' not 'science'.

1.2.3 Hockey

To conclude any reflection on my education without including hockey as a separate topic would be incomplete. My love of sport meant that I played anything and everything but when I went to secondary school I encountered hockey for the first time. Suddenly from being enthusiastic and of moderate ability I became a 'talent'. I

found that not only was I good enough to be in the school team I was one of the strongest players. Hockey was an opportunity to fulfil the sporting ambitions that had been growing from a very early age.

From my first school match to my last, seven years later, whenever I was available I was in the school team. All the way through school my hockey ability gave me status in my year group, I was respected for what I could do on the pitch. I had the respect of both peers and teachers for what I could do with a stick in my hand. Playing hockey gave me a chance to compete and win within a sporting arena.

Maybe that was why the other side of playing hockey hurt so much. The ‘other side’ was all about representative honours. The best players from any school team invariably, well almost invariably, went on to play representatively for the county. I wanted to be on that ladder, I wanted the chance to compete at the highest level I could but it never happened. Every year I was asked to go to county trials, every year I made it to the final selection match, every year I failed to make the county squad. The feelings of hurt and the disappointment were immense and each year the fall hurt even more.

All in all hockey at school was a bittersweet experience. Hockey gave me self-respect, peer group respect and status within my local world. I could compete and win at school level, but I couldn’t break out of that world to compete on a wider sporting stage.

When I moved on to HE I moved up a level as a player. The attitude towards sport at University was even more intense than it was at school. Our University teams were always strong and nine of my college contemporaries went on to win full international honours. I trained every day with stick and ball, the team trained three times each week and played twice at a standard way above anything I had experienced at school.

At the end of my first year in University I was a much better player and playing at a higher standard than the county schoolboys stuff that I had aspired to at school.

Confirmation of my ‘talent’ came when I was suddenly asked to play for the British Colleges team. The BC team played against senior county sides and even stronger regional teams (e.g. the North Division) but it was ever part of hockey’s performance

pathway. I found myself playing two or three matches against teams with current senior GB internationals in them and finding I could hold my own, just about!

University hockey reaffirmed for me that I was technically a good hockey player. It also reinforced how much competing at the highest level in a sport was something I enjoyed immensely. I was 22 when I left college and I never played seriously again. I had a young family soon after University and life didn't afford me the opportunity to train multiple times each week. Nevertheless, my love affair with the sport has continued and made a significant reappearance in my professional life further down the road.

1.2.4 Early professional career (1989-2003)

I graduated knowing that I wanted to be involved professionally in sport and if possible, in high performance sport. I hadn't quite made it as a performer so I wanted to see if I could work at the highest level as a practitioner. After a short period outside education and sport in 1989 I was offered a Project Assistant role (part-time) on a programme to support the England netball squad as part of the governments newly formed Sport Science Support Programme (SSSP). This was the UK's first ever public investment in sport science support for national squads. My role was to provide physiological support to the England netball team in terms of fitness assessment and training programmes. At the time I had no idea that this was the start of an involvement in netball that would last for another nineteen years. Soon after I took on the netball role I was offered a further part-time role on a second SSSP project so I had become, arguably, the first full-time applied sport scientist in the UK. Through this work I spent hours and hours at high performance coaching and training sessions absorbing the culture and observing coaches, players and fellow practitioners.

With the coming of the National Lottery in the early 1990s the SSSP was replaced by the English Institute of Sport (EIS) and I moved to start a lecturing career at Liverpool John Moores University (formerly Liverpool Polytechnic). In Liverpool I led the Coaching and Applied Sport Science strand of their programmes so all my teaching was focused on elite performance and high-performance coaching. Whilst I was no longer working full-time in support of elite athletes I transitioned in to working as an

applied sport science consultant on a range of EIS projects in elite sport. My experience of working in elite sport rapidly expanded and I found myself providing support in professional football as well as multiple lottery funded performance programmes.

In relation to this thesis one important aspect of my extended practice was a deepening engagement with junior rather than senior national squads. Within 1990's I worked in eight different sports with junior international performers from U-17 through to U-21 age groups. This area of expertise was recognized nationally and was an important factor in my later move to Loughborough University.

Alongside my lecturing and sport science consultancy I was also able to build another strand of practice in coach education. Whilst working on the two SSSP projects I became closely involved with the new National Coaching Foundation (NCF), delivering coach education courses within the North West. I was therefore constantly being exposed to sceptical, hard-nosed volunteer coaches who had little time for 'poncy' sport scientists so I was always being grounded in the real world of messy practice. Over time as I became more experienced as an applied sport scientist and coach educator I was offered opportunities to edit, and eventually author, new coach education texts and courses. This led to more opportunity to research, design and deliver coach education programmes within elite sport. I had the opportunity to meet and discuss high performance sport with many national coaches and really extend my understanding of that domain. I was exposed to a strong critical challenge from coaches who were confident in their experiential rather than formal knowledge base. The dialogue that underpinned so much of my coach education work allowed me to learn a massive amount about the world of high-performance coaching. Coach education knocked the rough edges off the subtle 'superiority' that I had developed through my sport science training.

When I stand back and look at my professional development during the 1980's and 90s I see so many elements of experience interwoven to make a whole. My earliest familial experiences engendered a deep love of sporting competition. My hockey experiences magnified that passion and focused it on wanting to be engaged at the highest levels of

competition. My decision to study sport in an HE context meant I was able to be part of the birth of applied sport science in the UK. My unfulfilled yearning to achieve as a performer laid the basis for an academic focus on elite sport as an area of work and study. Advances in national sporting investment then gave me an opportunity to develop as a practitioner and work at the highest levels of sport. Alongside this coach education work extended my understanding of performance sport. Finally, opportunities to work with talented young athletes allowed me to develop an expertise in that area and laid the platform for a critical professional move in 2003.

1.2.5 Later career (2003-2018)

The most significant single shift in my career occurred in 2003 when I moved from LJMU to take up the role of Head of High Performance at Loughborough University. Loughborough was, and still is, the leading sport University in the country with a world-wide reputation for producing great sport performers. The role I took was completely new and was an extension of Loughborough's ambition to stay ahead of other Universities in producing future generations of Olympic athletes.

I took the role because it afforded me the opportunity to run talent development programmes in their entirety rather than just be a contributor to them. I had a team of high-performance coaches, sport science practitioners and administrative staff working for me and collectively we aimed to produce Loughborough teams and athletes who could compete at the highest levels nationally and internationally. We ran performance programmes in ten sports ranging from our swimming programme, that produced a medallist at every World Championships over a decade, to soccer, where we were providing a safety net for young players rejected from professional academies.

A second facet of the role was that I was also responsible for managing the interface between the elite student-athletes and their academic departments. Not only did the student-athletes have to succeed in sport there was an expectation that they did so whilst matching other University students in terms of academic performance. My academic background was one of the reasons I was selected for the role. I understood academia and I understood the demands of educating young people. I was able in my tenure at LU to design and initiate far more extensive programmes of lifestyle support

for our best athletes and I think this was one of my major achievements when I was there.

The final part of the role related to Loughborough's position as an elite training venue for many full-time lottery funded athletes. The University campus hosted elite training centres for a wide range of sports including, amongst others, the England Cricket Board (ECB), British Athletics (*BA*), British Swimming (BS), British Gymnastics (BG), England and GB Hockey (GBH) and England Netball (EN). In addition we hosted one of the three main English Institute of Sport (EIS) training venues. I was responsible for assisting the main Director of Sport to manage those relationships and the interface between national and University high performance programmes.

The nature of the role and the place meant that I was working in an environment that was at the centre of national high performance sport policy. I was running talent programmes that interfaced in a very direct way with NGB talent pathways but had the luxury of being independent of them at the same time. Every shift in policy around Olympic performance and talent programmes had an impact on Loughborough. Consequently I was constantly interacting with a wide range of Performance Directors, EIS Managers and UK Sport (UKS) senior staff.

The role also created ancillary opportunities and experiences that have contributed to my understanding of issues in talent development. The best examples of this come from the work I was doing in netball and hockey.

In netball from 2003 to 2008 I was still working with senior England squad as an applied sport scientist. At the same time the sport started Netball Superleague as a competition and ran a tender process to find eight NSL franchises. The opportunity to get TV exposure from NSL meant I was asked by LU to bid for and then, once successful, run a franchise. This brought me in to contact with a wider number of staff at EN and eventually lead to me being asked to join the Board of Directors for the NGB. This was my first Board position.

Within hockey Loughborough was running two National League teams one of which, the men's team, was ranked in the top four in the Premiership and competing in the

EuroHockey League¹. At the same time Loughborough was selected as one of GB Hockey's talent centres therefore I was interacting with the Performance Director and other senior executives on a number of issues. When my tenure on the EN Board was coming to an end I applied for and was offered a position on the Board of GB Hockey. In both hockey and netball I wore several different hats simultaneously and it was during this period that I began to see conflict between my role supporting young people as students, my work developing talent programmes and the perspectives of an NGB Board member.

In 2015 I made the difficult decision to leave behind the amazing, varied and stimulating world of Loughborough University and seek other professional challenges. The core of the Loughborough role, the University's own performance programmes, meant that my work had been publicly critiqued whenever we competed. After completing three consecutive four-year performance cycles I had got tired of being judged in this way. I had also reached a point where I was questioning the purpose in what I was supposed to be achieving in my work. As I left LU I had reached the point where this thesis began ...

1.2.6 Summarising myself: multiple identities

After graduating as a sport scientist in the mid 80's I followed a career path that led me to something of a performance related 'mountain top' in 2015. I was running the largest and most successful multi-sport talent programme in the country that was producing more international athletes than ever before. I was also involved in shaping the performance strategy for whole sports. Yet I had also reached a point where I was increasingly aware of feeling conflicted around how we ought to be developing our most talented young athletes.

The part of me that was grounded in education had become increasingly uncomfortable at the impact of NGB performance programmes on the lives of many young athletes. I saw too many student-athletes who seemed damaged in some way by their

¹ Equivalent to the European Champions League in soccer

performance experience. Sadly this is now something that you see being reported on in the national media as athletes come forward to talk of their mental health challenges (Pirks, McKenna, & Falkingham, 2020). However, at the same time as recognizing the potential harm that can come from being on a performance pathway, I also witnessed the joy and passion that young athletes can exhibit when they compete. I saw talented young sports people blossom with the right coaching and the right support. I saw personal growth that stood in marked contrast to the way that we discussed talent systems round the board table. In the boardroom we talked about strategy, how we might systemically identify raw talent and how we might accelerate their development. All of it discussed in impersonal and detached tones using the rhetoric of business management. Yet at the time I was involved in any strategic discussions it felt appropriate given the systems we were creating were aimed at optimizing athletic potential and/or winning international medals.

In short, I came to recognize that there were two versions of me. There was a ‘Performance Self’ and an ‘Educator Self’ as summarized in Table 1.1.1 In addition to these two selves my career has also left me with two ways of thinking. The part of me that grew through my studies and my early career in Liverpool consistently wants to think in an academic and scholarly way. I want to critique what I know; analyse whatever data I have and build models to explain whatever phenomena concerns me. In comparison I also find myself reaching for the mindset of the experienced practitioner. I am concerned with what will work in practice, what craft knowledge is available to me and how can I build a meaningful, holistic understanding of a phenomena that can guide my practice. Both these perspectives can be applied equally to both my Performance Self and Educator Self, so my perception of the world is determined by a two-by-two matrix (Figure 1.1).

Table 1.1 My two 'selves' as developed through my career

<p><i>Performance 'Self'</i></p>	<p>A composite self in which I was concerned with maximizing athlete performance with the aim of supporting the athlete to compete successfully at the highest possible level of competition. This identity is formed from the values, attitudes and beliefs that conditioned my thinking in my roles as</p> <p>Applied sport science practitioner; Performance manager NGB Board Director</p> <p>These roles differ in terms of the balance of 'hands on' interface with performers, direct management performance programmes and setting high performance strategy. However, in all these roles the target was the same. As such it was more appropriate to see them as a manifestation of the same identity but in different contexts. or young people and adults at either secondary or tertiary education institutions in the UK.</p>
<p><i>Educator</i></p>	<p>The identity I assumed when working with individuals in either formal (HE) or informal (Coach Education) settings. This identity is formed from the values, attitudes and beliefs that determined my approach to the development of the individual. It was an approach in which I was primarily concerned with supporting the individual's growth as a whole person through their educational experience.</p>



Figure 1.1 A matrix representing my world views

The recognition of the selves in Figure 1.1 was a naturally occurring process as I reflected on my experiences. However, having retrospectively considered the issue of self conceptually, I find I can now situate my thinking within a clearer conceptual framework.

Our concepts of self are not fixed but are dynamic and malleable (Emery, Walsh, & Slotter, 2015; Krol, Raz, Bartz, Olson, & Theriault, 2020). It is possible for individuals to hold multiple concepts of self simultaneously (Pilarska, 2016) and I now recognise that in framing this research I was dealing with issues of self concept differentiation (SCD), self concept clarity (SCC) and self concept continuity (SCon).

SCD was at the centre of my questioning regarding my approach to talent development given that I had different concepts of self relating to different social roles. Self differentiation is not negative, in and of itself, and can be a useful psychological coping strategy when confronted with complex social situations. SCD can be positive provided that the differing views of self can be defined and integrated to establish an overall sense of identity. Where this isn't possible SCD can become the basis for feelings of discomfort and, if sufficiently pronounced, impact negatively on mental health.

The impact of SCD is closely linked to the clarity an individual holds regarding each of their selves. Self concept clarity (SCC) has been defined as a concept of self that is clear, confidently defined, internally consistent and temporally stable (Pilarska, 2016). If a person has high SCC around the selves that they perceive then SCD can be a positive in dealing with multiple social environments. However, where SCC is weaker SCD become increasingly uncomfortable for a person.

In addition to SCD and SCC there is also the issue of self concept continuity (SCon) which refers to the extent to which there is a sense of connection between an individuals past and present (Jiang, Chen, & Sedikides, 2020). The stability of SCC overtime gives an individual a sense of continuity in their perception of self. As human beings we seek to make sense of our identity and assimilate past identity with current experience of self. Such continuity is important to ensure consistent and effective functioning in our social world(s).

I now see that the nature of my evolution as a practitioner led quite naturally to a level of SCD. The decision to pursue my research process was a response to a partial loss of SCC which led to SCD becoming increasingly less comfortable. It has also been a process in which I have sought to attain SCon by being in a position to reconcile the evolution of self-identity with my current perspectives on practice in talent development.

1.3 Framing the question

As I hope you may now see I cannot separate myself from my research since issues of self-identity are intertwined with a desire to research talent development practices. The research aims I have arrived at are a synthesis of an academic review of the literature, craft knowledge that comes from professional practice and lived experience and concepts of self. The aims address what I see as being gaps in the literature as well as confusion within my own practice. It is not possible to say whether I became aware of one before the other and in many ways that is a redundant question. Each aim is simultaneously both academic and professionally oriented, one cannot exist in the same form without the other.

My research aims;-

1. explore my experience of talent development with specific reference to the multiple roles I have held within that domain
2. use this exploration to identify how the talent system might offer all talented young athletes a more coherent and effective developmental experience.
3. to offer the sporting community a perspective on philosophies of talent development that can support the development of better talent systems.

In the following Chapter I consider my choice of methodology in some detail. This in turn helps to explain the atypical structure of the remainder of the thesis.

2. Methodology

Chapter 1 outlined the interaction of self and literature in defining my research aims. In this Chapter I intend to outline how that same interaction determined epistemology, ontology and methodological choices. In addition, I attempt to explain the research process in some detail, something possibly lacking in other research using similar methods.

2.1 Epistemology and ontology

In terms of epistemology and ontology the most appropriate position for me to adopt in constructing my research was to take an interpretive-constructivist approach. I adopted this position not simply because it allows for my choice of methods but because it acknowledges the pivotal position of the researcher in the research process.

Within the social sciences during the latter half of the twentieth century there has been a movement away from scientific enquiry being dominated by positivist epistemological and ontological positions. The nature of the social science research process and the role of the researcher within social research have been increasingly questioned leading to what was termed the dual ‘crises of representation and legitimation’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994).

The nature of social interaction is such that the application of positivist methods to understand and explain the social world is limited. Our personal interactions with those around us and the organisations and systems that we inhabit are determined by our own individual perspectives on the world. Our personal understanding of experience and events is individually constructed from the interaction between what we perceive and our own emotional, mental and social beliefs and constructs. As such there is no singular social reality that can be uncovered, no social ‘truth’ that holds true for all (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis, 2015; Denzin, 2014; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011).

If one accepts that there is no ‘universal’ social truth then science, in relation to social phenomena, can only seek to understand and explore a person’s interpretation of their

world and their social action within that world. We cannot seek to objectively uncover a social reality in which there are laws and forces that impact equally on all people and all interactions. This is the fundamental epistemological thinking that is reflected in a range of intellectual positions such as hermeneutics, phenomenology and symbolic interactionism. Taken as a whole it can be argued that all these positions take an interpretive stance towards scientific study of social phenomena.

In considering an appropriate epistemological position for research into TID you could argue that the physical training and skill acquisition aspect of TID can be legitimately explored using natural sciences methods within a positivist epistemology. If we see the human body as being a vehicle to produce skilled movement then it could be reasonably argued that naturalistic methods are justified. However, when you want to look more deeply at the philosophies and belief systems underpinning TID then the adoption of an interpretive epistemology is more appropriate. The values and beliefs that condition the behaviours of athletes, coaches and practitioners are a function of their personal interpretations of their experiences. Consequently, stakeholder behaviour is the product of, and a response to, personal social interpretation of the talent development environment surrounding each individual. To meaningfully explore such perspectives requires the adoption of an interpretive epistemology.

Adoption of this epistemological position has subsequent implications for the most appropriate ontological approaches to talent research. Within talent development environments all stakeholders are simultaneously engaged in collaboratively constructing both shared and personal understandings of their experiences. All talent environments are therefore social constructions that are not separate from, nor can they be understood in isolation from, the people engaged in those environments. Hence the adoption of an interpretive-constructivist approach fits with the nature of the issues being studied. However, it would be misleading of me to suggest that my epistemological and ontological positions were determined prior to any consideration of methods. Epistemology and ontology were explored in parallel with a growing understanding of my position as a researcher within this research process.

As Chapter 1 showed my personal life journey has intersected with the issue of talent development in multiple ways over an extended period and I was not independent of the topic I wished to study. This became increasingly apparent to me as I began to engage with multiple lines of academic and professional literature regarding talent development. Irrespective of whether I was reading around optimal talent identification strategies or models of holistic personal development my responses were a function of me as an individual. My personal experiences were either consciously or sub-consciously always being compared to the research being presented to me. My understanding of any sub-topic within the talent domain was both a personal and an objective analytical construction. In addition, the presence of the multiple 'selves' identified in created multiple, and sometimes conflicting, interpretations of the same research. It therefore became apparent that my choice of research method had to account for not only my personal presence in the research process but the existence of multiple perspectives within a single researcher.

Given this position it was simply not possible to sustain a position where I could argue that I was an independent researcher. Had I attempted to adopt such a position and fashion an investigation that sought to place me outside the process I would have been denying the reality of my experience. Any research I conduct in this domain will be a function of my personal biases, beliefs and experiences. As I engaged with the literature I became aware that my methods decision had to allow me to write myself 'in' to the thesis not seek to place me at its periphery. This recognition reinforced my decision to adopt an interpretive-constructivist epistemology and ontology.

2.2 Selection of methods

By accepting that I was an active participant in creating my research findings I had to select methods that allowed me to be present in the research process and subsequent reporting. Continued reflections on the interaction between literature, practice and personal experience drew my attention to the potential of autoethnography (AE) as a research method for exploring the critical questions identified at the end of Chapter 1.

Autoethnography is method whereby the self (auto) is placed into the study (graphy) of a specific cultural phenomena (ethno). Autoethnography has been variously described as

‘the use of personal experience to examine and/or critique cultural experience’.

(Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2016, p22)

or

‘a reflexive means by which the researcher-practitioner consciously embeds himself or herself amidst theory and practice and by way of an intimate autobiographic account explicates a phenomenon under investigation’.

(McIlveen, 2008, p13)

The central theme in all descriptions of AE is an interaction between the personal and the cultural. It is an approach to study that foregrounds the researcher’s relationship to the issues or environment being explored and therefore accounts for my longitudinal interaction with the field of talent development. As such it is ideally placed as a method to support the research ambitions of a practitioner who wishes to critique a key area of their practice. However, I think it would be misleading if I presented AE as a purely logical choice of method arising from considered deliberation of epistemology, ontology and the crises of representation and legitimation. Not only does AE allows the researcher to express self within the research it also affords them the opportunity to come to know self more fully. If I accept that as a researcher I can’t detach myself from the topic being studied then neither can I detach myself from my choice of method. Having completed this thesis I am now aware that I was drawn to AE as much by the opportunity to explore myself as the chance to explore the topic.

I came to this realisation through reading Lake’s reflections on the process of completing his doctoral thesis which examined his work as a medical educator and General Practitioner (Lake, 2015). Lake cited the words of St Augustine to express something of his reasoning for using AE

“People travel to wonder at the height of the mountains; at the huge waves of the seas; at the long course of the rivers; at the vast compass

of the ocean; at the circular motion of the stars; and yet they pass themselves without wondering.”
(Lake, 2015, p681 citing St Augustine)

Reading this quote stimulated me to recall a conversation around my family dinner table that I initially considered as no more than family ‘banter’. I had been asked to explain what I was doing in my research and gave a brief outline of AE. My daughter mused for a second and then said with a sly grin ‘so it’s your old man memoirs then?’ to which my wife responded, ‘I just think he wants to get a few things off his chest ...’.

I can’t say whether I was the recipient of intended or accidental insight, but I now see both comments as being exactly that. I believe I was drawn to AE because it allowed me to explore myself and the thoughts I wanted to express as much as explore the issue of talent development.

My retrospective consideration of ‘self’ has also strengthened the rationale for choosing AE as an appropriate method for my research in to talent development. Autobiographical reasoning has been shown to contribute to enhanced SCC and SCon (Habermas & Köber, 2015). Empirical study of the link between reflection on specific experiences or the narration of life stories has shown that these processes enhance both SCC and SCon (Jiang et al., 2020). Given that this research has stemmed, at least in part, from a tacit recognition of self concept differentiation, it would seem appropriate to select a methodological approach that foregrounds self-reflection. Through the self-reflection implicit in AE the researcher can assimilate past and present to enable a more coherent perspective on the future (Jiang et al., 2020).

When considered in the round AE was the right choice of method for epistemological, ontological and personal reasons.

2.2.1 Autoethnography: Differentiating characteristics and genres.

To differentiate AE from other forms of personal writing researchers have defined a range of characteristics that apply to AE. Table 2.1 shows the characteristics that I believe set AE apart from simple autobiography and which, when met, position AE as being a rigorous research method. These characteristics have been synthesized from a wide range of sources (Adams et al., 2015; Costas Batlle, Carr, & Brown, 2018; Holman Jones et al., 2016; McIlveen, 2008). The characteristics from Table 2.1 have been used as a framework to guide choices of precise methods and their reporting in this Chapter. In addition to differentiating between AE and other personal writing forms the literature also suggests that AE can also be categorized as being ‘evocative’ or ‘analytical’.

Table 2.1 Characteristics differentiating autoethnography from other forms of personal writing

<p>Characteristics of robust autoethnography are;-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- A researcher’s insider experience is used to describe and critique cultural beliefs conventions, practices and experiences- It engages the personal and by doing so embraces researcher vulnerability with purpose- It critiques cultural practice and makes a contribution to existing research- It uses reflexivity, as a form of deep, longitudinal reflection, to identify and interrogate the intersections between self and society, the personal and the political- It balances intellectual and methodological rigour in investigation with emotion and creativity in presentation- It seeks to compel a response from its audience by inviting the reader to care and reflect on the issues raised
--

Evocative AE has been closely associated with the work of Holman-Jones, Ellis, Adams and Bochner (Adams et al., 2015; Adams & Jones, 2018; Ellis et al., 2011; Ellis et al., 2018; Holman Jones et al., 2016). Evocative AE as an umbrella term

describes those works where the researcher has placed emphasis on narrative, emotional exploration, therapeutic writing and emotionally engaging the reader. Given the nature of this type of AE it has often been used to explore situations where there is personal trauma or struggle (Stahlke Wall, 2016). In contrast analytical AE is an approach first described by Anderson (2006) who was concerned with the emphasis in evocative AE on the aesthetic, on challenging the reader emotionally rather than engaging in analytical scholarship. This is a view that has been echoed by other researchers who also feel that evocative work loses the goal of analysis and theory creation (Chang, 2013; Lake, 2015). It has been questioned whether works of AE that are presented purely in artistic forms, such as short stories or poetry, fail to adequately contribute to an analytical understanding of the focus of the research (Costas Batlle, Carr, & Brown, 2018; Stahlke Wall, 2016).

Whilst the debate regarding the relative merits of analytical and evocative AE is important it has recently been suggested that there is merit in both forms. It is more helpful to see AE as operating on a continuum between extreme forms of either the evocative or analytical genres. We should seek a middle ground which recognizes that a claim to scholarship is based on an analytical critique of theory whilst still valuing forms of presentation that emotionally engage and challenge the reader (Stahlke Wall, 2016).

In conducting my research the approach I have taken to both investigation and presentation is closer to the analytical than the evocative end of the AE continuum. There are several reasons for this choice;-

- An analytical style of thought and writing sits more easily and comfortably with my background in the naturalistic sciences. I naturally assume a critical and analytical mode of thinking when addressing any issue where professional knowledge interacts with personal experience. To seek to write a more evocative piece of work would have been fighting against my own nature and made the process harder.

- I am persuaded by the arguments that for personal reflexive work and writing to be categorized as research it has to seek to make a contribution to knowledge of a topic that goes deeper than an understanding of an individual case. Consequently, I believe my work must clearly link personal experience to theory and a critique of the dominant culture in talent development.
- The domain where I want my research to have impact (the world of talent development pathways) is one in which the naturalistic sciences hold sway. If I want my research outputs to have an impact in that domain then the form of presentation I select needs to resonate with that audience. I would question whether, at least at this moment in time, a form of research and presentation that leans more on the aesthetic than the analytical would have as much impact.

Having decided to situate my approach closer to the analytical end of the continuum that shouldn't be taken to indicate a rejection of evocative AE as a valid and appropriate mode of research in other domains and for other researchers. As the following section on precise methods will show in conducting this research I utilized writing more evocative narrative vignettes about specific events as a support within the overarching analytical process. By fusing elements of evocative work within an analytical framework I feel that I have conducted a moderate AE as defined by Stahlke Wall (2016).

“A moderate autoethnography would reconcile the best of these ideas and combine the power of the personal perspective with the value of analysis and theory, so that sociological understanding is advanced in ways it might never have otherwise been”.
(Stahlke-Wall, 2016, p8)

2.2.2 Quality markers

To assess the quality of any piece of research we must understand the criteria against which it should be judged. In relation to AE the standard concepts of validity and reliability that apply in positivist ontologies with naturalistic methods simply can't be applied. There is no external, objective reality to which an individual's perception of

their own thoughts and behaviours can be compared accurately and repeatedly. We must therefore seek other markers of quality that allow for assessment of AE research.

A variety of markers have been suggested in the literature based largely on quality markers suggested for qualitative research as a whole (Denzin, 2014; Pensoneau-Conway, Adams, Bolen, Ellis, & Bochner, 2017). I am proposing the quality markers in Table 2.2 as being those by which my research should be judged. These quality markers have been categorized according to whether they relate to the study, the researcher or the audience (‘other’) and are described in detail after the Table.

Table 2.2 Quality markers to be applied in this research

Category	Marker
<i>Study</i>	Verisimilitude
	Make a contribution to knowledge
	Be open to critique at all levels of research
<i>Self</i>	Catalytic Authenticity
<i>‘Other’</i>	Actively engage the audience

Markers relating to the Study

Verisimilitude – in the context of this research verisimilitude has two meanings. Firstly, there is the research’s verisimilitude to the domain being studied. Has this research produced a sense in the reader that it is describing the world of talent development as experienced by the researcher and others? Secondly, is there verisimilitude between this research and the characteristics of AE as described in Table 2.1? Can this research claim to have engaged in AE in rigorous and meaningful way?

Contribute to knowledge – this research should extend existing knowledge regarding individual, organizational and societal perspectives on talent development. This should be done recognizing the value of both insider insight and existing theoretical perspectives regarding talent (Adams et al., 2015).

Be open and transparent to critique at all levels of research - Both Lake (2015) and Stahlke Wall (2016) have argued that too much AE research is published with limited description of the methods used to support reflexivity and analysis of experience. Adams et al. (2015) also noted that in much published AE there is very limited reference to quality markers and how any given piece of research compares to any chosen markers. To protect its claim to scholarship AE research should demonstrate sufficient methodological transparency to allow meaningful critique of process.

Markers relating to the Self

Catalytic authenticity – the research should value the researcher’s personal experience and allow the researcher to engage in a longitudinal reflexive process to fully explore and critique their own experience. In addition, the researcher’s personal practice should be challenged through the reflexive process resulting in the potential for a change in practice where appropriate. (Adams et al., 2015; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Lake, 2015)

Markers relating to the ‘Other’

Actively engage the audience - Embracing the final characteristic in Table 2.1 this research should be judged on whether it’s depth of analysis and its presentational form are sufficient to compel practitioners to reflect on both their practice and their understanding of the domain.

2.2.3 Ethics

Given that within autoethnography the primary focus of research is your own experience the landscape of ethics is somewhat different to most other research approaches. However, in the process of writing about self you cannot escape writing

about others. Inevitably you write about other individuals with whom experiences were shared or organisations for whom you worked. Consequently, ethical considerations are still important (Adams et al., 2015).

However, my reflections cover a significant time span and multiple events therefore there is a practical limit to my capacity to gain informed consent from people engaged in events portrayed in this thesis. For example, any specific sports tour could have involved 10-20 athletes in addition to several coaches and support staff so it would have been impractical to seek informed consent from them all when writing about the tour. Nevertheless, it is still essential that the well-being of those individuals is considered and that an awareness is maintained of how writing up an event(s) portrays and treats all those who were part of that event. In responding to the ethical challenge of conducting this work I drew on two sources for guidance. I used University of Gloucestershire and British Sociological Association ethical guidelines as a base for my ethical conduct. Specifically in relation to the ethics of autoethnography I have drawn on the work of Tullis (2016).

Tullis (2016), in drawing on a broad range of autoethnographic articles, identified a series of ethical considerations for the autoethnographer. The considerations below formed the basis of this project's approach to ethics with key tenets being:

- As far as possible do no harm to self or others ~ remember that a narrative can do damage to the researcher as well as others appearing in it
- Get informed consent from the key 'others' in your narratives wherever possible ~ even if you are writing your own story there will be other people in them.
- Do not present publicly or publish anything you would not show the persons mentioned in the narratives
- Do not underestimate the afterlife of a published narrative ~ a published narrative remains static but societal appreciation and understanding of it may alter and shift.

Underpinning these considerations is a fundamental requirement to protect those who appear in the narratives including the researcher. Consequently, within the process of

constructing narratives around themes and issues a variety of writing techniques were used to anonymise others. These included techniques such as;-

- Altering the sport within which events occurred
- Merging specific incidents that highlighted a given theme in to a composite narrative and then presenting the composite as an exemplar of the issue.
- Avoiding descriptions of actions that could be attributed to specific individuals when the public prominence of some of my experiences precluded easy anonymization.

2.3 Methodology: Process

In this section I will outline the process that was followed in relation to reading, reflection and subsequent presentation of the research. However, it would be wrong to give the impression that all the elements in the research process were planned at the start. It would also be wrong to suggest that I was always completely aware of how the work I was engaged in at any specific time related to what had gone before or how it would relate to future elements of my research. In undertaking this research I have learnt that your AE research process ‘emerges’ as you engage with source material, reflections and writing. In AE methods are a ‘living’ element in the research process. My research process was not an implementation of pre-determined methods, but neither was it an undirected meander through personal recollections of particular events. The thinking described in section 2.3.1 established the principles underpinning my approach to my work. I then constructed an outline process that lead from initial synthesis of source material through to presentation of analyses. The outline process subsequently evolved as my understanding of method, topic and literature evolved. What is presented in this section is a depiction of the research as it happened rather than as it was originally planned.

It is also worth noting that whilst elements in the process are presented in a logical and largely sequential form phases and specific research processes were often blurred and ran in parallel. When personal reflection is a core research technique it is non-sensical to suggest that the researcher can ‘switch off’ one line of thinking and stop thoughts

interacting with each other to allow for a linear flow in research methods and analysis. Consequently, what is presented here is a sanitized version of a research process that was both alive and messy.

It is also presented in some detail because this is something that I found lacking in other research utilizing AE as its core method. Once a researcher has chosen to use AE unfortunately there is little in the literature that describes how one might set about using source material to stimulate reflection or even undertake periods of reflection. As a consequence of this a fourth aim for my thesis became;-

4. To contribute to the development and refinement of autoethnographic methods of enquiry that can be utilized by practitioners and others in sport.

2.3.1 Elements and Phases

The research process consisted of four elements that supported me in systematically moving from initial reflection through to in-depth analysis of experience in relation to literature and theory (Figure 2.1). Initially I conceived of these as being four ‘phases’ through which I would pass in a chronological sequence. Subsequent reflection has helped me see them as interrelated elements which interacted in an iterative and dialogic fashion. In the following sub-sections I will give more detail on each element.

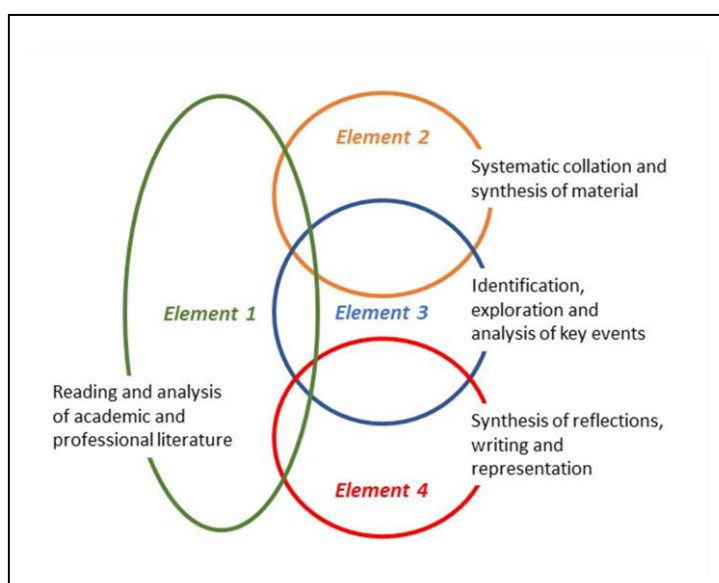


Figure 2.1 The four elements in my research process

Element 2: Systematic collation and synthesis of source material

The research process was initiated by collating source material, in the form of hard and softcopy documents², that I had accumulated during my career. I initially identified organisations with whom I had worked where I had been engaged in the guise of one of the two ‘selves’ identified in Chapter 1. The description of each ‘self’ is repeated in Figure 2.2 for ease of reference. My work with these organisations covered the period from 1989 to 2018. Having identified organizational information sources the researcher’s personal archives, both physical and electronic³, were scrutinised for relevant documentation. Any hardcopy documents, such as notebooks, were reviewed for related content before being added to the overall document pool. A chronology of the documentation in the pool of source material was subsequently created (Table 2.3 and Table 2.4).



Figure 2.2 A matrix representing my world views

² The word ‘document’ in this Chapter encompasses any single unit of information irrespective of whether it was a word-processed document, spreadsheet or email message.

³ This included email where available.

Table 2.3 Collated document pool from 1989 to 2003

				A = Applied Sport Scientist B = Board Member/Governance position E = Educator P = Performance Manager														
Applicable Lenses																		
A B E P				1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Organisation																		
LJMU Teach/Applied				Hardcopy Notes														
				Softcopy documents		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
				Email														
LJMU Research (PhD)				Hardcopy Notes										x	x	x		
				Softcopy documents						x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
				Email														
England Netball				Hardcopy Notes	x	x	x	x										
				Softcopy documents			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
				Email														
English Institute of Sport				Hardcopy Notes														
				Softcopy documents										x	x	x	x	x
				Email														

Table 2.4 Collated document pool from 2004-2018

					A = Applied Sport Scientist			B = Board Member/Governance position			E = Educator		P = Performance Manager						
		Applicable Lenses																	
Organisation					2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Loughborough University		Hardcopy Notes			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			
		Softcopy documents			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			
		Email			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			
English Institute of Sport		Hardcopy Notes																	
		Softcopy documents			x	x	x	x	x										
		Email																	
England Netball		Hardcopy Notes																	
		Softcopy documents			x	x	x	x	x										
		Email																	
GB Hockey		Hardcopy Notes																	
		Softcopy documents			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x					
		Email																	
British Basketball Federation		Hardcopy Notes										x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
		Softcopy documents										x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
		Email										x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Cheltenham Ladies College		Hardcopy Notes															x	x	x
		Softcopy documents															x	x	x
		Email															x	x	x
Chime Sport Management		Hardcopy Notes																	
		Softcopy documents													x	x	x		x
		Email																	

Given the size of the pool of source material pool it clearly required reduction and was therefore subject to further review. The folder structure for each organisation's electronic document pool was reviewed for folders specifically relating either directly or indirectly to talent development. As examples the topics shown in Table 2.5 were deemed to be relevant to the research and folders relating to these topics were retained in the document pool. This process resulted in a reduced electronic document pool as shown in Table 2.6.

Table 2.5 Exemplar topics that merited a folder's inclusion in a reduced document pool

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Applied sport science project on training adherence amongst U21 national athletes - The design of coach assessment criteria to be used in line management of coaches with a remit for talent development - Design and implementation of a policy for flexible assessment support for elite student-athletes - Organisational philosophy, vision/mission and strategy documentation (both draft and final versions) for a performance unit engaged in talent development |
|--|

Once the pool of relevant source material had been refined it was reviewed again to focus down on specific events which stimulated critical reflection about the process of talent development and the potentially contrasting perspectives associated with comparison of performance/educator selves or academic/practitioner perspectives. The intention was to select events where personal experience could be more fully examined in the light of relevant literature, philosophies and theoretical positions. This process is explained in Element 3 on the following pages. For ease of presentation the shift from Element 2 to Element 3 is shown in a linear fashion. In reality the very nature of personal reflection meant a blurring between Elements 2 and 3. Moving from a raw document pool to identifying those events that created greatest depth of reflection was neither a linear nor a purely inductive or deductive process.

Table 2.6 Scale of the initial and revised document pools

Organisation	Core Document Pool		Revised Catalogue		Material synopsis
	Folders	Files	Folders	Files	
John Moores University	98	1046	22	317	Applied sport science teaching material
Personal PhD	167	1055	1	19	Initial exploration of ethnography in research
			2	2	Original PhD Chapters regarding situating self
Loughborough University	1391	10266	174	1326	LU Performance Vision & Charter Meetings
			59	368	LU Performance policy documents
			26	163	Loughborough Lightning Documentation
			2	46	Student-athlete personal development
England Netball	7	125	2	16	Training processes and challenges with age group squads
Great Britain Hockey Ltd	75	600	4	42	Progress reports
			41	319	Board meeting minutes reviewing performance issues
			3	47	Performance management group meeting notes
			3	36	Specific documentation for the complete Olympic Cycle reviews 08-12 & 12-16
			3	27	Head of Talent role and selection
British Basketball Federation	47	355	11	91	Board meeting minutes reviewing performance issues
			11	52	Meetings related to talent strategy
TOTAL	1785	13447	364	2871	

2.3.2 Element 3: Identification, exploration and analysis of key events

As already stated, the pool of source material was not subjected to an exhaustive analysis process that would meet established criteria for content and discourse analysis techniques. The process did not involve the researcher scrutinising every document in detail. The intent was to sample the document pool sufficiently that it stimulated an appropriate depth and breadth of reflection. This process would be more accurately defined as ‘document sifting’ based upon the following definition for sifting.

“to make a close examination of all the parts of something in order to find something or to separate what is useful from what is not” (Cambridge-Dictionary, 2019)

However, to bring rigor to the ‘sifting’ process a specific sub-process, *contextualization*, was used along with ‘*response criteria*’ which helped identify events that stimulated the deepest and most critical reflections.

Contextualisation

Each group of documents in the pool was scanned to identify those files that might hold particular relevance to the research question. When a topic of interest was identified in any one document other related documents were read to create a broader picture of the event/issue.

For example, a particular policy document was identified in the Loughborough University document pool that outlined the criteria used for assessing coaching effectiveness when working with talented student-athletes. To contextualise the policy document other documents relating to it were searched for and read. Within this process electronic information was cross referenced with available hardcopy material and e-mail both sent and received around the date(s) of specific events. Subsequently a range of documents were reviewed including material relating to;-

- Early drafts of the final policy paper
- Dialogue with colleagues involved in the policy production.
- Individual responses to the paper.
- Notes from group meetings where the paper was discussed.

The contextualisation process enabled richer, deeper reflections for the researcher around this issue.

Response criteria

As documents were sifted and contextualized I simultaneously sought to identify critical experiences, or sequences of experience, in my practice that initiated the deepest reflections. This selection process was supported using specific criteria to assist in judging the impact of events on my reflections. These are outlined in Table 2.7.

Table 2.7 Criteria used to judge the impact of an event(s) on depth of reflection

- A sense that my current self, faced with the same issues again, would have wanted to undertake a task differently.
- Reading about an event or action provoked a sense of disquiet or uncertainty about the course of action taken.
- Where there was an immediate recognition that my ‘selves’ or two ‘perspectives’ would see an event differently
- A sense of resonance¹ with the research question.

¹ ‘Resonance’ in this context was defined as a strong evocation or suggestion of thoughts, memories or emotions linked to talent development. (OED Online, 2020)

These criteria were not used in the sense of providing some form of quasi-objective numerical rating for each event that was considered. The criteria reflected the issues of self concept differentiation, clarity and continuity addressed in section 1.2.6

I found I was tacitly selecting experiences for deeper reflection where the perspectives related to my performance self and educational self contrasted sharply. These were events where self concept clarity was weaker and I was struggling to reconcile the views of the multiple selves I had identified. Consequently, these were situations where differentiation between selves was most uncomfortable. Greater reflective time was devoted to events where I felt that, were I faced with that situation again, a future self may have perceived the situation differently. Having identified key experiences that evoked vivid and critical reflections my reflective time could be focused more meaningfully. I therefore consistently re-visited such events in my thinking over a period of approximately six months.

Whilst I was engaging in deeper reflection on particular experiences I also began to consider the process of presenting both reflection and analysis within the thesis. I considered how different experiences captured multiple tensions in my practice and how they might be analysed and presented. This process highlighted the need to become focused in making final choices as to which experiences could be presented in

this thesis. The two specific experiences relating to ‘Ten seconds or two years?’ and ‘Moments of Realisation’ were subsequently selected as the ones best representing my overall reflections (Table 2.8). These two extended experiences:

- drew on multiple events over extended periods of time
- were the two experiences that had greatest impact on me in terms of the criteria in Table 2.7.
- best represented overall themes that were emerging from my reflections on all five experiences.
- reflected elements of both performance and educational practice

Table 2.8 Exemplar experiences selected for presentation and analysis within the thesis

Experience	Precis of the experience
<i>10 seconds or 2 years?: Chasing medals</i>	Comparing two performance journeys with squads from the same sport. One squad was chasing an international medal the other was seeking the highest representative title in domestic competition. Both journeys involved many talented younger players. What did we learn and what did we value?
<i>Moments of Realisation</i>	A series of events all relating to supporting elite student-athletes in their life during their time in education. What constitutes support for the ‘person’ as opposed to support for the ‘athlete’ or the ‘student’

It should be noted that these experiences represent part of my reflective process not the whole. They are presented here as the best vehicle by which I can present and discuss my practice in relation to theory and culture.

‘10 seconds or 2 years’

This experience came through working with two different performance squads in the same sport. The first of the two squads was an international group aiming to gain a podium finish at a global sport event. The second was a UK domestic franchise squad aiming to reach the Grand Final in their sport, the highest possible competitive title, in only their second season in that competition. The two performance campaigns ran

from 2004-2006 and 2005-2007 respectively and for 12 months the experiences were concurrent. In my mind I naturally refer to each experience as being a 'performance journey' therefore that phrase will be used to describe them in the remainder of this thesis. Whilst the journeys overlapped chronologically they were distinct entities, the events in one journey did not influence the events in the other. However, what added to the depth and richness of these experience for me was that I shared both journeys with some of the same players.

National Squad - The squad was a mix of experienced and developing performers and was chasing a medal winning performance at a major Games. It had medalled in the last World Championships in the sport and, whilst there had been an influx of new players, there was an expectation that the squad would medal again. Consequently there was a burden of expectation from the start of the journey right through to the end. The coach was new to the squad at the start of the journey but was a highly experienced international coach who had guided other teams on similar journeys. The support team was also made up of experienced practitioners and, whilst some working relationships were new at the start of the campaign, no one was 'learning on the job'. Performances over the two years were consistent and there were no crises in relation to sudden losses in form for the squad as a whole. Injury and loss of form affected individuals during the two years but at the point of final squad selection for the competition there were no players unavailable.

Franchise squad - as with the national squad the Superleague franchise squad had a similar a mix of experienced and talented younger players albeit but with a higher number of younger players. The squad was newly created at the start of the journey given that the competition was also new. However, many of the players had played together for several years in preceding forms of domestic competition. Given the embryonic nature of the competition and franchise squad public performance expectations were unclear to start with although with the playing roster the squad had there was a public belief it ought to do well. Performance in the first season was sufficiently strong as to create an expectation that in subsequent seasons the squad should be capable of reaching the Grand Final. The nature of the coach and support team for the franchise squad mirrored that of the national squad. The franchise coach

was new but had a real depth of experience coaching in this level of domestic competition whilst the support team were all experienced practitioners but with some working together for the first time.

My role - my role with both the squads was as a significant member of the support team. I was neither player nor coach but had a clear position and a specific role to play in trying to realise each group's competitive ambition. My roles afforded me the opportunity to be fully immersed in each campaign but also allowed me time to observe the critical interaction between coaches, support staff and players. Looking at the experiences from a research perspective the nature of my roles allowed me to play the role of participant observer without realizing it.

These experiences came from engaging with teams in senior competition therefore one could question how they are relevant to TID. However, I believe that to write this AE without referencing these experiences and my subsequent reflections would have undermined the authenticity of this work. These experiences are relevant to my reflections on TID for three reasons:-

- Both playing groups were a mix of senior and developing athletes and I was able to observe the impact of a senior performance environment on those younger athletes.
- These experiences represent what we are preparing athletes for through their TID pathways.
- They are representative of the culture of high performance and the way in which high performance policy has been operationalized. This culture influences TID as much as senior elite performance.

My participation in these journeys, and their impact on younger players, was pivotal in challenging my thoughts on TID. To have written this thesis without exploring them would have compromised the authenticity of this AE.

Moments of Realisation

This was a collective set of experiences centred on the support for student-athletes. My work in this area spanned approximately 15 years working primarily in tertiary

education but more latterly at secondary level as well. I engaged with support for student-athletes in two complementary ways. Firstly, as creator and then manager of a support system for student-athletes and then, secondly, as an actual mentor for individual student-athletes.

Manager – within this role I had to design a system to support student-athletes. The purpose of the system was to assist the student-athletes in managing the interface between their education and their sporting ambition. This role involved the appointment and management of staff who were directly responsible for mentoring individual athletes. From an education organization perspective I was responsible for ensuring that student-athletes operated within the parameters of agreed academic support mechanisms. It was important that student-athletes were seen to progress academically as well as in terms of their sporting performance. The role also encompassed interfacing with the NGBs and pathway managers for individual athletes. NGBs were primarily concerned whether the system I was managing could allow young athletes sufficient freedom from academic demands to develop optimally as performance athletes.

Mentor – my work as a mentor I would describe as a fusion of academic tutor, life-skills educator and supporter of personal planning. In this role I worked with individual athletes and became aware of a wide variety of aspects of their lives. I was able to observe their interactions with coaches, NGBs, academic departments and peers. This afforded me a good understanding of the challenges of their position as well as their capabilities for dealing with the complex environment in which they found themselves.

Looking across the two roles I experienced both macro and micro issues relating to the development of student-athletes as people, as students and as athletes.

Further detail on the specific experiences that were the focus of my reflection for this thesis is presented in Part 4.

2.3.3 Element 3: Engaging Others

To augment my personal reflections I engaged in interviews with two close colleagues. Each colleague had shared one of the two critical experiences with me. Within the field of AE the intention of the interview is not to objectively understand the experiences of the ‘other’. Interviewing in AE can take several forms but the essence of the exchange is

“.. to connect our personal experiences, epiphanies and intuitions to those of others. Sometimes these connections confirm our experiences; other times, interview conversations contradict or conflict with our experiences. In both instances the insights we acquire from talking with and listening to others can deepen and complicate our own stories.”
(Adams et al., 2015, p55)

Within my work the intention of the interviews was to discuss individual recollections and reflections on shared experiences. I was not seeking to create a single, agreed upon picture of the experiences we shared. I was seeking to challenge, confirm and potentially change my perceptions of events and people by collaboratively walking through memories of specific experiences.

The two participants were approached because-

- they had extensive experience of the role they undertook in one of the two ‘critical’ experiences.
- we shared a longitudinal and positive working relationship in relation to each ‘critical’ experience.

I valued their perspectives on the ‘critical experiences’.

The two individuals were;-

10s-2y: ‘E’ – ‘E’ was a senior player in both squads with a clear leadership position in both groups. A player of many years experience both internationally (100 international caps) and at the top of the domestic game. E had won medals on the world stage and been part of a several successfully domestic teams who had

won the highest level competition in the UK. *E* was a constant throughout both journeys. Prior to these journeys starting *E* and I had worked together over several years (>5 years) in her status as a national squad player.

Moments of Realisation: 'P' – *P* was the lead for Performance Lifestyle mentoring at Loughborough University for four years prior to becoming a Performance Manager at LU. I appointed *P* as the first full-time manager for the Performance Lifestyle support programme that I had established at LU. *P* was both manager of the programme and its lead mentor. I was *P*'s colleague and line manager for seven years until I left LU in 2015. We had a strong working partnership and good personal relationship that continued socially after I left the University. *P* has remained at the University after I left but in a higher-level role. This role means *P* retained responsibility for the Performance Lifestyle support programme but did not directly manage it.

Interview Process

Both participants were contacted via email to ascertain their willingness to take part on the interview(s). After this had been confirmed they were sent introductory correspondence explaining the purpose of the study and the research process. At the same time they were provided with informed consent forms and asked to return them prior to any date being set for interview. Once informed consent had been received a mutually convenient time and location were confirmed for initial interviews.

A framework for each interview was constructed that served as a guide and aide memoire for the researcher. Beyond reference to the framework the interviews were unstructured to allow the interviewee to bring forward their thoughts and issues in relation to their recollection of relevant experiences (Appendices 1 & 2)

The collaborative conversations were recorded using a Dictaphone (Sony IC Recorder, ICD-PX370) and then transcribed verbatim. The transcript of each interview then became a document that was subject to the reflective and analytical processes described in Element 4.

Given the intent to use the collaborative dialogue to stimulate my reflection I subsequently returned to speak to both participants informally at points in the reflective process. This allowed me to further explore some of their answers to questions as well as their perspectives on themes emerging from my work.

2.3.4 Element 4: Synthesis of reflections, writing and representation.

In the sub-sections that follow I describe a number of processes that could have been included in either Element 3 or here in Element 4. For clarity and balance in presentation they have been placed in Element 4 where the processes reached their conclusions.

Reflective processes

As Element 3 progressed it became clearer which experiences were the ones that best captured my internal debates about talent development. I was also able to extend my understanding of each experience through the collaborative interviewing. This afforded me the opportunity to spend more time systematically reflecting on how my experiences had developed, how I responded to them and how my evolving understanding interacted with the academic literature.

Cycles and questions

In the process of analysis and reflection I was guided by two reflective models. The primary model I used was Gibbs Reflective Cycle (Figure 2.3) which was supplemented by drawing on specific questions taken from John's Model of Structured Reflection (Gibbs, 1988; Johns, 2006). Whilst reflecting I created analytical memos as described by McMahon, McGannon, and Zehntner (2017a). These memos described immediate thoughts, feelings and observations occurring both during and immediately after periods of reflection. The memos were captured using a variety of media including voice memos (Sony IC Recorder, ICD-PX370), electronic notebooks (Evernote Software), whiteboard, post-it notes and notebooks (Figure 2.4).

I was also influenced in my analysis by McMahon's concept of differentiating between three analytical perspectives: the historical self, the current self and the academic self (McMahon et al., 2017a). Whilst I did not seek to split my reflections in to these three distinct categories I tried to remain open to questioning my reflections in terms of whether they belonged to any one of these specific perspectives.

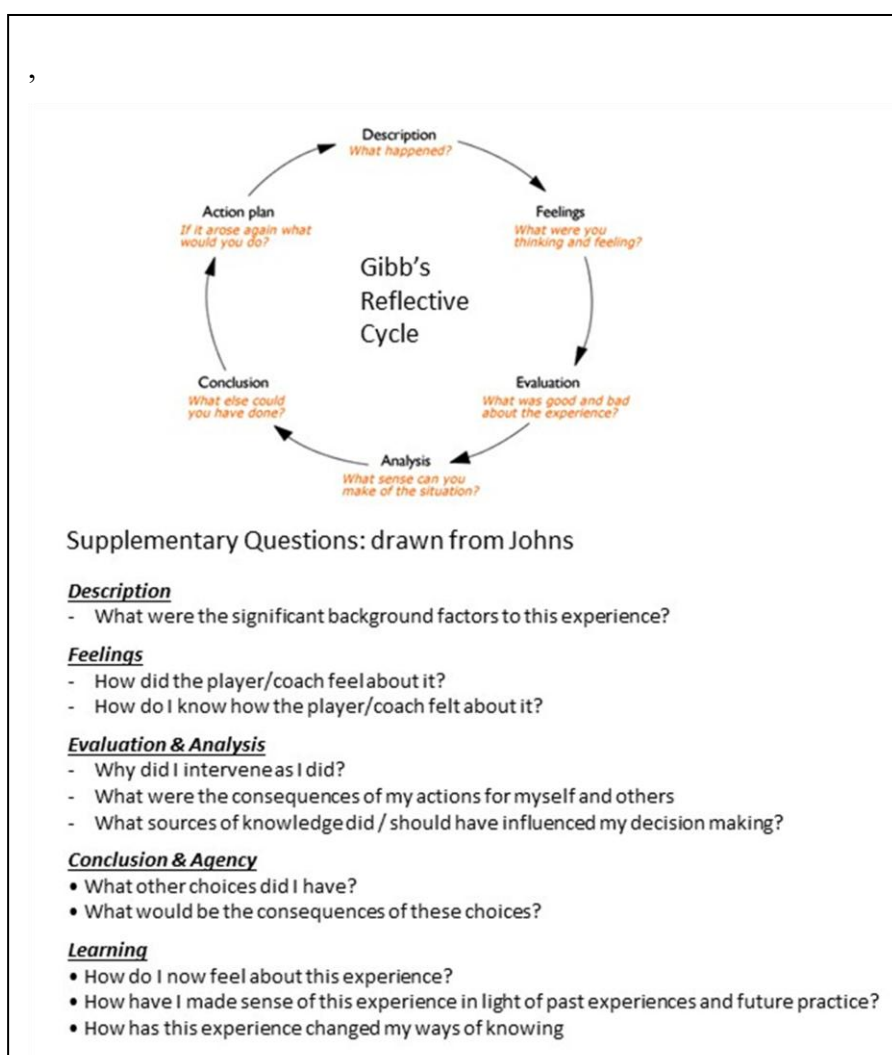


Figure 2.3 Gibbs (1988) reflective cycle with guiding questions drawn from Johns (2006)

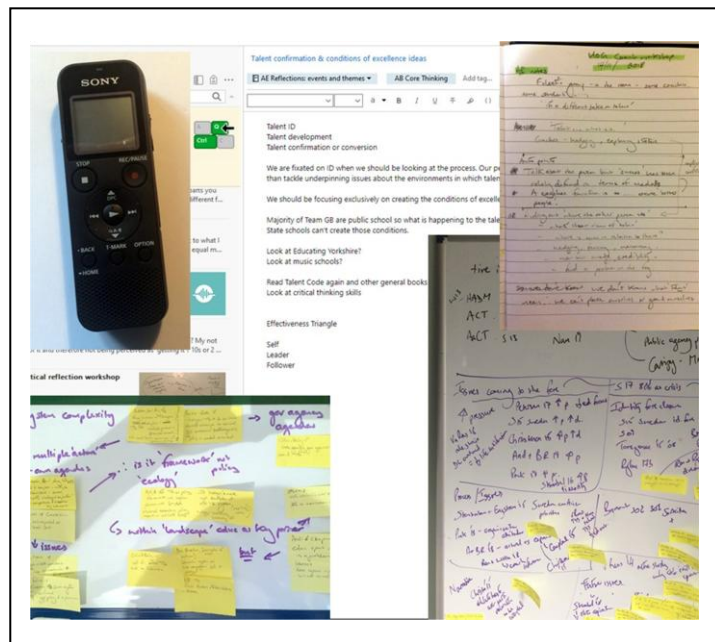


Figure 2.4 Media used to capture reflective memos and notes

Freezing action/reflection

To challenge and deepen reflective thinking I drew on an approach to AE described by Ivey (2017). Ivey based her AE work on techniques drawn from drama therapy, which were in turn based on the work of the playwright Berthold Brecht. Within his plays Brecht aimed to ‘disrupt’ an audience member so that they not only responded to his work emotionally but also engaged in more critical reflection. Drama therapists similarly seek to challenge those they are working with to respond to situations with greater detachment and analysis. One specific technique from drama therapy pertinent to my work was the concept of ‘freezing’ a scene before its normal conclusion. When freezing a scene early a therapist can alter thinking and understanding by asking for people to reverse roles, discuss what might follow or specifically discuss characters motivations. This is a process that was effectively used by Ivey in an AE analysis of her emotional relationship with her father (Ivey, 2017).

In undertaking my reflective work I found that by consciously stopping reflection at specific points (e.g. by setting a time limit) I could detach from the emotion of an experience and ask questions such as ‘what ought to happen next?’ or ‘what would an educator want to happen here?’. This allowed me to sustain a sense of distance at key

moments whilst also engaging with the emotion of experiences. This technique was particularly valuable when linking an understanding of my experiences to an interpretation of the literature. The technique also afforded me the chance to consciously shift perspective between my two ‘selves’. This was important in supporting inter-identity analysis of experience.

Writing: from storyboards to complete Chapters

The expression of my thinking in a coherent written form started with a collation of thoughts on a whiteboard. I used the whiteboard because it allowed me to maintain a consistent dialogue between the outline of what I wanted to write and my reflections. The whiteboard made it easy to write, re-write, capture on a smartphone, erase and then write again. This basic technique was supplemented by using post-it notes to record specific thoughts on a topic and then move those thoughts around the board to group, ungroup and re-group them in an iterative process (Figure 2.4). In essence the whiteboard allowed me to maintain an analytical conversation with myself. I used the technique in analysis of both experience and literature as well as subsequent syntheses. As reflection progressed specific events within each experience became more important than others and I felt the need to capture them as individual entities. I therefore wrote short vignettes to describe actions and feelings around very defined moments in my practice. For example, describing my thoughts about sitting in a hotel room in the early hours of the morning ploughing through video analyses of performance whilst on tour. These vignettes were more evocative pieces of writing that represented more emotional responses to the events rather than presenting critiques of practice. Two vignettes are used as the basis for Chapters 5 and 8.

Writing Process

Presentation of my analysis was influenced by the work of Douglas (2009), McMahon, McGannon, and Zehrtner (2017b) and (McMahon et al., 2017a) in their interweaving of theory and experience. The work of these researchers achieved the interconnection between expression of personal experience and critical analysis of culture that I was seeking in an analytically oriented AE.

The final process of moving from the storyboards to thesis was in itself an act of reflection and further analysis. The writing process was not linear. It did not move sequentially through an understanding of the literature, then experience and concluding with a critique of both. The writing process was a two-dimensional process as described in Figure 2.5.

