

## Article

# You can't buy love at Tesco - an exploration of a coach education event

Grecic, David and Palmer, Clive Alan

Available at <http://clock.uclan.ac.uk/31037/>

*Grecic, David ORCID: 0000-0003-1487-8327 and Palmer, Clive Alan ORCID: 0000-0001-9925-2811 (2014) You can't buy love at Tesco - an exploration of a coach education event. Journal of Qualitative Research in Sport Studies, 8 (1). pp. 111-128. ISSN 1754-2375*

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work.

For more information about UCLan's research in this area go to <http://www.uclan.ac.uk/researchgroups/> and search for <name of research Group>.

For information about Research generally at UCLan please go to <http://www.uclan.ac.uk/research/>

All outputs in CLoK are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including Copyright law. Copyright, IPR and Moral Rights for the works on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the [policies](#) page.

# You can't buy love at TESCO: observation field notes of a coach education event

**David Grecic and Clive Palmer**  
(University of Central Lancashire)

*Keywords:* coach education, ethnography observation field notes, parent-player-coach triad

## Abstract

This paper presents the observation field notes taken at a coach education event for young elite golf players, with their parents and coaches. The structured notes may serve as a worked example of what field observations look like in practice – although they are tied closely to the context of this event. In some ethnographic research there is a trend to present the raw data, if it is appropriate, to afford the reader a ring-side seat on actual goings on which is the intention here. In this way there may be a claim for authenticity and truthfulness in research, and that interpretation for emergent themes can be traced back to a given reality. A conclusion from the research is that there may be a misalignment of expectations and roles between parents and coaches with some pressures over respecting what each party might bring to the coaching scenario of the young golf player. Nestling under the obvious façade of golf/sports Competition, there seemed to be an underlying competition over who provides what - between love, support and counselling from the parents, and expertise, skill development and competition readiness from the coach.

## Introduction

A value of field observation is that it allows the researcher to get close to the lived experience; to witness the actual goings on in a situation, in real time and in real-context. Consequently there may be a valuable reduction of bias in field data compared to a verbal interpretation of events or beliefs that are yielded in interview data. For these reasons Silverman (2007:9) coined the phrase 'manufactured data' to describe interviews and focus groups which he regarded as dislocated from reality, or staged, which were 'only to be used as last resort' when a 'quick fix' for data may be needed. In this manner observation data 'fresh from the field' i.e. phenomena which can be observed first hand (it is clearly not possible to see everything in time and space), may in a qualitative sense, be of a higher order (free of second order interpretation) over data which is forced, staged or manufactured on a similar topic or instance. A key point being that observing naturally occurring behaviour might

*JQRSS*

ISSN: 1754-2375 [print]

ISBN: 978-0-9566270-8-7

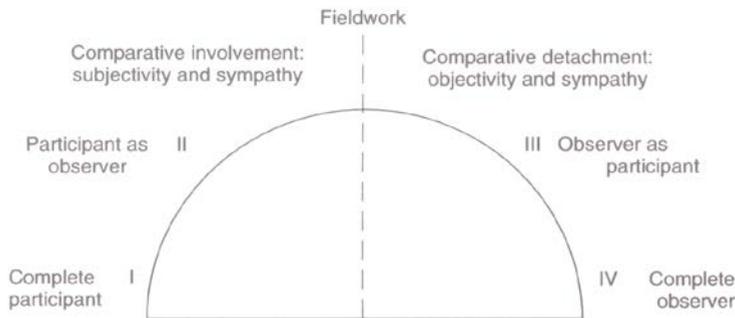
JQRSS Article No: 3/18-1-2014-PG[45]-076 © SSTO Publications, UK.

Web: <https://uclan.academia.edu/ClivePalmer/Journal-of-Qualitative-Research-in-Sports-Studies>

lead to more authentic, true, honest, vivid and perhaps accurate field data, which in turn can support more detailed philosophical analysis for practical understandings about human behaviour.

Whilst the observer’s view may be limited to one event at a time and may be demanding upon time and energy, the richness of what he can physically see, hear, feel, touch, taste and smell, can all add to the picture of reality that can be explored – and manifested for others to appreciate. This is when field observations can have maximum impact in research and be most engaging and instructive for readers, for example, in Loic Wacquant’s ethnography of ghetto culture and boxing in *Body and Soul* (2004) or Nicholson Baker’s (1988) book which is a rich description (130 pages) of observations made during his lunch hour. The fascination with minutia that field research permits can become the mirror which reflects back a reader’s life-experience and can bring about profound changes in other’s behaviour and their experience of the world around them. This may be why seemingly ‘unremarkable things matter’ to qualitative field researchers (Silverman, 2007:11) - it being their duty to pick at instances and note in fine detail the behaviour of the ‘unusual tribe’ being observed for the first time (intentionally phrased to trace field observation within ethnography back to its anthropological heritage ... *Dr Livingstone*).

At this coach education event Clive has acted as researcher for his colleague David, taking notes that were determined by his field positions within the Participant Observation spectrum, (see figure 1, after Junker, 1960 cited in Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995:104). In the first half of the event a field position of ‘comparative detachment’ allowed notes to be written freely as ‘observer as participant’ (I was there at the lecture but more watching and note-taking than taking an active part in anything.) In the second half of the event Clive’s field position shifted towards more ‘comparative involvement’ requiring him to think more strategically about note taking/recording as he became a ‘participant as observer’ (I sat with the subjects and participated in their discussion).



**Figure 1.** Theoretical social roles for fieldwork (Junker, 1960 cited in Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995:104).

Having conducted extensive field research in the past; 3 years observing elite gymnasts, judges and coaches on the international stage (Palmer, 2010) and having guided several students towards observation field work in their studies where field notes played a central role in their research; McCabe and Palmer (2007) in Physical Education and trampolining, Hughes and Palmer (2010) in coaching professional rugby league, and Pryle and Palmer (2013) in cricket in education, it was time to revisit the field myself and rehearse the process of observation in a sports pedagogy context. Thus, the aims of the exercise reported in this paper were to:

- (i) demonstrate the workings of one process of field observation technique,
- (ii) consider the machinations of the actual situation/topic under the microscope, i.e. a coach education event.

