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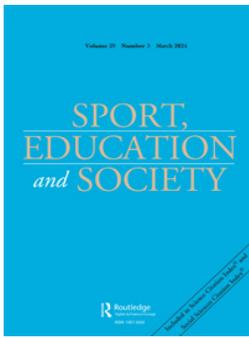
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Enskilment into the coaching landscape: towards a situated approach to coach education in Australian football

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how an enskilment approach could be harnessed to guide coach education in Australian football (soccer). To do so, we first overview current coach education practices in Australian football, looking specifically into the foundation of Football Australia's coach education model, rooted in a transmissive metaphor. Then, drawing on key ideas from Tim Ingold, we move towards a different approach to coach education, grounded in the relationality of enskilment. This leads us to reconceptualise the very notion of 'education' – moving from the transmission of secondary information, towards an approach in which people are led out into the world by experienced companions, encouraged to primarily experience things for themselves. Such a shift foregrounds the third section of our paper, where we explore a more situated approach to coach education, leaning into key concepts from Jean Lave and Étienne Wenger. In doing so, we propose an apprentice model to coach education that consists of three interwoven dimensions: *exposure to real-world contexts*; *legitimate peripheral participation within communities of practice* and *mentorship*. We bring life to each dimension through the presentation of examples in the context of football. In summary, to prepare Australian football coaches for the realities of coaching, coach education needs to consider a move from the transmission of secondary information, towards exposure to first-hand experiences of actual coaching.

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Introduction

In 2009, Football Australia (FA) – the national governing body overseeing the development of football in Australia – released the National Football Curriculum (NFC). This multifaceted document serves as a philosophical guide, an educational resource and curricular framework for formal coach education in Australia (Football Australia, 2013a). FA introduced the NFC with the aim of creating a 'fundamental transformation' in the way football is played and coached in Australia, seeking to cultivate a culture of theoretically informed, evidence-based coaching practices across all levels of the football landscape (Football Australia, 2013a). Despite the importance placed on formal coach education by FA, a recent investigation by Selimi et al. (2023) revealed crucial limitations in course design and delivery. Such was the magnitude of these limitations, some coaches labelled the courses as 'rudimentary', 'outdated', 'repetitive' and needing 'an absolute revamp', questioning their effectiveness in preparing them for the complexities of coaching (Selimi et al., 2023, p. 8).

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Consistent with the broader and well-documented critiques of formal coach education (see Chesterfield et al., 2010; Cushion et al., 2010; Jones & Allison, 2014; Nelson et al., 2013; Paquette et al., 2019), much of this criticism has been pointed towards abstract content delivered in decontextualised settings far removed from a coach's performance context. These critiques also highlight the scant recognition, within formal courses, of how the broader environment shapes coach practice and behaviours (also see Vaughan et al., 2021, 2022).

Aiming to unify the Australian football ecosystem, FA unveiled its 'XI Principles for the Future of Australian Football' in 2020. This strategical document delineates a comprehensive vision for the sport's future growth and sustainable development within the Australian landscape (Football Australia, 2020). Among the XI Principles' various measures, one focuses specifically on coach development. This multifaceted initiative encompasses several key components: (i) fostering a robust culture of coach development by emphasising the crucial role of coaches in player development; (ii) modernising the delivery methods for coach education and (iii) comprehensively reviewing the content of coach education courses and the Australian coaching methodology itself (Football Australia, 2020). However, if FA aspires to enact true transformation in the way football is coached in Australia (Football Australia, 2013a, p. x; 2020, p. 8), creating world-class coach education environments fit for the complex and multifaceted role (Football Australia, 2020, p. 32), then we contend that the issue of decontextualisation must first be addressed.

This critical conceptual analysis aims to sketch a reconceptualisation of coach education in Australian football, focusing its critique on the issue of decontextualisation. Indeed, while this is an issue that has been explored elsewhere (see Chesterfield et al., 2010; Cushion et al., 2010; Jones et al., 2012; Nelson et al., 2013; Piggott, 2012), to date, scant attention has been directed towards an Australian context. To achieve this, our paper is split into three main sections. The first focuses on the current foundation of FA's coach education model. Grounded in what is referred to as a *model of transmission*, we suggest that current practices of coach education delivered by FA are founded on a cultural ideology of 'acquisition' (see Lave, 1990; Lave & Wenger, 1991). In section two, we work towards a *different* episteme, grounded in the relationality of enskilment (Ingold, 2000; Woods et al., 2021). This paves the way for section three, where we sketch a contextualised approach to coach education in Australian football. Specifically, leaning concepts espoused by Lave and Wenger (1991), we outline an apprenticed approach to coach education that prioritises *learning-by-doing-in-place*. In doing so, we speak to three interwoven dimensions: (i) *exposure to real-world context*; (ii) *legitimate peripheral participation within communities of practice* and (iii) *mentorship*. While by no means is this sketch complete, we do hope its presentation opens lines of inquiry that could prove fruitful in the ongoing journey that is coach education.

