1 **Journal: Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health**

2 **Published: 2016. DOI: 10.1080/2159676X.2016.1157829**

3 **An Investigation of Professional Top-Level Youth Football Coaches' Questioning**
4 **Practice**

5 Ed Cope[a], Mark Partington[b], Christopher J. Cushion[c] and Stephen Harvey[d]

6 *[a]Department of Sport, Health and Exercise Science, University of Hull, Hull, UK,; [b]*
7 *Department of Sport and Physical Activity, Edge Hill University, Ormskirk, UK; [c]*
8 *School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, Loughborough University,*
9 *Loughborough, UK; [d] College of Physical Activity and Sport Sciences, West Virginia*
10 *Unversity, USA*

11

12 To position learners as more central components in the coaching process, scholars suggested that
13 coaches should employ a questioning approach, which may lead to the development of desirable
14 learner outcomes (i.e., increased problem solving and decision-making skills) studies, however,
15 indicate that coaches rarely employ questions within their practice. When questions are asked, these
16 questions rarely move beyond lower-order or 'fact seeking' enquiries. While this research provides
17 information concerning the frequency and in some cases, the type of questions coaches asks, it fails to
18 report the more discursive nature of coaches' questioning approaches. In order to address such
19 limitations, the purpose of this study was to investigate Coach Questioning Practices (CQPs). We
20 recorded the practices of five academy youth level football coaches' subjected the data to a
21 conversation analysis (CA), This enabled the analysis of interaction between coach and player(s).
22 Findings revealed that CQPs, regardless of coach or context followed similar discursive patterns. In
23 particular, three themes presented themselves in each CQP: 1) coaches' requirements for an immediate
24 player response, 2) leading questions for a desired response, 3) monologist nature of coach/player
25 interaction. This showed that the coach positioned themselves as the gatekeeper of knowledge and
26 learners as passive recipients. This reinforces the messages from previous work that has suggested
27 coaches' ideologies inform their practice, and are stable structures that are difficult to change. We
28 concur with other researchers that there is a need for further investigation in this area to better
29 understand how dominant discourse can be challenged.
30
31
32
33

Introduction

It has been acknowledged that effective coaching positions learners as active agents, or co-learners in the learning process (e.g. Becker 2009; Cushion 2013; Kidman 2005). For this to be realized in practice requires a shift in how coaches conceptualize their role within the coaching process (Light and Evans 2010). Traditionally, coaches have been found to use high levels of instructional behaviours (e.g. Cushion and Jones, 2001; Potrac *et al.* 2007), that limit learners' input (Ford *et al.* 2010) positioning them as passive recipients of learning. For coaches to include learners in the learning process they need to move away from using such high levels of instructional behaviours toward the use of questioning (Davis and Sumara, 2003; Kidman, 2005). For example, through coaches using questions they are able to engage their players in dialogue and discussion (McNeill *et al.* 2008) that in turn enables them to more critically reflect on their performance (Forrest 2014). Furthermore, asking questions potentially develops players problem solving, decision-making, and creative thinking skills, as well as their game understanding (Chambers and Vickers 2006; Wright and Forrest 2007).

Research in coaching from observation studies have shown that coaches, regardless of sport or coaching context, ask players few questions (e.g. Becker and Wrisberg 2008; Cushion and Jones 2001; Potrac *et al.* 2007, *inter-alia*). These studies reveal that coach questioning is a small proportion of their coaching behaviour typically between 2-5% of overall reported coaching behaviours. More recent studies, inclusive of wider definitions of 'questions', demonstrated coaches predominantly asking convergent rather than divergent questions (e.g. Harvey *et al.* 2014; Partington and Cushion 2013). Convergent and divergent questioning develops conditional knowledge (Ennis 1994) of "'when, why and under what conditions declarative and procedural knowledge should be used" (p.165); divergent questioning is seen as pivotal in learning to develop higher order thinking. So, questioning is a pedagogic tool that appears rarely employed by coaches, and even when it is, evidence would suggest that the questioning approach fails to cognitively engage players.

Beyond reporting frequency in systematic observation studies, there is limited evidence of how coaches employ questioning approaches in their practice. Interviewing coaches about their behaviours and practice has been a popular method, and while providing insight to why coaches use certain behaviours and practices over

others, coaches' perceptions alone cannot be relied upon to give objective accounts of coaching practice (Partington and Cushion 2013). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the ways in which top-level youth coaches used questioning in their practice. The study looks to extend previous studies in coaching that have captured only the frequency and the nature (i.e. convergent or divergent questions) of coaches' questioning – and largely not considered the players response or the conversational nature of such coaching moments. To this end we aimed to capture the question-response exchange that occurs between coach and players and describe this as coach questioning practice (CQP).

Given that coaching can be recognised as an educational and pedagogical endeavour (Jones, 2006) and the limited research that explores coaches' questioning approach, educational research offers a lens to examine the appropriateness of coach questioning to meet desired outcomes (e.g. problem solving, decision-making, opportunities to reflect on performance). For example, research suggests that teachers formulate the majority of questions, with these being more fact-seeking in nature, rather than requiring students to think beyond the recall of information (i.e. a small number of higher order questions) (e.g. McNeill *et al.* 2008; Pedrosa-de-Jesus and Da Silva Lopes 2011). This questioning structure has been identified as initiation, response and evaluation (IRE) (Cazden 2001). Topic or task related sets of IRE are the most common discursive patterns reported in educational settings, including physical education (Cazden 2001; Wright and Forrest 2007). Metzler (2000) argues that lower order, fact seeking questions, which are characteristics of IRE require "less knowledge and ability for making responses" than higher order questions that "build on the knowledge from the lower-order" (p.108) and engage "analysis, synthesis and evaluations skills" to generate new knowledge (p.107).

A number of assumptions and issues arise from these findings that require further exploration when thinking about coaching. First, there is an assumption that the level of question and type of cognitive processing required is fixed and can be generalized independently of the subjects and their context (Yang 2006). The players' (learner) experience and cognitive characteristics, the content and purpose of the question, and the relevance and meaningfulness of the content to the player will all impact on their learning (Pagliaro 2011). Moreover, questioning practices are subjective interactions that involve a range of complementary pedagogic behaviours,

100 such as body language, giving time for answers, encouraging or discouraging of
101 learner contribution, and discussion (Pedrosa-de-Jesus and Da Silva Lopes 2011).

