Power, Conflict, and Cooperation: Toward a Micropolitics of Coaching

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According to Jones, Wells, Peters, and Johnson (1993), being political is a necessary part of a coach's repertoire, because a coach's effectiveness and longevity may depend not only on a favorable win–loss record but also on an individual's ability to gain the approval of contextual power brokers (e.g., athletes, other coaches, or owners). Although only limited research has been done examining power and interpersonal relationships in coaching, there remains a paucity of work investigating the micropolitics inherent in such relationships. The aim of this article is to make the case for how the adoption of a micropolitical perspective could serve to further our understanding of the power-ridden, contested nature of sports coaching. After an introductory examination of the concept of micropolitics in the educational literature, a discussion of how such practice is beginning to emerge in recent ethnographic coaching research is presented. The literature addressing the micropolitical nature of teachers' interactions and relationships with other pedagogical stakeholders is then explored in terms of providing future avenues of critical investigation into the social complexity of coaching. Finally, a concluding section summarizes the main points and highlights their implications for future work.

Although the traditional rationalistic conceptualization of sports coaching has undoubtedly helped to improve practice, it has been increasingly criticized for not adequately reflecting the activity's complex nature (e.g., Cassidy, Jones, & Potrac, 2004; Jones, 2000; Jones & Wallace, 2005). It is has been argued that depicting coaching as a controllable, sequential process has left practitioners dissatisfied and disillusioned with much coach education, which they perceive as being "fine in theory" but unconnected from reality (e.g., Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2003; Jones & Wallace, 2005; Saury & Durand, 1998). Similarly, the accompanying mechanistic portrayal of coaching, often expressed through models and flow charts, has been disparaged for being unable to generate an understanding of the functional complexity that lies behind and between coaching's principal relationships (Jones & Wallace, 2005, Cushion; Armour & Jones 2006). In this respect, it has failed to reflect the social "logic in use" in the activity. Alternatively, recent research has positioned coaching as a personal, power-ridden, everyday pursuit where practitioners' management of microrelations with other stakeholders, be they athletes, other coaches, managers, or owners, form the principal

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aspect of their duties (Potrac, Jones & Armour, 2002; Potrac, Jones, & Cushion, 2006; d'Arripe-Longueville, Fournier, & Dubois, 1998). This often involves coaches' manipulating others' impressions of them to generate the necessary professional support, space, and time to carry out their programs and agendas.

The purpose of this article is to build on such beginnings by making the case for examining sports coaching from a micropolitical perspective (Jones & Wallace, 2005). It responds to the call for research not only to acknowledge the contested character of coaching (e.g., Cushion & Jones, 2006; d'Arripe-Longueville et al., 1998; Purdy, Potrac, & Jones, 2008) but also to actively propose a framework through which it can be analyzed. The significance of the article is grounded in the need to better recognize and theorize coaching's intricate, negotiated nature—to shed some light on the relational everyday aspects of sports coaching that remain clandestine and largely taken for granted, particularly where issues of power are in question (Gardiner, 2000). Such an investigation can lead to breaking the silence that seems to exist regarding issues of conflict and its manipulation in coaching, thus confronting the apparent slippage from analysis to (unfounded) prescription (Ball, 1987). We believe that such a deconstruction of seemingly ordinary practices holds the potential to stimulate an informed dialogue leading to a critical knowledge of the "connective tissue" that in many ways comprises coaching, enabling a better understanding of its complex character (Gardiner, 2000; Jones & Wallace, 2005). The article then attempts to highlight what we *don't* know about coaching; the micropolitics inherent in the context; the "dark side of organizational life" (Hoyle, 1982, p. 87).

In terms of the article's structure, some initial information related to the study of micropolitics is provided after this introduction. A discussion regarding how the micropolitical realities of coaching have been partially illuminated in recent ethnographic research is then undertaken. This is followed by a review of the educational literature addressing the micropolitical interactions and relationships that teachers engage in with colleagues, school principals, and students. This work is examined in terms of providing potential lines of inquiry through which the micro realities of coaching can be more productively investigated. It should be noted, however, that we are not advocating that educational research has somehow "got it right" and should therefore be seen as some "holy grail" for sports coaching (Jones, 2006a). Rather, recognizing that coaching possesses a considerable pedagogical element, and being mindful that education continues to be theorized to a much greater extent, the use of such concepts offers a means for coaching to short-circuit some of the growing pains experienced by education (Jones, 2006a).

