

Coaching as 'scaffolded' practice:
Further insights into sport pedagogy

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to locate the pedagogical notion of scaffolding within the field of sports coaching. The aim, however, is not only to present scaffolding as a wide-ranging rhetorical concept, but as a definitive perspective by which to better manage coaching's uncertain nature. Following an introduction, a review of the development and current conceptualisation of scaffolding is undertaken, inclusive of its connection to socio-cultural theory. Subsequently, drawing on current research, examples of how and where coaching practice can be scaffolded from macro, meso and micro perspectives are presented. Finally, a reflective conclusion summarises the main points made and outlines implications for future coaching and coach education.

Keywords: Scaffolding; Zone of Proximal Development; Sports Coaching; Socio-cultural.

Introduction

Over the past decade, coaching has been increasingly recognised as a social non-linear process characterised by complexity and ambiguity (Jones, Edwards & Viotto Filho, 2016; Jones, Bowes & Kingston, 2010; LeBed & Bar Eli, 2013); as an activity produced through negotiated interaction between significant actors where optimal athlete learning takes place within or near the ‘edge of chaos’ (Bowes & Jones, 2006). Despite supporting empirical evidence (e.g., Cushion & Jones, 2006, 2014), this conceptualisation has been criticised as being akin to ‘unmanageable complexity’ (North, 2013; Lyle, 2007). In claiming that such ideas lack explicit direction, the alternative case made was for greater linearity of structure, with coaching being conversely portrayed as a ‘logical decision-making process’ (Grecic & Collins, 2013; North, 2013; Abraham & Collins, 2011; Lyle, 2007). Responding to such assertions, Jones et al (2016) offered activity theory (Leont’ev, 1978) as a lens through which to credibly interpret coaching; a perspective which encompasses considerable elements of both structure and agency. Whilst not a call for an uncritical ‘anything goes’ individualistic attitude, where coaches construct reality within ‘closed self-centred’ circles’ (Engström, 2000), such a position nevertheless opposes a functional, undeviating coaching framework (complete with age, level, and time lines). The important point here was that an acceptance of structure exists, albeit it a sceptical one with primacy given to relational social power (Seidman & Alexander, 2001). The work marked an attempt to present coaching as comprising an interpretive epistemology of contingency, inclusive of a progressive process. Hence, consensual inter-subjectivity as a product of convention was recognised. Although an epistemological case has thus been made (Jones et al., 2014), more concrete direction to further secure the position is required.

The aim of this paper is to present and firmly locate the notion of structural ‘scaffolding’ (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976), inclusive of its ‘core and contrasting terms’ (Pea, 2004), within the field of sports coaching. Although the metaphor of scaffolding has increasingly crept into the coaching literature (e.g., Abraham & Collins, 2011; Thomas & Wilson, 2014), the concept appears to have remained at the abstract level of rhetoric. This seems to be characteristic of a more general tendency, where the popularization of the term ‘scaffolding’ has led to claims that its significance is unclear (Pea, 2004); that the terminology has become unmoored from theory (Paliscar, 1998). The purpose here then, is to offer scaffolding not only as a wide-ranging concept but as a more definitive perspective by which to better manage coaching’s uncertain nature that is neither completely stable nor in a

state of total flux (Bowes & Jones, 2006).

The significance of the paper is two-fold. Firstly, it lies in furthering the case for coaching as a complex pedagogical system, whose (intended) trajectory is inherently influenced by socio-cultural factors (Hardman, 2008). This is not only in developing the premise that at the heart of coaching lies the contested teaching and learning interface, but that it is a terrain possessing a particular past which allows a certain present. It is a position which locates athlete learning interactions within their contextual history; of the previous interactions between participants, and what such participants know of each other. In doing so, the logic of coaching is grounded in a 'coupling' between the interaction order and the social order (Goffman, 1983). It is argued that to ignore such social logics decontextualizes coaching research to such a degree that it becomes of little use to practitioners facing the everyday complexities of practice. Secondly, the value of the paper lies in presenting the metaphor and concept of scaffolding as a means by which to secure a firmer foothold within the continually contested world of coaching. However, to avoid accusations of reductionist instrumentality, the concept is only proposed as pedagogical theorising. That is, it is offered in the sense of assisting coaches (and coach educators) to consider and reflect for what is required of them; to encourage what Pearce (2010) termed 'a critical resonance' which, in turn, holds the potential to invoke imagination and creation. Hence, in appropriating such ideas, they should be transformed in their use to better meet contextual demands (Wells, 1999).