102 This suggests that, to understand more about the nature of CQP questioning
103 cannot be reduced to frequency and cognitive level alone, but instead needs to be
104 considered as rooted in coaches' and athletes' differing knowledge, concepts and
105 ideological beliefs about coaching and learning (Pedrosa-de-Jesus and Da Silva Lopes
106 2011; Prain and Hicky 1995; Yang 2006) – thus recognising that coaches'
107 understanding of learning, their assumptions and beliefs, and their ontological and
108 epistemological underpinnings acting often implicitly, informs their practice (cf.
109 Cushion 2013; Light 2008). In addition, there are recognizable and traditional
110 discursive practices in coaching; rules, conventions, and dispositions that control
111 coaching that are based on "tradition, circumstance and external authority" (Tinning
112 1988, p.82; Harvey *et al.* 2010). Thus, the internal relationship between conceptions
113 of coaching and learning will impact how coaches perceive the functionality of
114 questions and the degree to which they understand and apply this approach to their
115 pedagogy (e.g. Cushion 2013; Harvey *et al.* 2010; Light and Evans 2010; Partington
116 and Cushion 2013; Pedrosa-de-Jesus and Da Silva Lopes 2011). Therefore, an
117 analysis of CQP is also a useful indicator of underlying assumptions, beliefs and
118 conceptions of coaching and learning. However, analyzing coach interactions as
119 routine patterns of communication does not interrogate fully the ideological
120 determinants and outcomes of these patterns (Prain and Hickey 1995). There remains
121 an ideological aspect to coaching where discursive practice involves power, and
122 control of when, where and by whom (Cushion and Jones 2006; Potrac *et al.* 2007) –
123 not least in CQP – where ideological beliefs can act to "negatively influence and
124 retard the perspectives" (Crum 1993, p.344). This lends further weight to the need for
125 in-depth qualitative examination of coach questioning beyond its 'type' and
126 'frequency'. Therefore analysis of CQP offers a way to describe and interpret practice
127 at the micro level of coaching interactions, while also providing insight to ideological
128 influences in terms of coach assumptions and suppositions - thus providing a deeper
129 analysis of coaching's discursive patterns.

130 In this case, qualitative conversational analysis (CA) offers a useful tool to
131 interpret coach-player interactive patterns (Groom *et al.* 2012) and allows a broader
132 consideration of CQP beyond behavioural data about 'frequency' and 'type'. CA was

133 pertinent as CQPs were characterised as 'conversations' as coach and player
134 undertook a process of 'turn-taking' (Gréhaigne *et al.* 2005). Therefore, this method
135 allows consideration of how interaction is initiated, how individuals earn the right to
136 speak, the degree of freedom individuals have in what they say, how often individuals
137 speak and how communication is controlled (Prain and Hickey 1995). Considering
138 CQP in this light provides interesting insight into the discursive practice and
139 conceptual orientation of their interrelationship – as well as description of the learning
140 environment being created. So far, research into questioning has lacked empirical
141 evidence from *in situ* or 'natural' coaching environments. For example, Wright and
142 Forrest (2007) and Forrest (2014) provided examples of the qualitative nature and
143 dialogue that occurs between teacher/coach and learners/players when different types
144 of questions are asked. However, these studies 'manufactured' questioning practices
145 to show the types of questions a practitioner *could* ask, and subsequent learner
146 responses, reporting only half the story and leaving the relationship between
147 conceptions of practice and learning, and actual practices unclear. Therefore, there is
148 a limited appreciation of the contextualised and situated nature of questions asked by
149 coaches, and, crucially, the responses given by players that create particular learning
150 environments.

151 **Methodology**

152 ***Study Context***

153 The study was set inside a professional English youth football academy. In England,
154 academy clubs are the place where youth players identified as talented are nurtured
155 with the aim to prepare them for full-time professional football. The Premier League
156 operates the academy system with each academy required to implement the
157 'developmental pathway of players' (The Premier League Elite Player Performance
158 Plan 2011). The developmental pathway is comprised of three distinct phases; the
159 foundation phase, the youth development phase, and the professional development
160 phase. The foundation phase is from under 9's to under 11's, the youth development
161 phase is from under 12's to under 16's, and the final phase, the professional
162 development phase is from under 17's to under 21's (The Premier League Elite Player
163 Performance Plan 2011). The participants in this study coached players from under
164 10's to under 14's crossing both foundation and youth development phases.

165 Foundation phase players are provided with between 5 and 8 hours of coaching and
166 weekend competitive matches each week, increasing to between 12 and 16 hours in
167 the youth development phase.

168 ***Participants***

169 Participants were five male academy football coaches who were homogeneously
170 sampled, which is a type of purposive sampling that investigates the practices of those
171 who have shared similar contextual experiences. All coaches were required by the
172 club to have attained the Football Association (F.A.) level 3 (UEFA B) and a full F.A.
173 Youth Award. The following section provides an overview of further qualifications
174 and characteristics specific to each of the five coaches involved in the study. All
175 names used are pseudonyms.

176 *Tom*
177 Tom was 32 years of age at the time of study and coached the under 10's. Tom had
178 four years coaching experience in this setting and another eight years professional
179 coaching on Fundamental skills at participation level. He had a postgraduate level
180 education in strength and conditioning, and a Post Graduate Certificate in Education.
181
182 *Will*
183 Will was 36 at the time of study and coached the under 12's. He had been coaching
184 for 12 years of which 4 have been spent in this setting. Will left school at 16 and
185 therefore had no formal higher educational qualification beyond those he had in
186 football.
187
188 *Oliver*
189 Oliver was 28 at the time of study and coached the under 14's. He had ten years
190 coaching experience of which five years was in the current setting. He had a
191 postgraduate level qualification in sports coaching and a Post Graduate Certificate in
192 Education.
193
194 *Joe*
195 Joe was 26 at the time of study and coached the under 11's with Paul in an official
196 equal role. This meant that both were responsible for designing and delivering

