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## **Psychophenomenology and the explicitation interview for accessing subjective lived experience in sport coaching** — [Source link](#)

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1           **Psychophenomenology and the explicitation interview for**  
2           **accessing subjective lived experience in sport coaching**

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1 **Abstract**

2 The purpose of this position paper is to promote the interest, usefulness and specificity of a  
3 coherent system that is based on psychophenomenology as a theoretical framework  
4 (Vermersch, 2012), and the explicitation interview (Vermersch, 2009) as an appropriate and  
5 original method for studying the subjective lived experience of participants in sport situations.  
6 This original approach is associated with an epistemological posture which accords significant  
7 importance to the first-person point of view (i.e. what is appearing to a person about his own  
8 subjective lived experience in a past situation). After presenting some limitations in other  
9 phenomenological approaches and interview methods, we present the specificity of the  
10 theoretical background and the method of explicitation interview, for describing in detail the  
11 actions and understanding of the lived experience of a person in a past and singular situation.  
12 To demonstrate the potential of this approach, we provide two specific examples of explicitation  
13 interview data from an in-match player decision-making situation and an in-game half-time  
14 speech of a coach. In concluding, we contend that psychophenomenology and the explicitation  
15 interview present new perspectives and opportunities for coach education, by developing the  
16 analysis of the subjective lived experience. This may have important implications for sport  
17 related research and the development of coaching practice and formal coach education, through  
18 closer links to real life experiences.

19 **Key-words:** psychophenomenology, phenomenology, explicitation interview, subjective lived  
20 experience, sport coaching, decision-making.

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# 1            **Psychophenomenology and the explicitation interview for** 2            **accessing subjective lived experience in sport coaching**

## 3 4 5 6    **Introduction**

### 7            *Increasing interest for subjective lived experience*

8    Over the past two decades, phenomenology has been adopted as an original and innovative  
9    approach for the study of individuals' subjective experiences in sport and exercise situations  
10   (Allen-Collinson, 2009; Cronin & Armour, 2015; Kerry & Armour, 2000). It is presented as  
11   both a philosophy and a methodological approach, offering the specificity to gather data about  
12   the lived experience of participants in real life contexts (Kerry & Armour, 2000).  
13   Phenomenology differs to other forms of qualitative inquiry in how subjective experience is  
14   accessed. The 'promise' of phenomenology is that it emphasizes an epistemological posture  
15   that favors the subjective point of view for gaining knowledge, a theoretical framework with  
16   roots in philosophy, and a specific methodological framework that describes or interprets the  
17   subjective dimension of experience as it was lived by participants (Allen-Collinson, 2018).

18            Whilst in recent years, studies have made attempts to address the calls to recognize  
19   subjective experience in sport and physical activity, the 'promise of phenomenology' remains  
20   largely under-utilised in sport-related research (O'Halloran, Littlewood, Richardson, Tod, &  
21   Nesti, 2018; Allen-Collinson, 2009; Brown & Payne, 2009). According to Allen-Collinson,  
22   (2009) although relatively few accounts are grounded in the 'flesh' of the lived sporting body,  
23   phenomenology offers a powerful framework for rich analysis of sporting embodiment that  
24   evocatively portrays the multi-textured experiences of the lived sporting body (corporeal,  
25   emotional and so on) in context. A potential explanation for the limited application of  
26   phenomenology within the discipline of sport and physical activity is the numerous  
27   philosophical interpretations of it that exist (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Alongside this, there lies

1 the challenge for researchers of identifying the most appropriate methodological approaches to  
2 gain access to the subjective human experience in sport situations. Finally, Martínková and  
3 Parry (2011) highlighted the lack of coherence between theoretical frameworks and methods  
4 when adopting a phenomenological approach, as a limitation of previous phenomenological  
5 studies. Thus, we critically review the on-going debates concerning: a) the definition of an  
6 appropriate phenomenological approach and the practical utility of phenomenology (Allen-  
7 Collinson, 2009; Brown & Payne, 2009; Martínková & Parry, 2011); b) the relevance of such  
8 methods for accessing the subjective lived experience (Sparkes & Smith, 2012) in the area of  
9 sport-related research.

#### 10 *Debates about the specificity and empirical utility of a phenomenological approach*

11 Edmund Husserl is considered the founder of phenomenology, establishing a  
12 philosophic tradition of studying phenomena, lived experience and consciousness. Husserl's  
13 approach, however, is not unique, as a total of 18 phenomenological approaches have been  
14 identified in sport-related research studies (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

15 We may distinguish with O'Halloran et al. (2018) two main approaches with differences  
16 in their philosophical underpinnings, interview and data analysis processes. Descriptive  
17 phenomenology has roots principally in Husserl's work (1902/1999), with the focus on  
18 describing and highlighting the participant's lived experience of a phenomenon, through the  
19 phenomenological epoche<sup>1</sup> and reduction with the use of bracketing<sup>2</sup>. Interpretive  
20 phenomenology, on the other hand, is influenced by Heidegger's approach (1927/2005), with  
21 an ontological inquiry studying the nature of being, existence or reality, as well as the basic  
22 categories of being and their relations. Typically, interpretative phenomenological studies  
23 identify the primordial constituents of the phenomenon itself, rather than a single, episodic, or

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<sup>1</sup> Researchers' attempts to arrive at the eidos of a phenomenon, its essential forms or characteristics.

<sup>2</sup> Bracketing involves setting aside one's natural attitude and a priori knowledge and assumptions in order to remain fully present to phenomena as they present themselves to consciousness.