**An objective for aim (i)** was to reveal the raw data as noted during the coach education event with minimal reinterpretation. The point being to bring the reader closer to the data from the lived experience which they might interpret themselves for their own ends. The intent behind this strategy is to let the data ‘speak’ for itself, similar to that experimented in photo-ethnography where the pictures stand alone to tell their story, there is no textual accompaniment (see Rookwood and Palmer, 2009; Price and Varral, 2011). The ‘naked’ field notes taken at this coach education event follow a structure of description, inference and researcher awareness (figure 2) which creates a simple but effective framework for reflexive and analytical observation in a practical and workable manner.

<b>Description note</b>	Observation and description of what is seen/experienced in the heat of the moment, describe the here and now, the sensual reality, note occurrences in time (in rich detail if significant), specifically from the researchers actual vantage point.
<b>Theorising note</b>	Making inferences; the researcher is free to make his/her own inferences about what they see, describe and experience. They can postulate and theorise, ponder on what-ifs, envisage consequences or opportunities and contrasts about the topic/data/instance they have witnessed, look to the future and consider the past in relation to immediate observations and context.
<b>Researcher awareness note</b>	Constant on-going critique of bias, limitations as to what can (or can't) be seen or heard from the researcher's limited vantage point. Note your field position in the spectrum of Participant Observation and comment on the consequences of 'being noticed' for you and the data; effects of moving position and impact upon data, consider the subjects' perceptions of the researcher (if role revealed) and how this effects the current field-role and data, judge/note the influence of the researcher upon the natural proceedings of the social setting.

**Figure 2.** FIELD NOTES: Structured observation is more than spectating

Whatever system of note taking is used it has to work under pressure, it has to yield comprehensive data but be simple to operate, the aim is to become ‘cluttered’ with rich data but be uncluttered by rules to collect it, to have an ordered format so that discovery might emerge from apparent chaos. It has to acknowledge limitations and bias whilst affording some insight to the field strategy; new positions and effects on data. It is this kind of reasoning that lifts structured field observation towards an effective research action, and away from passively spectating at an event.

**An objective for aim (ii)** was to invite David to comment on the field notes as an educator, drawing upon his experience of facilitating the coach education event. His is a post-event reflection, usefully adding detail to the overall message about coach education which may imparted. As both David and Clive were in such strongly defined modes of operating that evening; Clive as researcher and David as facilitator, there may be a new layer of understanding that David can bring about the pedagogy of the event itself and for the coach-player-parent interactions in elite golf.

The title of this paper stems from the data within it. Upon the premise that data leads the story, or guides the researcher through their qualitative research the phrasing about emotions; love and hugs and the supermarket TESCO relate to things which respectively the parent and the coach *can* and *cannot* provide for the young golfer. The concept of *who* provides *what* delineated their roles and seemed to create interesting conflicts between parents and coaches. The parents were tasked with providing emotional support (whether they wanted to or not) and the coaches wanted to provide ‘everything’ for the young player and their parents in some cases, seemingly all at once – just like a supermarket can provide everything at once. The upshot being that both parents and coaches may be over-stretched with ‘impossible’ demands, i.e. there may be a misalignment of perceived expectations manifesting themselves as demands. In the centre of all this is the player, who, like being at a fireworks event, might simply enjoy watching the various displays of attention he or she is stirring up through their sporting aspiration. All they want to do is play golf?

The field observation notes below are theoretically structured upon concepts of description, theorising and researcher awareness as outlined above and are chronically ordered in time; hours and minutes from 5pm to 9pm on the day of the event. The event itself being split between:

Arrival at 5.00pm	(a) Pre-event observations	(b) Lecture [part 1] observations	(c) Break time observations
(d) Workshop [part 2] observations	(e) closing/post event observations	Depart at 9.00pm.	

Following on from the field notes are some researcher critical summary notes; analysis and reflections from Clive and some pedagogical reflections from the catalyst of the whole event, David.

**Event:** Coach Education Workshop: Golf England

**Focus:** One in a series of National Governing Body Coach Education events held nationally for parents meeting coaches meeting players.

**Time:** Thursday evening: 15<sup>th</sup> May 2014 (18.00-20.00hrs)

**Location:** Regional Golf Club

**People in attendance:**

Clive Palmer: Field observer and note-taker; a fellow researcher from UCLan.

David Grecic: Facilitator of the coach education workshop (Golf England/UCLan).

Attendees: coaches, parents and some teenage golf elite players.

### **ARRIVAL IN THE FIELD AT 5.00PM**

After a drive down the motorway we arrived at the Golf Club at 5:00pm. David and I chat in the bar area having a coffee, some people have arrived for an evening meal. The workshop is scheduled to start at 6pm, people would be arriving soon so not much time to get set up; there is always a measure of improvisation to make the setting 'work' for a teaching event like this – as this is a reception hall at a golf club, not a classroom in college, some tinkering with the stage set is anticipated.

### **(A) PRE-EVENT OBSERVATIONS**

*5.30pm*

**Description note: Physical Setting and initial impressions - Bar and reception**

A 1970s(?) modern brick built building. There is a hotel feel to this Golf Club with heavy wooden doors, carpeted throughout with beige patterned carpet. Reception/waiters are all suited, or in black and white serving garb. The place is warm, quiet, equipped for convenience with 'IKEA posh' furniture in the bar and restaurant area. There is a mass production feel to this comfortable area.