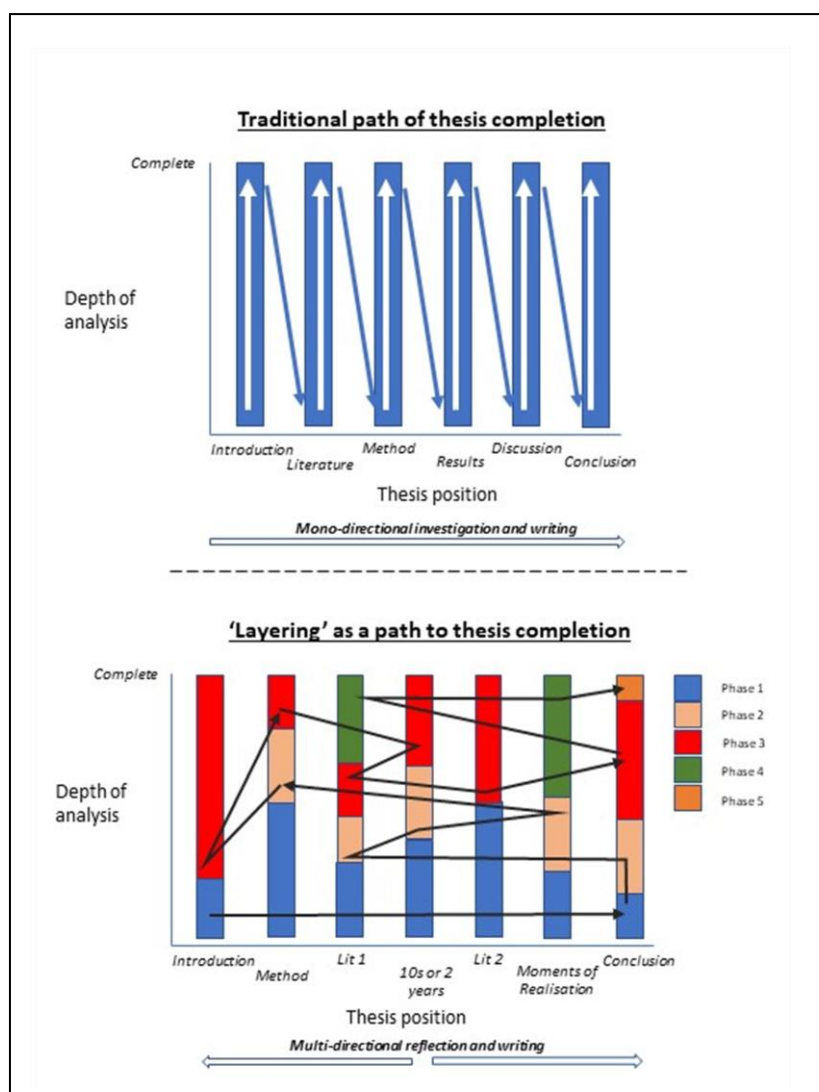


Figure 2.5 Comparison of traditional and 'layering' paths to thesis completion

I now see the writing of an AE, irrespective of it being evocative or analytical, as needing to 'start at both ends'. When you begin writing you have a 'big picture' sense of what your reflections are telling you. You start with a tacit understanding of how you see the stories of your life interacting with the theoretical analysis driven by the

literature. However, in order to arrive at a coherent critique of the interaction between theory and experience you also must possess a clear sense of what the literature tells you about the topic of the research. Both these perspectives exist in the researcher simultaneously therefore writing is subject to non-linear thought processes. In practice the writing of one section would raise further reflection on previous sections requiring me to re-visit and re-write other sections. Consequently, I moved up and down the thesis writing a range of sections almost simultaneously with each re-visiting of a section resulting in deeper layers of complexity in terms of understanding and analysis. Through this process the final structure of the thesis ‘emerged’ through the writing rather than the writing being done to fit a pre-determined structure.

One additional challenge in writing was the shift from lived experience and literature to philosophy. The writing of abstracted thinking was quite different to the writing of lived experience. As such the writing of AE can require the tackling of multiple writing styles as well as modes of thinking adding to the complexity of the process.

2.4 Thesis Structure

In undertaking this research one of the greatest challenges I have encountered has been in translating thought in to writing. In my mind my reflections about talent development form a gestalt understanding of research and practice. The challenge this created was how to reduce a broad swathe of thinking and reading into a body of work that expressed the gestalt nature of reflection but in a linear and word limited thesis.

As already stated, the final structure of the thesis emerged during the process of writing and is shown in Figure 2.6. The sequence of chapters may not have the sense of linear flow one might normally expect in a thesis. However, I believe this was largely unavoidable given the multiple practice perspectives and literature sources I was using within a holistic reflective process.

In the next chapter I have outlined key philosophical concepts that I was exploring alongside reflecting on my practice. The interweaving of philosophical reading and reflection had a significant impact on my interpretation of practice and my subsequent

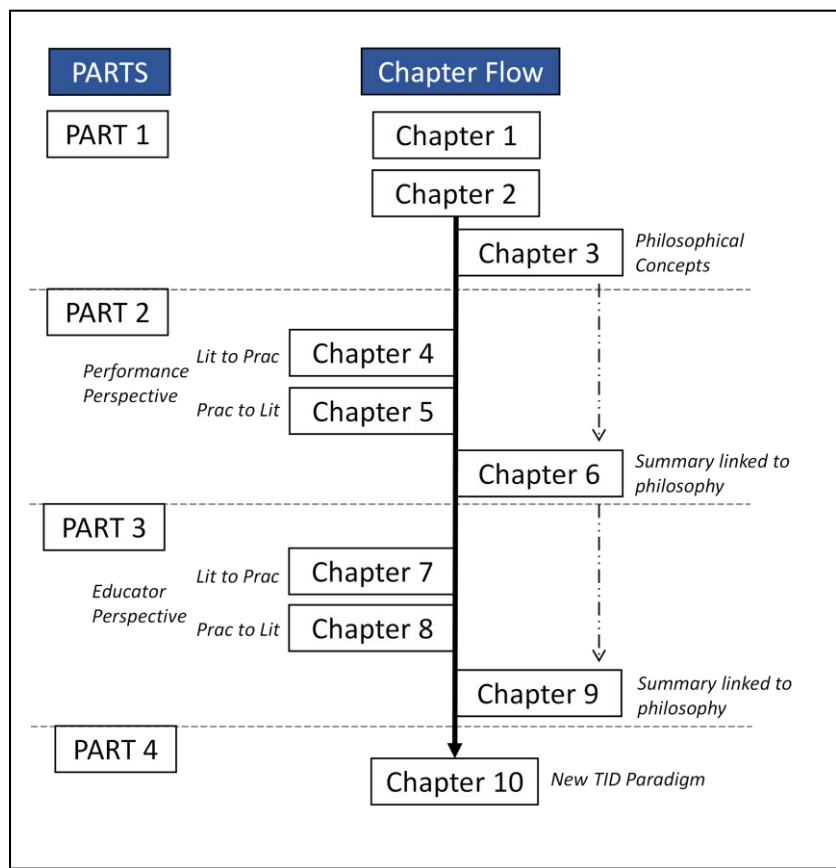


Figure 2.6 Structure of the thesis in relation to topic, critical experience and perspective

proposal for a new paradigm for TID. Consequently, for the reader to be able to interpret my reflective work in context I felt it appropriate to introduce philosophical concepts before expanding on my reflective work.

In relation to reflection on my practice I settled on a form of presentation in which performance and educator perspectives are considered separately in Parts 2 and 3, respectively. Parts 2 and 3 of the thesis have the same structure and use both inductive and deductive thought processes. In each Part the first chapter (Chapters 4 & 7 respectively) review literature that I found to have greatest resonance with my understanding of my practice. These chapters were not intended to be comprehensive reviews of each body of literature but are more personally focused reviews that considered issues at an appropriate critical depth whilst drawing links to personal experience. In the second chapter in each Part (Chapters 5 & 8 respectively) I reversed the process and reflected on the personal experiences that most captured the essence of

my experience. These Chapters cover the conflicts and questions within my practice, and work back to draw links to culture, theory and the literature.

In the final Chapter in each Part (Chapters 6 & 9 respectively) I have summarised the critical issues emerging from the two preceding chapters and linked them back to the philosophical concepts in Chapter 3. As such Chapters 3,6 and 9 form a strand within the thesis in which philosophical concepts are addressed and linked before influencing the paradigm presented in Part 4. In Part 4 I propose a paradigm for TID that I believe addresses the critical issues that emerged in Parts 2 and 3.

3. Sociological and Philosophical perspectives

In reviewing the literature around talent development the concepts of craftsmanship and existential philosophy appeared in key texts. The two theories offered a perspective on how you could approach the development of excellence in performance by focusing on process not outcome. Given that critical concepts from both theories are central to the paradigm I explore in Chapter 10 it is appropriate to outline them here.

3.1 What is ‘Craftsmanship’

Craftsmanship⁴ is a sociological theory regarding a holistic approach to work and activity that was developed in the latter half of the 20th century. It describes a natural approach to producing excellence in work that was identified in the study of multiple social domains such as music, education, medicine and commerce (Thorlindsson et al., 2018). Whilst being present in multiple work domains, craftsmanship is not a formal system or step-by step process for producing excellent work. It is more an attitude and a disposition to think and act in a certain way and one of the main benefits it can bring to TID is in its capacity to make activity more meaningful for the athlete. The central feature of a ‘craftsmanship’ approach to work is that an individual confronted with a specific task seeks to master that task and produce the highest standards of work. The ‘craftsman’ is driven to work to the best of their ability for no reason other than their intrinsic desire to produce excellence. Craftsmanship has most recently been defined by Sennett (2009) as

‘an enduring human impulse, the desire to do a job well for its own sake.’ (p9)

“the special human condition of being engaged” (p20)

⁴ The word craftsman is used to denote any person engaged in a particular approach to a task irrespective of gender. Craftsman is used here rather than gender neutral terminology to facilitate working with the terminology as originally described in early research.

It is a position that resonates with other perspectives on motivation where writers have suggested that we become fully energised when we can pursue mastery of a task (Gillard, Gillard, & Pratt, 2015; D. Pink, 2011).

A craft approach to an activity is therefore one in which the environment and specific activities are constructed to facilitate a person in becoming immersed in the task at hand. Such an environment enriches the craftsman at a personal level by engaging them in drawing meaning from **process** rather than outcome. However, whilst personal value is found in process the craftsman is still striving to produce work that others would see as being of exceptional quality. There is therefore an interplay between externally determined measures of quality and the craftsman's own metrics for evaluating the outcome of their labours.

I believe that craftsmanship perspectives on value and outcome are of particular relevance in TID. We know that a performance pathway is a funnel constantly reducing in size and that the majority of young athletes will never transition in to being senior elite athletes. By definition the majority of athletes will at some point fail to progress in a pathway. If we only ever apply pathway progression metrics as markers of quality then the 'output' for the majority of young athletes must be judged negatively. Ultimately, most talented young athletes will fail to produce something that is of the standard required by the TID system. By adopting a craft focus we can release ourselves from the mathematical inevitability of a negative judgement being made about a young athlete's performances. Adopting a craft approach to TID means we are free to judge the quality of the development environment on its ability to have made experiences more meaningful for athletes. By seeking to create environments that focus on the process of producing excellence we can build programmes that can benefit all young athletes equally irrespective of how far they progress on a pathway (Thorlindsson et al., 2018).

In the most recent substantive discussion of craftsmanship Sennett (2009) presented the craft workshops of medieval and renaissance times as exceptional examples of environments where excellence could flourish. Sennett proposed a workshop environment based on craftsmanship as being a positive alternate approach to current

management and teaching practices in business and education. In making his case Sennett highlighted the problems caused in current management by an over-emphasis on performance targets and measurement reviews to guide activity. Sennett suggested that such approaches damage the individual worker who experiences alienation and a loss of meaning in their activity. This seems a general critique of work in society that so clearly resonates with the critique of high-performance sport policy and practice in earlier parts of this thesis.

Recent research has shown that its adoption as a framework for designing learning environments leads to enhanced performance and increased meaning for athletes. In a large study of 10,300 Icelandic students (aged 13-16) Thorlindsson et al. (2018) correlated measures of craftsmanship with measures of meaning, sport engagement and academic performance. The study found that craftsmanship enabled young people to have more meaningful sporting and educational experiences as well as positively influencing academic performance. It also found that craftsmanship assisted in linking sporting and educational experiences that might otherwise have sat as disconnected events in a young person's life.

In a study of 258 UK based student-athletes, Ronkainen, McDougall, Tikkanen, Feddersen, and Tahtinen (2020) found that craftsmanship approaches to experience positively correlated with athletes drawing enhanced meaning from those experiences. Meaning in this context being defined as an understanding of experience in which we learn to value our past, present and potential for the future. Ronkainen, McDougall, et al. (2020) suggested that in a sport context a person will find their activity more meaningful if their activity:

- has a point and is conducted with purpose.
- contributes to an overall sense of purpose in life in general.
- has a positive impact upon something greater than oneself?

They also found that the organisation of the environment surrounding the athletes was critical in facilitating meaningful experiences. Overall, there is therefore a small but growing evidence base to show that craftsmanship has value as an approach to sport and TID.

Whilst craftsmanship doesn't offer a precise set of steps for the coach to follow it does offer an overarching mindset that can support a practitioner in dealing with the challenges outlined in Table 10.1. As a whole I believe it is an approach to TID that could have positively influenced many different aspects of the experiences I discuss in Parts 2 and 3.

Table 3.1 Critical features of Craftsmanship that are relevant to TID.

Element	Description
Skill centred	In terms of sport the craft view of skill and practice links across to current coaching research emphasising the effectiveness of constraints-led coaching in skill development. Craftsmanship also focuses tacit and experiential knowledge as being pivotal in producing excellence.
Oriented to excellence	Craftsmanship is a conceptual framework that has excellence at its heart. Not only does it have potential to guide effective TID practice but also gain conceptual acceptance within a high-performance sport community.
Process focused	The focus is on the person and the process they experience rather than the outcome. Craftsmanship allows for the pursuit of excellence without becoming exclusively focused on the external outcome of a training process.
Relates to development in multiple domains	In an educational context craftsmanship has been shown to be a positive framework for production of academic excellence (Berger, 2003). It is also a framework that resonates with wider educational theories from Piaget and Dewey that emphasising the role of active learning in education (Thorlindsson, Halldorsson, & Sigfusdottir, 2018). This in itself makes it relevant to the issues I have encountered in dealing with educational systems focused on qualification attainment as much as on learning.
Allows for multiple narratives	The craftsman/athlete draws their personal meaning from their experience and can live out their own personal narratives for their engagement in performance sport rather than be forced to accept the performance narrative.
Encompasses the ambiguity and messiness of life	Craftsmanship holds the capacity as life approach to mediate the link between facets of an individual's life. It can span the divide between life inside and outside sport and sees the ambiguities and mess as opportunities for holistic learning.

In Table 3.1 I have therefore tried to summarise the main features of craftsmanship, and the craft environment, that link to TID in sport. Whilst it offers much as a conceptual framework for TID craftsmanship it falls short in one respect. It doesn't speak to the nature of sport as an adversarial and contended activity. The moment in which two opponents vie for supremacy in a sporting arena is a critical feature of experience for all performance athletes, both junior and senior. The joy and pain of victory and defeat that can arise from being in competition is a potent part of sport in its entirety. This is where Aggerholm's work on TID in performance sport and his presentation of the concept of 'elite *Bildung*' comes to the fore.

3.2 Existential learning & Elite *Bildung*

My thinking on talent development was also deeply influenced by two literature sources that have looked at youth athlete development from an existential perspective.

Firstly, there is a body of literature that has considered how youth participants draw meaning from their sport engagement (Nesti & Ronkainen, 2020; Ronkainen, Aggerholm, Ryba, & Allen-Collinson, 2020; Ronkainen, McDougall, et al., 2020). The second literature source has been the work of Kenneth Aggerholm who outlined the value of taking an existential approach to talent development. (Aggerholm, 2015). Through looking at these sets of literature I came to realise that it is possible to see talent development from a completely different perspective to the one that had dominated so much of my career. As I simultaneously engaged with existentialism and reflecting on my experiences I came to see that key elements of existential thought resonated with my experience of TID. The aspects of existentialism that had most impact on my reflection were:

- agency and being person centred.
- embracing ambiguity
- engaging the tacit and the informal
- the concepts of *Bildung* and elite *Bildung*.

I would like to briefly outline each of these concepts now so that their influence on Parts 2, 3 and my proposed TID framework can be more easily understood.

3.2.1 Agency and person-centred learning

Existentialism as a base concept is a philosophical movement that stresses the individual's unique position as a self-determining agent. Flynn (2009) describes existentialism as a person-centred philosophy that is concerned with the individual's pursuit of identity and meaning. Applying this perspective to learning means that in a development environment an individual should be free to come to understand their own experience in a personally meaningful way whilst at the same time accepting responsibility for their actions. Through engaging with this freedom individuals can examine the authenticity of their personal lives and their surrounding environments.

The base concept of agency has been defined as

'one of the most fundamental characteristics of general human behavior that define the way in which the actor takes decisions about his/her role in the activity, the autonomous capacity of social action.' (Dabbagh and Castaneda, 2020, p3048).

In the context of this research it refers to the young athlete's intrinsic sense that they are in control of their actions and associated outcomes⁵. We now understand that agency is not detached from its surroundings and that agency is function of the interaction between personal cognitive processes and environmental factors. Agency is therefore embedded and situated, being negotiable rather than being a fixed trait or competence (Saarikallio, Randall, & Baltazar, 2020). A sense of athletic agency is therefore something the young athlete will develop through their engagement with their training and competition environment.

Sense of agency (SoA) is important because a strong SoA has been shown to relate to positive identity achievement whilst lower SoA to identity diffusion (Côté J.E & Schwartz, 2002). Negative SoA has also been related to higher levels of

⁵ In discussing agency with adolescents I recognise that any calls to increase agency have to be mindful of the legal, ethical and safeguarding frameworks surrounding working with children.

psychopathology in later life with concomitant low levels of well-being (Aytemur & Levita, 2021). In addition, agency is of particular importance in adolescence because this is a period in which the brain goes through significant maturation. Recent research has suggested that neurological development in adolescents adversely affects their SoA irrespective of environmental factors (Aytemur & Levita, 2021). Consequently, any factors in a young athlete's sporting environment that influence their SoA are of even greater significance in talent programmes.

Approaches to the design and delivery of talent environments that emphasise the importance of agency are therefore more likely to produce positive psychological and sociological outcomes for the young athlete. Unfortunately, this position contrasts with the experience many young athletes have in TID programmes where they are pushed to conform to a performance narrative rather than build their own narrative(s) as their life progresses. The prevailing approach to athlete learning emphasises pre-determined competency and skill curricula which leaves little scope for individual development (Aggerholm, Standal, Barker, & Larsson, 2018; Ronkainen, 2018; Ronkainen, Aggerholm, et al., 2020; Ronkainen, Ryba, & Allen-Collinson, 2019). TID environments are therefore likely to, at best, be doing nothing to enhance SoA and, at worst, directly undermining it.

Existential perspective on learning challenges the value in pre-determined curricula and puts the growth of the athlete as a unique individual at the heart of the process. By emphasising the young athletes individuality and the importance of their unique engagement with the sport environment I believe that this will positively influence the athlete's sense of agency. This will in turn lead to a more meaningful talent experience and contribute to stronger outcomes in terms of positive identity creation and long term well-being.

3.2.2 Ambiguity & discontinuity

As Parts 2 and 3 will show life within the talent and performance domains is messy and inconsistent, amazing highs contrast markedly with troughs of disappointment. In

my reading it became clear that existential learning embraces this messiness and ambiguity in life (Biesta, 2015). Existential learning focuses on facilitating reflection on our embodied experience in the world irrespective of whether that experience is positive or negative. It is an approach to learning that capitalises on the process of internal questioning that is so often triggered when we collide with something surprising and challenging. Those moments of ‘discontinuity’ that we all experience in life provide rich opportunities for learning. Our negative responses to life events highlight for us that things that are not as we expect them to be and this requires us to re-think and critique either our ‘self’ or an ‘other’. In the talent domain anything that disrupts the athlete’s normal pattern of experience can serve to create a learning opportunity. For the young athlete, the weaving together of accelerated sporting, academic and personal growth provides many moments of discontinuity. An existential approach to learning seeks to magnify our naturally occurring responses to such moments thereby deepening our reflective learning (Ronkainen, 2018; Ronkainen, Ryba, & Allen-Collinson, 2019).

What existential learning doesn’t do is seek to manage or dampen the impact of those events so that predetermined competency development can continue. In this sense existential learning contrasts markedly with current approaches to negative events within many TID programmes.

3.2.3 Tacit and the informal

Alongside embracing the messiness of life an existential approach to learning also acknowledges the importance of informal learning and tacit knowledge. Research on informal learning has shown that as much as 70-90% of organisational learning occurs naturally outside formal educational settings (Cerasoli et al., 2018). In addition, so much of who we are and how we exist in the world is influenced by our sub-conscious thoughts and emotions. Any educational process that ignores these fundamental truths cannot claim to holistically develop the person. In existential learning the tacit and the informal are as important as the explicit and the formal elements in a programme. Even though tacit knowledge it is not open to measurement it doesn’t diminish its personal significance or contribution to meaning. A young athlete may not be

conscious of their personal growth, let alone be able to articulate what has changed, but that doesn't alter the significance of the learning (Aggerholm, 2015). A programme based on existential principles accepts that positive personal growth will not, at least in part, be open to interrogation. As a learner led process existential learning also allows the individual to create their own identity and draw personal meaning from their embodied experiences.

Again this contrasts with current approaches in TID that emphasise development of core, pre-determined behaviours, characteristics and skills in young athletes. The system is the arbiter of what it is important for the athlete to learn and orientates its judgements about effectiveness and success to assessing change in core sporting competencies. By embracing both the formal and the informal an existential approach broadens the learning experience and allows for multiple avenues for athlete growth and development.

A TID programme based on existential learning principles would naturally oppose any attempt in a training system to completely impose a rigid and prescribed curriculum on young athletes. Athletes within a programme based on existential learning principles would be encouraged able to develop their own learning drawing on a wide range of informal experiences. This sits in contrast to current systems where individuality is constrained and young athletes have to play inauthentic parts to remain in the talent environment (See Chapter 4.2).

3.2.4 *Bildung*

The concept of *Bildung* has arisen within a European philosophical discourse but the phrase does not have a direct translation in to English. *Bildung* is most closely associated with ideas about how someone can cultivate and transform 'self' in its broadest sense (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2018). Aggerholm (2015) described it as the active process of developing your being. Within existential learning the intent is to develop *Bildung* by supporting the learner in developing their whole mode of being rather than targeting specific aspects of their character or abilities. It is a counterpoint to an instrumental view of education which focuses on pre-determined extrinsic measures of success. With *Bildung* the desired end product is not achievement of an extrinsically

determined standard of knowledge or skill but a development of the whole person. A development programme based on the idea of *Bildung* is one in which the learning process is constructed to assist the individual in making sense of their world and finding value and meaning in their life. Within existential learning our role as coaches or educators is to cultivate an individual's distinctiveness and awareness of self (Biesta, 2015). It is about allowing *Bildung* to occur for each individual in a way that assists them in finding value and meaning in their life. As such the development of *Bildung* is a subjective process that can neither be finished or measured (Aggerholm, 2015). It sits as a direct counterpart to approaches to education that are underpinned by the a desire to see the learner achieve pre-determined standards of performance (Aggerholm, 2015; Ronkainen, Aggerholm, et al., 2020).

3.2.5 Elite *Bildung*

The general concept of *Bildung* was refined by Aggerholm (2015) to create elite *Bildung*, a version specific to talent development environments. Aggerholm saw being talented as quintessentially a state of transience where the young person is defined as 'special' based on their potential to become something else. A young person's journey through this transient state presents a unique form of *Bildung* and has four core components: freedom, self-transcendence, excellence and habits.

Freedom – for elite-*Bildung* the young athlete must be free to make choices about the path that they wish to follow and how they wish to engage with their talent environment. However, this freedom has to come with taking personal responsibility for their actions and accepting the risk of not fulfilling their athletic potential. Alongside this balance between freedom and responsibility the athlete must also understand and accept there are sacrifices to be made i.e. in choosing how they will act in any given situation the athlete will always be sacrificing the experience not chosen.

Self-transcendence – the athlete must engage in a process of self transcendence, but this is not an act of disembodied self-reflection. The young athlete must be engaged and active in their experience, influencing experience as well as passively receiving experiences. In this way the athlete has to recognise not just their own

experience but their contribution to the experience of ‘others’. Being a young athlete is about their interaction with ‘others’ (e.g. coaches, other athletes, officials, teachers, family) and navigating simultaneous membership of multiple social groups. The individuals might be talented as an individual but this is defined within a collective context. Self-transcendence must therefore involve active attempts to comprehend ‘others’ experiences as well as the evolution of self and ‘other’ over time.

Excellence – in elite *Bildung* the concept of excellence plays a central role. The athlete is engaged in a process of ‘becoming’ and seeking to fulfil their athletic potential. This is evidenced and pursued through attitudes towards practice and competition. Practice is conceived as a process of strengthening, in a metaphorical sense, which requires agency, repetition and effort to systematically challenge the limits of performance. Cultivation of appropriate attitudes and values within competition are also necessary for the young athlete to achieve elite *Bildung*. Care must be taken to ensure that the young athlete sees the value of competition in the contest not the winning. If the athlete only sees value in winning then competition has become a negative element in talent development. The young athlete must also come to realise that competition needs to be seen as being a collective rather than individual enterprise. We need the opponent to ask questions of us in a competitive ‘dialogue’ and through attempting to answer these questions the young athlete learns. Competition is the collaborative pursuit of excellence.

Habits – self-transcendence in elite *Bildung* is a constant process of experiencing discontinuity, confronting our challenges and finding equilibrium in a stepwise progression. The young athlete has to create the ‘habit’ of continually building self not acquiring pre-determined skills or athletic knowledge. Habit formation is inextricably linked to repetitive practice and the consistent development of self as the young athlete continually opens themselves to new experiences. Through this the athlete acquires a deeper, more practical understanding of their world and what it means to be a talented athlete.

In elite *Bildung* I found a concept that linked the general principles of existential learning with the mastery and excellence focus of craftsmanship whilst directly embracing the adversarial nature of performance sport. The approach to competition expounded by Aggerholm allows us to see athletic performance in competition as a component of learning not the end product of learning. I believe that his shift in focus is pivotal in developing a new paradigm for talent development.

3.3 Summary

Reading this literature alongside reflecting on my career I found that existential thinking and craftsmanship offered a marked contrast to the performance perspectives that had dominated so much of my experience. By looking through an existential lens I moved to a position where athlete development wasn't valued solely by the performance output of a training programme. When I viewed my experience in this way I saw that all the subtle, yet powerful human interactions I observed and shared in my performance journeys were central to my learning from those journeys. By positively embracing discontinuity in experience existential learning also allowed me the opportunity to see the challenges of the performance world as things to be valued. The mess and ambiguity of the performance world becomes a catalyst for learning not something to be suppressed. Existential learning allows young athletes to naturally create their own personal narratives and become authentic individuals. When all these ideas are merged and applied to talent development it becomes a learning process in which every athlete's TID journey can have value irrespective of where it ends.

In the following Chapters I have presented a critique of both the TID literature and my experiences as both a performance practitioner and an educator. In undertaking my critical reflections I didn't start with the intention of looking at either practice or research through an existential lens. My understanding of existentialism grew alongside my critical reflection. Consequently I think the writing in Part 2 and 3 needs to be seen as analysis of literature and experience that grew towards existentialism rather than started there.

PART 2

In Chapter 4 I consider key parts of the talent development literature and compare them to my performance experiences. The literature pool related to talent development is exceptionally wide. It is a literature base that ranges from national policy, through coaching practice to important psycho-social issues such as identity and personal narrative. The challenge in writing the Chapter was to focus on the most pertinent aspects of the literature and decide what to leave out. In reviewing this literature I initially thought I would be undertaking an in-depth critique of the literature around the ‘how’ of talent development i.e. key components of athletic ability, what are the best physiological or psychological markers of talent? In the end I found this was of least importance to my experience. Issues of policy and its evolution were of far greater significance since they formed the culture within which I worked for many years. Literature relating to the athlete’s personal journey was also of significance because within that the impact of policy and culture on the individual athlete was discussed. As a consequence Chapter 4 may not cover all the literature that a talent development practitioner may expect but it covers that which resonates most with my practice.

In Chapter 5 I switch focus and reflect on two hugely meaningful sets of experiences for me. These were the experiences that caused me to question the aims of the high-performance sport community more overtly and provided the catalyst for this thesis. In writing this chapter I reversed the process from Chapter 4 and reflected on my experiences first and then related these reflections back to the literature.

4. Policy, people and practice

In this chapter I consider two, almost diametrically opposed, views of high-performance sport. The first is the view of performance from a policy and national performance agency perspective. How have we arrived at current performance policies and how has this filtered down in the operationalisation of our talent programmes? In contrast what does research tell us about how the individual responds to their performance experience? How does high performance influence the person at the fundamental level of their identity and their personal narrative? I focus on these two perspectives because I have found that they both helped me to understand something about my own practice and the tensions I experienced within it. In the sections covering each perspective I have attempted to interweave more traditionally written sub-sections of review with sub-sections expressing my personal perspectives and questions.

4.1 Elite sport policy: evolution, principles and impact

Over the span of my professional career elite sport policy in the UK could be reasonably categorized as being a ‘game of two halves’. The early part of my career, from 1981 until the mid-late 1990s was conducted within a sport policy environment that focused on enhancing mass sport participation with limited focus on elite sport. The latter, and larger, part of my career took place against the backdrop of a very different policy approach, one that promoted elite sport for a variety of reasons. The latter approach had a profound impact on the way in which elite sport was directed, coached and supported with significant impact on how athletes were developed.

During the early stages of my career (circa 1981-1995) national sport policy centred on the concept of ‘Sport for All’ (SfA). The SfA strategy had been developed by the GB Sports Council that had been created in 1972 within a broad welfare state discourse (Green, 2006). The egalitarianism of the Sports Councils approach promoted a view of sport in which sport was an instrument in policy directed at improving social welfare. SfA was the dominant sport policy in the UK for two decades and chimed with similar

approaches across Europe where the EU had published the European Sport for All Charter in 1975. Even so there always remained an unresolved tension between the community welfare view of sport and the desire from some to see more focus on high performance (Green, 2006).

During the 1970s and 1980s administration of sport was dominated by the individual NGBs with minimalist central government involvement. Sport was run by the largely autonomous NGBs at both the participation and elite levels, with each sport operating as the respective NGB saw fit. This led to a sports administrative landscape characterized by variation in organizational structure, governance, objectives and operations. It was a position jealously guarded by the NGBs who were intensely protective of their autonomy. Governments were comfortable to accept this autonomy out of deference to the established NGBs and also to reinforce the difference between the political systems of Western European and the state run sport systems of European Communist countries (Houlihan & Chapman, 2015). It was a state of affairs that continued until the mid-1990s with successive governments adopting a largely non-interventionist approach to sport generally, and elite sport in particular (Houlihan & Chapman, 2015).

However, this changed radically in the 90s and a new approach to national engagement with elite sport took shape from the middle of the decade. The shift in policy was heavily influenced by four factors that all exerted their influence over the same time period (1993-2000). These factors were:

- The National Lottery
- Perceptions of national benefit from elite sport success
- Team GB's performance at the Atlanta Olympics
- The modernisation agenda in government post 1997

Whilst each factor in isolation may not have catalysed the radical policy change that took place, the combination of factors all exerting influence during a specific time period built an irresistible pressure for change.

National Lottery

The concept of a National Lottery in the UK was discussed and then brought into being at the start of the 1990s'. The national lottery was run by a private-sector body overseen by a Director General (DG), appointed by the government. The DG's role was to monitor the propriety of the lottery ensure that the lottery raised the maximum amount for its 'good causes'.

At the launch of the National Lottery sport believed that that it could expect unheard of resource to deliver the prevailing 'Sport for All' agenda. However, whilst this may have been the policy direction when the National Lottery was in the planning phase, other events shifted focus as the Lottery came in to being. Team GBs performance at the Atlanta Olympics, a growing perception of the political and social capital to be gained from elite sporting success, and a new government's modernisation agenda all combined in a 'perfect storm' to irrevocably alter the direction of Lottery resourcing of sport.

National Benefit

From the late 1980s more governments started to recognise the potential value of elite sporting success to a nation. The Soviet and East German sporting systems were clearly producing enviable levels of international sporting success (Andersen, Houlihan, & Ronglan, 2015). Whilst, with the benefit of hindsight, we could attribute some of this success to systematic doping regimes the image was one of a highly systematic and centrally controlled process for developing coaching that led to considerable podium success. This encouraged a global trend towards other, non-Communist, countries beginning to use public funding to resource more systematic approaches to achieving international sporting achievement (Houlihan & Zheng, 2013). This was the start of what has subsequently been dubbed the 'global sporting arms race' with countries 'racing' to win ever increasing numbers of Olympic medals (De Bosscher, Shibli, et al., 2015). As it stands today this is an arms race that shows little sign of stopping and is a process that has had a profound impact on athlete experiences over the intervening years.

The justification for more sustained and systematic investment in elite sport was the perceived benefit elite success brought to a nation as a whole. In the UK successive

government strategy documents (Sport: Raising the game (DNH, 1995); A sporting future for all (DCMS, 2000); Game Plan (DCMS, 2002); Playing to Win: a new era for sport (DCMS, 2008)) all identified that investment in high performance sport was justified on the grounds that a virtuous cycle of sport improvement existed. In the supposed virtuous cycle elite success leads to increased participation which creates health benefits and a wider talent pool thereby leading to further elite success. Alongside belief in this cycle other national benefits were thought to be enhanced national pride, indirect economic benefit from improved international profile and direct economic benefit from hosting elite sports events (Breuer & Wicker, 2015; Grix & Carmichael, 2012; Houlihan, 2013; Sotiriadou, Gowthorp, & De Bosscher, 2014; Westerbeek & Hahn, 2013). These outcomes continue to be used to justify investment in elite sport both in the UK and other countries. For example, the current elite sport investment strategy for the UK specifically identifies the need to enhance national pride through the work of UK Sport (UKS). UKS strategy overtly references a desire “to inspire a nation”, as well as setting targets for societal impacts (social and economic) beyond the medal count (UKSport, 2019).

Belief in the virtuous cycle has been sustained despite research that questions the causal links between elite sport success and the perceived national benefits (Bailey & Talbot, 2015; Collins & Bailey, 2015; Grix & Carmichael, 2012). For example, analysis of the Canadian sport system has shown an inverse relationship between medals won and participation rates, a reduction in sport participation funding due to sustained elite funding and increases in the cost of elite sport engagement for the parents of talented athletes (Donnelly & Kidd, 2015). In the UK, after the London Olympics, even with Team GB’s record breaking performances, the scale of the UK’s delivery on the intended societal benefits from the Games was queried (Grix & Carmichael, 2012). So, despite a lack of clarity on the links between elite sporting success and specific variables, the UK government, along with many others, initiated and sustained investment in elite sport for its perceived national benefit.

Atlanta and unfavourable comparisons

A growing interest in the possible national benefit to be gained from international sporting success coincided with Team GB's poor performance at the Atlanta Olympics. In Atlanta GB won only one gold medal and this is now widely accepted as being a watershed moment in British sport. GB finished in 36th position in the medals table, the first time GB had been outside the top 15 in the table in ten successive Games. In absolute terms Team GB's failure to finish higher in the medals table than countries such as Kazakhstan and Algeria prompted much negative press criticism. However, it was Team GB's comparison to Australia that had greatest impact. Since the creation of the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) in 1981 Australia had risen in the medals table in each successive Games up to Atlanta. In Atlanta they beat Team GB and entered the top 10 for the first time in their history. This rise was seen in stark contrast to Team GB's declining fortune over the same period. Such comparisons provided real ammunition for critics of the NGB domination of sport policy to make a case for more central involvement in sport, per se, but elite sport especially. However, whilst Atlanta was undoubtedly a pivotal moment in the evolution of elite sport in the UK, radical change did not occur overnight. Atlanta was a hugely symbolic moment, but it was the government's commitment to a wider modernisation agenda that really laid the foundation for radical change in elite sport.

Atlanta, the Lottery and a growing interest in national benefit all contributed to shifts in elite sport policy but it was the modernisation agenda in government that was the critical factor in practical change to elite sport systems.

4.1.1 Modernisation

Following on from Atlanta the sporting drivers for change were matched by a political desire for change that manifested itself in a 'modernisation' agenda within government. The Labour government, elected in 1997, argued that government institutions and many partner agencies in society were not 'fit for purpose' and therefore had to be modernised (Houlihan & Chapman, 2015). This was part of the wider adoption of 'New Public Management' (NPM) processes across liberal democracies (e.g. Australia, Canada, New Zealand, UK) with NPM being applied to the management of sport as it was to all other areas of government (Andersen et al.,

2015; Grix & Carmichael, 2012). NPM principles focus on performance budgeting, contracting and robust evaluation of system outcomes as being the primary mechanisms by which the delivery of government policy should be managed. Consequently, the government looked for its engagement with partner agencies in sport (NGBs) to adopt these principles and for NGBs to become far more accountable for the funding they received. It was also decided that in order to effectively modernise sport a new leading body for elite sport was required to challenge the status quo of NGBs and existing Sport Councils (Grix, 2010). UK Sport (UKS) was therefore created with a specific remit to manage elite sport policy. This required lines of demarcation to be drawn between the work of the Home Country Sport Councils and UKS. The process of separation of power was not without its difficulties but the existence of UKS gave government a clear ‘tool’ to use in the modernisation of elite sport policy (Grix & Carmichael, 2012; Houlihan & Chapman, 2015).

Once in existence UK Sport picked up the baton of modernisation and began to focus attention on improving the NGBs in relation to their delivery of elite sport. UKS adopted a policy summed up in the slogan ‘*No Compromise*’, which involved the setting of medal targets for each NGB. In its drive to modernise NGBs UKS paid particular attention to the areas of coaching, innovation [in science, medicine and engineering] and talent development seeing these as the primary levers for achieving medal targets. This was underpinned by a financial reward and punishment system linked to potentially unprecedented levels of funding for elite programmes (Houlihan, 2013).

In order to access funding NGBs had to lock into a system involving rigorous use of service agreements, contracts, performance reviews and audits. The relationship between UK Sport and Olympic NGBs became contractually much stronger and the demands on NGBs clearer (Houlihan, 2013; Houlihan & Zheng, 2013). The level of resource on offer also created a resource dependency in the NGBs so they had little, if any, choice but to engage with the modernisation agenda. This dependency gave UKS the leverage it needed to demand that NGBs devise more systematic approaches to the development of both athletes and coaches.

In a paradox whilst the UKS approach improved partner agencies and attempted to empower them to deliver public policy the process of modernisation also increased central control of policy delivery. The impact of more precise and clearer contracting, combined with more intense auditing, served to allow government, via UKS, greater control of partner agency action (Houlihan & Chapman, 2015).

One of the most far-reaching effects of the modernisation agenda in elite sport was a shift in the governance of elite sport across the UK. NGBs were traditionally membership organisations owned by and run for the benefit of their members. Whilst NGBs have remained constitutionally independent of central government their resource dependence on lottery funding has altered their fundamental role to being one of a government 'contractor' (Houlihan & Chapman, 2015). This shift altered not only the relationship between NGB and UKS but also the relationship between NGBs (Board and executive staff) and their own members.

The impact on governance was most clearly demonstrated with responsibility for participation and elite performance being split between separate organisations within a single sport. At the start of the modernisation period, many NGBs in England served both English and British performance programmes from within a single NGB. Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish NGBs, whilst supporting GB Olympic agendas, were responsible for the governance of their sport in their Home Country. To create clarity around the elite performance agenda UKS required many sports to create separate British entities purely to oversee the operation of the performance programmes e.g. British Swimming, GB Hockey, British Athletics.

The NGB response to the modernisation agenda was often a mix of frustration, passive acceptance and enthusiastic engagement with UKS agendas. Some NGBs saw increasingly sophisticated performance review as creating unnecessary and intrusive hoops that had to be jumped through to gain funding (Grix & Carmichael, 2012). Estimates of the NGB staff time required to comply with UKS audit processes were significant with at least one NGB estimating that, at times, performance staff spent 70-80% of their time on meeting the audit requirements that came with lottery funding (Houlihan & Chapman, 2015). Limited negotiation with the modernisation agenda was

possible but only for those NGBs already successful in delivering Olympic medals. As a counterpoint to frustrations with administrative processes some NGB executive staff welcomed UKS intervention because it complemented a reform agenda that they were already pursuing in their sport (Houlihan & Zheng, 2013).

Irrespective of whether one sees modernisation as having created positive or negative change in sport in the UK it irrevocably altered relationships between central government and NGBs. NGBs became the deliverers of a government's elite sport agenda rather than just being autonomous membership organisations. In addition, a critical consequence of the relationship shift between government, UKS and the NGBs was that athletes and coaches in performance programmes became contracted deliverers of policy objectives as much as independent agents. In order to be part of the emerging high-performance systems coaches and athletes were required to operate within agreed performance structures in order to access funding and support. Sport for sport's sake and for the personal growth of the participants was no longer a valid policy objective (Green, 2006). 'No compromise' was the mantra of the high-performance evangelists of the late 90s and early 2000s and you either worked within the scope of that approach or the system rejected you.

4.1.2 Modernisation in action: Elite athlete 'production' & TID

The increases in public investment that accompanied the Lottery increased the UK's chances for winning more medals on an international stage. However, whilst increased investment is a necessary condition for improved performance, it is not a sufficient condition (Houlihan, 2013; Houlihan & Zheng, 2013). A number of countries, such as Spain and Japan, have increased elite sport expenditure in the same way as the UK did in the late 90s but have not enhanced their national standing in relation to the Olympic medals table. High performance investment combined with high population numbers only accounts for 41% of variance in Olympic medals won. It is the effectiveness of a country's performance system that is pivotal in translating resource into podium places (De Bosscher, Shibli, et al., 2015). The UK therefore needed the 'no compromise' approach to transform its system bringing perceived clarity of purpose coupled with a focus on core components of athlete development.

In the UK the ‘no compromise’ policy meant that performance targets were determined solely in relation to Olympic medals (Houlihan & Chapman, 2015). NGBs had to agree simple targets for the number (and colour) of medals to be won at milestone events (e.g. World or European Championships) and subsequent Olympics. Simple outcome measures were preferred despite an awareness that more complex, and more accurate, assessments of system effectiveness can be made using composite measures that consider medals success relative to national factors. Medal performance expressed in relation to population, GDP, number of sports entered at major Games or market share of medals in comparison to other nations all give more accurate assessments of a countries performance relative to other nations (De Bosscher, Shibli, et al., 2015). Unfortunately, whilst relative measures allow for more sophisticated judgements of system performance, they are not as easily understood by the public or politicians. The British media expresses performance success or failure in absolute ways that are easily consumed by the public. So, in the UK the targets for individual sports were set simply in terms of winning a predetermined number of medals. If all sports hit their individual targets then the system as a whole would achieve a specific Olympic medal table ranking. Consequently, all UKS tools of audit and review were directed at understanding and monitoring each sport’s capacity to achieve a medal target with a very direct link between funding and medals won (De Bosscher, Shibli, Westerbeek, & van Bottenburg, 2016; Shibli, de Bosscher, & van Bottenburg, 2013). Medal targets established the frame of reference for each NGB performance system with specific targets having to be reached at specific times. UKS then demanded that NGBs and the performance system as a whole direct their efforts towards developing critical performance components (Table 4.1).

The components in Table 4.1 closely resemble the 9 ‘pillars’ of effective performance systems identified by the SPLISS 2.0 study (Sport Policy Leading to International Sporting Success (Figure 4.1) (De Bosscher, Shibli, et al., 2015). SPLISS 2 analysed

elite sport policy in 15 nations⁶ gathering data from 9,258 athletes, 2,176 coaches and 432 performance directors in the process to create their understanding of the 9 pillars.

⁶ The sample did not include the UK who declined to take part but did include Northern Ireland as a separate sporting system.

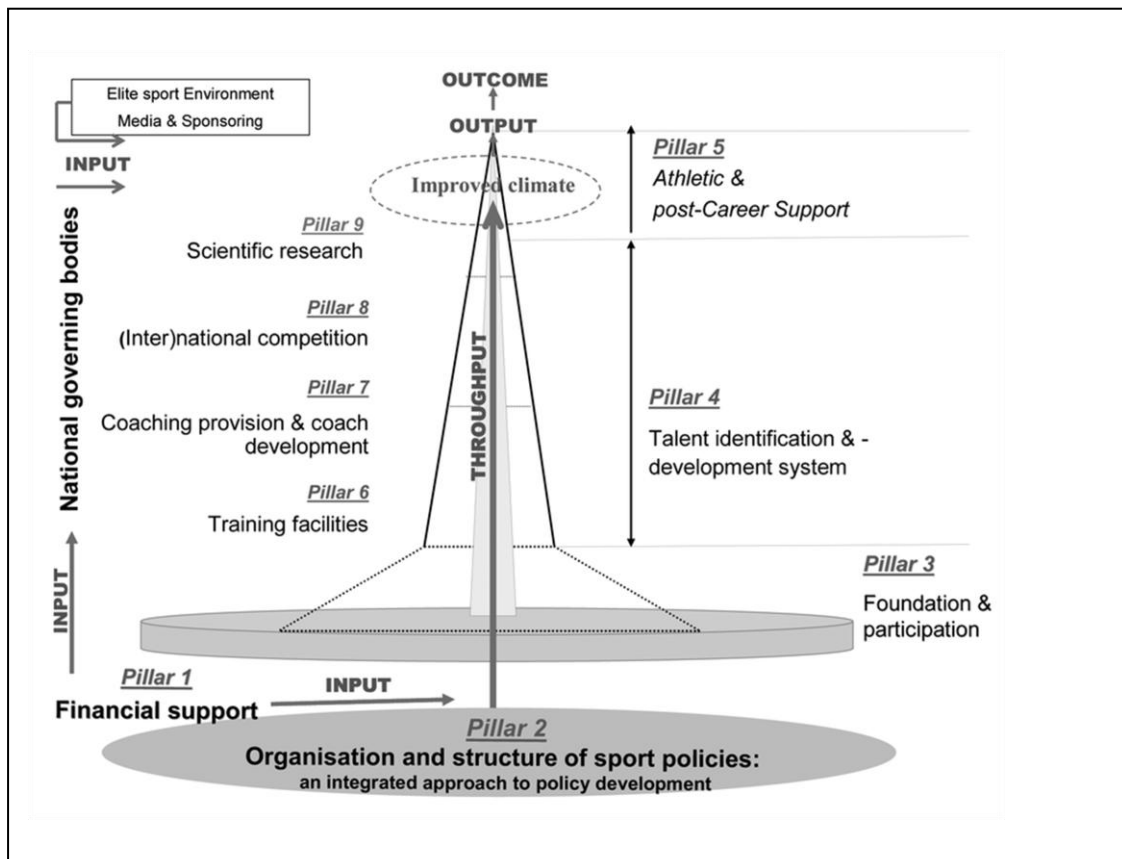


Figure 4.1 SPLISS model: Theoretical model describing 9 pillars of sport policy factors influencing international success (De Bosscher et al, 2015)

Table 4.1 UKS view of the central elements of a modern elite sport system (UK Sport, 2013)

- clear and agreed outcome goals
- world class coaches
- a performance management system that tracks progress, identifies, prioritises and addresses challenges and encourages sharing and collaboration across sports
- the continued evolution of the use of performance intelligence
- greater focus on athlete profiling
- better and more aligned talent pathways
- better resourced Paralympic campaign
- improved standards of leadership, governance, financial management and administration in sports

Both UKS and SPLISS2 describe the training and support processes that agencies and governments see as being central to effective high-performance systems and unsurprisingly one of these components is TID. To qualify for a share of the lottery bounty not only did a sport need to agree to, and be perceived to be able to deliver, a medal target it had to demonstrate its control over the core performance variables. Consequently, NGBs had to show that they had robust and measurable systems for the identification and development of talented athletes.

Modernisation and TID

Given that TID systems were seen as being the vital pipeline to sustained medal success it is little wonder that such systems received significant investment. In the lead up to the London Olympics it was estimated that NGB's in the UK were devoting 10% of their world class budgets to TID with UK Sport putting an additional 15% of central performance funding in to focused programmes for TID (Pankhurst & Collins, 2013). That level of funding was sustained through the Rio Olympic cycle with an even larger investment in the Tokyo cycle (UKSport, 2017b). TID was therefore a primary target for reform at the start of the UK modernisation process and was to be subjected to the same intense scrutiny as all other areas of performance (Slot et al., 2017; Vaeyens et al., 2009).

Application of the principles of New Public Management to TID drove a search for the components of talent that could be measured, profiled and audited. Encompassing biological, psychological, motor and social factors the early breakdown of TID into the type of constituent parts can be seen in Table 4.2. This table gives a sense of the reductionist thinking that was applied to identifying and developing talent (Collins, Macnamara, McCarthy, Moore, & Wattie, 2016; Pankhurst & Collins, 2013; Rees et al., 2016; Vaeyens et al., 2009; Vaeyens, Lenoir, Williams, & Philippaerts, 2008). We wanted to reduce talented athletes to their constituent parts so that they could be refined as they were rebuilt. This approach has held sway in TID since the earliest days of 'No Compromise' thinking and it is telling to note that the most recent review of talent development commissioned by UK Sport only looked at athlete variables related to the individual's ability to perform in their sport. No attempt was made to

review variables related to a young athlete's wider personal growth (Rees et al., 2016). Our reductionist thinking had a profound effect on the systems we designed and how we behaved as practitioners.

Table 4.2 Factors impacting the effectiveness of TID processes as defined in four review papers published since 2008 (Pankhurst & Collins, 2013b; Rees et al., 2016; Vaeyens et al., 2009; Vaeyens et al., 2008)

Factors affecting TID	Rees <i>et al</i> 2016	Pankhurst & Collins 2013	Vaeyens <i>et al</i> (2008 & 2009)
Birthdate	√	√ (within section on athlete development)	
Genetics	√		
Anthropometry and Physiology (incl RAE)	√	√ (as GDM) (within section on athlete development)	√
Psycho-social skills	√	√ (within section on athlete development)	
Personality	√		
Birthplace	√		
Significant Others (eg family, coach etc)	√		
Coach as key stakeholder		√	
Athlete Support Programme	√		
Practice	√	√	√ (within section on Jun-Sen performance)
Specialisation	√	√	√
Fundamental Movement Skills			
Junior-Senior performance	√	√	√
Economics of TID			√ (within section on Jun-Sen performance)
Selection	√	√ (within section on Specialisation)	

Within this thesis it isn't possible to attempt to discuss the impact of modernisation on all of the TID variables identified in Table 4.2. However, to give a sense of the impact of modernisation I want to use the issues of specialisation and deliberate practice as exemplars of the thinking applied to TID.

Specialisation and Practice: exemplars of impact

Evolution of national performance policy pushed NGBs to attempt to identify, systematically train and then retain athletes in their sport at ever younger ages i.e. require athletes to specialise very early (Pankhurst & Collins, 2013). The assumptions underpinning this approach were twofold. Firstly, that by identifying talent at the earliest possible opportunity, it maximized the time available for the volume of appropriately intense training that was required for young athletes to reach world level. Secondly, early identification of talent allowed NGBs to conserve resources (e.g. time/money) by focusing only on those who had the potential to reach the required performance levels i.e. a time-economic set of drivers (Vaeyens et al., 2009). A belief in the power of early specialization to help meet performance targets was pervasive in the late 1990's and early 2000's that NGBs were effectively competing to attract and retain athletic talent as early as possible in an athlete's life. A practice that is still at the forefront of talent work in sports such as professional soccer where Premier League clubs run 'academies' for the most talented U-8 and U-9 year olds (Bergkamp, Niessen, den Hartigh, Frencken, & Meijer, 2019).

The early specialization approach was underpinned by initial perspectives on deliberate practice. The most influential work on practice was the theory of deliberate practice developed by Ericsson in the early 1990's (Ericsson, 2020). Deliberate practice was differentiated from other forms of activity or practice with it being effortful, highly structured, repetitive and largely non-rewarding. Ericsson's proposition was that to reach elite status in a domain, such as sport, an individual had to accumulate approximately 10 years or 10,000 hours of deliberate practice. Consequently, this was interpreted as justifying the necessity for early specialization in a single sport as being essential to achievement of elite status. Without early specialisation a performer wouldn't accumulate 10,000 hours practice at an optimal

rate nor could someone who started serious training at a later age catch up with those who started earlier.

Within talent systems increasingly concerned with quantification and measurement it was taken as a given that the highest levels of performance couldn't not be attained without accumulation of high volumes of well-designed and focused practice and training (Ericsson, Charness, Feltovich, & Hoffman, 2006; Starkes & Ericsson, 2003). Having a definitive target of 10,000 hours of practice suited the 'No Compromise' mindset with its focus on measurement and audit. Practitioners didn't question the validity of the 10,000 hours rule rather we discussed how the 10,000 hours should be apportioned during the athlete's developmental years. This deliberate practice thinking dovetailed with the economic drive to attract and retain talented athletes at increasingly young age creating a belief that talent 'hot houses' were essential to elite success. We needed to grab athletes at an early age and place them in programmes that developed practice volume whilst avoiding the distractions of education and adolescence. If you approach the challenge of creating Olympic medallists from a quasi-industrial perspective then the reduction of the athlete to component parts is intuitive and logical. However, there is now a growing research base which suggests that our early thinking was simply wrong. Research has shown that even in studies where world champions can be differentiated from other world level athletes by virtue of accumulated practice hours differences in practice volume have only been found in training in late adolescence and adulthood (Hardy et al., 2017; Rees et al., 2016; Strachan, Côté, & Deakin, 2009). In the majority of recent work on practice volume it has been found that variance in practice volume **doesn't** differentiate international performers from Olympic/World champions in many sports (athletics, badminton, basketball, fencing, figure skating, gymnastics, judo, rowing, soccer, swimming, table tennis and wrestling) (Bailey & Collins, 2013; Güllich & Emrich, 2014). It's now quite clear that early specialization doesn't bring the benefits that were supposed early in the evolution of performance policy (Hardy et al., 2017; Rees et al., 2016). In the majority of sports breadth of sporting experience is now seen to be more valuable in the development of elite adult performance (Rees et al., 2016). A broad activity base is now see as being a critical feature of elite performers TID journeys as opposed to singular training focus at an early age. We now see that the role of practice in TID is complex and

contextually dependent. The question has evolved from being ‘how much practice is required’ to ‘what constitutes meaningful activity/practice that will contribute to eventual elite performance?’ As a response to questions over the value of early age talent identification programmes UK Sport has now shifted attention towards late-age talent recruitment programmes or ‘talent transfer’ programmes (UKSport, 2017b). Such programmes are aimed at identifying young athletes, typically over the age of 16, who have shown moderate talent in one sport and who meet critical physical criteria. These athletes are then put through a comprehensive physiological and psychological screening programme to find those ones who might have untapped potential for elite performance in specific sports where particular physical characteristics are critical e.g. rowing, beach volleyball. The athletes identified by late-stage programmes are seen as having the potential to achieve international performance standards within 12 months of taking up a sport provided that they can be subsequently wholly immersed in the right talent environments (UKSport, 2017b, 2018; Vaeyens et al., 2009).

So, we now have a more nuanced understanding of the role of practice in creating elite athletes. Nevertheless, consideration of the evolution of approaches to specialization and deliberate practice, shows the impact of modernisation. The modernisation agenda championed an approach to TID in which there was purposeful attempt to de-constructed ‘talent’ to identify its core components. The belief was that, once identified, core components of the athlete could be manipulated during the early stages of development to optimize talent development and medals won (Houlihan & Chapman, 2017). By taking the concept of practice as a single variable that could be quantified and manipulated we sought to control athletic development without any regard for the holistic development of the performer. This is a prime example of how talented athletes were seen as athletic ‘machines’ that could be de-constructed and rebuilt. Sadly, it is unclear what the cost of early specialization has been for many generations of athletes. When looking at the current issues being faced by British Gymnastics that cost may be quite high (Ingle, 2020).

The reductionist approach to TID demonstrated through the conceptualisation of specialisation and practice has been the dominant thought process since the modernisation agenda altered elite sport.

Overall I think it is possible to draw a clear line between developments in governmental thinking, through high performance sport policy and down into the construction and operationalisation of our talent programmes. As practitioners within these early systems our thought processes and behaviours were directed towards the deconstruction and reconstruction of the athlete, seeking to control and manipulate a variety of aspects of their lives to maximise each individual athlete's chance of making it to the podium in later life.

4.1.3 Modernisation: a personal view

To understand my personal view of modernisation in elite sport you have to understand my journey into the world of high-performance sport. I left school as talented sports person (county/regional standard) who was a massive sports fan. I could eat, sleep and breath sport and loved competition but I knew I was never going to make it to the highest level as a performer. So when I looked for the next stage in life after school I found myself drawn to the emerging but tiny world of sport science in HE.

At the start of my undergraduate study sport science as a discipline was only just passed the stage of conception. There were only two sport science honours degrees in the UK (Loughborough and Liverpool) when I started in 1981 and the *BA Combined Studies (Sport Studies)* I studied was only an Ordinary degree. It became an honours degree at re-validation in 1984 so I graduated from only the third sport science honours degree in the UK. So, there I was in the mid-80s, hugely passionate about sport, loving competition, wanting to use my newly acquired scientific knowledge to develop athletes at the highest level I possibly could.

However, at the time I finished my undergraduate studies there was no central government funding for sport science to operate in support of any sports. I therefore embarked on post-graduate study but then in 1986 the Sports Council committed to funding the Sport Science Support Programme (SSSP). The SSSP was the first centrally funded programme to link sport science with national squads. A small number of projects ($n=8$) were funded so that NGBs could link with University sport science teams and access support for national squads. The total budget was 64k to cover all projects which today, even allowing for inflation, would only amount to 150k

to cover the whole of British sport. The level of funding didn't matter to me though and I managed to secure a Project Assistantship on one of the programmes (supporting England Netball).

That was my first experience of the world of high-performance programmes in the UK. I was young (23), passionate, dedicated and relatively naïve when it came to the highest levels of competition. I came into high performance with an expectation that coaches, and athletes were already using the kind of systematic, objective and analytical approaches to understanding performance that I have learnt as an undergraduate. I was shocked to find that even at international level sport in the UK could be anything but systematic in its approach to winning medals.

For example, I found I was working with sports where the selection processes for national squads still meant all potential performers turning up for a 'trial' on the same day. The 'Trials' were then the **only** environment in which a player could be observed by a selector and selected for the national squad. Non-appearance at trials meant non-selection. I came across sports where the national squad athletes had to pay the NGB a training fee for every national training session that the athlete attended and then another 'fee' as a contribution to an international tour or Test series, if selected.

In relation to training and preparation I had been taught to think logically, control variables, analyse and dissect human performance before writing training programmes. I then stepped into a world where neither matches nor training were necessarily filmed, where fitness wasn't systematically tested and the application of science, as I understood it, was non-existent.

So, after eight years of working in this kind of environment either as a Project Assistant or consultant the sea change in performance policy in the mid 90's was music to my ears. The brave, new '*No Compromise*' world was one that I embraced with huge enthusiasm. Lottery funding brought the 'impossible' within reach. The 'promised land' of focused, systematic performance programmes had become a reality scientific support for performance was now front and centre of a new approach. The clinical objectivity that had been drilled into me as a fledgling scientist was now the core ethos running through the mindsets of staff in the high-performance agencies.

The manner in which modernisation was operationalized in sport was something that I wholeheartedly embraced. The application of robust management practices into elite sport just seemed natural to me. So much of what I experienced in my earliest years as a practitioner was poor practice and needed to change. When you have been taught to bring a positivist scientific thought process to your understanding of elite sport you want to see that same robust thinking reflected back at you from within sport. To then be confronted with thought processes that are vague and decision making that was more guess work than evidence based meant that I was more than ready to unquestioningly accept modernisation when it arrived. My experience told me that too much training was poorly planned and even more poorly executed being based on minimal systematic analysis of performance. Too many administrators I met were willing volunteers who were there for the status that came with a particular position rather than being individuals with relevant skills sets and a deep seated desire to develop performance. From my professional, scientific perspective radical change was required. The 'No Compromise' policy direction challenged so much of the poor practice I experienced that I had to embrace it. Not to have done so would have been like a tacit acceptance of the sub-standard performance environments that I encountered. For example, prior to modernisation I had seen performers being selected into national squads because they were personally 'vouched for' by a selector rather than on the basis of observed performance. Policy change meant that this kind of behaviour was no longer possible. UK Sport demanded that there were clear selection criteria, that selectors had to be openly recruited, that decision making was systematic and transparent. How could I not embrace change that brought rigor, transparency and fairness to archaic selection processes?

The deconstruction of performance, and performers, that was part and parcel of 'No Compromise' was simply a policy extension of the kind scientific thought process that I had learnt as an undergraduate. I saw the world as variables to be identified, controlled or systematically manipulated so I didn't have the perspective or vocabulary to question the way that the high-performance systems was divided up in to the 9 Pillars implication or how 'talent' was broken in constituent parts. Intuitively the thought processes underpinning 'No Compromise' chimed with my own world view so I saw only benefit to be gained from the policy shift.

I tacitly assumed that every athlete on a performance pathway was totally focused on winning medals. If young athletes weren't myopically focused on being an international athlete, then what were they doing on a performance programme? I never questioned the core philosophy that was the basis for high performance sport policy. I simply wanted to work with talented young performers and be part of an optimal system for growing them into world level athletes.

The values inherent in the Sport for All policy that preceded modernisation simply didn't connect with me as a person. I think I believed in the virtuous cycle supporting national benefit, not because I had consciously thought it through but because it provided an easy rationale for pursuing what I wanted to pursue which was supporting athletes to win on a world stage. I don't think I was alone in this regard. I was part of a new generation of sport practitioners many of whom had been taught to think about performance analytically and scientifically. Modernisation reflected who we were, so I unconsciously accepted the shift from young athlete as person to athlete as potential medal winning machine without a second thought.

Why did I embrace modernisation unquestioningly? I think the real question should be 'why wouldn't I embrace it?'. I certainly didn't look beyond the immediate impact of policy changes. I had been working in an area that was appallingly resourced and now it was going to be resourced. Any reservations or questions that I might have considered at a moral, philosophical or ethical level were never given the mental room to take shape. I could at last plan training programmes knowing that an athlete might have more than a couple of evenings a week to actually dedicated to specific training regimes. To ask someone to consider the possibility that the new policy might be detrimental to athletes and/or sports would have been a bit like asking a man dying of thirst in a desert to question whether the water he has just found may have long term health implications if drunk. It might be a valid question but at the time you aren't going to listen to it. So I became an acolyte of the 'No Compromise' approach.

Winning medals was important and if we were going to win them we needed to throw off our old amateur approaches and become serious about training and preparation.

Modernisation was therefore carried over in to how we conceptualized and operationalized our work with athletes. 'No compromise' influenced whole systems

and within that it had a demonstrable impact on how talented athletes were prepared for the podium. As a practitioner working with developing athletes I just absorbed the ‘No compromise’ mind-set and reflected it in my work with those athletes.