1 causal account of it. In the context of sport coaching, phenomenological studies have provided  
2 rich descriptions about the experiences of ‘being’, for example, by describing the lifeworld of  
3 a youth performance coach (Cronin & Armour, 2017); and through the exploration of ‘doing’,  
4 to understand the practical knowledge of participants in specific settings (e.g. free skiers,  
5 Nyberg, 2015). Further, sport coaching studies have provided an interpretative  
6 phenomenological account of community sport and youth performance coaching (Cronin &  
7 Armour, 2015; Miller, Cronin, & Baker, 2015).

8           However, we think that this frontier between description and interpretation is not fixed  
9 for researchers, who use in both cases philosophical background and phenomenological attitude  
10 requiring engagement in epochē (i.e. the temporary suspension of our ‘natural attitude’, our  
11 taken-for-granted assumptions and preconceptions surrounding a phenomenon or phenomena).  
12 The differences perhaps concern the object of study and the methodology.

13           Moreover, theoretical phenomenological frameworks have also been combined with  
14 other disciplines. Socio-phenomenology, for example, examines human subjectivity and  
15 embodiment in general, but also investigates the specifics of socially located, socially related  
16 and interacting bodies (Allen-Collinson, 2009, 2018). This approach echoes Merleau-Ponty’s  
17 form of existentialist phenomenology with its focus upon embodiment. Merleau-Ponty (1969)  
18 adopted the terms ‘flesh’ (chair) and ‘flesh-of-the-world’ in contrast to ‘being-in-the-world’, in  
19 order better to convey the centrality of what we might term our ‘corpo-reality’, our bodily  
20 grounded lived reality.

### 21           *Methodological considerations about immersive approaches*

22           The initial and continuing promise of phenomenology for sport-related research  
23 considers that phenomenology can provide a theoretical and methodological framework (Allen-  
24 Collinson, 2018). An appropriate and original method, in the sense of technique, in coherence  
25 with the epistemological posture and the theoretical framework, is vivid, for operationalizing

1 phenomenology in a specific empirical approach (Allen-Collinson, 2009). A range of different  
2 methods, utilized in previous research of this nature, have been adopted as a way of accessing  
3 lived experience as it is told by participants.

4 Interviews have emerged as a principal method within phenomenology to explore individual  
5 subjective experience. For example, semi-structured interviews, alongside reflective diaries  
6 were used by Cronin and Armour (2017) to identify three constituent 'essences' of youth  
7 performance coaching, in a broad lifeworld that included settings on and off the field of play.  
8 An exploration of the embodied expertise of an elite golfer's daily practice also applied  
9 interviews and participant observations to identify how a pre-reflective performative dimension  
10 appeared central to how the golfers adjusted and reshaped her technical skills (Ravn &  
11 Christensen, 2014). However, the use of semi-structured interviews has been criticised, due to  
12 the problem of collecting participants' own felt, lived, embodied experiences (Allen-Collinson,  
13 2009). This method, is limited in its ability to capture lived experiences, because verbalization  
14 supposes for the interviewee the ability to be already conscious, in a classic meaning (i.e.  
15 aware), of his own experience. However, a part of his/her activity was non-conscious during  
16 the experience and may still be non-conscious during the semi-structured interview situation.  
17 Moreover, the interviewee may speak about 'what he should do' or 'what he thinks he does  
18 generally' (i.e. justifications or rationalizations), but not 'what he really did' (Mouchet, 2015;  
19 Vermersch, 2012).

20 Stelter (2010), in contrast, presented the method of experience-based, body-anchored  
21 qualitative interviewing, with an orientation toward the present moment, 'the here-and-now of  
22 the situation', to balance questions about bodily experiences, emotions, thoughts, and actions  
23 in relation to a specific situation. Descriptive phenomenological interviews' (Dale, 1996) have  
24 also been used for creating new knowledge through rich description in sport psychology  
25 research (O'Halloran et al., 2018). This type of interview is unstructured in nature; it begins

1 with an open-ended question related to the phenomenon of interest and the follow-up questions  
2 are open, *non-leading* and based on the descriptions provided by the person being interviewed,  
3 with a focus on listening and ‘letting it come’. Although O’Halloran et al. (2018) aimed to  
4 present guidelines on how to conduct a descriptive phenomenological interview; we argue that  
5 these guidelines consist of general principles of implementation, without any specific method  
6 described in detail.

7 Finally, Allen-Collinson (2018) applied a distinctive phenomenological attitude and ethos  
8 where a high degree of reflexivity was requisite. There were four central requirements within  
9 this ‘phenomenological method’, derived from Husserlian phenomenology (epoché, reduction,  
10 essences, intentionality), with a focus on the essence of the subjective, immediate lived  
11 experiences. Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2017) used this methodological approach for  
12 studying the lived experience of temperature perception in distance running, with evocative  
13 narratives and detailed field notes. This is more as an orientation to the world, a way of looking,  
14 an attitude, rather than a set of prescribed techniques or procedures. And it is based on the  
15 capacity of oneself, as self-analyzer to use this attitude.