In terms of structure, following this introduction, a review of the development and current conceptualisation of scaffolding, inclusive of its connection to socio-cultural theory (Boblett, 2012), is presented. Drawing on current research, examples of how and where coaching practice can be scaffolded are then presented, from macro, meso and micro perspectives. Finally, a reflective conclusion summarises the main points made and outlines implications for future coaching and coach education.

The concept and metaphor of 'scaffolding' practice

In everyday life, a scaffold is considered a temporary framework used to support the construction or repair of a building or other such structure, which is dismantled on completion of the work. Within the context of pedagogical interaction, however, the notion of scaffolding was first used over 40 years ago by Wood and Bruner (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976) as a metaphor to describe how a learner can be assisted by another. It is a process of

guided mediation within a socio-cultural framework (Engin, 2014). Drawing on Vygotskian (1978) thinking, the original definition read as an intervention;

that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts (Wood et al., 1976: 90)

In particular, Wood et al. (1976) used the term scaffolding to describe the nature of parental tutoring in the language development of young children; a process which possessed a number of foundational features (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005a). These included progressing along a series of incremental steps akin to manageable components; focusing on a specific learning objective at a time; and, lessening angst and frustration in relation to that learning. Maybin, Mercer and Steirer (1992: 186) subsequently termed the activity as the “temporary but essential nature of [a] mentor’s assistance”. It is through such assistance that learners were considered to be pushed or pulled beyond their current abilities and levels of understanding (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005a). A central aspect of scaffolding related to what Wood, Wood, and Middleton (1978) referred to as the contingent shift principle. This consisted of two rules; to "increase control when students fail, and decrease control when students succeed" (van de Pol & Elbers, 2013: 33). Such flexibility represents the adaptive nature of scaffolding support and, in doing so, confirms the relationship between contingency, challenge, teacher response and student learning. The idea of 'response' is interesting in this context, as, in line with Vygotskian thinking, it is more concerned with providing support which is ahead of learners' development. But more of this later.

As previously stated, in more recent years, scaffolding has been adopted and interpreted in numerous ways to describe all types of support and guidance (Boblett, 2012). Much of the resultant confusion revolves around those who see scaffolding as a design structure and those who see it as an interactional process (van Lier, 2007). Recent work has engaged with this apparent perplexity in attempting to clarify both viewpoints, individually and in relation to each other (Walqui, 2006; van Lier, 2007). In doing so, complementary aspects of the ‘construction site’ have been identified; the supportive structure around the building and the actual construction work undertaken (Walqui, 2006). In a pedagogical context, these relate to the frameworks set up to facilitate learners’ entry into challenging facets, in addition to the support and encouragement given to learners’ initiatives and abilities. Viewed from this perspective, scaffolding is seen both as supportive and liberating (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005a). In locating the concept within the Vygotskian interpretation of microgenesis (Werner, 1957), emphasis here is placed on what enables the moment-to-

moment transformation of experiences into understandings. In this respect, the curricular rigging of task procedures is designed to enable this transformational process. Without the former, the latter is confined to the vagaries of fortune.

Locating scaffolding in the learning landscape

The concept of scaffolding as pedagogy presupposes a non-linear view of learning. It is a perspective which views learning not only as a cognitive issue, but a relational and contested one grounded in cultural practice (Sfard, 1998). It is also a perspective which resonates with the Vygotskian notion of a zone of proximal development (ZPD) which was defined as;

the distance between the actual development level [of a child] as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky, 1978: 86)

For Vygotsky, optimal learning occurred within this zone, which was, in turn, replete with many ambiguities. The recognised complexity here was considerable, with learning acknowledged at having an initial social component and then an individual one. In addition, learners could have differential ZPDs, while disparate learners could react differently to the same pedagogy. Taking account of its apparent equivocal nature, perhaps it is not surprising that Vygotsky did not propose a specific procedure or theory of instruction to apply within a zone of proximal development (Boblett, 2012; Walqui, 2006). Recently, however, the case has been made that the idea of scaffolding pedagogical practice fits well within that of a ZPD; in this respect, it can be viewed as an attempt to place order on the uncertainty of learning.

