



## **“I am different now ... I’ve come to understand what coaching is”; an exploration of an Olympic coach’s beliefs and pedagogical practice**

Stephen Macdonald, Justine Allen & Reece Chapman

To cite this article: Stephen Macdonald, Justine Allen & Reece Chapman (22 Oct 2025): “I am different now ... I’ve come to understand what coaching is”; an exploration of an Olympic coach’s beliefs and pedagogical practice, Sports Coaching Review, DOI: [10.1080/21640629.2025.2575652](https://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2025.2575652)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2025.2575652>



© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 22 Oct 2025.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

# “I am different now ... I’ve come to understand what coaching is”; an exploration of an Olympic coach’s beliefs and pedagogical practice

Stephen Macdonald <sup>a</sup>, Justine Allen <sup>b</sup> and Reece Chapman <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Faculty Health Sciences and Sport, University of Stirling, Stirling, UK; <sup>b</sup>Department of Sport, Exercise and Rehabilitation, Northumbria University, Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK

## ABSTRACT

Coaching philosophy is an important foundation for coaches’ practice and athletes’ learning, yet existing literature provides only limited understanding of coaches’ philosophy of coaching. This study explored the development of one Olympic coach’s philosophy of coaching and its impact on pedagogical practice. Over six-months, prior to the Tokyo Olympics, we conducted multiple interviews and observations of training sessions involving the coach (Alex) and their three athletes (Chris, Sam and Laurie). Utilising Freirean concepts as a theoretical lens, and employing reflexive thematic analysis, we developed four themes that conveyed Alex’s philosophy development: “We’ve been on quite the journey”; Nudges and self-exploration along the way; Challenges en-route to the Games; and The journey continues. Our analysis helped us to better understand the realities of, and the ad-hoc nature of, developing and practicing meaningful philosophy of coaching within a high-performance programme, which, in turn, impacts and guides the coach’s pedagogical practice.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 13 December 2024  
Accepted 10 October 2025

## KEYWORDS

Coaching philosophy; coach development; coaching practice; Olympics; Paulo Freire; humility

## Introduction

Extant research has highlighted the importance of a coaching philosophy to underpin, support, and enhance the practice of sports coaches (e.g. Cushion & Partington, 2014; Lyle, 2002). Subsequently, it is generally accepted that encouraging coaches to develop and articulate their philosophy for coaching will promote understanding of their practice and provide a (formal or informal) foundation for both the coaches’ development and athletes’ learning (Cassidy et al., 2023). However, Lyle and Cushion (2017) suggest that existing literature provides a limited understanding of coaching philosophy, instead being based on coaching ideology and rhetoric. Furthermore, they argued for a deeper, more reflexive approach to exploring beliefs, values, and practices over time, in situ, and employing a range of methods.

Coaching presents many challenges, which are often intensified in high-performance sport and results driven environments where multiple stakeholders have different agendas (Allen & Muir, 2021). As a result, many coaches approach designing and applying a coaching philosophy in a somewhat superficial way (Hall et al., 2022; Partington & Cushion, 2024). These challenges are further heightened in the build-up to a significant international event, e.g. the Olympic Games (Ritchie et al., 2018), the focus of this study, where for many, the desire to optimise performance in a highly competitive context is ever-present (Doron et al., 2024). With access to Olympic coaches inherently limited, much remains to be understood about how they navigate the complex interplay of theory, practice, and contextual pressures (Allen & Muir, 2021).

One way coaches can address these complexities is through the articulation of their coaching philosophy. Lyle and Cushion (2017) define a coach’s philosophy as outlining their fundamental beliefs about coaching, including the importance of athlete development, ethical considerations, and long-term goals. Furthermore, Newman and Alvarez (2015, p. 133) claim understanding one’s “own philosophical beliefs, values, and principles (are of significant importance), as they ultimately influence and effect all who are involved (e.g. coaches, participants, athletes, spectators)”. Nevertheless, coaching philosophy remains a highly contested and often misunderstood phenomenon (Partington & Cushion, 2019, 2025). For example, McCallister et al.

**CONTACT** Stephen Macdonald  [stephen.macdonald@stir.ac.uk](mailto:stephen.macdonald@stir.ac.uk)  Faculty Health Sciences and Sport, University of Stirling, Stirling, FK9 4LA UK

© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

(2000) and Ashford et al. (2025) both found inconsistencies between coaches stated philosophies and actual practices, suggesting there is still a potential misapplication, or even misunderstanding, of coaching philosophy. This discrepancy is also demonstrated in some contexts (e.g. football) where coaches conflate technical and tactical knowledge, as well as their football intentions (i.e. a style of play) with a coaching philosophy (Partington & Cushion, 2024). These identified discrepancies between coaches' stated philosophies and their practices underscore the complexities inherent in coaching practice. Thus, whilst coaches are said to understand the critical importance of defining and developing a coaching philosophy as a fundamental first step (Newman et al., 2023), unsurprisingly, many coaches have difficulty exploring their philosophy in depth (Hall et al., 2022).

Grecic and Collins (2013) explain that when coaches articulate their philosophy, they are essentially mapping out their epistemological chain. By utilising an epistemological chain, coaches can make explicit connections between their coaching beliefs and the decisions they make about 1) what to coach, 2) the environments they create, and 3) selection of appropriate coaching methods. As such, coaches engage in a pedagogical process where they design learning experiences based on their coaching, ontological, epistemological and biographical beliefs. Coaching pedagogy integrates theoretical frameworks, practical methods and approaches, and the coach's underlying beliefs and values about learning and the coach's role (Armour, 2011). It is the practical application of these beliefs through specific coaching behaviours, strategies, and interactions *with* athletes (Cassidy et al., 2023). As such, pedagogy is the intersection where coaches' espoused philosophy and their coaching practice converge. To develop a deeper understanding of a coach's coaching philosophy, it is important to explore their pedagogical practice and the extent to which it's aligned with their beliefs. Therefore, examining a single coach (as we did) enables an in-depth and nuanced exploration of their beliefs, values, and practices. Furthermore, Jenkins (2010) called for further research on how, and what, influences coaches (e.g. influence of others, coach education, their coaching journey) to develop their coaching philosophy. The purpose of this study was to explore the development of one Olympic coach's philosophy of coaching and its connection to pedagogical practice.