16 Visual methods such as videography have been used for studying the submarine  
17 sensorium (Merchant, 2011), or student experiences in adventure sports (Leather & Nicholls,  
18 2016), without having been used with a phenomenological approach for studying sport  
19 coaching. Sparkes and Smith (2012) proposed interviewing as a multi-sensory event and  
20 identified the potential of visual technologies to provide access to the range of senses involved  
21 in sport and physical culture activities. Sparkes (2017) also underlined the interest in creative  
22 combinations between visual technologies and interviews with open questioning, and advocated  
23 these novel approaches for exploring the sensorium in action. Nevertheless, using visual  
24 methods such as photo elicitation, does not eradicate the difficulties in verbalizing the embodied



1 experiences, even though the images have facilitated participants' recall of embodied memory  
2 (Orr & Phoenix, 2015).

3 Reflecting on those considerations, our aim in the present paper is to promote the interest,  
4 usefulness and specificity of a coherent system that is based on psychophenomenology as  
5 theoretical support (Vermersch, 2012) and the explicitation interview (Vermersch, 2009) as an  
6 appropriate and original method for capturing and understanding the subjective lived  
7 experience during real situations in sport contexts. In the next sections we are going to present  
8 this theoretical framework and method, and then proceed to use two examples of explicitation  
9 interviews in the sport coaching area.

### 10 **Specificities of psychophenomenology**

11 In this section, we situate our own perspective for using a phenomenological approach to  
12 deal with the challenge of using an appropriate theoretical and methodological framework, to  
13 access the subjective lived experience in sport situations. We share the same epistemological  
14 stance with other phenomenological approaches, placing significant scientific value on the  
15 participant's own perspective. We also assume the philosophic roots, mainly adopting Husserl's  
16 propositions, the interest in subjectivity, and the desire to demonstrate the empirical utility of  
17 phenomenology. However, we focus on a different level of analysis: not only a psychological  
18 state, identity, being or corporeal sensation, but the subjective lived-experience in specific and  
19 singular situations. Further, we throw some light on a specific method, respecting Husserl's  
20 approach of epoche and reduction, an interview technique which has been implemented for a  
21 long time in different contexts in France. This technique, in our opinion, makes a strong  
22 contribution to the challenge of phenomenology, with the possibility to overcome some of the  
23 limitations mentioned previously for both researchers and practitioners. In doing so, we aim to  
24 contribute to developing the use of phenomenology in sport.

1 Psychophenomenology is defined as ‘experiential psychology’ (Maurel, 2009) or  
2 ‘empirical psychology of subjectivity’ (Vermersch, 2012), that allows us to describe, and  
3 conceptualize subjectivity (i.e. acts of consciousness as they appear to a person), while offering  
4 a specific, original and rigorous method of verbalization with the explicitation interview  
5 (Vermersch, 2009). This method engages the interviewee in the ‘reliving’ of the subjective lived  
6 experience of a past, specific and singular situation. This includes the whole stream of actions,  
7 thoughts, emotions and perceptions that occur at a given moment while performing an activity,  
8 of which the actors are either aware of at the time or can be subsequently made aware of  
9 (Cahour, Salembier, & Zouinar, 2016).

10 This framework is linked to the epistemological posture in research that: the subject’s  
11 point of view is irreplaceable for understanding the organization of his action, and this is an  
12 important approach for knowledge production about human activity. This posture values the  
13 ‘first-person point of view’, that which appears for a person who lived an action, in order to  
14 understand the organization of his/her actions (Vermersch, 1999). For Cahour et al., (2016),  
15 this first-person perspective makes it possible to take into account and closely analyse the  
16 cognitive, sensory and emotional aspects of the subject’s experience, and to access not only  
17 what can be directly verbalized but also what can become conscious through an act of reflection.  
18 This is a form of introspection (Vermersch, 1999), lived experience associated with cognitive  
19 and mental events (Varela & Shear, 1999), an embodied state with experiential insights into the  
20 lifeworld where cognition is viewed as situated, concrete, and bodily based (Depraz, Varela, &  
21 Vermersch, 2003).

22 The theoretical roots of psychophenomenology are in both phenomenology, with  
23 Husserl’s perspective (1902/1999), and psychology with Piaget’s (1974), whilst being  
24 distinguishable from transcendental phenomenology and experimental psychology. Thus, it is  
25 important to note that psychophenomenology is the interpretation of a philosophical approach

1 with a psychological and empirical purpose. This is an original framework which proposes a  
2 theory of consciousness, in connection to Husserl's propositions about acts of consciousness,  
3 passivity, intentionality, and Piaget's propositions about awareness within child development.  
4 Vermersch (1999, 2012) elaborated on an interesting distinction of modes of consciousness and  
5 on the transition between these modes. He distinguished pre-reflected consciousness (i.e.  
6 consciousness in action, lived, implicit, of which the subject is not reflectively aware during the  
7 lived experience, and not to be confused with the Freudian concept of unconsciousness), and  
8 reflective consciousness (i.e. conceptualized knowledge, judgements or explanations about a  
9 process, reflected upon that corresponds to the intuitive picture people usually have of  
10 consciousness, where consciousness becomes aware of itself via a reflecting mental process).  
11 Pre-reflective experience can be defined as 'an experience, which is lived without being fully  
12 aware of itself' (Petitmengin, 2009, p. 9). This provides an important support for going further  
13 than the limits of verbalization and for accessing to knowledge in action.

14 Vermersch (1994) considers that the subjective lived experience has a global nature.  
15 Therefore, this author distinguishes between various domains of verbalization that are  
16 connected: the emotional dimension, the sensitive dimension, the aperception (i.e. mental  
17 functioning), and the lived action. This last dimension is the main focus for  
18 psychophenomenology and its method. So, it is more adapted for capturing the 'doing' or  
19 'acting' than the 'being' as a state, or the 'being' when acting in a specified moment of a  
20 situation. Thus, the essence of the explicitation interview is to go beyond activity description  
21 offered within reflected consciousness and to access a pre-reflected level of consciousness  
22 obtained through various and precise interview techniques (Vermersch, 2012).