Even if I had questions or concerns I doubt that they would have been voiced because no one around me was asking dissenting questions so why would I? I was a young practitioner whose future potentially lay in the new funding that was coming into sport so to have ‘rocked the boat’ may have threatened that possible future. The assumption in the emerging high-performance system was that if you weren’t excited by the new world you were wrong. Caution was interpreted as negativity, anything less than complete enthusiasm was seen as resistance to change. Complete faith in the ‘No Compromise’ agenda was a pre-requisite for advancement so to be a dissenting voice was to run the risk of missing the race towards the podium. I would like to think that despite the personal advantages to be gained from embracing ‘No Compromise’ I still wrestled with the ethical dilemma of whether I ought to raise concerns about its impact on the athlete as a person. However, being honest that wasn’t an issue because, like so many around me, I simply didn’t see any questions that might have been asked. As a young practitioner I didn’t see another way to view TID because there was no debate or discussion. I couldn’t see another way of viewing TID without sacrificing the pursuit of sporting excellence.

However, reflecting on myself as a practitioner in the late 90s, I can now see problems with my unquestioning acceptance of modernisation in sport policy. This has been due in part to experiences which will be explored in Chapter 5 but also due to a growing appreciation of wider thinking about high performance sport and talent development specifically.

Instrumental Rationality and the ‘purpose’ of TID

My perspectives on the evolution of elite sport policy and its impact on TID have been heavily influenced in recent years by the work of Aggerholm in his consideration of the philosophical basis of talent development (Aggerholm, 2014, 2015). In the context

of this thesis a review of policy and TID is therefore incomplete without a consideration of applied philosophy.

In this work on TID Aggerholm talks of a ‘natural attitude’ in performance sport, a common sense understanding of reality which seems so obvious that we can’t comprehend the world being any different. The process of modernisation in sport has led to the creation of such a ‘natural attitude’ to performance sport that unquestioningly sees its own world through its own lens. In the search for medals, and in parallel with the tenets of NPM, national agencies have immersed themselves in the processes of modern science with a desire to quantify, measure, monitor, objectify, statistically analyse and then tightly manage interventions. Sport has developed a natural orientation towards using such mechanistic principles explain performance and drive development. Aggerholm cites Loland (2000) in arguing that sport has allowed these values to dominate in such a way as to create an unquestioned social logic in which performance development is assumed to be linear, quantifiable and controllable.

"Through the quest for standardisation and objectivity, scientific and technological know-how is applied to control the uncontrollable, to eliminate chance, and to measure performance improvement in an increasingly more accurate way" (Loland 2000, p42)

In tandem with development of this ‘natural attitude’ performance sport has become dominated by a means-end rationality. If the ‘end’ is to win medals rationality demands that performance systems must be structured to do that and that alone. Performance systems are therefore operating within the construct of instrumental rationality (Kolodny & Brunero, 2013). Adopting a philosophy of instrumental rationality any processes that do not directly relate to the achievement of medals simply detract from a system’s potential for achieving the right ends and are therefore inappropriate. The description of a natural attitude dovetails with my experience of high-performance sport early in my career. The nature of the political process of modernisation mirrors the mindset of instrumental rationality with an ‘ends before means’ approach.

The challenge posed by instrumental rationality, especially when applied in the field of TID, is that athletes become resources that a system deploys in their attempt to secure

the right end to the process. An increasingly instrumental approach to athletes and the subsequent objectification of their bodies means that their value is only in their capacity to bring about the ends required by the system.

‘The modern worldview subordinates human activity to the primacy of the object or product’ (Aggerholm, 2016, p15)

I found that this perspective had a strong resonance with my lived experience of TID. As instrumental rationality connects a single end to the means to achieve that end it allows no reflection on the value or meaning of the ends pursued. The ‘end’ that the system chases obscures the possibility that the experience of chasing the ‘end’ can create meaning for the athlete that is independent of the ‘end’ itself. Instrumental rationality doesn’t recognize that the process of enhancing performance creates experiences that give meaning to life irrespective of whether the athlete ever gets on to a world stage or becomes an Olympian. The individual meaning any individual athlete can draw from their lived experience is of no value since it doesn’t bring an advantage to the system in chasing its goals. The creation of personal growth and understanding in life is a distracting irrelevance because it isn’t pertinent to the system producing the medal, i.e. the means producing the ends. If the logic of instrumental rationality to TID it there is no value in young athletes experience per se unless they reach senior elite performance levels. Aggerholm argues that that the experience of being a young athlete cannot, and should not, be reduced to the instrumental level of explanation. IR cannot provide an exhaustive account of the meaning that can be drawn from engaging in TID pathways (Aggerholm, 2015; Aggerholm & Breivik, 2020). This raises the question of whether instrumental rationality should ever be the philosophy that underpins TID programmes since it does not serve the interests of the individual?

There may be much to be gained from adopting philosophical positions with a greater concern for the young athletes experience as a person. Should we not be working with young athletes to enhance not only their sporting potential but also their capacity to question their experience and draw meaning from it? As Aggerholm states we should see TID experiences as being

*‘a phenomenal field filled with a range of existential phenomena that provide meaning and colour the experience of young athletes’
(Aggerholm, 2016, p15).*

Yet despite concerns about instrumental rationality as a foundation philosophy Aggerholm didn’t present a blanket rejection of the idea that we should have talent development programmes at all. There was no sense that the development of talented young athletes was not possible within a more person-centred philosophy but there was a clear call to expand our philosophical horizons. Aggerholm’s thinking encompassed my own growing concern with commodification of the young athlete but allowed for a sustained focus on optimising talent.

At the time I was engaging with Aggerholm’s applied philosophy I was also immersed in research relating to identity and personal narrative. At the time I started reviewing the identity/narrative literature I couldn’t connect it with the radically different perspectives of high-performance policy. However, Aggerholm’s applied philosophy created a conceptual bridge that helped me link them and start to make sense of my own contradictory values, beliefs and practice. In the next sub-section I want explore the identity and narrative literature because its juxtaposition to high performance policy and its implementation played a key role in shaping my current thinking about TID.

4.2 Athlete as person: Identities and narratives

The concepts of self and identity have been core concepts in behavioural and social sciences since the work of Erikson (1968). Social psychology has subsequently developed the concept of identity as relating to how the individual sees them self in relation to social roles and social groups (Ronkainen et al., 2016a). Within social psychology there are two main theories of identity. Identity theory and social identity theory share a belief that an individual’s identity is negotiated in relation to the social groups to which they belong and the social roles the individual believes that they are expected to fill. An individual derives a view of self from their fulfilment of a specific role and how they identify with a particular social group, such as a sport team (Fink,

Parker, Brett, & Higgins, 2009). Consequently the nature of an individual's interaction with the social context of their environment is pivotal in influencing the growth of their identity.

One's sense of identity constantly evolves throughout the course of our life, but adolescence is considered an especially critical time in identity creation. During this period optimal identity creation occurs when a young person explores a variety of activities and interacts with a broad range of people. Breadth of experience supports a young person in making informed decisions about their personal values, interests, and skills, and enables them to develop a sense of their own identity. Adolescence is a time where parental influence diminishes, and other relational influences (such as peers or adult role models) come to the fore to provide breadth of experience for the young person. It has also been noted that from a work career perspective adolescence is a time when young people are expected to plot a vocational or professional course through life via exploration of career options (Savickas, 2012). The issue of identity and its creation should therefore be of real concern to anyone working with talented young athletes.

Building on mainstream social psychological foundations Brewer, Van Raalte, and Linder (1993) were the first researchers to conceptualize and systematically study 'athletic identity' as a specific identity issue. Athletic identity was defined as

'the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role.'
(Brewer et al., 1993 , p. 237)

It was suggested that athletic identity is both a cognitive construct, that guides an individual's thinking about their experience, and a social role, that is defined by the expectations of others (e.g. coaches, teammates, managers). Since athletic identity was brought to the fore as a psycho-social construct a body of literature has accumulated concerned with how identity influences, and is influenced by, a range of factors such as maturation, training environment, performance and well-being (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017; Carless & Douglas, 2013b; Douglas & Carless, 2009).

A strong athletic identity has been found to be a positive asset because it helps develop motivation and sport commitment. However, strength of athletic identity has been

shown to have a negative impact on an individual if it becomes exclusive. If athletes aren't able to engage fully in behaviour that allows them to explore identity alternatives they default to adopting 'being an elite athlete' as their primary source of identity i.e. they are in a state of identity foreclosure (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). Brewer and Petitpas (2017) defined athletic identity foreclosure as being a commitment to the athlete role in the absence of exploration of occupational or ideological alternatives. Athletic identity foreclosure leaves the athlete vulnerable to stress and anxiety when confronted with disruption to their athletic journey. A severe loss of form, serious injury or sport retirement can all have a serious psychological impact on individuals with an exclusive athletic identity (Brewer and Petitpas 2017; Grove, Lavalley, and Gordon 1997).

For example, identity foreclosure has also been associated with a number of negative outcomes for senior athletes in terms of professional career development outside sport. High levels of athletic identity and identity foreclosure have been associated with individuals who show low professional career maturity i.e. they struggle to make mature career decisions after having gained appropriate self- and vocation-related knowledge and skills (Houle & Kluck, 2015). In addition researchers have found foreclosure to be negatively correlated to professional career knowledge and optimism but positively correlated to dysfunctional career attitudes and beliefs, indecisiveness and perceived barriers to career choice (Albion & Fogarty, 2005; Brewer & Petitpas, 2017; Tyrance, Harris, & Post, 2013).

Athletic identity foreclosure can be a problem for younger, talented athletes whose performance journeys start at relatively young ages. The time available to young athletes for exploring other selves and future possibilities is often compromised by the needs of their performance pathway. The loss of time and/or personal freedom to engage in exploratory behaviour this hinders the process of establishing a sense of self-identity (C. Brown, Glastetter-Fender, & Shelton, 2000). The issues caused by identity foreclosure will be explored in more detail later in this Chapter.

To complement role-based identity research there has been increasing use of narrative and discursive research approaches to further understanding of how identities are

forged. (Ronkainen et al., 2016b; Schinke, Blodgett, Ryba, Kao, & Middleton, 2019). A deeper understanding of the process by which identities are created can only serve to enhance the support available to athletes' who are dealing with identity issues. Consequently narrative research related to athlete identity has explored the narrative structures and cultural resources that have influenced athletes as they developed their identity (Carless & Douglas, 2013a; Ryba, Ronkainen, & Selänne, 2015) Ryba, Ronkainen & Selanne, 2015).

This research has adopted a refined perspective of identity in which it has been conceptualised as -

'an integrative, evolving story of the self that organises different elements and experiences of the self to bring some degree of coherence, unity and purpose'.
(Ronkainen and Ryba, 2019, p2)

Within this conceptual framework an individual's narrative identity is the base template from which they create specific 'stories' to explain, understand and guide their interactions with particular people, events or environments. In its creation any given person's narrative identity will have inevitably drawn on the cultural narrative resources to which that individual has been exposed (Smith and Sparkes 2008). To understand the process of narrative identity creation it is therefore essential to understand dominant cultural narratives that surround the individual athlete.

This is particularly important when considering identity creation in young athletes. As already stated, adolescence is a critical time for identity development and one in which a young athlete will be exposed to a rapidly expanding range of cultural narratives in a short space of time. For the young athlete identity creation becomes a process of 'playing with' different personal stories in a range of cultural settings to judge how they fit in different contexts (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2019). Adolescent identity creation is further complicated by pressure placed on them to not only navigate their current identity but also focus on their future. Adolescents are required to build narrative identities that can describe not only who they are but who they want to become (Ronkainen et al., 2016a).

The challenge for talented young athletes is particularly acute because they can have only a limited concept of what it means to be an elite athlete or someone other than an elite athlete. They are therefore heavily reliant on the cultural narratives and narrative resources provided by significant others (e.g. older athletes, coaches, sports administrators) to provide them with a ‘narrative map’ (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2019). Modernisation of high-performance sport policies and programmes has profound impact on the cultural narratives to which young athletes are exposed. As will be seen in the following sections, modernisation has reduced the scale of the narrative map being offered to young athletes and limited the resources available to them as they evolve their identity.

4.2.1 Narrative types

The Performance Narrative

Over the last decade studies of narratives in elite sport have consistently identified a dominant narrative type that has been termed the ‘performance narrative’ (Carless & Douglas, 2012, 2013a; Douglas & Carless, 2006, 2016; Ronkainen & Ryba, 2017, 2019). This narrative has been described as

“a story of single-minded dedication to sport performance that justifies, and even demands, the exclusion or regulation of all other areas of life and self” (Douglas and Carless, 2016 p73)

In the performance narrative winning, results, and competitive outcomes are valued above all other achievements and the athlete’s identity and self-worth are judged by their ability to deliver performance targets. The pursuit of performance outcomes is central to the athlete’s life to the exclusion of other possible life courses. The performance narrative demands a narrow focus on achieving optimal performance and a deviation from that exclusivity of focus is taken as a sign of lack of commitment to achieving performance goals.

This narrative has been consistently identified as a powerful social construct in multiple performance settings across a range of sports (e.g. field hockey, swimming, soccer, athletics, golf) and in multiple national cultures (UK, Finland, Denmark, USA) (Carless & Douglas, 2012; Douglas & Carless, 2009, 2016; Skrubbeltrang, Karen,

Nielsen, & Olesen, 2018; Torres & McLaughlin, 2015) . The existence and positioning of the performance narrative has also been confirmed in specific talent development settings as well as senior high performance environments (Papathomas & Lavalley, 2014). For example, it is the dominant narrative within the US Collegiate (Houlberg, Wang, Qi, & Nelson, 2018).

The pervasive nature of the performance narrative is, at least in part, fuelled by the public persona of an ‘elite athlete’ as created by the media and consumed by the general public. The public ‘picture’ of the elite athletes draws heavily on the themes of the athlete as ‘hero’ or ‘warrior’ going out to do battle with a determined enemy. Media portrayals of athletes in competition lean heavily on language associated with conflict and war or see the body as a finely tuned machine, somehow distinct from the athlete as a person. In the creation of stories to sell newspapers or attract viewers the media appears to either deify or dehumanise the athlete (Douglas & Carless, 2016).

The media characterisation of an ‘elite athlete’ is of particular importance when we consider young athletes. Media presentations of an ‘elite athlete’ are seen by talented athletes before they are even exposed to the cultural narratives that are part of NGB performance pathways. Consequently they draw on the public narratives available to them in projecting a ‘picture’ of the world that they will be entering irrespective of whether that picture has any basis in reality. The interplay between public narratives and performance cultures means a young athlete’s socialisation in relation to elite sport has commenced well before they enter a talent system. Unfortunately, their socialisation has started using an idealised model of an elite athlete, one that neatly ignores the challenges associated with the life of an elite athlete.

Alternate narratives

Whilst the performance narrative has been shown to be the dominant narrative in performance environments it is not the only narrative that athletes, senior or junior, have created about their lives. In the case of younger athletes this has recently been demonstrated by asking them to project into the future and describe their ‘dream day and what they would be doing during that day (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2018). It was found that for approximately 70% of the sample performance sport played no part at

all in their ideal future day. The activities that athletes wanted to experience on their 'dream day' revolved around time with friends and family and simply doing things for the fun associated with doing them. In earlier work two other competing narrative forms have consistently been identified as being relevant to elite athletes; the discovery narrative and the relationship narrative (Carless & Douglas, 2012; Douglas & Carless, 2006, 2009).

The discovery narrative has been described as being the antithesis of the performance narrative in that it values process over outcome (Douglas & Carless, 2016). The discovery storyteller values life outside the sport domain, in direct contrast to the performance narrative, and sees their life both in and outside sport as a voyage of exploration and discovery. In discovery narratives athletes portray the process of 'being effortful' as being a defining characteristic of their identity. The process of committing to a goal and working hard to achieve it is an end in itself that is a more valuable than winning. Winning without effort brings little return to the individual who sees them self in relation to this narrative (Carless & Douglas, 2012). Such athletes also value elements like experiencing joy when producing a masterful performance of skills or the pleasure that can derive from learning a new skill. The athlete draws value from their embodied experience of the process of training and competing rather than the outcome at the end of competition. Learning is embraced as an end in itself and performance weaknesses are seen as positive opportunities to learn rather than perceived as negative threats to achieving a competitive outcome.

In terms of creating and sustaining self-identity the discovery narrative has one major advantage over the performance narrative. The narrative focuses on personal return from hard work in training and masterful performance of skills which means its contribution to self-identity is both controllable and sustainable. Even when not performing optimally an athlete can continue to strive to perform optimally and take pleasure from exhibiting a sustained commitment to perform at their best. Even when injured an athlete can control the manner in which they commit to rehabilitation and recovery. Performance outcomes are rarely controllable or sustainable and if an athlete loses consistently the performance narrative can leave them feeling disempowered or ineffectual. In contrast the discovery-oriented athlete can have the same competitive

experience but because their focus is on the effort and process, their narrative is sustainable despite competition results.

Alongside the discovery narrative a third main narrative type, the relationship narrative, has also been identified (Carless & Douglas, 2012). Within this narrative type the athlete values connection with others through diverse interactions such as belonging to a specific group (team or training squad), sharing the challenges of training and competition with others, building stronger personal relationships or contributing to a higher, shared purpose as part of a team. This narrative approach resonates with the reasons that many young people enter sport in the first place (Keegan, Harwood, Spray, & Lavalley, 2009; Keegan, Spray, Harwood, & Lavalley, 2010; Russell, 2014; Visek et al., 2015). Athletes enter sport because of a connection with friends or family members or to become part of a club. They don't enter because there is an initial assumption or expectation that they will be competitively successful. For some athletes this rationale for participating in sport is sustained throughout their sporting life irrespective of the performance level that they reach. The relational narrative is one in which the interdependence between people within the sporting domain is central to what the athlete draws from their sporting experience. Any performance outcome that results from that interconnection is a by-product of the performance process and it is the sharing of that experience with others that is valued by the athlete (Carless & Douglas, 2013a; Douglas & Carless, 2016).

Both the discovery and relationship narratives link to athletic identities that aren't framed by whether an athlete wins or loses. However, despite the existence of these alternatives the dominance of the performance narrative in our modernized performance pathways causes problems for the young athlete.

4.2.2 The problems posed by the performance narrative.

The performance narrative is by its nature a story of comparison and judgement. Despite its dominance of performance environments it is a story which has increasingly been seen by the research literature as creating multiple problems for young athletes. An understanding of these issues is central to gaining an overall picture of how talent development pathways may be impacting on developing athletes.

Metrics, measures and meaning

The primary problem posed by the performance narrative is that the metrics it uses to judge excellence are based on extrinsic competitive results or comparative judgements about performance capability. In relation to results success is determined solely by winning or demonstrating the capacity to win at some future point in time. The athlete's value is judged by the clock, the tape measure, the goal tally or the opinions of others and they are not in control of the value that is placed on their work. The performance narrative doesn't allow for merit to be gained for effort or for the yardstick of personal improvement to be used as a measure of effective performance. Attaining specific levels of personal performance may be sub-goals in a performance process but the end goal must always be a competitive outcome against which the athlete is judged. The athlete is defined by their results, no more no less.

The focus on extrinsic performance against an 'other' is problematic because we can't control the 'other' against whom we judge ourselves. An individual whose identity is based on a positive comparison with other athletes will be at risk of their identity being undermined simply because their position may change in relation to that uncontrollable 'other'. A young athlete may enhance their own performance tenfold in a given period of time but if their competitors all improve by a similar margin then comparatively the young athlete hasn't advanced. If our identity is created through our interactions with others then any environment which encompasses myriad forms of such comparisons is unlikely to be effective in building sustainable self-identity. The inherently competitive and comparative nature of talent development environments therefore make them the antithesis of positive environments in which to develop sustainable self-identity.

The issue of inter-personal comparison is further compounded when we consider the 'mathematics of talent development'. The number of places in elite training squads at higher levels of performance will always be limited either by competition rules or by organisational resources. Consequently, irrespective of how much any young athlete improves their performance there will still only be the same limited number of opportunities to progress to become a senior elite athlete. Their progress is therefore beyond their control. So, by definition, the vast majority of young athletes adopting the

performance narrative will inevitably find their self-identity undermined at the point they are rejected by a performance pathway irrespective of how much they improve as an athlete.

The consequence of the performance narratives unrelenting focus on extrinsic and comparative measures of value is that the athlete loses any sense of pleasure to be gained from competing. In a recent study of narrative formation in talented young performers in Finland Ronkainen and Ryba (2019) established that one consequence of the performance narrative is that it negated any sense of joy that the athletes drew from training or competition. Their study found that the narrative shifted sport from being a pleasurable activity to being one of 'work'. Athletes lost their sense of fun and natural enjoyment from the process of competing and found that emotional returns only came from competitive outcomes not competitive participation.

The physical boundaries of the performance narrative

The problem of comparative judgement is further compounded by the physical nature of sport itself and the limitation this creates for the longevity of the athletic career. Coupland (2015) described the athletic life as being 'bounded' by body-performance and body-decline. The peak of a sporting career comes very early in life and attainment of that peak is determined, at least in part, by the capacity of the body to perform at specific levels of skills and intensity. The young athlete walks an athletic career pathway in which the end of the journey is in relatively close proximity to its start even if the athlete does become an elite adult performer. The proximity of start and end of the journey foreshortens the athletes view of their end identity and is one reason young athletes become closed off from exploring broader alternatives to an athletic identity. The young athlete doesn't perceive that there is time for them to explore narrative or identity options before building their own performance narrative (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2019). Researchers have also suggested that the brevity of the performance journey fosters a sense within the athlete that their path to a desired end identity is linear and within their control. It is normal for young athletes to experience a sequential series of upwards steps in performance level when starting on a performance pathway. The smooth nature of this progression gives them a rationale for falsely believing that the

whole of the performance journey will follow a similar pattern despite evidence to the contrary (Güllich & Emrich, 2014). Linearity of progression only has to continue for a very limited number of years before the drivers to consider alternate pathways and potential identities aren't recognised.

Idealised futures

In addition to issues of measurement and physical limits the performance narrative dangerously creates an 'idealised future' for the young athlete (Coupland, 2015). The narrative draws the young person in to conceiving of themselves as becoming the athletic 'hero' as they transition in to being an elite performer. However the 'athletic hero' is not a real construction, as discussed it is an idealised media construction, consequently the young athlete is developing a life narrative based on a stylised picture of an athlete. The athletes may then struggle when attempting to make a junior to senior transition as they find that the senior athletes with whom they are starting to train and compete don't match their idealised construction. If young athletes find that their senior colleagues are not who they thought they would be then who are the young athletes striving to become? This validity of the young athlete's own narrative and identity is called in to question (Coupland, 2015). Work with senior Olympic athletes has identified multiple examples of older athletes who had been forced to significantly modify their narrative and self-identity after transitioning in to being senior athletes. The narrative these athletes had developed through the formative stages of their talent pathway simply weren't viable when faced with the reality of their experience. Consequently these athletes suffered from identity confusion at a critical juncture in their athletic career (Carless & Douglas, 2012).

Marginalization of narrative alternatives

Finally, whilst multiple narratives exist in elite sport the performance narrative creates a cultural resistance to allowing young athletes to explore narrative alternatives. The performance narrative is not content to sit alongside other narratives given that one of its core tenets is that an elite athlete has to show a singular focus on performance.

Acceptance of alternate narratives is in itself a rejection of this fundamental part of the performance narrative and is therefore incompatible with it.

Significant challenges arise for a young athlete when the personal narrative that they wish to tell deviates from the performance narrative. If their personal narrative doesn't align sufficiently with cultural norms then narrative tensions arise that can lead to developmental and mental health problems (Douglas & Carless, 2009, 2016). Sadly, research would suggest that the talent domain is one in which such narrative tensions frequently arise.

Where studies have looked at narratives in a variety of talent development settings research has found the performance narrative to be so dominant that athletes who wished to align to either a discovery or relationship narrative frequently experienced conflict between their preferred identity and the one that was expected of them (Cosh & Tully, 2015; Coupland, 2015; Ronkainen et al., 2016b; Ronkainen, Ryba, & Nesti, 2013; Ryba et al., 2015; Ryba, Stambulova, Selänne, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2017). It would appear that young athletes are constantly being asked to live within a sporting environment that challenge their preferred self-identity.

Negative consequences

Given the number of potential issues that the performance narrative poses for the young athlete it is not surprising that this narrative has been repeatedly linked with negative consequences for the young person. In an investigation of Danish football Christensen and Sørensen (2009) found that young footballers suffered from stress and anxiety as they attempted to live the performance narrative. Similar results have also been found in studies of golf and track and field where the athletes found the pressure to live up to the performance narrative created anxiety, stress and depression (Douglas & Carless, 2017; Papathomas & Lavalley, 2014). Most recently in a large scale study of talented athletes in the NCAA Houlberg et al. (2018) found that athletes who strongly associated with the performance narrative also demonstrated the highest levels of mental health problems in terms of depression, anxiety, and shame coupled with the lowest levels of life satisfaction. In contrast NCAA athletes who adopted alternate

narrative identities showed much higher levels of psychological well-being and life satisfaction. Despite its dominance in elite sport there is clear evidence that the performance narrative can cause serious problems for young athletes in terms of their mental health and well-being.

Unfortunately, the performance narrative as the dominant narrative in elite sport carries real potential to undermine and damage a young athlete's sense of identity. An identity based on performance leaves the athlete living with the risk that their identity and personal narrative can be undermined with little or no warning. When sport does not go well a young athlete with strong performance based athletic identity will experience a magnified negative response to these states or transitions (Park, Lavallee, & Tod, 2013; Ronkainen et al., 2016a). Adoption of the performance narrative allied to an exclusive athletic identity places a young athlete at risk of mental health challenges before they reach senior athlete status (Harris & Watson, 2014). Unfortunately, due to the public reinforcement of the narrative, and its alignment with high performance policy and philosophy, it has strong cultural roots. Despite a growing body of research that attests to the potentially negative consequences of adopting the performance narrative it remains the dominant cultural narrative in the majority of talent development environments.

4.2.3 Narrative interaction

Whilst the performance narrative is clearly dominant in talent environments it would be wrong to suggest that every young athlete adopts it or that all athletes are forced to make binary choices and select a single narrative to inform their evolving identity. The evolution of narratives in young athletes has been shown to be fluid and interactional (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2019; Ronkainen, Ryba, & Allen-Collinson, 2019; Ryba et al., 2015). Young athletes rarely, if ever, develop within a single narrative and it has been suggested that they are best described as being 'polyphonic' (Carless & Douglas, 2013b). A young athlete will engage with different narratives dependent on social context or explore multiple narratives in a single context as they go through the process of developing their identity. Recent work has shown that the athlete creates a

layered identity as a response to the complexity of their experience (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2019; Ronkainen, Ryba, & Selänne, 2019).

This is a more positive picture than one in which a young athlete is forced to make a binary choice between conflicting narratives. Unfortunately even when athletes build layered identities the performance narrative still exerts a disproportionate and potentially damaging influence. In their work with young Finnish athletes Ronkainen and Ryba (2019) found that the performance narrative was so culturally dominant that it 'flattened' other narratives. Elements of discovery and relational narratives were present in the stories young athletes used to describe their experiences, but these were often pushed to the margin to leave the performance narrative as being central.

In dealing with narrative interaction and conflict young athletes respond in a variety of ways. In research across a variety of talent programmes in individual and team sports Carless and Douglas (2013b) found three response patterns to the presence of competing narratives. These were described as 'living the part', 'resisting the part' and 'playing the part'.

'Living the part' athletes' simply adopted the performance narrative as their personal narrative. Winning became central to their sense of self and they adopted a single-minded pursuit of optimal performance that relegated issues such as career, family or partner to the periphery. Irrespective of the personal stress that these athletes experienced when prioritising sport over everything else this was still seen as being the optimal path to becoming an elite athlete.

A much smaller group of athletes overtly resisted the performance narrative. Athletes taking this approach often spoke of actions such as refusing to move to particular training locations or ensuring that they stayed connected to family or friends. Such actions often brought them into conflict with coaches, performance managers or sporting systems and resulted in them being seen as 'difficult', lacking commitment or not having the mental resilience required to reach the top in their sport. Resistance to the performance narrative carried real risk for the athlete. They risk rejection by their sport because they do not fit the mould of an elite athlete not because they lack the requisite skills or abilities to be an elite performer. If the individual who is resisting is

an exceptional talent then sports may tolerate such resistance and designate them as ‘mavericks’. For those on the margins of talent programme such a road may cost them their place on the programme (Carless & Douglas, 2013a, 2013b).

Given the dangers inherent in resistance to established performance cultures a high proportion of young athletes choose a third option. Rather than either overtly adopting the performance narrative or resisting it they elect to ‘play the part’ of the performance athlete. In adopting this approach the athlete’s genuine narrative and identity are either, consciously or sub-consciously, lived out covertly rather than openly. Skrubbeltrang, Olesen, and Nielsen (2016) also identified that athletes seek to play the role of the ‘good athlete’ in front of significant others such as coaches or teachers. The athletes managed their public image to present a picture of an athlete who is coping with the demands of the performance narrative irrespective of how much they were internally struggling mentally, emotionally, or physically. This finding was mirrored by Carless and Douglas (2013b) who found that athletes varied the part that they played dependent on socio-cultural context. Unfortunately, whilst this strategy negates the risk of resistance there are other consequences. When an athlete ‘plays the part’ there is a sizeable proportion of the athlete’s life where they were having to act out one or more images of ‘self’. Sustaining such pretence over an extended period of time has subsequently been shown to magnify mental health concerns (Douglas & Carless, 2017).

Taking into account the presence of three potential narrative scripts and the athletes capacity to adopt, resist or ‘play the part’ of any of them it is only to be expected that developing athletes do not follow a single narrative script (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2019). During the period of late adolescence we are looking at young people whose narrative and sense of identity would be evolving and changing significantly irrespective of any sport involvement. A young person’s immersion in a talent pathway then complicates their identity challenge given that the elite sport environment champions a single narrative so strongly. It is therefore not surprising to find that young athletes present narratives that are fluid, shifting narratives according to the socio-cultural context in which they find themselves. They naturally become polyphonic because that is what is

required to navigate their complex lives (Kavoura & Ryba, 2019; Ronkainen & Ryba, 2019),

4.2.4 Narratives: a personal view

Reading the literature on narrative and identity I find it both resonates and challenges me in terms of the approach I should adopt when working with talented athletes. On first discovering narrative research it resonated because I instinctively recognized the performance narrative. This narrative articulated my view of how an elite athlete should be and captured my sense of how elite policy should be reflected within the lives of athletes within the system. I can now see the philosophy of instrumental rationality being reflected in the narrative I bought in to around elite sport. However, despite acknowledging the problems that an exclusive adherence to this narrative can cause, even now I still have a sense that it is the narrative that is most likely to lead to competitive success.

In relation to my own practice my acceptance of the performance narrative undoubtedly had a direct impact on how I engaged with young athletes. When I interacted with young athletes I am now aware that I responded to them most positively if they espoused the performance narrative and appeared to live it. These were the athletes who responded more positively to what you asked of them in training, who reflected the values we associated with the performance narrative. Their language reflected what we expected in terms of commitment, dedication and prioritizing performance above other aspects of their lives. Consequently, these were the athletes I invariably found it easier to work with.

Could I tell if they were ‘playing the part’ or ‘living the part’? The honest answer is not really. Once I had got to know an athlete I felt I could often determine if they were telling me or the coaches what they thought we wanted to hear but I am not sure if that was simply a superficial judgement. It may well be that those I doubted were simply the ones who weren’t as good at ‘playing the part’ as others. I now wonder how many young athletes I saw were ‘playing the part’ without their support teams being any the wiser?

What I now see is that my perception of whether an athlete was living the performance narrative had an impact on my view of their potential for reaching the highest levels of their sport. In the early parts of my career I believed that the performance narrative was the route to the podium, so I thought that those who were on that path were more likely to reach the top. Did it influence my analysis of their performances or the data gained from our monitoring programmes? I am not sure that it influenced my analysis of anything because I was wedded to my belief in positivist scientific objectivity when dealing with data. Did it influence what I thought about them as individuals and potentially communicated about them within the support teams? On that score I am sure that it did. I know I would have commented on my perceptions about whether I felt individual athletes were committed to training and the potential for them reaching targets in terms of fitness or performance. I am certain that at times this will have influenced coaches thinking and influenced how individual athletes were treated within their performance systems. In this sense I accept that I was part of a system that may have added to the identity challenges being faced by some young athletes. Issues of identity and narrative were simply not part of the thinking I engaged in within modernized performance programmes. I can now see the importance of our understanding of narrative and identity, but these issues sat outside my frames of reference in my work as a practitioner.

4.3 Drawing the extremes together

In this chapter I wanted to review the literature that sat at the two extremes of my experience. At one level I wanted to place these extremes in juxtaposition to each other draw attention to the breadth of perspective you can adopt when creating or delivering talent development programmes. At another level I wanted to highlight the potential for fundamental conflict in values and beliefs within my practice.

Having reflected on this literature I feel that both perspectives impacted on, and continue to impact, on my practice and the lives of the young athletes with whom I come in to contact. To fully consider my practice with talented young athletes I have to look at both extremes, to look from just one perspective is wrong. The ‘battle’ between

these two perspectives determines where you place the athlete as a person within your conceptualization of elite sport. Within policy, and its underpinning philosophy of instrumental rationality, the athlete as a person is at the periphery whilst the athlete as medal winning product is at the centre. Within narrative and identity research the position is reversed with the person at the centre and programme goals and podium places moved to the edge of the picture.

In comparing these literatures I find I have not wholly rejected one perspective in favour of the other. I look at elite sport policy, and how it has been operationalized, and know it still has an intrinsic resonance with me. In order to produce performance at the level required to win international medals athletes have to invest many hours in preparation, training and competition. There are no shortcuts to the podium. We can argue about exactly how many hours are required and debate the point in a young athletes life that more focused training should begin but no one is suggesting that disciplined, focused preparation can be avoided by an elite athlete. A laissez-faire approach to performance will not win medals so, if you accept that national benefit can be gained from elite success, instrumental rationality is an appropriate philosophy position. We have to have performance systems that focus resource on those things that assist in reaching the podium and rejecting anything that gets in the way.

On the other hand when I look at the narrative and identity literature I feel the same sense of resonance. This stems from a personal recognition of the importance of each individual's mental health and well-being. We are all fragile and unique human beings who need to be nurtured as much as trained. How we grow as a person is surely as important, if not more important, than attaining a place on a sport podium? How performance sport impacts on each athlete's personal experience should be of central concern to those involved in performance systems especially when discussing young athletes.

So can one perspective ever trump the other completely? Now that I am alive to both views I know I have to reconcile them in some way or reject one completely. If I don't then with all my future practice with young athletes I will be in conflict with part of myself however I chose to work. I need to reconcile such diametrically opposed

theoretical perspectives in a meaningful way that can guide my work with young athletes.

In the next Chapter I want to look at these same issues but from the other end, from practice moving back to culture and theory. As already stated, the two experiences I will focus on were the catalyst for both my questioning the impact of elite sport policy on young athletes and my engagement with the narrative and identity literature. My reflection on these experiences has subsequently been central to helping me formulate an answer to the question of how we ‘square the circle’ and pursue excellence in performance without marginalizing the athlete as person.

5. ‘10 seconds or 2 years’: Pivotal Experiences

The questioning of my enthusiastic acceptance of modernisation and its impact in elite sport came gradually. There wasn't any single pivotal event that radically altered my perspective nor was there any 'road to Damascus' experience. I simply experienced a gradual querying of how UK elite sport policy was impacting on individual athletes, especially ones who were developing. The change in me was iterative as experience led to questions and the search for answers then to altered perspectives and a re-evaluation of experience.

In Chapter 2 I provided an outline of the performance experiences that came through working with two different performance squads in the same sport (p43-45). These experiences played such a significant role in altering my perspective of TID that my reflection in this thesis would be incomplete without an exploration of them.

In my reflections on these experiences I found that I naturally referred to each as being a 'journey' therefore I will use that phrase to describe them throughout this Chapter. I also found that trying to express my reflections in a way that captured the chronology of events didn't allow me to present issues with clarity. My writing either became so detailed as to obscure emerging issues or was too superficial to highlight critical themes. Consequently, I have decided that this chapter is best presented by discussing two inter-related themes that emerged from my reflections; 'Programming' and 'People'. The fact that these two themes match the extremes of the literature reviewed in the previous Chapter is coincidental. Both of these themes started to emerge naturally in my thinking after the end of the two performance journeys and before I engaged with the literature. The process of reading and reflection for this thesis has refined them but they existed in my head before this thesis began.

The themes are clearly inter-related therefore to present them sequentially as writing dictates gives an artificial impression of the nature of my thinking. In writing this Chapter I still find it hard to think about either issue in isolation when trying to express them on the page. Nevertheless looking at each issue separately is important before drawing comparisons between them and the literature. In choosing which to present

first I have decided to discuss my reflections around the 'Programming' theme. The thought process that has resulted in this thesis started the moment all performance programming ceased at the end of the final match so it seems appropriate to start with this issue.

5.1 Programming a Performance: Planning, training and competing

In pure performance terms both squads achieved the majority of their short- and medium-term competitive goals. That didn't always mean winning matches on either journey but when we lost we were normally close enough to the opposition for them to believe that we had a realistic possibility of defeating them. Far more often than not we hit our scoring targets and achieved the right stats for effectively executing key plays. There were key losses, matches where we chronically underperformed and simply couldn't translate what had been learnt in practice into the game but they were few and far between. Positive match statistics were supported by the professional observations of coaches, players and media pundits who all spoke of the effective performance changes that took place. The performance for both squads became stronger and more consistent over time with individual players becoming technically more proficient. Both teams were playing with more cohesion and tactical awareness at the end of their respective journeys.

The nature of practice also evolved over the course of time. Squads got whittled down, the playing groups were refined so that you were working with smaller numbers of performers. In practice and matches we focused on smaller and smaller points. Coaching and training became about refining patterns and skills not painting styles of play with a broad brush. We became increasingly 'forensic' in the way we thought, always seeking small adjustments in play and players. We ramped up the analysis of opposing players, looking in increasing detail at movement patterns, which hand they preferred to use when passing, anything that we thought could give us an edge. Thinking and focus became more intense the closer we got to the end point for each journey. All of this was underpinned by very detailed programme planning which for me has become a symbol of specific cultural approach to working elite performance.

This cultural approach expressed itself in how we tried to mould and control the lives of each person on the journey.

The following sub-sections present my key thoughts and recollections about this cultural approach. Each sub-theme is based on memories of individual events and actions far too numerous to mention let alone describe. What I have attempted to do is distil these memories into descriptions that give a general flavour of what I experienced on each journey.

5.1.1 Programme Planning: a framework for living.

In both journeys we had two years to get it right, two years to learn how to put a performance together that would bring that final reward. Two years sounds like a long time, but it flies by when you are in the thick of it so both groups worked hard to optimize the time we had available to us.

We started the planning for both campaigns with ‘the end in mind’ which is standard practice. We knew roughly when and where the final games would be, end points were clearly established before we started. We outlined the set competitions we knew we had to negotiate and then started to fill in any competitive ‘gaps’. The ‘gaps’ were periods of time when we wanted to be competing but weren’t so we sought out opponents, tours and additional one-off matches. After that we had a complete fixture list and a tour schedule emerged. So, the who, when and where of competing was established and then everything else in the programme was built around that.

Next down the planning list were the major training phases, the times when training volume and intensity would be manipulated to create troughs of fatigue followed by peaks of performance (Figure 5.1). Training phases were then broken down into shorter, more discrete training blocks. Small sequences of weeks that worked on one physical attribute, specific technical skill or team tactic. After that frequency and sequencing of training sessions were determined for each week to create the right gaps between sessions.

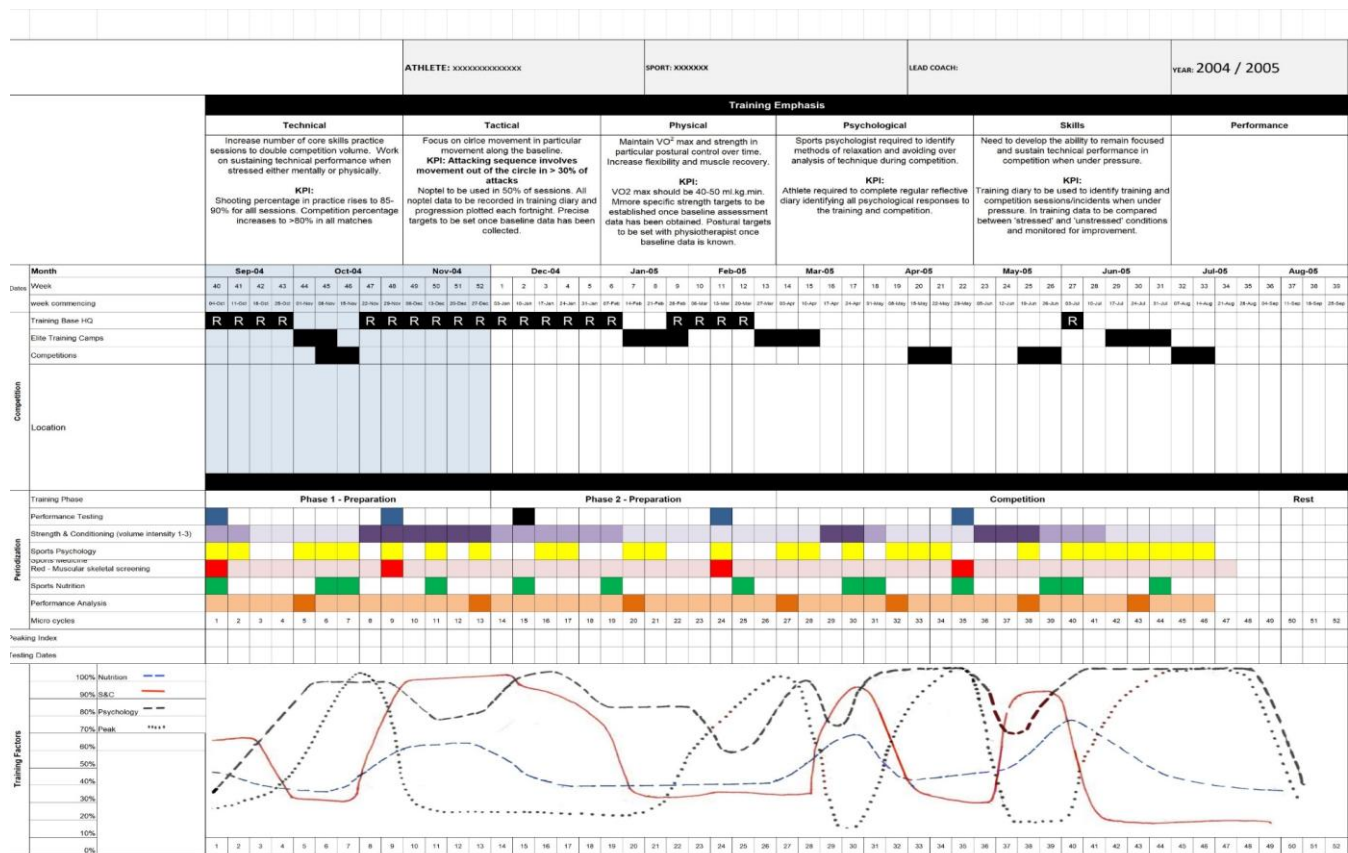


Figure 5.1 Exemplar Training Programme

Rest and recovery are as critically important as the training sessions because its during recovery that the body makes the adaptions that lead to

peak performance so you plan rest as much as you plan training. Alongside all of the training planning we also planned when, where and how coaches and support staff would interact with the players. We determined which disciplines had priority at what stages of the programme. When did strength and conditioning take priority over technical training? When and how would we schedule psych input at a training camp? Building the programme was as much a negotiation between coaches and specialist support staff as it was a cognitive exercise that could be done by a single person. Once all of the above had been done we had the 'performance plan'.

Our lives, at least in relation to each performance journey, were mapped out. These journeys were never going to be spontaneous voyages of discovery. We all lived a semi-controlled existence where what we were doing at any given moment was continually assessed in relation to the 'plan'. Each person had a structure and a framework to guide the significant time we all gave to our shared performance ambitions. The correct things were done in the right order. Our performance lives were logical, focused, measurable and quantifiable, the rest of life ebbed and flowed around the 'plan'. I now feel that we were searching for control. Control of time and control of the person.

As each journey unfolded there was an evolution in what we focused on in the planning. Squads got whittled down, and playing groups were refined so we worked diminishing numbers of players. That gives more time for greater depth of analysis and planning so in practice and matches we focused on smaller and smaller points. At the end of each journey coaching and training became about refining patterns and skills not painting styles of play with a broad brush. We became increasingly 'forensic' in the way we thought, always seeking small adjustments in play and players. We ramped up the analysis of opposing players, looking in increasing detail at movement patterns, which hand they preferred to use when passing, anything that we thought could give us

an edge. Thinking and focus became more intense the closer we got to the end point for each journey.

5.1.2 A way of thinking and a way of being.

The planning process was a practical expression of a specific mind-set. On both these journeys the end point was to win, that was a given, so no other perspectives were discussed. The question was always ‘how can we win?’ never ‘what do we want to achieve for these players as people?’ No one ever discussed or challenged that state of being, you only ever discussed what it took to win and how to get to the right end point. Players were broken down into individual components, their technical skills, tactical awareness, physical fitness and mental resilience were all scrutinised. Each component was assessed, quantified, prioritized and then programmes designed to deconstruct and reconstruct the player. We aspired to cold, logical objectivity and treated the elements of any given player’s performance as a variable to be controlled and manipulated. This approach to performance manifest itself for me quite vividly in two specific situations.

Case conferences

At the end of key training phases the support teams always held ‘case conferences’, both formal and informal, to discuss individual players. The members of the support teams, coaches, scientists and medics, would gather during somewhere in a bland hotel meeting room and discuss each player in turn. Players were metaphorically ‘dissected’ and then we would plan how to re-build the player to make them better. Meetings could last for anything between 2 hours to 10 hours but tended towards longer sessions. If you had a squad of 20 players then if you only took 4 hours to cover a whole squad you were summarizing, scrutinising and making judgements on a player’s life in roughly 12 minutes per player. The meetings sought to be dispassionate and everyone strove as far as humanly possible to engage in evidence-based discussion. Even when dealing with more subjective coaching opinions there was always a move to try and underpin those opinions with game statistics or video evidence. My

overriding sense looking back is that in those meetings we were collectively seeking to ‘engineer’ better players. If we discussed what we knew of a player’s home life, their social and domestic circumstance, it only seemed to occur when it was felt that ‘life’ was impinging on training or performance. And throughout this dissection of an individual’s life, hopes and dreams they weren’t present. Case discussions took place without the player there, during the conference they weren’t a person they were just a disembodied athlete.

Long nights of analysis

When we were in the thick of a tour or a test series my strongest memories are of hotel rooms rather than matches or playing venues. It was in my hotel room that I would spend hour upon hour crunching game stats and isolating key video clips. I would regularly find myself in the early hours of a morning craving sleep and self-medicating with coffee after coffee but still watching games again and again. I stopped ‘seeing’ matches as a whole and I certainly never watched to enjoy a game. I only ever watched to gain understanding with the crowd noise always on mute to ensure that the emotional ride of the spectator didn’t impinge on my analysis. In those moments understanding player movement was the only thing of significance. When did players move, where did they move, how often did they move ... pass, feed, shoot, intercept, pass, feed, shoot it was numbers and patterns, numbers and patterns. Individual experiences were irrelevant, the quality of a match as a spectacle, as a piece of sporting theatre, didn’t register. The screen could show the magic in the deftest passing feint, the power in an intercept, the intensity of a physical clash ... wonderful, truly magical moments, but I didn’t see them, they weren’t important. Numbers and patterns ... a perennial search for game understanding based on a belief that somewhere in the numbers and the video there was a pattern of play that, if we can only understand it, we could beat it.

For me case conferencing and game analysis exemplify the culture and approach that governed both performance journeys. ‘Logical’, ‘impersonal’, ‘objective’, ‘removed’

..... all adjectives that can be applied to both behaviour and mindset as we created, then managed our performance plans.

5.1.3 Endgame

So where did the planning and the mindset take us? On both journeys it took us to within touching distance of our ultimate goals with both squads reaching their pivotal, final matches with every chance of winning. Our performances on route to those games meant that on paper we were predicted to win both key games.

The matches themselves were predictably emotionally intense and I experienced the same potent combination of nerves, excitement and fear on both occasions. Whether it's worse or better for support staff who can't directly influence a match once and aren't in the thick of the fight I can't tell you. However, I think that for coaches and support staff, the emotional ebb and flow of a match is easier to recall.

Both matches followed exactly the same pattern. In both games we started appallingly. We were flat, half a yard slow, lost most 50:50 challenges and the opposition looked sharp in comparison. By the end of the first quarter in both games we were losing heavily and had contrived to create small mountains to climb if we were going to win either match. There was a sense of shock almost amongst the supporters of both teams, disbelief that teams that had performed so strongly to get to each key game could play so badly when it mattered most.

Then the games started to change, the teams started to pull it together. We stopped conceding goals easily and started to hold our own in key contests. I remember the emotional shift from stunned disbelief to one of cautiously starting to believe that we could compete and that the matches weren't over. A small kernel of belief began to form.

On the scoreboard the gaps had started to close and by half time, whilst we were still some way adrift we had held our own and regained some ground. During half time

there was a sense of relief that we weren't going to crash and burn completely. Individually and collectively we were starting to look like we could compete.

I just remember the feeling of flatness and personally it was like this can't end on that flat note I then remember the feeling of the tide turning, you almost got that momentum shift again when we started converting a few more shots and turning the ball over a couple of times. (E)

At the start of the second half momentum shifted in both games. The opposition looked more hesitant, we looked sharper. Our passes found hands, theirs only found fingertips and balls were turnover. The gaps in score continued to close. By the end of the third quarters we were still trailing in both games but now had a realistic chance to win them both. On both occasions the 'feel' of the event altered at this point. There was a palpable change in the crowd, some parts of each arena had become quieter, others noisier with a building sense of excitement even amongst the neutrals in the crowds. I remember my knot ball of emotion quite clearly, but I couldn't say which emotion was uppermost, excitement or fear. I am not sure they were necessarily distinguishable. At the start of the final quarters the intensity of play from all teams stepped up a notch and the contests became more physical, edgier. Tension mounted, players oscillated between making uncharacteristic errors and creating moments of brilliance. The scores just kept creeping closer and closer. In the final few minutes my emotion swung with every goal scored and every pass dropped, from fear to elation in a heartbeat. Watching the games again on video a decade later I could still recall the emotional intensity so vividly. And as the match clocks ticked down the scores inexorably came together in both games we reached the end with scores level and we were in possession of the ball quite literally our destiny was in our hands as the final 10 seconds played out ...(Table 5.1)

I just remember me, Abbie as she was playing GA and I remember her just keep laying it back to me on the line and going again and we're just trying to maintain possession and I guess that feeling of calmness but yet still of my God just keep giving me the ball, like you know its fine, its fine, keep going, keep going (E)

Table 5.1 The final seconds of the two performance journeys

04-06	05-07
<p>... we didn't panic ...</p> <p>... we held our nerve ...</p> <p>... we got in a position to shoot</p> <p>..... and we scored</p>	<p>....we felt the pressure...</p> <p>... a player panicked ...</p> <p>... we gave the ball away...</p> <p>..... and they scored</p>
<p>The end of the first match was all about a mixture of elation and relief. And if you had a stake in the game, as player or support staff, it was relief that was dominant.</p> <p>Relief at not having explain why you lost. Relief that you had justified all the effort, the commitment, the pain. Relief that the pressure was off.</p> <p>The elation comes later and with it a sense of deep satisfaction of a complex job well done.</p> <p>And tucked in amongst all the positivity there was also a realization of the wider significance of the win. Hitting our competitive target meant that performance funding was secure for another four years. Another generation of players would have the same opportunities and the best possible chance to win another medal. We had achieved what we had set out to do.</p>	<p>The end of the second match was just disbelief and numbness. I just sat there stunned. My brain struggled to cope with the almost instantaneous shift from hope to despair in such a short time.</p> <p>I don't think we really knew what to do. What did we say to anyone? What did we say to each other? What did we say to the opposition?</p> <p>And what made it worse was that it wasn't private pain. In the same space you had another group of people experiencing the exact opposite in terms of emotion. The opposition were experiencing all the incredible feelings that I had experienced a year earlier.</p> <p>To be so close and not win somehow made it worse than being hammered. The knowledge that it had been ours for the taking in the final seconds compounded the pain.</p> <p>We had missed our target and we would have to face the world with that knowledge.</p>
<p>Two years and it had all came down to 10 seconds</p>	

My overriding recollection of both matches is the emotional response, pain and the elation. Those memories are still so sharp and vivid, but my memories of the actual games were vague. I had to watch the videos of both matches to recall anything of each game other than the flow of the performance in terms of the score line. I couldn't tell you who played well or who played badly. I couldn't tell you what we got wrong or what we got right tactically. Upper most in my mind is the contrast between the two endings. And yet both journeys were grounded in the same kind of performance processes, the same approach to planning, the same mindset. So what, if anything, distinguished between them apart from the last 10 seconds?

5.1.4 Critical reflection

On both journeys I simply dived into the process of planning and managing performance. An unquestioning acceptance of high-performance policy and the modernisation of elite sport simply manifest itself in how I embraced what I believed needed to be done for either group to achieve its competition goals. Everything about the approach from planning programmes to managing individual athletes was an expression of modernisation in action. Our drive to set clear goals, analyse, measure performance and optimize our use of resources was simply a reflection of the performance culture at a macro level being operationalized at a micro level. The sport scientist in me saw this as being a natural extension of the scientific mindset. The performance manager in me accepted the necessity for rigorous planning and de-personalising of the process so that we achieved optimal deployment of the resources available to us. From either perspective our planning and prescription of training was impersonal, seeing the player as a 'person' wasn't relevant to the process. If we paid attention to the individual it was limited to helping them cope with, or better yet remove, distractions that could undermine their training plan, the 'production process'.

By embracing the performance culture promoted by elite sport policy we were also tacitly accepting the validity of the associated measurement frameworks. Success was determined by whether you hit your performance targets, by medals won or lost or places on the podium. Using that framework the two journeys should be labelled as a

success and a failure. The difference between the two may have been the smallest of margins but it was a critical difference. Within the rubric of instrumental rationality the two endings were binary opposites. Whatever ‘means’ we had used to pursue our ‘ends’ had only worked in one of the two cases.

My performance self sees what we were doing as simply adopting the ‘natural attitude’ to performance Aggerholm had described (Aggerholm, 2014, 2015). The phrase ‘natural attitude’ describes my position so well because I was adopting a viewpoint which seemed so obvious to me that I never countenanced the world being any different. I was simply not aware that I had adopted “instrumental rationality” as an underpinning philosophy to guide my behaviours. The ‘ends’ were all important and we sought to control the ‘means’ to achieve them. However, it would be wrong to suggest that my approach was just the product of the culture surrounding me.

I enjoyed being a scientist, I enjoyed being a performance manager. I like trying to unpick a performance and understand it. There is real pleasure to be gained from working with an individual player and crafting a training programme that sees them become a better performer. The process of review, analyse, plan and implement training is a positive cognitive challenge that I want to meet. It’s a challenge that if mastered can bring significant personal satisfaction as a reward. So, it would be inaccurate to simply leave the impression that those of use working in the support teams were blank canvasses waiting for policy to mould us in the way it saw as being in the national interest. I think we were willing participants in operationalising policy. The mental tools of modernisation (review, audit, measure) were ones I certainly enjoyed wielding. Consequently my reasons for engaging in the behaviours required by performance culture were a reflection of me as a person as well as the environment in which I was practicing.

The impact of underpinning philosophy and national policy manifest themselves in specific behaviours. At the centre of this increased awareness is a recognition that my language on these performance journeys was the language of instrumental rationality. Driven by policy high performance sport has clothed itself in rhetoric that is

unremittingly technocratic and rational (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2018; De Bosscher, Shibli, et al., 2015). Elite sport has developed mimetic isomorphism in using the imagery of business and industry to describe what it sees as being appropriate thought and behaviour (Houlihan & Green, 2008). Policy discussions revolve around ‘producing athletes’, creating ‘medal factories’ or building ‘talent laboratories’ (Andersen et al., 2015; Slot et al., 2017). Even policy research now refers to how systems engage in the ‘industrial production’ of athletes or the ‘industrialisation’ of athlete development. Performance systems are discussed in relation to their need to produce an adequate ‘return on investment’ (Bohlke & Neuenschwander, 2015; Donnelly & Kidd, 2015; Houlihan & Chapman, 2015). In both my journeys the coaching and support teams used this same style of rhetoric to describe what we were doing. Case conferences were the place where this manifested itself more than anywhere else. In those conferences we talked about the players as products to be ‘molded’ and how we could ‘shape’ them. Our analytical approach saw players as physical and mental machines that needed to ‘produce the goods’ at the right moment. We never set out to objectify players but that was the inevitable outcome of the language we used to discuss their development. I now wonder if at one level we were subconsciously aware that the way we talked diminished the player as a person which is one reason why we didn’t want them present during these conferences? Irrespective of our reasoning our language and thought processes mimicked those of business and industry and in doing so talked about players as the ‘products’ of our performance programmes.

In many ways it's easy to question the whole ethical underpinning of the processes and behaviours championed by elite sport policy and adopted on both these journeys. However, we were simply reflecting the accepted social logic of the high performance world. What mattered was getting the right performance outcomes so the philosophy and the language were never challenged and, perhaps of greater significance, no one wanted to challenge them. We believed that the process we were engaged in was the right one to bring about the end that we all wanted. Could it all have been done another way? Despite recognising the commodification of the athlete the more analytical parts of my performance self still say ‘no’. This was the way it had to be and still has to be.

The cognitive demand of building a complex, two year preparation process with 16-20 players to produce a particular level of performance at a specific time is huge. The inter-personal demands of working with players, coaches and support staff in emotionally intense environments are significant. The need to manage multiple disciplinary inputs, to dovetail different elements in a programme and deal with logistical minutiae combine to consume vast amounts of thinking time. You simply don't have the mental bandwidth to think deeply about much else. You have to make assumptions that athletes are there because they want to be there, that it's right for them to be there ... and if it becomes apparent that they are struggling then you try and help them cope ... but to stand a chance of reaching a particular performance outcome you have to reduce the degrees of freedom to make the cognitive challenge manageable. You have to focus on the core parts that you can control even if individuality is lost and the 'person' becomes anonymous. With the margins between success and failure being so small you have to be ruthless and dispassionate in dissecting performance to find the places another inch of improvement is possible. To ask a performance manager, coach or support practitioner to consider more than the medal target when they are in the middle of such a longitudinal and complex process may simply be asking too much.

Whilst I can see the challenges that an instrumentally rational approach might create how can anyone chase the highest levels of performance without pursuing the objective, systematic approach to programming and planning that we used on both journeys? What we did in management of both performance journeys was both a manifestation of both policy and a response to the nature of the task itself. The journey itself draws you in to thinking and acting in a way that reflects national performance policy as well as that policy setting framework within which you have to act. In this sense the 'natural attitude' discussed by Aggerholm stems from the interaction of athletes, coaches and support staff with the cognitive challenge created by the need to enhance performance to a specific level in a given space of time.

5.2 The People: Individuals & Teams

Aside from adopting the same uniform approach to performance management the striking feature of both journeys were the people. When I think of those journeys I am always struck by the richness, depth and variation in the people and how each person's individuality created a personal, unique experience that resulted in growth and learning.

5.2.1 Professional learning

In terms of practical and professional skills I don't think experiences of the depth and intensity of these performance journeys can fail to change an individual whether they be athlete, coach or support staff. We all learn and grow when working and training as hard as we did. Personally, I know that I was a more proficient, tactically more aware and a better practitioner at the end of these journeys than I was at the start. My social and professional network had also expanded significantly during these journeys and this had a profound impact on my subsequent career. I had created positive working relationships with many people in the sport ranging from the National Performance Director, through individual Superleague franchise owners down to particular high-profile players. The person I was at the start of these journeys was not the person I was at the end and my life was different because of that experience.

Professional development was also central to the experience for the playing group and other support staff. Younger players secured their status as high performing players in both squads and have subsequently had long and successful professional and semi-professional playing careers. Older players reached the end of their playing careers during each journey and several went on to take up positions of influence and importance within the sport. Players from both squads have become Performance Directors in Superleague franchises, held national coaching roles, developed television punditry careers and held high performance managerial positions in other sports. The two performance journeys initiated professional change for all of us in ways that meant the impact is still being felt today.

But these journeys were about far more than the development of professional skills or networks. I believe that through these experiences we changed at a more fundamental level. You can't have experiences where you in such pressured environments sharing such intense experiences with other people and not be changed by them. And those personal experiences are shaped not just by the performance process itself but by the individuals with whom you share the journey. Each journey is made unique through the complex social interaction players, coaches and support staff.

5.2.2 Personal differences

If you asked me what the two squads were like as people I would say I remember difference as much as similarity. At one level there was a homogeneity to each group. All the players were committed and competitive, they all trained hard and wanted to win. No one was playing for fun or not committing to personal and team improvement but still players varied in subtle but important ways. For example, there were always variations in the emotional responses of individuals to winning or losing matches.

This was highlighted best after a critical game on the international journey which, had we won it we would have been the first English team to have ever reached that competitive milestone. All the discussion in the build-up was around how we could and would win the match. On the surface there was universal buy in to the idea that winning was within our grasp. However, we lost and player reactions were incredibly varied. Some players were distraught and had to leave the playing arena to compose themselves before they could face other people. For those players, the distress of having missed the opportunity to win a historic victory was acute and almost overwhelming. Other players reacted with a muted, limited show of emotion. Disappointment was evident but it seemed short lived, banter and smiles reappeared quite quickly after the final whistle. Watching from the side-line it felt as if some players had never really expected to win and were emotionally prepared to lose whilst others hadn't contemplated the possibility of losing.