Coach education in Australian football: reflections on current practice

Despite the importance placed on coach education by FA, recent research has raised some pertinent questions regarding the effectiveness, relevance and value of its formality (Karagiannis & Pill, 2017; Karim, 2016; Selimi et al., 2023; Siokos, 2011). Designed to support coach development, the coach education delivered by FA is often structured didactically, with coaches being seen to *acquire* knowledge from more experienced others (i.e. coach developers) (Karim, 2016; Maximos et al., 2022). Usually, this acquisition process occurs through the transmission of secondary information, a process typically undergone in decontextualised settings far removed from the coaching environment (Karim, 2016; Selimi et al., 2023). As Lave (1996) suggests, this didactic process reduces 'teaching' and 'education' to a matter of mastering the knowledge created, and transmitted, by others (also see Pierce & Telford, 2023). The corollary is that coaches spend a significant amount of time learning in settings that do not represent their performance context. Further, the homogenised and prescriptive nature of this transmitted secondary information – which is produced, packaged and presented by FA – is often seen as having little practical utility by coaches themselves (Cushion et al., 2010; Kuklick & Mills, 2023; Piggott, 2012; Selimi et al., 2023; Townsend & Cushion, 2017). This is not to

say, however, that the delivery of secondary information is not without its uses in coach education. Rather, its over-reliance in current formats appears to yield significant implications, especially if learning is to be viewed as a deeply embedded, ecological phenomenon (Button et al., 2020).

The pervasive over-reliance on secondary information in coach education (cf. Cushion et al., 2010; Leeder, 2022; Wang et al., 2023) has deep ties to the metaphoric model of transmission (see Ingold, 2017). According to this model, knowledge is seen secondarily and objective; a (pre)package-able entity that can be instilled into the receptacle minds of others (Woods, 2021). Knowing, in such a view, is a matter of storage and application, which holds that a knowledgeable coach would be one who is able to draw on a large amount of stored content – presumably manifest in rules, concepts and representations – to be applied in practice when the time is ‘right’ (Ingold, 2011; Woods, 2021). This reflects an ideology that Lave (1990, p. 310) refers to as ‘the culture of acquisition’, where learning is seen to be a cognitive process that occurs abstractly and sequentially. Broadly, it follows that one first acquires a general body of knowledge about a topic that is to be stored in the mind following its transmission, and then one retrieves such knowledge to construct an action, which is to be applied in the ‘proper’ context (Lave, 1990; Renga, 2022; also see Ingold, 2017, Ch. 1). From a coaching perspective, this is to imply that in order ‘to coach’, one must first possess some ‘basic’, ‘fundamental’ or ‘rational’ type of coaching knowledge that mediates their interactions, with this process of ‘knowledge acquisition’ being initiated in formal education settings.

Education or indoctrination?

Although discussing memory, David Rubin’s (1988) metaphor of a ‘complex-structure’ captures Lave’s culture of acquisition rather eloquently (also see Woods & Davids, 2023). According to such, knowledge can be understood by way of concepts, rules or representations that are determined *prior* to their application in practice. In other words, knowledge:

[...] takes the form of a comprehensive configuration of mental representations that has been copied into the mind of the individual, through some mechanisms of replication, even *before* he or she steps forth into the environment. The application of this knowledge in practice is, then, a simple and straightforward process of sorting and matching, so as to establish a homology between structures in the mind and structures in the world. (Ingold, 2011, p. 159, emphasis added)

A knowledgeable coach, in accord with this metaphor, would be one who is able to classify and characterise the various things they look *at*, matched against a prior formed ideal of what such things *should* be (Woods & Davids, 2023). Here, we explore this perspective through the distinction in ecological psychology of knowing *about*, and knowing *of* that which is of interest to us (Gibson, 1966, 1979; Reed, 1996; Turvey & Kugler, 1984). Knowledge *about* can be surmised as secondary information produced by another human individual, often taking shape through the presentation of words, codes, pictures or symbols (Araujo et al., 2009; Woods & Davids, 2023). This knowledge is bound to the categorial confines of that which has been produced by another human individual, with a coaching manual or game model representing such knowledge in the context of sports coaching. Such documents, for example, may tell a coach and player *about* certain formations or the various places one should stand in order for them to be applied in practice. Indeed, while such secondary information may be beneficial by way of referential meaning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Reed, 1996), it is fundamentally limited, in that its secondary nature constrains one’s search, narrowing their focus towards the application and enactment of what has been prescribed *for* them by another. In other words, focusing too much on knowing *about* coaching may limit a coach’s opportunity to grow their knowledge *of* it (O’Sullivan et al., 2021; Vaughan et al., 2021) – a sentiment eloquently noted by Reed (1996, p. 94):