197 practice, and matters regarding team selection. Joe had four years coaching
198 experience all in this setting. Joe had a degree level qualification.
199
200 *Paul*
201 Paul was 45 at the time of study and coached the under 11's. He had eleven years
202 coaching experience, three years in the current setting and six years at two other
203 professional football clubs in youth development. His qualifications included a degree
204 level qualification, and a Post Graduate Certificate in Education.
205
206 ***Data collection and procedure***

207 To enable qualitative analysis of CQPs, three practice sessions for each coach were
208 video recorded during the middle of the football season (fifteen in total). Video
209 recording each session allowed for more detailed analysis, as it enabled each session
210 to be reviewed an infinite number of times. Three sessions enabled an accurate
211 representation of the coaches' practice (Brewer and Jones 2002). In total 1215 number
212 of minutes of coaching was recorded with each session lasting on average 81 minutes.
213 Broken down, Tom was recorded coaching for 239 minutes, Will for 248 minutes,
214 Oliver for 231 minutes, Joe for 252 minutes, and Paul for 245 minutes. CQPs were
215 distributed relatively evenly amongst the coaches, with Tom initiating 44 CQPs, Will
216 52, Oliver 46, and Joe and Paul 53 each.

217 Post-observation field notes were used to enable us to report on matters linked
218 to the CQPs, and the coaches' wider discursive practices. For example, what was the
219 purpose of the session, what activities were undertaken, what was the nature of coach-
220 athlete interactions? Specific to questioning for example, why did the coach initiate
221 the CQP, who was the intended recipient of the questioning? It was determined that a
222 CQP occurred when there were any form of a questioning-response exchange between
223 coach and player(s). So, this could have been limited to only one question followed
224 by one response with only one player, or equally it could have been a series of
225 questions followed by responses from a from a number of players within that
226 particular CQP before the coach engaged in some other form of intervention (i.e.
227 instruction or feedback). In this sense, CQPs varied in time (six seconds – one minute
228 32 seconds) and length (one question and one response – thirteen questions and ten
229 responses).

230 ***Data analysis – conversational analysis***

231 To appreciate, and maintain the complexity of coach-player interactions through the
232 CQPs, a CA approach was employed. CA reveals interactions 'as they are' (Groom *et*
233 *al.* 2012, p. 230), as the concern is not only with what has been said, but also how it
234 was said (Hepburn and Bolden 2013). This was vitally important in the context of this
235 study, to not only understand the frequency and type of questioning, but also coaches'
236 complementary pedagogic behaviour and discursive patterns, including for example
237 how they asked questions, and the time they gave athletes to respond that contributed
238 towards the learning environment constructed. Furthermore, CA was an appropriate
239 approach to use in the context of this study, given its focus on in-situ recordings of the
240 coach/player interaction (Mondada 2013). Indeed, given the connected nature of
241 interaction between coach, player and environment Groom *et al.* (2012) advocate CA
242 as a powerful analytical device to further understand sports coaching.

243 The CA analysis followed the procedures and transcription symbols offered by
244 Groom *et al.* (2014) (see table 1). Two members of the research team reviewed the
245 recorded sessions independently. Initially, two complete reviews of each session were
246 undertaken. In the first review each CQP was transcribed. This included the question
247 initiation, the sequence of questions asked and responses given. The focus of the
248 second review was the lead in to the question and how the questions were asked
249 including notes of the coaches' wider discursive practice. This included such things as
250 the tone of the coaches' voice, the extent to which players were being encouraged to
251 respond to questions, and how coaches reacted when players failed to answer a
252 question. To ensure the credibility of the data, two further reviews were undertaken
253 by the same two members of the research team (Hastie and Hay 2012) as well as peer-
254 debriefing sessions (Patton 2002). This ensured researcher reflexivity through
255 discussing the separate analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994). Where differences did
256 occur in the analysis, the same two research members reviewed the video again before
257 reaching a point of confirmability (Harvey *et al.* 2015).

258 Insert table 1 here of conversational analysis symbols

259 **Results**

260 In total 248 CQPs were subjected to CA. This represented 158 minutes out of 1215
261 minutes of the coaches total practice time, which equated to approximately 13% of
262 their overall time being spent on questioning. The data are presented in the form of
263 CQPs or 'vignettes' enabled by the employment of a CA approach that include detail
264 from the notes taken during the coach observations. Presenting data in this way
265 reveals the complex nature of social interactions and the micro-reality of coaching
266 practice (Jones 2009), and also retains the authentic nature in which questions were
267 asked.

268 On reviewing the CQP data, which included the contextual information, a
269 number of themes were identified. These were: 1) coaches' requirements for an
270 immediate player response; 2) leading questions for a desired player response, and 3)
271 monologist nature of coach/player interaction. However, these themes were not
272 particular to certain CQPs, but rather occurred within CQPs. For example, it was not
273 the case that theme one occurred in 40 CQPs, or theme two occurred in 50 CQPs.
274 Rather, these themes appeared to give some structure to all of the CQPs, regardless of
275 the number of questions and responses, or the lead up to, and purpose of the
276 questioning. So, there was limited variability in the CQPs, with each following similar
277 patterns, regardless of coach or session. For the purposes of this study, and to better
278 present and understand the data, we present a CQP and link it to each of the three
279 themes. We then offer a general discussion, which connects data with theory.

280 ***Coaches' requirements for an immediate player response***

281 *CQP 1*

282 The session has been running for an hour. The coach stops the practice and
283 shouts for all of the players to come to him. The coach had already stopped the
284 players on eight previous occasions to give feedback/instruction e.g. "There
285 needs to be greater intensity in some of your movements off the ball", as well
286 as providing feedback and instruction while the players were practicing e.g.
287 "move faster", "get that ball in an be positive". The players gather around the
288 coach, who stands quietly waiting for all the players to listen .