I think people wanted to make a final, but I don't think they believed they could make a final and I think that's two very distinct things. (E)

On the surface both groups of players exhibited the persona of the committed athlete, focused, determined all about the 'win'. But scratch below that surface and attitudes and expectations varied massively. I don't think that in either group there was any such thing as a single 'performance athlete' personality. This was emphasized in my conversations with *E* who spoke about her differences with another player *S*. *S*, like *E*, was a truly world class player one who went on to play fully professionally outside the UK. *S* had so much natural ability, a near perfect physique, superb co-ordination, an ability to read play and a personal game that unsettled even the best opponents. *S*'s heart and soul were in competition, she came alive on the court and clearly revelled in the challenge of performing at the highest level. On the flip side in training *S* would be described as mercurial, frequently distracted and lacking in focus. During practice she could be sluggish and unresponsive, frequently driving the coaches to suggest that she was at times 'un-coachable'. The performance narrative simply wasn't her and the response from coaches, and practitioners like me, was to see her as a 'problem player'. We saw a player who was in constant danger of squandering her talent, of failing to fulfil all of her potential because she didn't commit everything to training and preparation. Yet, in social situations, she had the same vibrancy of character and personal energy that you saw in performance. *S* came alive when we were visiting different places for the first time or in unusual social settings (e.g. attending an Embassy drinks reception).

On-court both *S* and *E* were from the same mould, superb players who would be counted as being amongst the world's best. In relation to competition coaches had the same degree of respect for both players but out of competition *S* and *E* were diametrically opposed. *S* was a problem player, *E* was the 'role model'. Very different people but working together over a long period of time to try and achieve something extraordinary.

The comparison of these two players highlights to me the complexity of inter-personal interaction in relation to attitudes to performance. On top of this variation in performance attitude I also recall marked social variations within each group. Over the course of my career I have seen squads I would label as dysfunctional in relation to

performance. Player rivalries, clashes about playing styles and tactics have all been present in playing groups I have worked with, even at the highest levels of performance. However, on both of these journeys I felt that the squads were relatively cohesive in relation to how they were trying to play the game but in more socially oriented situations the squads were incredibly diverse.

Players were drawn from different socio-economic backgrounds, different educational paths and different national cultures. Players' life experiences had been quite different, ranging from an inner city up-bringing within a single parent family to an upper middle-class, suburban childhood in a traditional nuclear family. Players all seemed to mutually respect each other for what each brought to the group in terms of playing ability. However, the underlying personal differences created very distinct social sub-groups which became evident on those occasions where social choices could be made. On tour particular players would cluster around specific tables in hotel dining rooms, players would always travel in the same cars or slot into the same seat on the team bus. What was quite noticeable was that these groupings weren't determined just by age or experience. In each sub-group there would be a mix of older, more experienced players and younger 'newbies'. If you took away the common thread of being performance athletes with similar physical abilities then neither squad would have come together as a whole socially.

In addition to social differences arising from upbringing and education individual differences in playing experience also impacted on squad dynamics. For many of the younger players on both journeys they had no depth of relationship with other players prior to being selected for their respective journey. Consequently, social relationships had to be formed as each journey progressed with young players having to deal with all the uncertainties, insecurities and pressures that building new social relationships can bring. In contrast more experienced players had already spent considerable time with some of their fellow performers. They were therefore playing with people with whom they had deep personal bonds that had been built over the years through many shared experiences. It was inevitable then that the interaction between players with

deep personal bonds and those who were just starting to form relationships could be quite different. This could, and did, manifest itself at critical moments.

The personal and social interactions within these performance environments were almost the antithesis of the controlled, systematic approach to management of the performance process. Both groups were characterised by inter-individual difference rather than homogeneity. Players had varied performance expectations, coaches had different approaches to their craft, inter-personal interactions were heavily influenced by diversity of social background. Despite shared performance cultures each journey was an alchemy of individual interactions based on a myriad of personal differences.

The passage of time and the range of experiences we all shared meant that every person who ended the journey was not the one who started it. This seems such an obvious thing to say but I feel it is so often forgotten when external scrutiny focuses so much on the team and how it performed. Yet paradoxically in my reflections I find I can recall far less of the matches, won or lost, than I can of the moments of personal interaction and experience. In reflecting for this thesis there were so many games that I couldn't recall without referring to news reports or performance analysis data. In contrast I could recall people, relationships and personal interaction without prompting which raises the question of what is of greater significance to the people on those journeys?.

5.2.3 The 'Others' - a life apart

When I was reflecting about people I began to realise that I wasn't just reflecting about the people who were there with me on each journey. The reality of life is that every action we make represents a choice between competing alternatives so the time a player chooses to spend training is time not spend on the education, career or with other people. To capture the complete essence of a performance journey we need to reflect on what didn't happen as a result of being on that journey as well as what did. We should reflect on what happened to the others in our lives who were impacted by our presence on the journey. We need to recognize that because we went on those

performance journeys those around us went on journeys of their own that were conditioned in part by our choices.

Acknowledging the schisms between the performance life we lived and the lives of those around is provided some of the most striking and poignant moments of reflection. For all athletes and support staff the two performance journeys were significant parts of our lives but by no means were they the only parts of our lives. We all had to balance our performance role and our wider life and for many that balancing act was incredibly challenging. My conversations with M brought to mind one player in particular, *V*, who was a single parent but played for the Superleague team. *V*'s commute to our home venue involved a four hour round trip which to be done three times a week for the two training sessions and a home match. Training sessions were 2 hours long and match days lasted for 4 hours from arrival to departure. If we had an away match then on top of eight hours travel for training *V* could add on anything up to 10 hours travel time for competition. Aside from her time with the *V* had to commit at least another 3 hours to individual training. So in-season *V* was committing to up to 30 hours a week being a performance athlete whilst holding down a job and being a single parent. By definition *V* was making continuous personal sacrifice to chase a personal performance goal with her choices changing not only her life but the lives of others around her. *V*'s Mum provided live-in childcare to make all this possible so for a significant time each week *V* delegated the role of parent to another person. Inevitably there were family clashes and times when *V* didn't train, which then impacted on her court time in matches, or times when family events and special occasions were missed. The wider life was inextricably bound to the performance life.

I think it is only with the passage of time have I looked back and allowed myself to recognize the immense pressure that my participation in those journeys caused my family. With the benefit of distance I can now see that both journeys bracketed a time of significant personal challenge and change for both me and my loved ones. Firstly, I was barely 12 months into a new performance management role at Loughborough when the first performance journey started. I didn't think that being the new 'boss' amongst an established group of high-performance coaches was ever going to be a

smooth managerial ride and the reality didn't disappoint. I was constantly dealing with the emotional pressure of facing my own insecurities, developing new relationships and trying to prove myself in a role. The level of difficulty was topped off by the fact that the two performance journeys being reflected on here often pulled me away from my desk for protracted periods of time.

In addition to work demands my family life also contrived to become incredibly complicated. In early 2004 my wife, Helen, became seriously ill within Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. In the space of four months Helen went from being an active Nursery Infant teacher to being housebound unless she used a wheelchair. As a consequence the dynamics of my family life completely changed almost overnight. At the time Helen became ill we lived some distance from Loughborough and I commuted for about an hour to get to work. After Helen had been ill for 18 months and there was no sign of significant improvement in health we decided we had to move closer to my work to give me more time to support everyone. This brought huge emotional pressures for our children as they changed schools as well as presenting Helen and I with all the logistical challenges any house move brings. So, nearing the end of the first performance journey and in the middle of the second one my family and I moved house and had to start building new lives.

My reflections on two specific moments brought home to me with crystal clarity the impact my presence on those performance journeys had on those around me. The first moment occurred in the final stages of the international performance journey. That experience is described in Table 5.2. At the time I was simply too bound up in the moment and in simply surviving to reflect on the impact I was having on those around me.

The second moment came during the writing of this thesis when I found an old family calendar. The calendar covered the period when the final target competition for the international group occurred. The final tournament required me to be in the southern hemisphere for three weeks at a major multi-sport Games, an experience that was both exciting and challenging in equal measure. It was an experience that has created

personal and professional memories that will last a lifetime so, when I looked at the calendar it was through eyes expecting to see an entry that reflected the significance I attached to that moment in time. I thought I would see notes and comments that reflected when key matches were, perhaps a record of how we performed? What I actually found was ‘nothing’, there was simply a hole where I should have been (Figure 5.2)

Each member of the family had their own column on the calendar and those for my wife and children were full of dates, times, notes and key information. Evidence of busy lives being lived, new friendships starting, new experiences that created memories. My column simply said ... ‘leaves for CWG’ ... and then, 3 weeks later ... ‘returns from CWG’ with nothing in between. For me that 3 week block was such an important time in my life. It was so full of important events, new sights and sounds and critical matches and yet for those closest to me I had just been ... absent. I hadn’t been in their lives for that period of time. I now see that while those of us who were at the Games were accumulating a myriad of amazing and intense experiences we were also simultaneously experiencing a loss. We all had lives that were distinct from the performance journey and those didn’t stop just because we weren’t in them for periods of time. The ‘others’ in our lives carried on growing and changing but we missed out on seeing significant parts of their lives. Too often we just weren’t there and everyone lost something.

Table 5.2 The boarding queue

A hum of relaxed conversation ripples up and down the squad as we line up in the boarding queue. Not long until we board the flight for our final trip before the main event. It feels like quite a poignant moment, this is the first time the squad has been together since the final cut. Amongst the players there is a sense of anticipation bordering on excitement, especially amongst the younger players. The Games are only 5 weeks away and this is the final training trip. Time to run through final playing combinations, hone tactics, determine individual roles. Ten days of graft, three test matches and then home.

My phone goes and I pull it out of my pocket as the queue shuffles forwards, passports and boarding cards readied for inspection. I look at the number and pause. It's the solicitor, not what I was expecting. Please tell me that the house sale hasn't gone belly up now.

"Hi Andy, sorry to bother you but just wanted to catch you before you fly. Anyway to cut a long story short, things have moved faster than expected today and we have just exchanged contracts".

There's clearly excitement in her voice as she gives what, to most people, would be great news. I sense she's expecting me to respond in kind and shower her with effusive praise. I expect she hears a lot more moaning than thanks in her job and this is probably one of those rare moments when it has all gone to plan. Except I don't feel elated. I should, but I don't.

Logic tells me it's taken a long while to sell the house and find somewhere we wanted so this is great news. But I am about to board an aeroplane for 10 days and return to move house two days after I land. That seems daunting enough but my mind flips to H. How must she be feeling right now?

At home, living with a chronic illness that leaves you exhausted and fatigued at the end of every day, coping with two daughters, neither of whom want to move from one side of the country to another and one of whom hasn't talked to us in almost 2 months. And I am in a boarding queue for a flight to the Caribbean...

I exchange pleasantries with the solicitor as quickly as possible trying to be upbeat. Inside I feel well what do I feel ..? Numb, torn, happy, excited ... all of the above ... but right now torn is the dominant emotion.

How can I be doing this? I should be with the family. They need me so why am I here? Shouldn't I just step out of the queue and return home? But that would throw away the last two years. This boarding queue stretches all the way from here to the opening ceremony. If I step out of it now I can't step back in and I will have thrown away all the sacrifices that H has made over the last two years.

Damned if I do and damned if I don't

I now realise that performance journeys aren't just experienced by athletes, coaches or practitioners. When we are with 'others' we share our journey with them, they become part of our journey. Yet, at the same time they are going on personal journeys of their own and our actions in part determine the 'others' experience. Our absences mean that for both us and them there are parts of each other that we don't share. As each journey progresses it is not just a player or practitioner who makes sacrifices.

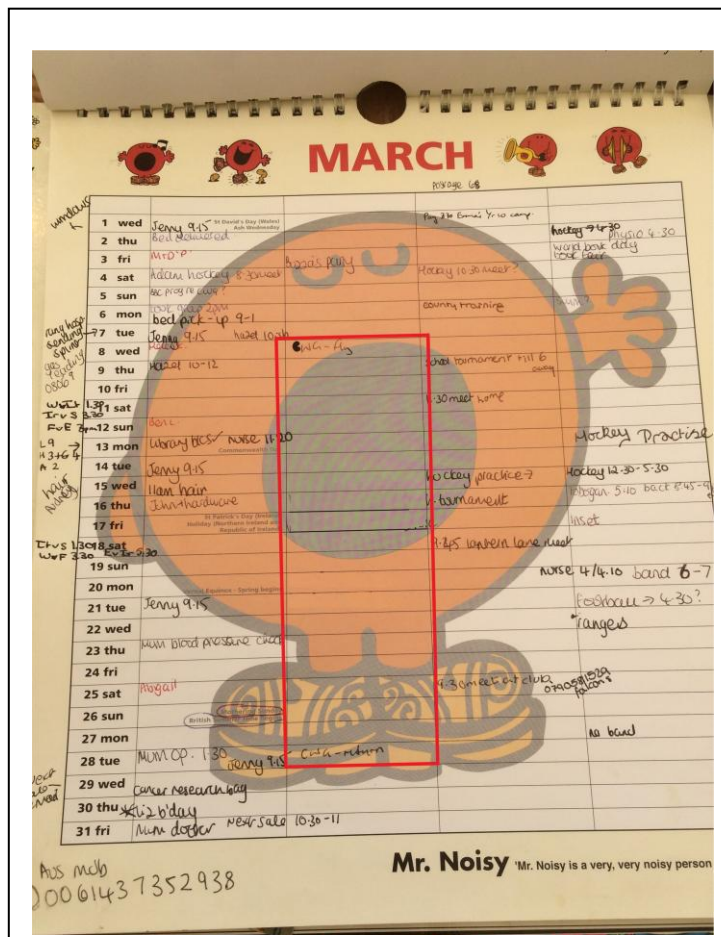


Figure 5.2 My family calendar - March 2006

5.2.4 Critical reflection

At the same time as accepting that an instrumentally rationale approach to performance is essential to achieving high performance my recollection of the personal nature of each journey challenges that acceptance. What I recall is the richness and depth of the intra- and inter-personal nature of these experiences. We all differed so much in terms of personality, circumstance and upbringing as people and as either athlete or practitioner. We were all changed by the journeys we went on and none of us ended a journey as the same person who started it. There was no single, homogenous ‘performance experience’ that we all received, each person’s performance experience was unique to them.

This sense of individuality and inter-personal difference sits alongside a realization that I, along with both coaches and support teams, espoused the performance narrative as defined by Douglas. We adopted a position where, in order to be accepted as being fully committed to a journey, the athlete had to ostensibly be living the performance narrative. Our actions as practitioners reflected Douglas’ description of high-performance sport in that we enforced the primacy of the performance narrative to the exclusion of all others (Carless & Douglas, 2012, 2013b; Douglas & Carless, 2016; Ronkainen & Ryba, 2019). Why was it adopted so readily and uncritically? I think that there may be two reasons.

At one level I wonder if our adoption of the performance narrative was an act of self-preservation? Within the prevailing high performance macro culture dissenting voices were often portrayed as being reactionary and lacking in the ruthlessness required to achieve medal success in elite sport (Green, 2006). The values and philosophies being espoused by the staff involved in leading the delivery of elite sport were inextricably linked to the performance narrative. Grix and Carmichael (2012) described this as being an environment where there were limits on what it was possible to think about elite performance and still be accepted within ‘modernised’ performance systems. It was a time when you had to ‘talk the talk’ not just ‘walk the walk’ or risk being marginalized in performance sport. Whilst never openly discussed I

wonder if one element in our consistent support for the primacy of the performance narrative was a desire to preserve our own position and image?

At another level I think the adoption of the performance narrative was just an extension of the ‘natural attitude’ in performance sport and the instrumental rationality that underpinned our systematic approach to developing performance. By placing the pursuit of performance outcomes ahead of all other considerations for the individual the performance narrative shared a philosophical base. Consequently we never listened for other voices or looked for other perspectives because we didn’t recognize their existence. Alternate narratives weren’t deliberately rejected they simply irrelevant to the instrumental approach on both performance journeys.

So on both journeys the performance narrative was promoted as being the only acceptable persona for an elite athlete despite there a mass of personal experience which highlighted inter-individual difference. I now sense that both groups were living a schizophrenic existence. In both cases players and practitioners could recognise inter-personal differences at a social level as they were expressed through social groupings or the formation of friendships. Yet in relation to performance positions radically altered and only one view of the world became permissible. We all reverted to espousing a single narrative that should describe every players position.

It was a contradictory existence that was highlighted by *S*, the player discussed in section 5.2.2. My understanding of *S* at the time was as a player who wasn’t maximizing her ability and falling short as an elite athlete. I would now describe *S* as a player who was ‘resisting the part’ as described by Carless and Douglas (2013b) . *S* was an outstanding high-performance athlete but one whose personal narrative was not the performance one. In social situations she had that same vibrancy of character and a personal energy that you saw in performance. *S* came alive when we were visiting different places for the first time or in unusual social settings (e.g. attending an Embassy drinks reception). Despite seeing *S* engaging positively with different personal experiences, and perhaps embracing the ‘discovery narrative’, we still tagged her as a problem simply because she didn’t live or play the part of the performance narrative.

This led me to an understanding that despite experiencing the uniqueness of each player in personal interaction professionally we didn't perceive them as complete people. My belief that we failed to see them as people intensifies when I also consider the 'others'. So much of the athlete as a person existed outside the performance environment. So much of what they experienced as individuals during a performance journey was created by their interaction with 'others'. Yet within the performance environment and narrative the 'other' shouldn't be part of the story because the 'other' doesn't contribute to the 'means' to achieving an 'end'. Within the performance planning approach championed by national policy the 'other' can only ever be a distraction, a stumbling block. Within the rubric of instrumental rationality you might seek to manage the impact of the 'other' on optimal pursuit of the medal target but the 'other' shouldn't be embraced as being part of the athlete. It is interesting to note that within SPLISS 2 modelling of effective performance systems the concept of the 'other' doesn't appear in any Pillar (De Bosscher, Shibli, et al., 2015). Even within the Pillar of 'Athlete Career Support' the focus is on the athlete and how best the system can support their career aspirations outside sport. An athlete's inter-personal relationships away from sport, even though they may be the most significant things in an athlete's life, aren't part of the system.

In contrast my experience tells me that growth and change in our relationships with 'others' may be incredibly deep and meaningful and endure long after the performance journey is finished. The 'other' sits apart in both policy and practice, a problem at worst and an irrelevance at best.

6. Part 2 Conclusion

In trying to summarise this part of the thesis I found there were two sets of thoughts that stood out. Firstly, the fundamental tension between performance and person that is present in both the literature and my experience. Secondly, the question of how the issues that have arisen thus far impact on how I should interact with young athletes in my continuing work in TID.

6.1 Fundamental tension

My reflection on the two performance journeys has only emphasized the tension in the literature between the design and implementation of performance systems and the athlete as a unique individual. A recognition of this divide leads to the inevitable question of whether these divergent views can be brought together in anyway so that a practitioner isn't left having to choose one over the other?

Without a unifying perspective I remain being split into two parts. My performance self still aligns to prevailing high-performance policy and culture. Working from a philosophy of instrumental rationality performance policy has created systems that enable our best athletes to win medals on an international stage. At a micro level we adopt a rigorous systematic approach to understanding performance so that we can work with individual athletes to maximise their sporting potential. The application of that process takes athletes to the pinnacle of competition both internationally and domestically. At a personal level, this approach is the extension of a 'natural attitude' that has been created via my evolution as a scientist. I look at a sports performance and I naturally want to understand how it has been achieved. I may no longer want to simply understand it solely from a positivist and reductionist perspective, but I still want to understand. This attitude then extends in to wanting to re-create it, to enable athletes to express their ability and achieve the highest levels of performance. I don't see the desire to understand or enhance performance as being negative per se.

This complements the natural attitude of athletes who willingly come on performance journeys to be stretched and seek to compete at the highest levels of competition against the best opponents. By doing so they want to experience a process that encourages and supports the relentless pursuit of excellence. Consequently such journeys allow athletes to experience moments emotional peaks of an intensity that life rarely affords. The journeys aren't without cost, but this is something that the athlete has to reconcile with themselves and those around them. Given the sacrifices that athletes make to pursue demanding performance goals as support practitioners we have a responsibility to work to help them achieve those goals. By doing so we share in the performance journey and become part of an environment that is special and set apart from everyday life. In relation to TID our purpose is to support young athletes in the development of their athletic self and maximise their chances of reaching the highest levels of performance. This allows them to access the unique experiences that performance sport can bring.

I still see the arguments I have just articulated as representing a perfectly valid view of the performance world. Yet, each time I develop those arguments I simultaneously question them. If we allow ourselves to see the world only through the lens of instrumental rationality then one of the two performance journeys discussed in Chapter 5 must be judged to be a failure. In the second journey we missed the performance target and failed to achieve what we set out to do at the start. However, I find I simply couldn't accept that judgement therefore the underpinning premise had to be faulty in some way.

The fault in the instrumental perspective of my experience lies in failing to recognize the people and the deeply personal experiences we all had. The people on those journeys shared pressure, disappointment, joy and elation in equal measure. We all made sacrifices within, and especially outside, the performance environment. Bonds and friendships were strengthened or formed. Our relationships with the 'others' in our lives altered and evolved as we went along. We all grew as players or practitioners, both professionally and personally. When we failed in the final ten seconds of that second journey it didn't suddenly cease to have the same personal impact as the

first journey. So how could that journey be labelled a ‘failure’ when it brought deep growth and learning?

If we allow ourselves to judge performance journeys as ‘success’ or ‘failure’ solely on the basis of the competitive outcome then surely we are denying the multi-faceted nature of the people on those journeys. We are reducing the players to having just a single identity. Players are nothing more than their athletic identity and if the athlete ‘fails’ then the person has ‘failed’? That can’t be right.

Without any reconciliation of these two extremes the practitioner is left with a stark choice. You can choose to accept the instrumental rationality inherent in performance policy and culture and by doing so ignore the athlete as a person. Alternatively you can reject instrumental rationality and place individual growth at the centre of your practice with the risk that you fail to achieve the outputs that the system believes will create national benefit. By rejecting instrumental rationality you risk being seen as a ‘non-believer’ and losing your status in the performance community. Equally, and arguably far more importantly you may fail the athlete by not enabling them to maximise their sporting potential. The challenge is to find a middle ground, a way to retain the essence of the pursuit of excellence but not at the cost of the person.

It was the challenge of reconciling the two parts of my experience that drew me to both craftsmanship and elite *Bildung* as philosophical concepts. The pursuit of excellence is at the heart of both of these approaches, so they speak to the positive experiences I witnessed coming from engaging with performance sport. Within craftsmanship and elite *Bildung* I started to see the foundations for a conceptual framework that would allow for the pursuit of excellence, and the behaviours you need adopt to achieve it, without sacrificing the central position of the individual in the process. These approaches also offered new ways of understanding the experience of young athletes as people.

6.2 The young athlete

The prevailing philosophy in performance and TID is one that places the systems needs above the athletes. The dominant personal narrative is one in which the young athlete ceases to be a whole person and is seen in relation to only one dimension of their being. This creates a culture in which other narratives and voices are marginalized even if they better reflect an individual young person's motivations for being in the performance environment. It is a culture where there is significantly heightened risk of identity foreclosure which poses a threat to the emotional and mental wellbeing of a young athlete. In addition each performance journey involves cost for both self and others. By going on a performance journey the young athlete loses things as well as gains them. Nevertheless despite our awareness of these risks our TID programmes actively encourage young athletes to walk down a road where there is a risk to self.

An advocate of current TID practice could point to the concept of athlete agency to justify exposing young athletes to such risk. By allowing young athletes to embark on performance journeys we are allowing them to exercise personal agency by choosing to go on the journey. These young people are competitive and find value in developing their sporting talent so why should the system act in any way to discourage them from entering a performance environment?

The counterpoint to this is to question whether at the start of their journey any young athlete is aware of the potential cost? Do we make young athletes aware of the sacrifices that maybe required of them? My reflection helped me recognise that every choice has a consequence and to choose to commit the time and energy required by a performance journey is a choice to forego other experiences. If we do not actively open out these possibilities for young athletes on what basis are they exercising personal agency? Are we supporting informed choice?

In relation to the specific experiences I reflected on the simple answer to the question of agency is 'no'. The instrumental rationality which guided our thoughts and actions didn't seek to

discuss with younger players any ‘means’ that might not relate to the desired ‘ends’. The performance programmes we created weren’t open to such debate because by entering into such discussions with a young athlete we would have been complicit in encouraging them to step outside the performance narrative. The younger athletes didn’t make informed choices fully aware of the potential for personal loss or the sacrifices required by self or ‘others’.

In TID if young athletes are exercising personal agency it is on the basis of a flawed appreciation of the performance world built around media constructed narratives of what it means to be an elite athlete. If a performance system wants young athletes to be exercising agency on the basis of informed choice then they need to be adequately prepared to make that choice.

In contrast to the instrumental approach I found that existential perspectives on learning would have positioned the athlete as an individual very differently. An existential emphasis on informal learning and positive use of the discontinuity of experience would have allowed a young athlete to retain agency in developing their own understanding of what it meant to be a performance athlete. Athletes would have retained genuine agency and been able to evolve a more authentic narrative with a clearer sense of self identity.

6.3 Summary

The challenge we have as coaches and practitioners is in how to help young athletes navigate and manage all the pitfalls in performance without compromising the benefits they can gain from the intensity and rigor of a performance programme designed to maximise their athletic ability. We have to find ways of preparing athletes that do not to constrain them to a single narrative, whatever that may be, but allow them to express whatever narrative is appropriate to them as a person. We must allow athletes to be polyphonic otherwise individual ‘voices’ are silenced leading to potential mental and emotional health issues. We have to protect them from such problems but within a process that affords them the opportunity to ultimately compete on

the highest sporting stage. This process has to involve taking a disciplined, analytical and robust approach to planning and programme management otherwise the young athlete cannot evolve in to one that can win on an international stage.

I now believe that the alternate perspectives offered by craftsmanship and elite *Bildung* offer the opportunity to retain the positives from performance experiences whilst offering solutions to the problems instrumentality can cause. In Part 4 of this thesis I will extend this thinking and present an alternate paradigm for TID based on adopting an existential philosophical position.

The challenge I then encountered in my thinking was to be able to place these important concepts within a framework that also addressed the issue of excellence. I was mindful that by embracing an existential perspective on development I didn't lose focus on the value to be gained from striving to produce athletic excellence. My performance journeys had a profound influence on me in part because we were collectively striving to produce excellence in athletic performance. The pursuit of athletic excellence had a value beyond the instrumental and had

the potential to bring meaning to people's individual and collective lives, and might teach us important lessons about what it means to be human.
(Ronkainen et al, 2020, p11)

To suggest an approach to TID that might dampen that drive for excellence would be to ignore this element in my professional experience. I wanted a framework in which athletic excellence and personal growth were not mutually exclusive goals. In elite *Bildung* I found a set of concepts that linked the positive features of existential perspectives on learning with the systematic pursuit of excellence. By establishing the right attitudes towards practice and competition we can create a drive for excellence that becomes habitual for the young athlete. This allows for sustained self-transcendence through TID rather than an inevitable progression to a point of failure for many young athletes.

PART 3

In this part of the thesis I want to change my lens and look at the challenges created by the interaction between my two primary ‘selves’ in education and sport. In the last two decades there have been substantive changes to how systems and organisation provide holistic support of both elite and talented younger athletes. There has also been a large increase in the volume of research dedicated specifically to how systems should support young athletes. Sometimes the focus has been driven by a fundamental desire to ensure that a young athlete is supported as a person and sometimes in response to publicly acknowledged poor practice or athlete abuse. Whatever the reason underpinning system and organisational evolution changes had a significant impact on my practice.

In Chapter 7 I look at a broad range of research literature that touches on the understanding of athlete experience, conceptualisation of holistic support environments and the impact of support processes on the young athlete. The volume of literature regarding these issues has expanded rapidly in the last decade as holistic support systems have become common features within high-performance sport. I focus primarily on the body of thinking around *holistic athlete careers* and *dual career* conceptualisations of athlete development that has influenced research and directly impacted on my own practice. It is a review of this literature that constitutes the major part of Chapter 7 given its personal relevance.

However, it would be wrong within Chapter 7 not to recognise that there are other alternate perspectives on athlete development that could be applied to my experience. In the recent past there has been increased focus in the world class performance community on the concept of *human flourishing* or *thriving*. Whilst recognising the growing significance of the *thriving* approach it had far less impact on my experience and is therefore less relevant to this autoethnography. Thriving does however link more strongly to the philosophical and sociological thinking introduced in Chapter 3 and resonates more closely with the model for practice that I introduce in Chapter 10. Consequently, in Chapter 7 I will give a brief overview

of thriving and flourishing before moving on to a more substantive review of holistic athlete careers and dual career research and practice.

Both reviews will be preceded by a focused consideration of the term '*well-being*'. Well-being is a term that appears frequently in the debates regarding the development of an athlete outside of their sport irrespective of whether the debate concerns thriving, holistic athlete models or dual-career support. Whilst *well-being* is used comprehensively in both practice and research it is a term that is loosely and poorly defined within sport. Given its widespread use of I start Chapter 7 by outlining competing conceptualisations and definitions of *well-being* before outlining how the term will be used in the remainder of Part 3.

In Chapter 8 I present reflections on my practical experiences of providing holistic support to student-athletes. This reflection draws on an analysis of two vignettes that describe particular events in my practice. These reflections are complemented by an analysis of issues that emerged from my collaborative interview with *P*. Given the nature of my practice these experiences are critiqued based on the *holistic athlete/dual career* literature base rather than from *thriving* perspective.

7. Holistic support: the athlete as person.

High performance sport policy can be argued to have resulted in the construction of performance systems that reduce the athlete to being just a system output. The professionalisation of performance systems has therefore significantly altered the life experiences of elite athletes. In particular, the systematisation of talent pathways has changed the experiences of large numbers of young athletes irrespective of whether they succeed in making it to the pinnacle of their sport. As a counter balance to the systematisation of talent development performance agencies have also looked to ensure that they support the athlete well-being and their life outside of sport. Balancing the drive to enhance performance whilst supporting well-being is something I have experienced in both performance and educational roles. I have spent considerable time working at the interface between sport and the rest of the young athlete's life. How support systems are conceptualised and operated is so important to the development of the young person as well as the athlete.

There is now a substantive body of work around the topic of holistic athlete support in both professional and academic literature. This is positive in many ways unfortunately within the framework of this thesis there isn't opportunity to conduct a comprehensive analysis of every aspect that literature. As stated in the introduction to Part 3 I will look briefly at the work around thriving and flourishing before taking a deeper look at holistic athlete and dual career models. When considering the literature regarding holistic models and dual careers I will focus on three particular issues that relate most strongly to the reflections on the personal experiences described in Chapter 8. These issues are;-

- Support systems; the evolution of thinking and practice in relation to holistic support.
- Individual responses to holistic support systems: skills and outcomes
- Outstanding critical conceptual questions

As the chapter develops I particularly want to draw attention to the fundamental tension between education and sporting systems as well as highlight potential, unchallenged

assumptions about system philosophies. I want to start though by briefly considering the concept of well-being and how it is described or defined.

7.1 Well-being

The term *well-being* is one that appears in much of the literature relating to the holistic or lifestyle support of athletes. It is a complex topic but an important one. If we assume that one aim of our work with young athletes is to, at the very least, not damage their well-being then how we define that term impacts on what we should or shouldn't do in our talent programmes. Unfortunately, within sport there is no universal definition or description of *well-being* that can be used to frame our thinking. Looking outside of sport there are multiple perspectives on the meaning of the term.

During the last decade the United Nations has recognised that 'well-being' was a poorly defined that was difficult to articulate. There were many competing descriptions of the term despite its use as a key term in UN strategy objectives (Dodge, Daly, Huyton, & Sanders, 2012). In response to this lack of clarity a sub-group of a UN Working Group⁷ was formed to develop a consensus framework for defining, programming, and measuring adolescent well-being (Ross et al., 2020). It was considered essential to better define well-being to aid in directing UN support to programmes that might maximise well-being in adolescent populations. The work of this group identified two conceptual approaches that have dominated research, debate and practice with regard to well-being: subjective and objective well-being. Subjective well-being (SWB) emphasises personal factors such as personal growth, finding meaning in life, satisfaction with life and indices of happiness. In contrast objective well-being (OWB) focuses on extrinsic quality of life indicators such as income, nutrition and housing status along with more social factors such as education or social connections. Objective factors link more to the possibilities

⁷ United Nations H6 Technical Working Group on Adolescent Health and Well-Being

and opportunities provided by an individual's given context whereas subjective factors are independent of environment (Ross et al., 2020).

To bring coherence to the thinking around well-being Ross and colleagues proposed both a short and an expanded definition of adolescent well-being (Table 7.1). In addition they proposed five interconnected domains for adolescent well-being and the requirements for adolescents to achieve well-being within each of these domains (Table 7.2). Both subjective and objective constructs were encompassed within the domains to emphasise the multidimensional nature of well-being.

Table 7.1 UN short and expanded definitions of adolescent well-being (Ross et al, 2020)

Short definition of adolescent well-being.

‘Adolescents thrive and are able to achieve to their full potential’

Expanded definition of adolescent well-being.

‘Adolescents have the support, confidence and resources to thrive in contexts of secure healthy relationships healthy relationships, realizing their full potential and rights.’

Table 7.2 The five domains of adolescent well-being (Ross et al., 2020)

No.	Domain	Subdomains	Requirements include	Type of well-being
1.	Good health and optimum nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical health and capacities. Mental health and capacities. Optimal nutritional status and diet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information, care, and services: access to valid and relevant information and affordable age-appropriate, high-quality, welcoming health services, care, and support, including for self-care. Healthy environment: such as safe water supply, hygiene, sanitation and without undue danger of injury in the home, safe roads, management of toxic substances in the home and community, access to safe green spaces, and no air pollution. Skills to navigate the environment safely. Physical activity: Has access to opportunities for adequate physical activity. Diet: Has access to local, culturally acceptable, adequate, diversified, balanced, and healthy diet commensurate to the individual's characteristics and requirements, to protect from all forms of malnutrition 	Physical Nutritional Emotional Sociocultural
2.	Connectedness, positive values, and contribution to society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connectedness: Is part of positive social and cultural networks and has positive, meaningful relationships with others, including family, peers, and, where relevant, teachers and employers. Valued and respected by others and accepted as part of the community. Attitudes: Responsible, caring, and has respect for others. Has a sense of ethics, integrity, and morality. Interpersonal skills: Empathy, friendship skills, and sensitivity. Activity: Socially, culturally, and civically active. Change and development: Equipped to contribute to change and development in their own lives and/or in their communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connectedness: Has access to opportunities to become part of positive social and cultural networks and to develop positive, meaningful relationships with others, including family, peers, and, where relevant, teachers and employers. Valued: Has opportunities to be involved in decision-making and having their opinions taken seriously, with increasing space to influence and engage with their environment commensurate with their evolving capacities and stage of development. Attitudes: Has access to opportunities to develop personal responsibility, caring, and respect for others and to develop a sense of ethics, integrity and morality. Interpersonal skills: Has access to opportunities to develop empathy, friendship skills, and sensitivity. Activity: Has access to opportunities to be socially, culturally, and civically active that are appropriate to their evolving capacities and stage of development. Change and development: Has access to opportunities to develop the skills to be equipped to contribute to change and development in their own lives and/or in their communities. 	Emotional Sociocultural
3.	Safety and a supportive environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safety: Emotional and physical safety. Material conditions in the physical environment are met. Equity: Treated fairly and have an equal chance in life. Equality: Equal distribution of power, resources, rights, and opportunities for all. Nondiscrimination. Privacy. Responsive: Enriching the opportunities available to the adolescent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safety: Protection from all forms of violence and from exploitative commercial interests in families, communities, among peers and in schools, and the social and virtual environment. Material conditions: The adolescent's rights to food and nutrition, water, housing, heating, clothing, and physical security are met. Equity: There is a supportive legal framework and policies and equitable access to valid and relevant information, products, and high-quality services. Equality: Positive social norms, including gender norms, to ensure equal rights and opportunities for all adolescents. Nondiscrimination: Free to practice personal, cultural, and spiritual beliefs and to express their identity in a nondiscriminatory environment and have the liberty to access objective, factual information, and services without being exposed to judgmental attitudes. Privacy: Their personal information, views, interpretations, fears, and decisions, including those stored online, are not shared or disclosed without the adolescent's permission. Responsive: Has access to a wide range of safe and stimulating opportunities for leisure or personal development. 	Physical Emotional Sociocultural

Table 7.2 cont'd. The five domains of adolescent well-being (Ross et al., 2020)

Continued

No.	Domain	Subdomains	Requirements include	Type of well-being
4.	Learning, competence, education, skills, and employability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning: Has the commitment to, and motivation for, continual learning. • Education. • Resources, life skills, and competencies: Has the necessary cognitive, social, creative, and emotional resources, skills (life/decision-making) and competencies to thrive, including knowing their rights and how to claim them, and how to plan and make choices. • Skills: Acquisition of technical, vocational, business, and creative skills to be able to take advantage of current or future economic, cultural, and social opportunities. • Employability. • Confidence that they can do things well. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning: Receives support to develop the commitment to, and motivation for, continual learning. • Education: Has access to formal education until age 16, and opportunities for learning through formal or nonformal education or training beyond. • Resources, life skills, and competencies: Has opportunities to develop the resources, skills (life/decision-making), and competencies to thrive. • Skills: Has opportunities to develop relevant technical, vocational, business, and creative skills. • Employability: Is given the opportunity to participate in nonexploitative and sustainable livelihoods and/or entrepreneurship appropriate for their age and stage of development. • Confidence: Is given the necessary encouragement and opportunities to develop self-confidence and is empowered to feel that they can do things well. 	Emotional Cognitive
5.	Agency and resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agency: Has self-esteem, a sense of agency and of being empowered to make meaningful choices and to influence their social, political, and material environment and has the capacity for self-expression and self-direction appropriate to their evolving capacities and stage of development. • Identity: Feels comfortable in their own self and with their identity(s), including their physical, cultural, social, sexual, and gender identity. • Purpose: Has a sense of purpose, desire to succeed, and optimism about the future. • Resilience: Equipped to handle adversities both now and in the future, in a way that is appropriate to their evolving capacities and stage of development. • Fulfilment: Feels that they are fulfilling their potential now and that they will be able to do so in the future. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agency: Has opportunities to develop self-esteem, a sense of agency, the ability to make meaningful choices and to influence their social, political and material environment, for self-expression and self-direction. • Identity: Has the safe space to develop clarity and comfort in their own self and their identity(s), including their physical, cultural, social, sexual, and gender identity. • Purpose: Has opportunities to develop a sense of purpose, desire to succeed, and optimism about the future. • Resilience: Has opportunities to develop the ability to handle adversities both now and in the future, in a way that is appropriate to their evolving capacities and stage of development. • Fulfilment: Has opportunities to fulfill their potential now and to be able to do so in the future. 	Emotional Cognitive

As a counterpoint to the UN's policy driven approach to defining well-being researchers have focused increasing attention on understanding key psychological components of well-being. In a review of the topic Diener, Lucas, and Oishi (2018) found exponential growth in the number of articles relating to well-being within the general psychology literature. Within this body of work multiple definitions of well-being have emerged with Diener and colleagues identifying 16 different definitions of the term (Diener et al., 2018). The definitions most relevant to the sport literature are shown in Table 7.3 Definitions of well-being taken from Diener et al (2018)Table 7.3

However, even within the single concept of psychological well-being there are potentially multiple components. Ryff (2014) identified six possible components of psychological well-being that were supported by nine different theoretical foundations (Figure 7.1 The dimensions of psychological well-being and their theoretical foundations (Ryff, 2014)Figure 7.1). Looking at Table 7.3 and Figure 7.1 it is clear that

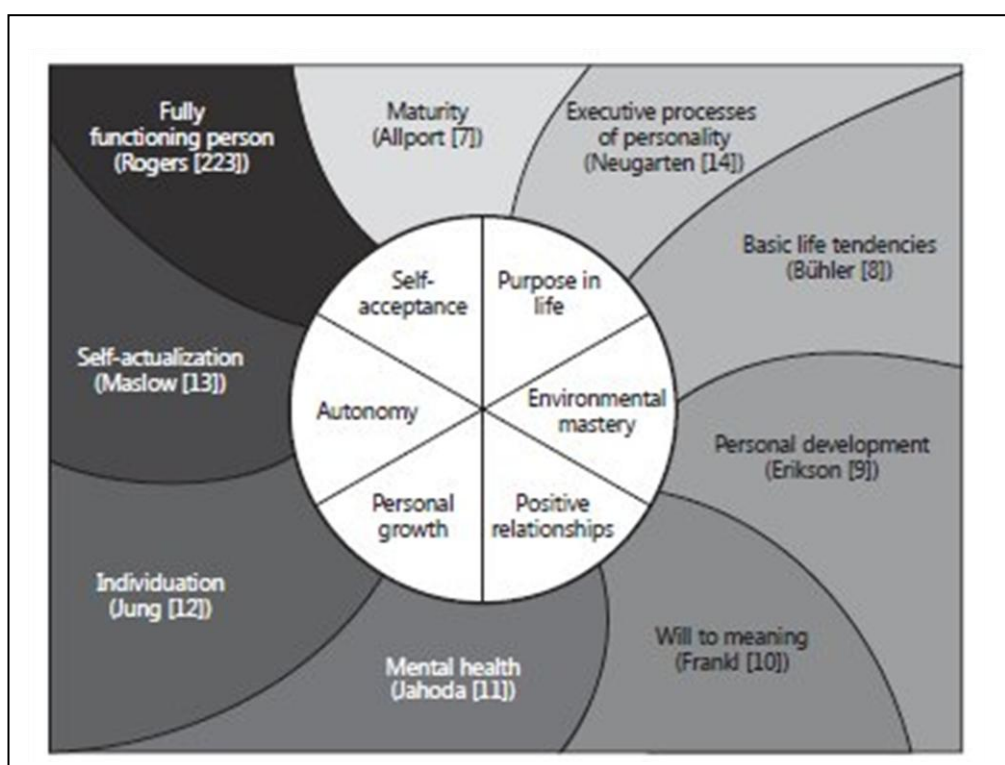


Figure 7.1 The dimensions of psychological well-being and their theoretical foundations (Ryff, 2014)

within the general psychology literature well-being is a multi-dimensional construct that has multiple definitions.

Table 7.3 Definitions of well-being taken from Diener et al (2018)

Concept	Definition
Well-Being	The most general term covering how well individuals are doing in life, including social, health, material, and subjective dimensions of well-being.
Psychological Well-Being	A term that has come to be equated with Eudaimonic Well-Being (see below). Thus, it is often used in a way that does not refer to all possible types of psychological well-being, but only to one form of well-being.
Quality of Life	A term usually referring to a person's overall life circumstances, including environmental, social, societal, material, and other aspects of their life that would affect how desirable and positive his or her life is.
Subjective Well-Being	General term referring to the various types of subjective evaluations of one's life, including both cognitive evaluations and affective feelings.
Life Satisfaction	People's explicit and conscious evaluations of their lives, often based on factors that the individual deems relevant.
Hedonic Well-Being	A person's well-being derived from pleasure, and lowered by pain. Often scholars will include physical pleasures, pleasures of the mind, and emotions.
Emotional Well-Being	<p>People's positive moods and emotions and low levels of negative moods and emotions, and reflects not only momentary enjoyment, but also movement toward goals that are congruent with a person's motives.</p> <p>In addition, Emotional Well-Being is thought to include resilience after bad events, and the ability to express various emotions that are functional and appropriate to the situation.</p>
Evaluative Well-Being	People's explicit evaluations and judgments of their lives, including both Life Satisfaction, Domain Satisfaction, and other evaluative judgments about their life.
Eudaimonic Well-Being	<p>In contrast to Subjective Well-Being, this refers to well-being defined as desirable psychological characteristics such as meaning and purpose, positive social relationships, mastery, autonomy, virtues, and so forth, which can enhance effective functioning and Subjective Well-Being.</p> <p>Eudaimonic refers to Aristotle's notions of well-being based on the good functioning person.</p>

Within the sport psychology literature well-being has most often been associated with concepts such as personal growth and finding meaning thereby linking to

psychological and eudaemonic well-being as described in Table 7.3 (D. Brown, Arnold, Fletcher, & Standage, 2017; D. Brown, Sarkar, & Howells, 2020; Dahl, Wilson-Mendenhall, & Davidson, 2020). The sport literature also makes frequent mention of well-being linked to being a fully functioning person or self-actualisation (D. Brown, Arnold, Reid, & Roberts, 2018). Unfortunately the rationale for the choice of definition, the components of well-being that are considered and choice of underpinning theory are rarely considered.

Relating the sport psychological literature back to the broader UN perspective adds to the uncertainty around what well-being might refer to in any given context.

Comparison of the sport psychology focus on eudaimonic well-being to the UN well-being dimensions in Table 7.2 shows that it relates well to domains 1, 2 and 5 but less well to domains 3 or 4. The sport psychology approach doesn't seem to consider any sense of well-being arising from education, employability or career development. In contrast the dual career literature aligns very strongly with domain 4 by placing a significant emphasis on progression in education and career development in the conceptualisation of well-being. Within the dual career literature appropriate promotion of well-being in a young athlete is strongly related to the ability of a talent system to ensure that the athlete can progress in formal education or vocation systems alongside their sport (Stambulova, Ryba, & Henriksen, 2020).

Looking across the psychological and more general approaches to defining well-being it seems clear that we can choose to see wellbeing in any number of distinct ways. Many perspectives will be interlinked but by adopting subjective or objective positions it is possible to define it in ways that are distinct from one another.

Given the complexity of the topic arguing the relative merits of different approaches and how they might be integrated is worthy of its own doctoral research.

Consequently, I feel it is beyond the scope of this thesis to look at the issues in more detail. However, to bring some coherence to the discussions in the rest of this thesis I have chosen to adopt the broadest definition provided by Diener et al (2018).

‘Well-being’ refers to how well individuals are doing in life, including social, health, material, and subjective dimensions of well-being.

I have settled on this interpretation on the basis that this is closest to the broad, lay interpretation that influenced my practice. Within my practice I aimed to avoid damaging athlete well-being and enhance it wherever possible. In doing so I didn’t practice on working with the more exact definitions that have been discussed, I always tacitly adopted a broad approach to well-being in my work. I therefore feel that this general definition is appropriate to me as an individual practitioner.

I recognise that adopting such a general definition might be less helpful when reviewing different bodies of literature. Consequently, when the research I review provides a more specific or limited perspective of well-being I will endeavour to highlight this by using alternate terminology (e.g. specially state ‘eudaimonic well-being’) or articulate what the authors meant in their use of the term.

7.2 Thriving and Flourishing

The concept of thriving in sport and how an athlete can flourish both within their sport and their life in general is one that has received increasing attention in recent years. The aim of enabling athletes to thrive is now a core element in the sport psychology support provided by the English Institute of Sport to elite athletes (EIS, 2020).

Outside of sport the concept of thriving has arisen through study of the quality of personal functioning in a variety of contexts and processes. For example, it has arisen from research looking at responses to adversity at work and similar response patterns in youth development. Unfortunately, in each context different interpretations of thriving have been offered resulting in it being a widely acknowledged but poorly defined concept. In a review of the field D. Brown, Arnold, Standage, and Fletcher (2017) found thirteen different definitions of thriving in the literature. In the area of youth development, particularly relevant to this thesis, thriving was defined in relation to growth in characteristics such as competence, character, connection, confidence, and

compassion (Dowling et al., 2004). In contrast, when considered in the domain of work, thriving was linked more to outcome measures relating to particular accomplishments, success or financial reward (Sarkar, Fletcher, & Brown, 2015).

Within sport our current understanding of thriving has also evolved from multiple start points. Initially the thriving concept was seen in research relating to mental toughness in elite athletes (Bull, Shambrook, James, & Brooks, 2005). More recently it has appeared in research that has looked more generally at development in youth and adult sport populations (Gucciardi, Jackson, Hodge, Anthony, & Brooke, 2015; Gucciardi, Stamatis, & Ntoumanis, 2017; McNeill, Durand-Bush, & Lemyre, 2018).

Unfortunately, in sport research definitions of thriving have been taken from the general literature and thereby mirrored the divergent approaches to thriving seen outside sport. More recently the need for greater conceptual clarity in sport has been recognized in the work of Brown, Arnold, Standage and Fletcher (2017) and D. Brown et al. (2018). These researchers, through a combination of literature review and inductive exploration of thriving amongst elite athletes, generated a universal definition of thriving. Their definition was that thriving in sport performers is characterized by a sustained high level of performance and the development of eudaimonic well-being.

The well-being/development dimension was consistent with previous work on thriving both inside and outside sport and was linked to the innate human drive for self-fulfilment and growth highlighted in self-determination theory (R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2017). If an individual has the necessary social and personal functioning for development to occur then they will experience high levels of well-being and will thrive (D. Brown & Arnold, 2019).

In addition, thriving in sport was found to be strongly related to the concept of performance. However, 'performance' was not just limited to competitive outcome but any outcomes that were relevant and meaningful to the individual athlete in a specific context. Performance was therefore seen as being the quality with which an action or process was completed and therefore independent of competitive outcome (Sarkar et

al., 2015). Achieving elevated levels of performance on relevant tasks underpins thriving by giving the athlete a sense of achievement. To assess this researchers have used process measures and informant-rated performance scales (Sarkar et al., 2015; Verner-Filion & Vallerand, 2018; Verner-Filion, Vallerand, Amiot, & Mocanu, 2017)

D. Brown, Arnold, Fletcher, et al. (2017) concluded that for an individual to be holistically thriving both performance and eudaimonic well-being components should be experienced simultaneously. They subsequently defined thriving as “the joint experience of development and success” (D.Brown et al, 2017a, p. 168). When this definition is applied in a sporting context an individual who demonstrates high levels on both well-being and performance indices can be considered to be functioning fully and, therefore, thriving (D. Brown et al., 2018). Thriving is therefore an appropriate goal for athlete support systems so an understanding of how thriving might be optimally facilitated is important.

Facilitating Thriving

The literature suggests that there are two routes to facilitation of thriving. The first is through meeting an individual’s basic psychological needs as defined by R. M. Ryan and Deci (2017). Ryan and Deci’s psychological needs theory proposes that all individuals have three basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and feeling a connection to others. The satisfaction of these needs is fundamental for an individual to experience ongoing growth, wellness, and thriving. D. Brown, Arnold, Fletcher, et al. (2017) found that greater levels of need satisfaction were significantly correlated to a sport performers’ exhibiting a thriving profile. In contrast high levels of need frustration correlated with a poor thriving profile.

The second process relates to whether an individual sees the stressors in their environment as positive challenges leading to potential gain or whether such situations are only related to potential negative consequences. If individuals make positive challenge appraisals this encourages better task engagement and creates opportunities for the positive changes associated with thriving. Perceiving that you can meet the challenges in your environment has been shown to result in high levels of task

enjoyment and individual thriving. [https://unimailderbyac-my.sharepoint.com/personal/786459_derby_ac_uk/Documents/Lit & Source Material/General Reading Library/Thriving & Flourishing/15032-4386-FullBook.docx - Ref_1507_FILE150324386SIV013D](https://unimailderbyac-my.sharepoint.com/personal/786459_derby_ac_uk/Documents/Lit%20&%20Source%20Material/General%20Reading%20Library/Thriving%20&%20Flourishing/15032-4386-FullBook.docx-Ref_1507_FILE150324386SIV013D). Brown, Arnold, Standage, et al. (2017) also found a statistically significant relationship between the perception of demanding competitive sporting encounters as being positive challenges and indices of thriving.

Sport-related research has subsequently identified a number of sport-related personal and contextual enablers that enhance an individual's capacity to engage with, or benefit from, either underpinning psychological processes. It has been hypothesised that these enablers contribute to the creation of enhanced task engagement, positive work ethic and resilience against the stressors within elite sport (C. J. Brown, Webb, Robinson, & Cotgreave, 2018; D. Brown & Arnold, 2019; D. Brown, Arnold, Standage, et al., 2017; Gucciardi, Hanton, & Fleming, 2017).

In terms of personal enablers a number have been identified that are just as important in a talent development context as a senior high performance environment. Enablers relating to motivation, goal setting, creating challenge, positive mental states and self-belief have all been related to thriving (D. Brown et al., 2018; Sarkar et al., 2015). In particular resilience and mental toughness qualities have been correlated to indices of thriving (D. Brown, Arnold, Standage, et al., 2017; Gucciardi, Hanton, et al., 2017). What isn't clear from the research to date is whether the personal 'enablers' are a product of thriving in an individual's sport engagement or are a precursor to thriving.

The potential contextual enablers of thriving are primarily associated with social elements in the athlete's environment. For example, levels of support from parents, colleague/teammates and coaches/support staff have been found to be related to thriving (D. Brown et al., 2018; Harris & Watson, 2014). In addition, research suggests that it is the depth and strength of inter-personal bonds with teammates and support staff as well as a meaningful connection to a club/squad that is pivotal (D. Brown & Arnold, 2019). If I relate this back to issues arising in Part 2 I can see how contextual enablers of thriving were present in my experiences.

In Section 5.2. I highlighted that one of the experiences most valued in my performance journeys was the personal relationships that were established along the way. The human interaction on those journeys was both life affirming and enriching. This resonates strongly with Ryan and Deci's idea that 'relatedness' is a critical psychological need. It also links to Brown and Arnold's finding that social support networks, and the depth of personal relationships, are critical to our experience of thriving. This emphasises for me that we are more likely to thrive on a performance journey when we recognize that our connection to those with whom we share the journey is as important as the destination we are trying to reach.

The subsequent question that needs to be addressed is how can we construct talent environments and support processes to maximise the chance of athletes' thriving? The key would seem to be in being able to improve both personal and contextual enablers so that when they interact we maximise the opportunity for an athlete to thrive. In terms of personal enablers programmes that can develop personal resilience qualities (e.g. positive personality, motivation, confidence and focus) can assist in changing how athletes' perceive and respond to challenge (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012, 2016). That in turn will influence challenge appraisal and subsequent capacity to thrive. In addition, programmes that enable athletes to set realistic goals and enhance self-awareness have also been shown to enable thriving (McNeill et al., 2018). In essence, if athlete development programmes are constructed thoughtfully we can enhance young athlete's capability to thrive through their sport experience.

The impact of developing personal enablers will then be maximized if the talent environment around them is also structured to facilitate thriving. In this regard building environments that foster the development of meaningful relationships between teammates, coaches, support staff and the organization would seem to be pivotal. D. Brown and Arnold (2019) found that key processes in building meaningful relationships were establishing, and listening to, a collective and shared "voice", developing a club/organization collective identity and building a climate of transparency and fairness. It was also found to be important that environments facilitate communication based on openness, honesty and empathy so that athletes can

express themselves without fear of negative consequence. In short, we need to construct environments in which developing athletes can be themselves.

In this regard the literature on thriving resonates with the work on competing personal narratives in Part 2. In Section 4.2. I discussed the impact that environments which promote the performance narrative to the exclusion of all others limit the growth of young athletes. The work of Carless and Douglas (2013a, 2013b) showed that environments in which relationships become superficial and narrative choice is restricted result in young athletes having to ‘play’ versions of themselves. The athlete’s perceived need to have to play a part rather than be authentic is unlikely to facilitate thriving.

7.2.1 Well-being & Thriving Summary

This brief review of well-being and thriving is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it highlights potential variability in the definition of the term ‘well-being’ and that well-being is actually a complex and multi-faceted construct. Unfortunately, the sport literature that will be reviewed in the remaining parts of this chapter often treats the term as though it has a clear and universally agreed meaning. Consequently when research suggests that certain types of programme or approaches to practice facilitate well-being we should always critically ask what form of ‘well-being’ is actually being discussed? Furthermore, when we compare approaches that purport to develop athlete well-being are we comparing like with like? Are all programmes aimed at protecting and enhancing well-being actually targeting the same elements in an athlete’s life?

It is also useful to note the links between thriving and elements in the conceptualisation of subjective well-being. Those links seem relatively clear when the bodies of literature are compared directly but each one in isolation doesn’t reference the other. Within sport that may be of significance given the widespread use of the term ‘well-being’ and the growing focus on ‘thriving’ as a key element in athlete development.

The thriving literature in itself is useful in drawing attention to the personal and contextual enablers that will allow an athlete to thrive beyond just the enhancement of their competitive performance. In constructing talent environments, and especially their links to education, are we looking at meeting a young athlete's fundamental needs of autonomy, a sense of competence and the connection to others or are we simply concerned with academic performance? Are we designing programmes that actively try and enhance the young athlete's challenge appraisal? If not then whilst we might assume that by developing sport-education links we are enhancing athlete well-being it is questionable whether we will enhancing their opportunity to thrive or simply creating further stressors?

My final thoughts on thriving and well-being relate to system structures and processes. Facilitating of thriving in athletes is an appropriate goal for any sport systems and it is laudable that there is a very clear focus on thriving within the programmes run by the EIS (EIS, 2020). However, it is worth noting that 'Project Thrive' is delivered by the performance psychology team at the EIS whereas all other aspects of personal support are delivered within separate lifestyle and well-being programmes. This calls in to question the nature of the driver to encourage elite athletes to thrive? Surely supporting thriving in an athlete should be about the whole person and therefore sit fully aligned with other aspects of lifestyle support? Yet, in the UK the Thrive programme is being delivered by a team whose *raison d'être* is to enhance competitive performance. So, are we trying to assist athletes to thrive because it is the right thing for them or because it is felt that a thriving athlete is more likely to deliver higher competitive performance? The difference could be quite profound in how programmes are operationalised.

The literature around well-being and thriving is interesting because it raises some fundamental questions in relation to my experiences of the sport-education interface. I would now like to move on and look at the literature specifically related to that interface. This is a literature base that has had more direct impact on my experience and practice.

7.3 Systems and models: the context

In order to understand practice it is important to understand the context in which that practice takes place and how that context has evolved. In this section I will be outlining key aspects of the macro-context for holistic athlete support and how this has developed over time. I also want to consider questions about the macro-contexts within which I have to practice.

7.3.1 Transitions and models

The earliest work that focused on holistic athlete support came in the form of research that sought to understand the ‘athletic career’, defined as:-

“a multi-year sport activity voluntarily chosen by the person and aimed at achieving his, or her, individual peak in athletic performance” (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007)

Within this work there was an almost exclusive focus on athletic retirement as an issue. Researchers sought to explain this critical event as a life ‘*transition*’ using non-athletic theoretical frameworks from the fields of loss and ageing (Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler, & Côté, 2009). Within this work a ‘transition’ was defined as

“an event, or non-event, that results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in ones behaviours and relationships” (Schlossberg, 1981)

As research into athletic retirement continued researchers began to recognise other phases of an athletic career in which an athlete experienced a significant transition e.g. when moving from junior to senior performance. In addition research moved beyond seeing a transition as a ‘single event’ that happened at a specific moment in time. It was recognised that transitions (e.g. retirement) could take many months to complete and be either a positive or negative experience for the athlete. Consequently athletic

career models quickly began to conceptualise transition as a process rather than an event fixed in time. The athletic career transition model (Stambulova, 2003)(

) then presented a transition as a coping process which could be influenced with the right support.

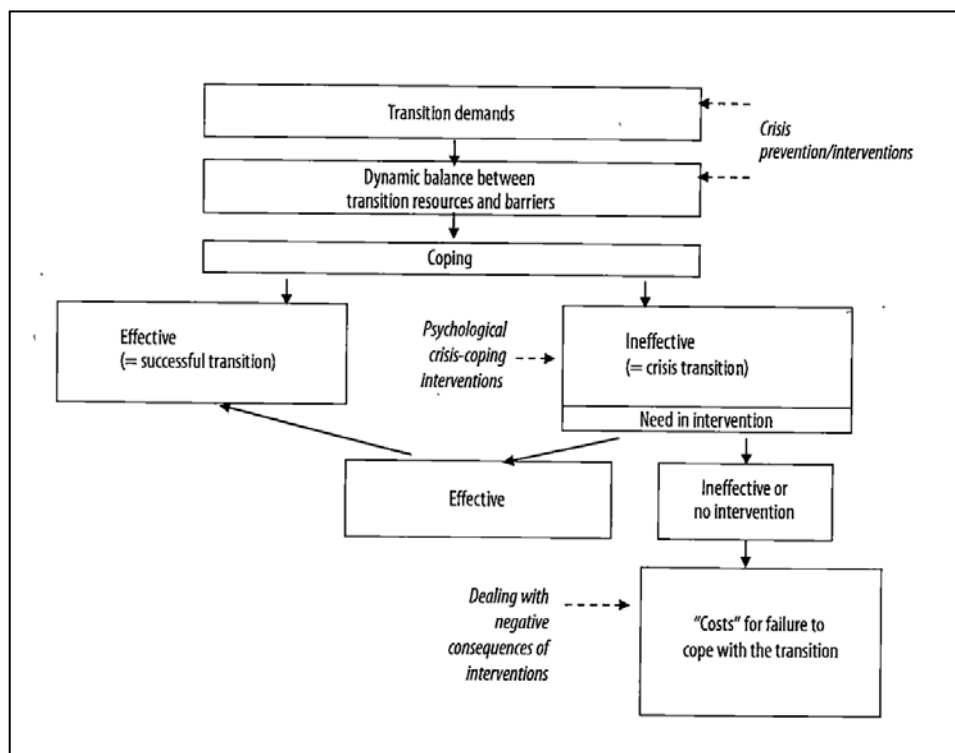


Figure 7.2The athletic career transition model (Stambulova, 2003)

Alongside the conceptualisation of transition as a process researchers began to consider the multiple transitions that athletes may experience as their career progresses, e.g. moving from junior to senior athlete or initial selection in to a national squad, as well as end career experiences (Stambulova, 2012). Developing this line of thinking a ‘holistic lifespan perspective’ was proposed in which athletic careers were considered in conjunction with other facets of an athlete’s life (Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavallee, 2004; Wylleman, Lavallee, & Alfermann, 1999). To complement an increasing awareness of transitions in athlete development Henriksen and colleagues developed the concept of a ‘holistic ecological approach’ (HEA) to the issue of talent development (Henriksen, Stambulova, & Roessler, 2010a, 2010b, 2011). The HEA approach was developed in response to prevailing attitudes in TID in which a young

person was viewed only as an ‘athlete’, a one dimensional being. Broader dimensions of athlete’s lives were ignored as sport fixated on optimising training programmes. As a counterpoint to this perspective Henriksen developed the Athletic Talent Development Environment (ATDE) model which can be seen in Figure 7.3 (Henriksen & Stambulova, 2017; Henriksen et al., 2010a, 2010b). The ATDE model sought to account for the full range of athletes' experiences inside and outside sport, including macro and micro contextual influences in both athletic and non-athletic domains. Henriksen et al’s position was that optimal TID required stakeholders in the HEA, including formal education providers, to be aligned in their work and offer coherent support for the athlete.

