Understanding and Supporting Parents of Academy Footballers

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis was two-fold: firstly, to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of academy football parents and identify support that may be beneficial, and; secondly, develop, implement, and evaluate programmes of support for parents of academy footballers. Two action research cycles were carried out to address these aims. The exploration and reflection phases of action research cycle one, sought to understand parents' experiences and offer recommendations for supporting parents within youth academy football. An instrumental case study of one football academy was conducted, with data collected over an eight-month period through interviews, focus groups, informal conversations, reflexive diary, fieldwork, and observations. It was recommended during this study that parents may benefit from a programme of support, along with a series of cultural changes that focused on enhancing their experience. Subsequently, based on these initial findings, reflections, and recommendations made, a programme of support for academy parents, combined with cultural changes, was developed and implemented. The initial programme was evaluated using interviews, observations, informal conversations, practitioner reflections, fieldwork, and an online survey. Overall, parents found the sessions useful for gaining information and benefitted from talking with other parents. However, attendance was poor and some academy staff did not buy-in to the proposed cultural changes. As such, following a period of reflection and building on the findings of the first action research cycle, a second programme was planned and delivered. This was a condensed programme, comprising one 90-minute face-to-face session and booklet. Further cultural changes were also promoted. This programme was evaluated using an online survey, observations, fieldwork, informal conversations, and practitioner reflections. As with the first programme, parents suggested that the condensed version was useful for increasing their knowledge, they enjoyed learning from others, and gained social support. Despite the condensed programme, the issues pertaining to attendance and buy-in continued. Based on the findings of the two action research cycles, general suggestions for working with parents and developing parent support interventions are presented.

Declarations and Statements

DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed...... ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ ....

Date......... 28/10/2021 ....

STATEMENT ONE

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references and a bibliography is appended.

Signed..... ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ ....

Date......... 28/10/2021 ....

STATEMENT TWO

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available online in the University's Open Access Repository and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

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STATEMENT THREE

This thesis has been produced following the University's ethical procedures and ethical approval was granted for the research.

Signed... ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ ....

Date......... 28/10/2021 ....

Publications

Articles (peer reviewed)

Newport, R. A., Knight, C. J., & Love, T. D. (2020). The youth football journey: Parents' experiences and recommendations for support. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise, and Health*. http://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2020.1833966

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Newport, R. A., Knight, C. J., & Love, T. D. (2020, December). *Practitioner-researcher reflections on three-years of delivering support to parents in youth academy football*. 5 slides in 5 minutes oral presentation at BPS Division of Sport and Exercise Psychology virtual conference.

Newport, R. A., Knight, C. J., & Love, T. D. (2020, July). *Recommendations for delivering support programmes to parents based upon three years of development*. Oral presentation at the Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise conference, Durham, England. (Conference cancelled due to Covid-19)

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Newport, R. A. (2019, September). Being an Academy Parent booklet (Revised).

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1   **Chapter One: Introduction**

2   Parents[1] are a vital part of youth sport (Dorsch, 2018; Elliott et al., 2018), no

3   more so than within academy football, where players often dedicate their childhood

4   from eight to 18 years old to football. Despite their dedication, the success rate of

5   academy players becoming a professional footballer is 0.012% (Calvin, 2017, 2018).

6   Even with this very small success rate, boys who are chosen to be part of a football

7   academy commit to daily training sessions, as well as weekly matches throughout

8   the season. The pressures, demands, and commitments that arise as a result of

9   involvement in academy football is substantial (Champ et al., 2020a; Clarke et al.,

10   2018; Mills et al., 2012; Sagar et al., 2010). However, these stressors and demands

11   are not only experienced by players.

12   Due to children being involved in academy football from such a young age,

13   many of the demands and pressures are shared with their parents (Harwood et al.,

14   2010). In addition, parents also experience their own demands and sacrifices (Clarke

15   & Harwood, 2014). For instance, a number of studies have found that when

16   supporting their child, parents experience a plethora of stressors relating to

17   competition, organisational, and developmental concerns (e.g., Burgess et al., 2016;

18   Harwood & Knight, 2009a, 2009b; Harwood et al., 2019; Lienhart et al., 2019). It

19   has been recognised that the types of stressors that parents experience may change

20   over the course of their child's sporting involvement (Harwood et al., 2010;

21   Harwood & Knight, 2009a), although further studies considering such changes are

22   needed (Knight, 2019).

23   While they attempt to manage the aforementioned demands and stressors,

24   parents must also fulfil numerous important roles within the youth sport journey

25   (Gledhill & Harwood, 2014; Holt & Dunn, 2004). For instance, parents provide

26   financial and logistical support to enable children to participate (Harwood et al.,

27   2010) and offer emotional support throughout competitions (Elliott & Drummond,

28   2017). Additionally, parents must develop relationships with coaches and other

29   parents, and manage their emotions when watching their children compete (Hayward

30   et al., 2017; Pynn et al., 2019). The extent to which parents 'appropriately' carry out

31   these roles may impact upon whether children achieve their sporting potential, have

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[1] Throughout this thesis, the term 'parents' is used to refer to all those who fulfil the parental role, including guardians, carers, and step-parents

32   a positive psychosocial experience, and experience positive developmental outcomes

33   (Harwood & Knight, 2015).