**Description note: In to the Conference Room**

More plush, patterned, thick, beige carpet with brown swishes in it, like Nike swishes, about banana size. The carpet cushions your foot as you walk on it. Full length windows and heavy crush velvet curtains. Pink crush velvet chairs with metal frames sprayed in gold paint, reminiscent of those one might see at a hotel wedding. (I would notice later that many of the silver Philips-head screws holding the backs of the chairs on, were loose and falling out. It is curious to note, in my role as fly-on-the-wall observer, what details serve to form first impressions of a place, not bad ones, although a general picture was emerging at this early stage).

### **Description note: Setting the scene**

At 5.00pm a waitress had prepared the room and announced upon our arrival that she had set the chairs ‘in theatre’ [style] and that the presentation area was screened off from the main bar/restaurant area. In the area where the lecture will take place there is a raised stage (a very large varnished plywood box) with a slide projector screen stood on it, and a data-projector for connection to a laptop. However, nothing is lined up, nothing hooked up or tested. The fitted speakers in the room do not operate from the laptop. There is a flip chart stand which David uses in the second half of the session but seemingly was in the way for the first half. An obstacle of sorts, it needed moving. The table which the data-projector is sat on, supplied by the waitress, is too small to hold the laptop as well, so we exchange it for a bigger table and use the boxes from flip chart pens to prop up the projector in the right place for the PowerPoint slides to be seen, trying our best to reduce that wedge shape in an image projected from a clumsy angle. All very *Heath-Robinson* (adapted on the spot) which may be *par for the course* (excuse the pun) in this kind of teaching setting/scenario. Get it working the best you can and get on with it.

### **Theorising note**

Everything about this place was warm, pleasant, comfortable, not at all objectionable, but not what I would have set up for an educative talk/workshop with these people. I get a feeling that the physical setting is a compromise already for David but I know he will just work around it; he’s a good teacher like that. The initial setting up/practical issues being noted are typical of presenting at venues which are not used to accommodating these kinds of talks, therein lies the challenge for David.

**5.40pm**

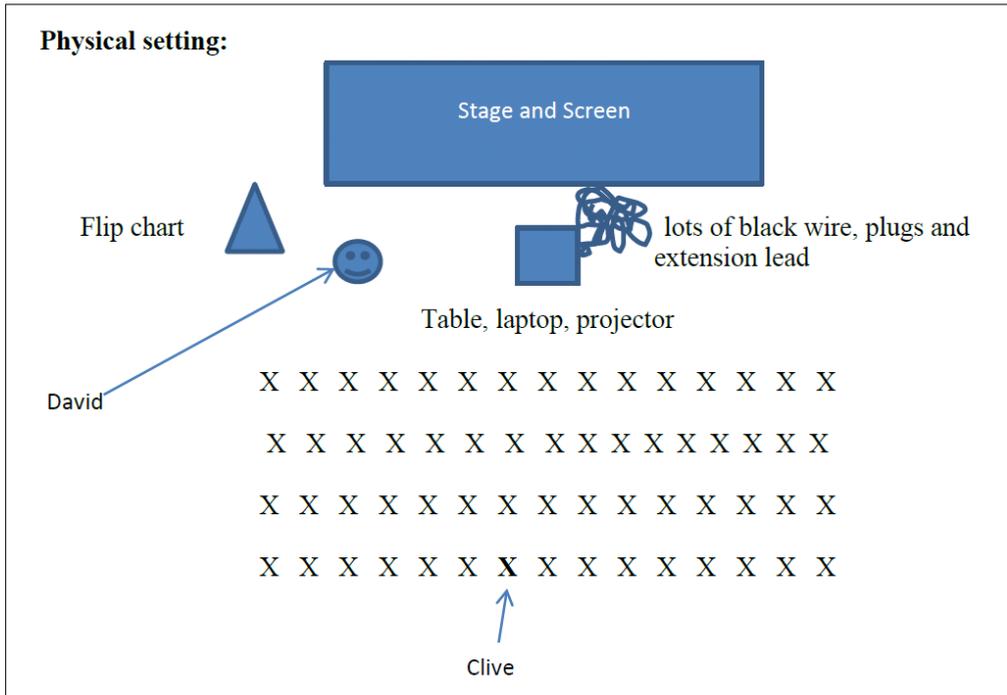
### **Theorising note**

Obstacles everywhere, how will you move and be free to maintain their attention? David is a great teacher and I know he will cope with all this in his stride. It’s really not a problem for him but, given a better setting I wonder what David might be like? Is it reasonable to consider what his ‘teaching’ might be like without these obstacles as this is exactly the kind of setting in which he is likely to get this kind of audience – just accept the compromise. Is this as good as it gets?

### **Theorising note**

With regard to the setting of chairs and layout; a formal setting, complex carpet, crush-velvet covered, steel framed chairs, no speaker for the computer (for narrated video clips), and regimented ‘theatre style’ formal lecture setting. Will this be [counter] productive for the message David wishes to impart? As I understand it David’s intention is to guide parents and coaches to learn from each other. If

teaching is bringing about a change in behaviour then this may not be the setting to achieve that. Turn on the charm David!



5.50 pm

### Theorising note

David showed me the flip chart sheets from earlier workshops. These are valuable primary data for the coach education project David is developing. There are what appear to be good, thematic words emerging around the group tasks that occur in the second part of this workshop- brainstorm tasks: notions of support, top 10 etc.

### Theorising note

Two words strike me from the 10 or so sheets David shows me, LOVE and HUG. I wonder what the relevance of *love* here is to golf?

- Hug; it takes two people to hug, physical contact needed to hug, but golfers are out there on their own at the most pressured time in competition.
- A hug; infers warmth, acceptance, belonging, forgiveness, a trouble shared. Is this what parents feel they want to give? Is there a measure of insecurity somewhere?
- Love; who loves what? Where and when? Parents proud? Do parents forgive failure? Well, yes, but is there a consequence to this in sport?

### **Theorising note**

It will be interesting to get close to a conversation that might yield these words (or similar) later in the evening, we'll see...