### **A Freirean perspective**

The theorising of Paulo Freire was selected as a means for exploration of a coach's coaching philosophy and practice. One specific extract from Freire's work that resonated with our theorising and thus informed this study was: "Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the continuing inquiry men [*sic*] pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (Freire, 1973, p. 28). We adopted this theoretical lens to connect theory and practice in coaching, offering a critical framework through which to examine how coaches engage with, and reflect on, their environments. Its emphasis on dialogue and co-construction of knowledge enables reflection of a coach's world and *their* coaching journey and the development of *their* coaching philosophy. Thus, a Freirean lens enables us to (re)consider a coach (Alex) who participated in this study.

Advocates of Freire's work (e.g. Gadotti & Torres, 2009) point to his pursuit of a more socially just world and education system that prioritises empowerment and dialogical, problem-posing, education as opposed to the more oppressive banking education (i.e. the depositing of information to students by teachers). Freire (1973) introduces problem-posing education as a philosophical and pedagogical approach that encourages educators to support learners to invent, re-invent and socially inquire of and with the world in which one lives. This moves beyond the classroom to consider how individuals (e.g. coaches, coach developers, etc.) engage critically with their environments and interact with others e.g. in coach-athlete relationships. This philosophical and pedagogical approach suggests that a more collaborative, co-produced education system would enable learners to make a greater connection between taught content, knowledge and their situated worlds.

Some authors have criticised this school of thought for presenting an unrealistic utopian world, whilst simultaneously being overly concerned with challenging the inequalities more associated with South American discourses (e.g. Jemal, 2017; Schugurensky, 1998). This view, however, remains overly simplistic and readers should consider more complete accounts (e.g. Suoranta, 2022; Chapman, 2023), where detail of Freire's biography, philosophical concepts and wider criticisms of his work are

discussed. Furthermore, readers should consider beyond Freire's pioneering piece - *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* - to later work, e.g., *Mentoring the Mentor; A Critical Dialogue with Paulo Freire* (Freire et al., 1997), where the value of the educator supporting others is emphasised, and Freire dismisses that his work offers pedagogical recipes for educators. Critical to this study, we too view Freirean theory as not restricted to a pedagogical process that educators should strictly adhere to. Indeed, it is much more. Freirean theory is understood by some to be a philosophical school of thought or a moral philosophy (e.g. Chapman, 2023; Glass, 2001, Knijnik et al., 2019; Roberts, 1998) that seeks to empower, liberate, and provide opportunities for individuals to feel more human and prioritise their understanding of their own epistemological assumptions that impact their everyday life. Freire sees education as the vehicle towards achieving this humanisation.

Freire's e.g., (1973, 2005), ideas developed over time which led to the reconstruction of many philosophical concepts. Many of his concepts have been used to develop a more detailed understanding of Nursing (e.g. (Fields et al., 2022), Teacher Education (e.g. Luguetti & Oliver, 2021), and Coach Education (e.g. Chapman et al., 2023). Challenging a banking model of education, Freire promotes *problem-posing education*, grounded in dialogue and shared inquiry. This is particularly relevant to coaching, where athletes are often positioned as recipients of the coach's expertise. However, despite the performance pressures of elite sport, i.e. the immediacy for results, a Freirean approach would encourage collaborative meaning-making, with coaches and athletes sharing responsibility towards common goals (e.g. an identified performance outcome), as opposed to a powerful coach dictating and controlling approaches to competition. Concepts outlined in Table 1 offer useful entry points for exploring this shift. Importantly, problem-posing would enable empowerment of authentic dialogue (i.e. where not one voice is prioritised but multiple perspectives are heard, shared and valued equally), demonstration of humility of one's knowledge and role in the process (e.g. coaches and participants are bound by their own biographies and sporting experiences and thus a recognition of this is critical to growth), and an openness to recognise the value and potential sporting impact of constructive alternative views. Central to this shift is the development of critical consciousness, a core Freirean concept that involves a deepening awareness of one's environment, world and culture (their reality) supported by one's will to make change, to provide opportunities for positive social development (Freire, 1973; Freire et al., 1997; Schugurensky, 1998).

Crucially, it is important to recognise that Paulo Freire (Freire, 1973; Freire et al., 1997) does not call for education (coaching) to be a utopian learner-led process, removed from the educator (coach). Rather, that coaches develop philosophical and authentic ideas and practices that overcome anecdotal stereotypical behaviourist pedagogies and embrace more experiential, and coach-athlete processes. Therefore, a Freirean philosophical lens is an insightful lens to adopt here to explore and better understand coaches' pedagogical practice and philosophical underpinnings.

**Table 1.** Freirean pedagogical concepts (Freire, 1973, 2005).

Freirean Concept	Explanation
Humility	"No one person knows all and therefore no one person is ignorant of everything" (Freire, 2005, p. 72). Through this realisation knowledge should be co-constructed and co-produced.
Openness	The awareness and understanding that individuals hold their own views of reality and <i>new</i> knowledge. This should be understood by coaches before espousing personal perspectives to athletes/participants.
Shared roles (teacher-student, student-teacher)	The challenging of power to share roles within any education (coaching) space to allow for all voices to be shared and heard. These perspectives are socially, culturally and politically developed over time from individual biographies.
Banking education	A dogmatic, behaviourist, process of teachers filling students with content that is removed from their realities; thus, students are seen to be passive, and teachers are active in the learning process.
Problem-posing approach to education	In contrast to <i>banking education</i> (see Darder, 2024), Freire (1973) refers to problem-posing education as a journey of education that encourages voice, freedom, experiential learning that considers beyond political structures to include the societal world.
Dialogue	Authentic conversation and interaction with other actors within society. This should see power shared, voices empowered, and context recognised.
Critical consciousness	The understanding of one's environment, world and culture (their reality) supported by one's will to make change, provides opportunity for positive social development.

## **Methodology**

### ***Philosophical positioning***

Our philosophical assumptions which underpin this research position us within an interpretivist paradigm framed by a relativist ontology and a subjectivist epistemology (Poucher et al., 2020). Throughout our research, we sought coherence between our philosophical “worldview” and our research processes (Burke, 2019; Poucher et al., 2020; Tracy, 2010) to enable us to develop a deep understanding of how the coach’s beliefs and practices are shaped and enacted. This included alignment amongst our philosophical position (i.e. interpretivism), design and methods (i.e. questions asked, multiple interviews and observations over time, reflexive thematic analysis) and interpretations.