When one is examining the world for oneself there is no limit to the scrutiny – one can look as carefully as one wishes, and one can always discover new information. But this is emphatically not the case with [transmitted] second-hand information. (text in brackets added)

This view is shared in recent football coaching literature, which suggests that formal education, grounded in a model of transmission, may be ineffective in preparing coaches for the realities of coaching (Cushion et al., 2010; Kuklick & Mills, 2023; Leeder, 2022; Nelson et al., 2013; Selimi et al., 2023). This can be attributed, in part, to the insistence that coaches adhere or conform to a standardised curriculum, preventing them from exploring alternative ways of knowing *in* coaching. Comparable to a process of indoctrination or enculturation (Vaughan et al., 2022), formal coach education in Australia typically encourages coaches to ‘adopt’ and ‘re-enact’ pre-determined practices and behaviours in order to obtain accreditation (Karim, 2016; Selimi et al., 2023), which reflects concerns about homogenisation in some corners of the academic literature (Chesterfield et al., 2010; Cushion & Nelson, 2013; Cushion et al., 2010; Leeder & Cushion, 2020; Nelson et al., 2006).

Critiquing along similar lines, Abraham and Collins (1998) suggested that formal coach education is often caught attempting to convince coaches of a singular and appropriate way of coaching, over-constraining opportunities for exploration. This highlights one of the inherent limitations of the transmissive model common to coach education in Australian football, which is that despite best intentions, the nature of how knowledge is presented, ‘acquired’ and assessed inadvertently encourages indoctrination and conformity, risking coach education regressing into a ‘box ticking’ exercise rather than a valuable and integral part of an ongoing educative journey (Chesterfield et al., 2010; Cushion & Nelson, 2013; Cushion et al., 2010; Leeder & Cushion, 2020; Nelson et al., 2006). Collectively, this ‘seriously calls into question the legitimacy and value of an overly instrumental approach to coach learning and its provision’ (Cushion et al., 2010, p. 3). Ironically, rather than bringing the coaching community together in its differentiation, the pervasive requirement to conform to transmitted knowledge about coaching likely pushes many away from identifying and engaging with course content; as voiced by a coach in the work of Selimi et al. (2023, p. 8):

A coach looks at it [the National Football Curriculum] and says, I’m under pressure, we’re in the bottom half of the table, we’re closer to relegation than we are to winning the competition, and people are telling me I should have ‘this’ philosophy because that’s what the national curriculum says? That’s nonsense! It erodes the confidence of people. *These procedural documents that define what the game should be ... it doesn’t match the reality.* I think that disenfranchises people who are saying, well, in those circumstances, it doesn’t apply to me, it’s irrelevant to me. I just need to survive. (emphasis added)

This sentiment is consistent with the literature, according to which national governing bodies, such as FA, are accused of being overly concerned with regulating the attitudes, behaviours and practices of coaches, while the unique context in which a coach operates in is often disregarded or overlooked completely (Nash et al., 2017; Stodter & Cushion, 2019). It highlights a central limitation of FA’s current coach education process: *in prioritising the transmission of knowledge about coaching, have FA undervalued the importance of supporting coaches to grow their knowledge of it, embedded in the contexts in which they practice?* While our forthcoming response to this question is in the positive, we do not intend to imply that such shortcomings are, by any means, deliberate. Rather, we contend that the issues highlighted here are the result of the underlying and often unchallenged ‘culture of acquisition’ that has led to a transmissive model of coach education in Australian football. Thus, we next move towards a *different* approach to coach education, one that is grounded, not in transmission, but *exposure*. In doing so, we hope to lay a path for coach education in Australian football that swings away from the pervasive ideology of acquiring knowledge *about*, towards one in which coaches are supported in growing their knowledge *of*.