### **Researcher awareness note**

I must not lead in a conversation to bring these terms (or similar) about, just see what emerges from the group naturally.

## **(B) LECTURE [PART 1] OBSERVATIONS**

### ***6.10pm David starts Workshop***

#### **Observation/description note**

As David calls for attention to begin the workshop... About 30 people have shown up, a mix of some parents and coaches with some teenage players in attendance also. All sit in silence, the 'theatre style' seating, ostensibly, having already established the formality 'required' for such a lecture.

#### **Inference/theorising note**

I have not seen the lecture before, so I have no idea what is coming up other than it is to do with a player centred approach to coaching golf. David has briefed me that the aim is to get parents, coaches (and players eventually) to comprehend their respective roles differently, to help each other more effectively under the 'new' concept of being player centred – i.e. that the coach, parent and player would have a fresh view of the responsibilities they have and a clearer understanding of those responsibilities appropriate to role.

#### **Observation/description note**

David is commanding the floor – parents/coaches attention is fully on him, David is very engaging. The audience are conspicuously silent, still, but attentive (I think).

#### **Researcher awareness note**

David has introduced me/my presence to the group as a fellow researcher at Uclan interested in Coach Education and that is why I may be writing things down, to help David. This sorts out any Gatekeeper permission to access the event but does reveal my role immediately, but also to some degree excuses me and frees me up, it accounts for my presence albeit with a compromise. This may have some affect on delegates' behaviour and comments. In the 'lecture' setting, formal as it is, this does not seem to affect things too much. To reduce my impact I deliberately sit at the back of the group and move my chair further back, slightly out of line with the others so my notes and act of note taking are not a distraction to members of the group.

### **Observation/description note**

The person in front of me to my right has an ipad on his knees with his emails open, but has paused his virtual communications to watch the YouTube clips David is showing on his PowerPoint.

### **Researcher awareness note**

I am pretty much a fly on the wall observer here and now, my note taking would have been obvious and conspicuous to some as no others were doing this so David's revelation about my presence usefully explains things, they all know he is from Uclan, most will know he is engaged in some sort of research. So I am free to note, infer and scribble to my hearts content.

*6.15pm*

### **Inference/theorising note**

I wonder what this lot in front of me are thinking about? I think the formal chair arrangement may be hindering a subtle social interaction that might be useful for this group to share, just these folks having some [fleeting] eye contact with each other might be helpful. Because of the [formal] setting it may not be clear how they should be involved – what is their buy in?

### **Inference/theorising note**

David is still 'driving' - they appear like passive recipients, silent, not moving a muscle, congregation like. Is, because of the way they are sat, reinforcing their passive recipient role?

*6.25pm*

### **Inference/theorising note**

Are they aware, David, that you are talking about them now in your presentation (as parents or coaches). From their reaction (or lack of it) I don't think they are aware of this. It is as if this lecture is about other people. The seating arrangement seems to reinforce this detachment. It is as if they are being given a chance in this lecture to look in upon some ideas which affect other people, not them.

### **Researcher awareness note**

I am sat at the back of the group, 4 rows back. I have a good view of responses albeit the back of their heads (also body language and fidgeting). I can make plenty of notes from this position as David has introduced me, so no problems with covert role. I.e. I am not particularly covert, I am not acting as one of them, but then, I am accepted and promoted through David, the Gatekeeper and so seem to be accepted without question.

### **Observation/description note**

20 mins in to presentation – David is on a slide with a colourful divided triangle. David is holding the group’s attention really well, a few heads and eyes wandering around the room at times. The guy in the blue checked shirt towards the front looks nearly asleep.

### **Inference/theorising note**

I still get the feeling that this is ‘just’ a lecture to them. How can I find out if they realise you are talking about them (in your advice about player centred learning).

### **Observation/description note**

PCDEs slide. There is a bulleted list on the slide. Some great things here, folks seem to shift around a little bit at this, what was said seemed to prompt some physical reaction, but not much. PCDEs – is an acronym which I seemed to miss, explain, what does it stand for?

### **Researcher awareness note**

In a moment of self-reflection in this context, it is a great privilege for me to make these notes, fly on the wall style, interesting (being this free, being trusted).

### **Observation/description note**

Slides – Jesus in Rio.

I am really curious at the moment, there was no visible response to you or the slides; scaffold idea.

This is the strongest and most vividly illustrated point you’ve made so far, but, no nods of heads, no shifting, no signs of agreement or disagreement, only passiveness from what I can see.

### **Inference/theorising note**

Slides Dwek/Perry references.

Again, do they realise you are talking ABOUT THEM now?

I wonder, if they are thinking ‘this is all well and good David but what has it to do with me?’ I wonder what they are thinking? When might I be able to ask?

### **Observation/description note**

Delayed learning/speed bumps slides.

You are communicating that a coach’s reasoning for doing certain things may not be clear to the parents at all times, but is in fact well reasoned.

Communication issues.

**Inference/theorising note**

This is such a powerful point (message behind delayed learning/speed bumps slides) that relates directly to the coaches and parents who may judge each other harshly and too quickly at times.

Perhaps make more of this, it relates to them, here and now.

**Observation/description note**

ZOUD another acronym, what does that mean again?

**(C) BREAK TIME OBSERVATIONS**

***6.50pm Break / interval***

**Observation/description note**

6.50 finish talk (first half of the workshop completed) David signals that refreshments are available at the bar and to reconvene in 20 minutes time. Everyone just walks out of the room. A few folks are talking to each other but not about David's presentation. Others are silent and walk off to the bar. No-one engages David with any discussion, directly, about what he's just said. This is very interesting indeed! In the bar area people stand around in clusters, some at the bar waiting, others making polite conversation.

**Inference/theorising note**

Has David challenged them so much that they scurry away? I must get to the bar and earwig right now.

**Researcher awareness note**

I leave my note pad back in the lecture room for efficient and effective eaves dropping. To outward appearances if I am seen without my note pad they may think my researcher role has been paused.