### ***Participants***

Based on their continued collaboration as a group and that each athlete had successfully qualified for the Olympic Games, one coach and three athletes agreed to participate in this study. This unique access allowed us to explore, one coach’s journey and philosophy during the pivotal final six-months prior to the Olympic Games. Given the rarity of reaching Olympic selection and to ensure participants felt safe sharing their stories, we have kept their identities and sports anonymous, using gender-neutral pseudonyms for protection. However, to provide some context, the sport is an Olympic individual sport where training involves a small number of athletes working with a coach and support staff. Furthermore, once a competitive performance begins, the coach’s role moves from active interaction to observation (i.e. they can no longer provide direct input to athletes).

This study focuses on Alex, a coach previously known to the researchers. Alex has over 15 years of coaching experience at national and international levels, with the four years prior to the study spent coaching on an Olympic programme. Alex had worked with the athletes in this study as a training group since 2016. The athletes (Sam, Chris, and Laurie) had each been working at a world standard in their sport for over five years and had been on a national programme for nine years. Sam and Laurie had worked with Alex for nine years, with Chris joining the group five years prior to this study.

### ***Procedure***

Following approval from the first author’s institutional Ethics Committee, the coach was contacted via existing networks, and the study explained. All participants provided signed informed consent prior to participating. Data were collected from multiple sources, i.e. interviews, observation and focus group, on multiple occasions over six months immediately before the postponed 2020 Olympic Games. Due to ongoing travel and social distancing restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic at the time, observation of training sessions was collected via a coach-worn, head mounted GoPro video camera and participant interviews and focus group held on Microsoft Teams. All interviews were conducted in English by the first author, recorded, transcribed verbatim, and all identifying information removed.

### ***Data collection***

#### ***Observations***

Six coaching sessions (part of the training programme) were video recorded by the coach over a six-month period, approximately four weeks apart, to allow us to explore the coach’s practice (Thorpe & Olive, (2016)), such as practice design, communication and feedback. These sessions were selected by the coach in consultation with the first author based on their focus on performance of skills, rather than physical training. Each unstructured, one-hour observation provided an opportunity to witness the coach’s practice, in their normal context while also serving as a reflective prompt for the interviews. Video recording and review were routine practices in this setting, which helped reduce any sense of intrusion during data collection. In this study, before meeting the athletes, the coach spoke directly to the camera to record their intentions and focus for the benefit of the researcher.

### ***Coach interviews***

Six individual semi-structured interviews (average 50 minutes per session) were conducted with the coach (Smith & Sparks, 2016). The early interviews explored the coach's philosophy and its development over time, with subsequent interviews investigating the impact of the philosophy on coaching practice. This included exploration of personal significance and meaning, important values and views of the process of acquiring and developing skill. Coach interviews followed each of the recorded (observed) training sessions. This enabled further sense-making of the coach's actions during the session.

### ***Athlete focus group and interviews***

The athlete perspective was gathered via 60-minute focus group (Smith & Sparks, 2016) established the researcher/athlete relationship with all three athletes, exploring how they perceived Alex's coaching practices had evolved over time and why. Midway through the six-month period, each athlete also participated in a semi-structured interview (average 45 minutes). These individual interviews were conducted to encourage the athletes to feel freer to express their individual perspectives (i.e. their voice was not suppressed by the locality of other athletes), explore their personal experiences of Alex's coaching approaches and were informed by the prior observations and coach interviews conducted to that point.

### ***Data analysis***

Through reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019), we explored the coach's philosophy of coaching and connection to pedagogical practice. All authors contributed to the analysis process which followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stages. Stage 1: to develop familiarity with the data we repeatedly reviewed the interview transcripts and the training videos, identifying key moments and replaying them to examine actions, body language, and reactions. This allowed us (Stages 2 and 3) to generate initial codes and themes. Each researcher reflected on the identified codes before meeting to discuss and refine key ideas in the coach's and athletes' narratives.

Our interpretive narrative of the data (Stage 4 and 5) took place over several meetings, where the initial themes such as "coaching philosophy" and "philosophy development" were reviewed, discussed, and developed to best represent the principles at work within the coach's practice. During these stages we grounded our analysis in Freire's, (1973) pedagogical concepts providing a useful scaffold. By moving backwards and forwards between the developed themes and Freire's concepts, we were able to analyse the data further, ensuring that the themes identified reflected the participants' voices and practices. This approach – beginning with inductive analysis to uncover patterns, followed by a deductive phase, utilising Freirean concepts, to interpret and deepen the analysis – ensured a comprehensive, nuanced interpretation. Our analysis resulted in the development of four narrative themes that capture Alex's coaching journey. Each theme is united by a "central organising concept" (Braun & Clarke, 2013), ensuring that the themes are meaningful patterns that allowed us to create a rich narrative that accurately represents participants' experiences and perspectives.

### ***Research rigour and quality***

Consistent with our interpretivist paradigm, we adopted a relativist approach to assess research quality. We drew on established criteria including worthiness of the topic, rich rigour, thick description of the coach's journey (Tracy, 2010), prolonged engagement (Berger, 2015; Burke, 2019), triangulation of data sources and researchers' interpretations, transparency (Burke, 2019; Tracy, 2010), and substantive contribution (Burke, 2019). Participants were engaged over an extended period using multiple methods (interview, focus group, observation) and sources (coach, athletes, researcher) on multiple occasions. This prolonged engagement (Berger, 2015; Burke, 2019) combined with regular movement between data sources and multiple researchers' interpretations allowed for triangulation of sources and interpretations (Burke, 2019; Tracy, 2010) and deepened our understanding of the pedagogical process, participants' experiences, the underlying assumptions shaping practice. Our academic and practitioner backgrounds positioned us as "insiders" (Berger, 2015) within the coaching domain. However, access to this restricted context required careful negotiation and trust-building with Alex and the athletes to overcome the challenges of gaining acceptance (Champ

et al., 2020). Simpson et al. (2024) demonstrate how trust is constructed through people, in this case the first author's networks in the sport, and involved transparent communication about the research aims, ethical commitments, and the iterative nature of the study. This fostered rapport, enabling participants to feel comfortable elaborating on our interpretations across data collection "rounds" (Burke, 2019; Smith & Sparks, 2016; Tracy, 2010).

Insider status can also bring challenges, such as overlooking familiar topics, or imposing our assumptions (Berger, 2015). To mitigate these challenges, we maintained a dual position: as insiders with shared experiences, as coaches, and as outsiders with respect to Olympic-level coaching, researching the unfamiliar and learning from the participants who were positioned as the experts (Berger, 2015). We further reduced bias by reviewing the data separately and engaging in critical professional discussions to challenge our interpretations (Burke, 2019) and ensure a comprehensive, transparent analysis (Berger, 2015).