What Is Micropolitics?

Far from being confined to its association with public institutions and the process of government, politics is a universal and pervasive feature of human behavior, Leftwhich (2005) argues. He suggests that politics can be found whenever two or more human beings are involved in some form of collective activity, whether it is formal, informal, public, or private. In this way, politics can be considered to consist of the interactive ingredients of people (who often have different interests,

preferences, and ideas), resources (which are often scarce and may consist of land, money, or opportunity), and power (the ability of an individual to get his or her way; Leftwhich, 2005).

The term *micropolitics* has been used to describe the political interactions that take place between social actors in different organizational settings, such as schools, sports clubs and teams, companies, and families (Ball, 1987; Blase, 1991; Blase & Blase, 2002; Lindle, 1994). Although no one definition of micropolitics is considered conclusive, the most frequently used is the one developed by Blase (1991):

> Micro-politics refers to the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals. In large part, political actions result from perceived differences between individuals and groups, coupled with a motivation to use power and influence and/or to protect. . . . Both cooperative and conflictive actions and processes are part of the realm of micro-politics [while] the macro and the micro frequently interact. (p. 11)

Such a designation builds on Hoyle's (1982) earlier definition of micropolitical action as the "strategies by which individuals and groups in organizational contexts seek to use their resources of power and influence to further their interests" (p. 88). According to Blase and Anderson (1995), it was not until the 1980s that theoretical and empirical work in micropolitics developed, principally in the fields of management and education. Lindle (1994) has suggested that our understanding of this topic has been somewhat stunted by a reluctance on behalf of academics to engage with the notion of political activity in organizations in terms of research, textbook coverage, or teaching programs. Here, she noted that "if there [was] acknowledgement of political activity, it was recast deliberately as poor climate, bad management, or an indicator of incompetence on the part of teachers and administrators" (Lindle, 1994, p. 2). She, among others (e.g., Ball, 1987, Buchanan & Badham, 2004), questioned such an approach in terms of our theorization of organizational life, as well as best preparing teachers, school principals, managers, and administrators for the messy nature of their work.

Although the study of micropolitics has a short history, it has produced some constructive insights into the turbulent nature of pedagogical practice (Lindle, 1994; Blase & Anderson, 1995). The findings of this work (e.g., Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 1997; Sparkes, 1988, 1990; Sparkes & Mackay, 1996; Sparkes, Templin, & Schempp, 1990, among others) have undoubtedly served to reinforce Blase's (1989) contention that the micropolitical perspective is capable of providing "a valuable and potent approach to understanding the woof and warp of the fabric of day-to-day life in schools" (p. 1). Instead of simplistically presenting schools as only comprising a set of cohesive and coherent social networks, the perspective has provided provocative insights into schools' contested nature. In particular, it has illuminated how schools are vulnerable to the often conflicting ideologies of teachers, students, parents, and administrators (Ball, 1987; Blase, 1989; Blase & Anderson, 1995; Lindle, 1994). Such inquiry has revealed that whereas we like to believe that schools are characterized by rationality, order, collaboration, openness, and trust, the reality can be quite different (e.g., Ball, 1987; Blase, 1991; Blase & Anderson, 1995; Fry, 1997; Lindle, 1994). Rather, it has

been suggested that "competition sits alongside cooperation" with "informal backstaging supporting public action" (Buchanan & Badham, 2004, p. 2). It is a stance supported by Sparkes (1990), who asserted that "issues of power, conflict and struggle are central to our understanding of curriculum change in schools" (p. 177). We would argue that such issues also need to be considered in the context of coaching research and subsequent coach education.