**Observation/description note**

The bar itself is overwhelmed. They are all waiting to be served, 30 people pitch up at once but the Golf Club have left just one person in charge of the bar and people wait for ages to get a drink.

**Observation/description note**

I entered into one conversation with a coach who was interested in my role and reason for being at the event. I explained that I had never played golf in my life but was helping David with ideas around researching coach education.

### **Researcher awareness note**

Realising that this break-time was a valuable opportunity I, with apologies, cut short my conversation with the golf coach and walked around looking for an opportunity to drop onto some relevant conversation between parents and coaches.

### **Researcher awareness note**

*Toilet Field Research* The excuse I use to cut short my conversation with the coach is that I need to visit the toilets. This conscious strategy would necessitate that I leave the room by one door, whilst looking around at clusters of people talking, and could re-enter the room via another door allowing me to make a fresh reconnoitre of potential data targets and people to approach. *In and out of the toilet to get in and out of the field.* As I turned to walk, it immediately dawned upon me that for my excuse to appear genuine I had to make the timing of my visit to the toilet look realistic, even though I did not need to use the toilet at all. Having made the commitment I walked to the toilets which were empty, thankfully, stood around a bit, ran a tap, flicked on the hot air dryer and then re-entered the main room to select fresh targets. Strange, but true.

### **Inference/theorising note**

I am not sure that there was any juicy coach-parent conversation going on around the bar area. This may be interesting in itself as this apparent ‘down time’ seems to signal to the ‘audience’ to chat about trivialities such as the traffic that evening, or the weather. I wonder if this break might be subtly redirected to link in with the workshop - ‘find a parent who... or find a coach that...’

### **Observation/description note**

With little going on in what I thought might be a ‘data rich environment’ I walked back into the lecture area, only to find the chap in the blue check shirt that fell asleep earlier talking quite animatedly about his realisation of roles and coaching approaches under a player centred approach. It was he and about 3 others talking in the front two rows of seats, but sat in a cluster of chairs repositioned so they could see each other. Just then the [useful] conversation was stopped before the seats were moved away for the next session, repositioned around tables for the next phase of the workshop. The chap in the blue check shirt seemed enlivened. I was unable to record his actual words but he seemed most receptive to some of David’s ideas. Like an awakening, a revelation, like it all seemed to make sense to him now, now David had pointed things out. (How can you foster, capitalise and access more of this ‘talk’ David?)

### **Inference/theorising note**

I wonder how the ideas (in the PowerPoint) might be converted into action by parents and coaches (and players) away from David’s workshop. How transferable

are these concepts for them? At the moment I get the feeling that some parents appreciate being understood for some of their woes as parents of performers.

## **(D) WORKSHOP [PART 2] OBSERVATIONS**

*7.30pm – the workshop reconvenes...*

**3 Tables – groups sit around a table for brainstorm activities.**

### **Researcher awareness note**

It was clear that my previous field position sat at the back of the group was not going to work for this phase of the workshop. I decided to get closer to the conversation on one table and sat with them. I chose to leave my note book in my bag at the side of the room so as not to make people conscious of my note taking as they spoke. If they were to brainstorm openly, as desired for this session to work, then my actions to write things down as they said it might bias their thinking, and affect what they wrote on the brainstorm sheets, ideas which would be shared with the delegates.

### **Researcher awareness note**

Clearly, the compromise for me is to think of a way of capturing some of the freshness of conversation but without a means to record it, also without lapsing into judgemental recall that might be inevitable too long after the event. Also if people invite me in to a conversation I may wish to avoid saying things which might affect what they think and say. (This is a very strange feeling for me as teacher and coach because my professional endeavour over the last 25 years has been deliberately to say things which affect how people think).

### **PRACTICAL NOTE:**

There were three brainstorm elements to the second half of the workshop so I started off with no pad for the first two exercises but then made a move to get my pad and started making notes during the last exercise before I forgot what was being said/taking place.

### **Observation/description note**

**Task One:** The first task was *Notions of Support* which asked for key words and phrases about what support meant to people in their roles as parents or coaches. One significant phrase that emerged from one parent was that of ‘emotional support’ which on the face of things is a bland statement but she was not bland in her explanation about its importance of her support for her child performer. She commented ‘99% of the time they lose the matches, that’s the nature of the game, but it means that 99% of the time I am picking up the pieces’ (from emotionally distraught teenage players). She inferred that this level of emotional support is not

seen by the coach, probably taken for granted by the coach but was very draining for her as a parent.

**Inference/theorising note**

This lady's comment infers a sports counselling role which she has not been trained in or prepared for, as a sports psychologist might be. If anything it seemed like a level of distress which a parent could well do without but just deals with it for the love of their children and his/her aspirations in sport.

**Inference/theorising note**

This statement 'emotional support' was worthy of much deeper critical unpacking remembering the interesting words from similar sheets that David showed me before the start of the workshop – love and hug.

**Observation/description note**

Another significant phrase from a parent was 'Does that mean I don't have to clean your clubs anymore'. This led to some interesting conversation between the parent and his daughter (the teenage player) sat at his side about notions of support and roles and responsibilities [unable to recall direct quotes]. The others around the table seemed to give cursory nods at this but I felt that they judged it to be of low priority, which I don't think it was.

**Inference/theorising note**

Similar to the statement 'emotional support' above, this cleaning of equipment comment was worthy of much deeper critical unpacking. I wondered why the father felt compelled to clean his daughter's clubs anyway, it may have measured up to his conception of what a father should do for his elite golf playing daughter. Was it a tangible display of care? As the conversation developed I am not really sure she appreciated her father cleaning her clubs and that the father, reciprocally, felt unappreciated for his efforts. Was the father perceived as interfering?

I think this situation may be indicative of the confusion that grows around roles and responsibilities between players, parents and coaches and what David's coach education efforts are directed at, at least in part.