23 Besides this objective, we can characterize psychophenomenology and the method  
24 associated by the specificity of its level of analysis: the subjective lived experience in a past,  
25 singular and specified situation, with a focus on the detailed description of the procedural

1 aspects of the actions, and not the elements of context, the explanations, the comments, or the  
2 judgments about the action. As such, it is a micro-level in human activity analysis, at one  
3 moment or some specified moments, with an in-depth analysis. The priority is to describe the  
4 procedural aspects that a person implemented for reaching a goal (i.e., ‘elementary actions’, or  
5 ‘operations’ such as information and decision-making). It requires the researcher to set up the  
6 methodological conditions in the interview, so that the subject is in a ‘position de parole  
7 incarnée’ (‘embodied speech position’), that means in touch with his/her experiences, on a  
8 sensory mode. This retrospective seizure requires a state of reminding, which restores the  
9 subjective lived experience into its sensitive, intuitive dimension, in other words the concrete  
10 memory. This speech position is different from the more usual one, which is rational and  
11 explanatory (explaining the reality).

12         To date, psychophenomenology has been employed in sport research, mainly in France.  
13 Gouju et al. (2007) reported hurdle racers’ own experiences in real situations of competition,  
14 and shed some light on how the racer feels the presence of his co-competitors and how this  
15 perception influences his actions to maximize his speed and effectively conduct his race. Other  
16 researchers studied subjectivity in elite rugby players’ decision-making in matches (Mouchet  
17 et al., 2014), or ‘the experiential attention’ of athletes in competition (Mouchet, 2013). When  
18 considering attention as modulation of consciousness in a phenomenological situation, with a  
19 complex structure and attentional dynamics, the last author illustrated the study of attentional  
20 processes of expert rugby players in complex and evolving game-plays. This approach was also  
21 used in sport coaching research with a focus on rugby coaches’ team talks before the match  
22 (Lainé & Mouchet, 2015) and during half-time (Mouchet & Maso, 2017). It allowed an in-depth  
23 insight on how the coaches acted when delivering the message in specific contexts, and how  
24 they lived the coaching situations.

## 25 **Characteristics of the explicitation interview**

1            *What is an explicitation interview?*

2    The explicitation interview was initially developed by Vermesch (1994), as a form of  
3    introspection; that is, finding information in oneself that is largely invisible until it has been  
4    brought into reflective consciousness. ‘Explicitation interviews, which were developed by  
5    Vermersch (1994) as part of his psycho-phenomenological approach, focus initially on an  
6    action and the cognitive processes involved, but also on the sensory and emotional aspects and  
7    the phenomenological question of “what appears to the subject”, by reviving a past experience  
8    in order to obtain a vivid evocation’ (Cahour et al., 2016, p. 268). The technique has spread into  
9    various disciplines including cognitive science (Petitmengin, Remillieux, Cahour, & Carter-  
10    Thomas, 2013), pedagogy (Maurel, 2009) and educational sciences among others in Physical  
11    Education (Candy & Mouchet, 2018; Lémonie, Light, & Sarremejane, 2016)<sup>3</sup>, ergonomics  
12    (Cahour et al., 2016), and emergency medicine (Mouchet, Demeslay, & Bertrand, 2017).

13            The fundamental hypothesis in the explicitation interview method is that it is possible,  
14    within an act of evocation, which is characterized by the using of the passive memory and the  
15    recalling of details from a lived experience, to relive his/her actions in a past situation, and to  
16    gather what was in pre-reflective consciousness. That is a technique for guiding a person in  
17    recalling a given experience by redirecting his attention to specific aspects of an experience so  
18    that he can then precisely describe it (Vermersch, 2009). It enables a person to become aware  
19    of and describe the experience with precision. In doing so, the focus concerns the ‘what’ and  
20    ‘how’ of our activities, as opposed to the ‘why’. Petitmengin et al. (2013) suggest whether we  
21    are touching, seeing, listening, imagining, remembering, understanding or deciding, whether it  
22    be concrete or abstract activity, the lived experience is not immediately accessible to reflective  
23    consciousness and verbal description. The ‘explicitation interview method’ therefore aims to  
24    trigger this understanding of the cognitive processes through prompts and questions in order to

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<sup>3</sup> This study used a phenomenographic framework and elicitation interview.

1 help a subject move from a pre-reflective state to a reflective state. It is used to access detailed  
2 phenomenological reports of an individual's past experience.

### 3 *How is an explication interview conducted?*

4 In terms of protocol, Vermesch (2009) describes the process of carrying out an explication  
5 interview with two main steps: (a) the identification of a lived experience in a past and singular  
6 situation, with some important moments for the interviewee's point of view; (b) the evocation  
7 of this experience. This second stage is where the explication interview occurs. Evocation  
8 relates to intuitive rather than signitive relation to that experience. Intuitive is an experiential  
9 relation to the past situation, with the sensoriality, as if the interviewee was reliving the past  
10 situation and discovering many more details of what he really did. Signitive is conceptual and  
11 based on knowledge providing meaning to an object.