34   Numerous personal, relational, and environmental or socio-cultural factors

35   influence how parents fulfil the aforementioned roles. For instance, at a personal

36   level, parents' concerns regarding their own behaviour can lead them to regulate the

37   manner in which they are involved in their child's sport (Knight et al., 2016). At a

38   relational level, the quality of the relationship that parents have with their child's

39   coach, as well as other parents, may influence the comments they make, the

40   questions they ask, and their active engagement in coaching their own child (e.g.,

41   Clarke & Harwood, 2014). Finally, cultural ideals perpetuated by specific sports or

42   the broader youth sport culture may influence parents' sideline comments and

43   behaviours (Dorsch et al., 2015a; McMahon & Penney, 2014). Clearly, parental

44   involvement in youth sport is complex and understanding parents' experiences is

45   critical to ensure appropriate guidance and support can be provided to parents

46   (Harwood & Knight, 2016).

47   Recognising the importance of parents' accessing support and guidance, has

48   led in recent years to a growing number of parent education programmes being

49   developed and evaluated within the scientific literature (Azimi & Tamminen, 2020;

50   Dorsch et al., 2017; Richards & Winter, 2013; Tamminen et al., 2020; Thrower et

51   al., 2017, 2019; Vincent & Christensen, 2015). These parent education programmes

52   have included a face-to-face parent education programme delivered in British

53   gymnastics (Richards & Winter, 2013), a face-to-face collaborative education

54   session delivered to US soccer parents (Vincent & Christensen, 2015), the

55   combination of a face-to-face education session and a guide delivered to US soccer

56   parents (Dorsch et al., 2017), a face-to-face parent education series delivered in

57   British tennis (Thrower et al., 2017), an online parent education programme

58   delivered to British tennis parents (Thrower et al., 2019), a face-to-face educational

59   workshop combined with reflective tasks delivered to Canadian soccer and hockey

60   parents (Azimi &Tamminen, 2020), and an online parent education programme

61   delivered in Canadian hockey (Tamminen et al., 2020).

62   This growth in support for parents is positive, demonstrating an increasing

63   commitment to help enhance the involvement of parents in their children's sporting

64   journeys. However, there are a number of issues with the current evidence base.

65   First, there has been little consideration of parents' specific support needs within

66   these programmes, specifically as they change over time (Knight, 2019). That is,

67   these programmes have been based on the scientific evidence regarding positive

68   parental involvement (e.g., Azimi & Tamminen, 2020; Dorsch et al., 2017;

69   Tamminen et al., 2020), but the vast majority of these do not account for parents'

70   experiences or support requirements. One exception is that by Thrower and

71   colleagues (2017, 2019) who based their tennis parent education programme on an

72   earlier study in which they identified parents' support needs. Specifically, they

73   identified during childhood/mini-tennis, parents need support to appreciate the

74   financial and time demands they will encounter, understand the benefits of engaging

75   in tennis, develop a basic understanding of the sport of tennis, and how to provide

76   organisational, developmental, and competition support to their child. These needs

77   changed as children moved into early adolescence, with parents subsequently

78   requiring information on supporting their child to transition through different levels,

79   as well as understanding the impact of growth on performance and how to balance

80   education and make career choices. Reinforcing how parents' needs change over

81   time, parents, coaches, and administrators in the US suggested that parents require

82   education on developmentally appropriate parenting approaches as well as specific

83   technical knowledge (Dorsch et al., 2019).

84   Second, all programmes to-date have been positioned as education

85   programmes, which were designed to teach parents how to better support their

86   children and display more desirable behaviours at competitions. However, this

87   education approach often emphasises that parents are the problem (Pankhurst &

88   Collins, 2013), where the demands and stressors experienced by parents are often

89   disregarded (Harwood et al., 2019; Lienhart et al., 2019). As such, simply teaching

90   them how to change their behaviour may be ineffective in the face of such demands.

91   Rather, a more humanistic supportive approach, where parents are supported rather

92   than educated, encourages parents to reflect and change their own behaviour through

93   empowerment.

94   Finally, the education approach does not take into consideration the impact

95   the sports environment and culture may have on parents' involvement and their

96   experiences (Knight, 2019; Knight & Newport, 2020). For instance, parents are often

97   socialised in to the youth sport environment and rely on cultural expectations to

98   guide their behaviour (Clarke & Harwood, 2014; Dorsch et al., 2009). This often

99   means they are "living the part of the athlete parent" as guided by the organisational

100   culture (McMahon & Penney, 2014, p167). Consequently, when seeking to provide

101   support to parents, understanding how the culture is both impacting on their

102   behaviours and support needs, as well as considering how changes to the culture may

103   enhance parents' involvement is needed.