Towards a contextually situated approach to coach education

Minor, cosmetic changes will not be enough to make the difference: *a fundamental transformation is necessary.* (Football Australia, 2013b, p. 17, emphasis added)

To start this second section, it is worth revisiting our earlier distinction; knowing *about* and knowing *of* one’s environment. Contrasted to knowledge *about*, knowledge *of* is primary, grown by experiencing the coming-into-being of a surround (Gibson, 1979; Reed, 1996). It is the knowledge, according

to Gibson (1979, p. 242), that is not transmitted or acquired but grown by *looking*, along with *listening*, *feeling*, *smelling* and *tasting*. It is the knowledge, in other words, forged through *exposure* to the beings and things which surround us (Gibson, 1979). Indeed, knowledge viewed in such a primary way has important implications for how we are to conceptualise what it means 'to know'. Notably, it implies that knowing of a surround is not just a matter of ascribing labels to its constituents, but of becoming more attentive to the information that directly specifies its key features; a process often referred to as *attunement* (Ingold, 2000; Woods, 2021).

In a counter-metaphor to that of the complex-structure discussed earlier, Rubin (1988) introduced that of a 'complex-process', which captures the directly active and processual episteme we are foregrounding here. The active process of knowing, according to this metaphor, is prioritised over the property of knowledge, which is to say that knowledge is not an entity to be 'acquired' and then 'applied' in practice, but to know is by *way of practice* (Woods et al., 2022). Far from being produced, prescribed and transmitted into the mind of a passive recipient, knowledge viewed as a complex-process is continually grown through exposure and immersion within an unfolding field of relations (Ingold, 2011). A knowledgeable coach, for example, would not necessarily be the one who can recite game models or patterns of play transmitted to them, but the one who is able to pick-up, and attentively respond to, key features of an environment in a way that resonates with their action capabilities and those of the players and support staff they work with (Araujo et al., 2009; Morris et al., 2022; Wood et al., 2023; Woods et al., 2021).

Pertinently, this perspective holds that knowing is not a point that a coach can reach through the recitation and regurgitation of transmitted secondary information. It is not, in other words, a sequential process of 'filling up' a receptacle mind with secondary information (Woods & Davids, 2023). Rather, knowing is an ongoing process of attuning to the ever-changing coaching landscape – that is, coaches do not just know more, but progressively know *better* (O'Sullivan et al., 2023a). For instance, the past two decades have witnessed a growing recognition of sports coaching as a profoundly relational practice influenced by an array of nested and interacting socio-cultural constraints (Cushion et al., 2010; Horn, 2008; North, 2017; Vaughan et al., 2022). Such constraints implicate coaching through their influence upon learning, the sports position within the community, how interpersonal dynamics emerge and how socio-political factors shape opportunity and access to resource. Thus, how coaches become perceptually attuned to such socio-cultural constraints is through immersion, learning to resonate with key information in ways that corresponds with inhabitants (O'Sullivan et al., 2023b; Woods & Davids, 2021).

This process of attunement, as Gibson (1979) emphasises, unfolds through the exposure to varied contexts. It is through this exposure that people become more aware of things and perceive more opportunities to act, learning to differentiate between sources of information in a surround (Gibson, 1979). Such a distinction has significant implications for how we conceptualise and comprehend the coach education process and the role of an experienced other (i.e. coach educator). Accordingly, if we are to take seriously these distinctions, then coach education requires a shift from its current grounding in a model of transmission, to an approach that appreciates the deeply situated and processual nature of what it means 'to know of' – a shift we feel responds to the quote with which this section opened.

From indoctrination to enskilment

Following the work of Woods et al. (2021) and Ingold (2000), we propose that the notion of enskilment could offer fruitful grounding in working towards such a situated approach. Enskilment is a type of local 'know-how' or 'knack' that progressively emerges as an individual becomes intimately familiar with a task and environment. It can be defined as:

Understanding in practice ... in which learning is inseparable from doing, and in which both are embedded in the context of a practical engagement with the world. (Ingold, 2000, p. 416)

The inseparability of learning-by-doing-in-place the above excerpt highlights is important for our broader thesis, as it speaks to the growth of knowledge we are advocating for in coach education: *of*, not just *about*. Moreover, as noted in the above referral of ‘practical engagement’, the knowledge central to enskilment is not secondary, but primary; it is not transmitted, but grown by doing-in-place with others (also see Harris, 2005; Hsu & Lim, 2016; Woods & Davids, 2021). In a wonderful ethnography with Icelandic fishing skippers, *Enskilment at Sea*, Pálsson (1994) showed that becoming an enskiled skipper was an ongoing process of learning to attend to changes in environing conditions. Simply, it was a process of attunement, of learning to notice things, paying attention to the unfolding of one’s surround. For example, skippers often spoke of the importance of learning to ‘read’ weather patterns, ocean currents and avian movements, as such dynamic environmental features implicated the various locations one may decide to fish (Pálsson, 1994). Learning to become a skipper, according to Pálsson (1994), is thus a deeply embedded process that can only occur at sea:

For skippers ... enskilment in fishing is not a matter of formal schooling and the internalization [and transmission] of a stock of knowledge [about]; rather it is achieved through active engagement *with* the environment, in the broadest sense of the term ... ‘Real’ schooling is supposed to take place in actual fishing. (p. 916, text in brackets and emphasis added)

To us, skippering and coaching are not that dissimilar, especially when starting from the premise that both could be understood as an ongoing process of enskilling into a respective land- (or sea-) scape. Accordingly, if we are to follow this line of thinking, and view learning as inseparable from doing-in-place, then the development and subsequent assessment of coaching skill would need to occur in the context in which the coach practices; reflecting the above sentiment that ‘real’ schooling is supposed to take place in *actual coaching*. This contextualisation would likely provide crucial insight into the unfolding of coach behaviour, understood as a deeply situated phenomenon. Interestingly, this view resonates with the perspectives of a coach interviewed in the work of Selimi et al. (2023, p. 9):

Had a coach educator come to where I was working and spent a week with me, for example, in the planning process and in training sessions and team meetings on game day, you get a much better window into who the coach is. Are they an A licenced coach? Maybe or maybe not. But you can tell very quickly if that person is going to be a good coach or not. And that should be the basis for passing or failing or recommending further development. But at the moment, you’re in a group of 30 to 40 people, maybe you contribute once or twice in the classroom, you put on a session nervously, with a load of guys that don’t really want to be there. It either goes well, or if it doesn’t, you fail and then you’re suddenly not an A licence coach. Or, you have a personal relationship with the coach educator, or you’re an ex-Socceroo and suddenly you’re an A-licenced coach ... it’s pretty backwards.

In other words, for coach educators to gain a deeper insight into coach practice, they may need to place themselves in the real-world context of coaches, thereby seeing coaches in the midst of *doing* in *their* environment. By adopting this more embedded and situational approach, coach education could shift its practice from understanding knowledge and skills as ‘entities’ that can be acquired in isolation, to seeing such things as being nested within a broader system or field of relations that continually unfold (Lave, 2009; Lave & Wenger, 1996). The concept of enskilment, thus, invites us to reconsider the fundamental nature of how knowledge, skill and learning are conceptualised, foregrounding the importance of situatedness. In coach education, this leads to a shift away from standardised curricula based on a model of transmission, towards exposure and primary experience. As discussed next, this imbues an educative process that is ‘about attending to things, rather than acquiring the knowledge that absolves us of the need to do so; about exposure rather than immunisation’ (Ingold, 2017, p. 11). Perhaps, then, it is worth (re)considering the very word, ‘education’?

From ‘teaching’ to ‘leading out’

In an exceptional essay on the education of gaze, Masschelein (2010) invites us to consider two etymologies of ‘education’: *e-ducare* and *e-ducere*. The first, *e-ducare*, roughly means ‘to teach’ and refers to the idea of becoming more aware or conscious *about* a specific subject matter in

order to develop a better understanding (Masschelein, 2010). Most Australian football coaches who have participated in the coach education system would inadvertently be familiar with this view of education, as it starts from the premise that ‘knowledge’ is a tangible entity to be acquired from more knowledgeable others (i.e. teachers or coach educators). In contrast to this more conventional interpretation, Masschelein (2010) introduces *e-ducere*, which roughly means ‘to lead out’. Rather than becoming more aware or conscious about features of the world, *e-ducere* is concerned with liberating or displacing one’s view through exposure. In other words, education – from this view – is about encouraging people to primarily experience different features of an environment, opening new opportunities for further exploration (Morris et al., 2022).

These contrasting interpretations lead to an interesting point in our paper’s journey. Namely, if we take education as a process of leading others out into the world, then what would coach education look like? In response, we next draw on concepts from Lave and Wenger (1991), supported by sentiments expressed by coaches in the work of Selimi et al. (2023). This allows us to sketch an apprenticeship model to coach education in Australian football that consists of three interwoven dimensions: (i) *exposure to real-world contexts*; (ii) *legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice* and (iii) *mentorship*. Following a brief introduction to these dimensions, each is brought to life in reference to their respective implications on coach education in Australian football. Though, prior to this, we do wish to briefly signpost our intentions here. Namely, this sketch aims to provide key insight regarding how a more contextually situated approach to coach education *could* unfold, thereby striking a more parsimonious balance between ‘coach accreditation’ and ‘coach development’. Given that formal education is overwhelmingly tilted towards the transmission of second-hand information (see Sect. 1), this sketch aims to show how coach education in Australian football could move towards *exposure*, thereby helping coaches enskil into their respective environments. While far from complete, we hope this sketch opens a fruitful path for work to come.