12 While listening to the subject's chronological account of his experience, taking care not  
13 to influence his responses, the investigator asks non-leading questions that refine the  
14 descriptions, yielding a fine-grained level. The listener's attitude is important: the experience  
15 has to be received without making any judgments or personal projections. This line of enquiry  
16 guides the subject towards the description of a more detailed and vivid 'evocation'.  
17 For guiding the interviewee toward this embodied speech position and maintaining the  
18 interviewee in evocation, the interviewer uses several techniques (Gouju et al., 2007; Maurel,  
19 2009):

- 20 • Making a 'communication contract' between interviewer and interviewee;
- 21 • Asking the interviewee to 'let the situation come' that he wants to explore, without any  
22 effort of remembering or conceptualization, even if it is vague at the beginning ('I  
23 propose to you, to take the time to let come back to you, whatever is coming back');
- 24 • Focusing on a precise moment (or some important moments) for the interviewee during  
25 this situation that he wants to explore;

- 1 • Developing a sensorial anchorage in that moment (e.g. ‘where are you precisely on the  
2 pitch?’; ‘Are there any team mates around you?’);
- 3 • Slowing down the rhythm of speech, with ‘a temporal dilation of the moment which has  
4 been lived’ (Vermersch, 1999, p. 25): e.g. ‘take your time’, ‘wait’;
- 5 • Avoiding judgement questions typically beginning with ‘Why’, which require the  
6 interviewee to offer rationalizations and justifications; prefer questions that begin with  
7 ‘How’ or ‘What’ to gain a detailed description of the actions
- 8 • Using sensorial questions to help the interviewee to ‘remain in the present’ (e.g., ‘What  
9 are you attentive to right now?’ instead of ‘What were you attentive to?’). This also  
10 helps to steer the interviewee away from making reflective generalizations, which are  
11 symptomatic of a non-evocative state. Moreover, the topic of experiential attention  
12 should become the focus in the questioning. Thus, instead of asking ‘do you see this  
13 defender?’, we could ask: ‘what are you attentive to?’, ‘is there anything else you are  
14 paying attention to?’, ‘and just when you turn your head on your rightside... what is  
15 appearing to you?’;
- 16 • Using both the interviewee’s own words (‘and when you take the gap in the defensive  
17 line... how do you take it exactly’) and Ericsonian language to structure guiding  
18 questions to prompt and help the flow of responses (e.g., ‘Perhaps you see or hear  
19 something... or perhaps not?’).

20 Later in this paper, we present extracts of explicitation interviews that were conducted by the  
21 first author.

### 22 *How can we know if the interviewee is in evocation?*

23 Vermesch (2012) identifies verbal and non-verbal cues for participants engaging in an act of  
24 evocation. Verbal indicators include the use of ‘I’, specific reference to places and times,  
25 concrete details and varied vocabulary. In addition, the present tense may be used as an indicator

1 of the subject re-enacting their experiences. This, however, must not be mistaken for generality  
2 (I usually do...). On the other hand, non-verbal criteria include the eye-contact and gestures of  
3 the participant. A loss of eye-contact suggests the participants is recalling a particular situation  
4 and consequently, moving away from the present state to an evocation of the situation. In doing  
5 so, the flow of speech may become interrupted and distracted from the interviewer; this  
6 indicator marks a form of sensorial awareness of what took place. Moreover, verbal and non-  
7 verbal behaviour symmetry, and linguistic indicators are also of interest for appropriate  
8 guidance. Consequently, with the help of appropriate questioning the participant may be able  
9 to retrieve the past experience as vividly as possible and come into contact with it. Interviewers  
10 can check this set of specific cues to be sure that the interviewee is in a state of evocation, or,  
11 if not, stop and adapt the questioning to achieve it.

## 12 **Examples of explicitation interviews in sport coaching**

### 13 *Understanding intuitive player decision-making in sport*

14 Using an explicitation interview technique, Mouchet (2005) studied elite rugby players'  
15 decision-making in-game situations, and the coaching process for improving players' decision-  
16 making (Light, Harvey, & Mouchet, 2014; Mouchet, 2014a). This research contributes toward  
17 understanding the relationship between embodied and conscious thinking in decision-making  
18 within an ecologically valid context and makes an important contribution towards  
19 understanding 'at-action' decision-making in team games during competition rugby matches.  
20 The following example is useful for sport coaching, because understanding players decision  
21 making processes is an important part of coach education and this method of explicitation can  
22 be used to educate coaches about the importance of gaining the players' lived experience.

23 We now present one extract of explicitation interviewing implemented with an elite rugby  
24 player during an official and important match in the Top 14 competition in France. The situation  
25 involves decision-making at action, during open-play (i.e. all players and the ball are in



1 movement), where the player, as ball-carrier, has just made a tactical adaptation (decision in  
2 the moment) and broken through the defensive line. At that moment of the explicitation  
3 interview, we want to understand his subjective lived experience about his own cues. Extracts  
4 of verbatim are in Italics, with initials for a fictive name for the player (M for Michel) and 'I'  
5 for interviewer. Following this, we provide some comments about the data.