**Observation/description note**

This seemingly important point was reduced to the word 'preparation' and committed to the brainstorm sheet for subsequent sharing with the delegates.

**Inference/theorising note**

When these comments/conversations are reduced to one-worders, 'preparation' 'communication' 'emotional support' that are so bland and predictable compared to the personal conversations that spawned them, they become meaningless. If

comments are too conceptual (reduced) the brainstorm sheets may not be reflecting the real level of discussion as well as they might.

Note to David, encourage the folks to record their first response words that I listened to from parents: 'I clean her clubs', 'I get them up and feed them', 'they lose 99% of the time, we have to deal with that' – and explore what these might mean.

### **Observation/description note**

#### **Task Two: a second brainstorm task, listing positives and negatives – 10 things.**

Praise and recognition was one phrase I noted in this exercise that seemed significant but again was deserving of more critical unpacking than it was given.

### **Inference/theorising note**

From listening to the conversation between these coaches and parents, it occurred to me, when did either party ask the child/player what they want to be praised for in their performance. Parents were concerned that they don't know what to say to their children when they may be emotional – treading on eggshells kind of idea. Perhaps they should ask, even if the answer is to say nothing.

### **Researcher awareness note**

I am flagging without my note pad and know I will lose much of this detail unless I get it written down very soon. I decide, against my better judgement to fetch my pad from my bag. Damn. I have left my bag at the side of the room meaning I have to make it publically obvious that I am recording stuff, or at least intend to. I must position my bag better next time. I collect the pad and sit with it for now until the next brainstorm exercise.

### **Inference/theorising note**

An idea, if I were coaching David. Ask David:

'ok David, what do you want me to praise you for in your golf performance? Show me what good looks like'.

Ask David:

'What do you think are the core skills for good golf?'

I (Clive) have an idea that core skills for golf might include things like, power, accuracy, breathing, timing, balance, hand eye coordination, targets, weight transfer, along with ideas about risk taking towards strategy in golf (whatever that might be – gambling?).

I would be interested to see what ideas you come up with and present you with some challenges. (It is probable that whatever challenges I envisage might count as delayed learning which present problems of appreciating and value in that kind of training investment).

### **Observation/description note**

**Task Three:** the third brainstorm task was called Mr and Mrs – what each might know, or predict about each other. Not much gets written down on the flip chart paper for this exercise but there is a lot of discussion. David brings up some slides on his PowerPoint which allude to job roles and responsibilities which are a really good to prompt for useful talk. I am unable to capture actual quotes but there is the noise and hubbub of productive talking and exchange. On the slides there are points 1 to 6 about coaching philosophy, learning, focus etc.

### **Researcher awareness note**

Upon the showing of slides there is a visible alteration in power from the intra-group eye-contact that had been established, back to the screen and back on to David to guide discussion which may be counterproductive but may also be needed to get things going in a productive direction. Better to have things going than grinding to a halt I guess, but the power shift/disruption was noticeable and took a while to get re-established, if it ever really did.

### **Inference/theorising note**

Over and above playing golf there seems to be little that is asked of the performer to include them in the coaching process. The coaches seem to ‘give’ and the parents seem to ‘give’ - both excessively in some cases. I assume there may be perceived notions of excessive ‘taking’ to match/contrast with giving. What seems clear to me is that whatever is being given or taken by either player, parent or coach is also being lost somewhere, which might lead to suspicion over effort, perhaps.

### **Inference/theorising note**

The coach and parent could ask the same question of each other and the player; ‘what do you want me to praise you for in your performance/duties?’ I would expect different answers to the same question, both correct but both different. Whatever the answers might be it would reveal a great deal about their understanding of their role (respectfully) and, in the case of the child performer, involve them more with management of their progress. (Player-centred management?)

### **Observation/description note**

One parent made the point that review was pointless but I get the feeling that this was born out of frustration with a coach in a particular scenario.

### **Inference/theorising note**

Interestingly, under some circumstances, I agree the with parent, but my point is more related to sense engagement with coaching and immediacy of feedback rather than some point of view that might judgmentally be visited upon a player after they have tried their best.

When is the best time to review what is already history? What, specifically, will be reviewed and why, what's the point (that's not to say that there is no point). And critically, who has responsibility for reviewing? Who owns the outcomes of the review and is there is a level of accountability (for each party) established by the review?

### **Inference/theorising note**

I get an over-riding feeling that the player is not involved at all (amongst this group of parents and coaches) with the machinations around points 1 to 6 (player centred coaching philosophy). Why not?

### **Researcher awareness note**

I am taking risks here, sat at the table making notes whilst discussion is going on around me. They must be aware of me [my actions to scribble when they speak] but I get a sense that discussion is not that really affected by my actions, curiously.

Whilst I acknowledge that there will be some impact on the data (their actions and dialogue affected by me) their topics of conversation and manner of exchange do not seem to be affected by my actions at this late stage of the evening. Perhaps they have just got used to me and accept me.

### **Observation/description note**

Some parents opposite me moan about the governing body Golf England – moans centre upon communication issues at a practical level, timings, costs, pre-req's etc. Bickering really. David guides their conversation towards more productive outcomes and puts up slides about jobs roles – as if they were adverts with desirable and essential qualities.

### **Inference/theorising note**

The job roles slides are really good and gets discussion back on track. Is coaching (and parenting) in golf like trying to be TESCOs i.e. trying to provide everything at once – where does this leave the performer? Over and above playing, what is their stake in the race of responsibility to 'provide'?

### **Observation/description note**

David, your slides hint at the flow and direction of communication (closing slides in the PowerPoint) which is good.

### **Inference/theorising note**

I know you mean to involve the player more meaningfully in communication and other aspects of performance management but I am not entirely convinced that these coaches and parents are confident to do this, yet. Control freaks? To promote player-centredness, coaches and parents might ask, how many ways could I include / empower my child/player to manage their own performance?