Scaffolding within the ‘zone of uncertainty’, however, is not an easy or straightforward process. This is because, as argued above, such action does not take place within a social vacuum but is embedded in sociocultural settings (Walqui, 2006). Nevertheless, whatever the contextual and relative complexities to be overcome, the goal of scaffolding remains the same; that of the appropriation or internalisation of knowledge. In this respect, the scaffold used to help the learner reach or realise the learning objective in question can be considered the mediator in the process. Such mediation is central to learning, and can emanate from a variety of sources. For example, it can come from other individuals, from the interaction between learners, or from the environment itself. Other mediators to learning range from the concrete (e.g., specific artefacts), to the abstract (e.g., social norms),

with the greatest of these being language (Vygotsky, 1978). In this respect, Vygotsky believed that socially produced cultural artefacts, such as forms of talk and discourse which, in turn, contribute considerably to the ‘setting of development’, both shape and are shaped by “human engagement with the world” (Daniels, 2010: 27).

An interesting and relevant notion to engage with in this regard is Sitkin’s (1996) concept of ‘intelligent failure’. Intelligent failure focuses on learning by experimentation as opposed to learning by avoidance (Sitkin, 1996). When scaffolding the learning environment then, the aim for a coach or teacher should be to encourage as opposed to eliminate failure. Here, it is considered that well planned and carefully considered sessions with uncertain outcomes (i.e., within the zone of uncertainty) allow athletes to err, providing them with new information with which to experiment and learn. Hence, although experimentation is no doubt risky, it is nevertheless necessary. This is because experimentation is the antecedent to the discovery of new understandings and techniques. Indeed, it is the process of experimentation at the limits of what is already known, where errors are made, and in the subsequent reflection and further trialling, that learning occurs.

According to Sitkin (1992), learning from success is, at times, a liability. This is because it promotes complacency by reducing motivation to pursue new approaches and ideas, while endorsing adherence to old routines. Conversely, learning through failure is deemed to be more effective, as “failure provides small doses of experience to discover uncertainties unpredictable in advance” (Wildavsky, 1988: 26) Of course, the case made here is in terms of a principle and never absolute. For example, in relation to coaching, the closer one gets to a game or event, the less failure is often (or should be) encouraged. Here, what athletes need is less a challenging and more of a reassuring environment, where they can feel comfortable that ‘the work has been done’ and that a particular game plan has been set and largely mastered. Such a notion as generating ‘small failures’ then, is always influenced by the vagaries of context.

The magnitude of the failure(s) realised is also crucial for knowledge development, as large losses are more likely to produce protective rather than exploratory responses. On the contrary, small failures are considered to promote risk taking, innovation and the ability to develop the capacity to adapt to changing circumstances (Sitkin, 1996). A key element of failing intelligently is that of dynamic assessment, as instant feedback from the coach within the action allows athletes to make immediate adjustment to their performance. In this respect,

the assessment or evaluation by the coach of performance in relation to scaffolding takes place during the learning process, which clearly resonates with Schön's (1983) 'reflection in action'. Dynamic assessment is founded on the moment-by-moment assessment of the environment and what happens within it (Lajoie, 2005); a notion which also echoes that of pedagogical 'noticing' (Mason, 2002). Although for some, the reactive element implicit here contrasts with that of a built scaffold, such an act of noticing presupposes the ability to make and identify distinctions. For Mason (2002) then, noticing involves taking an intentional stance towards our profession; it is an act of attention founded on the prior concepts of consciousness raising and reflection. In other words, a purpose is evident within the assessment. What coaches' notice, and how this becomes a basis for action, was a concept recently discussed by Jones, Bailey and Thompson (2013). Although in principled agreement, they cautioned against the rigidity of adhering to pre-determined fixed categories of observation. Instead, they tentatively made a case to follow Luhmanian orientated thinking linked to 'guided differences' and 'disciplined glances' when making assessments of observed practice.