6 *I. Right at the moment when you go through the gap... What are you doing just after that?*  
7 *M. I want to well finish the game play... I want to insure the continuity of the game...*  
8 *I.Hum, hum.*  
9 *M. And, if possible euh.... If possible, make my partner play.*  
10 *I. OK. So when you want to make your partner play ...*  
11 *M. Yes.*  
12 *I. How do you do that at this precise moment?*  
13 *M. I'm looking at euh... at the exterior... **(his head turns to the right side)***  
14 *I. Yes.*  
15 *M. And I... I see Eric.*  
16 *I. Yes, you see Eric.*  
17 *M. Here I see him euh... I know that it is him because it is him that should be there... **(he's looking at***  
18 *me). I see him, I see his face euh... I know that I see him and I see also that there is... There is a*  
19 *Toulousian who euh ... If I give the ball he will tackle Eric.And I know, I feel... **(left hand up on the left***  
20 *side)... So I don't see, but I feel that I'm going to be tackled also.*  
21 *I. OK. So at this important moment when you are taking in account many things...*  
22 *M. Yes.*  
23 *I. How do you see Eric precisely, just at the moment when you are seeing him?*  
24 *M. **(eyes go up)** I see that he is euh ... I see him running and euh ... I see that he is a little inclined euh...*  
25 ***(Slope of the chest and the hands opened in front of him)** towards me, and that he's really ready to*  
26 *receive the ball.*  
27 *I. Yes.*  
28 *M. And euh ... He is euh ... I am here and I see him a little like that **(rotation of the chest and the hands***  
29 ***opened in front of him)***  
30 *I. Yes.*  
31 *M. So euh ... ready, receptive **(look at me)***  
32 *I. He is receptive?*  
33 *M. Yes.*  
34 *I. When he is receptive... you tell me he's ready to receive the ball....*  
35 *M. Yes.*  
36 *I. How do you see that he is ready to receive the ball and that he's receptive?*  
37 *M. Because euh ... He's really come towards me **(bringing in and rectilinear movement of the right***  
38 ***hand)**, he's really come to play the ball **(fingers spread)** euh ...*  
39 *I. Yes, OK. You tell me that you see a Toulousian who is just behind Eric... What are you seeing at that*  
40 *moment?*  
41 *M. Yes... I see him (Eric), and a Toulousian who is euh... Who is just beside him, on his right side...*  
42 ***(eyes go up)***  
43 *I. Yes ...*  
44 *M. And euh ... If I give the ball to Eric he's going to tackle him..*

45

1           We can notice in this extract that a new sub-goal appears and the ball-carrier hesitates  
2 between keeping, or passing the ball, then at which moment to pass it. During the search for a  
3 partner in support, his perceptive activity is dominant. The attention field is reduced and  
4 directed to the partner. We can underline the combination of these visual indications, with  
5 background data corresponding to common references for this strategy implementation. The  
6 attention field integrates also the presence of an opponent close to Eric. The preferential sub-  
7 goal seems however to be prioritised just later, during a deliberated decision, ('I'm also thinking  
8 to keep the ball but I don't do it', 'I choose to give him the pass'). This reflexive activity gets  
9 organized manifestly from a configuration of cues on one hand, with information about the  
10 partner through an attention on indications such as the chest tilt, opened hands and face and; on  
11 the other hand, by the defender being very close to his partner. Finally, by the sensation of a  
12 strong threat behind him. Let us underline at the same time the absence of sound signal there  
13 (later the player declares 'I could hear something from my partner... But I don't hear that').  
14 Nevertheless, it seems to give evidence to us that the player is listening, even though no  
15 indication is given to him by his partners.

16           This extract, illustrates the value of the first-person point of view for gaining a rich  
17 description of the cognitive processes that were implemented in a real context. It would be  
18 impossible to record such processes during a match with a device on the player, and impossible  
19 to get such precise details that are often unobservable. Nevertheless, those details are so  
20 important from the subjects' own point of view.

### 21           *Understanding in-competition coaching*

22           When identifying the coaches' knowledge in the literature (Cassidy, Jones, & Potrac, 2009), we  
23 can notice the distinction between declarative knowledge (i.e. knowing) and procedural  
24 knowledge (i.e. doing), between tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge (Nash & Collins,  
25 2006) in relation to real-world decision-making and problem solving. However, it is a difficult

1 challenge to reach this procedural knowledge in a real context, principally for two reasons.  
2 Firstly, this procedural knowledge which is ‘knowledge in action’ (Barbier, 2000), is embodied  
3 and tacit, with expert people, so it may be familiar and non-conscious even for the participants  
4 themselves. Secondly, it is difficult for researchers to collect data in real contexts, about the  
5 public and private demensions of coaches’ activity (i.e. what is observable and the cognitive  
6 processes). Although this is a significant challenge for researchers, it is nevertheless important  
7 for both scientific and professional reasons.

8         With those considerations in mind, in-competition coaching has been identified as an  
9 important element of the core functions of the coach (Lara-Bercial et al., 2017). It is defined as  
10 coaches' activity that occurs during the game (Jones, 2006), specifically in team sports where  
11 we speak about ‘in-match coaching’ or ‘in-contest management’ (Mouchet et al., 2014). For  
12 example, coaches must monitor the opposition, prepare athletes for substitutions, deal with  
13 referees, manage pre-match, half-time talks, time-outs as well as breaks in play, and motivate  
14 athletes to perform at their optimal level (Cushion, Ford, & Williams, 2012). This requires very  
15 important competencies for managing the on-going evolution of the game, with complexity,  
16 uncertainty and temporal pressure, that require the ability to ‘read and react to the field’ when  
17 the coach should observe and respond to events appropriately (Lara-Bercial et al., 2017) and  
18 make reactive decisions. While underlining this importance and specificity, competition  
19 coaching competence and intervention in match situations would often appear to rely on  
20 instinct, sensations, experience and informal learning between coaches (Lyle, 2002).