Real schooling happens in actual coaching: sketching a situated approach to coach education

Pioneered by Lave and Wenger in the early 1990s, the framework of situated learning starts from the premise that meaningful learning is not only situated within the specific contexts that people participate in, but is also deeply shaped by, and shapes, the socio-cultural practices of that community (Miner & Nicodemus, 2021). This directly contrasts with the earlier discussed ‘culture of acquisition’, which posits that learning is an abstract, context-free phenomenon that unfolds sequentially through transmission (Lave, 1990). From a situated perspective, learning is far from an abstract and sequential endeavour. It is an embedded process that unfolds within a broader environment, which means learning is not only entangled in doing, but doing is entangled in varying socio-cultural practices (Heft, 2013). Simply put, situated learning posits that people (i.e. coaches) are more likely to effectively learn their craft by practising it in context (Ingold, 2000; Lave & Wenger, 1991). According to the findings of Selimi et al. (2023), the emphasis on contextualisation espoused in situated learning is resonate with what football coaches in Australia are calling for:

[FA] could intersperse the course with actual work in a real environment and you get to experiment and try things that you’re learning on the course in a real setting. I think there’ll be more influence and more learning from those courses as opposed to just come here, we’ll teach you, here is all the information. Bang, bang, bang. Now, off you go and enjoy.

In other words, by grounding coach education in exposure, coaches could experience, and be supported in, aspects of their journey not otherwise encountered through current practices. This, we suggest, could help them grow their knowledge *of* coaching, not just *about* it. As espoused in the above excerpt, the distinction between knowing *about* coaching and knowing *of* coaching is something that coaches appear to intuitively value and appreciate. That is, coaches are understanding of the fact that formal coach education (in its current state) can only prepare them to a certain point,

and it is primarily by doing (i.e. coaching) that they can grow a deeply contextualised knowledge of coaching (Jones et al., 2012; Selimi et al., 2023). For example, as voiced by two coaches interviewed in the work of Selimi et al. (2023):

There is a distinct and noticeable difference between people who know [about] football and people who coach. And it requires very different skill sets.

I don't think the courses prepared you [for senior coaching] to be honest. If you've never been in that environment, there's still a lot of learning to do when you get in there.

To remedy this, we contend that an apprenticeship model could offer a critical point of difference to the transmissive model germane to current coach education in Australian football. Specifically, an apprentice model has the potential to be a viable way of bringing to life to the relationality of enskilment. To do this, however, it must constitute *learning-by-doing-in-place*. Thus, we next discuss apprenticeship as a process that unfolds across three intertwined dimensions: (i) *exposure to real-world contexts*; (ii) *legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice* and (iii) *mentorship*.

Apprenticing involves exposure to real-world contexts

Situated learning emphasises that learning is context-dependent, embedded within the place in which a particular task unfolds (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This, for example, implies that if coaching is of developmental footballers in a particular socio-cultural region, then the educative opportunities coaches are exposed to should be situated in – or at the very least, represent – such contexts (O'Sullivan et al., 2023a). This perspective is in direct contrast to the current coach education practices facilitated by FA, which tends to compartmentalise knowledge and skills into discrete, 'acquirable' entities, only to then present them in classroom settings far removed from a coaches performance context (Karim, 2016; Selimi et al., 2023). A potential drawback of such an approach is that coaches may become unresponsive to the needs of their context and instead simply repeat and reproduce the pre-determined criteria solely for the purpose of obtaining accreditation (O'Sullivan et al., 2023a). Conversely, with its emphasis on authenticity, context and active participation within a community, exposure to real-world contexts may enable coaches to explore and develop their own coaching identity, which fosters a deeper commitment to learning (Lave, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

The importance placed on context here aligns with the place-based, relational undertones of enskilment (Ingold, 2000; Pierce & Telford, 2023; Woods et al., 2021). According to Ingold (2000), learning 'about' a place is inseparable from being 'in' a place, as it is through 'dwelling' that people learn to become intimately familiar with the behaviours, customs, tasks and respective features that constitute it (also see Woods et al., 2021). When we follow this line of thinking within the realm of coach learning, it becomes evident that learning entails more than mere storage and replication of pre-determined behaviours and practices that are detached from their respective contexts. Consider the example of skippering noted earlier. An inexperienced skipper could indeed spend vast amounts of time being 'schooled' *about* how to fish by more experienced others. But to become enskilled into the seascape, they must – at some point – be *exposed* to the changing winds and currents, and actively engage with the broader socio-cultural practice of fishing (Pálsson, 1994). This would imply that for coaches to become enskilled into the coaching landscape, education must make more room for exposure to real-world contexts, thereby supporting and guiding coaches in the midst of actual coaching (also see Land & Jonassen, 2012; Stein, 1998). It is of note that such a call for exposure was voiced by two Australian football coaches interviewed in the work of Selimi et al. (2023):

I think the courses give you structure, but I don't think it necessarily teaches you football. *You can't learn football in a classroom*. You have to make mistakes; you have to lose games. you have to win games. I don't think it necessarily teaches you a deep knowledge of football.

