

Institution: University of Northumbria at Newcastle		
Unit of Assessment: 24 (Sport and Exercise Sciences, Leisure and Tourism)		
Title of case study: Enhancing education and practice in sport coaching: Using novel sociological insights to develop coaches' social, emotional and political astuteness		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2016 – December 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Edward T. Hall	Senior Lecturer	2014 – present
Paul Potrac	Professor	2016 – present
Zoë Avner	Lecturer	2018 – present
Emma Boocock	Lecturer	2017 – present
Phil Hayes	Senior Lecturer	1991 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2018 – December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) <p>Coach education at all levels of sport has been underpinned by rational and dispassionate models of practice, which fail to provide coaches with the intra- and inter-personal skills required to navigate the complex social reality of coaching. Northumbria University's novel research into the social, relational and emotional dimensions of coaching has enhanced learning and practice of coaches across the UK, most notably elite rugby union player development pathways in England and Ireland, as well as in other sports. Northumbria's research informed new training approaches for UK-wide sporting bodies and supported mechanisms to cascade novel approaches across the community of practice, improving individual coach performance and the coaching experiences of athletes.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>Rational and dispassionate models of practice that underpin coach education and development initiatives have been increasingly questioned by practitioners and governing bodies in recent years, including the International Council of Coaching Excellence and England Rugby [R1]. Indeed, the growing importance attached to developing coaches' intra- and inter-personal knowledge and skills by national and international organisations reflects increasing evidence that coaches feel under-prepared for the social, emotional, and pedagogical challenges of everyday practice [R2]. By addressing the interactive, emotionally engaging, and dynamic nature of coaches' work, research from Northumbria has contributed to better social understanding of coaching that coincided with priority areas identified by coaching and sport leadership bodies. These priorities included: (a) building, sustaining, and, where necessary, repairing relationships across a variety of interconnected stakeholders, including athletes, support staff, administrators, and athletes' parents/guardians; and (b) experiencing and managing emotions in everyday practice.</p> <p>This research was undertaken within the <i>Informing Practice and Policy</i> research group at Northumbria University. Its empirical focus on the relational and emotional dimensions of sport coaching blended qualitative fieldwork and sociological theory. The former included field observations, in-depth semi-structured and stimulated recall interviews, and collaborative inquiry, while the latter comprised relational and dramaturgical theorising. The research challenged orthodox representations of sports coaching by revealing it to be a fundamentally more relational and emotionally demanding undertaking than previously understood. Specifically, this body of research provided insights into the individual and collective meaning-making that is generated in the intricate networks of sport organisations, and the emergent consequences of</p>		

the face-to-face interactions that occurred between coaching's principal actors – coaches, athletes, coach educators, administrators, and parents. The research has examined these issues in the context of community sport [R3, R4], coach education [R2, R5], and elite-development pathways [R1, R6]. The insights generated have shed new light on the essential (but informally developed) political astuteness of the participants and have supported the development of tools and mechanisms that have helped coaches and coach educators to manage their interactions and relationships in the coaching context [R1-R6].

Importantly, the research indicated that the development of political astuteness is an iterative process that entails responding (both proactively and reactively) to situational demands, as well as critically reflecting upon them [R2]. It requires the development of skills that have traditionally not been a part of formal coach education provision. These include: i) being able to map the relationships and interests that comprise the social terrain of organisational life [R1, R4, R5]; ii) engaging in disciplined and situationally sensitive noticing [R3, R5, R6]; iii) using these insights to develop and enact plans that positively influence others [R1]; and iv) carefully managing the impression of the coach in the eyes of various organisational stakeholders [R3, R4, R5]. Overall, this knowledge challenged the continued use of homogenous, rational, off-the-peg solutions to coaching challenges. Instead, it highlighted how critical reflection can be used to help coaches recognise how they are simultaneously tacticians and targets of influence within a network of social relations and, subsequently, to develop intra- and inter-personal strategies that can help them to productively navigate the dilemmas, opportunities, and challenges of their respective organisational settings.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- R1. Zoë Avner, Denison*, J., Jones**, L., Emma Boocock, and Edward T. Hall (2020) 'Beat the game: A Foucauldian exploration of coaching differently in an elite rugby academy' *Sport, Education and Society* <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2020.1782881>
- R2. Edward T. Hall and Gray**, S. (2016) 'Reflecting on reflective practice: A coach's action research narratives' *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* 8 (4): 365-379 <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2016.1160950>
- R3. Gale**, L. A., Ives**, B. A., Paul Potrac, and Nelson**, L. J. (2019) 'Trust and distrust in community sports work: Tales from the "shop floor"' *Sociology of Sport Journal* 36 (3): 244-253 <https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.2018-0156>
- R4. Paul Potrac., Mallett*, C., Greenough**, K., and Nelson**, L. (2017) 'Passion and paranoia: An embodied tale of emotion, identity, and pathos in sports coaching' *Sports Coaching Review* 6(2): 142-161 <https://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2017.1367067>
- R5. Allanson*, A., Paul Potrac, and Nelson**, L. (2019) 'The career experiences of Football Association (FA) coach educators: Lessons in micropolitical literacy and action' *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*: 1-15 <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1690563>
- R6. Nichol***, A., Phil Hayes, Vickery*, W., Emma Boocock, Paul Potrac, and Edward T. Hall (2020, ahead of print) 'Athletes as "sites of normative intersectionality": Critically exploring the ontology of influence in sport coaching' *Sociology of Sport Journal*: 1-10 <https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.2020-0114>