Micropolitical Action in Coaching: An Unfolding Story

Recent research in coaching has pointed to the role of micropolitical action in practice (e.g., Jones et al., 2004; Cushion & Jones, 2006). This relates not only to novice coaches' induction into the field, where the need to "make a mark" appears of great significance, but also to the managed implementation of change. This is particularly so where resistance to such change is apparent. For example, the elite coaches interviewed by Jones et al. (2004) alluded to the use of many conscious strategies to manipulate other actors and circumstances to their advantage. Specifically, they engaged in "white lies," humorous friendly personas, and constant face work to make athletes believe in them and their coaching agendas. Similarly, the work of Potrac et al. (2002) points to the manipulatory actions of coaches in protecting carefully built up self-images in the face of contextual difficulties. The greatest fear of such coaches was to lose the respect of athletes; hence, their behavior was often dictated both by their own expectations and their perceptions of athletes' expectations of the coaching role. This is not to say that they always behaved without conscience in peddling false impressions, rather that it reflected an understanding of the particular locations from where social power is exercised (Schempp, Sparkes, & Templin, 1993).

Research by Cushion and Jones (2006) on the actions of professional youth soccer coaches provides further proof of the impression management evident in coaching. Their findings illustrated how coaches' authoritarian discourse and actions stemmed from their belief in the need to act in a "coach appropriate" way; it was an occupational demand. Echoing the work of Potrac et al. (2002), such behavior was also predicated on a perception that to do otherwise would be to risk losing players' respect. This, of course, is not to say that the players were totally without power. Indeed, elements of resistance and struggle were witnessed both against the coaches through withholding best effort and also between the players themselves as they jockeyed for positions in the order of hierarchy. Both coaches and players, therefore, appeared to be involved in constant micropolitical action as they strove to hold on to or improve their positions of sway and influence (Cushion & Jones, 2006).

In a similar vein, d'Arrippe-Longueville et al. (1998) found that elite judo coaches were constantly engaged in a number of forthright strategies to entice the best performance from their athletes. These included verbally provoking and stimulating personal rivalry between players, displaying indifference, and direct confrontation. The actions were justified as being culturally appropriate and, although not always appreciated by the players, were accepted as fitting based on previous accomplishments. Such a situation can be explained in terms of actors' strategic

"tacit cooperation," whereby both coaches and athletes carried out assigned roles to maintain a winning system, thereby positioning the coaching that happened in it as both a cultural and political act (d'Arrippe-Longueville et al., 1998).

More recently, Potrac et al.'s (2006) case study of coaching practice in soccer highlighted the micropolitical nature of a coach's work when attempting to win over important contextual actors. The study explored the actions of Gavin (a pseudonym), a newly appointed head coach, as he attempted to persuade the players at Erewhon City FC (a pseudonym) to "buy into" his coaching program and methods. The data revealed that he used a number of strategies to persuade the players to believe in him, his aims, and his methods. For example, Gavin initially decided to allow one of the existing (inherited) coaches to lead the majority of the coaching sessions. He believed that such a course of action not only dampened resistance to him from the players but also gave him the opportunity to observe what he termed the "training culture" and to identify who the most influential players in the group were.

Once he was confident that his approach and methods were more effective than what the players had been previously exposed to, Gavin began to increase his active involvement. He initially worked with small groups of players, a decision based on the premise that it gave him a better opportunity to "sell" himself and his ideas to the players. He also purposefully strove to demonstrate an in-depth knowledge of the tactical and technical aspects of the game, while leading very structured, game-related, fast-paced activities that he believed would impress. Although the approach ultimately proved successful, it was not a resistance-free process. For example, one of the senior players was particularly vociferous in his criticism of Gavin's methods and decisions. Rather than engaging in instant retaliatory action, however, Gavin, while presenting a supportive collaborative front, engineered training situations designed to highlight this player's shortcomings. The aim was to decrease the player's status and standing in the group. It soon led to the player's marginalization and the realization of a subsequent request to be transferred to another team.

Gavin recognized that the coaching environment at Erewhon City F.C. was a "contested arena" (Ball, 1987). He demonstrated that he was aware of the need to recognize, and be sensitive to, the ideologies and expectations of those he worked with if he was to successfully implement his coaching. To achieve this, Gavin focused on managing his coaching "front" to enhance his perceived expertise in the eyes of the players (French & Raven, 1959; Goffman, 1959). He also avoided direct confrontation, instead focusing on managing and manipulating situations that would result in his agenda being accepted and supported (Fry, 1997).