## Results and discussion

Through our research it was clear that there is now a strong alignment between who Alex is, what Alex values to be important, how Alex seeks to, and does, work with athletes, and what Alex understands the role of a coach to be. However, this was not always the case. Therefore, the story presented herein is not about what Alex's philosophy is per se; rather it is about how Alex's philosophy for coaching has developed to this point. We present Alex's coaching journey through four broad themes. This is followed by a Freirean interpretation of Alex's coaching philosophy and pedagogical practice.

### *"We've been on quite the journey"*

Alex's coaching journey isn't one that is linear, how Alex got to where they are now unfolded throughout this study. As Alex reflected on their coaching journey, it became clear that they now believe themselves as a fundamentally different coach. This is captured in current practice that isn't one size fits all, instead prioritises the athlete and their individual needs, as Alex commented, "understanding of how they [athletes] see the event and how they've experienced it". Observations supported Alex's aim to understand each athlete's perspective, showing how they used a tailored problem-posing approach (e.g. setting the problem for one athlete and designing the problem with another). Yet, at the start of Alex's coaching career, and like many other first-time coaches, Alex relied on prior experiences to navigate the complexity of coaching and coach-athlete interactions (Crisp & Hamblin, 2023). Alex acknowledged that, "when I started coaching, I had a positive intention to be a good person, I was just focused on having good relationships . . . I knew what the sport looked like to be good". This included limited engagement with the idea of a coaching philosophy, as Alex explained, "at the start, I was tasked to create a coaching philosophy . . . , I was more likely to plagiarise one to satisfy others". This highlights that when coaches are new to their role, their view may be to help athletes conform to a technical model (i.e. what good looks like) and thus when articulating their philosophy, the only lens they have available to achieve this is a technical and tactical one (Lyle & Cushion, 2017; Partington & Cushion, 2024).

Alex's development moved beyond a technical focus, and acknowledges "it was quite a turbulent [journey]", which was corroborated by athlete Chris, during the athlete focus group, who recalled that:

From that point on [in 2018] we had a massive shift in how we planned any kind of delivery style work, in that we were trying to only really cue the space that we wanted to move into and not technical specifics.

Throughout our discussions, Alex explained their journey in fine detail, with precise language. Alex's views and their coaching philosophy and practice have developed. Alex now wants to provide athletes with "opportunities to explore", an expression in practice of Alex's philosophical worldview and was noted in the language used during video observations. Alex explained:

It's [my coaching practice] evolving fast, still. Coaching is like a vehicle for a worldview I have. Quite a deep philosophical worldview that's developed since I travelled a lot, I was early 20s and just got, sort of influenced by different things . . . I talk less, ask more questions or make more invitations to explore further or show through action. I guess, I'm more interested in we're exploring together.

Alex's journey of philosophy development was described as "turbulent", evolving fast' and representing a "massive shift". This signifies how the development of a coaching philosophy, that is authentic to one's beliefs, is challenging and requires deliberate effort. It may also explain why many coaches fail to engage sufficiently with the process (Hall et al., 2022). And yet, coach education continues to seek written clarification which, 1) could be construed to be oppressive (Freire, 1973), and 2) is concerning as it could encourage a single reproduction of coaching ideology and rhetoric (Cushion & Partington, 2014). As Alex divulges, to "plagiarise others". Instead, a coaching philosophy that demonstrates humility, and is "representative of their axiology (i.e. what they value as necessary) and ethics (i.e. what they believe is morally right or wrong)" (Leeder & Beaumont, 2023, p. 10) should be identifiable in their practice (Partington & Campbell, 2020). In Alex's case this is only evident now, and, after a significant *journey*.

Specifically, Alex has moved from a focus on how performance in the sport should look, to a detailed and nuanced expression of their philosophical worldview (Grecic & Collins, 2013) and how it drives a holistic focus on the individual athletes. Alex's development and transformation as a coach is summarised by athlete Sam who had been part of Alex's journey for nine years:

The learning, the curiosity and the humbleness to admit that [Alex] doesn't know everything . . . you can, have conversations with [Alex] to learn together . . . definitely shifted over the years. I think the way that Alex operates has changed. And the humility to just be like, "well, we'll find out".

This highlights that coaches have the capacity to develop both their understanding and philosophy over time, incorporating both critical thinking and deep intrapersonal reflection (Downham & Cushion, 2022). Through our reflections, it prompts us to pose whether the development of a coaching philosophy might be more effectively explored (and developed) through one-on-one interactions between coach and coach developer, in-situ (Rodrigue et al., 2019), rather than through formal coach education.

### ***Nudges and self-exploration along the way***

Reflecting on their career, Alex explained that their development as a coach and their associated coaching philosophy was organic and not associated with one incident. However, Alex commented that "I came to a point of frustration with personal practice and experience, and that sense of not being able to create what I thought I could in my coaching". Alex unpacked this frustration and highlighted that it fundamentally stemmed from how they viewed the sport and their coaching role within it:

when I started coaching, I felt I could connect with people, and I knew what good [performance] was. So, I tried to use my strengths in the former, to manipulate the latter. What I found when you try and manipulate somebody and [their] interconnection with the environment to a view that isn't theirs, your results are somewhat sporadic, at best.

Contributing to Alex's development were nudges and, at times, significant jolts that prompted Alex to question and, importantly, develop their coaching practice. Alex described timely nudges from others that "opened" space and readiness for learning:

. . . about three years ago [a coach developer] came to visit me and, asked why I coach . . . within two days of that question, I had a much clearer view on my principles and philosophy of coaching.

Self-exploration was also generated through Alex's informal interactions with coaching colleagues and peers, Alex reflected:

The richest learning I've ever had, wasn't situated on a [coach education] course . . . rather enquiry from the networking from the courses and with colleagues. So [fellow coach] . . . we have a lot of rich conversations . . . he poses some tough questions to think about.