Scaffolding coaching practice

Although it captures something easily perceived as fundamental to (incremental) coaching practice in terms of what it means to successfully engineer athlete learning, the context of sport brings some interesting and unique challenges to the scaffolding metaphor. Principal among these is that related to scaffolding's assumed temporary nature. That is, similar to the builder who dismantles a scaffold once a construction is assembled, pedagogical scaffolding has been assumed as temporary assistance withdrawn once the learner can complete the given task unaided; that is, once new knowledge has been internalised. In coaching, however (or as ever), things are not so straightforward. This is because game (sport) related structures and concepts, once learned, can never be fully left behind. Hence, although the notion of 'fading' is present in the literature associated with scaffolding (e.g., van de Pol, Volman & Beishuizen, 2010), the precise nature of such action or movement is considerably under developed. Within coaching, it is contended that such structures, far from being progressively erased, are constantly returned to in efforts to strengthen the foundations upon which performance and further learning is based. Such fundamentals are revisited under the coaching mantra of 'back to basics'; a position or belief that precludes a complete dismantling of any earlier 'scaffold'. Consequently, coaches appear to only fade former scaffolds, leaving up 'ghost' frameworks which can easily be revisited as the need arises.

Hence, any scaffolding erected around a given learning objective cannot be totally taken down, as many ideas, notions and skills have to be constantly revisited for progressive development to occur. Such a consideration gives credence to the unique nature of athlete, as opposed to more formal student, learning.

Following from the discussion in the previous sections, scaffolding for coaching can be thought of as an attempt to inject order on the insecure and often shapeless process of athlete learning (Santos, Jones and Mesquita, 2013). In this respect, scaffolding can be seen, or has the opportunity, to work at macro, meso and micro levels. It is to an examination of these that we now turn.

Scaffolding at the macro level

As mentioned earlier, Vygotsky (1978; 28) considered the greatest mediator to be language ('just as a mould gives shape to a substance, words can shape an activity into a structure'). However, this went far beyond the mere use of words to a way of thinking. In this respect, although acknowledgment existed that a concept is not possible without words, emphasis was placed on the meaning deposited; that the concepts spoken need to be remembered and understood as more than words. Language was and is, therefore, considered not only as a tool for communication or description, but as a "domain in which our knowledge of the world is actively shaped" (Tonkiss 1998: 246). Although it could be argued that cultural residues and the talk created in relation to them constrain communication, this is not a process which denies individual agency (Daniels, 2001). Rather, in putting culturally relevant and understandable ideas to work, we often (and perhaps should be willing to) transform them so they can have the greatest contextual use (Wells, 1999). Hence, an assumption exists that although individuals do not act in settings of their own choosing, they nevertheless possess the ability to be active agents in their own development, and the development of others (Daniels, 2001). It is through such mediation, of the engagement and interaction with the ideas and experiences presented to us, that the social formation of the mind (i.e., what and how we think) is constructed. What we have here, of course, is the tension and interplay between agency and structure; in that "as much as culture creates individuals, culture itself remains a human creation" (Bakhurst & Sypnowich, 1995: 11). Nevertheless, what is important in this context is the realisation that ways of thinking (and thus acting) can be created through the externalisation process; in short, they can be scaffolded. Consequently, any meanings we construct from information given are likely to be greatly affected by the

choice of descriptors, metaphors and analogies used by the speaker, as they ‘frame’ the activity for us (Cassidy, Jones & Potrac, 2016). Such ‘framing’ has been described as having the ability to ‘paint pictures in our heads’ with all the resultant implications (Sabo & Jensen 1994). To consider the process of macro scaffolding within coaching then, we need to take into account the language-in-use; its functions and outcomes, and how it can be altered. What this contains is an on-going examination of how influence is achieved in and through talk; of what is said and the way it is said (Faulkener & Finlay 2002).

While talk is clearly crucial, how the physical and cultural context is organised also plays an important role in scaffolding knowledge at the macro level. Here, ‘designed in’ scaffolding (Engin, 2014), such as the general planning process and the curriculum to be followed can also be considered to assist the wider context of any learning. Nevertheless, as such activities are grounded in, and emanate from, a particular gatekeeping discourse (Roberts & Sarangi, 1999), such initiatives can be considered, by and large, to merely support or reaffirm the talk.