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4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Dr Edward Hall used the underpinning research from Northumbria's *Informing Practice and Policy* research group to support coaches and coach educators across the UK through a mix of long-term, practice-based support, training, mentoring, and Continuing Professional Development (CPD), with sometimes weekly support sessions. As a result, coaches and coach educators improved their practice, resulting in better coaching experiences for athletes.

4.1 Enhancing coach education and coaching practice across elite rugby union

England Rugby (ER) is the largest governing body of rugby union in the world. ER manages an elite Player Development Pathway, which seeks to identify and support future professional and national team players to achieve their potential. Hall designed and delivered a bespoke workshop at the week-long Wellington Festival, the largest academy festival in English Rugby, which is attended by members of all 14 professional academies and aims to develop both academy players and coaches on and off the field. The workshop (based upon **R1-R6**) was attended by an audience of over 100 key ER, academy, and national team leaders, including almost all the managers, head coaches, and coach educators connected to the Player Development Pathway [**E1**]. The event organiser, Russell Earnshaw, ER Pathway Coach Developer and High-Performance Coach of England U18s, highlighted the direct impact of the research: *'As a result of Dr Hall's workshop ... I know that many coaches changed their coaching practice to become more reflective and sensitive to the emotions and politics of coaching ... these coaches have also improved their ability to notice appropriate opportunities to interact with players (e.g. feedback, scaffolding), which I know has had positive impacts on players' learning and performance across the pathway'* [**E1**]. Following this intervention, Hall was asked to use the research [**R1-R6**] to support national level curriculum change and new learning for coaches taking ER's highest level coaching qualification (Level 4).

As a result, Hall designed and delivered bespoke new coach learning and development provision to organisations in elite rugby player development pathways in England and Ireland. These included Newcastle Falcons [**E2**], Ulster Rugby [**E3**], London Irish, and Leicester Tigers [**E4**]. This material was further tailored to support the learning and development of coaches involved in England Men U20s, England Men Students, and England Women rugby teams [**E2**] through CPD and mentoring work on the pitch.

Aiden McNulty, Elite Player Development Officer from Ulster Rugby identified the beneficial changes to his practice and the learning and performance of the players in his charge: *'I have no doubt that the enhancements to my coaching practice, based on this research, has positively impacted my players' learning, development and performance'* [**E3**]. *'As a result of this improvement, 17 players have gained professional playing contracts and a further 21 players were selected to represent national teams'* [**E3**]. McNulty has also been responsible for organising coach support and professional development opportunities for hundreds of coaches and states Hall's work with this group generated *'positive change in the attending coaches' practice including improvements in session planning, coaches' ability to recognise and respond to individual player needs and collaborating and co-ordinating activity with co-coaches'* [**E3**]. In 2019-2020, Hall and McNulty created a unique coach development opportunity that allowed the 50 best elite pathway coaches connected to the academy to access a bespoke CPD package, based exclusively on research at Northumbria. This led to *'players exploring the boundaries of their capabilities and being more confident to make decisions under real-world performance conditions, and ... other coaches who have been exposed to the research being more confident and influential in their social interactions to achieve better outcomes for themselves and others'* [**E3**].

Since 2015, delivery of training and mentoring based on the research to the Newcastle Falcons has led to changes in coaching practice across all of the club's teams, from ages 13 to 23. They now *'plan in more depth, to be more strategic in the specific interactions different coaches have with players during sessions, achieving a clearer shared purpose as a coaching team'* [**E2**]. In summary, the Newcastle Falcons now have a *'more athlete-centred, democratic, group*

leadership approach [E2] which is seen as translating to *'improved performance and increasing success on the pitch'* [E2]. Similar benefits were reported by coaches at Ulster [E3], London Irish and Leicester Tigers [E4].

4.2 Enhancing approaches to coaching in other sports around the world

The research has informed coach education in other sports, including British Canoeing's Level 4 Coaching Programme, the Youth Sport Trust Young Coach Academy, GB Hockey's Advanced Coach Programme, England Athletics Coach Development, and Newcastle United Football Academy. For instance, [R2] served as the catalyst for new coach CPD provision focused on reflection in coaching practice that was delivered by UK Coaching (the governing body for coaching across different sports) to over 400 coaches [E5].