Does something that you learn on courses automatically make you a better coach? Maybe, maybe not. But I still think as a coach, you learn more by *doing* than by seeing a PowerPoint presentation.

When presented with suggestions for contextualising coach learning, apprenticeships as contended by Lave and Wenger (1991) emerge as a viable educative form that situates coaches in performance contexts that are representative, thereby enhancing the visibility of the practices, tasks and knowledge that constitute the fundamental components of coaching (Nash, 2023). For example, instead of Australian coaches spending their educative experiences in decontextualised settings (i.e. classrooms), coaches could undertake a short-term apprenticeship with a certified FA Club or Mentor. Here, coaches would be immersed in actual coaching, growing first-hand experience of how a mentor handles complex training and game situations, including but not de-limited to, managing staff and players, designing and implementing practice, adjusting tactics, navigating conflict and so on. Thus, exposure through apprenticeships not only provides coaches with first-hand experience of what coaching entails in the real-world, but also becomes the context in which learning takes place.

Apprenticing as legitimate peripheral participation within a community of practice

Instead of conceptualising learning as the mere ‘acquisition’ of transmitted secondary information, Lave and Wenger (1991) position learning as a process that unfolds in the midst of participation with and alongside others. To this end, learning could be said to involve participation in a community of practice (CoP) (Lave & Wenger, 1996). As a conceptual device, a CoP can be defined as a group of people ‘who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by *interaction on an ongoing basis*’ (Wenger, 2002, p. 4). The emphasis on participation and interaction within a community aligns nicely with that of enskilment in its advocacy of skills being shaped by the socio-cultural contexts in which they are practised (Ingold, 2017). This means it is the practice of a community that creates the basis for what *can* and *is* learned – that is, its ‘curriculum’. Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 98) note this through their referral to how social relationships and structures ‘define possibilities for learning’ (also see Kinchin & Kirk, 2003). In this sense, each community becomes a hive of activity, in which skill is not viewed as a ‘thing’ that can be passed down or transmitted, but is grown through participation in a living tradition that adapts and transforms over time (Ingold, 2017; Wenger, 2011).

The process by which an individual learns within a CoP is captured through what Lave and Wenger (1991) refer to as legitimate peripheral participation (LPP). The concept of LPP is a ‘way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artefacts, and communities of knowledge and practice’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). When first entering a CoP, newcomers are likely to start their journey on the periphery, usually by participating in activities that are accessible and relevant to their current action capabilities. As they continue to engage and contribute to a community’s unfolding practice, newcomers progressively enskil into their respective environment, and it is through the consensus of mentors and experienced participants that newcomers slowly partake in tasks and activities that are more central to those of the community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Considered in the context of football coaching, an aspiring coach may commence their educative journey by assuming the role of an apprentice within a club, undertaking tasks that reside on the periphery. Then, slowly, they may work their way more centrally into the community by undertaking more central tasks – a process that could manifest, for example, in the progression from a development coach, to an assistant coach, and then to a head coach.

To enact this, FA could establish a programme through which clubs become certified CoPs, thereby allowing them to host apprentices and foster opportunities for LPP. In this regard, learning is legitimate because apprenticing coaches actively participate and contribute to the overall functioning of the CoP they are involved in. Moreover, learning is peripheral in the sense that apprenticing coaches are more likely to engage in activities and tasks that correspond to their current action

capabilities (e.g. setting up main training practices, facilitating smaller training activities, taking notes while observing team meetings and so on). As part of this process, and as discussed in detail next, FA could concurrently promote the active role of a mentorship programme, through which apprenticing coaches work with experienced mentors in the midst of navigating challenges experienced during their educative journey. Indeed, such recommendations are still very much abstract in nature, requiring careful consideration from many prospective stakeholders. This, however, should not be considered as a weakness of our current position, but rather a strength, as it opens an opportunity to work with the broader footballing community in Australia to consider ways of successfully enacting this approach in practice.