Only extreme ‘cognitive self-centred’ thinkers would argue that individual actions are not influenced by culture. Hence, the issue faced in trying to scaffold at the macro level is how do we change or influence that culture. According to Lemert (2012: 125), a culture can be taken as the means “whereby societies organize myths, legends, stories and other representations of what they value, hate or wish to repress”. Taken as such, if such structures have been created, they can be re-created. Having said that, Lemert (2012) also warns us that in re-writing a ‘script’, care must be taken so that others still recognise the role or roles being played; hence, social rules, must to some extent continue to be acknowledged. In this respect, macro-scaffolding involves developing shared understandings of aims and context which, in turn, provides a way of commonly thinking and reflecting on contextual action(s) (Engin, 2014). Indeed, this aspect of intersubjectivity forms a central tenet of scaffolding (Boblett, 2012).

In giving credence to linguistic practice, a principal way coaches (or anyone) can influence thought in others is through the use of metaphor; this can be in terms both of their explanatory and generative powers. For example, in the first instance, a metaphor can help understanding or clarification of a given concept, whilst in the second it can help develop an alternative conceptualisation invoking imagination, the ability to envision, and creation. In this respect, it can help forge previously unconsidered connectivities. In both instances,

metaphors are often capable on bringing the unthought into thought, making the implicit, explicit. Indeed, this was the intention behind Jones and Wallace's (2006) conceptualisation of coaching as 'orchestration' and Loland's (2011) portrayal of coaches as 'enlightened generalists'. The linguistic scaffolds adopted here hold the potential to create specific forms and experiences both of the self and for other selves. In doing so, they are capable of generating new objects of knowledge, in addition to "tailoring other objects of knowledge in accordance with [their] own point of view" (McCarthy, 1996: 8). Subsequently, both 'cause and compass' (Kretchmar, 1994) are provided for the meso and micro means and strategies to follow.

Scaffolding at the meso level

In her examination of contextual support for teacher learning, Engin (2014) drew a clear distinction between macro and micro scaffolding. As outlined above, the macro predominantly referred to the power of discourse, through the production of norms and conventions to shape behaviour, although was also thought to include the sequencing of tasks. Other forms of action, in particular that which takes place at the 'interaction level' (ibid; p.28), was considered to be micro in nature. Earlier work by Boblett (2012), however, contained the concept of meso-scaffolding which corresponded to the structuring of activities. Similarly, our interpretation (and consequent inclusion of) meso scaffolding is one that promotes how the abstract discursive 'rules of the game' are given concrete life. Scaffolding at the meso level then refers to the structuring of exercises within training or coaching sessions. Here, tasks and demands can be made more or less complex and challenging as appropriate (Walqui, 2006), depending on what coaches want athletes to learn. Consequently, the meso-scaffolding process comprises an active construction of context, where pedagogies are shaped in and by particular social circumstances (Daniels, 2001).

Of course, the scaffolding of exercises at the meso level does not take place within a social vacuum. Rather, the influences of dominant cultures pervade practice, impacting the nature and implementation of given and performed exercises. It is in this context, that the influence of history and social norms can be seen to mediate pedagogic intention; whilst the pedagogic action, in turn, reaffirms and further shapes the dominant culture (Daniels, 2001). Hence, if macro-scaffolding is the support operating at the over-arching structural level, meso-scaffolding refers to the tasks being supported. In this way, the nature and conventions

of the activities become (or are usually) aligned to notions of ‘good practice’ espoused by and through the discursive macro.

Within these cultures of participation, coaches attempt to construct optimal learning environments by manipulating the tension that exists between structure and agency. For example, if a coach talks in terms of complexity and the need to exist within it, the exercises used within given sessions more than often (or should) reflect the discourse. To encourage subsequent athlete thinking (and related achieving), exercises can be adapted through varying the conditions of play (e.g., more [or more active] opposition, smaller areas etc). Similarly, tactical understanding can be challenged by increasing or reducing the complexity of the game specific problems posed. Indeed, recent work by Santos et al. (2013) found coaches working at this meso level of scaffolding produced varying degrees of instability for athletes. The point here related to creating the inevitable variability and volatility prominent during game situations (Santos et al., 2013). This, of course, brings the earlier discussed concept of ‘intelligent failure’ (Sitkin, 1996) to the fore, whereby well planned and carefully considered sessions with uncertain outcomes allow athletes to engage with, experiment and develop within contextual complexity.