This informal enquiry and perspective of others helps coaches explore both what they think they do and what they actually do (Ashford et al., 2025). Alex explained the result of these nudges "led to really deep exploration of different landscapes in my head". They described how a significant "jolt" prompted a shift in how they viewed coaching:

the biggest jolt . . . the video review [after a significant event] . . . and the athlete said "aargh, as soon as I did [X], I just thought, Alex's gonna hate that". I loved hearing that . . . [because, I thought] I'm getting through [to the

athlete] . . . and it was only over time that I felt that the athlete was [performing] to appease the coach. Or is the athlete [performing] to achieve the task? That was a big jolt and probably sums up the former coaching practice, and shift into this different space.

This “different space” could be characterised as a person-centred, problem-posing approach to coaching, which was observed regularly in videoed sessions. For example, during discussions of athletes’ performance, Alex was seen to ask detailed questions to fully understand the athletes’ perspectives, before choosing whether to offer his own, dependent upon the athletes’ understanding. The nudges, self-exploration, critical Freirean openness (i.e. not accepting all knowledge without rigour), and developed humility to be open to learning, enabled Alex to engage with academic literature, mentors, peer coaches, etc. (with varying success) in developing their coaching practice. Yet, Alex openly explained that aspects of organised coach development “didn’t always work” and led Alex to seek answers:

Predominantly, it was self-led. There was a point where I suddenly found myself reading 10 papers and listening to about eight podcasts a week. I don’t think I’ve ever read a coaching book before that. I was like, what’s happening? So self-led, and intentionally . . . . when I was ready to explore.

This self-directed exploration of coaching, also recognised by athlete Chris in the focus group as “a (coaching) pilgrimage to vulnerability”, led Alex to question existing practices (Alex’s and others’) and “test” new ideas:

Researching around that, was almost a conscious mirror back to making sense of previous practices . . . And it’s only from that . . . that I’ve got more curious as to why we were doing (what) we were doing . . . and then to articulate to others, share the journey, be challenged by athletes.

The journey also led Alex to revisit and reaffirm his philosophy of coaching. Alex commented:

First, my job was back to my personal philosophical view of understand before attempting to be understood. So, it’s like I’m not going to proffer my way on. [athlete X]

Alex’s deepened understanding of what coaching is and the importance of a sound values base for a philosophy aligns with Leeder and Beaumont (2023) and Freire (2005) that an espoused philosophy should encompass a coach’s wider values and ethics and demonstrates, as recommended by Ashford et al. (2025) that coaches can and do conduct their own action research into their practice.

### ***Challenges en route to the games***

Critically, this research took place in the six-months just prior to the delayed Tokyo Olympics, and amid significant uncertainty brought about by the ongoing Covid restrictions. To help athletes navigate such uncertainties it is important for coaches to remain consistent in their behaviours to retain the trust of athletes (Gould et al., 2002). It was evident from the data we collected that despite increasing expectations and changes to sessions, from exploration of performance options to the delivery of performance, Alex’s coaching practice remained the same outworking of their philosophy, modelling consistency in actions (Henderson et al., 2022). This demonstrates how Alex’s well-developed philosophy assisted their practice and supports us in understanding the value placed on a philosophy of coaching (Allen & Muir, 2021; Cushion & Partington, 2014; Lyle, 2002).

Consistent with findings from Lara-Bercial and Mallett (2016) that coaches with experience in high-performance contexts had changed their practice over time, Alex’s practice also changed, privileging the athlete perspective more than previously. Alex recognised they don’t know everything and that the athletes’ experiences of their own practice are valuable reflections to guide athlete learning and their coaching practice. Alex commented:

it’s a shift from [the] coach imparting answers to others or hold back answers but get there in the end. It’s a real embodied shift . . . I guess largely my removal from knowing or perceived to be knowing has been one of, “well, it’s their [the athletes] view that is pivotal”.

However, this change had not occurred immediately or in the lead into the 2020 Olympics, rather it had occurred during their wider experiences coaching Olympic level athletes. Alex was also quick to

acknowledge that the development journey hasn't been easy, instead it required "open vulnerability". The change in practice has taken place with the athletes as both observers and participants. The journey they have been on together required patience and adjustments from the athletes and therefore has not been without friction as athlete Chris commented, "we've both been severely challenged by each other but in an amenable manner . . . of course there's been some friction at times". Friction was also identified by Lyons et al. (2012) who noted initial resistance from athletes when the coach changed their approach.

Alex has transitioned from a more coach-led approach "having answers" to an approach with shared responsibilities for athlete development. From Alex's perspective, athletes are now co-creators. This is characterised by Alex's effort to share responsibility between a coach and athletes. Alex explained:

We have a lot more discussions around intentions . . . it's more, "what happened there, show me. I'm curious to know what you make of that information. Show me on the next one".

Although the athletes were vastly experienced, there was still a need for the coach to be involved to support their processes during performances, aligning with a Freirean view where the educator is not removed from the process (Freire et al., 1997). Alex explained their "new" interpretation of the coaching role:

To help them release to be the best version of themselves, realigning permissions, whether that be just in noticing and inquiring how people are in certain phases or whether it's decision-making, questions.

"Letting go of control", particularly in a high-performance environment with an Olympics approaching, can be challenging and daunting. Especially given the context of job security where it becomes easier for the coach to seek to control everything. However, with the clarity provided by their philosophy, Alex put the athlete perspective at the forefront of their decision making, even with hard decisions, to afford the athletes support (Allen & Muir, 2021) which allowed them to flourish.

This releasing was supported by Alex's purposeful/deliberate adoption of specific coaching behaviours and shifting emphasis to support the athletes through the final preparation phase (Henderson et al., 2022). For example, Alex referenced a conversation with the athletes: "we talked about giving and receiving of offers, without bias or leading down paths that may not exist. It's obviously with a delicate balance for the coach, and particularly for a big performance". This demonstrates Alex's critical-consciousness, appreciation of shared-roles and a deepened understanding of their role within this phase of Olympic preparation. Despite this, in the final weeks before the Olympics some friction could be seen in athlete responses to coaching. Athlete Laurie explained:

This morning Alex just keeps probing the same thing in different ways. I was like: "I didn't have an answer when you first asked, if you carry on, I'm not going to create a new answer, I just don't know the answer".

Notwithstanding some challenges and even occasional friction, Alex further demonstrated Freirean humility and positioned the athlete at the heart of the performance process (e.g. as observed in Alex's supportive and understanding approach to poor athlete performance in the final session before departure for the Games). Alex modified their approach in the moment, without betraying their core values. This congruence allows Alex to understand athlete expectations and be clear in communication, resulting in the athletes accepting the decisions made to improve performance (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016).