104   Given the aforementioned limitations with parent support programmes, the

105   aims of the current thesis were two-fold; firstly, to gain an in-depth understanding of

106   the experiences of academy football parents and identify support that may be

107   beneficial throughout their child's football journey, and; secondly, to develop,

108   implement, and evaluate programmes of support for the parents of academy

109   footballers. To address this aim, this thesis details a two-cycle action research study,

110   conducted over a period of three years, in which I sought to implement and evaluate

111   two parent support programmes.

1.1. Thesis Structure

113   Following this initial introductory chapter, chapter two comprises a

114   comprehensive overview of the literature relating to supporting parents within sport.

115   The literature review provides an overview of the sport parent literature, organised to

116   align with the six postulates of sport parenting expertise (Harwood & Knight, 2015).

117   Next a review of the education and support needs of parents is provided, followed by

118   an overview of current examples of education provided to parents within sport.

119   Finally, the literature review concludes with a review of the youth football culture

120   and specific consideration of how cultural changes may be incorporated within

121   parent support programmes.

122   Chapter three details the action research methodology used throughout this

123   thesis, along with the philosophical underpinnings, my positionality, and details of

124   the reflective approach used. The action research methodology was guided by

125   McNiff and Whitehead's (2006) action-reflection cycle and O'Leary's (2017)

126   multiple cycles of action research. The action research cycles within this thesis were

127   adapted from an observation phase to incorporate an in-depth exploration and

128   understanding of the parent experience as the first phase, which is detailed in chapter

129   four.

130   Specifically, chapter four comprises the initial exploration and reflection

131   phases of the first action research cycle, conducted through a case study of one

132   football academy. Based on the identified parent journey, combined with personal

133   and collaborative reflections, recommendations for appropriate parent support were

134   developed. Specifically, it was identified that parents would benefit from having

135   access to a support programme that was developmentally appropriate and delivered

136   using a flexible approach alongside a series of cultural changes.

137   Drawing on the outcome of chapter four, chapter five details the planning

138   action, action, evaluation, and reflective phases of action research cycle one. A six-

139   session parent support programme combined with a series of cultural changes was

140   developed, implemented, and evaluated. This parent support programme was

141   evaluated using interviews, an online reflective survey, informal conversations,

142   observations, fieldwork, and my reflexive diary. Overall, chapter five highlights the

143   benefits that parents gained from attending the parent support sessions and the

144   challenges that were experienced during delivery. In addition, consideration is given

145   to the impact of the cultural changes.

146   Consequently, based upon the learning within the first action research cycle,

147   a second intervention was developed, as detailed in chapter six. This second

148   intervention comprised the delivery of a 90-minute parent support session and a

149   booklet, plus further cultural changes. This parent support programme was evaluated

150   using reflective informal conversations, observations, fieldwork, my reflexive diary,

151   and an online reflective survey. Chapter six provides an evaluation of the parent

152   support programme, which comprised a support session, booklet, and cultural

153   changes.

154   Drawing together the findings from the earlier chapters and drawing the

155   action research cycles to a close, chapter seven comprises a general discussion which

156   is specifically focused on providing suggestions for future work with parents.

157   Particularly, the two action research cycles are considered in relation to the literature

158   detailed in chapter two, along with my personal reflections on the challenges and

159   learnings from delivering to parents within academy football. Study limitations,

160   applied implications, and future research directions for practitioners, coaches, and

161   sport organisations are also provided.

162   **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

163   **2.1 Introduction**

164   Parenting within organised sport settings is complex and there is a large

165   volume of research exploring the roles, experiences, behaviours, and involvement of

166   parents as they relate to the development of youth athletes (Clarke & Harwood,

167   2014; Gould et al., 2006; Harwood et al., 2019; Knight et al., 2016b; Lauer et al.,

168   2010a; Pynn et al., 2019; Wuerth et al., 2004).

169   *2.1.1 Theories Used to Understand Parental Involvement in Sport*

170   In seeking to unpack the influence parents have within sport, and particularly

171   to understand the consequences of different behaviours and types of involvement, a

172   number of different theories have been used. These theories include family system

173   theory (Bowen, 2004; Minuchin, 1974), attachment theory (Bowlby, 2005),

174   competence motivation theory (Harter, 1978), expectancy value theory (Eccles et al.,

175   1983, 1984), self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), and achievement goal

176   theory (Nicholls, 1984).

177   **2.1.1.1 Family System Theory.** Some of the earliest literature regarding

178   parental involvement in sport (Hellstedt, 1987) was shaped by family system theory,

179   which focuses upon understanding individuals within the family unit (Minuchin,

180   1974). Drawing on this theory, parental involvement in sport can be considered

181   based on the concept of boundaries (Rouquette et al., 2020). These boundaries are

182   particularly important when evaluating family functioning, as they define the

183   communication and concern among family members (Minuchin, 1974). Boundaries

184   have been defined on a continuum from enmeshment to disengagement. When

185   parents are enmeshed with their children they diffuse boundaries and a blurring of

186   the role of parents and children can exist, whereas, disengaged parents provide

187   inappropriately rigid boundaries. For most families, there are clear boundaries and

188   the family unit functions in the middle of this continuum. However, it has been

189   suggested that, within sport, issues of both enmeshment and disengagement may be

190   present (Hellstedt, 1987). Specifically, it is suggested that parents range from under-

191   involved, where there is a lack of emotional, financial, and tangible support provided

192   from parents (i.e., disengaged) to overinvolved, whereby parents are excessively

193   involved within their child's sport (enmeshed). Perhaps unsurprisingly, it is

194   suggested based on family systems theory, that optimal parental involvement occurs

195 when parents sit in the middle of these two, providing a moderate amount of

196 involvement.