21         Many studies have highlighted the complex, dynamic and context-dependent process in  
22 coaching (Lyle 2002; Nash & Collins 2006), with flexible adaptations to the dynamic nature of  
23 sport and the ability to make quick and effective decisions depending upon the particular  
24 situation at hand (Jones 2006). However, this context-dependent, coach decision-making has  
25 not been adequately explored because most research on coaching behaviour has taken a

1 behaviourist approach that uses a descriptive-analytic system of episodes (Smith & Cushion,  
2 2006). There is, therefore, a need for a more holistic research approach that can more effectively  
3 account for the subjective dimensions of coaching in real contexts (Light et al., 2014).

4 For those reasons, we consider that psychophenomenology theory and explicitation  
5 interview method, constitute a well structured and appropriate solution if we want to access the  
6 subjective lived experience and the coaches' personal logic in action. Some authors emphasized  
7 the subjective dimensions of in-game coaching, with a focus on observation of the match  
8 (Mouchet, 2014b), communications with players (Mouchet et al., 2014) and the half-time talk  
9 (Mouchet & Maso, 2017). This inquiry into what coaches do within competition contexts  
10 provides insight into their embodied level of consciousness and 'knowledge in action' (Barbier,  
11 2000). For example, when referring to the 'silent' observation and analysis of the match, which  
12 was previously identified as a deliberate coaching strategy (Smith & Cushion,2006), Mouchet  
13 (2014b) characterized the phenomenon of 'œil de maquignon' (i.e., someone who has a lot of  
14 experience and who is able to evaluate quickly just by observing) among expert coaches, from  
15 the subjects' point of view. Mouchet (2014b) has highlighted the structure of the field of  
16 attention and attentional dynamics of coaches that articulate significant cues in situ, prior  
17 knowledge and previous experiences. This is an important professional gesture, situated at the  
18 heart of the subjects' activity, whether in sport or in other professional fields, especially in  
19 complex and dynamic situations. This approach allows further elucidation of the thoughts  
20 and/or cognitive processes of coaches' in-competition behaviour as required to more fully  
21 understand coaches' decisions and actions. It is important to understand the intuitive part of  
22 activity, as it is lived by the coaches themselves, under pressure within the flow of actions.

23 We use an extract in Italics, using again some initials: 'I' for interviewer and 'F' for  
24 Franck, the coach fictive name.

25 *F. I begin to speak and I hear the whistle of the referee.*  
26 *I. Yes.*

1 F. And I want us to remain concentrated (**raise eyebrows**) I don't want to lose time because he  
2 has whistled.  
3 I. All right.  
4 F. I want to deliver the message.  
5 I. Yeah.  
6 F. And... And in fact (**breathes, raises eyebrows**) They remain concentrated, they remain tight.  
7 I. How do you know that they remain concentrated at this moment when you want to deliver the  
8 message? Let's come back quietly to this brief moment, that goes quickly.  
9 F. (**Closes the eyes, left hand on the face**) Because, I have the impression that the circle does  
10 not move, we are together. We stay focused on us, we do not want it to finish, it is funny...  
11 I. Yes.  
12 F. I have the impression that it is ... brief, very brief.  
13 I. It is very brief?  
14 F. And I have the sensation that nevertheless, we want to be together and for a long time.  
15 I. All right. When you have this sensation, how do you deliver your message? Take time to let  
16 things come back to you (**silence 5''**).  
17 F. I had the impression that I squeezed the players and in fact I didn't. I realized, because I see  
18 them now, I did that with my hands (**opening of both hands**).  
19 I. You see your hands OK. How you see them when you speak?  
20 F. I see... a background of the players (**gesture of both hands, looks down**).  
21 I. Yeah.  
22 F. I see looks (**gesture of both hands**).  
23 I. You see looks and this background.  
24 F. I have... it is funny. I see a fuzziness, the looks and my hands.  
25 I. Of the fuzziness, the looks and the hands. Take time to stay at this moment.  
26 F. Of the fuzziness... I have the impression that (**raises eyebrows**) we are there, without  
27 anything else around us (**look at I**).  
28 I. All right. You see looks, take time there when you see these looks, what appears to you in  
29 these looks which you see?  
30 F. The confidence (**raises eyebrows**).  
31 I. The confidence.  
32 F. Our importance (**raises eyebrows**).  
33 I. Your importance.  
34 F. That is clear to me now by speaking about it because that makes it... If I analyze well the  
35 beginning, a sensation of emancipation.  
36 I. Yes, a sensation of emancipation.  
37 F. And at the end, on their reactions, a sensation of confidence in us and need for us (**looks**  
38 **down, raises eyebrows**).  
39 I. And need for you.  
40 F. Finally it's funny because it's not necessarily things which I look for (**looks down on I**)  
41 I. All right. You are speaking to them. How do you do that to deliver your message quickly... At  
42 this precise moment, when there is all of this which is taking place for you?  
43 F. (**Looks down**) I don't know... I don't even know what I tell them.  
44 I. Yes.  
45 F. (**Silence 4 ''**) I don't know, it is funny...  
46 I. What is funny there?  
47 F I have the sensation that in fact euh... I see in their looks (**head slightly behind, looks down**)  
48 euh... The confidence in us.  
49 I. Yes.  
50 F. That they need us.

1 *I. Yes.*

2 *F. And in fact, I realize that in this exchange which we had, I needed them (look at I).*

3

4

5

## 6 **Conclusion**

### 7 *Limitations and validity*

8 On the methodological level, debates concerning the limits of this method and possibilities to  
9 go beyond these limits by developing the interviewer's skills, have been already discussed by  
10 Vermersch himself (1999), and recalled by Gouju et al. (2007), or more recently by Cahour et  
11 al. (2016).