Henriksen and colleagues subsequently used the ATDE model to compare the functioning of successful TID environments (kayaking, sailing, track and field) with a less successful one (golf) (Henriksen, Larsen, & Christensen, 2014; Henriksen et al., 2010a, 2010b, 2011) The comparison of these ATDEs showed that one of the key

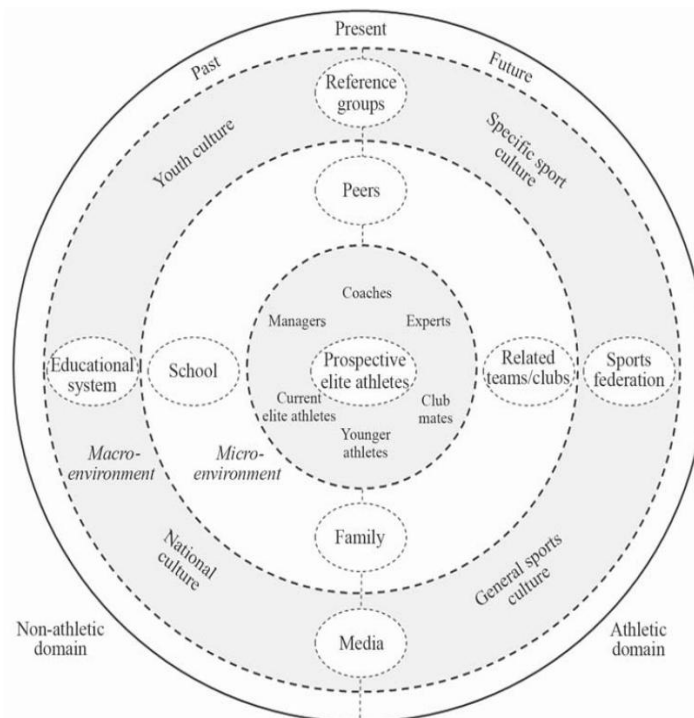


Figure 7.3 The athletic talent development environment (ATDE) model (Henriksen, 2010)

differentiating factors between the successful and unsuccessful environments was the positive integration of the athletic and non-athletic lives of the athletes. It was shown that support, coordination and communication between key agencies (e.g. school and club) was a critical feature of successful ATDEs (Henriksen & Stambulova, 2017), a finding which resonates with other investigations of the importance of athlete support networks (Knight, Harwood, & Sellars, 2018; Li & Sum, 2017).

Stambulova and Wylleman have recently noted that despite a decade having passed since Henriksen's initial work we still have only limited understanding of how to construct holistic ecological environments for developing athletes (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). However there have been moves to correct this position in Europe with the EU seeking to develop a taxonomy of TID environments in Europe (Cartigny et al., 2019; ECO-DC, 2018). This research is seeking to develop a deeper understanding of the common features of a wide range of successful holistic support

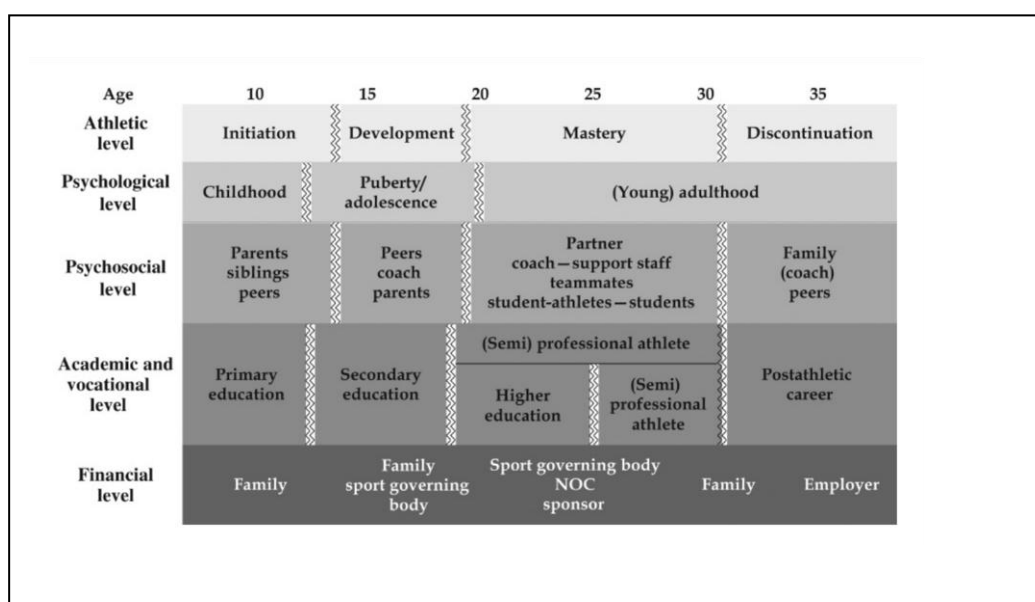


Figure 7.4 The Holistic Athlete Career Model (HACM) (Wylleman et al., 2013)

environments and then create tools to measure the presence of these features in any ATDE. It is hoped that this will support researchers and practitioners in developing effective ATDEs within which holistic support is embedded.

In parallel to the development of the ATDE model the Holistic Athlete Career Development Model (HACM) was proposed by Wylleman, Reints, and De Knop (2013) (**Error! Reference source not found.**). The HACM presented the athlete as experiencing development in four strands of life in addition to their athletic career. The proposition was that the athlete simultaneously experiences all five strands of the model therefore a consideration of any specific stage of athletic career, or a transition, cannot be done without commensurate consideration of the other life strands.

One of the strengths of the HACM is that it can be adapted for specific populations simply by moving the transition points in any given strand. The inherent flexibility in the HACM puts it in an ideal position to scaffold research into athletic careers in different performance systems, national cultural norms, and sporting traditions (Stambulova, 2009; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). It's multi-dimensional nature has helped it become the preeminent model in the field and many researchers have used it as a framework to position their work (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2015).

Both HEA and HACM draw attention to the importance of the athlete's life outside the sporting domain. HEA presents a picture of a cohesive environment whilst the HACM maps the phases of an individual's development. These models laudably seek to move us away from a view of the 'athlete' towards a perspective on the 'person' and what is required for optimal development.

7.3.2 Systems and agencies

In parallel to the development of theoretical perspectives on holistic support many national sport agencies were developing practical programmes to support athletes in their life outside of sport. This was highlighted in the wide ranging SPLISS 2 study⁸ in which Athlete Career Support was found to have become a key component in effective high performance sport systems (De Bosscher, Shibli, et al., 2015). SPLISS 2 also

⁸ For note: SPLISS 2 analysed elite sport policy in 15 nations gathering data from 9,258 athletes, 2,176 coaches and 432 performance directors in the process to create 9 Pillars to effective performance systems.

found that there was more consistency in the content of athlete support systems than in any other type of support available to athletes.

De Bosscher et al. identified that high-performance agencies had developed their support mechanisms to achieve two specific aims. Firstly, they aimed to enhance their athletes' chances of developing successful post-sport professional careers. The underpinning rationale for this being that, by providing an environment that supported the athlete in making a successful retirement transition, agencies were more likely to maintain athlete well-being and potentially keep athletes in an athletic career for longer. It was felt that if an athlete was less concerned about their future life/career they would find it easier to commit to their athletic career. Secondly, agencies focused athlete support at supporting personal well-being during the athletic career. It was assumed that support for athlete well-being allowed the athlete to sustain focus on their athletic development thereby reaching higher levels of performance (De Bosscher, Shibli, et al., 2015).

Within current national systems support is now commonly offered in the form of access to services such as financial planning, career guidance, mental health support, education opportunities with flexible study options and job placements. In most systems access to these services is co-ordinated by a designated athlete advisor. Athletes are assigned a specific advisor with whom they can develop a rapport and on-going relationship. This advisor works with the athlete on their holistic development needs and facilitates the use of specialists in specific domains as required (De Bosscher et al., 2016; De Bosscher, Sotiradou, Brouwers, & Truyens, 2015).

In the design of their support systems many national agencies acknowledged the influence of the life-span perspective in the HACM as having influenced the creation of their systems. Unfortunately, despite there being a shared recognition of the importance of life span perspectives holistic athlete support was reported as being the least developed of all the services available to elite athletes (De Bosscher, Shibli, et al., 2015). Support services relating to enhancing performance (e.g. sport science or

conditioning) were consistently more developed than systems designed to support an athlete's life outside sport.

One observation of particular note was that

‘Athletes pursuing success in sport are increasingly recognised and treated as employees’ (De Bosscher et al, 2015, p235)⁹

Whilst this observation may not directly influence the content of support programmes it does, perhaps, give an indication of the mind-set underpinning the work of high-performance agencies. What was also of significance was the finding that there was a discrepancy in the eyes of the athletes between rhetoric and reality. In the SPLISS 2 study national agencies consistently rated the quality of the services they provided more highly than the athletes. In addition there was also a mismatch between the range of services agencies claimed to deliver and what athletes felt they received.

In relation to holistic support for younger performers a number of countries have either created or seen the emergence of specific routes through education for their most talented athletes. Examples of public systems include those in Holland, Germany, Flanders, Singapore and Denmark whilst private school systems have gained ground in Norway and the UK (Emrich, Fröhlich, Klein, & Pitsch, 2009; Kristiansen & Houlihan, 2017; Quinto Romani, 2018; Van Rens et al., 2015). The thinking underpinning the creation of such routes is threefold. Firstly, by concentrating talent in specific locations it is easier to provide high quality support services, such as coaching or conditioning, to the widest sample of young athletes. Secondly, by designing educational routes specifically for young sports people it should be easier to dovetail the individual's sport with their education. Theoretically this should make it easier for a young person to sustain good progress in both domains. Finally, by creating a critical mass of like-minded young people with similar ambitions it becomes easier to foster a

⁹ It is worth noting that in the UK athletes on publicly funded talent and performance programmes are legally not categorised as employees. Financial assistance is always in the form of a grant which is exempt from income tax.

culture of high performance conducive to optimising athletic development (Kristiansen & Houlihan, 2017).

In addition to the development of specific pathways through education some countries, notably the UK, have developed national scholarship schemes to support talented young people. In the UK, the Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme was started in 2004 with the intention of providing scholarships for talented young athletes who were in full or part-time education. The scholarships enabled athletes to enhance their training through provision of services such as strength and conditioning and sport medicine. In terms of wider support the scholarships also provided access to performance lifestyle advisors to assist the athlete in managing their well-being and the balance between their education and sport. TASS operated by funding education providers to deliver services to athletes. This meant that not only did it impact directly on the athletes, but it also altered practice within the education sector. TASS achieved this by setting quality criteria that education providers had to meet before they could deliver TASS services to scholars. TASS also influenced system delivery by creating a qualification for lifestyle advisors in Talented Athlete Lifestyle Support (TALS). Any organisation wishing to deliver TASS services had to provide access to TALS qualified advisors (TASS, 2020). More recently TASS has made a further contribution to this area by starting to fund research and facilitate discussion between researchers and practitioners (TASS, 2019).

Alongside the development of support in publicly funded sports there have been commensurate developments in professional sports. For example, in soccer the Premier League sets standards that all Football League Club Academies have to meet in order to receive central funding. As part of this every club has to have a designated Education and Welfare Officer and ensure that young players have access to educational opportunities, well-being support and career guidance (Premier League, 2020).

In addition to the work of national agencies, both public and professional, strategic action has also been taken by international political agencies such as the European

Union. The work of the European Union has been of particular significance within UK sport and has had a direct impact on my professional experiences.

In 2012 as part of a wider EU Sport programme the European Commission published guidelines for the holistic support of athletes and initiated an Expert Working Group to oversee European co-ordination in this area (European Commission, 2012; Ooijen, 2012). Since then the EU has been a powerful force in championing the development of holistic support programmes for athletes. It has also made a significant contribution to our understanding of this area through a number of research initiatives that will be considered in section 7.4.

Finally, as performance systems have developed athlete support programmes there has been an evolution in the language surrounding this field. In the HEA and HACM terminology focused on ‘life-span perspectives’ and a ‘holistic view’ of the athletes life. Over time this nomenclature has evolved, particularly within European research, towards the use of the term ‘dual career’ (DC) to describe programmes designed to support the athletes life outside of sport (Cartigny et al., 2019; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). The word ‘dual’ is used to recognise the challenge of simultaneously pursuing the two pathways of sporting and education/vocational development. ‘Dual career’ has gained such widespread acceptance that it has been adopted by major international institutions, such as the European Union, and within high performance systems and agencies (De Bosscher, Shibli, et al., 2015; European Commission, 2012; Houlihan, 2013). The phrase is now also used by researchers from Asia (Nam, Shin, Jung, Kim, & Nam, 2019) and Australasia (M. A. Pink, Lonie, & Saunders, 2018). In the USA terminology is coalescing around ‘Athlete Development Specialist’ but ‘dual career’ is dominating research in Europe. Certainly with regard to ‘dual career’ the shift does not seem to have been planned within the research community or amongst practitioners. Consequently there is no specific rationale underpinning the use of the term and no debate about whether its description of the athlete support process is valid.

7.3.3 Personal experience: evolution and questions

The preceding sections show that, at a macro level, there have been significant developments in our understanding of holistic athlete support over the last twenty years. The need for systems to support athletes in their life outside of sport has become recognised and support programmes are an accepted feature of high-performance systems around the world. As the need for holistic athlete support has become widely recognised both national and international agencies have become involved in re-shaping the support landscape in sport. So the situation would appear to be a positive one with athletes being able to access more support than ever before for their life outside sport. So why do I have a sense of dissonance when I look at this perspective? What doesn't ring true?

At the heart of my unease is the sense that whilst research and system development appear to be on the same page my experience has been of research and practice growing in parallel rather than being intertwined. With some certainty I can say that the only link between the early work on transitions, the HEA, the HACM and my early professional practice was that all were concerned with development of talented athletes. I don't see any connection between the type of ATDEs as described in the HEA approach and what I did or what I experienced.

As discussed in Chapter 4 when lottery funding flowed into UK sport in the late 1990's and early 2000s sports formalised their performance programmes followed closely by their talent pathways. As talent systems became more structured they demanded more time and commitment from young athletes. Sports looked to increase training volume and frequency adding layer after layer of sophistication to our talent pathways as time passed. However, I don't recall there being a collective sense of an 'optimal structure' for a talent pathway. Each sport I was involved with built its own performance models and designed its own talent pathways taking into consideration contextual variables such as the domestic training and competition structures, geographical distribution of the sport and the demographics of its talented athletes. ATDE models such as Henriksen's were neither a guide for practice nor a target that sports looked to attain.

Our talent systems were logical creations that were conceived in the minds of coaches and practitioners, grounded in the mindset of instrumental rationality.

We didn't build talent pathways with the whole person in mind, we created our programmes with the intention of making better athletes. Sports weren't challenged to ask how their practitioners intended to support life outside sport and NGBs didn't stop to consider the holistic athlete for themselves. Why would they? NGBs were looking to seize the moment and get 'serious' about performance planning without thinking too hard about the consequences for the athletes. The performance rhetoric of the time was about 'forensic focus' and 'no compromise' so to talk of lives outside of sport was to invite the accusation that you were prepared to let athletes 'compromise' in their training. To discuss the importance of athlete lives outside the training environment was to demonstrate a lack of commitment to staying on the road to the podium. To question was to 'compromise' and to compromise meant you weren't really on the journey to get to the top of the Olympic medals table.

In that environment who was going to shout 'hold on, there might be consequences for athletes that we haven't considered'. I doubt that a sport which had the foresight and courage to think of the whole athlete would ever have had its voice heard amongst the noise of so many sports clothing themselves in the new performance language. Equally an individual practitioner questioning the received wisdom of 'no compromise' would have been categorised as not having the 'edge' required to be effective in the new performance systems. How a 'no compromise' approach might come to influence athletes in ways that were anything less than positive never entered the mind. We didn't ignore issues of holistic support we just didn't recognise the concept so it was simply absent from our thinking. Through ignorance we initially built talent systems that marginalised an athletes life outside of sport.

Yet, despite a beginning in which practice was divorced from theoretical knowledge, we have arrived at a position where holistic athlete support is now a key feature in effective high-performance sport systems. So how have we arrived at a point where the SPLISS 2 data is unequivocal in placing holistic athlete support as being a key

component of effective performance systems? I believe that it is naïve to think that sport simply responded to the research that was being generated and made a morally driven decision to create better support systems. My experience of talent programmes was that engagement with the athlete's life outside of sport was driven by necessity rather than by a belief that we were ethically obligated to support the whole person. Increased resourcing of talent programmes meant that we could sustain national training weeks rather than weekends and support much longer competition periods with greater travel. As a consequence sports found that they couldn't achieve their performance goals for talented athletes without interacting with the athletes life outside sport and the athlete's educational provider in particular.

We were not trying to create the kind of ATDE's described in the HEA. Interface with education was driven by a need to 'cope with' or influence the educational demand on the athlete rather than embracing the young person in round. At times I am sure the talent systems we created superficially appeared like the ATDEs Henriksen describes but the essence of a truly symbiotic partnership between education and sport was missing. When sporting system did talk to educational system the conversation was almost always framed around how the needs of education might flex to accommodate the needs of sport. I don't ever recall discussions about links between talent pathways and education start by seeking a collaborative answer to the question 'what's best for this young person'.

My experience suggests the journey to the current state of play started with research and practice sitting in two separate places. Does this matter? Possibly not but the literature is now presenting an uncritical picture of the interaction between research and practice. We haven't unpicked the path trodden to arrive at the current position and certainly not asked any searching questions about 'why' sport has engaged in creating support systems. There seems to be a silence around discussing stakeholder motivations for building holistic support systems. It is as though there is an unspoken resistance to exploring starting points and subsequent evolutions. Does the resistance lie in academia where researchers don't want to recognise that they may have had limited influence on practice? Or does sport resist such critical introspection because it

doesn't want to recognise the potential moral and ethical shortcomings in early performance strategies? Or is it a combination of both leading to a tacit agreement between academia and sport not to look back but simply to look at the here and now because that carries less risk for either party? Yet by not seeking to understand where we have come from we aren't in a position where we can consider how the roots of holistic athlete support may still be influencing current practice for better or for worse. Is it important? Maybe, maybe not, but the question is worthy of consideration.

My other primary reflection when looking at the macro literature is about the language being used in this field and what this tells us of attitudes and philosophies. As discussed in Chapter 4 high performance policy is based on a philosophy of instrumental rationality. Through instrumental-rationality technical and logical thought processes come to the fore resulting in issues being framed in terminology relating drawn from business and economics. I think this influence can be seen in the holistic support literature in two ways.

It has been noted that all too often athletic careers are conceptualised and discussed using the rhetoric of economics (Tekavc, Wylleman, & Cecić Erpič, 2015). At a base level just the definition of the word 'career' is related to employment and the idea of professional development rather than personal growth.

*"A career is the job or profession that someone does for a long period of their life" and
"Your career is the part of your life that you spend working"
(Collins-Dictionary, 2019)*

*'The job or series of jobs that you do during your working life'
(Cambridge-Dictionary, 2019)*

The use of the term 'dual career' to describe the process of athlete support is an interesting one. Do we subconsciously see 'dual careers' as being related only to the interface between sport and activities that involve employment or formal education? Are we unquestioningly focused on research and practice that is oriented to career enhancement rather than life enhancement?

A focus on 'career' as being an economic issue can also be seen in the increasing use of working career theories and frameworks to underpin dual career research (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). Researchers have started to use employment related frameworks such as 'career construction theory' (Ryba et al., 2015) and 'career horizons' (Andersson & Barker-Ruchti, 2019) to model dual career practice in sport. Such research rarely, if ever, explicitly states that it is only concerned with professional development as opposed to issues of personal well-being, but the use of economic models and terminology suggests that this bias maybe present, albeit tacitly.

Recently some researchers have actually been explicit in seeing dual careers as an economic rather than a personal issue. Nam et al. (2019) reviewed the Korean dual career system in terms of its development of human capital and the capacity of athletes to contribute to the overall knowledge economy of the country. The thrust of the research was to ascertain how dual career support for athletes could benefit society as a whole rather than the individual athlete.

The original espoused intent in models such as the HEA and HACM was to see the athlete as a whole person. I wonder if current terminology is a response to, or catalyst for, a context in which we are using a reduced perspective of the athlete? In this reduced perspective the athlete is seen in only two dimensions, sport and work/study. Life outside sport is considered but with the wider aspects of the athletes life relating to psycho-social development or well-being pushed to the margins?

Summary

The overall positioning of holistic athlete support within modern performance pathways has become much stronger over the last decade. Athlete support programmes are now a consistent feature of the high-performance world and performance systems have recognised the contribution of research to extending their understanding of this field. However, there seems to be a reticence to ask more critical questions regarding what is being offered to athletes, why it is being offered and how we came to arrive at

current practice. These questions remain to be addressed to create a more complete understanding of the current context for holistic athlete support.

7.4 People: practitioners and athletes

As high-performance systems have extended the support available to athletes research has extended our understanding of the experience of individual athletes and practitioners. It should be noted that this is in part due to the willingness of agencies to fund research into the field of holistic support. For example, the EU has funded a large number of research projects across Europe whilst within the UK TASS has also initiated its own research programme.

Researchers have explored many aspects of individual experience, such as the influence of national culture, cross-cultural support challenges and the differences between sports (Chamorro, Torregrosa, Sánchez Oliva, García Calvo, & León, 2016; Hong & Coffee, 2018; Linner, Stambulova, Lindahl, & Wylleman, 2019; Lyons, 2019; Nam et al., 2019; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019; van Rens, Ashley, & Steele, 2019). Rather than attempt to review every aspect of this literature I want to focus on two issues that have resonated most with me when looking into holistic athlete support research, namely:

- perspectives on athlete motivations and the skills they require to manage the balance between sport and life. Without understanding their motivations or the skills they require are we adequately supporting young athletes?
- the impact dual career support has had on young athletes. Has the manner in which holistic support is being delivered made young athletes lives better?

These issues are important because they tell us much about the context within which the broader life of the athlete is being supported.

7.4.1 Athlete skills and motivations

So what do we understand of athletes and their capacity for engaging with holistic support? If we are going to offer optimal support to young athletes' then we need to understand the motivations and the skills they require for balancing life and sport. In Europe this has been recognised through EU funding for the 'Gold in Education and Elite Sport project' (GEES) which aimed to identify the skills athletes need to successfully navigate a dual career (GEES, 2016). In GEES a sample of over 3,000 student-athletes from nine countries were investigated to ascertain the skills most associated with effective management of a dual career. The project identified four key areas of competence as shown in Table 7.4 (De Brandt et al., 2018)

The first two factors, DC Management and Career Planning were linked to the athlete's capability to manage the integration of education/work and sport over their life course. The final two factors, Emotional Awareness and Social Intelligence & Adaptability, were related to the athlete's capacity to cope with the psychological and psychosocial demands of sustaining a DC. As yet there is no research that has looked at how these specific competencies can be best developed however other researchers have investigated the potential impact of generalised interpersonal skill development interventions on athletes' abilities to cope with DC.

Van Raalte, Andrews, Cornelius, Brewer, and Petitpas (2017) looked at the development of DC management skills through delivery of a targeted workshop programme. An intervention focusing on career self-exploration skills, transferable life skills and enhancing stress awareness was delivered to collegiate athletes in the USA. After completing the workshop programme the student-athletes had higher levels of self-efficacy in relation to their ability to manage their dual career. This finding was supported by Fogaca (2019) who found that a mental skills training programme significantly enhanced athlete coping and self-management skills. Overall there is strong evidence that personal competencies and general life skills can be effectively

developed in young athletes through targeted interventions whilst the GEES study has identified the skills that need particular attention.

Table 7.4 Competency areas in Athlete Dual Career Competency framework (De Brandt et al, 2018)

Skill/Competency	Definition & Explanation
DC Management	The capacity to commit to and effectively organise their combination of sport and education. Specific skills include well-developed self-discipline, time management, planning, and prioritising skills.
Career Planning	The exploration of career options outside of sport. The capacity to look at life beyond the athletic career was felt to support better retirement planning, assist in creating non-athletic identities and promote autonomy in decision making.
Emotional Awareness	The capacity to cope with the emotions related to DC efforts and the <i>way</i> in which athletes are able to manage their DC. For example, coping with adversity and multi-level stressors arising from their DC. Specific skills and attributes to be fostered are self-belief, resilience, patience, and stress management.
Social Intelligence and Adapatability	Effective interpersonal communication and socialisation skills and competencies that help in creating and maintaining a facilitative social environments.

Aside from having a deeper appreciation of athlete dual career skills research has also considered athlete motivations in relation to managing the life/sport interface. Recent

investigations of this issue have attempted to identify and categorise these motivations. Aunola et al. (2018) looked at a sample of talented young athletes in Finnish sport schools (schools specifically designed to facilitate dual careers) and found that there were three distinct motivation patterns in their sample. Within the sample 63% of student-athletes were motivated equally by academic and athletic success, 25% were motivated more by sporting success and, perhaps surprisingly, 12% were motivated more by academic success. Cartigny et al. (2019) replicated this finding with a sample of UK athletes and identified three distinct pathways through to becoming an elite athlete: a dual career pathway, a sport dominant pathway and an education/vocational pathway. Interestingly Cartigny et al found that some athletes were pursuing the education/vocation pathway not through lack of motivation for becoming an elite athlete but because there were practical barriers to this pursuit. These barriers included factors such as lack of finance, lack of appropriate training facilities or paucity of coaching. As a consequence of the barriers athletes focused more on the education/vocation pathway because they were limited in their opportunity to commit fully to sport.

What both the Aunola et al. and Cartigny et al. studies show is that it is wrong to assume that young athletes form a homogenous group in relation to their motivation to pursue either their sport or a dual career. They do not all equally aspire to being an elite performer or to balancing life and sport in the same way. The implications of this are that generic support programmes will get different responses from different groups of athletes. An effective intervention for the group who want to balance a dual career might need to be very different to a programme for athletes that wants a more exclusive focus on either sport or education. This deeper understanding of athlete motivation and skills is to be welcomed and is something research must build on moving forwards. However, it should also be recognised that this research hasn't, as yet, been cross-referenced with any of the work on identity and narratives.

The work on athlete narratives and identity that was discussed in section 4.2 doesn't feature in the research on athlete motivations towards dual careers. The influence of

performance, discovery or relational narratives on how a young person might respond to a dual career pathway wasn't considered. Neither does the possibility that a young athlete may seek to 'live the part', 'play the part' or 'resist the part' in relation to being committed to their dual career. This is a point I will return to in section 7.5 when I discuss overarching conceptual questions regarding holistic support for athletes.

7.4.2 Outcomes: dual career impact on the young athlete

In the preceding sections we have considered how systems are supporting young athletes and how we might do that more effectively. In this section I want to alter the focus and consider what is known about the impact holistic support systems have on young athletes lives. Whilst athlete support systems are increasingly at the heart of performance strategies this is based on an implicit and unquestioned assumption that policies and systems promoting holistic athlete support always operate in the best interests of the athlete. At an intuitive level this seems a reasonable assumption to make because surely support systems consciously designed to support the whole person will deliver positive athlete experience. Yet despite the intuitive logic of this assumption a number of studies over the last decade have raised questions. Research has produced clear evidence that the pursuit of a dual career within a talent pathway can have a negative impact on an athlete's well-being.

High performance sport agencies, certainly those in the UK, present a picture in which young athletes on talent pathways receive a positive sporting experience whilst being adequately supported to continue their education and life development (UKSport, 2017a, 2018). Yet the picture emerging from a broad range of research approaches suggests that actual experiences can be far from positive and, in some situations, directly damaging to athlete well-being.

Outcomes

In attempting to optimise their support for young athletes several countries have formalised their approach to talent development by creating elite sport schools (ESS) or specific educational pathways for talented athletes (e.g. Finland, Denmark,

Germany, Holland). This approach would seem to afford greatest opportunity for athletes to grow within the kind of holistically supportive ATDE described by Henriksen. A number of studies have subsequently compared educational and sporting outcomes for athletes in these specialist school environments with athletes in mainstream education. A study of German ESS found no difference in eventual performance level between athletes who had attended an ESS and those who hadn't attended one. Non-ESS trained athletes won as many medals in senior international competition as ESS trained ones (Emrich et al., 2009). Emrich also found that ESS trained athletes had lower educational performance in comparison to athletes attending mainstream education and suffered from reduced rates of successful transition into higher education. So in Germany at least athletes in ostensibly specialised dual career environments had no better sport performance outcomes than their peers and lower education outcomes.

This finding has been mirrored by more recent research in Holland. Van Rens et al. (2015) compared the outcomes of athletes who had passed through the Topsport Talent Schools (TTS) in the Netherlands with athletes who chose to stay in mainstream education. The study found that attendance at a TTS didn't influence the eventual level of performance attainment by talented athletes. What they did find was that 50% of their sample, irrespective of whether they were TTS or mainstream educated, had stopped playing their sport at a performance level at 21 years of age. In terms of satisfaction with their ATDE TTS and mainstream athletes were equally satisfied with the life balance but athletes in a TTS were less motivated academically. This translated into lower academic attainment at both secondary and further education levels by TTS athletes.

Even more recently Aunola et al. (2018) examined motivations for sport and study exhibited by Finnish student-athletes during their first two years in sport specialist upper secondary school. The data show that the majority of students (63%) started upper secondary with a balanced motivation for sport and study. Of those favouring one path over another 25% prioritised their sport and 12% prioritised their education. After two years at sport school the number of pupils opting for a balanced approach to

sport and study dropped by 16%. One might expect that the shift in focus was towards favouring sport over education but surprisingly the main shift was towards greater prioritisation of education.

Taken overall these studies suggest that even when ATDEs are specifically constructed to optimise dual career pathways they aren't achieving the outcomes one might expect. It is not clear whether such specialist training and study environments are producing athletic performance gains. However, what does seem more certain is that specialist environments are impacting negatively on academic attainment and progression. Is it possible that the intensity of specially constructed ATDEs is actually undermining the positive outcomes the environments were designed to produce? Is it possible that this is the dual career equivalent of the practice/specialisation debate in terms of athletic development (Section 4.1.2). Specialisation of environment at too early an age appears to have hindered development. It is possible that allowing athletes a broader experience until later in their development (the equivalent of athletic sampling) brings greater benefits?

Unfortunately, as well as opening up these questions over sporting and education outcomes, research has started to raise serious concerns about the impact of ATDEs on the well-being of young athletes even when those environments encompass the active promotion of holistic athletic career support.

Pressure

A consistent finding over the last decade has been that the pursuit of a dual career pathway in ATDEs has increased the demands made on young athletes and the sense of pressure that they experience. Stambulova (2017) estimated that over 80% of young athletes experience the transition from junior to senior athlete as an emotional crisis. Sadly, environments that have encouraged a dual career approach in young athletes have found that the impact of trying to pursue a dual career pathway can be hugely negative one.

Christensen and Sørensen (2009) looked at the Danish football system within which players were required by the Danish FA to continue in education whilst being in a club academy. This is similar to the current UK Premier League requirement that all players in academies must be studying throughout their time in the academy. Using a narrative approach to understand the experiences of 25 talented players Christensen and Sørensen found sustained conflict between the worlds of education and sport. All players reported experiencing time pressure each day in balancing the demands of study and sport with the pressure being seen as a real threat to being successful in either endeavour. School became a 'necessary evil' for many players. Evidence emerged that the sustained tension between study and sport lead to mental health issues for some individuals and manifested itself in them being diagnosed with stress whilst still adolescents.

Similar results were also reported by Stambulova, Engström, Franck, Linnér, and Lindahl (2015) whose examination of individual athlete responses to Swedish elite sport schools showed that athletes universally experienced the dual career approach as creating pressure on them. As pressure from the demand of pursuing both study and sport increased athletes narrowed their focus in life to exclude anything that wasn't sport and study. The motivation to sustain a balanced dual career path decreased and levels of life stress increased. The athletes felt that they had to make a binary choice between an identity as an athlete and an identity as a student.

Mirroring Stambulova's examination of the Swedish system Skrubbeltrang et al. (2016) looked at athlete responses to Danish 'sport-classes'. Sport classes were introduced to Danish education to support talented athletes with dual careers whilst optimising the coaching they received. Unfortunately, athletes reported that the expectations from both sport and school were that academic and sporting performance would always continue to improve in a linear fashion. If linear improvement wasn't seen then the relevant organisation expected greater commitment to their domain until performance increased again. The athletes also reported that, in addition to sustaining a linear rate of progress, their continued status as a talented athlete was dependent on their progress being comparable to their peers. If personal progress lagged behind their

peers in either domain there was an expectation of increased prioritisation of that domain to make up lost ground. The athletes compensated for these pressures by image managing in front of coaches and teachers, learning to play the role of the 'good student-athlete' irrespective of any inner struggle or discomfort. In a follow-up examination of sport classes Skrubbeltrang et al. (2018) confirmed the findings of their first study in terms of the athletes' negative responses to studying within the Danish sport system. Skrubbeltrang et al.'s conclusion across both studies was that the system was tacitly encouraging athletes to struggle and strive irrespective of the cost of this struggle to their well-being.

An examination of the Swedish women's soccer system reported that as athletes progressed through the talent pathway they felt increasing frustration and dissatisfaction with key aspects of their life (Andersson & Barker-Ruchti, 2019). The athletes attempts to balance study and sport were experienced as a constant contradiction in life with that contradiction growing with each step up the performance and education ladder. In response to this increasing pressure players reduced their focus on study and the scope of their social environments.

In two studies of Finnish elite sport schools researchers looked at academic and sporting burnout profiles in samples of 391 and 491 young athletes respectively (Sorkkila, Aunola, & Ryba, 2017; Sorkkila, Tolvanen, Aunola, & Ryba, 2019). The first study identified that 30% of young athletes (aged 15) were showing signs of burnout at point of entry into their secondary level sport school (Sorkkila et al., 2017). The second study showed that after two years in specialist sport schools, 60% of the sample were showing burnout symptoms and a further 30% were showing signs of high burnout. It was noted specifically that the burnout symptoms displayed by the high burnout group were starting to mirror those one might expect to see in a population suffering from clinical depression (Sorkkila et al., 2019).

Away from Scandinavia both M. A. Pink et al. (2018) and Van Rens, Borkoles, Farrow, and Polman (2018) looked at the impact of dual career pathways in Australian Rules football. Van Rens et al. used the framework of role strain to look at players responses

to the multiple roles they had to play (e.g. athlete, student, family member) and considered these roles in relation to four components: overload, conflict, ambiguity and underload. The study found that the effort required in pursuing a dual career was overloading the young athletes and that overload was correlated with a significantly decreased satisfaction with a number of variables. Satisfaction decreased with friendships, family, school and most importantly with self leading the authors to suggest that the overload being experienced had consequences for the player mental well-being. This was echoed by Pink et al. who also found that athletes actively pursuing dual careers experienced increased severe demands on their time with subsequent increases in stress and dissatisfaction with life. In both studies it was concluded that whilst the sport system was attempting to adopt a positive approach to athletic careers by supporting dual career pathways the athletes themselves found that this was adding to, rather than alleviating, the stress they experienced.

Finally, in the UK Coupland (2015) looked at the experiences young athletes in professional rugby league. Coupland's inquiries around this talent environment created a picture of athletes engaged in a constant struggle to reach the performance standards required to gain a professional contract. The environment portrayed education as a fallback option which would only be relevant if the athlete failed in what was assumed to be their primary goal of becoming a professional player. Athletes spoke of the impact on their mental and physical well-being of living with this constant tension and the physical demands of the sport. Some athletes described being in a state where they never started a day feeling 'fully, fully fine'.

Taken as a whole, the body of work described in this sub-section paints a picture of consciously constructed ATDEs, with built-in holistic athlete support, that are failing to remove pressure on the young athlete and may even be exacerbating it. In some cases there was clear evidence that not being in a talent development environment with structured dual career support gave better outcomes in academia whilst not compromising sporting outcomes. What seems clear is that there are potentially serious negative consequences for young athletes in engaging with structured dual career

systems. So what are the potential causes of the negative responses to programmes designed to produce positive outcomes?

Dissonance

The cause of many of the challenges highlighted above would appear to be dissonance at both a macro and micro level. Even in talent pathways where national agencies have mandated that sport and education are linked athletes continued to experience a clash of cultures between these worlds. The dissonance in athlete experience seems to stem from two sources. At a macro level there can be direct conflict between the expectations sport and education systems have of an athlete. At a micro level there can be conflict between the espoused beliefs and actual behaviours of individual organisations or coaches and teachers.

Several studies have commented on the pressure experienced by athletes when the sport and education organisations within their ATDE pursued different outcomes for the athletes. For example, Christensen et al.'s study of Danish soccer determined that schools and clubs simply placed contradictory demands on the players. The situation was described as a competition between systems, a macro-level clash of cultures experienced at a micro level as incompatible demands on player. The same issue was also found in the Swedish sport schools by Stambulova et al. (2015). Athletes reported a fundamental mismatch between school and sport expectations of them with both domains expecting the athlete to prioritise their domain when a choice had to be made about allocation of time or energy. Similar experiences were also reported by players in UK Rugby League and Australian Rules who were aspiring to turn professional (Coupland, 2015; M. A. Pink et al., 2018). The underpinning perspective in the professional clubs in these sports was that education, whilst important, was of secondary value to developing performance.

In all these cases the conflict between education and sport existed in spite of policy statements that espoused the value in dual career pathways for young athletes. Both Coupland and Christensen et al wrote about an identified clash between the espoused values of the sporting organisations in their studies and the 'taken for granted,

underlying and unconscious assumptions’ at the heart of each talent environment. Coupland identified that whilst professional clubs espoused a belief in dual career support for their athletes the ATDE surrounding the player openly and tacitly championed an exclusive dedication to sport. This fostered a belief in the athletes that education or work was ‘getting in the way’ of their progress as an athlete.

In addition to the macro level dissonance research is starting to show that its actually dissonance at the level of the individual educator or coach that magnifies stress for the athlete. Ronkainen, Ryba, Littlewood, and Selänne (2018) looked at coaches perspectives of dual careers in ice hockey with specific reference to whether the coaches promoted life narratives that allowed young athletes to elect to pursue a dual career rather than just an athletic career. What they found was that coaches fell in to two broad groups and pursued either a performance oriented or participation oriented coaching process. The performance-oriented coaches espoused support for dual careers but only presented education as a ‘Plan B’ for the athlete if they failed to make the professional grade. Education was tacitly treated as a mechanism for coping with failure in sport performance and there no authentic alignment of coaching process with an educational discourse. In contrast participation-oriented coaches took a robustly ‘holistic’ perspective of the athlete and limited athletes’ opportunities to explore whether they wanted to adopt a performance focused approach in their athletic careers. In both cases the coaches evidenced little faith in the athletes’ capacities to make their own choices regarding the balance between sport and education and consequently left athletes feeling disenfranchised.

A subsequent study by Saarinen, Ryba, Ronkainen, Rintala, and Aunola (2019) specifically looked at the issue of athlete empowerment in a variety of sports. Their data showed that a majority of athletes, despite being in systems that espoused dual careers, had experiences of disempowering ATDEs due to their coaches’ exclusive emphasis on athletic performance. Saarinen et al. concluded that the coaching approaches being adopted de-motivated athletes to pursue their education as well as limiting the athletes’ explorations of future lives outside the sporting context. This

suggests dual career support processes can sit quite some distance from an existential perspective on learning which prioritises learner agency.

Whilst the examples discussed thus far are drawn from sport it is not just sport that is guilty of inconsistency between espoused beliefs and actual practice with regard to dual careers. Education institutions have also been shown to exhibit schisms between espoused and actual organisational behaviour. At the secondary education level teachers have been shown to act in relation to a belief system in which education should be exclusively prioritised to the detriment of the athlete's other passions and interests (Stambulova et al., 2015; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2015). With regard to tertiary education C. Ryan, Thorpe, and Pope (2017) studied the experiences of University student-athletes in New Zealand and found that, whilst there was clear institutional policy regarding flexible educational support for talented athletes, individual academic departments operationalised policy in different ways. Consequently athletes received variable levels of support for their dual career efforts.

So within systems where interaction between sport and education is mandated those two domains aren't necessarily working in synergy with the outcome of increased stress for the athlete. Within organisations dissonance between the organisational policies and the actions/beliefs of individual staff is potentially magnifying that stress. So just because athletes have access to dual career support it doesn't mean their experience of being a talented athlete is going to be enhanced. It should also be noted that in this section the focus has been exclusively on interaction between education and sport. The development of the whole athlete outside of these two domains has hardly figured in the research.

7.4.3 Personal reflections

When I consider the research covered in this section in relation to my practical experience I am struck by two thoughts. Firstly, I am struck by how much practice has changed since I first started working as a practitioner in both education and performance sport. Where practitioners were once almost completely unsighted on the holistic needs of the individual athlete there is now a desire to understand and improve

holistic athlete support. Research is attempting to address the gaps between our athlete support practices and our understanding of such processes. More than ever before practitioners have an understanding of athletes' needs in terms of balancing dual careers and there is solid evidence that specific interventions can enhance athletes' self-management and coping skills. Research has also shown that there are different dual career motivational profiles in young athletes so practitioners can work out how best to respond to these differences.

However, research has also shown that not all holistic support is universally positive for the athlete. To move forward optimally I believe we now need to become more critical of where we are and how support systems function. Without honest interrogation of some of the challenges in holistic support we risk failing the athletes we aim to support. In reflecting on my practice in relation to the literature two areas of disconnect have caused me disquiet.

Firstly, the work on athlete skills and motivations in holistic support seems to be developing in its own bubble and has not taken account of any of the work on identity and narratives that was discussed in section 4.2. Whilst it intuitively seems reasonable to think that an athlete's identity will have a significant influence on their approach to dual careers it hasn't been considered. Identity and narrative concepts have been ignored as have Carless and Douglas (2013b) ideas about 'living the part', 'playing the part' or 'resisting the part' in relation to a young athlete's role in coping with a dual career. Why should we assume that 'living', 'playing' and 'resisting' parts only relates to sport? Equally, the current grouping of athlete DC motivations in to just three categories seems simplistic when compared to the research that has shown young athletes to be polyphonic with layered identities (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2019; Ryba, Ronkainen, & Aunola, 2020). Research seems to be focusing on a reductionist approach to isolating skills and competencies that can help an athlete cope with specific pressures. It isn't addressing any deeper interplay between the athlete as a person and their responses to support programmes.

My second concern is the disconnect between practice and recognition of the literature which has demonstrated the negative consequences to engaging with a dual career. There is clear data showing that pursuit of a dual career can be damaging to the athlete and yet that hasn't formed part of any discussion I have listened to in recent years about dual career practice. As a practitioner I can't recall any conversations where, in either an educational or sport setting, I sat and discussed whether pursuit of a dual career might cause athletes distress or harm in any way. The implicit assumption underpinning my practice, and the colleagues around me, was invariably that pursuing a dual career was always the right option for young athletes. I cannot recall ever being confronted with the idea, or any data, that suggested that a dual career may be a negative experience for a young person. There was never a sense that by championing dual careers practitioners could be adding to the pressures of being a talented athlete rather than alleviating them.

I realise I worked in a professional world where the positive impact of a dual career was an implicit and unchallenged assumption. Clearly the provision of dual career support is not a universal positive and this recognition ought to have featured in discussions of policy and practice. However, in terms of my practice, there were rarely, if ever, any meaningful discussions of when it might have been wrong to promote the pursuit of a dual career or how dual career support might increase pressure on an athlete.

So much good progress has been made in relation to understanding athletes and their responses to dual career systems. Yet, there are also critical disconnects that I believe have to be addressed if we want to create optimal talent development systems.

7.5 Underpinning conceptual questions

During the span of my career our understanding of holistic support and dual careers has moved forwards in many different ways. Conceptual models have emerged that can provide frameworks to guide the critique and synthesise of a growing body of research. In my own practice I reached the point of writing this thesis so much more

aware of the holistic needs of young athletes than I was at the start of my career. However, preparation for writing this chapter forced me to look more closely at the research underpinning support systems and the equivocal impact of those systems on young athletes. This in-depth consideration of the literature has helped me recognise that there are a number of critical conceptual issues that research and practice have yet to confront.

What we currently do with the majority of holistic support research is present a sanitised, air brushed face to the world. Models like Henriksen's HEA, with its picture of a balanced system, or Wylleman's HACM, with neat strands of development, simply do not capture the essence of messy education-sport interface that has been part of my experience. Whilst adding value to our conceptual understanding of holistic support such models present idealised versions of systems that don't capture many of the conflicts experienced by young athletes. Some of these messy, real world issues will be explored more fully in the next chapter but just based on analysis of the literature I see three conceptual questions that need to be addressed. The first two questions relate to macro issues whilst the final one, a philosophy of individual learning, is very much a micro issue.

7.5.1 Education and sport: very different systems

In all the holistic support and dual career research I have seen to date no one has addressed the issue of the fundamental differences between education and sporting systems in terms of objectives and scale. There has been an implicit assumption that any differences aren't relevant to the challenges of managing the interface for young athletes.

In section 4.1.3 I discussed the impact of government policy based on instrumental rationality on the attitudes and behaviours in talent pathways. Given that in any given country both education and sport policies are influenced by the same government it seems reasonable to ask whether education policy is also linked to instrumental rationality. Certainly in the case of HE in the UK you can make a strong argument that this is very much the case. The 1992 Further & Higher Education Act affirmed the

intention of successive governments that the HE sector should conform to the same principles of New Public Management as other activities that were supported centrally (Palfreyman & Tapper, 2014). HE became a centrally regulated market and a vehicle via which government could attempt to achieve policy goals (Tight, 2009). HE is now seen as something that is very much tied to the economic health and wealth of the nation rather than the intrinsic betterment of its citizens. In the UK government attitude to HE is perhaps revealed by responsibility for HE residing inside the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. Palfreyman and Tapper concluded that

The contest, then, is between HE as a public sphere activity and one where HE is commodified, commercialised and corporatized; with managerialism replacing collegiality as its governance style' (Palfreyman and Tapper, 2015, p93)

They went on to present the HEI as having been reduced to an engine of economic growth and commodified through its management. HEI management now has to focus on KPIs relating to institutional performance in competition within a regulated marketplace (Palfreyman & Tapper, 2014).

The parallels with the impact of NPM on sport policy are clear. HEIs now have to conduct activity within a framework of audit and review in the same way that high-performance sport has to do. HE has to be oriented to achieving the 'ends' determined by government policy in the same way that high performance sport has to do. A similar impact has also been seen in secondary education with a move towards performance measurement, public KPIs and league tables (Gewirtz, Maguire, Neumann, & Towers, 2019). Whether it is right to apply NPM thinking to education is a debate beyond the scope of this thesis. However, surely the existence of an 'ends' driven educational system ought to be factored into our thinking about how we support talented young athletes for whom the sport-education interface is critical?

Formal education systems have become less about the development of the person as a whole and more about the pursuit of formal qualifications in the belief that this enhances career prospects. If sport assumes that just by facilitating an athlete's link to

formal education they are supporting an individual's holistic development they are most probably wrong. A support system that encompasses just sport and education is building being created within two domains that are both instrumentally focused. Such a 'dual career' support system could end up tacitly ignoring any personal development that doesn't contribute to either sport or educational performance 'ends'.

Acknowledgement of an instrumental focus in both sport and education systems should also raise questions about the potential for ever creating real synergy between two systems that have competing aims for the young person. If education is working to a philosophy of instrumental rationality then it is working towards an end point that is not the desired 'end' within performance sport. At a macro level sport and education aren't engaged in a joint endeavour where they mutually seek the optimal development of the young person. At best one might find that the two systems can compromise sufficiently to sit beside one another but inevitably there have to exist some fundamental tensions between sport and education.

This then calls in to question whether it is actually possible to create anything like Henriksen's holistic training 'ecologies' with complete synergy between all partners? Surely for the kind of environment described in Henriksens's HEA to be possible either, or both, education and sport have to alter their core philosophical position?

It also seems reasonable to suggest that the fundamental conflict between education and sport may be at the heart of the dissonance in athlete experience discussed in section 7.4.2. If practitioners working in education and sport are judged by their contributions to system and organisational objectives then they are being judged by their contributions to potentially conflicting outcomes. Is it any wonder then that athletes experience conflict between the demands of education and sport and the behaviours of practitioners in both domains?

I accept that I am presenting a simplified view of a complex interaction, but the questions are important ones that have been ignored in the holistic or dual career support literatures. I wonder whether such questions are being tacitly avoided because

to ask them would significantly complicate the simplistic models of holistic support that dominate this literature?

Allied to the issue of policy drivers and philosophy there is also the issue of scale and its impact on the inter-relationship between education and sport. In current conceptualisations of holistic support education and sport are normally presented as equal partners in the endeavour of developing the young athlete. However in reality one domain dwarfs the other as an industry. This imbalance can be demonstrated simply by comparing the financial turnover of one of the Universities where I practiced with the finances of the UK high performance sport system. In the 2018-19 financial year Liverpool John Moores University and UK Sports total expenditures were £221m and £144m, respectively. A single UK HEI has an expenditure that is 53% higher than the entire Olympic sport funding budget (Liverpool John Moores University, 2019; UK Sport, 2019). At other levels of operation differences are equally stark. In the most affluent of the NGBs where I have been a board member annual expenditure peaked at £15m compared to the national average budget for a single secondary school being circa £5.8m (Britton, Farquharson, & Sibieta, 2019; DfE, 2019). Three secondary schools in one location are likely to have annual expenditures in excess of most sport NGBs. These figures paint a very clear picture of a massive national system sitting alongside a very small, yet vocal, partner. At the level of the individual learner issues of scale are also telling. For example, 30 young athletes at the top of a talent pathway form a significant group of people for an NGB but for an education system they are simply a very small drop in a very large ocean.

Within these issues of policy driver and scale there may be a fundamental truth that our thinking about holistic support doesn't want to have to address. Education as a whole doesn't need anything from sport but performance sport does need support from education. Education and sport might be of equal importance to any given athlete but as systems this is not a relationship between equal partners. Currently I don't see this being accounted for in research or practice.

7.5.2 Instrumental Rationality; a subconscious bias

The instrumental rationality underpinning the policy approaches in both education and sport may also be having a profound impact on the way that dual career systems are being conceived and operationalised within sport.

Given that performance systems, especially the UK system, are based on instrumental rationality shouldn't we be asking if the holistic support elements of these systems operate within the framework of instrumental rationality or apart from it. If they operate within instrumental-rationality and the 'end', the medal, is the important outcome then how can we square this with the concept of the athlete as a person being at the centre of our holistic support systems?

If talent pathways that house our support mechanisms are primarily being managed to deliver more medallists then what are the support systems trying to achieve? I would suggest a strong argument can be made that the approach to holistic support within high performance sport is as much a function of instrumental rationality as the approach to athletic development.

As evidence of this I would point to my own earliest experiences of holistic support which stemmed from a performance need to minimise the 'negative' impact of athletes' broader lives on their ability to train. My early practitioner experience of holistic support mechanisms was that they were there to serve the needs of the sport and the performance development process. This was not done as callous rejection of the athlete as a person but was simply an extension of the emerging 'no compromise' mindset which all too often saw the athlete's life outside sport as being a form of compromise. Whilst you could argue that this has changed over time there is sadly still much evidence that instrumental rationality is governing the delivery of holistic athlete support.

The SPLISS 2 study showed that across many performance systems holistic athlete support is still the least developed of all the support services. It is also the one where there is greatest discrepancy between performance agency rhetoric and athlete

experience. This would indicate that holistic support still isn't being given the same degree of attention as other support areas more directly linked to winning medals. In addition the language and metrics being used in the assessment of holistic support effectiveness are questionable. All too often dual careers are conceptualised and discussed using the rhetoric of economics and performance (Stambulova et al., 2009; Tekavc et al., 2015). In most transition related research metrics for quantifying the 'effectiveness' of transitions aren't clearly defined but the language used in the research tells a story. Researchers talk about athletes 'failing' to make the next level, drop out from sport has been framed as a 'risk' in a system and a sign that the athlete is 'not coping'. Athletes 'stall' in their development and don't make a step to the next level of performance. It would appear that both research and practice are unquestioningly assuming that progression to the next level of a sporting pathway is the natural measure of success in dual career support (Bundon, Ashfield, Smith, & Goosey-Tolfrey, 2018; Pretorius, 2019; Stambulova, 2017; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). It is assumed that not progressing to the next level in sport is a negative outcome for an athlete and a system. Consequently the purpose of dual career support has to be to limit the likelihood of that outcome.

But so often I have seen athletes who experience joy at being released from the constraints of a talent pathway. Athletes who have been weighed down with the burden of trying to be an elite athlete and sustain a positive work or educational experience are suddenly free. Not progressing in a pathway is a moment of liberation not failure. I completely accept that if exiting a pathway isn't foreseen then there the athlete experiences emotional pain at the rejection. For some this is a serious emotional trauma but for others the opposite is true. I have seen athletes weeks or months after a transitional 'failure' seeming happier and more relaxed than I have ever seen them. Yet both research and practice seems to almost systematically ignore the possibility that a young person might enjoy a better quality of life by exiting from their performance pathway. The outcome of greatest importance is the one that benefits the system not necessarily the person.

In a recent TASS symposium I attended (Nov 2019) delegates discussed their perspectives on future dual career research priorities. At the top of the list was to find, or create, research that demonstrates that dual career support enhances sport performance. This statement of priorities spoke of a sub-conscious need to justify dual career support not in terms of how it might benefit the athlete as a holistic individual but how it can contribute to performance system outcomes. I was also struck by the discussion around this priority which was described as ‘the holy grail’ of dual career research. The discussion didn’t make a call to find out if pursuing a dual career enhanced performance, the call was to actively try and prove that it did. This would suggest that holistic support is ultimately seen as being ‘validated’ by its capacity to contribute to the instrumental ‘end’ of winning medals not by any metrics relating to the growth of the person.

7.5.3 ‘Dual’ v ‘Holistic’

The final critical question concerns the young athlete as a person. In examining the literature surrounding holistic athlete support I have come to question whether we are truly responding to an espoused ambition to support the whole athlete? At a superficial level the answer to this question is ‘yes’ and much research and practice is genuinely directed at supporting the athlete as a person. However, thus far models such as the HACM and the European ‘dual career’ movement have only looked at personal development in relation to two aspects of an athlete’s life, sport and formal education/work. For example, in the HACM there is no strand of the model that accounts for any wider personal growth. The model doesn’t consider that a young person may be good at both music and sport or be artistic as well physically able. In the HACM a young athlete’s life has been modelled ‘holistically’ but only includes two strands of personal development? This limitation is therefore present in every study that has used HACM as its conceptual framework so there is a whole genre of research claiming to look at the athlete holistically but actually limiting the young person’s life to two dimensions.

This limitation has become even more pronounced as the terminology of the ‘dual career’ literature has gained prominence. This can be seen clearly in the recent work on athlete motivations and skills for dual careers (Section 7.4.1). Researchers have tried to understand the motivations young athletes have for dual careers but in doing so have limited the scope of their work to just considering the relative importance of sport or education. Broader concepts around identity and personal narratives, such as the ‘performance narrative’ (Douglas & Carless, 2006) or ‘the idealised self’ (Coupland, 2015), have simply been ignored. Equally, that same research ignored issues relating to Carless and Douglas (2013b) ideas about young athletes ‘living’, ‘playing’ or ‘resisting’ the part of a performance athlete. Why should we assume that ‘living’, ‘playing’ and ‘resisting’, only relate to sport might they not also relate to being a student? Our current grouping of athlete motivations in to just three ‘dual career’ categories seems so simplistic when compared to wider research that has shown young athletes to be polyphonic beings with layered identities (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2019; Ryba et al., 2020).

With a constrained focus on ‘dual careers’ research does not appear to be considering that exposure to other domains (e.g. music, art, drama, volunteering), either formally or informally, may be of more value to a young person than pursuit of formal educational qualifications. How are we accounting for the athlete for whom music is a critical part of their identity but isn’t a field in which they will build a professional career? Does their love of music sit inside or outside the concept of a dual career? Is it something to be encouraged or ignored? And what of a young person’s social world? In terms of developing personal identity social relationships can be just as important to a young athlete as anything that they do in the sporting or educational arenas (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2018).

The current dual career approach certainly doesn’t sit easily with the existential learning concepts described in section 3.2. The dual career concept reduces athlete agency by making an assumption that the only areas of importance for them are sport and education/work. It also seems to give complete primacy to learning within domains that are dominated by codified, formal knowledge rather than valuing tacit

and informal learning from experience. Within the ‘dual career’ field ambiguity and discontinuity are aspects of life that athletes need to be taught how to control rather than embrace as opportunities for learning. Success is measured in terms of pathway progression or gaining academic qualifications not in the self-transcendence of elite *Bildung*.

I wonder now if both research and practice are falling short in a fundamental way. Performance systems have laudably sought to deepen our appreciation of best practice in dual career support and provide solid frameworks to guide practical interventions. However, I am not sure we have yet moved beyond the purpose of a holistic support system being to serve the outcome required by the sport i.e. to find and create medallists. The philosophical roots of our support systems have yet to be recognised or critically examined so instrumental rationality is free to exert an unquestioned and silent influence. Despite the positive rhetoric I am not sure we have actually been looking at supporting the whole athlete. Do practitioners believe that they are supporting the whole person when in fact they are simply providing a ‘qualification safety net’ to cushion an athlete’s eventual departure from elite sport? Are academics and researchers only looking at a version of holistic support that gives primacy to formal education, a domain in which the academics have a vested interest? We have yet to get to the philosophical roots of what we are doing in practice or looking at in research.

7.6 Conclusion

In comparing my experience to the holistic support literature there are a number of issues that stand out as being gaps in practice and research (Figure 7.5). In recent years, much progress has been made in enhancing the holistic support of athletes however, despite this positive intent, we have studiously ignored research that has consistently shown that dual career experiences are not always positive for athletes. Talent environments with well-developed dual career systems have shown conflicting expectations between sport and education, differences between espoused beliefs and

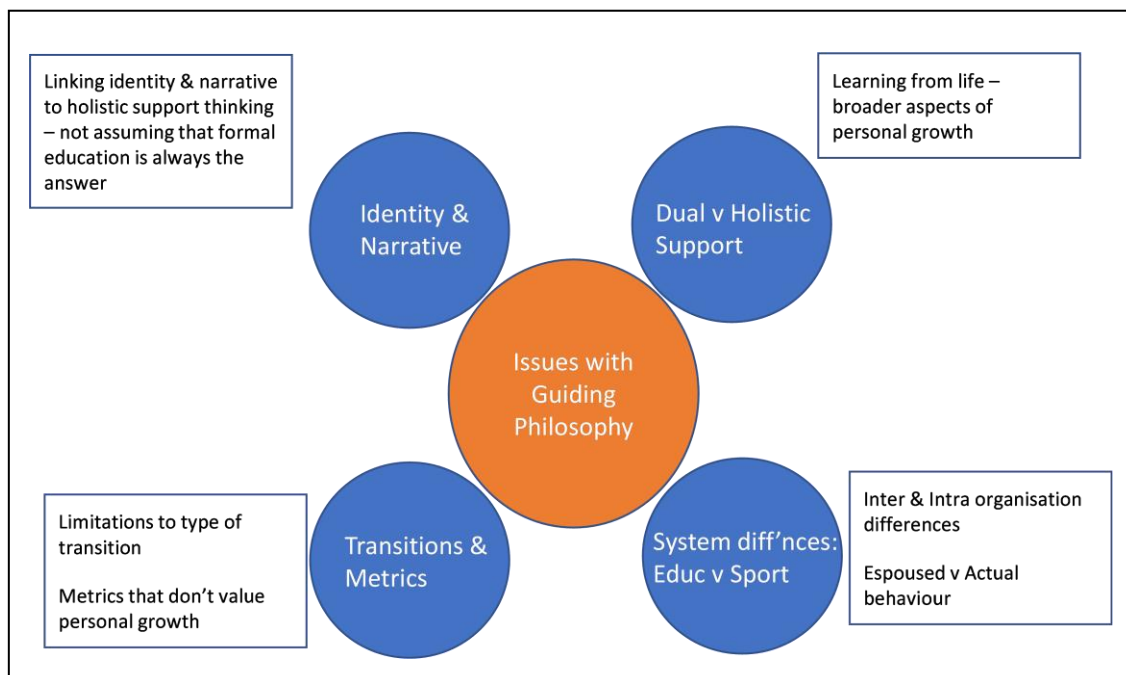


Figure 7.5 Diagrammatic representation of issues with holistic support research & practice

actual practice regarding dual careers and increased workload pressures on young athletes. This has led to young athletes with decreased educational attainment and ambition, decreased passion for their sport and high burnout rates. In some cases even where talent environments promote dual careers the pressures of the experience has been such that individuals have developed clinical mental health issues. The picture is some way from being universally positive and yet this is studiously ignored in the main dual career debates.