197   **2.1.1.2 Attachment Theory.** Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973, 1980, 1982)

198 proposes that young children are biologically predisposed to maintain proximity to

199 another clearly identified individual who is perceived to be better able to cope with

200 the world and will keep them safe. The biological function of this close proximity to

201 this familiar individual is for protection. From birth, having the familiar individual

202 within easy access means that they are known to be ready and willing to protect the

203 child or come to their aid in an emergency (Bowlby, 1982). Thus, a secure

204 attachment to that familiar individual is created when the individual reflects this

205 function through the maintenance of close proximity, creates a safe-haven (the

206 individual protects the child from threats), and is a secure base (the individual is

207 considered a base in which the child can explore their environment; Bowlby, 1973,

208 2005). When the parent and child are securely attached to each other, the parent

209 provides sensitivity, responsiveness, and availability to their child's needs (Bowlby,

210 2005).

211   Considering attachment in the context of sport it was found that when

212 athletes had an insecure attachment to their parents it was negatively related to their

213 basic need satisfaction (Felton & Jowett, 2013). Thus, the quality of the attachment

214 that athletes have with their parents, beyond early childhood, influences their basic

215 psychological need satisfaction and overall well-being. Beyond influencing their

216 basic psychological need satisfaction, a secure attachment with their parent(s) can

217 also impact on athletes' ability to develop friendships with their peers and teammates

218 (Carr, 2009a, 2009b). Plus, parent-child attachment has been found to benefit

219 athletes' positive self-esteem through athletes' perception that their parents will

220 provide social support to them, especially emotional support (Kang et al., 2015).

221   **2.1.1.3 Competence Motivation Theory.** Parents involvement within sport

222 can also impact on their child's motivation and as a consequence parents'

223 involvement within sport has been given consideration using motivation-related

224 theories (Rouquette et al., 2020). One of the motivation theories used to understand

225 parents' involvement is Harter's competence motivation theory (1978). Competence

226 motivation theory (1978) suggests that children require parents to provide positive

227 reinforcement during their mastery attempts to subsequently experience affective

228 outcomes, perceived competence, and to maintain their motivation to persist. Within

229   sport this was supported by the finding that when children found their parents'

230   attitudes and behaviours to be more supportive they reported greater sport

231   enjoyment, higher perceived competence, and a higher level of intrinsic motivation

232   (Babkes & Weiss, 1999). Specifically, children experienced more enjoyment along

233   with a higher level of perceived competence and intrinsic motivation when they

234   experienced less pressure from their father to perform and increased levels of

235   maternal support. In a similar manner it was found that eight elite youth canoeists

236   who identified that cheering and encouragement from parents, when appropriately

237   timed, had a positive impact on their experience (Knight et al., 2016b). In addition,

238   through examination of the parent-child relationship the continuous interactions that

239   occur can create feelings of warmth and positive affect within the child (Dorsch et

240   al., 2016).

241   **2.1.1.4 Expectancy Value Theory.** Another motivation theory to be used to

242   understand parents' involvement within sport is Eccles and colleagues' expectancy-

243   value theory of achievement (Eccles et al., 1983, 1984). This theory describes factors

244   influencing children's expectations for success and the value they place on a given

245   task. Children's expectations for success are defined based upon their belief in their

246   ability and the perceived difficulty of the specific task/sport. The value children

247   place on a given task is a combination of four elements; their intrinsic value

248   (enjoyment gained), utility value (usefulness for the future), attainment value (desire

249   to do well), and cost of engagement (potential negative consequences; Wigfield &

250   Eccles, 1992). Expectancies and values have been shown to influence children's

251   performance in achievement behaviours, persistence at these behaviours, and task

252   choice (i.e., sport chosen to engage in; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). This means that

253   parents' beliefs and values, communicated through their verbal and non-verbal

254   behaviours, can positively impact upon children's motivation and sporting outcome

255   (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Specifically relating to parental involvement in sport, it

256   has been found that parents' competence and value beliefs were associated with

257   children's beliefs and participation in sport (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005).

258   Expanding upon this to consider the wider social context when understanding

259   the effect of family on children's motivation and ability perceptions, it has been

260   suggested that parents are role models, interpreters, and providers of experiences

261   (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). However, this model of parental involvement in sport

262   has been criticised for only considering the personal characteristics of gender,

263   occupation, and income, when there are potentially many more individual and

264   environmental factors that are influential on parents' involvement (Knight et al.,

265   2016a). As such it has been suggested that parental involvement within sport can be

266   grouped in to supporter, provider, coach, and administrator (Knight et al., 2016a).