289 Coach: What did we start off with (.)

290 Player: = Footwork and :: movement

291 Coach: What did the lads in the bibs do all the time (0.7)

292 Player: Dribbled

293 Coach: What did we take boys from the first bit (2.5)

294 Player: When you've got the ball look around you and give accurate passes °

295 Coach: = What did we move onto then (.) when we put another red in, what
296 was the decision we had to make (1.2)

297 Player: Make it quicker ::

298 Coach: What was the passing then (1.4)

299 Player: Harder, longer passes

300 Coach: = Did you find that easier then (2.1)

301 Player: {I didn't because it was a smaller area and it was four vs. three}

302 While this period of questioning was directed to the whole group, the players
303 were not required to cluster around the coach. Instead, players had 'frozen' on
304 the spot at the point at which the coach stopped practice. Players were
305 dispersed within the playing area. At this point in the questioning episode,
306 which had been going on for approximately 20 seconds, six of the players'
307 have turned to what is going on in other sessions that are going on at the same
308 time. However, as the coach directs his questioning to only those responding,
309 he does not notice some of the players not paying attention.

310 Coach: What did we have to do when two balls came across (0.8)

311 Player: QUICKER REACTIONS

312 Coach: Was it chaos all the time (1.4)

313 Player: Yes, but organised chaos

314

315 Data highlighted that coaches often required players to provide immediate responses
316 to questions they had asked. In this CQP, players were rarely given more than two

317 seconds (e.g. 'What did the lads in the bibs do all the time (0.7)') to provide a
318 response to a question. This indicated that players perhaps knew the answer that their
319 coach wanted to hear as a consequence of instruction provided by the coach earlier in
320 the session. When responses were not immediate, coaches often acted to fill in the
321 players' silence (e.g. '= What did we move onto then (.) when we put another red in,
322 what was the decision we had to make (1.2)'). In many instances, the coaches used
323 self-answering and rhetorical questions where players had little time to think about
324 their responses.

325 Questions that promote critical thinking require player's to consider a number
326 of responses before selecting an answer they feel to be most appropriate (Daniel and
327 Bergmann-Drewe 1998; Wright and Forrest 2007). However, for players to be able to
328 consider their responses, rather than expecting immediate responses, coaches need to
329 allow time for reflection (McNeill *et al.* 2008), as well as allow players the
330 opportunity to discuss answers amongst themselves. Wiersema and Licklider (2009)
331 talk about the need to provide opportunities for learners to ask questions of
332 themselves and others as this results in greater levels of learning; to think and reflect
333 more deeply about their performance.

334 Time is required for critical thinking and reflection to happen (Chambers and
335 Vickers 2006). The CA showed that coaches in this case rarely provided players with
336 time to think about their responses. As already discussed, when an immediate
337 response was not forthcoming, coaches filled the silence with an answer or re-initiated
338 through a re-phrased question. McNeill *et al.* (2008) argues that inexperience tends to
339 produce too many questions in quick succession, and this does not allow time to
340 reflect on possible answers and their consequences – while the coaches in this case
341 cannot be described as 'inexperienced' it could be argued that their experience of a
342 less directive and more questioning approach was limited. Indeed, research has
343 indicated that coaches are unable to facilitate well or conduct instructional
344 conversations, not knowing how, having never experienced sufficient guidance, nor
345 seen effective models in action (Cushion 2013; Light and Evans 2010; Partington and
346 Cushion 2013).

347 ***Leading questions for a desired response***

348 *CQP 2*

349 Players are engaging in a modified game after waiting for 4 minutes while the
350 coach explained how he wanted the activity to run, and the players role. Just
351 over 3 minutes into this activity the coach stops practice after seeing one of
352 the players perform exactly how he had instructed them to

353 Coach: SO what have they done to help him (1.2)

354 Player: <Moved>

355 Coach: SO if he comes in this way what might you three do :: (0.8)

356 Player: °Get out of the way°

357 Coach: Okay, so what did you do↑ (5.1)

358 Silence, the players stand and stare at the coach failing to give a response. The
359 coach responds to the silence by immediately re-phrasing the question.

360 Coach: Did you wait for him to come to you ↑, or did you pass it early (1.2)

361 Player: >Waited for the defender<

362 Coach: So when he waits for the defender, <what is it harder for that defender
363 to do> (4.4)

364 The coach has his hands out in front of him, as he looks at every player
365 waiting for an answer to be given but no players respond; they stare at the
366 coach. The coach continues to look around the group waiting for a response
367 from someone. When it doesn't come the coach re-phrases the question.

368 Coach: So if he comes here as the defender, and then he passes it, >is it easier
369 or harder for him< (0.8)

370 Player: Harder

371 Coach: (.)WHY

372 Player: °Because he has to run over to chase the ball°

373 Coach: So when he is running across what do you need to

Player: - Run across to support him.

This CQP shows how a number of the coach's questions were 're-initiation' i.e. re-phrased questions when there was no response or not the desired response to a question. For example, in this CQP the coach asked 'Okay, so what did you do↑ (5.1)'. When players failed to provide a response the coach rephrased the question to 'SO what have they done to help him (1.2)', which a player was then able to offer a quick response. This is synonymous with an IRE questioning framework where the coaches' asked 'test' questions to illicit a predetermined 'correct' response (Wright and Forrest 2007). Cazden (2001) notes that this predictable routine can easily become 'recitations' rather than genuine discussion, or verbal interaction with the development of new understanding. Data also showed that coaches prolonged the final word of some of their questions or there was a rise in intonation ('SO if he comes in this way what might you three do :: (0.8)'), meaning players were being led to a certain response. When this occurred, the players' gave much quicker responses ('>Waited for the defender<') as they appeared to more clearly understand the response the coach wanted to hear. Thus, the frequency of questioning appeared relatively high when coaches adopt this approach 'real' interaction and hence potential for learning was actually limited (Harvey and Light 2015).

In most cases, the CQP failed to move beyond recall or leading in nature, requiring players to produce an answer from memory (Siedentop and Tannehill 2000). Thus, the verbal role of the players was not generative and individual interpretation was not encouraged. However, analysing the data using a CA approach revealed a greater detail of information concerning how coaches structured the CQP. For example, where players were unsure of their response, their answer was delivered in a much softer tone ('°Get out of the way°') than when they were confident they were giving an answer they believed their coach wanted to hear.