## **(E) CLOSING/POST EVENT OBSERVATIONS**

### ***8.30pm Workshop finishes.***

#### **Observation/description note**

Testing my field data. At the end of the workshop I had a conversation with two coaches who were sat right next to me. I asked them if they ever asked their players how they want to be praised (or what, why, when, where) i.e. to give the player some control over this aspect of coaching. Both coaches said ‘no’ they had not thought of that. After some further discussion, they seemed to realise how much information they could glean about the player’s state of mind and understanding of performance by adopting this player centred tactic.

### ***8.35pm***

#### **Observation/description note**

Testing my field data; I then had the same conversation (about player initiated praise) with a parent and teenage performer who were sat opposite me for the first brainstorm phase of the workshop. It was the father/daughter/club cleaning scenario mentioned earlier in the evening and field notes above. The outcome of posing the question ‘what do you want to be praised for today’ – i.e. tell me what you think you’ve done well, was that the player realised how empowered she was, or could be if things/requests were that way around, i.e. more player centred which seemed to mean for her; more trusted, and perceived to be competent, allowed to have a say in things and be valued differently.

It also meant that the parent was relieved of the angst and tedium of trying to carry responsibility that the player should be showing – the catalyst for this being who cleans the clubs. Following their important point about cleaning duties, that got buried in the general concept of ‘preparation’, the daughter realised that she needed to manage her father so he can perform his role of caring for her effectively – and that included her taking more responsibility for the cleanliness of her clubs, which as it transpired she wanted to do anyway.

### **DEPARTURE from the field 8.45 – 9.00pm**

David and I packed up our belongings and left the Golf Club, drove home chatting into the night, along the motorways back to Preston.

### **Post Event Summary and Reflection:**

#### **Researcher awareness notes: Was I a distraction?**

No I don’t think so. Everyone was strange! I was a new face to all 30 people, except David, with no contact with golf sport whatsoever but no-one knew that. The delegates were probably meeting each other for the first time, except a few, so the social meet and greets and first impressions being formed in this setting may have

meant that I did not stand out at all. I was socially accepted as one of them as it didn't really matter either way. The point being that if all the delegates were already a close knit group my presence as a stranger and visitor would be emphasised and could make my research task more difficult. There would be a high risk of biasing the data right from the off.

### **How did I fit in?**

Clearly I was not one of them and I was there on a mission to observe – an outsider making field notes. My research mission was probably more clear cut and motivated than theirs was to be there, them being open minded and receptive to David's invitation to attend the regional workshop – a new/novel invitation to come and listen to each other (coaches and parents).

### **Appearance – what would a golfer look like in this context?**

I deliberately wore 'plain clothes'. I remember asking myself before the event, 'what might golf coaches wear' and tried to wardrobe myself accordingly. A plain top, trousers, shoes, smart and casual I guess. I was conscious not to have any UCLan badges on me. David did, that's his remit and 'sponsor' so to speak and the delegates knew that. As David reinforced his link with the university I wished to soften it and not reveal it so blatantly in order to reduce pre judgements and reduce bias potential in the data. I felt I needed some distance/anonymity from such icons – university badges - (just like the delegates) to be able to operate confidently and freely as a researcher in this situation.

### **A data rich environment – recognising times to pounce**

Prior to the event, I judged that during the course of the evening, getting access to the delegates talking and social interaction would probably allow a greater insight to their understanding of the golfing coach education phenomena. Consequently there would be good (and not so good) opportunities at different times to follow threads in conversation and explore meanings in the 'heat of the moment' and also to observe delegates' manner of engagements; participation, body language, willingness to contribute etc. Recognising these 'data rich' moments, I judged my data collection opportunities to be:

- Before the workshop – meet and greet
- First half – didactic lecture
- Half time break - conversation
- Second half – interactive brainstorm
- Closing and departure conversation

I mentally prepared myself to engage more pro-active strategies for social engagement at data rich times. However...

### **Actuality – where was the rich data really, during this event?**

*Before the workshop – meet and greet.* As it turned out, this phase was not very data rich, folks were too new to each other and the lecture phase was quickly underway, time was limited. Not much talk or interaction – just strangers in a strange place gathered together for something yet to come, imminently.

#### ***First half – didactic lecture***

*'Theatre style'* I sat on the back row and pulled my chair further back to reduce the impact of my note taking actions - out of eye-shot. As it turned out I don't think this phase was very data rich in terms of social interaction, because of the didactic lecture and 'theatre style' what was demanded of that social context (delegates interpretation of what appeared to be demanded through the physical layout of furniture). The delegates all sat quietly and listened, congregation-like, see notes on *reverence* below, an observation about seating and social control.

#### ***Half time break – conversation***

I knew the break had potential to be a data rich opportunity and I had a plan to get among the delegates and mingle, without my note pad, to strike up some conversations with coaches or parents, going fishing for points of view on aspects of player centred approaches to coaching.

As it turned out this was a relatively unfruitful time although the odds were in my favour. The poor organisation of the Golf Club not to put on more bar staff to attend to the delegates for drinks meant they were stood around chatting, waiting a long time to be served. 'Awesome, get in there'! However, the delegates still seemed to be at the *strangers meeting strangers* stage in their conversations (travel, home town, commonalities, acquaintances) and were not really talking about things related to David's lecture. This in itself was interesting but not something I could quiz the delegates on directly. After some initial efforts to engage I returned to the lecture area by making an exit to the toilet as an excuse (even going there for a wee I did not need, allowing me some thinking time). In the lecture area I discovered the man in the blue checked shirt having a conversation, usefully, as noted above.

On reflection, I squandered the break time as the best moment to ask questions and just get in there, be more pro-active as a researcher. This was the best research opportunity to engage in some impromptu unstructured interviews and enquire about their thoughts. Ask some appropriate questions and lead them a little bit on track towards discussing player centredness in their context/interpretation. Whilst any dialogue captured in the break might only be a tenuous lead to a potential change in their behaviour it might give a clue as to the impact of this coach education workshop upon coach/parent/player behaviour.