267   The role of supporter offers athletes emotional support and general encouragement.

268   The provider role offers opportunities for their children to participate in sport. The

269   role of coach can facilitate an opportunity to provide children with quality coaching,

270   while also spending time with them. Finally, the role of administrator is where

271   parents are involved in running and organising their children's sporting competitions

272   potentially through a formal volunteer role. Parents may take on one or two of these

273   roles while being involved in their child's sport.

274   **2.1.1.5 Self-determination Theory.** A third motivation theory used to

275   understand and examine the consequences of parental involvement within sport is

276   self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b, 2017). Self-determination

277   theory is underpinned by a perception that active organisms (i.e., people) have a

278   tendency for growth, engagement, and wellness (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b, 2017).

279   The theory critically considers the impact of intrinsic and individual development

280   within social contexts that facilitates motivation, social integration, and well-being.

281   Specifically, self-determination theory proposes that social contexts that support a

282   child's basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness will

283   positively influence intrinsic motivation and growth, enabling children's capacity to

284   fully function (Ryan & Deci, 2017). As key members of the social environment,

285   parents play an important role in helping to satisfy the children's basic needs – both

286   within and beyond sport.

287   Research that has considered self-determination theory in relation to parental

288   involvement in sport, have shown that if athletes have a more positive relationship

289   with their parents then it will be associated with a higher level of self-determined

290   motivation (Ullrich-French & Smith, 2006). Further exploring the impact of parental

291   involvement it has been found that autonomy-supportive behaviour from parents is

292   positively related to athletes level of self-determined motivation (Amorose et al.,

293   2016; Gagné et al., 2003). Plus it has been found that children of parents who display

294   moderate involvement reported a higher level of basic psychological need

295   satisfaction, in particular for competence and relatedness (Lienhart et al., 2020).

296   Therefore, for athletes to have a high level of self-determined motivation it has been

297   recommended that there is a positive parent-child relationship, parents display

298   autonomy-supportive behaviour, and are moderately involved.

299   **2.1.1.6 Achievement Goal Theory.** Finally, achievement goal theory

300   (Nicholls, 1984; Elliot & Hulleman, 2018) has been consistently adopted as a theory

301   to understand the consequences of parental involvement in sport. Specifically,

302   drawing upon this theory, researchers (Biddle et al., 2003; Keegan et al., 2009;

303   Weltevreden et al., 2018) have sought to understand the impact that parents'

304   achievement goals and the motivational climate they create can influence a variety of

305   children's psychosocial outcomes. Within achievement goal theory, there are two

306   types of goals; task/mastery and ego/performance goals (Elliot & Hulleman, 2018).

307   Task/mastery goals have been conceptualised as those where an individual is trying

308   to master a task or improve over time to develop their ability. On the other hand,

309   ego/performance goals were conceptualised as trying to do better than others to

310   demonstrate their ability in comparison to others.

311   Those who have a significant role within children's development, in

312   particular parents, have an important role within the development of children's task

313   or ego goals (Ames & Archer, 1988; Biddle et al., 2003). It has been found that

314   children's goal orientations are often consistent with the goal orientations of their

315   parents (Biddle et al., 2003). For example, if parents are ego-involved then it is likely

316   that they will promote ego-involvement to their child and their child will focus on

317   performance outcomes rather than mastering a skill. Whereas, if a parent is task-

318   involved then the parents are more likely to encourage the child to be task-involved

319   rather than focusing on the winning or losing.

320   In addition to parents' goal orientations, the motivational climate that parents

321   create – that is whether they create an environment that encourages children to adopt

322   ego or task goals – is influential within sport. Research has also found that parents

323   and coaches can shape the types of goals that athletes develop through the

324   motivational climate that they create (Harwood & Swain, 2001). For instance, the

325   verbal, visual, and material cues that parents demonstrate before, during, and after

326   matches to create the motivational climate can impact on children's level of

327   enjoyment and anxiety (Kaye et al., 2014). Specifically, when parents create a

328   performance climate it can contribute towards a less enjoyable and more anxiety-

329   provoking environment for children (Kaye et al., 2014). However, it has been found

330   that if parents display autonomy-supportive and responsive behaviour towards their

331 children through a mastery climate then this is beneficial and they gain more

332 enjoyment (Weltevreden et al., 2018). Overall, it has been found that there is an

333 interaction between athletes' goal-orientation and the motivational climate created

334 by parents, then the subsequent psych-social outcome of the athlete (Harwood et al.,

335 2015).