12 This interviewing technique is difficult and requires specific learning and practice. The  
13 lead author has implemented this learning process with master students at university and  
14 practitioners in different contexts (coaches, teachers...). It involves an intensive programme for  
15 five days (30 hours), with an equilibrium between the theoretical framework, specific  
16 techniques and experiential learning involving specific interview exercises, where the  
17 participants adopt different roles (i.e. interviewer, interviewee, observer).

18 Moreover, concerning the intrinsic validation, Vermersch (2012) considers that the  
19 subject is the only one to be able to express what that lived experience consists of according to  
20 himself. However, it does not suggest that all that he says is immediately relevant, detailed and  
21 complete. Thus, during the explicitation interview, specific criteria validate the fact that the  
22 subject, when he speaks about his experience, feels subjectively in touch with it: singularity<sup>4</sup>,  
23 'présentification' of the lived experience<sup>5</sup>, memory 'remplissement'<sup>6</sup> (Vermersch, 2012). These

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<sup>4</sup> Was the interviewee in evocation of a singular situation (topic and spatio-temporal situation)? We can find some graduation in this answer.

<sup>5</sup> Was the interviewee in contact with the subjective lived experience in the past situation, with a vivid evocation, as he relived it

<sup>6</sup> Was it possible to relive the past experience with the richness of sensorial modalities: visual, auditive, corporal filling, emotions....

1 criteria work in the course of the interview and during the transcription, so allowing an  
2 immediate validation and a deferred validation. The elaboration of specific criteria which are  
3 appropriated for judging this kind of study given its particular purposes, is in accordance with  
4 the suggestions of Sparkes and Smith (2014).

5 On the other hand, the extrinsic validation concerns firstly, during the interview, the  
6 observation of the non-verbal and para-verbal aspects of the interviewee, because they  
7 constitute indicators of access to the embodied speech position. For example, when a person is  
8 in evocation he doesn't look at the interviewer, speaks slowly, uses 'I' and not 'we', uses many  
9 gestures connected to his past actions, and speaks in the present tense. Identification of these  
10 indicators is important for regulating the moments when the interviewee is not in evocation.  
11 This validation takes place also during the transcription and during the data treatment, where it  
12 is of interest to film the subject during the interview to integrate the non-verbal aspects in the  
13 verbatim as we did previously in the two examples (e.g. gesture, duration of silences, eye  
14 movements). Of course, it is necessary to get the consent of the interviewee for ethical reasons.  
15 Furthermore, as for other qualitative methods, a procedure of review (proofreading) is  
16 necessary, as well as a procedure of double level coding on several verbatim transcripts, to  
17 guarantee the reliability (Mouchet et al., 2017).

18 Finally, as demonstrated in previous sport-related research (Light et al., 2014; Mouchet  
19 et al., 2014; Candy & Mouchet, 2018), the interest of the combination of the first-person point  
20 of view (explicitation interview) and the third-person point of view (audio and video recording)  
21 is important for analyzing the activity in its private and public dimensions. If the explicitation  
22 interview has a central place, because it is allowed to characterize the subjective lived  
23 experience inherent to the actions, it is also possible to exploit the tracks of the activity as a  
24 precious information source, to corroborate the verbalizations. Thus, we agree with Sparkes'  
25 (2015) concerning the interests of a multi-method approach, data triangulation for greater

1 validity and completeness for a more comprehensive picture of the studied phenomenon to  
2 emerge that can also generate new insights.

### 3 *Implications for coaches' education*

4 We contend that psychophenomenology and explicitation interview present new perspectives  
5 and opportunities for coach education, by developing the analysis of subjective lived  
6 experience. This may have important implications in the development of coaching practice and  
7 formal coach education, through closer links to real athletes' and coaches' experiences (Lyle,  
8 2002). Reflective practice in coaches' education has received significant interest in the literature  
9 (Abraham & Collins, 2011). For example, Harvey, Cushion, Cope and Muir (2013) considered  
10 reflection as a key strategy to enable coaches to identify their beliefs and dispositions, and  
11 become more aware of their own practice.

12 We suggest that coach education and development programmes should seek to articulate  
13 the practical experience, the individual analysis of this practice, and the collective formalization  
14 of knowledge. We also emphasise the inclusion of the coaches' lived-experience within the  
15 process of coach development. Such an approach was successfully included in the process of  
16 coach development within an elite rugby academy (Mouchet, 2015), for improving the half-  
17 time talks by the coaches. A 'spiral training approach' was organized, which utilised the  
18 analysis of coaches' behaviour within a multi-method approach, and a collective training  
19 session within that group of coaches. The coaches' subjective lived experience was, therefore,  
20 at the heart of the analysis of their professional practices and transformation.

21 In conclusion, we consider the potential for future development of a  
22 'psychophenomenological pedagogy'. This approach may consider the subjective lived  
23 experience of athletes, as a resource for adapting and individualizing the coaching approach to  
24 consider the differences within a group. For example, coaches could use the explicitation  
25 interview during specific sessions of analysis of practice, off the pitch, for improving players'



1 decision-making during games, or specific skills (e.g. penalties with kickers). They could also  
2 use it during practice with specific questioning ‘on the spot’, with a ‘touch of explicitation’, in  
3 connection with the previous action that was completed by the players. Such pedagogy would  
4 be of great value for practitioners when they want to understand the personal logic of the  
5 participants and adapt the coaching/teaching strategies to enhance learning.

6

7

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