Future Research Into Micropolitics and Coaching: A Suggested Framework

Although studies such as those mentioned in the preceding section have illuminated some aspects of the micropolitical nature of coaching practice, we believe that a more explicit investigation of micropolitics would prove fruitful for a more adequate theorization of coaching. Consequently, in the next section we provide an overview of the research of Fry (1997) and Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002a,

2002b) that address the micropolitical nature of teachers' interactions and relationships with other pedagogic stakeholders. Particular attention is given to how this work could potentially provide productive lines of future inquiry into the social complexity and politically laden activity of coaching.

In her insightful article "Dealing With the Powers That Be," Fry (1997) used a micropolitical perspective to examine one teacher's strategic attempt to initiate and deal with implemented change in an Australian school. Such change, more than often, brings conflict and resistance that needs to be realistically managed if desired ends are to be achieved. Dynamic change should not only be viewed in terms of planned implementations, because the everyday pedagogical environment can be considered as constantly shifting terrain with decisions being continuously made by both managers and teachers on contextual evidence. Fry's (1997) work, founded on that of Ball (1987), claimed that a micropolitical analysis can better reveal the everyday tensions of interpersonal influences in social systems such as schools, thus giving a realistic account of how change can be generated, responded to, and generally handled at a personal level. Ball's (1987) work concluded that such systems are based on power that, in turn, influences the ways decision making in them is distributed. Power, as opposed to being a fixed commodity, was perceived as being in a constant state of flux, with the ability to enforce it being relatively gained or lost through pending change (Fry, 1997). Political activity was defined in terms of "skilled strategic action" engaged in by individuals or groups contesting for control of emerging situations (Ball, 1987, p. 10).

Fry (1997) asserted that there was potential conflict not only between departments that comprised the structure of schools but also within them, as increasingly scarce resources were competed for. Her stance echoes that of Sparkes and Mackay (1996), who highlighted how teachers negotiate their practice in a system of structured inequality. This is particularly so for neophyte practitioners who must learn to navigate the contextual codes of culture that include the distribution and appropriation of power as they search for their station and how to improve it (Schempp, Sparkes, & Templin, 1993). Therefore, the inevitability of political action in pedagogical contexts begins to be realized. Such power plays, however, were not seen as being exclusively negative, because power could also be conceived of as "creative energy" (Fry, 1997)—for example, in terms of empowerment, a notion that has increasingly found its way into sports coaching literature (e.g., Kidman, 2001, 2005). Although such a concept, which assumes equitable as opposed to hierarchical relationships, has recently been criticized where there is a need to influence others' learning (e.g., Jones & Standage, 2006), Fry's (1997) use of power in the creative context stemmed from its potential to liberate—to allow and even encourage innovation in curriculum change.

More specifically, Fry's work documents how her subject, Mary, attempted to implement curriculum change in a deeply embedded culture and negotiated a field fraught with disputed ideologies and competing egos. These more than often belonged to the most potent culture makers or "critical reality definers" within the context, including school administrators, managers, and fellow teachers (Ball, 1987). The work builds on the experiences of Sparkes and Mackay's (1996) subject, Sarah, whose ability to pass her teaching practice owed much to her skillful navigation of the hidden and null curricula's turbulent waters. Importantly, Mary considered herself as possessing a degree of capital (Bourdieu, 1986) born from

experience and some "political nous," a foundation from which she initially decided to network, make a few contacts, and "play a waiting game" (Fry, 1997). It was a conscious strategy designed to overcome barriers erected by the school's conservative elements who had an investment in maintaining the status quo.

A more active approach, however, was soon adopted by Mary through sensitively implementing her proposed changes in a way perceived as nonthreatening to the established elements (whom, betraying her own politicization, she termed "self serving"). Personal alliances were subsequently forged and reforged based on past and developing relationships with other members of the school's hierarchy, hence, openly following a political agenda. Here, supportive colleagues were mobilized and enlisted to create and consolidate a "critical mass" (Lortie, 1975), thus generating a favorable social context for change (Fry, 1997). More confrontational actions were also engaged in, as Mary threatened to withhold her developed resources when she perceived a loss of control over the implementation process—an action that Lacey (1977) termed "strategic redefinition," where those formally in power are forced to reinterpret situations by those with less. Such a position could also be interpreted through Goffman's (1955) notion of face work, where people construct and project a certain image of themselves in an attempt to leave a desired impression in the eyes of others (Sparkes & Mackay, 1996).