Monologist nature of coach/player interaction

CQP 3

The coach is half way through his session with the under 12's. This particular part of the practice is a conditioned game and has been running for just over two minutes. During that time, the coach had regularly intervened by

instructing the players what he wanted them to do, something common to every practice session observed. For example:

“Adam, you need to move further up the pitch”

, “Liam ‘run faster with the ball”

After a series of these instructions had been given the coach stopped the entire practice.

Coach: TOMMY JUST STOP AND COME OVER HERE

Tommy instantly comes rushing over to where the coach is standing.

Coach: When did I say we needed to run with the ball (2.1)

Player: >When your head is up <

Coach: When else? ↑ (1.8)

Coach: Should I run with the ball now -

Coach: Should I run with it now -

Player: (.) ° No

Coach: Why (0.8)

Player: Because they are not looking ↓

Coach: > Okay, but why else wouldn’t I <

Player: It’s a tight angle (?)

Only Tommy is being asked these questions. While the coach speaks with him, five of the other players in the group are talking amongst themselves, with a group of three observing what is going on in sessions going on elsewhere. The remaining five players are listening in on the exchange between the coach and Tommy.

Coach: -Yes, but why else? (.)

Coach: - Have I got loads of space there (?)

430 Player: ° No

431 Coach: = {No, so I need more little touches which means I wouldn’t run so
432 fast. If I am here now, have I got loads of space}

433 Player: ° No

434 Coach: So do what instead then (1.0)

435 Player: Turn back and start again

436 Coach: So you need what to run with the ball ::

437 Player: Space ↑

438 Coach: >Good get back in there<

439 As Tommy quickly runs back to where he was originally standing, the coach
440 asks him a final question.

441 Coach: TOMMY, DO YOU HAVE A BIG TOUCH OR SMALL TOUCH
442 WHEN YOU HAVE LOTS OF SPACE (0.7) ↑

443 Player: BIG ↑

444 In the discussion of the previous theme is was demonstrated that players were
445 involved in recitation rather than discussion, as the evaluation phase of CQPs was
446 often brief or non-existent and the focus appeared on the coach leading the
447 questioning. What also occurred was the sequential nature of question followed by
448 response without the coach exploring players’ answers further. For example, in this
449 CQP, the coach asked a question (‘When did I say we needed to run with the ball
450 (2.1)’), which was followed by an instant response from a player (‘>When your head
451 is up <’), before the coach proceeded to ask a further question (‘When else? ↑ (1.8)’),
452 with out exploring the player’s first response in any great depth. Mortimer and Scott
453 (2003) argue being dialogic occurs when teachers engage with learners’ ideas,
454 expressed by a question and/or an answer and, consequently, stimulate the learners’
455 intellect. A non-dialogic teacher-learner interaction occurs when the teacher does not
456 explore the learners’ idea or perspective and/or does not stimulate further reasoning to
457 generate new meaning (Mortimer and Scott 2003).

458 In the present study coaches did not engage with the players and the
459 questioning was non-dialogic in this sense – the CQPs appeared as an instrument for
460 and of the coach, rather than being dialogic and using questions to explore players'
461 concepts and promote interpretation of information (Pedrosa-de-Jesus and Da
462 SilvaLopes 2011). The CA data showed how coaches' talk sometimes immediately
463 followed that of the players, or overlapped that of the players or even themself in
464 order to cut what players were saying. This occurred when players did not give a
465 response that the coach wanted, as based on instructions given throughout practice,
466 and so sought to ask another question, which would eventually lead to players
467 providing the coach with the 'right' answer that the coach wanted to hear. Therefore,
468 the coaches' low dialogic reaction formed part of their complementary pedagogic
469 behaviour, illustrating that the quality of questioning involves creating a dialogic
470 climate, and is not just about the frequency of questions asked (Harvey and Light
471 2015). Wright and Forrest (2007) suggest that learners' ability to discuss components
472 of their performance most likely demonstrates their ability to successfully play the
473 sport. It is of note that none of the CQPs led by the coaches in the present study
474 encouraged players to discuss their responses with each other. Instead, coaches
475 controlled the CQPs dictating when players could and could not speak.

476 **Discussion**

477 Coaching norms provide an overriding, powerful, and historical view of what coaches
478 *should* do and what coaching *should* look like (Cushion 2013; Cushion *et al.* 2003),
479 particularly in elite, or developmentally elite contexts (Potrac *et al.* 2007). One such
480 norm suggests that the coach *should* be positioned as the authority and responsible for
481 decision-making (Cushion 2013; Light and Evans 2010). The data in the present study
482 like Groom *et al.* (2012) demonstrated that players were passive recipients who
483 tended to intervene only when solicited by the coach and never on their own initiative.
484 The CQP illustrated an unequal encounter where players were not offered the
485 opportunity to decide when to speak and had to wait to be acknowledged. Hence
486 coach-led and dominated encounters were evidenced, the coach acting overtly as the
487 gatekeeper of knowledge in a didactic style that resulted in the coach not the players
488 acting as adjudicator, and the coach playing a central role as the only authority of
489 learning - the coach as 'expert' (Cushion 2013; Prain and Hickey 1995). The player's
490 learning, skill acquisition, and understanding was through a coach-centred

491 transmission of subject-specific vocabulary, where the coaches mediated every
492 exchange. Such an approach not only reinforces coaching norms but also is unlikely
493 to encourage players to interpret or elaborate understanding or prompt deeper
494 reflection and participation in learning (Cushion 2013; Prain and Hickey 1995).