### ***Second half – interactive brainstorm***

This was a significantly better data rich opportunity because I was closer to the action but I had to leave my trusty note pad at the side making recording/capture more difficult. What notes I did capture were from recall at the start of the second half. Then I threw caution to the wind and went for the pad right in front of the delegates I was sat with, and scribbled lots of notes. I held my pad low on my knees, and sat slightly back from the table.

As the delegates were being asked directly to be more interactive (through the brainstorm tasks) I decided to be silent throughout this phase. This is not to say my point of view might be unhelpful, rather, that because of David's revelation of my role I knew that if I did make a point I would sway their conversations completely and potentially 'hold council' on matters concerning coach education. This would bias the data completely. This was a time for me to be quiet.

### ***Closing and departure conversation***

Two interesting conversations were had with coaches and parents as noted above; have you asked you player what they wished to be praised for. Notes made straight after the conversation, not during.

### ***Corrosive Seating: 'I have set your seats up in theatre style'***

Were the formal seating arrangements 'highly corrosive' to learning?

***'I have set your seating in theatre style' - reverential seating and social control - bless our Lord David for he probably did not intend things to be this way.***

Soon after their arrival at 6pm, all the delegates entered the lecture area in an orderly fashion, in complete silence and took up their pew. They seemed to take in the setting, gazing around making an assessment of where to sit, and nodded politely at David, the vicar, as they walked past. But they did not really engage him. David initiated the talking and welcomed folks in (to his space?) to take a seat but there was no conversation.

Because of 'theatre style', the inference is that everyone sat as individuals facing forward who were not permitted to 'cross engage' for fear of distraction from the message they were about to receive. The role and responsibility, how to behave in this setting seemed to be known by the delegates indicated by the seating plan and room layout, i.e. for them to sit quietly and listen about stuff, almost reverential, like a sermon. My notes recall, 'do these folks realise David is talking about them directly' i.e. it is not a general story about other people in sport that they have come to be entertained by, that they might take or leave your message.

As the lecture phase finished (first half) I observed with great interest that the whole group left the room with exactly the same reverence that they entered. In complete silence, they all filed out. David stood at the front and was not engaged by one person on anything he had said in the previous hour or so (not through any rudeness or ignorance). Meanwhile I could hear conversations starting up as they got closer to a socially neutral area. Then the evening and my research notes develop into the break phase.

*Note to David:* I wonder how much more memorable the lecture phase might be if the chairs and lecture setting were arranged differently. Might the delegates be so strongly socialised, conditioned into this reverential expectation of formal coach education visited upon them that they might actually be confused if you offered something more engaging, and even possibly rejected.

**Summary Reflection: Inference/theorising note**

The first half of the workshop (lecture phase) permitted me the greatest freedom to ponder and theorise (about people listening to a talk) and easy for me to make notes. The second half had much more interaction but was more difficult to record. Both seem to be valuable for developing research ideas.

**Data: Themes emerging and recommendations**

(...as may be relevant only to this one event in time and place – but there may be generalities)

1. Consider the impact of settings – seating, ‘theatre style’ upon your ability to teaching and their ability to learn from the message you actually wish to impart.
2. Brainstorms/mind-maps – the right conversations seem to be taking place but the *wrong* things are being recorded (or vague inaccurate interpretations of the conversations as one-words). The parents and coaches may be misinterpreting the value of their own conversations during these brainstorm phases. Capture people’s first comments and utterances that may be the real keys to exploring the bigger [reduced] concepts of ‘preparation’, ‘emotional support’, roles and responsibilities as player coach or parent.
3. Consider: how might you facilitate greater informality in this workshop to bring about the more fruitful conversations that may impact upon learning in this context.

### **Research roles – what next?**

1. The break was potentially data-rich but I squandered the opportunity.
2. Go completely covert and adopt a role: parent or coach.
3. Be coached by a coach – produce a narrative.
4. Involve some players as active researchers of their own role – a research informed coaching initiative.

### **David's post-event reflections: Golf and the pedagogy of coach education**

Structure? – up to you

? follow the same chronology – pre event, first half, break, second half, closing.

? write a short story?

? Did I note anything that caused you to reflect? – if so what?

Tales from the Tee? – (how) does that kind of data representation (personal narratives of experience) fit into this event – ideas for extension.

## References

- Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. (1995) *Ethnography, principles in practice* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Routledge, London.
- Hughes, C. and Palmer, C. (2010) Examining a coaching philosophy through ethnographic principles Winter in Woolton. *Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies*, 4, 1, 23-48.
- McCabe, J. and Palmer, C. (2007) An application of ethnographic method in an investigation into girl's attitudes towards trampolining in Physical Education. *Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies*, 1, 1, 77-88.
- Palmer, C. (2010) Observing with a focus: field notes and data recording (Chapter 10, pp. 141-156). In Scott-Jones, J. and Watt, S. (Eds.) *Ethnography in social science practice*. Routledge, London.
- Rookwood, J. and Palmer, C. (2009). A photo-ethnography, a picture-story-board of experiences at an NGO football project in Liberia (part 1). *Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies*, 3, 1, 161-186.
- Price, B. and Varrall, S. (2011) Doing and representing qualitative research: a human perspective (Part 1: visual). *Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies*, 5, 1, 59-86.
- Pryle, J. and Palmer, C. (2013) Cricket provision in schools – is the system flawed? An ethnographic investigation. *Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies*, 7, 1, 27-86.
- Silverman, D. (2007) *A very short, fairly interesting and reasonably cheap book about qualitative research*. Sage Publications, London.
- Wacquant, L. (2004) *Body and Soul: notebooks of an apprentice boxer*. Oxford University Press, New York.