The momentum generated by Mary was sustained by further professional networking and lobbying: for example, encouraging teachers in other schools to embrace her proposed curriculum changes. In doing so, she developed a collective supportive voice that, in turn, extended her control over events. Such a process, however, was not without its negative aspects—some colleagues unexpectedly, and hurtfully, broke her trust. In addition, she felt the power of "hierarchical observation" (Foucault, 1977) from above as the school's principal sought to reassert his authority over the unfolding situation. Nevertheless, her "clear sense of purpose sustained her efforts" (p. 153). Integral to her success was the establishment of supportive, functional relationships, which gave both personal and professional strength to her actions. Fry's (1997) work gives an account of how conscious tactics can challenge the status quo in teaching to realize desired ends. It contradicts the stance often taken that a teacher's work is, or should be, nonpolitical and clearly demonstrates how micropolitical activities with a number of stakeholders outside the classroom must often be engaged in if change is to occur and a personal agenda within the classroom is to be realized.

It has been suggested that a coach's job security may very well depend not just on being a nice person and winning games but also on gaining the approval of relevant powerbrokers within the working context (Jones et al., 1993; Potrac et al., 2006). Fry's (1997) work then could be usefully employed to frame ethnographic studies that seek to explore how coaches attempt to gain the support, space, and time to implement their respective coaching agendas. Such inquiry could focus on the micropolitical interactions that coaches in sports at all levels consider necessary to engage in. In doing so, it could build on existing coaching literature, by investigating how and why coaches interact in the ways they do with the various contextually significant others who are features of their working lives. Such an investigative agenda holds the potential of rich insight into how coaches try to gain control of their environments and manage any conflict that occurs, leading to a more nuanced and deeper understanding of the complex reality of coaching practice.

Similar to the work of Fry (1997), Kelchtermans and colleagues' (e.g., Kelchtermans, 2005; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b; Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1998) work provides an interesting window into the micropolitics that are often an inherent feature of everyday life for teachers. In particular, this body of research explores how beginning teachers come to understand and navigate their way through the political aspects of their work. It is a part of learning that Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002a) consider significant in teachers' general professional development. Indeed, they argue that any theory on teacher development would be incomplete without recognition of how teachers deal with the inevitable contested character of what they do.

At the heart of Kelchtermans and colleagues' work is the issue of how new teachers develop "micropolitical literacy," that is, the process by which new teachers learn to read the micropolitical school landscape and write themselves into it (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a). Rather than viewing new teachers as passively sliding into an existing context, Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002a) highlight how the development of micropolitical literacy is both interactive and interpretive. Drawing on the work of Zeichner and Gore (1990), they suggest that although new teachers are influenced by the school context, they can, at the same time, affect the structures in which they are socialized (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002a) suggest that micropolitics are often linked to the concept of "working conditions." They state that all teachers hold beliefs about what conditions are desirable in order for them to undertake their professional activities, viewing such conditions as consisting of the material and infrastructural surroundings to the quality of professional and collegial relationships (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b; Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1998). The work here sought to illuminate how teachers will, through their micropolitical interactions, attempt to create desired working conditions, protect these working conditions when they are threatened, and reestablish them if they have been removed. Kelchtermans and Ballet's (2002b) project then provides a valuable insight into how the actions of beginning teachers are guided by their professional interests, that is, their "self interests," "material interests," "organizational interests," "cultural-ideological interests," and "socioprofessional interests." Although these categories were neatly delineated for analytical reasons, it was noted that they are frequently more fluid and interactive in practice.

