A Bourdieusian Analysis Of An Elite Youth Football Team: What Makes Coaching Work?

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Introduction and Rationale

What has been done?
- Cushion and Jones (2006; 2014)
- Bourdieusian analysis of Elite Youth Football Academy
- 16-18 Year Old Players

- Improves our sociological understanding
- My work replicates and builds on this existing research

- 11-16 year olds
- More sophisticated understanding of practice
- When does this start? How far does this go?

Methodology

Case Study
Participants
- Youth Football Academy
- Youth Academy Coach: UEFA B License, FA Youth Award, Head of Youth Development Phase
- Youth Players: U12-U16

Ethnography
1. Participant Observation (40 Hours)
2. Field notes
3. Semi-structured interview (coach)
4. Group interviews (players U12’s)

Findings & Analysis: Socialisation

• The players had been socialised into the role of ‘footballer’ by 11 years old. This was still ongoing - hidden curriculum (Skelton, 1997).
• Embodiment of the field’s logic: The players learnt the external constraints and possibilities of their role in the field (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1995; Brown, 2005; Cushion and Jones, 2006).
• ‘Meshed’ habitus resulted in favourite status.
• Logic of the field
  - Respect for authority
  - Working hard
  - Being/Becoming a Pro
  - Coach as knowledge holder

The field’s logic was embodied, conserved and reinforced by the coach on a daily basis to achieve his objectives and dominate (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu in Wacquant, 1989).

Findings & Analysis: Socialisation (Coach always right)

The ‘Modern Coach’ is in Authority

- The verbal abuse has gone…but an authoritarian discourse remains.
  - E.g. Control, Decision Making, In-Charge, Disciplinary
- Covert and hidden with 11 and 12 year olds.
- Misrecognised as player-centred
- The players’ resultant norms of behaviour and attitude were the same as those found by Cushion and Jones (2014).
- Learning the ‘rules of the game’ (Kim, 2004, p. 366) to battle for social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1987; Cushion and Jones, 2006).
Findings: Questioning (Coach as knowledge holder)

Participant Observation: Training Session
Coach pauses the game
Where do we want it? If I can receive it on my back, does that mean I am opposed or unopposed?

Player

Coach

Yeah it does, so in the ideal world we will be able to receive it on the back foot, yeah, so what is going to be important?

Player

Movement.

Coach

What sort of movement? Behind to in front, high to low, low to high, those double movements are what are going to help you get away, to get yourself unopposed.

The players don't verbally respond and play restarts.

Conclusion: What made coaching work?

Analysis through a Bourdieusian framework makes explicit the field’s logic, the social legitimacies and culture of Elite Youth Football at 11 years old.

Exposed a socialisation process centred on covert authoritarian action and implicit messages through discourse which are used to create and sustain the field’s logic.

Impact surface level (Coaching behaviours), cultural reproduction remains.

Power hasn’t gone away it has just been reconfigured (Cushion et al., 2017b)

References