### ***The journey continues***

Alex's understanding and appreciation of their coaching role, philosophy, and the way these inform practices have developed over time. Alex appreciates the journey they and the athletes have undertaken and recognises this is as much about the process as it is about arriving at the destination. It is clear from narrating these coaching developments that Alex has engaged in critical reflection (Downham & Cushion, 2022), subsequently increased self-awareness, particularly regarding the impact of Alex's coaching actions. This reflective process has led to an athlete-focused coaching approach that empowers individuals (Duda & Appleton, 2016; Freire, 1998) by giving them agency to direct their own learning/training, highlighted by Athlete Sam: "Alex shapes (our) path, but gives us the responsibility to make it our own" (Focus Group).

Alex's deeper understanding has been developed informally through experiences as a coach and acknowledging their limitations. This led to a move to a problem-posing approach with questioning and

discussions to support (Freire, 1973). The coaching methods Alex employs are closely connected to philosophical beliefs around ecology and Eastern thought (Woods et al., 2020), which enables Alex to articulate this practice effectively:

As I understand what coaching is, I talk about being person centred, it's more informed through practice and theory than previously . . . There's a lot more co-creation and co-design. For example, I loved it when Laurie and Chris coached each other through the video review.

But in the two interviews immediately prior to the Games, Alex acknowledged their journey continues:

I'm still on a journey, I hope I never stop feeling that . . . It's like I'm exploring this way, I'm curious, I'm beginning to find some worth in going deeper. [Subsequently] I'm beginning to see some enhancements in our environment.

By employing philosophical thinking on his practice (Hughes, 2022), Alex is well equipped for the ongoing journey.

### **A brief Freirean discussion of Alex's journey**

Alex's journey is one that typifies a high-performance coach's endeavour/need, to be successful and achieve performance outcomes, none less than within their context, the pursuit of Olympic success. Yet, what should be highlighted in Alex's journey is in their recognition of their coaching responsibility for shared roles (Freire, 1973, 2005). For example, Alex's journey to the Olympics is a shared one, one where they and the athletes are seeking success together.

To share responsibility, Alex empowered the athletes and together they seek to co-create learning opportunities throughout their time together, demonstrating Freirean *praxis* (i.e. the process of reflection and action) (see Chapman, 2023), and problem-posing, when considering training and performance. This can be seen as coach-athlete, athlete-coach roles. As highlighted throughout the results, this has developed from Alex's own powerful reflections (e.g. a greater appreciation of their role and a wider understanding of who they are), a developing critical-consciousness (e.g. their understanding of the world and a realisation of one's role within it) and fundamentally, a coaching humility that recognises that they, nor the athletes, are what they once were (Chapman et al., 2020).

Alex has been reflective, listened actively, and engaged critically in authentic dialogue with athletes, responding in ways that align with their own *developing* values and beliefs. Indeed, Alex's philosophy and wider coaching practice now recognise the biographies of the athletes and oneself. Yet, this is not commonplace. For example, Docheff and Gerdes (2015) highlight that humility is not always a trait prevalent in coaches. They argue it is with humility that coaches can be comfortable with their limitations and view mistakes as opportunities for personal growth, in turn developing stronger coach-athlete relationships. Alex's problem-posing practice, described in coach and athlete interviews and depicted throughout the journey retold, strongly aligns with a sense of humility.

Yet for many coaches, the approach of an Olympic Games (as described in Theme 3) challenges their practice, priorities and philosophical foundations. For Alex this was not the case. Instead, their philosophical views, humility, openness and problem-posing practice remained consistent. Although it should be noted, the increase in the prominence of the "delivery of a competitive performance" brought its own problems to be solved by athletes, reducing Alex's need to pose them, instead increasing the support offered in the pursuit of "answers". These highlight some of Freire's later work (e.g. Freire, 2005; Freire et al., 1997) that explains the role of an educator (coach) is not to be understated and indeed is fundamentally required to support the athlete in their continued learning.

### **Limitations and future directions**

This study accessed a hard-to-reach sporting population, offering valuable insights into the development of coaching philosophy and alignment with pedagogical practices. While our findings reflect the journey of one coach and their athletes, they highlight the importance of continued research into how coaching philosophies evolve. Future research should further explore how coaches develop and align their

philosophies with practice and how such development can be facilitated and supported (e.g. in coach education, through 1-to-1 coach development, or reflective engagement with critical incidents in daily practice). Alex's journey illustrates that coaches are not devoid from academic influence, in fact, Alex actively sought it. This challenges assumptions of the gap between research and practice and suggests that researchers might explore how pathways for knowledge development can be made more accessible.

Our findings reinforce the value of sustained, in-situ engagement with coaches. However, due to Covid-19 restrictions our access was limited to video recordings and online interviews. Future researchers may benefit from immersive fieldwork to capture the “atmosphere” of the high-performance environments, including the interactions and emotions before and after sessions and with other stakeholders. Furthermore, we arrived at Freire's work during the research and found his concepts valuable for exploring coaching philosophy and pedagogy. Future researchers might apply a Freirean lens to explore the lived reality of coaches and athletes in high-performance sport.

### ***Implications for practice and research***

For coaches, coach developers, coach educators, this study offers several important implications. First, it highlights that it takes time for coaches, particularly in high-performance environments, to make sense of their role and themselves within it. Even experienced coaches may need to be supported (nudged) to engage with and make sense of the critical learning incidents within their everyday practice, which can then serve as powerful catalysts for growth. Linked, the development of a coaching philosophy is not a straightforward or well-understood process. For many coaches, it remains a complex and deeply personal journey. Rather than following a linear process, the formation of a coaching philosophy often unfolds serendipitously, shaped by lived experiences, meaningful dialogue, and an understanding of the athletes' biographies. It demands humility, effortful sense-making, and willingness to engage in authentic conversations about values, identity, and purpose. Here the role of coach developers, significant others (e.g. performance support staff) and academia is important to explore further with coaches.

Finally, while deepening understanding of personal values (e.g. person-centredness) can change pedagogical practice, it is important to recognise that athletes may not be on the same journey and indeed struggle with their own tensions. Importantly then, coach education (policy and practice) should be wary of making demands to (re)produce a philosophy as part of formal accreditation, for fear of coaches “plagiarising” material to satisfy learning outcomes. Further exploration could see researchers (continue to) work with NGB's to seek opportunities for more open and genuine reflection, with the aim of helping coaches to enhance and align their coaching intentions with their actual practice.