336 **2.2 Sport Parenting Expertise**

337 Although the aforementioned theories have provided pertinent insights into

338 different aspects of parental involvement within sport, the disparate nature of the

339 studies was limiting the progression of the field of research. As such, in an attempt to

340 draw the various theories and literature pertaining to parental involvement in sport

341 together, Harwood and Knight (2015) proposed the idea of "sport parenting

342 expertise" (p25). Sport parenting expertise is displayed through the involvement of

343 parents within youth sport that aids children's development, helps them to achieve

344 their potential, and gain a positive psychosocial experience (Harwood & Knight,

345 2015). In order for parents to demonstrate such expertise it was recommended that

346 parents develop a series of personal, relational, and organisational skills. They

347 suggest that these skills are required to successfully execute the requirements of six

348 postulates that underpin sport parenting expertise. These were: 1) select appropriate

349 sporting opportunities and provide the necessary support, 2) understand and apply

350 appropriate parenting styles, 3) manage the emotional demands of competitions, 4)

351 foster healthy relationships with significant others, 5) manage the organisational and

352 developmental demands associated with youth sport, and 6) adapt involvement to the

353 different developmental stages of their child's sporting career.

354 Drawing upon these six postulates, the remainder of this chapter will provide

355 a broad overview of the sport parenting literature with the aim of highlighting the

356 influence of parents on young athletes' sporting journeys, as well as the varying

357 demands and expectations placed on parents. Subsequently, a critical examination of

358 the support required by parents and examples of education and support programmes

359 that have been delivered to parents to help them enhance their involvement within

360 their child's sport will be provided. Finally, recognising the gaps in the existing

361 parent support literature, the chapter will focus on understanding how the culture of

362 football, and sport more widely, may influence parents' involvement, and the

363 potential benefit of making cultural changes to enhance parents' experience.

364   Drawing all the evidence together, this chapter concludes with a detailed overview of

365   the thesis aims.

2.2.1 Selection of Sporting Opportunity and Necessary Social Support

367   The first postulate refers to a parent's ability to provide their child with

368   appropriate sporting opportunities and the necessary support. Parents are responsible

369   for helping children to access appropriate sporting opportunities based upon their

370   child's development, which includes facilitating children's first and subsequent

371   experiences (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). For instance, during early sporting

372   experiences, parents are responsible for enabling their children to sample a variety of

373   sports to facilitate their interest and enjoyment (Côté, 1999). Following these initial

374   sporting opportunities, some children may wish to be supported to specialise in one

375   or two sports (Côté, 1999) or they may wish to continue to engage in a wide range of

376   recreational activities (Knight & Holt, 2014). Parents play an important role in firstly

377   identifying which route their child wants to take (i.e., what activities their children

378   want to participate in) and secondly facilitating engagement in these through the

379   provision of appropriate support (Harwood & Knight, 2015).

380   Parents need to provide children with tangible (i.e., transport, finance, and

381   required kit), informational (i.e., general advice, keeping sport in perspective, and

382   combining sport with education), and emotional support (i.e., encouraging and

383   overcoming a losing streak) to facilitate sport participation (Gould et al., 2006, 2008;

384   Holt & Dunn, 2004; Lauer et al., 2010a, 2010b; Rees & Hardy, 2000; Wolfenden &

385   Holt, 2005). In regard to tangible support, children are financially dependent on their

386   parents for their sporting opportunities, as parents purchase equipment, pay for

387   training opportunities, and incur transportation costs among others (Baxter-Jones &

388   Maffuli, 2003; Kay, 2000). However, it should be noted that there appears to be a

389   relationship between perceptions of parental pressure and parents' financial

390   investment in their child's sport (Dunn et al., 2016). Specifically, data indicated that

391   as the proportion of the family income spent on children's sport increases,

392   perceptions of pressure increase, while sport enjoyment decreases (Dunn et al.,

393   2016). Consequently, although financial investment from parents is needed, it is

394   important for parents to be cognizant of how much they are spending on their

395   children's sport in relation to the family income to minimise any negative impact on

396   their child's experience.

397   With respect to informational support, parents provide information about, for
398   instance, their child's sport, competitions, and education (Holt & Dunn, 2004). Such
399   informational support is important because it shows children that their parents care
400   about them and their involvement in sport (Furusa et al., 2020; Knight et al., 2010).
401   One example of the informational support parents provide is offering feedback to
402   their child following a sporting event (Elliott & Drummond, 2017; Tamminen et al.,
403   2017). Parents often engage in this process with their children believing that it was
404   important for their child's performance and demonstrates the qualities of a good
405   parent (Elliott & Drummond, 2015). However, some children have described this
406   process of debriefing and receiving parental feedback as something they have to
407   endure (Tamminen et al., 2017). Additionally, children have indicated that they
408   prefer to only receive technical or tactical advice if their parents are experienced and
409   knowledgeable about their sport (Holt & Dunn, 2004; Knight et al., 2010;
410   Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). Therefore, although parents likely engage in the provision
411   of information with good intentions and a desire to support their child, it could
412   potentially have a detrimental impact on children's experiences and motivation
413   (Elliott & Drummond, 2015, 2017). As such, it has been recommended that parents
414   just provide general information and guidance to their child, leaving specific
415   guidance and information to the coach (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). General
416   information may include; suggestions to help keep sport in perspective, strategies
417   regarding how to combine sport and education, and conversations regarding sporting
418   goals and desires (Elliott et al., 2018; Knight & Holt, 2014; Wolfenden & Holt,
419   2005).
420   Finally, parents also provide emotional support, which includes providing
421   comfort and reassurance to their child when their child is experiencing stress or
422   emotional upset (Holt & Dunn, 2004; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). For instance,
423   emotional support is particularly valuable for children when experiencing injuries,
424   nerves, slumps in performance, and for overcoming a loss of confidence (Rees &
425   Hardy, 2000). Moreover, it is not uncommon for children to experience stress,
426   anxiety or disappointment in the period surrounding competitions/matches (Lewis et
427   al., 2017). Understandably, the receipt of emotional support from parents in such
428   situations is valued by children (Knight et al., 2010, 2011; Knight et al., 2016b).
429   However, children have specific preferences regarding what this emotional support