495 The data showed that CQP occasionally resulted in questions directed to
496 individuals but these questions were still asked in the presence of all players. While
497 whole group questioning is important to allow reflection and hence meaning making
498 (Light 2002) it is less significant in players understanding than inductive questions for
499 individuals or small groups during practice (McNeill *et al.* 2008). A further issue with
500 a whole group questioning approach reported from the CA data is that when questions
501 were directed at certain players only, other players paid little attention. This can be
502 seen in CQP three, where a group of players turned their attention to another coaches'
503 practice while their CQP was taking place. Indeed, it is a false assumption that
504 individual responses elicited from questions asked in whole-group settings reflect the
505 depth of understanding across the group, while whole-group questioning is ineffective
506 at instigating personal decision-making (Harvey and Light 2015; McNeill *et al.* 2008).
507 To meet individual learner needs, it has been proposed that questions should be asked
508 to individuals or smaller groups (Crowe and Standford 2010; McNeill *et al.* 2008).
509 Curiously, while often advocated as 'player-centred', and appearing to emphasise the
510 individual, questioning as evidenced in the present study was a 'one size fits all'. That
511 is, regardless of individual learner differences, the same CQP with very little variation
512 was deemed sufficient. However, not all learners are the same, nor are circumstances
513 and contexts and advocating a singular whole group approach to questioning seems to
514 contradict athlete centredness, and deny, or minimize, individual difference (Cushion
515 2013; Yang 2006). Seemingly positioned as active learners with different needs,
516 learner subjectivity was, in fact, suppressed as the recipients of a universalised
517 learning framework where decisions were made by the coach (Sicilia-Camacho and
518 Brown 2008). CQP should reduce rather than maintain the power differential between
519 player and coach through joint involvement in decision-making (Kidman 2005), yet
520 CA data from this study would suggest the opposite occurred.

521 Given the link between coaching and learning conceptions, assumptions and
522 presuppositions and adopted coaching practices, questioning practice can be a useful
523 indicator of the main coaching and learning conceptions of a coach (Pedrosa-de-Jesus

524 and Da Silva Lopes 2011). Traditional coaching pedagogy has a number of
525 underlying assumptions that are framed by a positivistic paradigm underpinned by
526 behavioural conceptions of learning (Cushion 2013; Light 2008). This results in
527 coach-led and coach controlled practice sessions that are less dialogic, interactive and
528 one-directional, with the coach positioned as expert and athletes' passive receivers of
529 information (Cushion and Jones 2014; Potrac and Cassidy 2006). The presuppositions
530 in CQP discourse suggested that the coaches assumed that, as the expert, they must
531 emphasize skill acquisition and maintain close control of the discursive possibilities
532 of the session. Thus the coaches controlled the turn-taking contributions of the players
533 and ensured that a 'necessary' focused closed agenda was maintained – the coaches
534 agenda. This dominant discursive pattern served to establish, maintain and naturalize
535 the positions of power and authority for the coaches (Cushion and Jones 2014).
536 Interestingly, the coaches used 'we' during CQPs that appeared to imply a shared role
537 for the coach and players, however the coaches were the dominant agents and
538 authority for learning throughout (Cushion and Jones 2014; Prain and Hickey 1995).

539 A dominant coaching ideology appeared evident throughout CQP where the
540 coaches seemed to fail to recognise or understand the contradictions in conceptions of
541 coaching practice and athlete learning using questioning versus an authoritarian and
542 direct/behavioural approach (Cushion 2013; Light and Evans 2010). Several authors
543 coin this as coaches' 'epistemological gap', the use of an approach but with limited
544 conceptual or practical understanding of it (Davis and Sumara 2003; Light 2008;
545 Partington and Cushion 2013). In uncritically accepting this ideology, coach's focus
546 little attention on how learners internalize their participation or the formation of long-
547 term knowledge, also overlooking the potential of language interactions as a resource
548 for learning (Prain and Hickey 1995).

549 Developments in youth coaching profess a deliberate shift from traditional
550 coach-led pedagogical modes to more non-didactic approaches including changes in
551 practice types and game forms. To this end, the governing body have introduced a
552 series of 'Youth Modules' with the purpose of developing coaches in a manner that
553 enables them to structure sessions where players are able to learn through trial and
554 error as coaches use a more questioning based approach; with 36,000 coaches
555 reported to have completed two out of the three part course. However, the present
556 study supports longitudinal research by Stodter and Cushion (2014) that these changes

557 are not being realized. Coaches are strongly committed to these innovations and
558 attempt to change coaching content and practice structures (Cushion 2013; Partington
559 and Cushion 2013; Stodter and Cushion 2014) but in reality the present study supports
560 Stodter and Cushion (2014) with the notion that 'deep structures of communication'
561 remain largely unaltered; with only make surface-level, if any, changes to their
562 coaching practice. A crucial issue in this respect is that coaching beliefs are stable
563 structures that are particularly difficult to change (Light and Evans 2013; Strean *et al.*
564 1997), and coaches come to value certain types of knowledge over others (Cushion *et*
565 *al.* 2003). Therefore, coaches appear unable to change discursive practices or
566 challenge ideologically driven coaching behaviours and attitudes.

567 **Conclusion**

568 The purpose of this study was to observe coaches during their daily coaching and
569 provide 'authentic' or 'real-life' questioning practices with the aim of analysing
570 qualitatively CQP and its wider discursive patterns. Data revealed that while coaches
571 engaged their players with a higher number of questions than reported in other studies
572 many of these did not enable players to develop their critical thinking skills, or take
573 responsibility for their learning (Wright and Forrest 2007). So, while questioning has
574 been associated with an athlete-centred approach to coaching, deeper analysis shows
575 CQP's to be coach-led. In developing players a wide spectrum of questions and a
576 dialogical approach alongside complementary pedagogical behaviours is necessary to
577 challenge players knowledge, techniques, skills and strategies. If CQP is 'ineffective',
578 players lose out on abilities to 'defend, reflect on, examine or analyse their
579 performance' (Cleland and Pearse 1995, 33).

580 By using a CA approach to analyse data, we were able to move beyond
581 examining the type and frequency of questions asked by coaches to consider the
582 discursiveness of the interactions between coach and player(s). This showed how
583 coaches allowed players little time to consider a response to the question asked, and
584 when a response was not immediately given, coaches would re-phrase the question in
585 an attempt to lead players towards the answer, or answer the question themselves.
586 Where this happened, the result was an automatic response given by players as a
587 consequence of earlier instruction provided by the coach. Furthermore, coaches would
588 exercise their authority over their players by controlling the question/answer

589 exchange, and dictating when players were permitted to talk. While a CA approach
590 has enabled us to report the interactions that occur between coach and player, we
591 concur with Groom and colleagues that further work is needed in coaching to
592 understand this further.