Based on the research, British Athletics has changed how it monitors coach development and defines good coaching practice, which continues to shape its *'long-term planning for strategic youth talent development coaching for hundreds of British Athletics coaches until the 2028 summer Olympics'* [E6]. Specifically, entry into the Talent Programme was originally for athletes only but, following the research's emphasis on relations and interactions, now coach-athlete partnerships must apply together to the Youth Talent Pathway, Junior Talent Programme, and Futures Programme [E6]. Similarly, where previously only selected athletes had an individual development plan this has now been added as an element to their coach's development programme [E6]. In addition, the England Athletics Coach Tracker – designed to track coach development and inform educational interventions – was adapted to incorporate enhanced language to frame questions that promote critical reflection on experiences and practice. For example, coaches are now prompted to focus more critically on their interactions with stakeholders, critical thinking skills, ability to influence others, and how they build, maintain and repair relationships [E6]. *'Importantly, these changes have helped us to generate a more holistic and authentic representation of the complex work coaches are engaged in with their athletes'* [E6].

These changes have led to a beneficial impact on coaches' progress. One cohort of 18 coaches saw significant progress over a single year connected to the skills introduced, thanks to Northumbria's research. The coaches showed up to 20% improvement across several factors, from perceptions of interactions and critical thinking to influencing skills and inter-personal relationships. This compares with an average growth across these factors among all participants of 9.3% by the end of the programme [E6].

Having worked with Hall, in 2018 Russell Earnshaw set up an independent coach development company called The Magic Academy. This organisation provides coaching resources, coach education, and a platform where coaches share best practice. More than 7,000 coaches in numerous different sports use Magic Academy globally. Northumbria's research on reflective practice and social, emotional and political astuteness has been incorporated into the development of content on the platform, which has the widest reach of any independent coaching professional development initiative [E1].

In total, 800 coaches and coach educators, in rugby union and other sports, have attended workshops based on this research between 2015 and 2020. Secondary impact was also achieved from this - 148 of the participants reported coaching 13,341 players, and they also manage, lead, and support the learning and development of a further 1,276 coaches [E4, p2]. Surveys completed immediately following the workshops and webinars showed 94% agreed or strongly agreed that the research had increased their understanding of coaching [E4, p2], and 80% agreed or strongly agreed that they had learned how to integrate the research findings into their everyday practice [E4, p2]. In-depth follow-up feedback was also sought more than six months after workshops. Participants included schoolteachers, coaches, and coach educators. They worked in cricket, soccer, hockey and rugby union, in Canada, England, Malaysia, Northern Ireland, and Scotland. This analysis confirmed that the workshops had led to positive changes in the respondents' knowledge, skills, and practice (100%), with positive changes in their beliefs about and approaches to coaching practice (91%) [E4, p6]. Participants identified

areas they intended to address differently as a result of the workshops, including: *'Being aware of what implications my interactions can have to others through their perception'* [E4, p3] and *'Look at the implications around planning and how I can plan players interactions between peers and constraints within environment'* [E4, p3]. They also noted beneficial changes to practice: *'The questioning I am now using and the specific planning surrounding practice is having positive effects on all interact[ions] I have with stakeholders'* [E4, p7].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Ref.	Source of corroboration	Link to claimed impact
E1	Testimonial - Russell Earnshaw, England Rugby Pathway Coach Developer and High-Performance Coach of England U18s	Corroborates that Northumbria's research changed practice among coaches, who became more reflective and sensitive to the emotions and politics of coaching, and changed their interactions with athletes and other stakeholders
E2	Testimonial - James Ponton, Head Coach of a Premiership England Rugby Academy and England U20s Assistant Coach	Corroborates change in his interactions with players and coaches, as well as secondary impacts on the performance and success of his players
E3	Testimonial - Aiden McNulty, Elite Player Development Officer, Ulster Rugby	Corroborates that Northumbria's research impacted his personal coaching practice and benefited his athletes, as well as influence on coach education for pathway coaches
E4	Feedback from 148 coaches	Corroborates that Northumbria's research enhanced coaches' knowledge, skills and practice in Canada, England, Malaysia, Northern Ireland, and Scotland
E5	UK Coaching webinar materials 'Reflection: Developing your coaching craft'	Corroborates development of new Continuous Professional Development materials that were delivered by UK Coaching to 404 sport coaches across various sports
E6	Testimonial - Nick Ridgeon, England Athletics Event Group Lead (Throws) and British Athletics Futures Coach	Corroborates that Northumbria's research informed key changes in organisational practices, coach development, and coaching practice, as well as his own personal practice