430   comprises, as well as when and how it is provided (Furusa et al., 2020; Knight et al.,

431   2016b).

432   Before competitions children have indicated that they like their parents to

433   help them mentally prepare for upcoming competitions/matches, in particular

434   helping them to manage their nerves and increasing their confidence (Knight et al.,

435   2010, 2011), as well as encouraging them to take care of their physical preparation

436   (Furusa et al., 2020). However, unless they have the appropriate knowledge and/or

437   experience, children do not want their parents to provide technical or tactical advice

438   (Knight et al., 2011). During competitions children have suggested that emotional

439   support provided through comments focused on effort rather than outcome, team-

440   level encouragement, and positive body-language, was beneficial and desired

441   (Knight et al., 2010, 2011; Knight et al., 2016b). Moreover, children have explained

442   that they would like parents to manage their own emotions so as not to draw

443   attention to themselves or their child, be respectful of the rules, opposition, and

444   referees, and interact positively with other parents and coaches (Knight et al., 2010).

445   Importantly, preferences for parental involvement do differ between children, so it is

446   particularly important that parents understand their child's individual preferences

447   (Furusa et al., 2020; Omli &Wiese-Bjornstal, 2011). Finally, after competitions,

448   children want positive but realistic feedback from their parents to help them to put

449   poor performances in perspective (Knight et al., 2010; Knight et al., 2016a).

450   However, such feedback should be provided when the child has had time to process

451   their performance, receive feedback from their team/coach, and in a private setting

452   (Elliott & Drummond, 2017 Knight et al., 2010, 2011; Omli & LaVoi, 2010;

453   Tamminen et al., 2017). If this feedback or process of debriefing is negative or not

454   provided at an appropriate time it can have a negative impact on children's

455   enjoyment of sport (Elliott & Drummond, 2015, 2017).

456   Overall, the provision of appropriate tangible, informational, and emotional

457   support to children is important because, through the comments parents make, the

458   feedback they provide, and the general behaviours they display, parents

459   communicate their beliefs, expectations, and values pertaining to sport participation

460   (Dorsch et al., 2015b; Fredricks & Eccles, 2004; 2005; Elliott & Drummond, 2017;

461   Knight et al., 2016a; Tamminen et al., 2017). These in turn, influenced children's

462   motivation, anxiety, expectations for success, perceptions of competence, and

463   confidence among others (Knight et al., 2016b; Keegan et al., 2009). Consequently,

464   ensuring that parents understand the types of support they need to provide to their

465   children and tailor this support to align with children's specific preferences and

466   sporting participation is critical (Harwood & Knight, 2015).

467   *2.2.2 Parents Apply an Autonomy-supportive Parenting Style*

468   The second postulate states that parents should create a healthy emotional

469   climate and use a parenting style that meets the needs of their child. Parenting styles

470   are parent's attitudes and values towards the child that creates an emotional climate

471   in which parent's behaviour and interaction with the child is expressed (Darling &

472   Steinberg, 1993). The most commonly recognised typologies of parenting styles

473   were developed by Baumrind (1971a, 1971b, 1978). These three typologies of

474   parenting styles were initially created to depict the level of authority and control that

475   parents expressed over their children (Baumrind, 1971a, 1971b) and were labelled as

476   authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive (Baumrind, 1971a; 1978):

- An authoritarian parenting style is one in which parents set out a definitive
  standard of behaviour for their child and use punitive and forceful measures
  in an attempt to change the child's behaviour to match this standard of
  behaviour. Obedience is favoured and respect for authority is enforced.
  Verbal discussions are not encouraged and there is the belief that the child
  should just accept the parent's perspective as correct.

- Authoritative parenting is where parents will engage in verbal discussion,
  provide reasons for decisions, and value their child's input. Boundaries are
  created for the child, but these are not restrictive or confining for their child's
  exploration. The parent may affirm current behaviour, while also setting out
  guidance for the child on the expectations for future behaviour using a
  combination of reasoning and power to achieve these behaviours.