### **Conclusion**

This study sought to explore how one coach developed their coaching philosophy and how this informed their pedagogical practice within an Olympic programme. Our discussions help to better understand the realities of, and the ad-hoc nature of, a coach developing a meaningful philosophy of coaching within the constraints of a high-performance programme which, in turn, impacts and guides the coach's pedagogical practice. Much of this development is tacit and it takes specific nudges, and even jolts, to bring the philosophy into a meaningful statement. Therefore, it takes time, effort, openness, humility and support. Indeed, a journey of enquiry, to get to this point. And, without the drive provided by a curiosity to find out more, this development may likely not occur. For Alex it was twelve years after they began coaching that they were able to somewhat articulate their philosophy. This length of time is necessary to amass sufficient experiences to reflect upon and learn from, as well as developing a self-awareness and humility that the coach is comfortable not having (or even needing) answers for the athlete. In addition, access to a wide range of learning inputs and catalysts, e.g. conversations with peers and mentors, informal learning (i.e. podcasts), engagement with academic publications and academics, all contributed to the development of Alex's philosophy. Furthermore, the development of a philosophy which impacts practice requires ongoing, authentic, critical reflection (praxis) as to the way the coaching philosophy is espoused in practice. When coaches have time, space, opportunity for critical dialogue and an openness to develop their philosophy, it can have an authentic impact on their coaching practice.

## Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the coach and athletes for their willingness to engage with the project and their generosity with their time over many hours of interviews. Without their co-operation this research would not have been possible.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## ORCID

Stephen Macdonald  <http://orcid.org/0009-0001-8893-0186>

Justine Allen  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9918-9330>

Reece Chapman  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1714-1331>

## References

- Armour, K. (2011). *Sport pedagogy: An introduction for teaching and coaching*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315847108>
- Ashford, M., Cope, E., Abraham, A., & Poolton, J. (2025). Coaching player decision making in rugby union: Exploring coaches espoused theories and theories in use as an indicator of effective coaching practice. *Physical Education & Sport Pedagogy*, 30(1), 28–49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17408989.2022.2153822>
- Berger, R. (2015). Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 15(2), 219–234. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112468475>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners*. Sage.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise & Health*, 11(4), 589–597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>
- Burke, S. (2019). Rethinking 'validity' and 'trustworthiness' in qualitative inquiry: How might we judge the quality of qualitative research in sport and exercise sciences? In B. Smith & A. C. Sparkes (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of qualitative research in sport and exercise* (pp. 330–339). Routledge.
- Cassidy, T., Potrac, P., & Rynne, S. (2023). *Understanding sports coaching* (4th ed.). Taylor & Francis.
- Champ, F., Ronkainen, N., Nesti, M. S., Tod, D., & Littlewood, M. (2020). "Through the lens of ethnography": Perceptions, challenges, and experiences of an early career practitioner-researcher in professional football. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise & Health*, 12(4), 513–529. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1638444>
- Chapman, R. (2023). *An exploration of the socio-pedagogical development, and present-day coach experiences, of grassroots coach education in English football* [Doctoral dissertation]. Liverpool John Moores University.
- Chapman, R., Cope, E., Richardson, D., Littlewood, M., & Cronin, C. (2023). How did we get here; a historical and social exploration of the construction of English FA coach education. *Sport, Education and Society*, 29(9), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2023.2256754>
- Chapman, R., Richardson, D., Cope, E., & Cronin, C. (2020). Learning from the past; a Freirean analysis of FA coach education since 1967. *Sport, Education and Society*, 25(6), 681–697. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2019.1654989>
- Crisp, P., & Hamblin, M. (2023). Beginner-coaches and connectivity of knowledge: Real-world coaching and self-reported importance of prior playing experience. *Physical Culture & Sport. Studies & Research*, 101(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.2478/pcssr-2023-0020>
- Cushion, C., & Partington, M. (2014). A critical analysis of the conceptualisation of 'coaching philosophy'. *Sport, Education and Society*, 21(6), 851–867. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2014.958817>
- Darder, A. (2024). *The student guide to Freire's 'pedagogy of the oppressed'*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Docheff, D., & Gerdes, D. (2015). The heart of coaching. *Strategies*, 28(2), 28–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08924562.2014.1001105>
- Doron, J., Lienhart, N., Martinent, G., & Goisbault, M. (2024). Coping with intensive training demands: A longitudinal investigation of the relationships between appraisal, emotion, coping effectiveness and engagement among elite fencers. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2024.2407487>
- Downham, L., & Cushion, C. (2022). Reflection and reflective practice in high-performance sport coaching: A heuristic device. *Physical Education & Sport Pedagogy*, 29(6), 601–620. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17408989.2022.2136369>
- Duda, J., & Appleton, P. (2016). Empowering and disempowering coaching climates: Conceptualization, measurement considerations, and intervention implications. In M. Raab, P. Wylleman, R. Seiler, A. Elbe, & A. Hatzigeorgiadis