Apprenticing and the role of the mentor

Apprenticing by way of LPP within a CoP offers opportunities for people to learn their trade within dynamic and collaborative spaces, in which individuals with shared interests come together and guide their attention towards a particular concept (Wenger, 2002). Within the multifaceted structure of a CoP, it stands to reason that mentorship emerges as a pivotal aspect, playing a multifaceted and indispensable role in supporting community members (Culver & Trudel, 2008; Lave & Wenger, 1991). One of the primary roles of mentorship in a CoP is to lead the sharing of ideas, establish resources supportive of skill development and provide the structure to the tasks critical to the community's functioning (Cushion et al., 2006; Wenger, 2002). As noted by a coach interviewed in the work of Selimi et al. (2023), such mentor-apprentice interaction in football coaching is an important, yet axillary, aspect of the current formalised coach education process:

Having people, like peers or mentors around you, learning and listening and having the willingness to be humble and open and ask questions and be curious and then, you know, sort of visit their environments if you build that relationship with them, I think that could definitely be a positive of coach education.

As echoed in the above, the role of a mentor in a more situated approach to coach education would be one of collaboration and guidance *without* specification (Ingold, 2013). By guidance without specification, we mean that the mentor helps expose the apprentice to opportunities to discover things for themselves in a safe, but uncertain way (Morris et al., 2022). This could be achieved through the use of what Rudd et al. (2021) refer to as 'soft' pedagogical approaches, like nudging or questioning, which encourage inexperienced others to attend to things directly. Indeed, such a view on mentorship is consistent with that of an enskilment approach, in that the experienced practitioner (mentor) works with the mentee, softly guiding their attention by showing them where to look, but not necessarily telling them what to see (Wood et al., 2023; Woods et al., 2021). It is of note that this view of mentorship from a more situated approach was voiced by a coach in the study of Selimi et al. (2023):

I feel like mentorship is important, but not like a mentor who stands over you. You know [a mentor] who thinks that they're better than you ... I'm not keen on those dynamics anymore. I just feel like the more that everyone can be on the same level, no matter where you are, we all have something to learn from each other. And it's important as an experienced coach that we're giving that respect to that other person; they have knowledge and drawing that out of them is important to learning.

Extending our call in the second dimension, we contend that mentorship be considered a key dimension within a situated approach to coach education in Australian football. As espoused earlier, FA could facilitate this through a mentorship programme, which allows apprenticing coaches opportunities to learn *with* and *from* experienced companions in the midst of their actual coaching practice. Further, this would enable FA to broaden their reach across the coaching landscape by leveraging the coaching community as another source of 'expertise', while grounding learning in contexts that are important to coaches. By conceptualising the role of mentorship through the situated approach we are advocating for here, FA could concurrently cultivate a new generation of coaches who are not only attuned to the dynamics of changing contexts, but also

have the ability to help softly guide aspiring coaches starting their journey by participating on the periphery of a supportive community.

Concluding remarks

The aim of this critical conceptual piece was to explore how the notion of enskilment could be harnessed to guide the establishment of a more situated approach to coach education. To achieve this, we first overviewed current coach education practices in Australian football, looking specifically into the foundation of FA's transmissive model. This, we suggested, could be traced to what Lave (1990) referred to as a 'culture of acquisition', in which learning is viewed as an abstract and sequential process. Following this critique, we then set out to explore a different approach to coach education, drawing on the relationality of enskilment (Ingold, 2000). Doing so led us to reconceptualise the very notion of education, which paved the way for us to sketch a more situated approach. Drawing on key concepts from Lave and Wenger (1991), we sketched an apprentice model that constituted three key dimensions: (i) *exposure to real-world contexts*; (ii) *legitimate peripheral participation within communities of practice* and (iii) *mentorship*.

Indeed, while this sketch is far from complete, it does contribute to a broader thesis aimed at uncovering the specific challenges and opportunities of transforming coach education in Australian football. In this respect, it plays an important initial step in our emerging line of research. Accordingly, we would like to conclude our paper with some questions that we feel could prove interesting in the establishment of future work. First, if we are to move towards the apprentice model we advocate for here, how, would, or could, FA accredit this process? Second, how could FA navigate the pragmatic challenges associated with implementing a large-scale, national coach apprenticeship programme? Third, how could FA carefully mitigate challenges associated with the establishment of CoP's in competitive coaching environments where participants may be hesitant to share with counterparts? Questions such as these, we feel, are just some of the pertinent considerations that would need to be resolved if future work is to concretise the various lines of inquiry that have been exposed here. While addressing such questions would be challenging on multiple fronts, the move towards a more situated approach to coach education in Australian football – we feel at least – is a warranted one. Namely, if FA are serious about ensuring that coaches are prepared for the realities of coaching, then prioritising exposure to contexts that coaches actually coach in appears a critical step. After all, echoing the sentiments of Pálsson (1994), 'real' schooling happens in the midst of *actual coaching*.

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