Such an example of meso scaffolding ties closely to Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of learning and, in particular, his notion of a zone of proximal development. Without going over old ground, the merits of which have been argued elsewhere, the ZPD refers to the gap between what a learner can do alone, and what he or she can do with guidance. It also underpins Mariani’s (1997) later advocacy for a high challenge, high support environment for optimal learning to take place. What is important to remember is that the ZPD is an attribute of the task and not the learner (Hammond & Gibbins, 2005a); hence it is constructed in and through the scaffolded activity created by a more capable other (e.g., a coach).

Scaffolding at the micro level

According to Engin (2014), pedagogical scaffolding at the micro level may be evidenced through interactional talk. Examples of such practice include questioning (Engin, 2013), elicitation and recapping (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005b), as well as confirmations, elaborations and reformulations (Mercer, 1995). van de Pol and Elbers (2013) also considered micro scaffolding through quantitative means, with teacher and student ‘turns’ at talking being so coded, while one of the teacher turns was considered an intervention strategy.

Although to a degree informative, we'd like to develop the notion of coaches' micro-scaffolding to take better account of what Goffman (1983) referred to as the 'interaction order'. Doing so, gives credence to recent work that has argued the person of the coach, or who is coaching, is as important to athlete learning as the what or how of coaches' practice (Jones et al., 2012). Using the writings of Goffman as a sense making lens, such work has considered how coaches carefully construct the 'fronts' or faces they present in efforts to secure the engagement, agreement and compliance of athletes and others. A foundational study in this regard was that carried out by Potrac, Jones and Armour (2002), the principal findings of which outlined how much of coaches' behaviour was determined by others' expectations and the desire to create a particular impression of self. This was developed through subsequent empirical and theoretical work, outlining the performances that coaches give or scaffold to secure desired ends. What was, in essence, produced here was an evaluation of coaches' constructed selves, echoing Goffman's agential performative or dramaturgical approach. The case made was based on the premise that a primary interest within coaches' practice is managing the impressions of others, principally athletes, through face-to-face strategies or face work so that the latter engage with their words and wishes.

Such practice echoes the orchestration metaphor developed by Jones and Wallace (2005, 2006). Here, coaching was considered akin to (often unobtrusively) stage managing athletes' learning; a process involving continuous decision making related to iterative planning, observation, evaluation, and reactions to contextual 'goings on' (Jones & Wallace, 2006). In an effort to put some empirical meat on theoretical bones, Santos et al. (2013) explored the precise actions that comprise coaches' orchestration(s). The findings here were principally two fold. Firstly, as opposed to the often presented functionalist portrayal of scaffolding, the coaches revealed themselves to be constantly engaged in confirming and further developing the loyalty and general compliance of staff through numerous 'illusory' empowerment and self-affirming strategies. Secondly, they regularly purposefully destabilised the training context to keep athletes in a state of considered anxiety (of 'keeping them on their toes'). The scaffolding here was not so much related to the precise exercise(s) (which could be interpreted as being meso in character) but to the way and demeanour adopted by the coach in carrying out the action. Naturally, both micro interactive strategies were not only embedded in extensive 'face work' to develop the desired image, but were also

the result of carefully deliberated intentions (see Santos et al. [2013] for a much fuller discussion of such actions).

The scaffolding evident in both Santos et al. (2013) and Jones et al.'s (2013) recent empirical investigations of orchestration, however, did not reflect rigid adherence to micro planned strategy. This was a point clearly made by van de Pol, Volman and Beishuizen (2010) in their review of pedagogical scaffolding. Here, they concluded that because scaffolding is a dynamic intervention finely tuned to the learner's on-going progress, it can never be applied in every situation in the same way. Hence, although the scaffolding can provide a guiding structure for action, considerably agency still needs to be exercised by coaches to ensure the achievement of set goals. What has been found to inform coaches' actions in this respect is close observation of, and subsequent reaction to, unfolding events (Santos et al, 2013). Such actions built on Jones et al's (2013) call for coaches to notice the small realities; a concept itself borrowed from the work of Mason (2002) touched upon earlier. Hence, some of the coaches in Santos et al.'s (2013) work spoke of how they reacted to 'seen' critical moments (Myhill & Warren, 2005), stimulating alternative strategies to better secure the originally set objectives.