593

594

595

596 **References**

597 Becker, A., 2009. "It's not what they do, it's how they do it: Athlete experiences of
598 great coaching". *International Journal of Sports Science and Coaching,* 4 (1),
599 93-119.
600 Becker, A.J. and Wrisberg, C.A., 2008. "Effective coaching in action: Observations of
601 legendary collegiate basketball coach Pat Summitt". *Sport Psychologist,* 22 (2),
602 197-211.
603 Brewer, C.J. and Jones, R.L., 2002. "A five-stage process for establishing
604 contextually valid systematic observation instruments: the case of rugby
605 union". *Sport Psychologist,* 16 (2), 138-159.
606 Butler, J.I., 2005., "TGfU pet-agogy: old dogs, new tricks and puppy school".
607 *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy,* 10 (3), 225-240.
608 Carson, F., 2008. "Utilizing video to facilitate reflective practice: Developing sports
609 coaches". *International Journal of Sports Science and Coaching,* 3 (3), 381-
610 390.
611 Cassidy, T, Jones, R., and Potrac, P., 2009. *Understanding Sports Coaching: the*
612 *social, cultural and pedagogical foundations of coaching practice*. 2nd ed.
613 London: Routledge.
614 Cazden, C.B., 2001. *Classroom discourse: the language of teaching and learning.*
615 2nd ed. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
616 Chambers, K.L. and Vickers, J.N., 2006. "Effects of bandwidth feedback and
617 questioning on the performance of competitive swimmers". *Sport*
618 *Psychologist,* 20 (2), 184.
619 Cleland, F. and Pearse, C., 1995. "Critical thinking in elementary physical education:
620 reflections on a yearlong study". *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation,*
621 *and Dance,* 66 (6), 31–38.
622 Crowe, M., and Stanford, P., 2010. "Questioning for quality". *Delta Kappa Gamma*
623 *Bulletin,* 76 (4), 36-44.
624 Crum, B.J., 1993. "Conventional thought and practice in physical education:
625 Problems of teaching and implications for change". *Quest* 45 (3): 339-356.
626 Cushion, C.J., 2013. "Applying Game Centered Approaches in coaching: a critical
627 analysis of the 'dilemmas of practice' impacting change". *Sports Coaching*
628 *Review,* 2 (1), 61-76.
629 Cushion, C.J., Armour, K.M. and Jones, R.L., 2003. "Coach education and continuing
630 professional development: Experience and learning to coach". *Quest,* 55 (3),
631 215-230.
632 Cushion, C., Ford, P.R. and Williams, M.A., 2012. "Coach behaviours and practice
633 structures in youth soccer: Implications for talent development". *Journal of*
634 *Sports Sciences,* 30, 1631–1641.
635 Cushion, C.J. and Jones, R.L., 2001. "A systematic observation of professional top-
636 level youth soccer coaches". *Journal of Sport Behavior,* 24 (4), 354-376.
637 Cushion, C. and Jones, R.L., 2006. "Power, discourse, and symbolic violence in
638 professional youth soccer: The case of Albion Football Club". *Sociology of*
639 *Sport Journal* 23, (2), 142-161.
640 Cushion, C.J. and Jones, R.L., 2014. "A Bourdieusian analysis of cultural
641 reproduction: Socialisation and the 'hidden curriculum' in professional
642 football". *Sport, Education and Society,* 19 (3), 276-298.
643 Cushion, C. and Partington, M., 2014. "A critical analysis of the conceptualisation of

644 ‘coaching philosophy’”. *Sport, Education and Society,* DOI:
645 10.1080/13573322.2014.958817
646 Daniel, M.-F. and Bergman-Drewe, S., 1998. “Higher-Order Thinking, Philosophy,
647 and Teacher Education in Physical Education”. *Quest,* 50 (1), 33-58.
648 Davis, B. and Sumara, D., 2003. “Why aren’t they getting this? Working through the
649 regressive myths of constructivist pedagogy”. *Teaching Education,* 14, 123–
650 140.
651 Ennis, C.D. 1994., “Knowledge and beliefs underlying curricular expertise”. *Quest,*
652 46 (2), 164–175.
653 Forrest, G., 2014. “Questions and answers: understanding the connection between
654 questioning and knowledge in game-centred approaches”. In: R. Light, J.
655 Quay, S. Harvey, and A. Mooney, eds. *Contemporary developments in games*
656 *teaching*. London: Routledge. pp. 167–177.
657 Gréhaigne, J.-F., Richard, J.-F., and Griffin, L.L., 2005. *Teaching and learning team*
658 *sports and games.* New York, NY: Routledge Falmer.
659 Groom, R., Cushion, C.J. and Nelson, L.J., 2012. “Analysing coach–athlete ‘talk in
660 interaction’ within the delivery of video-based performance feedback in elite
661 youth soccer”. *Qualitative research in sport, exercise and health,* 4 (3), 439-
662 458.
663 Groom, R., Nelson, L., Potrac, P., and Cushion, C., 2014. “Conversational analysis”.
664 In: L. Nelson, R. Groom, and P. Potrac, eds. *Research Methods in Sports*
665 *Coaching*. London: Routledge. pp. 227-238
666 Harvey, S., Cushion, C.J and Massa-Gonzalez, A-N., 2010. “Learning a new method:
667 Teaching Games for Understanding in the coaches’ eyes”. *Physical Education*
668 *and Sport Pedagogy,* 15 (4), 361-382.
669 Harvey, S., Cushion, C., Cope, E. and Muir, B., 2013. “A season long investigation
670 into coaching behaviours as a function of practice state: The case of three
671 collegiate coaches”. *Sports Coaching Review,* 2, 13–32.
672 Harvey, S., Cushion, C. and Salmon, P., 2015. “Dilemmas faced by pre-service
673 teachers when learning about and implementing a game-centred approach”.
674 *European Physical Education Review,* 21 (2), 238-256.
675 Harvey, S. and Light, R.L., 2015. Questioning for learning in game-based approaches
676 to teaching and coaching. *Asia Pacific Journal of Health, Sport and Physical*
677 *Education,* 6 (2), 1-36.
678 Hastie, P., and Hay, P., 2012. “Qualitative approaches”. In: K. Armour, and D.
679 MacDonald, eds. *Research methods in physical education and youth sport*.
680 London: Routledge. pp. 79-94
681 Hepburn, A., and G. B. Bolden. 2013. “The conversation analytic approach to
682 transcription”. In: J. Sidnell, and T. Stivers, eds. *The handbook of*
683 *conversation analysis.* Wiley-Blackwell: London. pp. 57-76.
684 Jones, R. L., 2009. “Coaching as caring (the smiling gallery): Accessing hidden
685 knowledge”. *Physical education and sport pedagogy,* 14 (4), 377-390.
686 Kidman, L., 2005. *Athlete-centred coaching: Developing inspired and inspiring*
687 *people*. Christchurch, NZ: IPC Print Resources.
688 Light, R., 2002. “Engaging the body in learning: promoting cognition in games
689 through TGfU”. *ACHPER Healthy Lifestyles Journal,* 49 (2), 23–26.
690 Light, R., 2008. “Complex learning theory in physical education: An examination of
691 its epistemology and assumptions about how we learn”. *Journal of Teaching*
692 *in Physical Education,* 27 (1), 21-37.
693 Light, R.L. and Evans, J.R., 2010. “The impact of game sense pedagogy on Australian