We are also in danger of seeing the young athlete in only two dimensions, sport and education/work. We seem blind to the possibility of a young person's life having more in it than those two components. Dual career discussions are framed in the language of economics and athlete 'progress' is judged using limited measures that assess nothing about how a young person is holistically changed by their talent pathway experience. Our holistic athlete support mechanisms operate within performance systems based on instrumental rationality where the end is more important than the individual. So how can those support systems truly be athlete-centred?

At a macro level we need to consider the differences between sport and education in terms of policy, strategy and drivers. For a holistic training system to function optimally the stakeholders in that system must live symbiotically but how can you have synergistic relationships between two stakeholders whose drivers are fundamentally at odds? If sport and education aren't really playing the same game, then at some point what each stakeholder needs from the athlete will differ and conflict will ensue. Is this the root cause of dissonance in athlete experiences?

I am concerned that amongst the positive energy around dual careers, the growth of a profession and the honest desire to support young athletes more effectively we are not allowing ourselves to take a long, hard, critical look in the mirror. The dual career support field maybe in danger of starting to wear the Emperor's new clothes. We are not seeing problems within the holistic support and dual career domains as they really are yet, if we are to optimise talent systems, we surely have to view them as they are not as we would like them to be? What is the value in an idealistic model of a holistic talent pathway if it doesn't account for key parts of the reality of athlete experience? I feel that within the literature there are critical conceptual questions that require discussion if we are to provide better, more universally positive, support systems. If we don't tackle fundamental issues of philosophy, system compatibility and 'dual' versus 'holistic' support our understanding of athlete experience will always be incomplete.

So how do these questions link more closely to my own practice and are there aspects of my experience that don't seem to appear in the holistic support literature? These are the issues I want to address in the next chapter in a further analysis of my personal experience.

8. Moments of Realisation

In this chapter I present reflections on my experiences of providing holistic support to elite student-athletes. The majority of my thoughts in this chapter have their roots in the time I spent in my role at Loughborough University leading a team of coaches and dual career support practitioners within an educational organisation. During my time at Loughborough I also worked as an applied sport scientist and a NGB Board Director so I experienced first-hand the tensions between different stakeholder's perspectives of holistic support. I also observed others dealing with those tensions and developed a deep understanding of the issues and challenges surrounding holistic support for young athletes.

In bringing these experiences to life I would like to present two vignettes to describe the essence of my experience. In the vignettes I have tried to present sequences of events that portray key elements of my experience of working with talented athletes in their journey through academia. Out of all the myriad experiences I could have selected I have chosen these because together they best encapsulate the tensions, challenges and conflicts that I found to be inherent in my practice. They also provide opportunity to discuss a number of critical features of practice that can be directly linked to the literature.

The first vignette (Who am I ...?) concerns a new student-athlete who spent the early part of their time at University life grappling with their sense of identity. This very much relates to the work in Chapter 4 on narrative and identity foreclosure. The second vignette (Progression or not) presents the experience of making decisions regarding the academic progression of a student-athlete. The core of the vignette comes from one specific case but in writing it I drew on my knowledge of a range of similar cases to add more depth to the narrative. The vignette concerns the debate around a talented athlete who was on the brink of failing their first year at University and reflects my experience of how systems and people responded to student-athlete academic performance.

In addition to these two vignettes I have decided to directly present ideas that emerged through reflections on the collaborative interview with my close colleague, *P*. This particular colleague was involved with me in many of the events described in the vignettes, so interview reflections and vignettes are inextricably linked. I thought it appropriate to give a separate overview of the themes that emerged from the conversations with *P* for three reasons. Firstly, my collaborative conversations with *P* created additional insight for me into the experiences that I describe in the two vignettes. Secondly, the conversations drew my attention to specific issues I was seeing in the holistic support literature. Finally, the dialogue with *P* helped refine my own thinking so the interviewing process produced a gestalt set of concepts that represent a shared perspective on holistic support.

Given the inter-related nature of the vignettes and the interview themes I have chosen to present each of them with limited analysis prior to reflecting on them as a whole. To analyse them separately wouldn't do justice to the inter-connected nature of issues that they highlight.

8.1 Vignettes and Interview Themes

8.1.1 'So who am I ?' – discovering self: Vignette 1 (V1)

The first vignette describes a series of conversations and my subsequent thinking about one first year undergraduate student-athlete and their first months at University. At the heart of this narrative is the student-athlete's experience of coming to terms with their identity once they had the freedom of being at University and away from the influences of home and family.

Table 8.1 So who am I ? ... Discovering self. Vignette 1

Who am I ?

Monday morning (Week 2 of term)

The phone goes and I reach for it automatically. I am not sure what kind of call I was expecting but it certainly wasn't an irate parent of one of the current crop of freshers. What I got to start my week was a 30-minute download of confusion and anger. I could see myself in one of those comic poses holding the phone a foot from my ear but stilling hearing what was said.

“Why is BA (the caller’s son), not in the Performance squad? What did we think we were doing? My son is devastated. Our selection processes are completely flawed. Are you even aware of what is going on?”

The words ‘*don’t you know who he is?*’ hung just outside what was spoken but their invisible presence hung over the conversation. I also knew that ‘*you’re clearly not doing your job properly*’ was on the tip of his tongue but never quite spilled down the phone line. A conversation that was heavy with veiled threats such as ‘*I might take this higher in the University*’ and ‘*what if we inform the BA’s professional club and his NGB of your cock-up?*’ Lovely start to the week!

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So one fresher not selected and one parent incensed ... a not uncommon situation around late October when the realities of stepping into a bigger performance environment hit home. Yet this one feels different to arrive at Uni having been in a professional club academy and not be selected into our club ????? That’s not just a small ‘miss’, it doesn’t really leave room for the placation mantra of “*your son/daughter can change this if they train hard This is a tough environment*

Give them time to adjust No one gets cast aside We keep looking at those on the fringes of the squad ...”

At first glance this is a gargantuan mismatch between what we have on paper about this student and what has actually happened to not get into the performance squad I can just about see .. but to not get selected for any one of **five** teams that is mind blowing if Dad is right and his son has the playing pedigree he says he has. I am thinking Hoping it's an admin error and messages simply haven't reached the player. So I stand and stretch, the mornings planned paperwork sits forgotten and forlorn on my desk as I wander off in search of my Director of Rugby.

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Monday late afternoon. I am strolling back down through campus in the autumn sunshine reflecting on the conversation with the rugby coaching team who ran selection last week. The Dir of Rugby (DoR) had set up my meeting so I didn't just get his perspective and he was spot on with what he thought the other coaches would say about this player. None of them had the player down as being club material let alone performance squad material. It's possible you can get one or two coaches not 'seeing' ability when others do. That level of disagreement is more commonplace than we'd ever like anyone to know. But all five selectors were unanimous, and they had all looked at this player because the gulf between expectation and performance was so large. What we know that we have on paper as a playing CV is correct because we have quietly crossed checked. The judgement on *BA's* performance in trials also stands up to scrutiny ... so what went so badly wrong for him???

At least we have a potential solution to the problem. The player will be invited to train with the performance squad this week and can play for a Freshers XV on Saturday. A second chance to be seen by multiple coaches in a range of settings ... that should set Dad's mind at ease so at least that's a positive phone call to make when I get back to the office.

Monday morning (Week 3)

Is this Ground Hog day? Another ballistic phone call from Dad, slightly less nuclear, but still trying to turn up the heat. After his weeks extended trial *BA* has been told he can train and play in the Freshers group but not the performance squad. On paper this is still completely wrong .. his playing CV says 1st XV but his performances are saying 'also-ran'. And to cap it all I get a call from a concerned and confused personal tutor. *BA* seems unhappy, lacking in motivation, fretting about his rugby but then not wanting any support with resolving any of his concerns? Its beyond bizarre a settling in issue.... away from home blues ...? So many students struggle to cope in the first few weeks of term and with the added pressure of trying to cement a place in a new sports club it could just be a tough time for *BA* all round ... and yet this feels like it is beyond the normal. It could be anything ... but there's definitely something.

Weeks 4-8

An experienced lifestyle advisor starts to work with the player and provide support around adjusting to Uni life. Dad rings a couple of times, but he can't say too much because it's clear we have run a really robust selection process. As the weeks pass there is no sudden change in the players performances. The undoubted 'butterfly' doesn't suddenly break out of the chrysalis ... but a good relationship has been built between lifestyle advisor and player.

Week 9

The phone goes and I answer. Its *P* the lifestyle advisor, she's at the Student Union and sounds slightly distracted but thinks she has resolved the '*BA* rugby riddle'. Can I spare the time for a coffee? There's a mountain of work on my desk but *BA* is a conundrum and I need to hear the 'answer'. I wander up to the Union, mentally conjuring up all sorts of possible 'answers' to the riddle a hidden injury ... his

girlfriend is pregnant ... too many possibilities. When I hear the answer I realise I could have saved myself some mental effort and just enjoyed the walk up because I would never have guessed the answer in a month of Sundays.

P- "He doesn't like rugby" A - "Pardon ..?"P - "He doesn't like rugby in fact he hates it"

P and I are sitting in an alcove in the coffee bar of the Union, away from the mid-morning crowd. As soon as we had got coffee and sat down I wanted to hear the 'answer' P had uncovered. When she told me I just sat there in stunned silence my mind just stalled. How could you be as talented as BA but hate the game? I brought my thoughts back to the present and realised that P was laughing quietly at my reaction. She carried on her explanation.

P - "It's all about Dad. A massively dominant character, really assertive. Former player but didn't quite make it himself and is now desperate for son to succeed. BA played from a young age and really enjoyed it at first, camaraderie, banter, being good at something, all very easy and relaxed. Then when it was clear he had real talent it all started to get more serious and BA never wanted that but couldn't say anything. He has hated the last few years ... from about the age of fourteen I think" A- "So where does this leave him ... us ?"P- "Well he wants to quit rugby for sure. He wanted to give it a go here to see if that changed anything without Dads presence, but it hasn't. He wants to walk away well glide actually, he wants to do recreational rowing"

I sat there trying to process what I was hearing and all I could really think was ‘well that’s going to be an interesting conversation with Dad’

Epilogue

BA quit their main sport after being intensively supported in explaining their position to their parents, Mum first .. then Dad. Dad caused some initial waves by suggesting that *BA* only wanted to quit because of the way he had been treated but that changed relatively quickly as he saw his son transform in to a happy, positive student. The professional club were more of a challenge with a series of pointed email exchanges demanding to know precisely what we had done and how we had arrived at *BA* deciding to quit the sport. The undertone in all the exchanges was ‘this is LU’s fault, you have lost us a good player’ with an inference that we had influenced *BA* to give up his rugby to focus on his studies. No one ever seemed to consider that LU could also think it had ‘lost’ a great player after working hard to support him coming to the University?

As for *BA* himself he revelled in his rowing experience in second Semester in first year and seemed to fall back in love with being involved in a sport again. We lost sight of him after that since he wasn’t engaged in any performance squads but we think we had a happy student on our hands.

8.1.2 ‘Progression ... or not’: - Vignette 2 (V2)

The second vignette is the synthesis of a series of events centred on making a decision whether to support a student-athlete in passing their first year or failing the year. The early part of this vignette encompasses the release of exam results for University sport scholars. This was an annual experience for me for over a decade and what is written is a synthesis of those experiences. The release of academic results was nearly always an uncertain time where prior to the release of the results I would fret about the possibility

of having to defend my teams work if the results were poor. Thankfully, the need to defend what we did was rare and normally the occasion turned in to a mild celebration of a job done well when the results hit target. However, there were often difficult cases to deal with and this narrative is concerned with one specific case that had significant consequence for the student-athlete involved. We had to deal with a ‘serial offender’ who had notched up multiple attempts to pass first year and failed every time. We had to review the student’s case in relation to a University policy that allowed my staff team to request mitigating circumstances for sport scholars if their sporting endeavours had compromised their academic study. My team would action a request if we felt the student had made all reasonable efforts to balance their study and sport commitments. In 95% of cases our requests would be viewed favourably, and students would be the recipient of an additional chance to make good on incomplete or failing work. I have chosen to write about this case rather than others because it presents critical issues more clearly than any other I think I dealt with over the years.

Table 8.2 Progression or learning? Vignette 2

‘Progression or not’

(My office – mid-June)

I am nervous. Little sparks of anxiety prick my consciousness and make me restless, so I wander away from my desk to make a cup of tea just to kill sometime. Coming back down the corridor I don’t look left or right into other offices. I don’t want to engage, conversation is avoided wherever possible, I’d rather be alone with my thoughts. Tea mug in hand I settle back at my desk and scan my Inbox again, nothing from Registry so I have to carry on waiting.

Leaning back in my chair I sip my tea and gaze out of the window, not really seeing anything but knowing it’s pointless to keep looking at my screen or try and do anything else productive. My mind drifts and starts to reflect on what I am waiting for..... I realise that in an almost imperceptible way I am shaking my head slowly as I let out an audible sigh. I am sitting here waiting for exam results. Exams that I didn’t

take but I am more nervous now than I was waiting for my own results all those 'eons' ago. How bizarre is that?

The results will tell me how many of our sport scholars have passed or failed their year. I feel such an odd mix of emotions. I know this matters to me for my sake as well as theirs. I want them to succeed as students as well as athletes, but I also want my team to have been successful in supporting them to achieve academic performances that match their peers.

But at the same time as wanting to be successful I know that however well we, or rather 'they', do these results will never be in a University press release. No one will ever pat us on the back for helping these young people. Amongst all the glamour of our 'on-field' successes academic performance gets lost. Never mind that for most of these athletes these academic results will have more impact on their lives than anything they achieve wearing our sports kit. There's nothing 'sexy' or PR worthy in 72% of sport scholars getting a 1st or 2:1 no matter how difficult that is to achieve. Our scholars' academic successes just blend into the background here, they don't get noticed. They are lost amid the general sporting 'noise', the championships won, the critical games lost. Who's interested in how many sports scholars got a 2:1?

So why am I nervous I am nervous because of the failures oh no they get noticed ... they aren't publicly noticed but they are noticed by people who matter. The Head of Academic Registry knows, Deans of Faculty know, influential academic tutors know. Our failures get noticed because their failure affects other people a sport scholar with a 2:1 is just a normal student statistic ... a sport scholar who fails the year potentially means more work for someone. Lecturers might have to set additional exams ... exam boards might have to make special allowances NGBs will notice

because suddenly one of their star ‘talents’ is having a meltdown, or they realise that they can’t carry on training here. Oh the failures get noticed ...

And as soon as there is a ‘high profile’ failure the questions begin, questions from ‘without’ and questions from ‘within’. I see the conversations in my mind and phrase replies I want to give but know I will never say out loud.

The first questions are always from Uni colleagues ... *“how did this happen?”*, *“what did you do to support them?”*, *“did you put them under too much pressure?”* Then you get the statements ... *“you’ve created a tricky situation”* ... *“well, he/she will be very lucky if we can give them a second chance”* ... *“so you need a favour”* and then there’s the old favourite *“you do realise we have to maintain the academic integrity of the University?”*. My mind frames ‘appropriate’ responses ... *“Wow, I have only been doing this for a decade and clearly no one has ever thought to make the point about academic integrity before ...”* ... and as for needing a favour *“actually no I don’t need one, if you could just apply the right University policy whilst not pretending that you are doing me a favour I would be hugely appreciative”*. But I will smile and nod and play the game ... all while my academic colleagues conveniently forget that when the same student wins something of note then they demand that the name of their Department is in the press release. The moment of anger passes, and I smile quietly as I shake my head. All of the imagined ‘questioners’ that I have just conjured up work for the same organisation as me. We all want what is ‘best for the student’ ... such a shame we have to work so hard to agree on what that is

And then there are the external voices, the world class coach, the performance director or the performance lifestyle advisor. They will all want to chip in and go through what I now see as the three established ‘stages’ to each conversation. You start with the

'amicable' - *"can we not just let them do it again?", "they are a good student but they have been under pressure"*

then we move to the 'assertive' - *"why doesn't the University value them ...?", "what message does it send other talented athletes if we don't support 'x'?"* then we get to the 'threatening' - *"if 'x' isn't given another opportunity we will have to let other potential applicants know you aren't supportive...", "we will have to stop recommending you as a place to study ..."*

I wonder if they realise they are so formulaic and predictable? It's like being in the ultimate game of 'Piggy in the Middle'. My own academic colleagues won't be entirely happy and neither will the NGBs, but experience says somewhere in the middle we can probably find a point where they will both be happy enough. So I sit and wait and stare at my Inbox waiting for an email with a spreadsheet that's going to tell me how busy and emotional the next few days will be and WW's name leaps out at me ... and my heart sinks ...

(Education and Support Team Meeting - 48 hours later)

The team drifts into the meeting room which is slightly cramped and stuffy. I think about postponing the meeting until we can get a bigger room but that's just delaying the inevitable. Experience says this can be a drawn-out affair, but we'll manage and as people take their seats *M* slides a pack of paperwork over to me with all the exam results. Oh the joy of going through name by name, discussing those that are 'cause for concern' and whether we can or will support formal requests for mitigating circumstances for those who have failed or are borderline. No one really relishes this meeting and discussing students who, for one reason or another, have struggled. We just have to get this done to manage the outcomes for individual students and consider how we will present a mitigating circumstances case to a department.

As I scan the list of names *WW* jumps out at me again and I have another visceral reaction to seeing the name on the page. At first I think it's the same wave of disappointment I had when I first saw the list but now it's something more. I am angry, angry with the student. How on earth could one young person be the recipient of so much support and still not care enough to do better than *WW* has? I think of all the others who sweat blood to do their sport and be a good student and *WW*'s attitude makes me want to scream. At the same time I know I am angry because of the angst and frustration that will come my way as we sort this out. I really could reach out and slap him right now

We get to *WW* in the meeting and 'unpack' the gory details. Failed first year ... not so bad at first glance, he isn't the first and won't be the last but he's failed the b****y thing three times!!!! For heaven's sake that takes effort!!! So the conversation flows ... *"how far off a pass?"* – *"within touching distance but too low"* – *"spoken to the tutor?"* – *"yep, they can actually swing it so he can progress to second year but trail a module"* ... the conversation trails off at this point and there is a silence heavy with thoughts left unsaid.

P as my best performance lifestyle advisor has dealt with this one personally ... if I am angry she must be fuming with *WW*. No one puts any solutions. I think we all tacitly recognize that whatever we say at this point will be born from anger so we collude in coming up with reasons why we need to wait *"we need more info"* ... *"have we got RD's (our coach) opinion?"* ... *"Has anyone talked to the NGB?"* We decide to meet again just about *WW* but have the University coach in the meeting as well.

(Small group meeting: Me, *P* and RD – my office)

P rehashes the situation and then raises the critical question “*so do we support WW or let him go ...?*” In my head the different lines of argument are in raging conflict.

Support the student, he is incredibly talented and was almost there in getting a pass this time and that in itself is progress. But is that helpful to him? If he can’t cope with first year will he ever cope with second and third year? But we have loads of case examples of students who have almost failed first year and then flown high once they learnt their lessons. Then there is the issue of being fair, are we being fair to other students in trying to support WW even further? How much resource will WW drain from the system? I realise I have drifted off and the coach is talking “*Well WW is a key player .. he is incredibly talented and is progressing really well on the pitch .. he is not far off on the academic stuff ...*” Arguments I have heard before in relation to other student-athletes, but this time RD isn’t convincing. He is always a passionate advocate for his players but this time his heart isn’t quite in this one. I don’t doubt WW is a great talent but RD knows that WW has brought this on himself ... so the decision is left with me.

.....

(My office)

Staring out of the window again, cup of tea on the desk, musing ... the discussion replays itself in my head. What do I know for sure ... well, this is the best training environment for WW, that’s certain, he is making great strides as a player. His sport is his passion, his life, so to potentially take that away would be devastating and the academic results this year weren’t devastatingly bad so we could ‘carry’ this one ... but we have been here twice before ... so this is beyond ‘poor’, this is disrespectful, disrespectful to everyone who is supporting him he’s not stupid so this is about lack of application not lack of intelligence so..... so what? To support him passing is what his NGB and his Uni coach want and his department will go with it. But isn’t supporting a student who doesn’t try undermining everything we are seeking to do? I mentally reach out to try and latch on to criteria that will help me make this decision, but they aren’t there. I can find any number of criteria for what’s ‘right’ but they

belong to different sides of the argument ... is there nothing in the middle? It feels like its 'make it up as you go along time', stuck in the middle.

But as my tea grows cold I find that my mind slowly keeps returning to one question above others, what's best for WW in the long run? What helps him most as a person? So, if I haven't got an answer yet at least I might have the right question.

.....

So the email is written and sent, decision made and actioned. It's all done. We won't ask for mitigation for WW so he will fail the year and have to leave the University, at least for a time, while he makes good academically. If he chooses to make good that is? Will it damage his performance opportunities? Possibly but actually that's his responsibility not ours. Actions come with consequences and if we shield the students from the consequences of theirs what do we teach them? Plus, what do you say to all the other students who have genuine mitigating circumstance claims or the ones who do have to face the consequences of not applying themselves? No athlete is an island and I don't think we can treat them as such. But when I hit the send button I know I will get grief from various quarters. I'll get half-hearted dismay from my own coach, consternation from the NGB, possibly even some disappointment from the academic department who, despite everything, seem to have a soft spot for WW. But sometimes we have to let people fail in the present to give them a better chance in the future ?

Epilogue

WW left University but remained living locally and got a part-time job. The University policy governing sports training and University teams in national competitions meant

that, as an alumnus¹⁰, WW could continue to train and play with the University in national competition. So WW stayed in the training environment but without the direct access to conditioning support, 1-1 coaching during the day and all the added extras of being a student-athlete. Academically WW made good on his failed modules and returned to 2nd year but returned as a changed student. The apathetic approach to study was gone and replaced with a manifest desire to be organized and conscientious. WW finally graduated as a model student with a good 2:1 degree ... and played in two Olympic Games.

8.1.3 Collaborative Themes

My conversations with *P* are worthy of separate consideration because of the insight they brought in relation to a number of issues from the two vignettes and the holistic support literature. During my conversations with *P* a number of themes emerged from her views on holistic support that were suggestive of a sequential flow in athlete experience (Figure 8.1)

In relation to **Theme 1** athletes entering University who had been on NGB talent programmes often arrived less able to handle the transition to independent living whilst studying and training than those who were talented but outside NGB systems. The NGB systems supporting the very best student-athletes managed the risk of the student not progressing as an athlete rather than seeking to enhance their life skills. For example, NGB lifestyle advisors would frequently communicate directly with academic tutors to resolve assignment issues to ‘protect’ athletes from this problem

¹⁰ Students who had failed a year but were actively retaking elements of the programme so they could re-join the University were deemed to be ‘alumni’ for the duration of their absence as a normal student. They could compete in open competition but not represent the University in inter-student competitions.

rather than encourage the student to proactively deal with their need for an assignment extension.

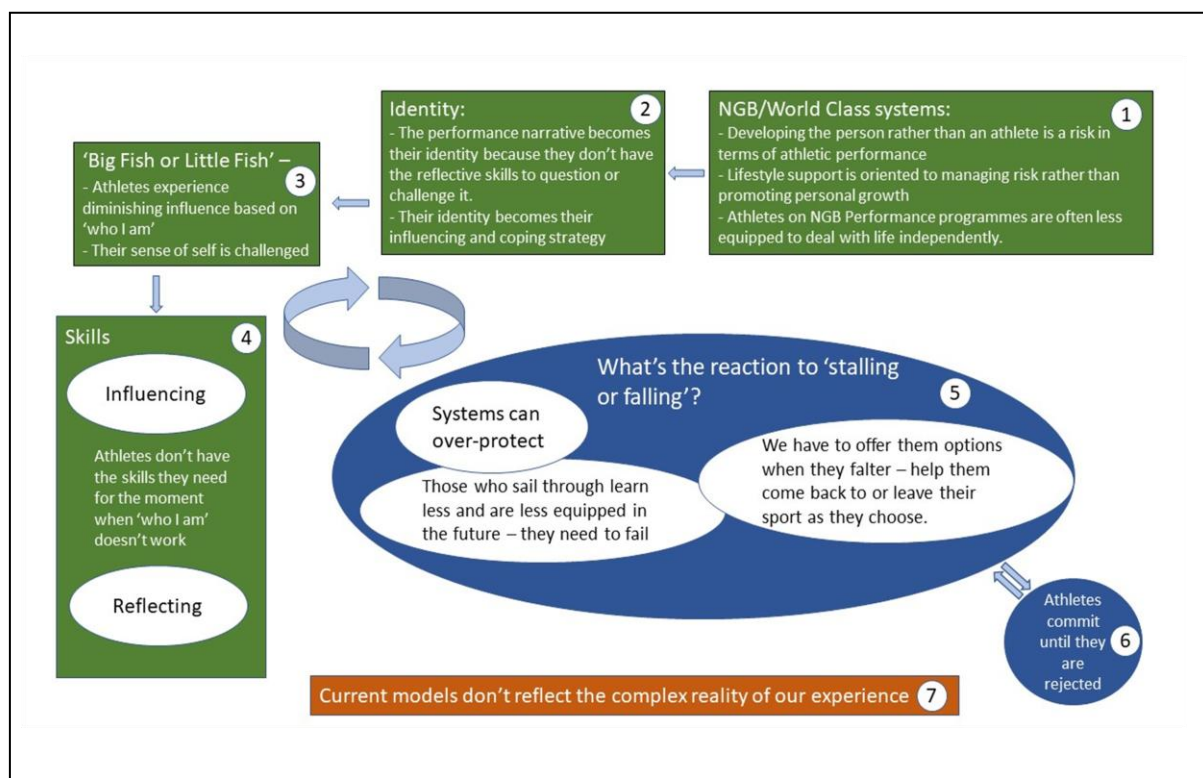


Figure 8.1 Themes emerging from conversations with P

Theme 2 reflected a belief that the nature of lifestyle support being offered within the NGB systems reinforced the performance narrative. NGB lifestyle support operated to minimize distraction from the young person's 'primary' role of being an aspiring elite athlete. This reinforced the perception that being an elite athlete was of greater significance than any other aspects of the individual's life. As a consequence of this *P* felt that many student-athletes arrived at University already experiencing a form of identity foreclosure. Being an athlete was their primary *raison d'être*. Education, social life and other personal activities were just things that filled in the rest of day.

Themes 3 and 4 concerned changes in self-identity and the young person's capacity to cope with change. We noted that the problems with the performance narrative were exacerbated by a young athlete's move from a small athletic pond to a big one. Whilst in school the vast majority of student-athletes experience enhanced social and sporting status due to their athletic talent. This talent set them apart from their peers and many spent their teenage years being told they were different. As a consequence the young person's mechanism for coping with life became their athletic identity. Being a talented athlete was their passport to gaining special support from schools, clubs and NGBs. When student-athletes came to us there was a fundamental change in the scale and nature of their environment. They moved from 'small ponds' of possibly 1200 other pupils, most of whom weren't sporty, and entered a University where roughly 4000 students represented the University at sport each week and some 350-400 fellow students were already junior or senior international performers i.e. it was a 'big pond'.

In the 'big pond' many student-athletes suddenly found that their identity was no longer a mechanism for coping with life. They were no longer afforded a 'special' status and their identity didn't automatically deliver additional help or support with the challenges of living independently. The ability to reflect on and learn from experience, to influence others, to interact and negotiate with tutors all these were skills that were frequently missing in student-athletes. Identity had become warped and this impacted on student-athlete capacity to cope with the demands of their transition.

Theme 5 related to optimal responses to student-athlete problems. Whilst a crisis of identity was a common issue for many student-athletes my conversation with *P* highlighted a shared belief that these young people needed to go through these experiences. We agreed that the right approach was not to protect them from identity challenges and skill deficiencies. What these student-athletes needed as people was support that enabled them to meet their own challenges and that often meant letting them fail at something. For example, when we worked with students who were struggling with academic workload the obvious coping mechanism was to discuss assignment extensions. But if you are looking at a student who has neglected their study, in addition to coping with a high training volume, then simply pushing deadlines

further into the future doesn't tackle the real issue. The stronger course of action is to agree a study plan with the student and then let them stand on their own feet even if you have minimal confidence that they will stick to the plan. The important thing is to be there when they fail, when performance drops off, when academic results are poor. Protecting the young athlete from themselves is rarely helpful in the long run. When they do stumble and fall whatever it is you do you have to offer them options and give them time. You have to offer them a route back to performing at the right level or support them in making a positive, proactive decision to walk away from either a performance pathway or from studying. If there is no route back and no support to move away then you're reinforcing the starkness of the performance narrative and that life outside the performance bubble is of little consequence. But just as important as options, you need to give them time to work through what they really want. Whatever they end up wanting to do they need to make an informed choice born out of self-realisation and such moments don't always happen in the blinding flash of a 'road to Damascus' experience. Self-realisation for most of us comes in relatively slow incremental stages and introspection needs to be nurtured over time.

Theme 6 concerned a recognition that the pull of performance 'glory' is so strong that many student-athletes never make a conscious decision to step off a performance pathway irrespective of whether it is a positive experience for them. They keep striving to reach senior international status and wait for the 'system' to reject them before they walk away. Performance dreams are powerful motivators, almost drug like in their influence creating performance addicts who keep chasing the next 'fix' until forced to give it up.

Finally, **Theme 7** was an expression of the belief that current models of transition and holistic athlete support don't capture the complexity and nuance of our experience. Rarely did athletes experience 'linear' development and neither were their transitions simple passages from one state of being to another. We held a shared belief that there is so much more that needs to be captured and understood about the young athlete experience in modern performance sport.

8.2 Reflections and discussion

Reflection on the vignettes alongside the thinking stimulated by the collaborative interview, served to reinforce the critique of literature in Chapters 4 and 7.

8.2.1 Complexity and division

Looking across V1, V2 and the collaborative themes my greatest sense is of the complexity of the education-sport-life interface. I don't see a moment or a situation where there was real synergy between these three domains within the athlete's experience. In V2 especially reflections on that experience bring in to focus the conflict I experienced between educational and sporting perspectives of the student-athlete. As the principle decision maker in V2 I was conscious of sitting on the borderline between the two domains with their different perspectives of *WW* being reflected back at me. Reflection on that experience brought to the fore the depth of feeling I had about the divide.

In my experiences at both secondary and tertiary levels of education I constantly encountered ambivalence and frustration towards the experience of talented young athletes. Many educational colleagues did not believe that talented athletes were of any greater significance to an Institution's strategic aims than any other student and therefore not deserving of specialist support. They saw time spent on supporting talented athletes as being a drain on them and the institution. The real cost of dual career support was seen as either a lowering of the resources available to support other students or an increase in workload for academic staff.

Even within educational establishments which ostensibly prioritised sport the needs of young athletes were often seen as being of a far lower priority than processes for promoting academic or research excellence. Activities that compromised 'core' business were seen negatively by many academic colleagues and the needs of sport sat on the margins. When I worked with Sport England to scope the talent landscape in the UK many colleagues from both sport and education reported similar experiences (Simpson et al., 2017).

As well as confronting system dissonance I am also aware that there were many times I encountered dissonance in individual practice. Time and again I found myself working with individuals, from both sport and education, who talked eloquently about their support for young athletes but who automatically prioritised their area of expertise when there was a clash. I can recall with great clarity working with one high performance coach and one of his athletes to plan their summer competition schedule and minimise impact on the athlete's exams. One or two very cordial and positive meetings resulted in a combined plan in which there was an assessment schedule that the University could deliver and a competition schedule that offered the athlete the right chances to compete at the right level. There was compromise on all sides to manage the pressure on the athlete and then three days before the athlete's first exam I received news that the athlete would miss that exam because of an additional training trip abroad. No discussion, no debate around 'what ifs' just a short email with an expectation that the University would compromise and cope with the late change. A single 3 sentence email succinctly captured that coach's commitment to holistic support for the athlete and exposed the gulf between espoused and actual beliefs. In the same vein I have experienced similar hypocrisy in academic colleagues. I encountered many colleagues who would be publicly supportive of the concept of flexible study for athletes but behind closed doors it was a different matter. Assignment extensions would be kept to a minimum regardless of whether that really alleviated pressure on the student-athlete or the tutor could never find the time to give a one-to-one tutorial to cover lecture material that had been missed. All too frequently I encountered covert resistance to athlete support despite the presence of institutional policies that stated a clear belief in flexible support for talented athletes. The frustration of dealing with the dissonance and hypocrisy was at times very intense and that frustration came to the fore when writing the narrative for V2.

What V2 also highlighted for me was how little sport and education attempted made to really understand the views from the other domain. Each domain interpreted any given situation in relation to its own frame of reference, so the arguments put forward for any given course of action were always 'legitimate' from the proposer's perspective. My

academic colleagues were often interested in the performances of individual student-athletes of their acquaintance but had no interest at all in appreciating the strategic aims of an NGB. Equally NGBs rarely if ever recognized any responsibility on their part to understand academia. I recall quite vividly when an NGB Board were asked to rubber stamp the appointment of a new Head of Talent. I asked what experience the proposed candidate had of working with academia at any level and the Performance Director simply didn't know. Not a single question had been directed at the candidates around that area, it just wasn't seen as being relevant. It seems so strange in many ways. Everyone involved in talent development recognizes the importance of the education-sport interface for the young athlete, but organisations spend so little time understanding the other stakeholders with whom they will inevitably interact.

When I think of academic models relating to this interface they seem simplistic and naïve. Within V2 I was working in an educational environment where there were University wide policies to support student-athletes and at one level it reflected the holistic ATDE described by Henriksen and Stambulova (2017). Nevertheless, at the level of inter-Departmental dialogue or conversation with an individual academic colleague there was still a huge gulf in understanding about the dual roles of sport and education within an athlete's life. The alignment of sport and education at the coalface was more about individual staff perspectives and wasn't a function of system positioning within an ecology. My experience tells me that our modelling of the interface needs to be deeper and more nuanced in order to shine a light on the complex web of interactions and relationships between and *within* organisations.

When V1 is viewed alongside V2 it emphasizes the limitation of seeing the athlete's life as simply being a dual career experience. The core of the personal challenge being faced in V1 had nothing to do education and little to do with performance sport. The athlete was dealing with issues of identity, complex personal relationships and choices about how he wanted to live his life. In V2 decision making was ultimately about what was best for the young person even though it carried risks in both educational and sporting domains. The critical interface in V1 was not between education and sport, it was between sport and a wider life. A young athlete's life is so much more than two

dimensional and I feel we have to question whether sanitized models such as the HACM really reflect this messy complexity? My collaborative interview with *P* also emphasized that its more often than not trying to cope with life that trips up aspiring elite athletes rather than their ability to weave together sport and a formal education.

8.2.2 Transitions, metrics and learning.

In addition to reflecting a complexity not present in talent development or holistic support models V2 raises many questions about concepts of transition. The outcome of V2 was clearly a critical transition for WW but was it a normative nor non-normative transition for him? It wasn't a desired or natural transition from one role to another but then neither was it an unplanned or unforeseen happening. WW was aware of his academic situation as he went in to his third attempt at first year and was certainly aware of the knife edge he walked when he entered his last set of exams. In this sense the end point of V2 was close to being a normative transition given that WW could anticipate the outcome of his position based on his route through to his final exams. However, it certainly wasn't a transition that would have been planned for and targeted at the start of his time at Uni. WW experienced a transition that might be more appropriately better described as 'consequential'? In addition to whether WW's transition was anticipated or not there is the issue of control. The decision that caused WW to be failed academically was controlled and managed in relation to WW's circumstance. It was a decision that was made with reference to WW's personal situation and the transition wasn't an inevitable, uncontrollable event. The transition was created by a purposeful choice in relation to specific circumstances.

The outcome was simultaneously both a normative and non-normative transition dependent on organisational perspectives. To the University it was a form of normative transition that was predictable given the circumstances. To the sport it was a non-normative transition and to the athlete it is unclear. The literature's binary categorisation of transitions as being normative or non-normative can't account for this complex reality. In order to enhance our modelling of young athletes experiences we need a more sophisticated understanding of transition. In defining transitions we need

models to capture the inter-relationships between different organisational and personal perspectives of the transition as well as accounting for purposeful decision making. We also need to differentiate between transitions caused by conscious, individualised decision making versus impersonal application of performance criteria and policies. Without more sophisticated modelling how can we hope to understand WW's type of experience and how a short term, negative transition was the catalyst for a larger, positive life transition?

V2 also raises issues in relation to the metrics we are applying to measure the effectiveness of holistic support systems. The debate in Chapter 6 touched on the rhetoric about effective holistic support drawing from the language of economics and the philosophy of instrumental rationality. In both V1 and V2 the end point for each athlete would have been classified as a failure of support, or evidence of ineffective support based on the way that support is being judged. In neither case did the transition the athlete went through lead to any performance gain and yet both transitions were the right ones for those athletes as people. In the case of V1 his personal well-being was radically altered by not continuing on a performance pathway. In V2 the initial position was one of academic 'failure' with potential for a parallel impact on performance. However, for WW this initial 'failure' was actually the catalyst for significant personal reflection and readjustment of attitude and development of stronger socio-cognitive skills. Consequently, the outcome was ultimately excellent in terms of both academic and performance development so at what point should we 'measure' the effectiveness of an intervention? There is so much more we need to do to understand the complexity of impact our talent programmes have on young athletes.

Both V1 and V2 resonate with Theme 5 from my collaborative discussion with P. Theme 5 suggested that we can be over-protective of young athletes and shield them from ostensibly negative but potentially vital learning experiences. In V2 I could have shielded WW from the consequences of his actions by allowing him to progress in the University. This would superficially have seemed like effective holistic support but in reality would have denied him a learning opportunity. In both V1 and V2 real learning came from life experience not academic or sporting experience. WW's critical learning

period occurred in the year away from academia, having to make good academic results, hold down a job and continue to train. For *BA* learning came through being able to live a life free from parental pressure to conform to a pre-determined identity. For neither athlete was the most important development in either sport or academia. So why do we focus so much on ‘dual career’ support when wider personal growth that can have a profound influence on well-being happens outside either domain? Why do we judge effectiveness of support based on linear athlete progression through systems? We have to find better, holistic, longitudinal and more meaningful methods for assessing the effectiveness of support. Those methods have to have the well-being of the young athlete as a person at their heart accepting that effective support may result in neither academic nor sporting progression. We have to see the athlete’s personal learning and growth as being a valid and important life outcome. If we accept this as a premise then we have to question the positioning of holistic support services within the philosophy of instrumental rationality that underpins performance systems.

8.2.3 Identity & Narrative

In addition to the issue of transition and metrics V1 and V2 are also pointed examples of the questions about identity that emerged in my collaborative discussion with *P* and in my analysis of the literature.

V1 presents in stark relief the challenge of aligning identity, personal narrative and wellbeing in young athletes. The pressure of the environment around *BA* and the expectations placed upon him by his father had pushed him in to adopting an identity that ran contrary to his preferred personal narrative. The identity he held when arriving at University was one that had been assumed and promoted by his Dad and expected by his club. The emotional trauma that *BA* experienced in challenging and re-defining his personal narrative was profound and challenged his mental well-being.

In *BA*’s case, as in so many others, talent and the performance narrative weren’t inextricably linked. It’s entirely possible to be immensely talented in a sport and yet not have any desire to push that talent to the limit of its potential. However, no one seemed to have considered that in *BA*’s case. The presence of ability stimulated an

unchallenged assumption that ability was synonymous with an intrinsic desire to reach the highest levels of performance. Sadly, I feel I saw this was all too often in young athletes albeit expressed in less acute ways than *BA*. *BA* was unusual because of the scale of the gap between imposed narrative and preferred narrative and because he actively rebelled against the identity being imposed on him. One can only wonder how many young athletes' are following performance pathways because it is assumed that they will do so and neither they nor anyone else questions the assumption.

Now that I am more attuned to the issues of identity and narrative I see a more subtlety expressed identity question in V2. WW's behaviour as a student during his initial time at University could be interpreted as that of someone who didn't really want to take on the mantle of being a student. WW would have fallen in to the category of athlete-student as defined by Cartigny et al. (2019). Being an academic scholar was not really part of WW's preferred narrative at that point in his life and yet the systems around him didn't seem able or capable of working with him to explore other life options. To the University the fact that WW had applied for a place meant that he wanted to be a student and, if truth be told, his talent as a performer meant that we wanted him to be our student. For his NGB his status as a student was the price he needed to pay to be in our training environment. Stakeholders assumed that he wanted to engage in a dual career because it was in their interest to make that assumption. The University therefore provided a lot of support in trying to deal with the symptoms of the mismatch between his preferred identity, that of professional athlete, and the one he needed to assume within the University, that of student-athlete.

In both V1 and V2 the athletes were living according to identities that neither wanted to play. Both *BA* and *WW* were 'playing a part' as described by Carless and Douglas (2013b) (Section 4.2.3). *BA* was following the line described by Carless and Douglas and playing the part of the young athlete committed to a performance narrative. However, WW was not playing the part of the 'committed young athlete' he was playing the part of 'committed student'. We need to recognise that 'playing the part' is a process that can encompass more than simply image managing around a young person's commitment to their sport.

What I find striking is that in both cases there needed to be a crisis before identity issues were resolved. In *BA*'s case resolution came via a chosen shift in his personal narrative, for *WW* issues of identity and narrative were confronted when he had could no longer assume the identity of student-athlete. In neither case was there a planned or purposeful consideration of the identity or narrative that either athlete wanted to adopt. Surely, we have to now start to overtly address issues of identity and narrative with young athletes, but will stakeholders do that when they perceive that they may 'lose' a talented athlete or scholar from their system? If our measures of effective support remain linked to progression within a system then where is the driver to encourage systems to tackle the problems highlighted in V1 and V2?

These two cases also highlight the issue of personal skills identified as Theme 4 in my collaborative discussion. Whilst facing significant challenges in their lives neither athlete had the skills to resolve those challenges. Somewhere within each athlete they lacked the ability to reflect on experience, interpret that in relation to their own identity and then construct a way of changing their behaviour or experience. It isn't possible to state what exactly was lacking in each athlete. In *WW*'s case it might have been an inability to reflect on their own behaviour whereas for *BA* it may have been an inability to articulate how they wanted to renegotiate identity. The important point is that neither one was able to independently tackle their challenges.

Is this surprising? Possibly not, should we expect young adults to possess the ability to truly understand their own narrative when so many of us still struggle with this even though we are older? It may be expecting too much of them but if that is the case then that is all the more reason why systems and stakeholders have to be so careful about the identities we impose on these young athletes.

When I compare my perceptions of the personal skills gap in these two cases with the literature I am concerned that support systems may not be developing the skills athletes most need. The GEES project model of dual career skills (7.4.1) identified four competencies for effective pursuit of a dual career. Two competencies related to the athlete's capability to manage the integration of education/work and sport whilst

two were related to the athlete's capacity to cope with the psychological and psychosocial demands of sustaining a dual career. There was no mention of any cognitive skills or competencies that related to the athlete understanding themselves as a person. There is nothing in the GEES model that might better enable a young athlete to understand the meaning they are drawing from their experience. The focus in GEES is on what the athlete needs to manage their dual career path, not what the athlete needs to understand whether that path is the right one for them in the first place. In both V1, V2 and the collaborative discussion my experience shouts loud and clear that what young athletes need are better reflective skills. They need to develop their ability to engage in consistent introspection so that they come to understand themselves more fully. They need to understand their values, beliefs and philosophies as much as how they might manage their time more effectively. Whilst developing those skills in young people may not be easy, and athletes will inevitably need support, that's no reason for any system to ignore their responsibility for developing the skills athletes most need.

9. Part 3 Conclusion

Reading Chapters 7 and 8 in preparation for writing this chapter I was mindful of the myriad of questions I was asking for which there were no obvious answers. There is a sense in the literature that holistic support of the athlete as a person is moving forwards purposefully underpinned by good research. In many ways you can argue that this is true but below the surface coherence there is much about holistic support that is uncertain and unclear. My practice threw up many issues that theory has yet to recognise let alone explore. I have come to a position where I sense a lot of people are doing lots of good work without really knowing why they are doing it or fully understanding the nature of the work that they are doing.

In Error! Reference source not found. I have summarised the critical issues related to support of talented young athletes. The blue circles represent the issues that arose in Chapter 7 whilst the outer boxes represent issues from comparison of my practice to theory in Chapter 8.

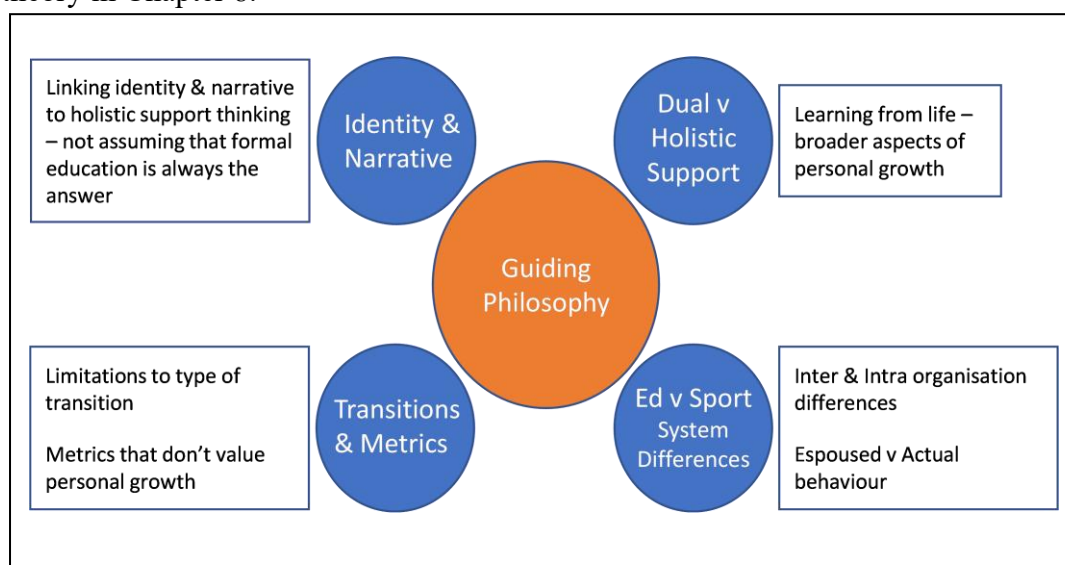


Figure 9.1 Diagrammatic representation of key issues surrounding the issue of holistic support for young athletes

In many ways my exploration of talent development from an educational and developmental perspective didn't help answer the question of why we run talent programmes. There is very limited evidence that being in a talent programme advantages the young person in any way other than improving them as an athlete. The holistic support programmes that are run are, more often than not, limited in scope and grounded in instrumental rationality. So why are we running such holistic support programmes? In the research literature this is a question that has not been subjected to any depth of analysis. The holistic support domain seems happy to live with fudged perspectives rather than seek clarity. I now recognise that within my practice I didn't really stop to think about this question either. I simply accepted the rationale that we ran support programmes to ensure that the young athlete developed holistically never asking what 'holistically' could or should mean. Consequently a number of critical issues have not been addressed properly.

At a macro level research hasn't scrutinised the nature of the sport-education interaction. Neither research nor practice seems to want to examine the interface between these two domains too closely. I wonder if this is because exploration of this issue may lead to the unwelcome recognition that performance sport can only ever be the junior partner in the relationship. Both education and sport operate to a philosophy of instrumental rationality and, by virtue of targeting different 'ends', they can never be true complementary partners. At their core they want different things for the young athlete in front of them. There is also a huge difference in size and scale between the systems so the idea that they can easily co-exist as part of a balanced ecology seems massively simplistic. I found the challenge of integration was evidenced in the dissonance, in both rhetoric and behaviour, both between and within each system. Despite this evidence neither research nor practice seems to want to confront these issues.

In terms of potential impact on individual athletes there are a number of themes that remain to be considered in both research and practice. Firstly, there is the question of whether we are truly offering holistic support to the athlete. Are we seeing the individual as a 'person' first or as an 'athlete' first? Whilst ostensibly starting from a

holistic support perspective many performance systems have adopted a position where the emphasis is on 'dual' careers. The aim is to manage the young athlete's interface with formal educational systems and facilitate success in both domains. However, by doing this we fail to recognise the impact that broader aspects of life can have on the growth and development of the young person. Sport systems seem to want to focus on how they interact with other formal development systems rather than think about how we best facilitate learning that from the complex and messy process of daily living. Support systems aren't being designed to maximise what can be gained from such informal learning opportunities. 'Life' is seen as something that must be controlled and managed in order to allow the athlete to progress within the formal sport or education systems. We pursue this in the face of practical experience which says that when the young athlete transitions away from home it is their inability to confront and cope with the full complexity of 'life' that derails their sporting and/or academic development.

Secondly, performance systems currently measure support effectiveness in terms of athlete progression within a pathway rather than look at any measure of personal growth. As long as the athlete is taking the next step in their education or sporting pathway then the system is working. This view dominates even though there is evidence that pursuing such progressions can leave athletes pressured, stressed, unhappy and damaged. The harm that talent systems can cause was evident in both research and practice whilst it was also clear that we can't assume that support systems reduce that harm. On the contrary, the literature contained clear evidence that pursuit of 'dual careers' can magnify pressure and stress. Is 'progression', sporting or educational, a positive if it comes at the cost of well-being? Unfortunately, this question is not being discussed within either research or practice communities. We aren't dealing with the young person free from an assumption that we are trying to facilitate linear progression along a sporting or educational pathway. We don't seem to be willing, or able, to recognise that moving along a talent pathway may actually be entirely the wrong thing for any given young person.

In contrast, if we embraced the existential approach to learning outlined in Chapter 3 then this would substantively shift our approach to holistic support. At the heart of this

shift would be an acceptance that ambiguity and discontinuity in life are positive because they facilitate personal learning. Formal education and sport would remain significant elements in a young athlete's life, but they would not be seen as the only important elements in that life. Informal experiences would be as important as engagement with formal systems of learning. Music, art, social relationships, other hobbies all would be seen as being areas of life where important personal growth takes place. The athlete would also have the agency to be the arbiter of which aspects of their life are of greatest importance to them. The support practitioner role would be to support the athlete in understanding the choices that they are making even if that means that sport is rejected and/or the young person does not place academic achievement at the centre of their world.

An existential approach would also accept that not progressing on a performance pathway may be the best thing for a young person. Engaging more fully with other aspects of their life may be the best possible 'progression' for a young athlete. Stepping away from sport may enable a young athlete to develop a more natural and authentic sense of identity that alleviates stress. Such an approach would also accept that gaining formal academic qualifications is only one form of personal development amongst many others. High quality support work may result in situations in which a young person progresses in either, both or neither sport nor education. Measures of the effectiveness of support processes would be linked to changes in self-identity, resistance to identity foreclosure or an increase in the range of narratives young athletes tell about their engagement in performance sport.

In order to address the issues highlighted in Chapter 7 and 8 I believe we have to engage with philosophical issues. The instrumental rationality that is influencing current approaches to holistic support is, arguably, selling the athlete short. Sport must enter in to in a deeper discussion about why it provides 'holistic' support services and critique current practice in a more robust manner. What the young athlete needs is for sport to adopt a unified approach to learning and personal development that places their well-being at the centre of the process whilst embracing both the formal and informal aspects of their life.

In the next chapter I will outline a new paradigm for talent development in sport that I believe can be applied to holistic support programmes as well as athletic training programmes.

PART 4

In this final part of the thesis I summarise and synthesise the issues and challenges that emerged during the whole reflective process. I then attempt to look forward and create a conceptual approach to talent development and my practice that draws together both my educator and performance selves. I present a paradigm for practice that is grounded in the philosophical and sociological concepts discussed in Chapter 3, namely craftsmanship and elite *Bildung*. I see this final part as expressing a way point on a personal journey of research and learning that doesn't end with the submission of this work.

10. ‘Excellence Literacy’: A new framework for TID

The issues that emerged in the critique of my professional experience in Parts 2 and 3 are summarised in Table 10.1.

The theme that runs through both sets of experiences is the concept of the person versus the outcome. My experiences in both performance and educational domains demonstrate a systemic lack of awareness of the personal dynamics of lived experience for those in a high-performance world. In both sport and education instrumental rationality has exerted its influence so that outcomes are more important than people. Young athletes have become commodified and the interface between formal education and sport is managed to optimise system outcomes rather than personal growth.

To resolve the tensions within and between sport and education we have to move beyond building ‘coping mechanisms’. It is not sufficient to simply find ways of minimising the potential damage to the young person that being on a talent pathway can cause. Simply looking to design better dual career support processes or alter coaching/practitioner pedagogies would be missing the point.

If we don’t look beyond the instrumental philosophical position that pervades TID then, however good our holistic support systems become, generations of young athletes will continue to be pushed towards a single narrative with limited focus on personal growth. The meaning that the young athlete can derive from their athletic experience will forever be subservient to their potential to win a medal. Yet, to offer these young athletes the chance of experiencing the heights of sporting competition we have to provide a robust, disciplined performance process, one that requires commitment and no little sacrifice. Without that rigour in our TID programmes we are in danger of not supporting the athlete in their pursuit of sporting excellence.

Recognition of these issues inevitably leads to a point where I have to address some fundamental questions about my practice:

- How can I re-frame my practice so that my actions resolve or at least diminish the problems highlighted in Table 10.1?
- How do I re-purpose my practice to be truly athlete-centred
- Can I re-frame in such a way as to bridge the gap between educator and performance selves?
- Can I re-frame my practice without losing an approach to the robust pursuit of excellence that is central to a good talent development process?

To answer these questions I believe I needed to step back and re-think the base philosophy that I apply to TID. I have to find a philosophical approach that provides balance so I can help create programmes which support the athlete as a person without sacrificing the drive to maximise athletic ability.

In pursuit of answers I have looked outside of traditional sport science and coaching literature relating to talent development and it is there that I encountered elite '*Bildung*' (existentialism) (Aggerholm, 2015) and craftsmanship (Sennett, 2009) (Chapter 3). Consequently, this chapter deals with the philosophical and the conceptual rather than present precise methods for creating TID programmes or optimal structures for a TID environment.

I think my synthesis of ideas from these areas has resulted in a framework that is best described as 'excellence literacy'. I believe that this model offers a perspective on talent development that counters the problems created by instrumental rationality without sacrificing the pursuit of optimal athletic performance.

However, before moving on to discuss my framework in detail I must recognise the part played in my thinking by Whitehead's conceptualisation of 'physical literacy' (Whitehead, 2010). Physical literacy became a significant concept in my thinking for three reasons. Firstly, Whitehead's picture of physical literacy is a monist one where mind and body form a single indivisible entity. The intent in physical literacy is to promote a disposition towards lifelong physical activity that influences not just the physical but also the affective and the cognitive aspects of embodied experience. As

such the properties of physical literacy prompted me to try and consider the properties of TID in a similar holistic and monist way.

Table 10.1 Summary of the critical challenges for TID identified in Part 2 and 3.

Thesis Section	Challenges	Description
Part 2	Performance v Person: Achieving balance	TID systems based on instrumental rationality value the performance more than the person. Performance pathways offer a young athlete special experiences in exclusive competitive environments. However, there can be significant personal cost to the athlete in being on a pathway. Our challenge is to balance support for the robust performance processes required to compete at the highest levels with support for the athlete as a person.
	Narratives	The performance world only recognises the performance narrative. Other narratives are silenced and young athletes have to conform in order to progress within systems.
	Winning and Growing:	We need to move away from the only measure of success in performance sport being the achievement of a particular competitive outcome. We have to recognise the value in the journey towards a competitive goal and help young athletes learn from that experience in a more complete way.
Part 3	Holistic support?	We need to ensure that our support systems are genuinely holistic and do not simply support performance in the two domains of formal education and sport.
	Progress not learning	We must have systems that value the learning from a pathway experience and not simply the potential for progression to a higher level of competition
	Specific skills v Personal learning	Performance systems dictate what skills a young athlete should develop to achieve specific performance outcomes. The athlete is not offered the freedom to lead their own learning
	Competing worlds	The worlds of education and sport are both driven by instrumental rationality and are irreconcilable at a fundamental level. What the young athlete does in each domain needs to become synergistic rather than remain competitive.

The second influence of Whitehead's work was her terminology and use of the word 'literacy'. Literacy has been defined as

'The state of having knowledge or competence' (Meriam-Webster, 2020)

The model I am proposing for TID is focused on creating within the athlete an attitude towards, and understanding of, the process for creating excellence. It could therefore be considered a 'state' that relates to the athlete's competence for producing excellence in a task and 'literacy' becomes a valid description.

Finally, physical literacy is phenomena that is already recognised and valued in sport. I accept that there is much still to debate about physical literacy and that the term is ambiguous (Bailey, 2020). Nevertheless, there is a widespread awareness within sport of 'physical literacy' as a phrase and a concept. By giving the high-performance community a known 'hook' on which they can hang an examination of what I am proposing I hope to have greater impact on a critical audience for this work. One of the quality markers for autoethnography was the capacity for a piece of work to resonate with the intended audience. By utilising conceptual ideas and terminology from physical literacy I hope that my 'conclusion' will have greater resonance with, and therefore impact on, the TID domain.

Excellence literacy offers a TID framework within which new pedagogical approaches can be constructed or position existing ones positioned e.g. Transformational Coaching (Côté & Erickson, 2016; Côté, Hancock, & Abernethy, 2014) or constraints-led coaching (Newcombe, Roberts, Renshaw, & Davids, 2019; Renshaw & Chow, 2019). It is also a framework that I believe is as applicable to formal education, or the workplace, as it is to performance sport. It can therefore provide an approach to supporting a young person that is applicable in all aspects of their life.

However, whilst the framework is a step forward in my thinking, I am also aware that my thinking to this point has evolved in a messy and discontinuous way with many twists, turns and blind alleys. I therefore hesitate to describe the framework as a

‘conclusion’. I think what follows is more a description of an intellectual ‘resting place’ in an on-going journey of discovery.

10.1 Exploring principles and attributes

In Figure 10.1 I have outlined the key components of ‘excellence literacy’. The figure describes an approach to TID in which the aim is to develop an empowered young person for whom seeking excellence becomes a ‘natural attitude’ across the multiple domains of their life.

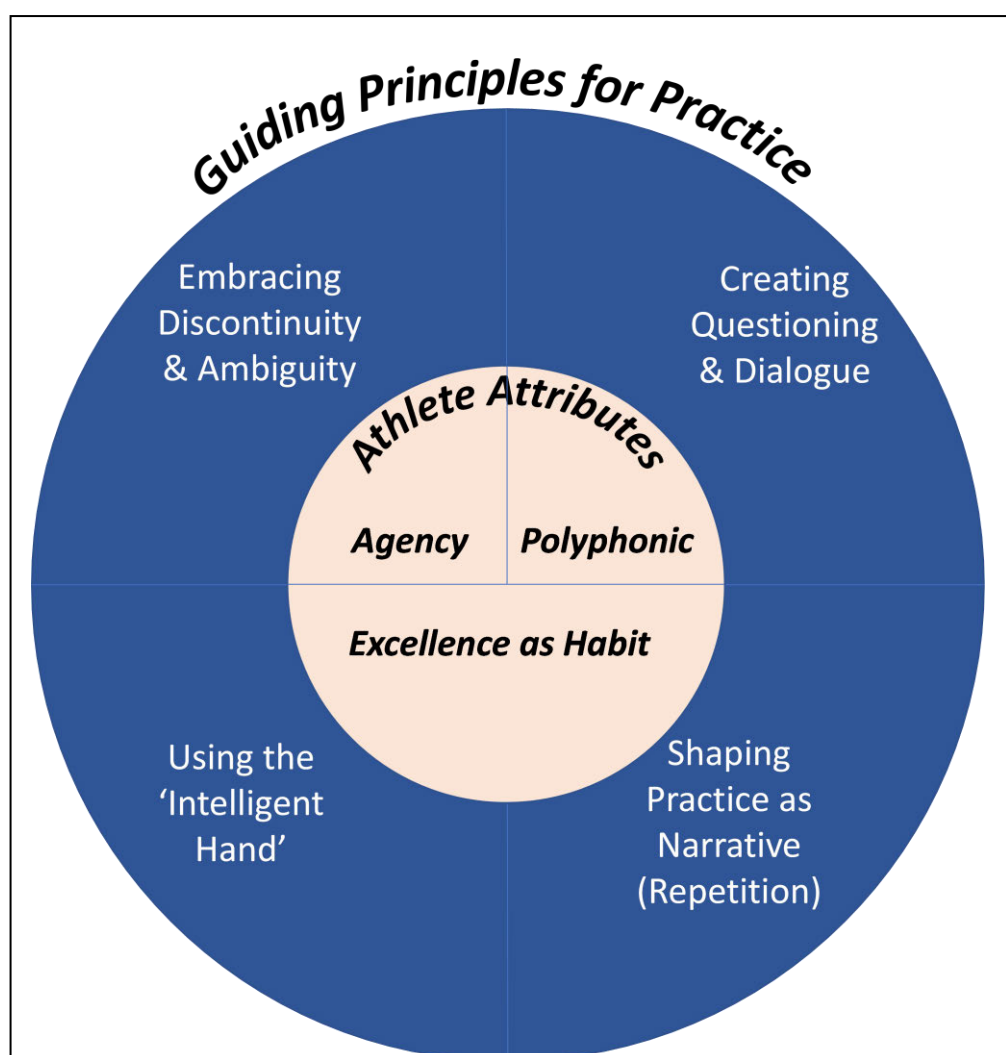


Figure 10.1 The key components of excellence literacy' in TID

This ‘natural attitude’ is based on the attributes described in the inner ring of the framework which are created by developing TID practice based on the principles in the outer ring. Each segment in this ring represents a principle that practitioners should ensure is targeted by the pedagogical methods they use to construct a TID programme.

10.1.1 Principles underpinning practice

The principles in Figure 10.1 have been formed by merging concepts from craftsmanship, elite Bildung and my own practice. Whilst presented as separate principles they form a gestalt whole and represent a mind-set rather than a set of tools. In explaining these principles I have chosen to start with the three principles most associated with the practice and training environment: the ‘intelligent hand’, practice as narrative and the role of questioning. The final principle expresses an approach to the discontinuity in experience which is such a significant part of each young athlete’s life.