- (Eds.), *Sport and exercise psychology research: From theory to practice* (pp. 373–388). Elsevier Science & Technology. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-803634-1.00017-0>
- Fields, L., Dean, B., Perkiss, S., & Moroney, T. (2022). Education on the sustainable development goals for nursing students: Is Freire the answer? *Nursing Inquiry*, 29(4), e12493.
- Freire, P. (1973). *Pedagogy of the oppressed. pedagogy of the oppressed*. The Seabury Press.
- Freire, P. (1998). *Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, democracy, and civic courage*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Freire, P. (2005). *Teachers as cultural workers: Letters to those who dare teach*. Westview Press.
- Freire, P., Fraser, J., Macedo, D., & McKinnon, T. (1997). *Mentoring the mentor: A critical dialogue with Paulo Freire*. Peter Lang, International Academic Publishers.
- Gadotti, M., & Torres, C. (2009). Paulo Freire: Education for development. *Development & Change*, 40(6), 1255–1267. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2009.01606.x>
- Glass, R. (2001). On Paulo Freire's philosophy of praxis and the foundations of liberation education. *Educational Researcher*, 30(2), 15–25.
- Gould, D., Greenleaf, C., Guinan, D., & Chung, Y. (2002). A survey of U.S. Olympic coaches: Variables perceived to have influenced athlete performances and coach effectiveness. *Sport Psychologist*, 16(3), 229–250. <https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.16.3.229>
- Grecic, D., & Collins, D. (2013). The epistemological chain: Practical applications in sports. *Quest (National Association for Kinesiology in Higher Education)*, 65(2), 151–168. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2013.773525>
- Hall, J., Cope, E., Townsend, R., & Nicholls, A. (2022). Investigating the alignment between coaches' ideological beliefs and academy philosophy in professional youth football. *Sport, Education and Society*, 27(3), 377–392. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2020.1856061>
- Henderson, S., Bloom, G., & Alexander, D. (2022). Desired coaching behaviours of elite divers during competition. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 20(6), 1777–1794. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2021.2003417>
- Hughes, C. (2022). Philosophy for coaching rather than philosophy of coaching: Some conceptual clarifications. *Sports Coaching Review*, 11(1), 108–126. <http://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2021.1995261>
- Jemal, A. (2017). Critical consciousness: A critique and critical analysis of the literature. *Urban Review*, 49 (4) , 602–626. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-017-0411-3>.
- Jenkins, S. (2010). Coaching Philosophy J. Lyle & C. Cushion. *Sports Coaching: Professionalisation and Practice*. Churchill Livingstone, 233–242. ISBN: 9780702030543.
- Knijnik, J., Spaaij, R., & Jeanes, R. (2019). Reading and writing the game: Creative and dialogic pedagogies in sports education. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 32(June 2019), 42–50. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2019.03.005>
- Lara-Bercial, S., & Mallett, C. (2016). The practices and developmental pathways of professional and Olympic serial winning coaches. *International Sport Coaching Journal*, 3(3), 221–239. <https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2016-0083>
- Leeder, T., & Beaumont, L. (2023). Navigating the athlete-to-coach transition: Understanding the experiences, philosophies, and practices of British orienteering coaches. *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning*, 25(2), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14729679.2023.2274095>
- llen, J., & Muir, B. (2021). Coaching high performance athletes. In R. Resende & A. R. Gomes (Eds.), *Coaching for human development and performance in sports* (pp. 169–198). Springer Nature.
- Luguetti, C., & Oliver, K. (2021). A transformative learning journey of a teacher educator in enacting an activist approach in physical education teacher education. *The Curriculum Journal*, 32(1), 118–135.
- Lyle, J. (2002). *Sports coaching concepts: A framework for coaches' behaviour*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203994986>
- Lyle, J., & Cushion, C. (2017). *Sport coaching concepts: A framework for coaching practice* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203126424>
- Lyons, M., Rynne, S., & Mallett, C. (2012). Reflection and the art of coaching: Fostering high-performance in Olympic ski cross. *Reflective Practice*, 13(3), 359–372. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2012.670629>
- McCallister, S., Blinde, E., & Weiss, W. (2000). Teaching values and implementing philosophies: Dilemmas of the youth sport coach. *Physical Educator*, 57 (1) , 33–45.
- Newman, T., & Alvarez, M. A. (2015). Coaching on the wave: An integrative approach to facilitating youth development. *Journal of Sport Psychology in Action*, 6(3), 127–140 <https://doi.org/10.1080/21520704.2015.1073203>.
- Newman, T., Black, S., Santos, F., Jefka, B., & Brennan, N. (2023). Coaching the development and transfer of life skills: A scoping review of facilitative coaching practices in youth sports. *International Review of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, 16(1), 619–656. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1750984X.2021.1910977>.
- Partington, M., & Campbell, J. (2020). A guide to understanding coaching philosophy: Moving to a philosophy of coaching. In E. Cope & M. Partington (Eds.), *Sports coaching: A theoretical and practical guide* (pp. 9–17). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351200035>
- Partington, M., & Cushion, C. (2019). Coaching philosophy: An orthodox and symbolic device. In C. Crosby & C. Edwards (Eds.), *Context and contingency: Research in sport coaching pedagogy* (pp. 41–48). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Partington, M., & Cushion, C. J. (2024). A deconstruction of coaching philosophy. *Sports Coaching Review*, 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2024.2322838>

- Partington, M., & Cushion, C. J. (2025). Re-visiting a critical analysis of ‘coaching philosophy’: Deconstruction to reconstruction. *Sport, Education and Society*, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2025.2505941>
- Poucher, Z., Tamminen, K., Caron, J., & Sweet, S. (2020). Thinking through and designing qualitative research studies: A focused mapping review of 30 years of qualitative research in sport psychology. *International Review of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, 13(1), 163–186. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1750984X.2019.1656276>
- Ritchie, D., Allen, J., & Kirkland, A. (2018). Where science meets practice: Olympic coaches’ crafting of the tapering process. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 36(10), 1145–1154. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02640414.2017.1362717>
- Roberts, P. (1998). Knowledge, dialogue, and humanization: The moral philosophy of Paulo Freire. *The Journal of Educational Thought (JET)/Revue de la Pensée Éducative* 32 (2), 95–117. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23767458>.
- Rodrigue, F., Trudel, P., & Boyd, J. (2019). Learning from practice: The value of a personal learning coach for high-performance coaches. *International Sport Coaching Journal*, 6(3), 285–295. <https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2018-0078>
- Schugurensky, D. (1998). The legacy of Paulo Freire: A critical review of his contributions. *Convergence*, 31(1), 17.
- Simpson, H., Edwards, C., Vinson, D., & Cale, A. (2024). “You can stay now, you are trusted”: Navigating qualitative fieldwork in sport coaching. *Sports Coaching Review*, 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2024.2395139>
- Smith, B., & Sparks, A. (2016). Interviews: Qualitative interviewing in sport and exercise sciences. In B. Smith & A. C. Sparks (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of qualitative research in sport and exercise* (pp. 103–123). Routledge.
- Suoranta, J. (2022). Freire, Paulo (1921–1997) as a Marxist revolutionary for education Maisuria Alpeh. In *Encyclopaedia of Marxism and education* (pp. 267–285). Brill. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004505612\\_017](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004505612_017)
- Thorpe H. Olive R. (2016) Conducting observations in sport and exercise settings. Smith B. Sparkes A.C. Eds. *Routledge handbook of qualitative research in sport and exercise* (Routledge) (pp. 124–138). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315762012-20>
- Tracy, S. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight ‘big-tent’ criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16 (10) , 837–851. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410383121>.
- Woods, C. T., McKeown, I., Rothwell, M., Araújo, D., Robertson, S., & Davids, K. (2020). Sport practitioners as sport ecology designers: How ecological dynamics has progressively changed perceptions of skill “acquisition” in the sporting habitat. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 654. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00654>