The micro scaffolding of athlete learning was also recently explored by Jones and Ronglan (2016). Beginning from the premise that coaching is reflective of a dynamic social system which, to a degree, cannot be rationalised, coaches' scaffolding practice was conceived as relational acts contingent upon many factors, not the least of which included contextual power relationships. Of importance here was the construction of enabling as opposed to restricting opportunities with, again, such decisions being informed by the perceptions and vagaries of context. Such opportunities involved setting up a number of typical (problematic) situations that athletes were likely to face during the course of their game or sport, often times in simpler forms. What was scaffold here, however, were not precise situations and definitive solutions. Rather, in mirroring the complexity of 'real time' performance, the objective was to develop situations which possessed similar characteristics before guiding and/or allowing athletes to find 'best' courses of action. Scaffolding at this micro level then, can be viewed as both initiatory and reactive. In this way, it echoes Armour and Jones (1998) metaphor of 'quality' pedagogy as 'chess played fast'. Hence, whilst not denying the importance of planning and intention, salience within micro scaffolding is also afforded to reaction and response to contextual occurrence.

Conclusion

During the past 15 years, scaffolding has received considerable attention in the educational literature (e.g., van de Pol et al., 2010). Although no consensus exists as to its precise definition, common characteristics have been identified. These relate to responsiveness or contingency, contextual support, a degree of intersubjectivity among teachers/coaches and learners, the need to fade scaffolds once learning is assumed to have taken place, and a transfer of responsibility. No doubt such features deserve some focus in any ‘scaffolding’ analysis. Building on the work of Boblett (2012) among others, however, this paper has additionally portrayed scaffolding as a structured concept which represents the link between individual actions on the one hand and the macro frames of reference on the other. In this way, it enables us to engage with the micro, meso and macro actions of coaches simultaneously as an integrated means of analysis, as opposed to viewing them as alternative courses of action. In doing so, it allows a means to both understand and appreciate the necessity of alignment between abstract concepts and theories, through more general practice, to the micro learning strategies and face work of practitioners. Indeed, the significance of the paper also lies in its development of the notion of micro scaffolding. As opposed to only considering those actions related to particular pedagogical teacher and student ‘talk, we believe the idea of micro scaffolding should also contain the personal ‘fronts’ constructed by coaches as part of their role performances.

However, and echoing a caution mentioned in the Introduction, lest we be accused of linear prescription, we present the notion of pedagogical scaffolding only as a loose metaphor; “a broad guideline to practice, and not as direct advice” (Flyvbjerg et al, 2012: 4). Thus, factors such as intentions, historical power dynamics, in addition to contextual identity politics and discourse need to be carefully considered when deciding how and when to scaffold coaching. Consequently, in constructing, or interrogating, any scaffolding practice, a sincere reflexivity in relation to one’s location and ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1984) as well as the pedagogical tasks and accompanying micro-interactions utilised are needed. Such reflexivity, however, also brings to the fore the essential contingent responsive nature of scaffolding; a potentially problematic conceptualisation. That is, to scaffold something indicates an initiatory action, as a scaffold has to be in place first before the structure can be built. However, borrowing from Lajoie’s (2005) concept of dynamic assessment, pedagogical scaffolding implies a fluid unfolding framework, dependent on context, whilst still holding

consistent to a greater goal. Similar to the orchestration metaphor then, it invokes a concept of action contingent on close monitoring of situated events to bring them back, or to keep them, 'on course'.

In conclusion, what we attempted in this paper was to develop a 'figured' coaching world; a socially constructed realm in which particular actors and acts are recognised as significant and meaningful (Holland et al., 1998). Such a world is respected as a historical phenomenon, whilst containing a conceptualisation and description of how to better understand the people, structure, context and practices that comprise it; that is, how that world is figured. Indeed, through the deployment of notions as macro, meso and micro scaffolding, we believe that links can be forged between discourse, practice and the 'interaction order' (Goffman, 1983), whilst also opening possibilities for "a language of description that (can) serve empirical as well as analytical purposes" (Daniels, 2010: 34). Not only can such a construction provide a degree of structure on fluid, complex pedagogical 'goings on', but also illustrate how framing discourse can be realised in the varieties of its practice possibilities.

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