Initially, Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002b) discovered that when the respondents' identity as teachers, their professional self-esteem, or their task perception was threatened by the working context, self-interests emerged. Such interests related to self-affirmation, dealing with vulnerability, and striving for visibility in their job. Perhaps the key finding here related to the importance attached to proactively seeking opportunities to demonstrate competencies and having such competencies recognized by significant others. Such actions by the new teachers resulted in their positive evaluation as "proper teachers" by school principals, colleagues, parents, and pupils, a highly valued working condition (Kelchtermans and Ballet, 2002b). Similar actions have also been observed in coaches as they attempt to develop face and capital to achieve desired ends (Jones, 2006b; Potrac et al., 2002), thus tentatively establishing a lead to follow. Goffman's work, however, could shed further light on practitioners' actions here. Whereas the value of using Goffman's work on the presentation of the self to examine coaching behav-

ior has been voiced elsewhere (see Jones et al., 2004; Potrac et al., 2002), his work on stigma has received relatively little attention (Jones, 2006b). Goffman's (1963) investigation of stigma addresses the strategies that individuals engage in to hide or minimize the impact of "deeply discrediting attributes" (preface) that could lead to them "being disqualified from full social acceptance" (p. 3). Such a framework could potentially shed some light on not only the stratagems that coaches may use to attempt to cope with and coverup their perceived deficiencies but also the logic that underpins such actions.

According to Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002b), material interests refer not only to the availability of physical materials such as teaching aids (e.g., books, televisions, video recorders), funds, and specific infrastructure (e.g., computer room, sports facilities, library) but also to the time for meeting with colleagues and preparing lessons and tasks. They highlighted how micropolitical action to access these materials was a significant feature of teachers' work lives (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). Failure to obtain these resources was perceived as having a significant impact on the teachers' feelings of vulnerability and their ability to provide a good job performance. The effort that the teachers put into planning lessons and developing creative and attractive teaching materials, then, could be understood from a micropolitical perspective, as well as a more obvious pedagogical one—specifically, that such endeavors could be directly related to the micropolitical agenda of self-presentation. Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002b) consequently noted that teachers targeted their energies "not just to please their pupils (and get their appreciation), but also for strategic reasons of becoming visible as competent, creative, hardworking professionals" (p. 112). It was a way to "advertise their professional competence" (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b, p.113). They also added that the significance of teaching materials can extend beyond the classroom to become an issue at the school level, as they can be symbolic of normative ideas about good teaching. As such, they are meaningful artifacts that either converge or conflict with the dominant school culture. Given this situation, it is perhaps unsurprising that Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002b) recommend that a micropolitical analysis of the symbolic meaning of teaching materials is necessary if an adequate understanding of teachers' job experiences is to be developed. Similarly, in the context of coaching, a coach's pedagogical methods could be used simultaneously and instrumentally to serve micropolitical purposes in addition to inspiring athlete learning. Indeed, such findings have been hinted at in the recent work of Potrac, Jones, and Cushion (2006) and certainly represent a potentially fruitful topic for further investigation.

Organizational interests consist of the procedures, positions, roles, and formal tasks in a school. The respondent teachers in Kelchtermans and Ballet's (2002b) study highlighted how "getting and keeping a job" was their central concern. The teachers' desire here led them to act strategically in terms of their interactions with significant others to access future job opportunities. This involved avoiding any conflicts with existing staff members and taking up extra duties to impress their superiors. In coaching, this issue could be explored in relation to if, and how, coaches attempt to develop their reputations, forge alliances, and engage in practices that are used to protect and advance their respective career trajectories.

Cultural-ideological interests were considered to encapsulate the "more or less explicit norms, values, and ideals that get acknowledged in the school as

legitimate and binding elements of the culture" (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b, p. 114). Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002b) noted that although there are legal prescriptions relating to such issues as staffing, curriculum, and funding, the goals, values, and norms of everyday life in schools are too open to negotiation and definition. The teachers in their study highlighted how such contestation came into play when they observed discrepancies between their own job motivation and task perception and those of the dominant culture in the school. The findings illustrated that many of the beginning teachers were unwilling to challenge or attempt to renegotiate the norms and values of the dominant culture during the early stages of their tenure. Instead, they opted not to engage themselves in ongoing conflicts and discussions and either adapted to the situation or complied with the dominant values. In terms of coaching research, similar inquiry could provide some valuable insights into how coaches attempt to navigate their way through an environment where the dominant discourses surrounding practice conflict with their own motivations and perceptions of the role of the coach.