The ‘intelligent hand’

The planning of practice and training in TID ought to start with a recognition that, at the moment of performance, the athlete acts as a single being with no artificial division between mind and body. The moments when we perform at our best, irrespective of our sporting abilities, are those moments when we are at one with ourselves. The holistic nature of peak performance has been recognised many times in the sport psychology literature. Peak performances in sport, and other domains (e.g. music), have been described as moments of ‘flow’, where mind and body work together in perfect harmony (Habe, Biasutti, & Kajtna, 2019; Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Swann, Crust, & Vella, 2017). And yet, despite our understanding of peak performance in high performance sport we allow an instrumental approach to development to continually separate mind and body.

Sennet speaks to this challenge in his description of craftsmanship and draws attention to the tendency for modern life to emphasise duality. He argues that we live much of our lives in a duality in which both mind and body are being developed separately.

This reduces them to the status of ‘tools’ that we utilise in a decontextualized manner and, by doing so, fail to engage with all that it means to pursue excellence. In duality an individual does not engage in a task as a whole person and this limits their learning as well as the holistic quality of their work. Ultimately both the craft and craftsman are impoverished. In my own experiences I now feel that this sense of duality was present when I was both performance practitioner and educator. The environments I worked in, based on reductionist thinking, drove a division between mind and body that need not have existed.

The antidote to duality is described by Sennet as recognising the ‘intelligent-hand’. This is a monist position in which you work from the assumption that the production of a physical skill is indivisible from the cognitive process of seeing and understanding the task. In this regard it can be linked to Whitehead’s conceptualisation of physical literacy. Sennet argues that by seeking ways in which the craftsman/athlete can see an athletic challenge holistically we facilitate them coming to understand their work more completely. This complete understanding of a challenge and their response creates opportunity for the athlete to draw deeper meaning from the experience. By drawing deeper meaning we simultaneously enrich them as a person as well as support them in achieving mastery of a skill.

Whilst originating outside sport the ‘intelligent-hand’ is a mindset that can be linked to contemporary perspectives on coaching pedagogy. Ecological systems thinking applied to coaching has led to the development of constraints-led coaching. In a constraints-led approach the coach structures the environment and the task to develop a learning challenge. The performer is seen as an active component of the learning environment not a passive recipient of coaching practice (Newcombe et al., 2019). Learning is an active interaction between athlete and environment with such an approach leading to degeneracy. Degeneracy in this context being defined as the process of creating multiple solutions to the same problem. Applied to sport this means that the athlete creates their own individual solution to a specific athletic challenge (Renshaw & Chow, 2019; Renshaw, Davids, Newcombe, & Roberts, 2019). Both constraints-led coaching and the ‘intelligent-hand’ embrace the holistic interaction between learner

and environment with an emphasis on creativity and individualism. Where the principle of the ‘intelligent-hand’ goes further is in looking to facilitate the growth of the athlete as a person not just enhance their athletic performance.

One final positive consequence of adopting the ‘intelligent-hand’ as a guiding principle in TID is that it constantly asks the athlete to work on the boundary between skill and imagination, between action and creativity. Training and competition become a holistic realm of skill and understanding, often beyond verbal capacity to explain but nevertheless central to the athlete’s growing sense of identity. This growth of self and identity encourages the athlete to see the value in continually seeking out new challenges that require the development of new skills. Consequently the athlete comes to sustain their pursuit excellence through repeated cycles of problem solving and problem finding.

A TID environment based on the principle of the ‘intelligent-hand’ places the individual athlete at the centre of a holistic learning process. Such an environment would naturally resist the deconstruction and reconstruction of an athlete according to an external template of an ‘elite performer’. As such the ‘intelligent-hand’ could play a central role in alleviating some of the problems that instrumental policies and processes have caused in TID.

Questioning and dialogue

A critical aspect of developing excellence as a habit is the formation of what Aggerholm refers to as a ‘questioning comportment’ (Aggerholm, 2015). Such a mindset starts with the young athlete accepting that being a talent is a state in which they are incomplete and that they are lacking in all that is required to become an elite athlete. This recognition lays the foundation for a process of continual questioning that seeks to discover what the young athlete needs to achieve elite status. Aggerholm describes this as a process of ‘wondering in action’, one that should express itself in the athlete’s forming a dialogical relationship between question and answer in practice and competition.

There are two aspects of questioning in practice that we should be looking to develop. Firstly, there is a general sense of purposeful, mental engagement in which the athlete is encouraged to ask questions of all aspects of performance from technique to tactics. The essence of this is fostering a sense of never being satisfied and allowing each answer to initiate the formation of new questions. Secondly, we have to cultivate a mental commitment to questioning in which the athlete continually seeks challenges and questions their own ability even if the process is uncomfortable. Consistently pushing the boundaries of their physical, mental and technical capabilities is a process will inevitably cause athletes to experience angst and frustration when they fail to overcome the challenges they set themselves.

Placing questioning as central to practice can also be linked to Eichberg's conceptualization of play as a form of questioning (Eichberg, 2016). Eichberg proposed that play and questioning are expressions of curiosity both of which are deeply rooted in the person. Through the process of play we articulate questions that are beyond the limitations imposed by language and engage in an embodied form of questioning. If we accept that sport is a structured and stylised form of play then the young person's engagement in a talent pathway is a natural expression of their desire to ask questions within a performance context.

The concept of seeing physical activity as a form of questioning should be extended in to seeing competition as a dialogical process. Competition can be framed as an act of social interdependence in which opponents are contesting and co-operating simultaneously by asking technical/tactical questions of each other. Indeed, it is quite possibly this aspect of competition that drives us to compete in the first place. In practice we can exert control over the questions that the athlete tries to answer, in competition we have no such control. Both athlete, coach and spectator experience competition as a wonderfully unpredictable and uncertain expression of athletic ability. When seen as a questioning dialogue competition becomes a process in which athlete and opponent combine to evolve athletic excellence. This is a process in which the young athlete can only truly achieve excellence if their opponent also produces excellence. Meaning is drawn from the dialogue between competitors not from the

eventual outcome of any given competitive event. Given this perspective coaches and practitioners should be looking facilitate an awareness of competition's purpose and then reinforce the need for a mental commitment to questioning in the face of the emotional highs and lows competition outcomes can bring.

Based on my performance experiences I feel that it is the re-framing of practice and competition as a questioning dialogue that is pivotal in creating a positive approach to pursuing athletic excellence. All the hours of effort put in to periodised planning, and structuring of training serves to enhance the questions coaches and athletes can ask of themselves in practice. Detailed analysis of performance and meticulous competition planning improve the questions that opponents can ask of each other during each competition. All of this is possible without overemphasis on who wins and who loses.

The process of questioning is what facilitates elite *Bildung*. Without a questioning comportment the athlete doesn't achieve self transcendence. Consequently, the development of a questioning comportment is something that we have to look to facilitate as we structure our talent environments. One element in this is undoubtedly for practitioners to ask questions of athletes before 'informing' how they might improve. This is an aspect of coaching that has improved markedly in recent years with considerable attention being applied to it in both research and practice (Cope, Partington, Cushion, & Harvey, 2016; Harvey, Cope, & Jones, 2016; Light & Harvey, 2017). However, this work has focused on the coach asking questions of the athlete it remains unclear how adept coaches and other practitioners are at encouraging athletes to ask the questions themselves? To optimise the opportunity for self-transcendence in a talent pathway we must discover how to structure learning activities that support athletes in looking for the right questions, not just answers.

Practice as narrative: 'Repeating the Future'.

To complement the process of building a questioning comportment we have to consider how we can optimise the benefits of the time athletes spend in practice. The

principle of 'Practice as Narrative' speaks to this challenge and its roots can be found in both elite *Bildung* and craftsmanship.

Repetition of drills or game scenarios in practice is an essential aspect of a young athlete's experience in sport. Unfortunately TID in performance sport has become fixated on the questions of 'how much' and 'how soon' in relation to practice volume and frequency (see Section 4.1.2.) The broader question of the value of practice beyond the enhancement of athletic abilities has not been addressed despite practice being such a pivotal part of a young athlete's experience.

Taking an existential perspective we must move beyond practice being the rote repetition of known drills designed to facilitate achieving pre-determined performance standards. If this is what practice becomes then we fail to create a questioning athlete and allow them to disengage from their embodied experience. However, the application of existential thinking to the issue of practice helps us re-frame it as an evolving narrative.

In elite *Bildung* the athlete engages with practice as an opportunity to apply their questioning comportment. We can enhance the value of this engagement if we frame repetition in practice as being a *future oriented* search for difference. Each time an athlete attempts a drill they are engaging in an active attempt to do something differently. By focusing the athlete's attention on the element of difference between successive attempts at a drill rather than absolute performance we can position repetition as being a process of continual change for the athlete. From this perspective when an athlete draws on their past experience and skills to perform a drill they aren't repeating previous experience but creating a new one. The athlete ends each drill as a different person and takes that 'new' person into the next attempt at the same drill. Repetition is therefore an act of creating change. Continual performance of a drill within a practice session becomes an act of repeating 'difference' between each successive attempt at a drill. Such differences between drills maybe incredibly small and unmeasurable but that does not mean they are not there. Practice therefore

becomes a process which affords the young athlete an opportunity to keep evolving the meaning they draw from their athletic experience.

The value of repetition in practice can be further enhanced if we use it as an aid to develop a young athlete's motivations for bettering their athletic performance. In elite *Bildung* emphasis is placed on creating a training environment in which the athlete is intrinsically drawn into practice by their potential for producing excellence in performance. This process of being 'pulled forwards' in practice is in marked contrast to an instrumental approach of being 'driven forwards' by the need to achieve pre-determined performance standards (Aggerholm, 2015). If we can facilitate the athlete developing a mind-set in which they allow themselves to always be 'pulled' forwards by the opportunity to experience excellence then the pursuit of excellence becomes a habit. It becomes a state of being that can influence all aspects of an athlete's life not just the development of athletic performance.

In taking a longitudinal look at the 'intelligent hand' in action Sennett's exposition of craftsmanship adopts a similar position on practice. Sennet described repetition in practice being the evolution of a 'story' rather than the digital repetition of isolated skills. Consequently, practice should be being a creative process through which we explore the future. Each repetition of a drill is the linking of past experience and craft knowledge with possible future experience as skills are refined through practice.

Sennet also emphasised the central role the learner plays in discovering how a particular skill in action works for them and how it may work for them in the future. Within craftsmanship the master craftsman (the coach) facilitates individualised learning through their structuring of the practice environment rather than dictating precisely what is to be learnt. The learner/athlete experiences practice as a future focused activity in which they are empowered to engage in experimentation and learning that has personal meaning.

Craftsmanship and elite *Bildung* share the view that practice is a narrative creating process in which the athlete repeats the search for difference between one repetition of

a task and the next. Adopting this as a core principle in TID would bring a number of benefits in relation to the challenges in Table 10.1. For example,-

- by conceiving of practice as a future focused, holistic process we emphasise the young athlete as an individual. This should encourage us to work with their understanding of performance rather than impose one up on them. In this regard by seeing practice as a narrative building process we can counter the dominance of the performance narrative in TID environments.
- by influencing an athlete's *willingness* to engage in repetition we create practice as a deeper and more meaningful process that has value beyond the '*what*' within any given in any given drill. As such athletic practice can help the young athlete to consistently refine the meaning they draw from sport, moving forwards as a person as well as an athlete.
- the focus on excellence as a process supports the athlete in achieving the highest standards of athletic performance. The realisation of athletic potential is not compromised since the goal of producing excellence in performance is an essential component of the environment. Adopting this principle means that all of the positive features of my high-performance experiences can be retained. There is no need to move away from critical performance analysis, robust feedback or intense practice in the training of young athletes. These are just activities that support the pursuit of excellence.
- by placing a future focus alongside the pursuit of excellence we encourage the young athlete to create a rhythm to their own practice narrative. As they achieve excellence in one task they are encouraged to keep repeating difference in repeated cycles of problem solving and problem finding.
- 'Practice as Narrative' lays the foundation for excellence to become a state of being, a habit, through the merging of the pursuit of excellence with a future focused orientation. By supporting this development athletic training can become a process that can have a positive impact on all aspects of the young person's life not just their sport.

By applying the principle of 'Practice as Narrative' we can position the time spent in the training environment as being a central component in a transformational process that supports a young athlete's self-transcendence.

Discontinuity, ambiguity and resistance: the nature of experience

The final principle in excellence literacy relates to the messiness of lived experience. In framing this principle I have drawn heavily on craftsmanship in which complexity, mess and ambiguity are seen as opportunities for learning not barriers to development. In Sennett's analysis of craftsmanship he argues that mess and ambiguity in life provide situations in which we find barriers to our progress in completing the tasks in which we seek to excel. This resistance to progress is inevitable but the craftsman learns to accept it and work with it. By learning to tolerate the frustration of resistance and ambiguity the craftsman finds time to understand the nature of the resistance being faced. Through that understanding they can bring imagination to bare in developing practice to resolve the ambiguity and overcome resistance. Without resistance and ambiguity the opportunity for creative change is reduced and the craftsman's growth is compromised. Discontinuity and ambiguity are therefore to be valued.

All my performance experiences in both Part 2 and 3 point to complexity and mess as being naturally occurring phenomena within the lives of athletes and practitioners. The talented young athletes I encountered were all simultaneously experiencing multiple transitions across different aspects of their lives and consistently trying to make sense of this 'mess'. Yet, despite the fact that the concepts of ambiguity and resistance as described by Sennett were ever present in my experiences, prevailing instrumental philosophies pushed the systems I was part of to try avoiding or minimising the impact of this 'mess'. Systems focused on deconstructing the complexity of athlete experience so that it could be controlled and simplified allowing for maximal athletic development. Sadly, this was so often done without recognising that by attempting to externally control and simplify young athletes lives we may well have been limiting the amazing learning opportunities presented by the rich complexity of experience.

Moving forwards TID frameworks need to accept and foreground complexity and ‘mess’. Talent systems need to embrace them as being phenomena that promote creativity and problem solving which leading to greater personal growth. We need to see the messiness and ambiguity in performance environments as being a desired state because such a state offers opportunity for richer, deeper learning¹¹.

Ambiguity and resistance are part of a holistic process of enlightenment. Ambiguity begats improvisation, improvisation supports growth in creativity and the learner becomes richer for the experience. By allowing complexity and ambiguity to exist in our development environments we may be giving up element of controls but optimizing learning. However, such an approach confounds the processes of measurement, audit and review typical of instrumental rationality.

Adopting this conceptual framework may help resolve the challenges in Chapter 9 in two ways. Firstly, acceptance of mess and ambiguity means an acceptance of the benefit to the young person in living a multi-faceted life. By seeing the positive potential in this kind of ‘mess’ we can help young athletes remain open to having multiple identities. We can assist them in becoming the polyphonic beings envisaged by Ronkainen and Ryba (2019) and help resist the issue of identity foreclosure.

Secondly, in relation to lifestyle support (Chapter 7), acceptance of the positive potential in discontinuity means practitioners should accept that the *transitions* of the HACM are opportunities for deeper learning. Consequently, DCSPs should not just be working to minimise the disruptions to training caused by transitions but using them as vehicles for learning. Such a perspective encourages us to stop seeing lifestyle support

¹¹ This is a perspective that has some resonance, albeit imperfect, with the idea that optimal talent development in sport occurs when the young athlete encounters bumps and trauma’s on the rocky road to success (Collins et al, 2016; Collins and Macnamara, 2018). However, in Collins et als’ view of the ‘rocky road’ complexity and resistance are allowed, and to be controlled, in order to maximise athletic development. The rocky road is not one to greater personal growth and finding meaning, it is still a road to the podium.

and coaching programmes as being different components in a talent system. Systems should see the development of the young athlete as a single, coherent process that encompasses and values multiple domains of life.

Specifically in relation to the interface between sport and education an acceptance of the value of discontinuity may negate practitioners perceptions that they need to 'compete' for primacy in a young athlete's life. The young athlete's learning from discontinuity can benefit their holistic growth and therefore enhance their interactions in both education and sport. An adoption of this perspective may help in alleviating the dissonance that the young athlete experiences within, and between, the strands of their life.

10.1.2 Attributes

A TID process grounded in the principles from Figure 10.1 would enable young athletes to develop a 'natural attitude' to seeking excellence across the multiple domains of their life. It would be an attitude based on the development of three personal attributes:-

Having Agency – the athlete would have the ability to make informed choices about their engagement with different activities in their lives (including performance sport). By developing a questioning comportment they would be resistant to having pre-determined narratives imposed upon them and would be better equipped to play an active role in creating their own identity. Their growth as an athlete would therefore be authentic and grounded, distinct from the instrumental development valued by prescribed talent pathways. However, it should be accepted that developing agency is not an easy process and is likely to involve the young person in having to make difficult and uncomfortable choices.

Being Polyphonic - by accepting, and working with, the multiple domains of a young athlete's life TID can contribute to creating people who have multiple voices. By working with the discontinuity and ambiguity in their lives the young athlete can discover who they wish to be in each area of their life (e.g. with family,

school, friends, arts, music ..) without having to live within a single narrative. Athletes would construct and re-construct their own narratives and identities as their life evolves. In addition we should be looking to develop young people who feel comfortable being polyphonic within their talent environment. Discovery and relational narratives should be accepted features of talent pathways and sit comfortably alongside variants of the performance narrative. As well as accepting these different forms of narrative the young person we develop should feel able to explore and evolve their own narratives within and between the multiple domains of their life. The narrative they chose to create in education need not be the same as the one in sport or in their social life. The young person should also have the agency to flex and change their narratives as they alter the sense of meaning they derive from their embodied experiences in all facets of their life.

Excellence as habit – The focus on questioning, practice as narrative and the intelligent hand would create young athletes who have an understanding of the pursuit of excellence as a generic process. By developing in an environment that values these three principles the young athlete would learn how to consistently challenge their own performance in a way that built a deeper understanding of self as well enhanced performance. The pursuit of excellence would appear as craft knowledge in action rather than as an abstract understanding of excellence divorced from context. The young person would also come to understand that the value in pursuing excellence stems from the meaning that is drawn from the process not in achieving a set performance standard. Overall the athlete would learn an approach to living that could be applied to multiple life domains.

If we can fashion talent development environments to produce this kind of young athlete then we can start to resolve the tensions I experienced in my practice. In Figure 10.2 the core attributes are linked to the challenges Table 10.1 where they may have greatest impact.

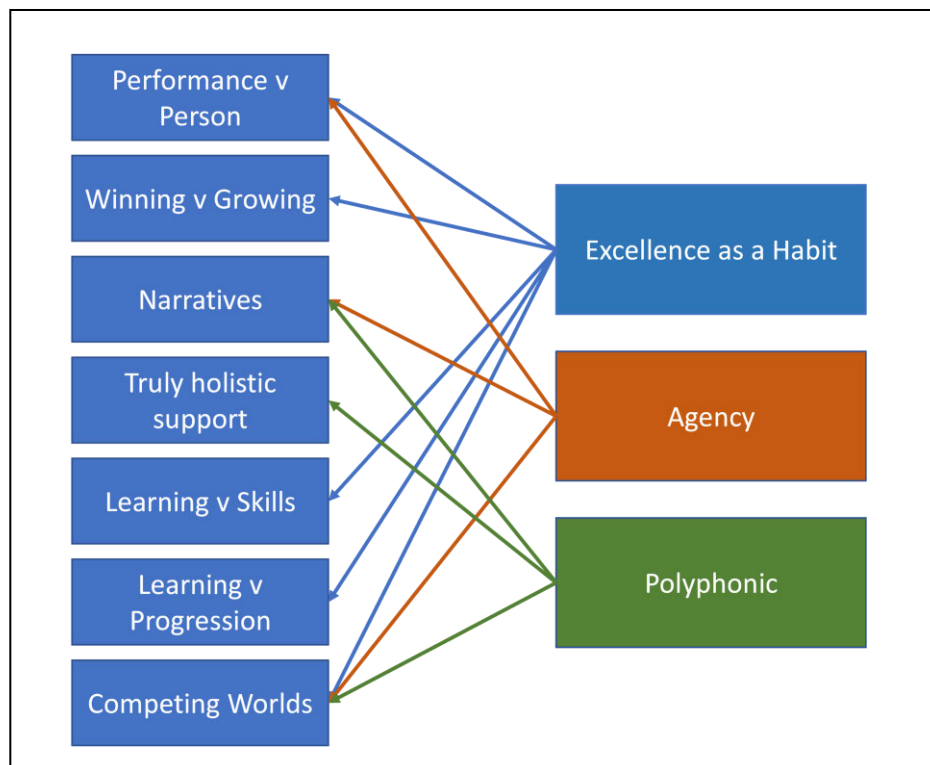


Figure 10.2 Core attributes linked to TID challenges where they may have greatest impact

By developing excellence as a habit we combat the core challenge of instrumental approaches to performance sport. We allow the athlete to retain their individuality without sacrificing a drive to produce the highest levels of athletic performance. We value the growth of the person over medal outcomes, pathway progression and the learning of performance ‘skills’. Pursuing excellence as a way of being can also link the instrumentally led worlds of education and sport.

Developing the athlete’s sense of agency can enhance their capacity to resist being commodified within talent programmes. An athlete with greater agency is better positioned to determine for themselves which narratives they are most drawn to and wish to develop. They will be able to navigate the interface more successfully between education, sport and other areas of their lives, choosing a path that is right for them. To complement this a young athlete who is comfortable being polyphonic will look beyond support systems that seek to define them in terms of only sport and education.

They will also naturally seek to explore beyond a single narrative that a system seeks to impose on them.

The challenge that remains is to start to identify pedagogies from multiple domains that can be adapted, merged and synthesized to create whole programmes that adhere to the principles set out in this chapter. In this regard I think the literature already provides a rich source of material. Different researchers and practitioners have stepped some way towards the concepts of excellence literacy without ever recognizing the ‘anchor’ of instrumental rationality. For example, the application of transformational leadership theory to coaching pedagogy (Turnnidge & Côté, 2017, 2018), the development of constraints-led coaching (Renshaw & Chow, 2019) and new perspectives on identity development (Champ, Ronkainen, Littlewood, & Eubank, 2020) are all positive lines of research with the athlete as person at their centre.

11. Conclusion and Final Reflections

My research aims;-

1. explore my experience of talent development with specific reference to the multiple roles I have held within that domain.
2. use this exploration to identify how the talent system might offer all talented young athletes a more coherent and effective developmental experience.
3. to offer the sporting community a perspective on philosophies of talent development that can support the development of better talent systems.
4. to contribute to the development and refinement of autoethnographic methods of enquiry that can be utilized by practitioners and others in sport.

The research aims I had for this thesis are shown above. They evolved through an iterative process of reflection and engagement with the literature and directed what was a significant personal, but non-linear, research journey.

My journey started with a desire to better understand the talent development processes in the UK in an objective and de-personalised way. After a life of ‘doing’ talent development work I had wanted to end with clear recommendations as to exactly how coaches, performance managers and policy makers should build better talent programmes. However, through reading a wide variety of literature I came to realise that my own experience as a practitioner meant that I could not detach myself from the topic of talent development. My critiques of the literature were inextricably linked to my experiences as a practitioner. In thinking about the practice-literature interaction I recognised that I have two dominant selves relating to performance and education. Each self provided a different lens through which I could view talent systems and this

had to be accounted for in my research. Consequently, to explore talent development I had to find ways of writing myself (my ‘selves’) in to the research and not out of it. This meant opening up to critiquing my own lived experience and practice and relating this back to theory and cultural norms. Irrespective of whether this might be an uncomfortable journey I felt it was essential. Any attempt by me to review the talent domain in a detached, ‘objective’ way would simply have been false.

The need to foreground my experience led me, via reading the work of Douglas (2009), to authethnography as a method for interweaving the personal with the theoretical. Having chosen this as a method I was disappointed to find such a paucity of it within sport given its capacity to support exploration of applied experience. Sadly I also found that, even within domains that used authoethnographic approaches more frequently (e.g. health literature, LGBTQ+ studies), the reporting of precise methods for undertaking AE was lacking. Consequently, to ensure that I engaged in a systematic, robust reflective process I had to draw from a diverse range of analytical approaches to create a personal autoethnographic method. Within my autoethnography I used a variety of techniques for data reduction, reflective synthesis and presentation in a phased process that ultimately created this thesis. In this regard I feel I have achieved the last of my research aims. I feel confident that I can now articulate a more precise sets of steps to completing an authethnography. Whilst my phased process won’t suit every researcher I feel it can provide a framework of ideas that other sport researchers can use as the foundation for building their own AE approach. In terms of my other research aims I feel that the autoethnographic approach enabled me to achieve my objectives. The exploration of the literature alongside core experiences from my performance and educational lives helped me to articulate the core issues shown in Table 11.1.

If I had to summarise my findings it would be that too often our focus on performance outcomes has blinded us to what might be best for the young athletes in our talent systems. In pulling together this final summary I re-read some of the journals I wrote

Table 11.1 Critical challenges identified in this autoethnography

<p><i>Performance v Person:</i> TID systems based on instrumental rationality value the performance more than the person.</p> <p><i>Narratives:</i> The performance world only recognises the performance narrative.</p> <p><i>Winning and Growing:</i> We need to move away from the only measure of success in performance sport being the achievement of a particular competitive outcome.</p> <p><i>Holistic support:</i> We need to ensure that our support systems are genuinely holistic.</p> <p><i>Progress not learning:</i> We must have systems that value the learning from a pathway experience</p> <p><i>Specific skills v Personal learning:</i> Performance systems dictate what skills a young athlete should develop to achieve specific performance outcomes. The athlete is not offered the freedom to lead their own learning</p> <p><i>Competing worlds:</i> The worlds of education and sport are both driven by instrumental rationality and are irreconcilable at a fundamental level.</p>

as this journey unfolded. I found that on the fifth page of my first research journal I wrote

“We reduce the individual (the athlete) to a singular focus which serves the need of the stakeholder not the person”

I wonder whether from the outset I sub-consciously felt that this is where our talent systems had ended up? My autoethnography then enabled me to pull this sense in to the light and examine it.

Having identified core issues with talent development the challenge I had to face was in re-framing my practice to address them without losing focus on the pursuit of excellence in athletic performance. To respond to this challenge I had to look outside

of the talent domain. My recognition of the negative and pervasive influence of instrumental-rationality as a base philosophy pushed me to look for an alternative philosophical path. This led me to re-defining my perspectives on talent development at a fundamental level using elite-*Bildung* and craftsmanship as base concepts. I found that both *Bildung* and craftsmanship allowed for a sustained focus on the pursuit of excellence within the talent development process. However, it was the pursuit of excellence for its own sake and for the meaning that an individual can draw from that pursuit.

Interweaving constructs from elite-*Bildung*, craftsmanship and my experience resulted in the framework shown in Figure 10.1. The primary aim of the framework is to facilitate the creation of young athletes who are able to:

-be polyphonic:

to have more than one voice or a voice that differs from the norm within sport. Young athletes who can be as energised by social connections, music, drama or study as much as their sport and be comfortable with that position.

-show increasing agency:

to seek to make their own decisions and play an active role in determining their path and sport and life. To use their voice, whatever that may be, and pursue routes through their sport experience that are most meaningful for them.¹²

-pursue excellence as a habit:

to understand how to pursue excellence in any activity that they are undertaking. To see the value to them as a person in mastering whatever task confronts them. To habitually want to produce excellence for its own sake not for the purpose of achieving a specific extrinsic outcome.

In order to facilitate the creation of a young athlete with these attributes the process that they are exposed to has to adhere to six key principles of operation.

¹² In pursuing this the adult practitioners creating talent processes still have to adhere to all appropriate legislative, educational and moral safeguards applicable to children and young adults

Embrace discontinuity and ambiguity:

To look beyond seeing the disruptions, ambiguities and conflicts that multi-faceted young lives naturally create as just problems to be solved, avoided or reduced. To see moments of discontinuity as opportunities to stimulate reflection, understanding and growth.

Promote Questioning and dialogue:

To support the young athlete in a process of continual questioning that helps the athlete discover what they need to achieve elite status. To see practice and competition as forming a dialogical relationship in which the athlete continually asks questions of themselves to stimulate continual improvement.

Recognise the intelligent hand:

See the young athlete as an indivisible whole not a separate mind and body. To construct training recognising that the young athlete lives an embodied existence, that the physical and mental aspects of experience cannot be artificially divided.

Shape practice as a narrative:

To support the athlete in apply their questioning approach in training and competition. Assist them by framing repetition in practice as being a future oriented search for difference between successive drills. Each activity, each drill, each moment in competition is part of an unfolding, future oriented narrative as the athletes seek to enhance mastery of their sport.

If applied to development processes then these principles will move an athlete away from seeing practice as simply a necessary evil or just a means to an end. It moves them away from seeing competition as simply an environment in which they can gain status through achieving extrinsic performance outcomes. These are deeper principles of development that should support athletes in seeing their experience through different lenses and help in building athletic identities based on more than just competitive performance.

And yet, these principles still allow for the pursuit of excellence to be just as strong. Training should be hard, feedback should be analytical, honest and as clear,

performance goals should be challenging. These principles do not ask for any reduction in the intensity of a search for excellence, they just frame that search in a different way.

The precise pedagogical methods that can be used in operationalising the search for excellence can be left to the coach and other practitioners to determine. What is important is that the environments being built around the young athletes contain these elements. If we can craft talent development processes based on these principles then we maximise our chance of growing athletes who can draw meaning from their talent experience in a way that it enriches their life as whole without diminishing a quest for athletic excellence. In addition, we will be developing support processes that are truly holistic. Support processes in which young athletes can assimilate their lives inside and outside sport in ways that go beyond simply seeking simultaneous performance in sporting and academic domains.

11.1 Next Steps

In undertaking this research I have tackled literature that I would never have considered at the start of the journey. I have grappled with a methodology that I didn't know existed when I began. I have learned to write in a completely new style after forty years engaging in applied sport science and management. The process of completing this work has been messy, challenging, fraught but, hopefully, worthwhile.

There are now additional steps I have to take to continue moving this work forwards. Firstly, I must learn how best to communicate my findings in a way that causes others involved in talent development to reflect and think. If I complete this work and then only seek to publish findings in journals that no practitioner ever reads then this thesis will be of value in terms of my professional development but not to a wider community. I believe a professional doctorate should seek to impact on the domain from which it arose therefore I have to seek out opportunities to speak to practitioners as well as researchers. I recognise that this may not be an easy road to travel given the stakeholders who are heavily invested in what a young athlete can do in terms of

performance but for whom the athlete's growth as a person brings little reward. Nevertheless, that it is a road I must take.

Alongside this I have to work with like-minded researchers and practitioners to offer positive, practical ideas about programme construction and pedagogy. Without offering some practical solutions to the challenges I identified I don't believe I will be true to evolution as a practitioner. Given the instrumental nature of the performance world I think I may also lose whatever credibility my voice holds in that world without considering how excellence literacy can be practically pursued.

Finally I must engage with a growing body of literature that is asking similar questions about our performance systems and our values and beliefs about winning. I feel that as the academic literature around thriving and flourishing continues to grow it will complement and challenge my current thinking. In the popular literature Cath Bishop's recent book on 'Long Win Thinking' has gained a lot of coverage in the mainstream media and has much to commend it (Bishop, 2020, 2021). Projects such as the True Athlete Project are also seeking to alter our perspectives on what athletes should really be seeking as they pursue high levels of performance (True Athlete Project, 2021). Looking at a broader swathe of practice literature from outside sport may also enhance my thinking about how we develop our practice in the talent domain. Scholarly activity and thinking around topics such as 'practice wisdom' may have much to offer (Higgs, 2019).

This conclusion simply represents a resting point in a reflective and scholarly journey towards enhancing talent development. There is still much to be done and this feels like the end of the beginning rather than an end in itself.

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On page 7 I started with the question ‘who am I, why am I here ..?’ (Steinman, 1993). Having reached this point it now feels appropriate to complete Steinman’s line.

“Who am I, why am I here..? Forget the questions, someone get me another beer!”

(Steinman, 1993)

Appendices

Appendix 1 Interview with Olivia Murphy

This Appendix contains;-

- a. Interview overview
- b. Interview transcript
- c. Outline of simple thematic analysis
- d. Informed Consent

a. Interview Overview

The interview was undertaken with a pre-determined set of topics that I wished to discuss. However, there was no set structure for the flow of the interview beyond outlining the general topics with which I was concerned. I wanted to allow ideas and issues to emerge freely as we discussed our shared recollections of two sets of experiences, Key topics for discussion are outlined below.

“Opening statement - In this interview there are absolutely no right or wrong answers to any question. This is a collaborative interview. Its about a conversation between two people NOT an interview by a detached interviewer to get at some objective ‘truth’. Sharing, comparing and developing personal opinions and perspectives on the topic is the aim of the interview. It does not have to follow a prescribed sequence of questions although there are broad themes I would like to touch on. It is perfectly reasonable for you to ask reciprocal questions to elicit my opinions if you want them. At times I may inject my thoughts and perspectives to compare with or challenge your opinions

None of my questions are set in stone,

General approach and Issues to discuss - Encourage ML to describe her recollections of the 04-06 period in the England squad. Potential areas to probe

- Highlights
- Low points
- Characters
- Outcomes
- What was working well and what wasn't
- Squad dynamics
- What were the drivers for Liv, what were the pressures?
- What were the drivers for the squad?

How did she experience the pressures of being an England player?

How did she change and develop through the period 04-06?

How did she see the squad change and other players change, if at all?

What were her feelings at the end ... the final whistle, the evening, the following day etc

Repeat the process for LL recollections.

Comparative perspectives - Did Liv feel Eng 'succeeded' and LL 'failed'?

- What did she think at the time?
- What does she think now looking back?
- Are we valuing the right things when we strive to win medals ...?
- Has Liv's subsequent work at LU influenced her perspective ?

Conclude interview by leaving the option open for either of us to chat further if additional questions or observations come to mind".

b. Transcript of Interview between ANDY Borrie & LIV Murphy

ANDY – What I want to try to and understand is the difference in what for me were 2 slightly different journeys. One with that England squad that went through the Commonwealth 2006 and the Lightning set up that went through to the major semi-final against the Mavericks in the following year and in both cases we won 1 game by 1 in the last 10 seconds and lost the other 1 by 1 in the last 10 seconds. And I want to get your perspective on those 2 journeys. So if we can start with the England one as that was your last major tournament. Did you know going in to that it was going to be your last major tournament?

LIV – Yes. So I hadn't told anybody else apart from family so I guess my journey through to that competition I knew that that was going to be the end for me. So for me that was kind of doing what I could with the best I could be at the end of that journey but knowing there would be the relief the end of that. So I think getting through, it was an interesting journey from what I remember from the rounds but I think I was probably most disappointed at the semi-final stage. So although it was great to come home with a medal and the way the game panned out because I knew it was going to be my last one. I thought Australia were there for the taking in that competition and didn't think they were that good. We were within touching distance and yes I think that was the disappointing bit for me. Obviously it was nice coming back with a medal.

ANDY – The squad that went through to that tournament what was your memories of that period like in that squad, what did it feel like being coached by Marg and what was the dynamic and feeling in that squad?

LIV – Marg was a really interesting character, just from the way she went about her business, her mannerisms, her social style with the group. I'm not sure any of us knew Marg or knew who she was, you know behind the coach. I had a pretty good relationship with her from what I remember. She was one of the coaches that would bring you in as the Captain and Vice-Captain and talk about your starting 7 and you were able to agree, disagree and you were able to give your opinions and that kind of stuff. Very rarely we disagreed but that would have been interesting I guess had we substantially disagreed, I quite liked that from her. I think she probably felt that her

place with us was as a coach and that's about it so not the kind of social side of it. Empathetic, there wasn't much of that which we probably needed we had other people in there for that purpose but yeah it was a different experience from a (3.32) or Lyn that was previously involved.

ANDY – What was the dynamic in that squad like? From my recollection it was a wide diverse range of individuals some at the start of their International careers and people like you at the end or people closing to the end. So what did that squad feel like?

LIV – I can only speak personally but I had some really close friends in the squad. The likes of Caz and Naomi and people like that I was really really close to so when I talk about not necessarily getting that support from the coach or the coaching environment I got that from other people within the group. There was a massive diversity in age, experience, background, culture. Really really different. I think a general respect across the group but not necessarily people loving each other or liking each other. You know you wouldn't necessarily spend time with each other outside of the netball environment but I think there was a general respect and drive to do well as a group. I think we had some superstars in the making so Pam as an example coming in didn't have a great tournament but sow the seeds for future. The likes of Amma, Sonia those kind of girls, again had great longevity in their careers and quite prickly in character potentially but I think that was why we probably was successful because you had that diversity across the group. Ok the one thing I probably would say looking back with hindsight now is that we didn't necessarily challenge each other that much. As a group that we all know we knew what the others were thinking but never really brought it up. I don't know if it wasn't encouraged or we weren't confident enough to do it. But I think if you look at yourself as a 40 something year old now, if I parachuted myself back there, there would definitely be more conversations than there were.

ANDY – Ok and what kind of conversations would there be?

LIV – Just things about I guess standards and expectations of each other and probably calling each other out a little bit more if those weren't adhered to or met.

ANDY – Ok and do you think because you talked about you knew it was going to be your final tournament, you thought Australia was there for the taking and there was a real focus on achieving that end point being the best you could be. Do you feel that was shared across the whole squad or were there variations of that?

LIV – I think people wanted to make a final but I don't think they believed they could make a final and I think that's two very distinct things. So of course if we had the opportunity and Australia were terrible in the semi-final then everybody would have wanted to do it. I don't believe they put in probably enough time, drive, effort. I'm not sure as the lead coach with Marg that she truly believed that we could do that either. I don't know that but that's my gut feel and it was almost like we were going to win a medal probably a Bronze and that's what we will aim for as opposed to how close can we get to this Australian team that's not that great.

ANDY – I remember we went on to Melbourne didn't we and played them in 3 non test matches and I never understood why when we were in touching distance and playing well.

LIV – Personally I remember mid-court and obviously this was your own personal battles, they didn't hang around long because they weren't good enough to stay there. Post that competition and they'd not long been there, so on a personal level I thought they were there for the taking only now again with hindsight we probably didn't have an attack end that was going to beat the best two teams in the World.

ANDY – Yes we did that's probably where we broke down a bit our shooting stats were always 5% off.

LIV – 70% if we were lucky whereas they were up at 85.

ANDY – 85 and that kills you because defensively you had Sonia, we had Amma, you had Julie and you were turning the ball over you...

LIV – Jade, me, Caz

ANDY – mid-court we couldn't compete we couldn't quite do it at the shooting end. So you feel generally the squad were striving to achieve but there was probably a slight **dissanance (8.33)** in whether that people truly believed Gold, Silver.

LIV – And again this is with hindsight too because what the programme had to do to change in order to compete on a regular basis some of those people, and I was included in that, weren't prepared to take that extra step with the England setup. Were we prepared to be centralised, were we able to do that financially – no not at that time. Would some people towards the end of their career make that call – no probably not. Some of those things would have taken to break back a bit really. But again that's with hindsight and not thinking at that time.

ANDY – So during that run-up into that tournament what were the highlights in that period of time – were there any highlights? Were there any lowlights?

LIV – Was Amanda in that group – I can't remember. Can you just name 3 of them.

ANDY – She must have been because she took the piss out of me for over paying a porter at an airport in Jamaica.

LIV – The reason I asked that question is one of the, again it's trying to re-collect, one of the lowlights was Amanda not playing. She was my Vice-Captain pretty much the whole time I was Captain and I can't remember if it was tournament or out of tournament but Marg would down and say who should start in this game and you know 99% of the time Amanda would be starting in any of my teams and I would be starting

in any of my teams and I remember sitting in a meeting and she wasn't on Marg's team sheet and that was pretty tough to take as a partnership, as a pair and I think the impact that had on her and around the group. You know what Amanda's like she tried not to let anything get in the way of her personality but she probably is the most competitive person on the group – that was tough. I don't know if you remember this, Marg leaving straight after the play-off game come back, obviously got our medals, the new coach has gone, left her accommodation and disappeared. Whether that's a lowlight I'm not sure but it stands out.

ANDY – Yeah well that says something about the dynamic.

LIV – Yeah, yeah and I think connecting to the group and probably not realising what they still needed. The closure from the tournament or the pleasure or dis-pleasure of what you've achieved. Yeah that's an odd thing. I think some of the tough bits you go through with your team mates are probably highlights as well as lowlights. I remember sharing a room with Naomi coming back she hardly played any games so it was really tough for her but, she was such a good team person and probably managed her own expectations very very well that she was able to support me when I needed it or the rest of the team when they needed it as well.

ANDY – The actual two key areas; the Australia game where we didn't hit the heights that we could have done they probably, my recollection, is they stepped up slightly in semi-final in front of a home crowd.

LIV – I remember their shooting circle being ridiculously like on form still I think we were still making a lot of errors elsewhere. But yeah I remember their shooting circle and Kath turning and shooting **and that stuff**.

ANDY – McMahon had one of her better games. So that game we didn't perform, they did so you're in the Bronze medal match. What are your recollections of that game and how it flowed and panned out?

LIV – So the first bit I remember from the end of the Australia game is me running off the court being upset. Running off, hiding for 5 minutes coming back knowing I've got to do media and then got to prepare for the next day. So I remember that bit and then remember the funny things you do recollect, the position I played I remember getting hit during the game and I think those things are significant cause when I got hit we were coming back and it was a typical Jamaican netball-style that was kind of momentum stopper. I was trying not to take time but had to at that moment. I remember taking time around the circle edge and remember Amma, Elaine the shooter fighting for the ball trying to slow it down back to the defence circle obviously this was towards the end of the game. I remember me, Abbie as she was playing Goal Attack and I was playing Wing Defence and remember her just keep laying it back to me on the line and going again and we're just trying to maintain possession and I guess that feeling of calmness but yet still oh my God just keep giving me the ball, like you know it's fine, it's fine, keep going keep going. I remember that and I remember the end of the game I don't really remember and I've only seen photos of the end of the game and I'm missing from team huddles and so I'm not sure where I am. I'm still like I have no idea at this moment, maybe I was doing media or something I don't know but yes there's a picture of the team huddle and I'm just not there. Then I have a picture in my head of seeing randomly Denise and Anita face painted all that kind of stuff in the crowd, so that's my kind of feel of the end.

ANDY – Did you have any sense in the first quarter we had a shocker and we were losing by 12 or something. Were you in that moment had a sense of that were you kind of going, crap?

LIV – I couldn't tell you, but I remember being 10 down. I remember feeling really flat which is probably being a signal for us being down and quiet and a few voices trying to raise it. I couldn't tell you anything about what was said to us I just remember the feeling of flatness and personally it was like this can't end on that flat note either. So yeah trying to re-energise people and connect to the people closest to me is the bit I remember from that. I then remember the feeling of the tide turning, you almost got that momentum shift again when we, that's much later on in the game, when we started converting a few more shots or turning the ball over a couple of times. I still remember towards the end of that low I didn't think that we were going to win as they still appeared to be able to find their shooter pretty convincingly until right in the last moments of the game.

ANDY – What was the emotion that was upper most at that point Abbie put that one away with 10 seconds on the clock? Was it a relief, joy, ecstasy, whatever?

LIV – Probably a bit of everything but I think the overriding emotion was probably relief but that's again a personal thing because I was at the end of my journey. I think the rest of the emotion then from other people encompasses you a little bit more. There some of those girls had never won a medal before, you know they were bouncing around and all that kind of stuff. For them it was the ecstasy as opposed to relief as they had nothing to lose almost. Whereas I probably felt I had a little more on the line at that moment and then again going back to the closest people in the group I remember finding those people and being on the journey with them.

ANDY – So you knew that was the final bit of your journey and you've got to an end winning that game but it clearly wasn't the end that you were driving for which was to beat Australia in the semi. Do you think that had an impact on how you responded to the Bronze medal match. I'm just trying to think it through in my head if the players never really expected to beat Australia here then you don't feel that emotion very much.

LIV – There weren't that many tears after the semi-final now there may well have been but I don't remember them apart from probably my own. Which to me shows emotional connection to win or lose in a semi-final there probably would have been if we hadn't made a medal. It was a bit more matter of fact for some people that tomorrow's big game that kind of thing but that doesn't explain the flatness at the start of the game but that could have been a personal flatness.

ANDY – We were flat down the court and I remember watching it, c'mon! It wasn't even that it was slowly evolving disbelief that we could get to that particular game and we knew it was important and the team was flat and it was visibly flat and I guess as a non-player I can remember looking at that trying to go, how? This is a crunch game and I think in my head one of my sort of reflections on it because I was sitting watching it with Nigel and I think our perspectives on it stemmed partly from his being

the Performance Director and me stepping in to that kind of role elsewhere and the significance of winning or losing that game not you guys were going to be emotionally feeling and not quite understanding how the coach could get the team to step out in the Bronze medal is actually flat. I guess it's a different perspective on it.

LIV – I remember Marg before the play-off game showed Steven Gerrard, do you remember that? It might have been you showing it from Istanbul.

ANDY – Yeah

LIV – Showing that bit and I remember in the game some of us almost trying to talk about that and resurrect some of that and Stevie was like this and all that kind of stuff and trying to do those things because we had literally just seen it.

ANDY – But obviously that was a very resonating view as that connected with your emotion.

LIV – Yeah and family and my dad and everything else. But probably for other people they were like who the hell's that. Because if you don't like football and you don't live Liverpool and you've not been around it, different yeah.

ANDY – The whole Marg thing I completely get you saying there was a lack of connection and empathy, my recollections of Marg, I had a lovely time working for her because she never challenged me and it didn't impact me in the same way and she was just a laugh most of time but at the core of things she was about her and she wanted the team to be successful because then she would be successful rather than she wanted the team to be successful because she wanted the team to be successful hence the right ok this is all over I want to go on holiday, I'm going and I think there is a theme that through the two years and beyond the World Champs into 2008 and in reality the team should have parted company with her in 2006 and then it would done better in 2008. It's strange how that the last 10 seconds...

LIV – Kept her in her job.

ANDY – Yes it did, it did. I remember one of the first things Nigel said to me when the final whistle had gone and we'd got the Bronze medal, well that's worth about £2,000,000 a year or something like that, because it's a huge perspective on it.

LIV – I guess from Marg's perspective she didn't really know her players so post Commonwealth Games I sat down with her and told her that was it and she spent the next 3 months trying to convince me that it wasn't it. But I was like if you know me you'd know this was it like if I've come to this decision it's game over and she continued to try and do that. Which I know I get as a coach, Captain and all that stuff.

ANDY – Well that would have been driven by I need my Captain I want my star mid-courter not is this good for Olivia which is not quite where she was at. I do have one bad recollection of players, one recollection of sitting in a performance analysis meeting a tour of Australia and she had been looking at centre court clips and she spent two minutes talking to Jade in how she should have played something. At the end of that she turns round and said what do you think JD? There's silence. She goes what do you think JD? That's the point we all realised Jade had forgotten the meeting. Marg spent two minutes, it was like she was trying to blind you with a laser pointer thing and that was my yeah you haven't quite got this cause you don't realise who was in the room.

LIV – That's brilliant.

ANDY – So anyway, Lightning then. Completely different. When we started the franchise my recollection....

LIV – You remember that room when we sat around talking about it..

ANDY – The ambition was to be in that final within that 2 years. We got a team that could have done that so what are your recollections of those first couple of seasons?

LIV – There was such a transition I think from the previous competition to the new one that I think some of my recollections of how much do we try to change versus how much do we just tick along with having good players and almost get over the line and I think at that point there were probably only 2 or 3 teams that were going to make the final. On a good day we were going to be competitive so trying to work out what to change or what not to change and it was interesting having Rosie in there heading it up was always, as you well know, I've known her for a long time so having her was interesting as she brings so many good things, so many good traits and almost the complete opposite to Marg from that perspective. So how to bring a team together, how to get the best out of individuals, understanding how people tick, team camaraderie all that kind of stuff she's got in abundance but, didn't necessarily have the technical tactical nous to get a team through a game. Again with lots of hindsight and experiences since then that was probably the thing that we missed the most. Like someone saying do this and it will work and you will compete or you will win the game. It was very much around principals and this is roughly how we want to play the game and not very few specifics about how to do that and that's probably jumping ahead a little bit why we end up losing by one or we should have been probably 5, 6, 7 or 8 up rather than losing by one. It's that tactical, technical nous that gets you over the line and probably my other recollection of that group and probably Lightning on the whole it's was all a little bit nice. So if we got a coach that was also nice and trying to keep everybody happy you don't have the ruthlessness of an 'Amanda' or I'm not saying 'Maggie' is not ruthless but she's got that streak in her like no get off, you're in that's what we need to do, that kind of thing. That has definitely not been our culture and wasn't at that time I would say. Probably just some of the, like again funnily enough, from our circles we had a great mid-court that was better than anyone else in the league, no question and then we, this sounds really awful, but we made the best of what we had at each end. It kept us how to **(28.38)** pupil like that were brilliant on their day but on another day horrendous. So yeah I guess I remembered the feeling of knowing that I've got to perform because our mid-section is going to win or lose us this game effectively. So probably there's a little bit of pressure that goes with that but also it's what I like to do. I like to play and I liked that bit of it so it was never really too stressful from that point of view. That was a lot of waffle, sorry.

ANDY – No it's really useful. I get the clear impression it wasn't as an environment, it wasn't as driven or focussed or anything like that as that England journey and that England experience.

LIV – Yeah probably not. Different drivers I think. Different as in the Loughborough environment it was a little bit more relaxed you know, a bit more probably more enjoyable. People were I know you choose to play for England and put yourself in that environment, but people were doing this sort of thing as an add-on to what they were doing. So they were effectively making the effort to come all the time. So there's a different driver and you see people on a very regular basis, my sister-in-law is playing and like that kind of stuff is probably a little bit closer than the England stuff. So there was definitely a different feel to it we definitely talked about winning, we definitely talked about making finals and that kind of stuff and I do think there was a true sense of belief. I think again personally I probably thought that on a good day that we could win it. If there was a little crack at either end we could win it. So there was probably an element of doubt in me at that time. Thinking we could have or couldn't.

ANDY – I always felt we were a quarter of another shooter away from winning it. My over-arching memory of watching Alex in those first couple of years was never, never quite believing the ball was going in the ring until it actually went in the ring. Even if she was under the chuffing posts in my head it was always 50 50 whether she would get it up and in and feeling if we could have possibly picked up 2 or 3 different shooters from around the league and plonked them into our shooting circle and we'd have won as we would have been more consistent.

LIV – Definitely and there were some match-ups that were going to go in our favour so Amanda against Alex, you knew it was going to be a tough day in the office. Louisa was another example at the other end, anyone tall we'd struggle against as we just didn't have the height in there. Again it goes back to what can we do in the middle to affect this game more than anything, we need to stop it going that way. We need to make sure we're getting enough ball the other way.

ANDY – Because you talk about the different nature of the two groups and also in part the nature of the two coaches would you say that one experience was more enjoyable than the other?

LIV – I'd like to say each experience had a different thing for me. Here I was driving the technical stuff or the training sessions, selection decisions therefore, player coaching if not in title whilst being there. In the England scenario it was definitely much more the coach is over here somewhere and I'm that liaison or link between the two; players and coach. I guess from my perspective it challenged different skillsets at different times. I was probably more of Rosie's confidence Marg didn't need the on-court confidence bit but she did need to understand what the rest of the people were thinking and I had to find a way to translate that. That brought two different things out of me. I loved the dynamic of being in Loughborough and it was home and the people around me, super confident in that environment, definitely enjoyed it. Effectively I was leading a lot of it so a lot of it was based on what I wanted and how I felt the environment should be. England was probably a little bit more serious and again that was probably the way the coach would lead the environment. You were less relaxed in that environment as a person not sure if that's a good or bad thing, I think it's a bit of both. You need a bit of fear factor in there but you also need to get the best out of people. So if I had to pick I would definitely say the Lightning or Loughborough one but that's not to say that I didn't enjoy England.

ANDY – You're right I wasn't trying to say one of them wasn't enjoyable but it's how they connect with you as a person and I think you've articulated that really really well. So we have a Lightning group that's relatively new for that first couple of seasons we could have reached a final, we could have reached the final in year 1 but lost a 4 goal lead in one; not that that's etched in to my memory.

LIV – God, you're analytical mind.

ANDY – Mate, I was watching it, you probably remember it more when you watch it. One day I will forgive Karen for going off side at two consecutive centre passes but we haven't got there yet. We get to that semi-final against Mav's again – it was always bloody Mav's and we lost the first quarter by 8 or 9 so for me as an observer it was

etched... you're in it and you don't have the same sense of awareness and it goes down to the last 10 seconds. Becky throws the ball and Alex moved the other way and blah blah blah and we lose. Do you have any sense of that game or how you felt at the end of it?

LIV – Was Collette there? Where was it?

ANDY – It was at Hertfordshire sports.

LIV – I have very little sense of that game if I'm honest, very little. There's a few Lightning big games that I remember and I remember my reactions afterwards so I remember the game down at Guildford Spectrum where we lost in the final. So I remember that vividly mainly because I remember the mistake I made which I felt had a momentum shift the other way and Collette was definitely there and I remember that feeling.

ANDY – It's absolutely fine, it's interesting isn't it what people and what isn't and I think that's very much your perspective on it.

LIV – It's funny I remember the game where we beat Mavs that year in the rounds and away and I remember a bit of that game again from a personal perspective I remember I think Amanda had just come back from an injury and wasn't quite as sharp enough so I was so confident in delivering the ball in the circle in all kinds of different ways cause I felt that was different.

ANDY – It's strange out of those early season those first few seasons the games, I remember the two semis against Mavs and I obviously remember the final. The other ones that stick in my mind was when we played Bath down in Bath in the semi and we didn't Amanda and we didn't have Jade and it went to extra time and Jo almost gave us the win. In a way that was one of the best performances we put out because Brownee and Penny were outstanding that day, outstanding I remember that very vividly. I

remember a couple of the Bath games very vividly I remember Amma taking the ball and clattering Tamsin. I remember when we played semi-final at Sheffield – Northumbria – I remember the fact that some of the players had all put fake tan on and chose to wear white dresses and everybody's dresses were brown as it had all come off from their legs. Why I remember that God only knows.

LIV – Well I think that was one of probably the best 30 minutes of netball that I've ever played in that game and that was partly because Collette had given me a game plan, a personal one and my responsibility was to fulfil that and if I did that the team would be successful. I remember apart from one picture of me not doing it for 30 minutes I was probably the best I'd been and that was quite a long time after I don't know what year it was but it was a long time after I'd retired internationally.

ANDY – It could only have been a couple of seasons because that could only have been a couple of years after International retirement.

LIV – I remember it being 30 minutes with Tasha and Becky and Jo.

ANDY – My recollection of the Mavs game when we lost by 1 it's not so much, I mean the end of the game was gutting but it was the following 24/48 hours because what I guess you guys wouldn't have seen, was I experienced what Nigel experienced had you lost the Bronze by 1 which was a bunch of people having a rant and rave about how we had not managed to reach the final. So in my head those 2 things went down to the last 10 seconds was one of them we scored and labelled successful and one we don't and it's labelled failure. If we had not scored that goal in the Bronze medal match would you have seen that same journey as a failure as opposed to success?

LIV – Probably. From a personal note definitely. Who knows had I not made my decision before that competition would I have stayed around for another competition hoping to finish on a podium, I don't know. At the time I didn't have to make that decision did I. Looking back I don't know how I would have felt finishing on what I would have considered as major failure in that respect. As a campaign I completely

agree with you I think Marg was pretty lucky to keep her job at that time but I'm not sure we had loads of other options lined up. So that's probably another reason that played in to that and at that point who knows what people took on board around stats although they're all there.

ANDY – Now that you're in the role that you're in working here, what's your sense of what success is and what failure is?

LIV – From a netball context I have a real reality check often because it's kind of relative to resource and relative to time and the journey that you're going on with a place like this when you get a constant cycle of people you've got to be realistic about what you're achieving. The netball programme this year I would say is over-achieving compared to resource, quality of player we've got, first year head coach, that kind of stuff. From externally you would still expect us to make semis etc because we have done the last couple of years. I think we are really trying to be clear that success isn't just winning at the end of it and I'm really comfortable with that. Having said that you still want the driver or the target to win. So Peace, Shamira, Beth played in here last year we definitely failed not winning the final last year we were absolutely the best team and should have won the game, Beth going down injured doesn't help but we absolutely should have done. So that moment was a failure but a success of getting those 3 people contracts out on Australia is an absolute success. The journey that Peace went on for the 3 years that she's been on is a huge success and a credit to the programme here so I think for me success and failure is chopped up into lots of different parts and I think we have to be a little bit careful though. Like I could say to you our programme is a success cause look what we've sent out to Australia we still need to perform and win so I think it's trying to find the weight in and around those things to define success and failure.

ANDY – So if you had a Lightning programme that was success and won on court but we did that by buying a couple of Australians we would be successful by the metric of winning the games, would that be enough?

LIV – Personally no, but I think because it's not just about me it's bigger than that, there's a process piece and all that stuff that goes with it. Some people would literally

just see Lightning win so a tick it looks good. Personally it's much bigger than that so the whole cliché of what we do every day. Amma being here last year was an absolute disaster from a coaching perspective and from a culture perspective. It took a lot of picking up the pieces in and around it so although externally we were looking like we were absolutely flying, internally we were a failure last year absolutely a failure because we weren't doing what we should have done for the athletes well somebody wasn't and the rest of us were picking up the pieces in trying to do that. So yes I think it depends what perspective you're looking at winning is really important to some people and it brings certain things, for me personally it's not enough.

ANDY – So it's winning plus something, if you could have winning plus a little bit of something else or a lot of something else plus a little bit of winning where would you sit?

LIV – My scale is a little bit of winning and a lot of everything else. So Hanna was a perfect example of that. Came here as a shy, grumpy madam if hopefully going to leave here with a good career, a good degree, a confident individual. I see her now speaking to Tracey from an England perspective when she's just had, she's just not been selected and she's a brilliant young lady, for me that's as important if not more so than getting a medal – Gold one.

ANDY – Do we lose that? Did the sport lost that? That's the bit I'm really struggling to get my head round because to me that England journey when we score a goal in the last 10 seconds and everybody goes yay, the coach carries on for another 2 years but that coach and that set-up and it all falls apart and it's a disaster in Auckland or wherever it was and everybody says well that was a car crash and we could see that coming.

LIV – Yeah, connect the dots here.

ANDY – Yeah and so extensively that was a success but the underlying bit was the lack of connection between coach and the players and the good development of the players and the exact opposite is a Lightning set-up that really values those personal

things but then doesn't stick a ball in the last 10 seconds and that's levelled a failure and I'm still struggling where that line should be.

LIV – Yeah I think it's because of the people judging and if you were judging it yourself then you may still judge it a success based on what you've been around all the time but unfortunately we don't always judge our own and when people recruit in to a winning team they might go because they win, not because they've checked out the background of what they do every day. I think it's really interesting now with Sara coming in one of the things she's talked about is having a ruthless nature which ruthless is a really interesting word but I guess if you can create the environment that's still developing people but have the ruthless moments, can you still get both and I'll be fascinated to see her journey and the type of player she attracts or develops in amongst that.

ANDY – And that ruthless is a really good word because people talk about high performance sport and development and the need to be ruthless but there is that fine balance where that ruthless becomes so negative for an individual that I can't quite see the cost is worth the benefit and struggle with that.

LIV – Yes definitely and probably an ideal example of me in this scenario is Beth so is out in Australia this year, last year she got an offer to go out mid-season. I remember this conversation with you way back when but I would have said yes to Beth to go out to Australia even though it was the middle of our season because it was the best thing for her as an individual to grow and for her future. Here collectively we said no because she was under contract and it was about us trying to perform and win a competition and that probably says a lot about my side in the scale but also externally how we're judged and still trying to compete when as it happens she still managed to get a contract she bloody did her ACL which is a whole different story yet to me the success of her as an individual going out to play in Australia should have trumped the fact that we want to make a final.

ANDY – Was I involved in that conversation?

LIV – No but we had a conversation years ago about...

ANDY – Amma did the dirty on us...she'd signed and taken a scholarship and after a few games went argh...

LIV – Yeah, I think if we were to go to another franchise in this Country hell no, but if it's a massive step up which that would have been.

ANDY – I think I would hope I could look at it from the point of view what are we teaching the individual here because if they've signed a contract you've made a commitment to something, so yes that new experience may be brilliant for you but there is personal integrity thing in following something through and I would hope that my decision would be based upon that learning for the individual by going or by having the integrity to stay rather than what's best for here.

LIV – Yeah it's a real tough one though as effectively that would have limited our chance of making the final. She was one of our stand out performers so it it's a really tough one. We had also been stung by when Jade was here because she did leave mid-season and we took that on the chin.

ANDY – It's so hard.

LIV – Yeah it's tough when you're competing in that environment but I guess the ultimate driver as well as I want to see them go on and play for England and win Gold medals so I want help them get them in that place that's going to give them the best opportunity to do that as well.

ANDY – I think one of things that's been a concern, that's probably too strong a word, is we seem in this Country to develop a mindset characteristic that it's where you finish on the medals table is important rather than what's happening personally to the

individual and you hear more and more stories about athletes like Elise with anxiety depression. I almost feel like we've lost a sense of the joy that can come from being involved in an elite sport or the value in that striving as opposed to wanting to win a medal the 2 things different. In order to win a medal you have to strive but the important thing is to strive not just to win the medal.

LIV – And I think as I've got older and definitely now I'm coaching more I'm trying hard to enjoy the journey too cause I think it's really tough as an athlete to actually enjoy the journey and remember the highs and lows, as you asked me before, it's really difficult to remember those things where as a coach as much as it's stressful and you're sitting there watching actually reflect on the bits you loved to do. We've got a couple of great examples Peace being one of them and Mary being another one who sometimes you have to pinch yourself about what they have and haven't had and the opportunity that they're being given here and grabbing with 2 hands and running with it and I think that brings you back down to Earth sometimes about is it about the people or is it about winning at the end of it.