694 rugby coaches' practice: A question of pedagogy". *Physical Education and*
695 *Sport Pedagogy,* 15 (2), 103-115.
696 Light, R.L. and Evans, J.R., 2013. "Dispositions of elite-level Australian rugby
697 coaches towards game sense: characteristics of their coaching habitus". *Sport,*
698 *Education and Society,* 18 (3), 407-423.
699 McNeill, M.C., Fry, J.M., Wright, S.C., Tan, C.W.K. and Rossi, T., 2008.
700 "Structuring time and questioning to achieve tactical awareness in games
701 lessons". *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy,* 13, 231–249.
702 Metzler, M.W., 2000. *Instructional models for physical education*. 2nd ed. Boston,
703 MA, Allyn & Bacon.
704 Miles, M. B., and Huberman. A.M., 1994. *Qualitative data analysis: An extended*
705 *sourcebook*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
706 Mondada, L., 2013. "The conversation analytic approach to data collection". In: J.
707 Sidnell. and T. Stivers, eds. *The handbook of conversation analysis*. Wiley-
708 Blackwell: London. pp. 32-56.
709 Mortimer, E., and Scott, P., 2003. *Meaning Making In Secondary Science*
710 *Classrooms*. London: McGraw-Hill Education.
711 Oosterheert, I.E. and Vermunt, J.D., 2001. "Individual differences in learning to
712 teach: Relating cognition, regulation and affect". *Learning and Instruction,* 11
713 (2), 133-156.
714 Pagliaro, M.M., 2011. *Exemplary Classroom Questioning: Practices to Promote*
715 *Thinking and Learning*. New York, NY: Rowman and Littlefield Education.
716 Partington, M. and Cushion, C., 2013. "An investigation of the practice activities and
717 coaching behaviors of professional top‐level youth soccer coaches".
718 *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine & Science in Sports,* 23 (3), 374-382.
719 Patton, M.Q. 2002., "Two decades of developments in qualitative inquiry a personal,
720 experiential perspective". *Qualitative Social Work,* 1 (3), 261-283.
721 Pedrosa-de-Jesus, M. H. and da Silva Lopes, B., 2011. "The relationship between
722 teaching and learning conceptions, preferred teaching approaches and
723 questioning practices". *Research papers in Education,* 26 (2), 223-243.
724 Potrac, P. and Cassidy, T., 2006. "The coach as 'a more capable other". In: R. L.
725 Jones, ed. *The sports coach as educator: Reconceptualising sports coaching*.
726 London: Routledge. pp. 39-50
727 Potrac, P., Jones, R. and Cushion, C., 2007. "Understanding power and the coach's
728 role in professional English soccer: A preliminary investigation of coach
729 behaviour". *Soccer and Society,* 8 (1), 33-49.
730 Prain, V. and Hickey. C., 1995. "Using discourse analysis to change physical
731 Education". *Quest,* 47, 76–90.
732 Sicilia-Camacho, A. and Brown, D., 2008. "Revisiting the paradigm shift from the
733 versus to the non-versus notion of Mosston's Spectrum of teaching styles in
734 physical education pedagogy: a critical pedagogical perspective". *Physical*
735 *Education and Sport Pedagogy,* 13 (1), 85-108.
736 Siedentop, D., and Tannehill, D., 2000. *Developing teaching skills in physical*
737 *education.* 4th ed. Mountain View, CA: Mayfleld.
738 Sparkes, A.C. 1990. *Curriculum change and physical education: towards a*
739 *micropolitical understanding*. Deakin University.
740 Stodter, A. and Cushion, C.J., 2014. "Coaches' learning and education: a case study of
741 cultures in conflict". *Sports Coaching Review,* 3 (1), 63-79.
742 Strean, W.B., Senecal, K.L., Howlett, S.G. and Burgess, J.M., 1997. "Xs and Os and
743 what the coach knows: improving team strategy through critical thinking".

744 *Sport Psychologist,* 11 (3), 243-256.
745 Thompson, C. L. and Zeuli, J.S., 1999. The frame and the tapestry: Standards-based
746 reform and professional development. In: L. Darling-Hammond, and G.
747 Sykes, eds. *Teaching as the learning profession: Handbook of policy and*
748 *practice*, edited by. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass. pp. 341-375
749 The Premier League., 2011. *Elite Player Performance Plan*. London: The Premier
750 League.
751 Tinning, R.I., 1988. "Student Teaching and the Pedagogy of Necessity". *Journal of*
752 *Teaching in Physical Education,* 7 (2), 82-89.
753 Wiersema, J.A. and Licklider, B.L., 2009. "Intentional Mental Processing: Student
754 Thinking as a Habit of Mind". *Journal of Ethnographic and Qualitative*
755 *Research*, 3 (2), 117-127.
756 Wright, J. and Forrest, G., 2007. "A social semiotic analysis of knowledge
757 construction and games centred approaches to teaching". *Physical Education*
758 *and Sport Pedagogy,* 12 (3), 273-287.
759 Yang, M. 2006., "A critical review of research on questioning in education:
760 limitations of its positivistic basis". *Asia Pacific Education Review,* 7 (2), 195-
761 204.