Finally, social-professional interests refer to the quality of interpersonal relationships in and around the school as an organization (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). Here, every beginning teacher in Kelchtermans and Ballet's (2002b) study considered good relationships with colleagues a very important working condition. Opportunities to share concerns or discuss pedagogical issues and questions were considered vital to their success and development as teachers. The findings also revealed that social-professional interests weighed more heavily in terms of the teachers' decision making and behavior than other interests. Several of the respondents highlighted how they were prepared to endure unconstructive conditions in their respective schools (i.e., a conflict of cultural-ideological interests) rather than risk troubled relationships with colleagues. Similar lines of investigation could be used to examine the value that coaches attach to interpersonal relationships in their working environment and how, if at all, they attempt to manage these relationships alongside other pressing, perhaps conflicting, issues.

We believe that Kelchtermans and colleagues' conceptualization of micropolitics as it relates to "working conditions" and "professional interests" could also be used if we are to more adequately theorize the messy realities of coaching. Indeed, work focusing on coaches' behaviors, thoughts, and interactions with significant others in their coaching environments could provide us with a good starting point in the quest to further our understanding of this largely ignored feature of practice. In particular, Kelchtermans and Ballet's (2002b) notion of micropolitical literacy—referring to the ability to read situations through a micropolitical lens consisting of knowledge, instrumentality, and experience—can contribute much.

Knowledge in this respect refers to the know-how necessary to read or interpret the micropolitical nature of a particular situation. Such a reading entails an understanding of the "grammatical" knowledge of the struggle of interests and the processes of power (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). This could involve exploring coaches' understandings of the micropolitical nature of their work and the sources that they draw on to develop their micropolitical knowledge.

Instrumentality, in turn, relates to the repertoire of micropolitical strategies that an individual is able to deploy in an effective manner to establish, safeguard, or restore desirable working conditions (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). Future coaching inquiry could focus on the various micropolitical strategies that coaches use to achieve desirable working conditions in their respective working environments and the extent to which coaches are capable of effectively influencing situations, be it in a proactive or reactive manner. Like Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002a, 2002b), we believe that it is important that such inquiry strive to do more than provide a list of micropolitical actions; rather, it should concentrate on the meaningful interactions between coach and context to examine whether, and in what sense, a particular behavior or action achieves micropolitical importance.

Third, the experiential aspect refers to the degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction that an individual feels about his or her micropolitical literacy. Here, how coaches react to the micropolitical nature of their work, in terms of how such an arena of practice can provoke both positive and negative emotions, could yield interesting results. In this respect, investigating coaches' emotional responses to the micropolitical demands of their environments can highlight how emotions are meaningful experiences that influence coaches' sense making and illustrate what is *at stake* for them (Kelchtermans, 2005).

Concluding Thoughts

Traditionally, much research has adopted a functional interpretation of coaching and has subsequently tended to view conflict or disagreement as a deviation from the main task. Alternatively, the purpose of this article is to position coaching not as an unproblematic, progressive process but as an arena for struggle. Such a stance is supported by recent research that points to the relevance of defining coaching in terms of micropolitical power dimensions. It would appear that in their quest to gain the support of contextual stakeholders and achieve their goals, coaches are engaged in a process of constantly forging and reforging alliances with contextually significant others. If such empirical clues are ignored, we run the risk of adhering to a distorted utopian view of complex social processes, thus denying the constraining and liberating effects of conflict (Sparkes & Mackay, 1996). Portraying coaching as a negotiated, contested activity holds much potential for future investigations in the search to develop a better understanding of what the job of coaching actually entails. Of particular significance here is how coaches initiate conflict and change before managing the consequences. The knowledge gained from such analyses relates to uncovering the contextual social rules that underpin action, in addition to the norms that bound such actions and how they can be overcome (Schempp et al., 1993). Our hope is that positioning coaching as a micropolitical activity can lead to a more detailed picture of coaches' practice and reveal how they get to do what they want to do. Finally, highlighting how coaches manage and negotiate constraints and opportunities also holds the potential for insightful reflection by both coaches and coach educators on what it means to coach and on how to cope with constraining influences in the quest for innovative personal practice.

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