ANDY – And do you think we don't teach athletes to enjoy the journey do we?

LIV – No

ANDY – We don't teach athletes about enjoy this because it could be one of the best parts of your life.

LIV – Beth and Nat had a photo in last year's campaign of the 2 of them after the semi-final win and I said to them you need to keep that picture because it's like they've literally got their arms round each other and loving life and I said you won't remember this moment unless you keep the photo and remind yourself of it often because it's bloody hard work for 60 minutes of that game, your balls out for effectively 60 minutes so the elation of that at the end you need to hold on to and you've done it with one of your best mates as well. Yeah so it's really tough to enjoy that journey.

ANDY – Yeah it is and I almost feel the way high performance sport has gone we have moved further and further and further away from teaching athletes or allowing athletes to actually enjoy the journey and which is actually interesting talking to you. If I think about my response to winning the Bronze medal I can remember that feeling of relief and elation, nothing like yours obviously, but having been part of that and that was the first time I'd actually seen an England Team actually win a medal and then the Lightning bit about the agonising of losing that and those are my 2 emotional memories and the realities along the way there was so much else that I struggled to put a label on or struggle to pull out and that's wrong. There's more depth and richness to these experiences than just these 2 performances and the goal at the end of the day.

LIV – And this group now talk about one of their 3 key words, they call it enjoyitvity which is obviously not a word but whatever they're doing they want to be trying to enjoy it and if they mess up they will laugh about because they spend so much time doing this why not enjoy it. I think the other 2 are growth and competitiveness so they still want to do those things but enjoy the ride.

ANDY – It is that and I love to see that word enjoy in there because you hear the ruthlessness and you hear the marginal gains and you hear all of those bits abnausia and it almost at times people look like you're not performance focussed enough if you say actually I'd like people to get a sense of joy out of this and hear them laugh and all those kind of things which is strange.

LIV – And ultimately you'd choose the game because you love to do it well that's the way I feel about it.

ANDY – One memory from here that really resonated for me towards the end of my time here was I was talking to George who started coaching here as Leicester hooker or whatever he was and we were paying him peanuts absolute utter peanuts and he kept turning up coaching and I remember planning my pitch and talking and going George what is it about this that pulls you here? And he goes well til I started doing this I didn't realise I completely stopped enjoying anything to do with the sport for the last 6 years of my professional career and I hadn't enjoyed a game of rugby and I thought shit we should not be doing that to people. That resonates and also having

gone and worked in the school where they've not got mega talented athletes but there's one or two who can go to International level and a number who can reach a lot of higher and understanding what they are experiencing and seeing where they start to lose joy and seeing kids who are joyful and get on a talent pathway very quickly and stop enjoying it and that is just..

LIV – I remember having a conversation with Julie, you remember Julie don't you? So we used to have home training here, weekly basis for the first 30 minutes of every session we would literally be running to and from cones and I remember she said to me why do you look like not you're not happy and I said because you're making me run to a flipping cone for 30 minutes, what I'm not here like, give me a ball and I would immediately smile at you. This is why I'm here allow me to enjoy what I'm doing not just run to a bloody cone for 30 minutes when this is our only 2 hours together as a group netball wise. Give me a ball, I think she thought I was crazy but I was like it's simple.

ANDY – Well we've almost come to this concept that ruthlessness is what you need to get to the top of sport and ruthlessness is associated with sternness and negativity and seriousness and I don't see why joy but with honesty can't get you to the same place.

LIV – That's a much different, it gives you a completely different picture in your head about what that looks like than the ruthlessness bit.

ANDY – Strange isn't it, thank you **LIV**.

c. Thematic Analysis

The analysis of the interview was undertaken using a loose thematic approach. The transcript was read on several occasions each separated by at least 5 days.

On each occasions notes were taken of the key themes that resonated with me as I read the transcript. Each reading of the transcript then brought an additional layer of understanding and reflections on the interaction between the emerging themes, my interpretation of various literatures and my own practice.

I then started to synthesise the thoughts that the interview generated by placing ideas on post-it notes and collating them in groups on a whiteboard. This generated clusters of ideas and I then looked for linkages between groups and patterns of thinking that crossed groups.




Figure 1 Exemplars of thematic analysis using a whiteboard

This analysis yielded diagrams such as the ones shown below. These were captured and recorded in note keeping software. The pictures were then referred to when further reflecting on my experience and constructing the analysis contained in Chapter 4.

The main themes emerging from the interview to influence my thinking were;-

- Success is a multi-factor concept
- Your perspective on a performance journey is a function of your position in the squad
- Social bonding is important
- High-performance sport creates intense emotional responses but with no focus on enjoyment
- Each player/coach has a very personal response to events
- Honesty and challenge amongst a squad are pre-requisites to achieve high-performance

d Informed Consent – Letter & Form

 UNIVERSITY OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE <i>at CHELTENHAM and GLOUCESTER</i>	University of Gloucestershire Oxstalls Campus, Gloucester, GL2 9HW	http://www.glos.ac.uk/	Fax: 01242 715222 Tel: 01242 715123
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Principal Investigator	
Mr Andy Borrie Doctoral Student	
Faculty of Applied Sciences, University of Gloucestershire Oxstalls Campus, Oxstalls Lane, Gloucester, GL2 9HW [Redacted]	

Title of Study: Reflections on Talent Development: Roles, philosophies and conflicts

Dear Liv,

As you know I am completing a professional doctorate at the University of Gloucestershire undertaking research in to the talent system in UK sport. Given the significance of talent development to elite sport understanding the philosophies, values and beliefs that underpin how our national system delivers its talent programmes is of great importance. However, interaction between critical stakeholders is under-researched. Organisations in both the educational and sporting sectors appear to have different, almost competing, philosophies as to how and why we should engage in talent development.

As part of the research process I am talking to key colleagues about our shared experiences of working in talent development systems and I would be very appreciative if you would take part in my study. I would like to sit and interview you about your experiences of the talent system and in particular the period of time from 2004-2007 when you were playing for England and Loughborough Lightning. I anticipate that this would be a single interview but we might also wish to have further conversations as we reflect on what we have discussed.

The interview would be voice recorded and then transcribed verbatim. All records will be kept private and secure and I will be the only person who has access to the raw material. You can request that the raw data is destroyed at any time.

As the study progresses I will contact you at regular intervals to let you know the main findings and check that you remain happy for your contribution to remain in the study. You can withdraw consent for your data to be used up to 6 months after the interview(s). If you wish to withdraw please write to me or email me at the address shown above so that there is a clear record of your withdrawal.

In writing up this research all events and participant details will be anonymized and no participant will be identifiable by name. Once the study is completefinished I intend to present the results at conferences and publish in academic journals maintaining the anonymity of all participants throughout.



The University of Gloucestershire faculty research ethics panel has approved this study. Please contact Dr Robin Bown, (Vice-Chair of the Ethics Committee), at the University of Gloucestershire, if you have any concerns (Tel: [Redacted] Email: [Redacted]).

If you would like to participate in this study, please read and sign the informed consent.

Many thanks

[Redacted]

Andy Borrie

 UNIVERSITY OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE	
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Appendix 2 Interview with Joanne Emmett

This Appendix contains;-

- e. Interview overview
- f. Interview transcript
- g. Outline of simple thematic analysis
- h. Informed Consent

Interview Overview

The interview was undertaken with a pre-determined set of topics that I wished to discuss. However, there was no set structure for the flow of the interview beyond outlining the general topics with which I was concerned. I wanted to allow ideas and issues to emerge freely as we discussed our shared recollections of two sets of experiences, Key topics for discussion are outlined below.

“Opening statement - In this interview there are absolutely no right or wrong answers to any question. This is a collaborative interview. Its about a conversation between two people NOT an interview by a detached interviewer to get at some objective ‘truth’. Sharing, comparing and developing personal opinions and perspectives on the topic is the aim of the interview. It does not have to follow a prescribed sequence of questions although there are broad themes I would like to touch on. It is perfectly reasonable for you to ask reciprocal questions to elicit my opinions if you want them. At times I may inject my thoughts and perspectives to compare with or challenge your opinions

None of my questions are set in stone,

General approach and Issues to discuss - Encourage JE to describe her recollections of our collaborative work on lifestyle support with elite student-athletes. Potential areas to probe

Areas to discuss

The talented young athlete experience ...

What were the motivational drivers for the s-a's?

In general how did s-a's cope with being an athlete and a student?

Did they see themselves more as 'athlete' or 'student' or a balance? Did this change depending on their performance level i.e. were the ones on Podium or Potential more likely to associate with 'athlete' rather than 'student'?

How many of the s-a's had a clear life direction? Do you think they had a sense of 'self' that was outside of their being an aspiring elite athlete?

When were they at their happiest? When were they at their most vulnerable?

What did 'success' look like for them? What did 'success' look like for you?

Challenges

What were the biggest challenges s-a's faced when they hit key transitions or critical events? (at point of entry; at point of exit; de-selection; injury). How did this manifest itself in their responses/behaviours?

Were the s-a's equipped to deal with the challenges they faced? Did they have any real awareness of the concept of 'transitions'?

[In your work was the HADM ever of real value ...?]

Growth & Change

Did their perspectives change over time as they moved from yr1 to yr3?

POR – what was your experience of that as a concept? How often was it a positive experience for the s-a and how often a negative experience?

Conclude interview by leaving the option open for either of us to chat further if additional questions or observations come to mind”.

b. Transcript of Interview between ANDY Borrie & JO Emmett

ANDY – You know the kind of stuff that I want to understand which is your experience of working with those student athletes.

JO – Yeah

ANDY – So you have spent a lot of time working with a whole range of them. So what do you think were the things motivating them, to drive them, to do the stuff that they were doing like the extra training.

JO – Are you talking about as an athlete or as a student.

ANDY – I’m talking about as a person. What drove them as a person as they’re making choices all the time, to be an athlete.

JO – I think it was probably quite varied. So I think you probably had the ones here who were very driven as an athlete, some of them who wanted to do both and then some of them who it was very

important to them to get a degree and then they're also a good sports person so doing training as well and I think their motivations probably change over time because some of them would be not fully committed to their academics when they started but by the end of, well sometimes too late, but they sometimes realise part way through that actually this is important to me and sometimes I think that was probably driven by realising by seeing the implications as if they didn't commit a bit more to their studying.

ANDY – Ok, so when they came in with those 3 being as in I'm an athlete first, I'm balanced or I'm a student first was there any consistency in kind of the route they had gone through to get to at that point? Was it the better athletes who were more I'm an athlete first or was it just completely random?

JO – I think it was pretty random. The other thing I would say is I would say I think that has changed over time so now I think we have more who are balanced or committed to their studies and I don't know whether that is because they are paying a significant chunk of cash to be here and whether that's coming from them or through their parents I don't know but the academics have become more important I would say.

ANDY – Ok and the ones you are talking about, who sort of went down that path and started to see academia and their degree being more important to them, is it a sense 'actually I need to get this so I have a career' or was it a sense of 'well actually being an athlete isn't working out so I need to go and do something else'? So is it positive move becoming important or kind of a response to negativity?

JO – Oh I think it was probably more to a response to negativity. So it was either the realisation that their sport wasn't going to hit the next level and meeting the international bit they were aspiring to, or they were seeing it as their backstop and what they would do if they got injured. Or if in 5 years time their sport didn't work out then they have got something else so I would say it's more a response to negativity than a positive step towards the academic side.

ANDY – Ok so you have got 3 different kind of groups. How did they cope as a whole as a student athlete. What were the biggest barriers they faced, the biggest problems they encountered from your perspective?

JO – I think organising themselves was probably the first one. So a lot of these athletes have had a support system around them, so their parents, coaches, teachers all kinds of people around them. Organising them, helping them with work if they missed lessons, helping them catch-up, keeping an eye on deadline, coursework and all that stuff. Also parents are washing their kit and driving them to right places and making sure they're all on the right timetable from a sport point of view. So I think coming here is quite a shock to a lot of people even, not even just sports people, but just students just having to sort everything out for themselves. Once they have sorted their lives out with food shopping, cooking and that kind of stuff. I still think there is always a thread of time management through this as if you are going to do this much training and competing and eat right and sleep right, and do your studying we've got a girl at the moment who is doing engineering and I'm very impressed with her and how she manages to have so many contact hours, and she plays in one of our biggest sports, with all the training and the matches and travel and she's doing amazingly well. We had a swimmer who, probably when you were here, who managed to get a 1st so it is possible.

I think the other thing that some of them find hard is the social pressure. So I wouldn't consider them to be 'normal' students as they can't be going out as much as the rest of the student population and some of them are fine I guess and comfortable enough to say 'I'm an athlete and I'm not going out drinking 5 nights a week' and others really struggle with that as they want to make friends and they want to fit in and want to meet people and feel part of Loughborough but they can't so that's kind of route 1 as in terms of the social life here and if you can't do that then it's much more difficult to integrate.

ANDY – The organisational bit doesn't surprise me I think that's what we always kind of felt. That's what trips them up in life, just 'doing life' and you just have no idea how to turn the washing machine on and that's a killer. So that's kind of a real life skill set thing they can develop but I'm really interested in them as people so the social bit I think is interesting and also whether they found any other challenges? Have they found, let's say, their emotional ability to integrate with the environment that's around them a problem and their emotional intelligence a pressure or is it just a time pressure thing that they found.

JO – I think the student population in general find it hard to take responsibility for themselves and by that I mean things like if you need to go and talk to one of your tutors because you need some flexibility that's really hard because a lot of them have never done it before. Or go and talk to your coach because you have a problem with essay deadlines or whatever it is. They seem to find that quite difficult so I don't think they're particularly mature in being able to have some difficult conversations. The other thing I think they find really hard, which our team sport coaches battle on a regular basis, is that ability to have mature conversations with their peers so if someone else within the group so they sit down at the start of the year and write down their behaviour standards, and they all call it different things but that's effectively what it is, and values and everything but then when it's very obvious, as they're very intelligent people, but when they aren't meeting those values but actually being able to call them out on it they find almost impossible to, especially in the first couple of years.

ANDY – Do you see that as being a factor of their age and being at that stage in life rather than anything to do with being an athlete?

JO – Yes because I think that, and I've not been through it recently, but the system that brings you to University doesn't seem to develop those skills. I guess people are so focused on getting through A-levels and getting what you need to get into University that some of the wider life skills I kind of think are secondary in the school environment and I guess they just don't have time for it.

ANDY – Do you think the athletes actually see the importance of those? Or is it just a duel in their head like sport, academic, sport, academic and they just don't see the bit in the middle?

JO – Yes I definitely agree with that. I guess it's what you and I used to say when you were here and that people don't appreciate the system here and what we are trying to achieve until they've gone. And then people will come back to you on a regular basis and say 'I can see why'. Obviously we had a philosophy here that while we were here to help people they had to sort out their own problems and every now and again you would get the really stropky ones that would say 'why can't you go and talk to the tutor' and 'you go and sort this out' and people reflect on this like 5/10 years down the line and like 'oh yeah so I can see what you were trying to do at the time' people are sorting stuff out for them

and, like parents included, and then they get here and they're like 'oh this is not what I'm used to' and they don't have the skill set to do it themselves.

ANDY – So that kind of spoon-feeding bit that possibly happens at the age 12/13 when you start to develop the sporting talent through to 18 and 'we'll put your kit in the washing machine' and 'we'll transport you to this event' it doesn't actually help them in becoming a person.

JO – No I don't think it does and some of them really struggle with it when they get here as they have almost been left helpless as their support system as gone. Some of them sink and we try to support them and some of them are fine but it's too big a jump at the moment.

ANDY – And the ones that come in who are like that, who perhaps have not got the life skills that you would like them to have, what's their sense of identity like? Do they struggle with actually 'Jesus I'm now a very small fish in a massive pond whereas before I was a fairly large fish'?

JO – Yeah I think that's the other bit about that people struggle with here is, whether people realise they're doing it or not, it's such a key phase in life in deciding about who you are as a person and what you're about and what you're going to do with your life. Whereas a lot of that's almost been decided for them. So I think some of them almost sleep walk into you know 'I've been selected for this NGB pathway, my parents think this is a good idea so off we go down this road, my school says I'm bright so I'm doing A-levels and I'm going to University' or 'everybody in my family has gone to University so off we go this is the route' and they're not necessarily making that choice. Whereas they come here and obviously, they are part of the sports programme and coaching staff around them but we have had people like, you know we had the rugby player that we talked about that really sticks in my mind, that as soon as he got here was like I don't want anything to do with this sport or any sport ever again because that had been forced on him and that wasn't what he actually wanted to do.

ANDY – It's strange they get here and want that freedom but when they get here it's like, and tell me if you think I'm wrong, (a) they don't have the skills to manage that freedom and (b) it's the first time in their life that opting out is suddenly an option? And they are like, it's like holy shit 'I can stop doing

this'. I've always felt that there's a number like you said that run into that brick wall, and like the rugby player, realise 'I don't have to do this'.

JO – Yeah but then he opted out of all sport and I guess he felt forced down the rugby line before he got here and then reaction was like extreme I don't want anything to do with rugby or any sport for the rest of my life. Now what he ended up doing we don't know but that was a very extreme reaction whereas there was a lad here last year who didn't want in for any sport but after Christmas he came back and said I'd made a mistake so he'd done his partying for the first 3 months of University and then realised that actually wasn't for him and he wanted back in. So that's I guess he tried it and University is all about experimenting and he was then brave enough and mature enough to say I've made a mistake and he had to earn his place back in the squad but he's back in. Which is I guess for me is an important part that when people make mistakes they have a second chance rather than you've made that decision and we're never speaking to you again. We had a couple last year who were doing something silly with recreational drugs and they had a period out of their sport and we gave them a choice and these are things you have got to do one said yes he wanted back in the squad and the other one picked another route and is not back in the squad. But they had a second shot at it even though they had done something really quite silly and they picked different paths. But it's very important to me that the guy who chose to go, well he even has another shot at it this Summer if he wants it, but he's got to demonstrate that he's learned from his mistakes and that he wants back in because for me it's really important here that people make mistakes get another go.

ANDY – Ok and do you think that's mirrored across this high performance spectrum as a whole or is that because Loughborough is an education institute or because of you and who you are?

JO – I don't think, well from my knowledge of the high performance spectrum I would think no because the impression I get is you commit to this you do what you're told and it becomes a bit of a medal factory although I've never been in it as you know but that's only my outside impression.

ANDY – You've seen the EIS performance lifestyle working with those student athletes?

JO – Yeah but their model doesn't allow, I'm not saying nobody doesn't make mistakes because they run a lot more of the lives of the athletes there's less chance of there being mistakes because they do do a lot of the sorting out for them whereas we won't do that and I guess you would think also the athletes in their system is a step on in terms of their performance so you would hope they're a step more committed.

ANDY – It's an interesting one as our, correct me if I'm wrong, our students who are on world Class performance were managed by EOS and the ones who weren't were managed by us. So did you see any differences between those 2 sets of experiences because I think you're right as the World Class system is let's control this and we'll do XY & Z for you and our system is if you fall over and try to get up we'll help but if you don't we'll just leave you sitting there. How did that play out? Did you see students getting different experiences?

JO – Yes definitely. And I guess my concern was always the ones that had world Class support and had EIS high performance lifestyle weren't learning life skills that would help them when their athletic career progressed and something happened and things started getting really serious or they leave sport and what they going to do afterwards. So while it worked it served a purpose I guess because somebody said to me once performance lifestyle role was to remove all distractions from the life of the athlete and I guess in the very short period of time that probably works because it takes all the where am I going to live and pay this bill and sorting out my lectures and all that stuff it take that away so they can purely focus on the sport so in the short term I guess they can say it works but you're not helping them develop their long term life skills.

ANDY – But that instinctively is like no no as you're not doing anything for them as a person.

JO – Correct but then that comes back to the debate of whether the high performance is bothered about them as a person or whether they're a vehicle with which we win medals.

ANDY – Yes and we've always had that sense of unease personally and with that sense of unease grows every year that passes and becomes more and more problematic for me. So you felt the students that

were on world Class were getting a different life experience to the ones we were dealing with. That's really interesting. Just jumping back a little bit, you talked about at some point the student athletes and the sense of their life direction and them sleep walking into this is my path, how many of them had any sense of life direction beyond I'm now at Loughborough I want to do well in my sport and some would say I want to get a good degree. How many of them were like yeah ok I understand this about myself as a person and that's what I want to do?

JO – Most of them can't even tell you what they want to be doing in 6 months time let alone post Loughborough. When you sit down and try to plan even a year that used to be beyond most of the capabilities of most of them.

ANDY – That must have driven you nuts with your OCD.

JO – Well yeah, well yeah, but I just have to learn to as whilst we are they to help learn and support they have got to be the one driving this. Although I think we have changed the system a bit since you were here and the first year is a bit more directional now because they just can't do it and therefore, we have to do it for them and teach them the skills together rather than just expect them to do it because they can't because there's no point just leaving them to do life direction and also we do quite a bit more work in the final year around what are you going to next. So further study, work, interview skills, CV's and all that stuff and how you use the skills you got from your sport in a CV context as quite a lot of them don't have much work experience because all they've been doing is sport. So Simon does quite a big, I guess the programme has become this is what happens in your first year here, this is what happens in the middle and this is what happens in your last year. So we have flexed it a bit because they can't cope with that level of thinking when they start here.

ANDY – Do you think over time, because you've been doing this a while now, the athletes coming here have got weaker. Weaker in their ability to do those things?

JO – There's definitely a bigger focus on studying as I said earlier, so I think something's influencing them to realise that's more important as a general statement. I think they probably are weaker and that sense of your need to sort this out for me as I'm paying you a lot of money comes through now.

ANDY – A sense of entitlement.

JO – Yes, there's a sense of entitlement which is almost like well I got all this when I was at school age and then now I'm paying a lot of money to be here so I'm expecting stuff to be sorted out for me and a little bit of there's arrogance here as well. Not in all our athletes but you know I'm a very good whatever, Loughborough needs me therefore, you need to sort this stuff out for me.

ANDY – I always used to find that one of the fascinating bits of October/November when they come in and go don't you know who I am and I go yeah and it still doesn't matter. Cos actually we're working with this person over here who has just won a world record so do you want to rethink your approach. OK, so you think bigger sense of entitlement potentially when they arrive, do you think the strong focus on the academic is a response to there is a lot more dual career stuff talked about now in terms of the governing bodies and performance lifestyle and (22.06 – tasks?) have done a great **Job**. A dual career is far more in focus but seems to me is that I'm an athlete, academic study and the bit in the middle about that person is still...

JO – No, I totally agree with that and I don't know whether it's a parental influence or whether it's the generic news around it's quite hard to get Graduate **JO**bs and I guess it's a more definite decision to end up with around £50,000 of debt. So I guess they're more certain that they want to study when they get here whereas I think previously there were people who don't really fancy getting a **Job**, I want to continue getting on with my sport and University is a way of doing that. I think we've got rid a lot of them as you are taking on a huge amount of debt and I guess if your parents are paying for it they're like well you need to commit to this and do it properly as I'm paying a lot money for you to be there. The bit in the middle I still don't think people understand while they're here. As I said I think people reflect on it 5 years later.

ANDY – Yeah when they compare themselves to other people. OK, so how many of them get to the end and have a sense of life direction when they toddle off the campus?

JO – I think that probably depends on whether they're offered a position on their NGB pathway or if they're in a professional sport if they get a contract because if that's on offer then 99% of them will take it.

ANDY – Yes

JO – The ones, well there's probably 3 groups. There's that group for whom it's pretty obvious and they're on that pathway and they're gonna try to achieve first with part-time **Job** along side it. There's a group I guess that realise this is the highest level of sport they're going to compete in and they're the ones I guess who increasingly become more non-sport career focus and engage in all the other stuff that we do as they'll be needing it pretty soon and most will stay in their sport and go and compete at their local club or whatever it is still at a reasonable level but they've not made that jump up to international. Then there's a group in the middle some of whom I think and I guess it depends on the sport and whether it's a late (24.50) one etc and they still think that sport is the way they're going go so they stay around and they find a way of funding themselves as they believe they're going to get picked up by their NGB so they commit another however many years to their sport some of whom do get picked up a lot of them don't so I guess they want to get to the point that I've given it my best shot before they move on to something else.

ANDY – It's almost like the dream hasn't yet died so they're gonna do stuff to keep the dream alive even though probably from the outside looking in for the majority of them you could look at it & go you're never gonna achieve that dream but they've still got to come to that realisation themselves.

JO – I think that some people that stay on to do a Masters are in that category as well and go I'm gonna give it another couple of years and they're capable of doing a Masters but it's not the studying that's the motivation but staying in this environment another couple of years to perfect their sport.

ANDY – And I also think that as I’m doing a Masters it can look like I’m doing something positive but actually I’m just delaying a decision point.

JO – Yes, absolutely.

ANDY – Delaying rather than confronting the reality that I’m not going to be a senior international and that’s pushing that further down the line, kicking it further down the road is what they want to do. How do they cope in those moments of adversity when they hear a student athlete, I’m really interested in their sense of identity is that solely locked up in them being an athlete or a good athlete or when it’s working well are they happy and when it’s not working well are they all doom and gloom or are they more balanced than that?

JO – I think everybody struggles when they get a long term injury in some way or another but I guess the ones who are more dual career have got something else to focus on but we do have cases when the wheels fall off from a sports point of view the wheels also fall off academically because they’re not actually here for the studying and they just put up with it when the sport’s going well and when the sport’s not going well the whole lot falls apart. I don’t know whether because it’s becoming more acceptable but we are seeing more mental health issues coming out and I don’t know whether that it’s just becoming more acceptable within society but people do seem to be more willing to talk about the fact that they’re really struggling and some of them are struggling when it’s going well so I guess that’s pressure issues then rather than when they’re injured. I think our staff do a pretty good **Job** of trying to keep people involved when they’re injured with other **JObs** if they’re term sports people or if they’re doing their rehab whilst everyone’s doing their training. In general certainly for team sports they’re still gonna be involved going for lunch or cinema or whatever they’re gonna be doing. But for our cohort it’s such a big part of their identity they’re all affected I think when something like that happens.

ANDY – Do you think accepting it’s a big part of their identity if that a good thing or a bad thing, would they be happier as people if it wasn’t such a big part of their identity? I’m only speculating.

JO – I think it depends on what makes them happy because some of them you can see they are heading for senior international and that is their life dream and their biggest goal and they've got the fire in their belly and they're on that path and therefore, they almost find a way of dealing with the injury because for them it's a temporary, I'm generalising massively here, but it's a temporary blip and obviously they know we've got all the support here and they can rehab and in general injuries, thank goodness, aren't career ending. I guess the ones that don't really know where they're going or in their heart of hearts know this is the top end of the sport they're going to compete at they probably struggle more because it's such a big part of who they are as a Loughborough student and if you've got a year out because you've done your ACL or whatever, that's a big part of your time here and they still all wear the kit and run around with the team and whatever squad they're in.

ANDY – So there is still a huge amount of personal identity wrapped up in being that thing being a talented athlete or playing for Lightning or playing for whoever. When do you think they were at their happiest when do you think generally the student athletes you dealt with were at their best? What was happening for them and what was happening to them in those situations?

JO – I think that kind of depends on where they were at on that kind of maturity, emotional maturity index when they got here because if, I'm thinking about the girl who was doing engineering she came in knowing what she wanted to do so where she was going with her sport and where she was going with her studying and touch wood she's never had any serious injuries, both are still going well she's still here, she's still achieving at everything. So I guess life is good from her point of view. The ones who are not so bothered about the sport or aren't so bothered about the academics it's probably when they're in the bit that they are bothered about which for most of ours sport would still be a part of that, we do have lower end squad members in some of the team sports who aren't quite so bothered and who aren't willing to make changes to their lifestyle or as many changes to their lifestyle to become more performance orientated. So I guess generally when things are going well in whatever they deem to be important is when they're happiest. I think the bit that they're missing is the ability to deal with things when they're not going so well and then also reflect on what they've learned from that. I'm not even sure when they come out of the injury or whatever they can't necessarily even think ok well I dealt with that like this bit of injury went well this bit didn't. Next time I face adversity in my life I'm going to do it like this.

ANDY – That’s interesting. So we often talk about the learning that goes on when you’re a talented athlete and people justify being on a talent pathway and all the performance stuff on the basis of well you’ll learn these skills and these skills and understand XYZ and there’s a large part of me that’s thought, really? Do they? Because I saw so many exit here and you’re looking at them thinking you’re no better organised than when you arrived. You talk about the reflective skill bit and we don’t really teach them the reflective skills bit particularly so I have a real question mark in my head and whether they learn or what do they learn because they don’t have the reflective skills and how many of them are good at reflection and how does that work?

JO – And we talked about that not long after I was in post in trying to teach that and I don’t even know if it is possible to teach it.

ANDY – I think it is possible to teach it but it has to be systematic and it has to be regular and it has to be purposeful and I don’t think we ever had the time or put the time to it to make that change.

JO – Well really you’d have to get the coaching staff and the sports science/sports medicine staff the ones who are teaching it as they’re the ones who are seeing them really regularly.

ANDY – Yeah frontline contact.

JO – Yeah so if you were going to do that it would have to be the frontline delivery people who are doing it really. It’s no good coming into a workshop twice a year, it’s not going to work.

ANDY – So do you feel that’s an area where they consistently struggle? They aren’t good at reflection so therefore, they don’t learn from their experience?

JO – Yes. I mean obviously there are exceptions but as a general rule I think that's still an issue which is why we get people going round the same cycle. The core of the mistake might be different but you think we've just dealt with this with you which is a different issue but if you had learned something from that issue you probably wouldn't have dealt with this like this and now you've got yourself in a pickle with something else.

ANDY – I guess as well because what you talked about at the start, they're coming from time at school and family where they've probably been a little bit spoon fed, a little bit organised, where's the need to reflect if someone else is doing the reflection for you. I can see a situation where their lifestyle doesn't create the experiences of problems which need reflection in the first place.

JO – The other bit for me which is a really good life skill and is really important whilst they're here is how they influence other people. So how they influence their team mates or the other people in their squad or how they influence lecturers or whoever, they can't do that and some of them can't look at their own behaviour and see why that action provoked that reaction in that person and if you want that person here to stop doing this or to start doing this how do I. They can't do that, some of them when you talk to them about it look at you like you're mad. What's the key influencer, you find your key influences through your environment and then you influence through that. I can't remember what the book's called but it's that kind of and also you talk to our coaching staff about that so if you're trying to change behaviour who are your key influencers and some of them look at you like, well I guess that's the nature of having some young and inexperienced coaches here as well and some of them are also learning some of the same stuff.

ANDY – It's who are you apostles. Who's going to go out and carry your message for you. But I think the point about a young athlete not being able to understand the influencing bit is really, I think it's really important because it's a statement about their sense of the centre of their world and that coming in here that they have been the centre of the world because Mum & Dad ran around for you, school is probably really supportive of you and you have this impression of yourself of being special and then you're in a world where you're not special and that must really throw some people. If you've never had someone saying how are you going to influence these people, you've always got away with stuff because your social status.

JO – Definitely, yes definitely. It's big fish small pond thing. You come here and people aren't running around after them and they can't make things happen because of who I am. They are then like I don't know what to do now. Generally you can see them like this isn't how it normally works and you aren't going to do this for me and I don't know what to do.

ANDY – The toolbox bit and if the only tool in my toolkit is who I am, that must be a hell of a shock when you think your tool to unlock everything is who I am and that doesn't work, what do you do?

JO – Yes absolutely.

ANDY – Actually what do you do?

JO – Yes and that's when you can see some of them have massive strops shouting and screaming, other just disappear and they can't cope with it so they take themselves out of that environment, some of them go down the partying route and they either stay on that route or they come back. So there are some extreme reactions to that I think.

ANDY – That's really interesting isn't it. I hadn't really focused my thinking on that bit about their sense of identity and their need to influence people but they have nothing in their armoury which allows them to influence people. Do you feel, generally speaking, that's what they learn whilst they're here if they switch on to it?

JO – I think if they learn it's because they realise it themselves and they learn it for themselves. I don't think the system teaches them that and allows them to practice it particularly. Even though we try to empower it you are still part of a massive system here.

ANDY – Do you think that's exacerbated for those who are on world class?

JO – Yes definitely, yes definitely.

ANDY – Because at that level you're still in to the, well I suppose what we talked about the world class view and performance lifestyle and you're helping them cope with distractions that is just feeding the monster.

JO – Absolutely, so it's the same system they've experience before they get here.

ANDY – You will cope with this for me because I am who I am and therefore, being who I am is my key to unlocking everything else.

JO – Yes so they just have an extension of what they had at the home/school system effectively. But then they fall off the cliff at the end.

ANDY – Yeah they do don't they. And then they're in a far worse situation because then they've missed 3 or 4 years of key learning that then you've got to try to replicate and you're never gonna replicate it.

JO – Well some of them are in that world class system for like 10 years. They come to University and they're a funded athlete for 10 years so there's somebody sorting stuff at out University, there's somebody finding you somewhere to live and sorting out how to pay your water bill for you. Some of the stuff they have to do is ridiculous but anyway, sort your life out for you and then you leave in your late 20's or even 30's and you've never dealt with life other than being an athlete.

ANDY – I think that's one of the things that would be fascinating and I'm sure the world class system don't do it. I think they're getting better. I think they're getting the dual career stuff I think they're better at getting athletes work experience and possibly their first **Job** but the test of it is not helping them find that first **Job** it's how do they cope in the first 3 or 4 years after being an elite athlete in that

environment. Because I can imagine some of them will go into that **Job** and still be thinking well I have an Olympic Gold medal so promote me and the Company's looking at them saying but you're shit at your **Job**.

JO – And you have no experience in this field and therefore, you're starting in this position and frankly we're being quite nice to give it you. We know you don't have that experience but you bring other things to the table. And it's also how do they find their next **Job** if someone's found them a **Job** and they've not really had to do anything you just keep pushing it down the line.

ANDY – And I guess at that point if that is your first **Job** and it doesn't work out your CV is still very very bare in terms of life skills and those kind of things.

JO – And the other thing I think in **Job** front people make some really random decisions about what they think they want to do because some of them think right I need to be earning whatever money and therefore, quite a lot of them go into salesy type **JObs** where they might be on a relatively basic salary but then there's loads of commission but when they get in there they're like I'm not successful in doing whatever it is you need to do to get the commission, they hate the environment because it's obviously high pressure sales and most of them have moved on within a year. That happens a lot when people leave here.

ANDY – That's really interesting isn't it. And I think also it feeds into that situation, it's almost the antithesis isn't it, that if your mind set is I am who I am and that will unlock the doors for me to the sales environment where you're trying to sell a product that you're not important but the product is everything. That is a completely different perspective on the world and what your customer is going to experience. They're not going to buy it just because you happen to win a medal.

JO – No and I also think it's related to so much of their identity is linked to them as an athlete that they actually don't know enough about who they are and what kind of work environment will suit them. They just look at it on a very basic level oh that salary looks nice off we go but they don't think about

what kind of work would interest them, would motivate them, what kind of environment they want to be in and all that kind of stuff. They just don't know anything about who they are apart from I'm an athlete.

ANDY – Do you think part of that problem is exacerbated in that performance community we have that performance narrative which is a dominant one about to get on you gotta be focussed and driven and sacrifice everything. So you have this perspective that is pumped at them of these kind of assertive, aggressive work champions and therefore, you look for **JO**bs that mirror that perspective when actually you as a person might be at your happiest other than being an athlete when you're in a social support role.

JO – Or caring or something like that. Our Lightening netball pictures are all mean and moody and no one smiling and all that kind of stuff and we've just done Mother's Day one. So there's been all the players with their Mum's thanking them, smiling and giving them flowers and stuff and the reactions have been amazing on social media because it's so different from all the mean and moody that you normally get. Whereas, actually these are just normal girls with their Mum's saying thanks on Mother's Day. It's a side of our girls you never see because all the rhetoric is that you have to be really hard, mean and moody and show the opposition that we're no messing and our media guys did something different and the reactions been really interesting because some people have seen a different side to them.

ANDY – See that they're human again.

JO – Yes absolutely.

ANDY – That is interesting isn't it, really interesting about the narrative that these young people that are fed and probably force fed from the age of 12 and 13 and if there's no other narrative that's allowed you try to modify yourself to become that thing even though that actually might not be who you are at all.

JO – Yes because that's what you're being told, that's going to make you successful. And as you say if you've got no one else telling you something else that's how you think you're going to be successful in life.

ANDY – Do you find you get many or any student athlete that walk to the beat of a different drummer. That have a sense of themselves?

JO – It's really interesting actually at one of our recent coaching breakfasts was about how you deal with the mavericks and most of our staff, providing they're not being disruptive, you need to find a way to include them but I think people struggle with it so the ones that are always messing about, still very good athletes and are doing the training but they're messing about or some of them are always late or they've not got the right food or whatever it is they're doing so they're not conforming to the system in some way or another. But they're still talented enough, fit enough, understand tactics whatever it is they still have a place in the team. It's how the coaching staff allow some flex for people like that but when you're trying to make everyone else be on time and this one person is always late how do you deal with it?

ANDY – It's interesting isn't it, it's the balance between the behaviours you exhibit and perhaps a little about who you are as a person. You can exhibit time keeping because you're playing a game because you need to be in the squad but perhaps still be socially orientated person rather than an outcome driven person. But because we never talk about, nobody ever thinks about it therefore, we don't seem to work with the young people on how they balance those things.

JO – And on the drinking front this age group seem to accept people who don't want to drink for religious reasons, it's accepted no question. Somebody who is choosing not to drink isn't acceptable and to me I found that slightly odd because if you say for religious reasons I don't drink you've got a reason and therefore, that's fine and there's no issue and no peer pressure or anything. If I'm choosing not to drink that isn't deemed to be a reason and therefore, there's a oh come on just one.

ANDY – I guess it's a bit of who you relate to if someone says I'm not going to drink for religious reasons you probably automatically put them in a different box which is you're not like me, I don't understand and that's absolutely fine. If you don't have a religious reason and they think you're in the same box as them and you say I'm not going to drink that's a threat and it's a threat to your sense of identity, is it actually ok for me to drink if they're not going to drink. So that makes them a better person.

JO – And it's so embedded in the culture here as well. The whole student drinking culture generally is around you all the time. So that's another big, alternative Freshers, we've gone off track a little bit here, but that's gathering some momentum now is an alternative freshers experience that there's no drinking in there at all. I think they go for walks and then finish at a pub so if you want a drink then that's fine but it's not the normal student fresher experience.

ANDY – Again that it's what we're talking about it's essentially a narrative what you do as a student and it's this and involves 95 pints of vodka and trying to create an alternative narrative. Whereas, we're still stuck in sport that a talented performance athlete does this as an athlete and there is no there narrative that sits alongside it and therefore they don't hear anything and see anything else. How good do you think the coaching staff are at perhaps seeing some of these issue that they're facing ?

JO – I would say generally they get it on a basic level but I think they're still focussed on the practicalities of sorting out this rather than the emotional development. So we have one athlete who is choosing not to compete because he wants to focus on his finals. So that's it I've made a decision now and this is important to me and I've got however long it is till I finish and I'm not going to compete for the whole of the semester 2. And that's been really interesting from the coaches point of view who is then more focussed on the practicalities of replacing this guy and how we carry on finish what we are doing and how the team mates have reacted. Because I think some of them the other finalists are like maybe I should be doing that but I don't want to do that because my sport is important to me and they can't, I think that's the other thing is, they can't quite grasp that it's ok to have different, like X academic is really important to him so he's made this choice, your degree is not as important to you so you've made this choice and both are fine. That's the other thing I think that's really hard here is that these people making different choices and it's all ok we don't all have to be all doing the same thing all the same time. I think there's a bit of (50.53) mentality going on.

ANDY – So we've given them, things are too binary you're in this group or you're not in this group. And if you're not in this group it's not ok it's just uncomfortable and we haven't given them a sense that there are multiple ways to come to this thing there are multiple ways of being.

JO – Unless there are an acceptable reason, so the religion one re drinking and our international netballer would do something differently and that was ok because she was from a different Country. So if there is a reason.

ANDY – So if you can find a reason to say that's why they do it than just they're different to me. That's really interesting. So that whole sense of identity is actually really important in terms of how they respond to other people and how they see other people and whether they can put other people in boxes. Which then links in to the whole influencing bit that if I really had no idea how you are as a person or consents what's good about indifferent and no idea how to start to influence that or be influenced.

JO – But they have no idea how to try. So if you've given them what they consider to be an acceptable reason they don't try to influence you but if you're in the same box as them and you're behaving differently, they don't know what to do with that and they don't have the skills to think that person's different to me and that's ok, that's the reflective bit or this is how I influence them to behave how we need to behave in this box.

ANDY – That's really interesting. And do you think, this is a really speculatively question, do you think by being in these talent pathways and coming through having had such a focus on one particular aspect of their abilities has been good for them, or has made life difficult for them or some sense, or are they gaining by being in those talent pathways?

JO – I think probably overall yes because I think they get some great experience and some really amazing life memories and our system here pretty much catches the ones that fall. We have, touch wood, never really had serious situations we've had some that could have potentially gone one way or

another but I mean the whole University counselling and support systems that are around people and I guess because we're dealing with a relatively small number the coaching staff know them individually so they're quite good at picking out when there are some issues and then it's a team response in how to help them. I'm not sure that's the same at other Universities I think some Universities have gone down a bit more of the world class view. You know we're buying you in and you're a commodity from our point of view. Bizarrely I think the ones that really struggle here probably get the most out of it because this is a supported environment so you are away from your family generally, but if things go wrong there is support around you and then even if they don't realise it at the time they are learning from that experience. Then I think when they go they are better equipped for whatever goes wrong. The ones that sail through, do well in their exams, find study relatively easily, they're not injured, they're always selected whatever they're trying to do outside of Loughborough is probably going well, they learn less because they've not had any tough experiences here.

ANDY – Everybody needs to hit a wall at some point. My mind goes to people like Henry, the **JO**urney Henry went on here, having cocked up his first year at least twice or was it 3 times.....

JO - At least twice

ANDY -and then had a really tough decision to fail him and kick him out was absolutely the right decision for him as a person.

JO – Well yeah cos look at how he responded.

ANDY – Exactly. Whereas at other places may well have gone no no no he's a commodity we'll keep him on board.

JO – Well that's what happened with Harry they just kept giving him concessions and concessions and concessions and he never finished his degree.

ANDY – Well you teach somebody nothing by constantly letting them off the hook.

JO – And also when Henry was told he couldn't carry on at the University the system was there to support him with going to the college and they've got their own system there around academic support. But you could almost see he changed his demeanour around education in the time he was here.

ANDY – Absolutely, because he had a year where he had to get a **Job**. I'm absolutely sure he had a year to get a **Job**.

JO – Yes.

ANDY – But we allowed him to carry on training so you're not lobbing them on to the scrap heap, you've got to resurrect yourself here and I think that was probably having to get yourself a **Job** and look after yourself for a year.

JO – But he still got the really important thing to him to hang on to. So we had another recreational drug incident a few years ago where the guy was chucked out of the sport but given the pathway back in. So we're suspending you now, you're not permanently excluded but you need to do this that & the other. Do you stuff whatever, whatever, whatever and you can come back in at this point. Obviously honouring that and again that was another learning bit to him because you're taking him away from the thing he loved the most which was his sport but he wasn't chucked out never to be seen again and had the pathway back in.

ANDY – It's the degree of the support person seems to me in my head is pivotal as opposed to being because they can win you a medal. It's a very different mindset in the way you approach you offer to young people. Yeah really challenging. Ok. Going at a different tangent now, you did the performance

lifestyle Masters how much did the holistic development theory and all stuff like that makes any real difference to the way you did your **Job** on the ground?

JO – I think that probably helped me with the practicalities of it but I guess because it was more performance lifestyle focussed therefore, the EIS system see that wasn't the practicalities of what you do on a daily basis it was more of the understanding the theory behind the transition and there was something in there around, it was a long time ago now, kind of the transitions terms in looking at it from an education point of view, a family point of view, a sport point of view but not from an emotional point of view. So that's what I mean about practical it was looking at you're at school, then you're at University, then you're doing this, you're parents, you might have a girlfriend, then you might go off and get married, have kids that's what I mean about the practicalities it wasn't it was more what you were doing rather than how mature you were and how you were dealing with it.

ANDY – It's really interesting because when I've looked at that whole hosting development model or whatever one calls it, to me it's relatively formulaic and it's a little bit blindingly obvious. You do get older, you do go from school to University, you do go into a **Job** or you do mature so then you get to a point in life when you get a partner and then possibly a wife and then possibly have children. It's those things that are life events that you can kind of see and know.

JO – Yes but I think when he was bringing it in I don't think people were thinking like that. So I don't think people were necessarily thinking the transition from the important people in your family being your parents to being your partner and how that might affect your athletic, cos it's a long time ago now. Now and I guess how we work here it's very obvious but I think when he was doing it, well he's still doing it, but when he started it.

ANDY – Ok I take that point that when he started it, it probably was new but the fact that we're now 15/18 years on and he's still trotting out the same stuff and it hasn't developed and I'm going no it's blindingly obvious stuff now and it is missing out the key point which is the emotional growth and the growth of those subtle life skills and the growth of identity which won't necessarily follow a neat pathway.

JO – And it's all the other life events that aren't on there so a parent dies, or an injury, or whatever, that isn't neatly in that model because you don't know when that's gonna be or if they're ever gonna happen and it's then how you're gonna deal with those and if you have taught the, or someone hasn't developed the emotional skills in the first place they're less likely to be able to deal with things like that.

ANDY – I think what we're saying is that to make this whole **JO**urney better for the young person if somewhere upon it you can systematically teach someone influencing skills, reflective skills and stuff it is about them as a person and they're going to have a better experience and generally emerge at the end of it far more, in a far better state.

JO – But also I guess if you're looking at it from a world class perspective I think they'd be better at coping with the **JO**urney as an athlete as well as what happens at the end as looking at what's gonna influence now it probably needs to start younger than, as in before they end up in the world class system. You talk to England hockey anecdotally and they always say we provide them with the best quality athletes that go into the system. As in fitter and stronger but also being able to cope with the environment. Obviously don't write that down but that is the message that comes back consistently as they have to spend way more time with the athletes that come from other environments to get them to a point that they can cope with the environment at Bisham.

ANDY – Absolutely, but what scares me if we're talking about hockey is that I now see talent program that there is no systematic development of those qualities across the board and therefore, every time somebody rants about the quality you're coming in to the centralised programme at Bisham it's like you're not doing nothing to change your fundamental issue.

JO – But I think they rely upon other people like Universities to do it.

ANDY – I think they do but I'm not even sure they do that consciously or whether that's happens stance. So when it comes back to are you as a sport prepared to delay performance development of your athlete

in order to build the life skills that will make them a stronger athlete or person further down the line and I don't think many of them are strong enough.

JO – Given there's so much pressure to win medals that's a bigger ask.

ANDY – That's a massive ask isn't it? But then who else in the system is thinking like this? It's either secondary schools who are totally unequipped to deal with this or it's Universities and there are too few who have sufficient capacity in terms of attention capacity to actually put this through. So yes I do think the kids that come here are probably whether they realise it or not are in a supportive environment as you're gonna get at this moment in time.

JO – A supportive environment that allows you to make mistakes. Because I think the EIS would say they're supportive but they don't. They try to stop there from being any mistakes but I think that's the difference. They try to prevent the mistakes whereas we allow them to happen and then deal with them and help them to deal with them. Whereas, EIS try to prevent the mistakes in the first place which is they're not allowing the learning.

ANDY – **JO** that's been really really useful. What else do you feel is important about that talent experience that we haven't talked about?

JO – Trying to think what else we do or don't do.

ANDY – Doesn't matter, this doesn't have to be a one off and I'm sure when I reflect on this I'll have other questions and I'll be like what did you mean by, what did you mean by because I think it's really important in getting under their skin of their experience as a person rather than as a student and their experience as an athlete is critical and I just don't think we have the philosophies around talent development at this moment in time. Certainly gives people licence to think about the person as well as the athlete.

JO – I'm just thinking about big fish in a little pond I do think we do some work to try to help them understand that that's ok. In terms of giving them a community of other talented athletes so they know other people in a similar environment and then helping them to try to adjust to that I think. Because to me that's who you are in the outside world while you might have been a big name in your school you're not going to be one here. We are at least starting them down the **J**ourney of helping them understand that actually that's ok to be the little fish in the big pond because it's a really good pond.

ANDY – It is that whole idea that's really helpful for me because I'm now thinking of the kid who's 16 and in the future's cup, they're in a world where everybody thinks being in the future's cup is important and therefore, that's really important but then you get to Loughborough and it's still important but it's less important and then you get in to the big outside world and the dense population can't name a Gold medallist from Rio. It's that sense your place in the world has shifted from being the centre of the Universe to ok I'm a planet orbiting and oh bollocks no I'm an asteroid and I have no idea where I am going.

JO – Well I guess that's a transition and here you're still at least a fish in the pond so you've moved but you get outside and no one cares what you are doing and so I guess that's a helpful transition. You're still important but you're not the be all and end all to when you leave here nobody cares.

ANDY – So in some case you could argue that being a talented athlete at that younger age group can be a negative aspect in terms of your development because you're not seeing yourself in a normal relationship with the rest of society.

JO – I guess coming here is a bit of a reality check which I think is really healthy because whilst you might be in the future's cup in the grand scheme of the world nobody cares and it isn't important. Really. Even if you go on to become a senior international the future's cup was a part of that **J**ourney but it's not, well you can imagine the schools doing assemblies and on their website and all this stuff. It's at this school age who's keeping your feet on the ground while being proud of you but keeping your feet on the ground. Whilst being here when we do the student athlete induction I always think the

conversations are really interesting because people come swaggering in and then talk to a swimmer who's already got a junior world record or whatever it is and they're just a bit like uh, right and they start to compute that actually perhaps they're not quite as good and or haven't really achieved something yet whilst you're still important because you're in the pond whereas when you leave here that's another **Job** again.

ANDY – And that's how you find the ones who will crumble at the face of that reality and the ones who will embrace it and fly.

JO – But what I think that's really good here is that the ones that crumble sometimes come back and I guess that's one of things I'm most proud of here is the environment we built allows you to have a second or third shot at it because that's what we're about. It's not about you're out and you never see them again.

ANDY – Really interesting, thanks **JO** that is fab.

c. Thematic Analysis

The analysis of the interview was undertaken using a loose thematic approach. The transcript was read on several occasions. On each occasions notes were taken of the key themes that resonated with me as I read the transcript. Each reading of the transcript then brought an additional layer of understanding and reflections on the interaction between the emerging themes, my interpretation of various literatures and my own practice.

I then started to synthesise the thoughts that the interview generated by placing ideas on post-it notes and collating them in groups on a whiteboard. This generated clusters of ideas and I then looked for linkages between groups and patterns of thinking that crossed groups.

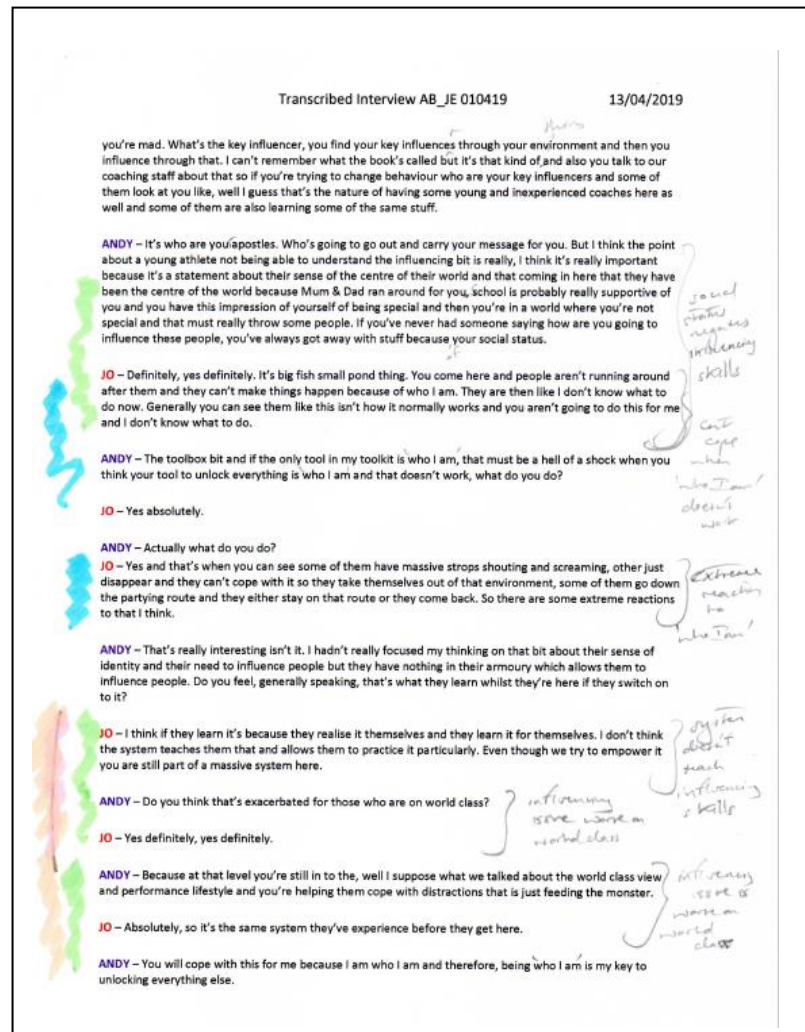


Figure 1 Example of transcript divided in to loose themes

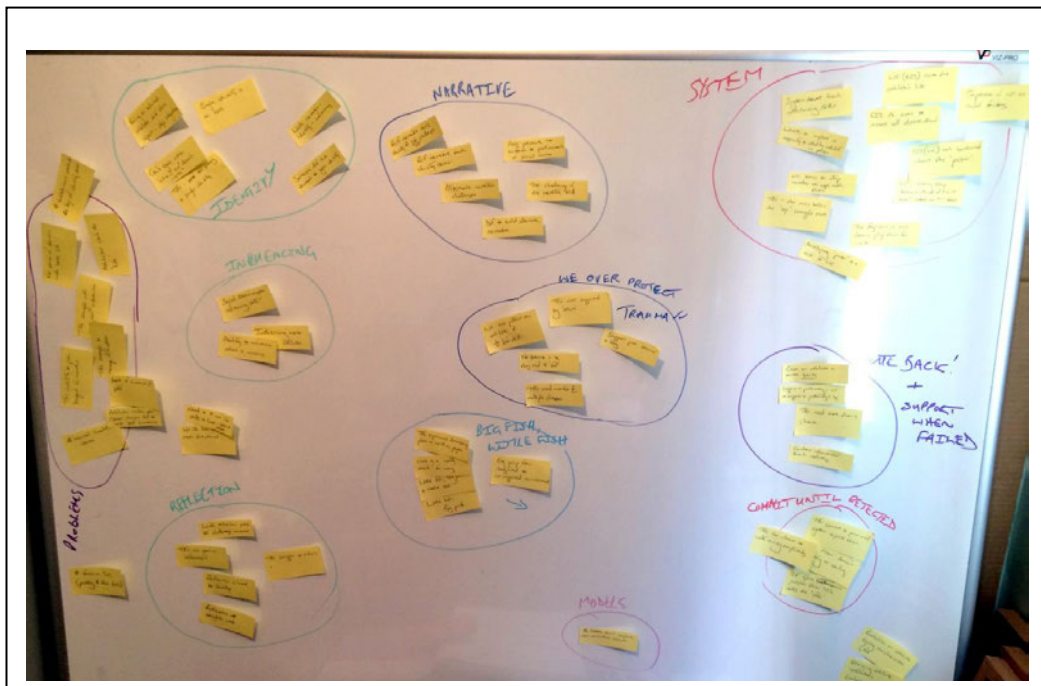


Figure 2 Example of collation of items identified in analysis of transcript

The main themes emerging from the interview formed a process model which is explained in detail in Section 8.1.3

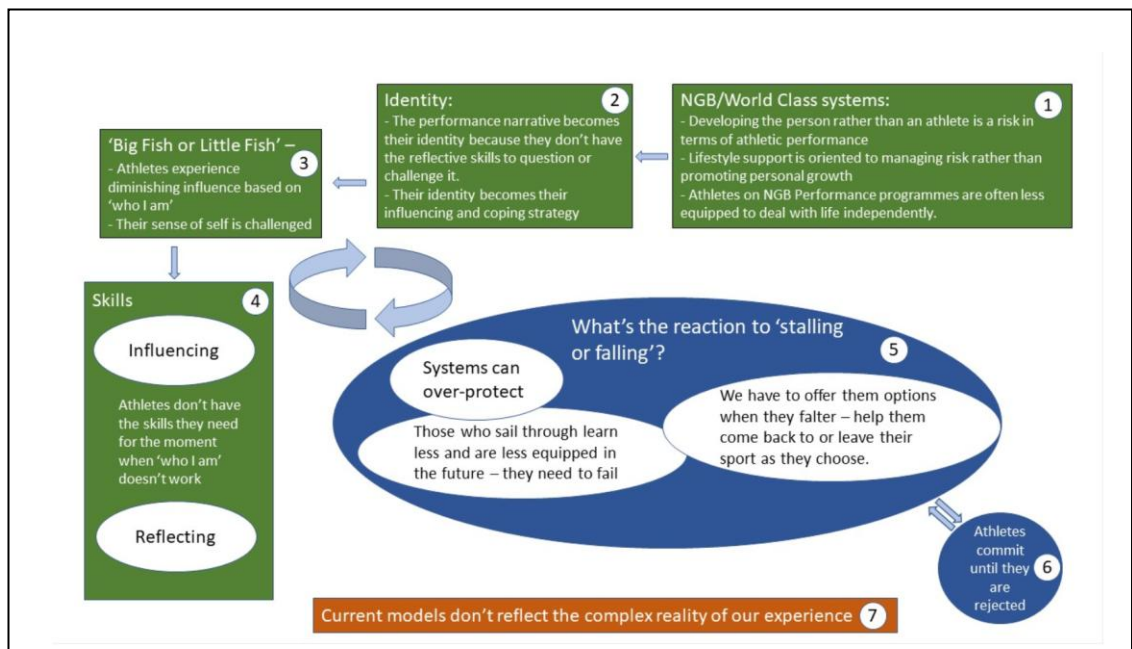



Figure 3 Model of issues arising from the interview with JE

d. Informed Consent – Letter & Form

 UNIVERSITY OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE at CHELTENHAM and GLOUCESTER		University of Gloucestershire Oxstalls Campus, Gloucester, GL2 9HW	http://www.glos.ac.uk/	Fax: 01242 715222 Tel: 01242 735228
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Principal Investigator	
Mr Andy Borrie Doctoral Student Faculty of Applied Sciences, University of Gloucestershire Oxstalls Campus, Oxstalls Lane, Gloucester, GL2 9HW	

Title of Study: Reflections on Talent Development: Roles, philosophies and conflicts

Dear Jo,

As you know I am completing a professional doctorate at the University of Gloucestershire undertaking research in to the talent system in UK sport. Given the significance of talent development to elite sport understanding the philosophies, values and beliefs that underpin how our national system delivers its talent programmes is of great importance. However, interaction between critical stakeholders is under-researched. Organisations in both the educational and sporting sectors appear to have different, almost competing, philosophies as to how and why we should engage in talent development.

As part of the research process I am talking to key colleagues about our shared experiences of working in talent development systems and I would be very appreciative if you would take part in my study. I would like to sit and interview you about your experiences of the talent system and in particular your work in Performance Lifestyle support at Loughborough University. I anticipate that this would be a single interview but we might also wish to have further conversations as we reflect on what we have discussed.

The interview would be voice recorded and then transcribed verbatim. All records will be kept private and secure and I will be the only person who has access to the raw material. You can request that the raw data is destroyed at any time.

As the study progresses I will contact you at regular intervals to let you know the main findings and check that you remain happy for your contribution to remain in the study. You can withdraw consent for your data to be used up to 6 months after the interview(s). If you wish to withdraw please write to me or email me at the address shown above so that there is a clear record of your withdrawal.



In writing up this research all events and participant details will be anonymized and no participant will be identifiable by name. Once the study is complete I intend to present the results at conferences and publish in academic journals maintaining the anonymity of all participants throughout.

The University of Gloucestershire faculty research ethics panel has approved this study. Please contact Dr Robin Bown, (Vice-Chair of the Ethics Committee), at the University of Gloucestershire, if you have any concerns (Tel: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED])


If you would like to participate in this study, please read and sign the informed consent.

Many thanks
[REDACTED]

Andy Borrie



Signed Informed Consent Form

 **UNIVERSITY OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE**
of CHELTENHAM and GLOUCESTER

University of Gloucestershire
Oxstalls Campus, Gloucester,
GL2 9HW

<http://www.glos.ac.uk/>

Fax: 01242 715022
Tel: 01242 715123

Informed consent form

Title of Project:	Reflections on talent development: Roles, philosophies and conflicts	
Principal Investigators:	Andy Borrie Doctoral Student Faculty of Applied Sciences, University of Gloucestershire, Oxstalls Campus Oxstalls Lane, Gloucester, GL2 9HW [REDACTED]	

Do you understand that I have asked you to participate in a research study?	Yes	No
Have you read and received a copy of the attached information letter	Yes	No
Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this research study?	Yes	No
Do you understand that you are free to contact the research team to take the opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	Yes	No
Do you understand that you are free to refuse participation, or to withdraw from the study, as outlined in the Participation Information Sheet, without consequence and that your information will be withdrawn at your request?	Yes	No
Do you understand that I will keep your data confidential? Do you understand who will have access to your information?	Yes	No

I wish to take part in this study:

Printed Name: Joanne Emmett

Signature: [REDACTED]

Date: 01/04/2019

Preferred Contact number: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]