- A permissive parenting style is a liberal approach where parents are accepting
  of their child's actions, they do not provide punishment, and do not reinforce
  the family rules. There are few demands or expectations as to how the child
  should behave. The child is allowed to behave in a manner of their desire,
  there is no encouragement to obey external rules, and no power is exerted to
  control behaviour. The parent does not provide firm enforcement but will
  encourage the child to be independent and have freedom.

496   These parenting typologies were subsequently expanded to consider bi-

497   dimensional levels of responsiveness and demandingness (Baumrind, 1991).

498   *Responsiveness* refers to the extent that parents provide warmth, are supportive, and

499   are attuned to their children's needs, while *demandingness* refers to the claims that

500   parents make of their children to become integrated within society through behaviour

501   regulation and behavioural expectations based on their development (Baumrind,

502   2005; Maccoby, 1992). As a consequence of considering the bi-directional nature of

503   parenting, four typologies were created: authoritarian (demanding and unresponsive),

504   authoritative (demanding and responsive), permissive (not demanding and

505   responsive), and rejecting and neglecting (not demanding and not responsive;

506   Baumrind, 2005; Baumrind et al., 2010).

507   Although Baumrind's typologies substantially extended understanding of

508   parenting, they have been criticised for not capturing the full extent of the attitudes

509   towards the child and social interactions within the family that create the emotional

510   climate in which parents' behaviours are expressed (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). As

511   such, based upon self-determination theory (Deci, 1975; Ryan & Deci, 2000a,

512   2000b), Grolnick (2003) developed an alternative classification of parenting based

513   upon the degree of behavioural and psychological control used by a parent.

514   Specifically, Grolnick (2003) suggested that there were three dimensions to

515   parenting; autonomy-supportive, involvement, and structure:

516   - Autonomy-supportive was valuing and encouraging children to initiate their

517   own actions, make choices, and be able to problem-solve.

518   - Involvement was the extent to which parents are interested, actively engage

519   in their child's life, and provide the child with resources.

520   - Structure was parents' provision of guidelines, expectations, and boundaries

521   within which they can express themselves and be self-determined.

522   Considering these three dimensions it has been suggested that the optimal type of

523   parenting was an autonomy-supportive approach, where children are involved in

524   discussion, rule setting, and decision making (Grolnick, 2003). As such, high levels

525   of parental involvement are perceived to be beneficial for children, but the positive

526   consequences of this involvement can be undermined by parents expressing high

527   levels of control (Grolnick, 2003). Again, structure can provide children with

528   boundaries in which they know what to expect in response to their behaviours.

529   However, if this structure is combined with control then it can undermine their

530   intrinsic motivation (Grolnick, 2003).

531   When considering parenting styles in the sporting literature, it is generally

532   suggested that an authoritative parenting style or an autonomy-supportive approach

533   was most beneficial (Harwood & Knight, 2015; Pynn et al., 2019). Specifically, it

534   appears that these approaches are associated with improved/enhanced

535   sportspersonship, sport enjoyment, motivation, sport satisfaction, and mastery

536   orientation (Gagné et al., 2003; Holt et al., 2009; Juntumaa et al., 2005; Pynn et al.,

537   2019; Sapieja et al., 2011; Wright et al., 2019). For instance, an authoritative

538   parenting style has been associated with children displaying a higher level of mastery

539   orientated behaviour, reduced levels of task-irrelevant and norm-breaking behaviour,

540   and healthy perfectionism (Juntumaa et al., 2005; Sapieja et al., 2011). In contrast, a

541   negative association between an authoritarian parenting style and adolescent's

542   unhealthy perfectionism has been identified (Sapieja et al., 2011).

543   Further extending the connection between perfectionism and authoritative

544   parenting, recent research suggests that children whose parents adopt an authoritative

545   parenting style and had a moderate level of self-orientated perfectionism, were less

546   likely to encourage children to specialise in sport early than authoritarian parents and

547   those who scored higher in perfectionism (Wright et al., 2019). This avoidance of

548   early sport specialisation was viewed positively because early specialisation is

549   associated with a range of negative outcomes for children (Law et al., 2007; Strachan

550   et al., 2009). Moreover, parents who adopt an autonomy-supportive parenting style

551   have been found to be able to read their children's mood, engage in open two-way

552   conversations with their children, and do not force the direction of children's

553   involvement in sport (Holt et al., 2009; Pynn et al., 2019). This autonomy-support

554   from parents appears to enable children to feel more autonomously motivated and

555   able to make their own sporting choices, as well as feeling more comfortable asking

556   parents for feedback and creating shared goals (Gagné et al., 2003; Holt et al., 2009;

557   Pynn et al., 2019). Given such positive outcomes, encouraging parents to adopt an

558   authoritative or autonomy-supportive approach to parenting appears appropriate.

559   ***2.2.3 Parents Manage the Emotional Demands of Competition***

560   Parents can experience many demands and/or stressors within organised

561   youth sport, particularly leading up to, during, and after competitions (Burgess et al.,

562   2016; Harwood & Knight, 2009a, 2009b; Harwood et al., 2019; Hayward et al.,

563   2017; Lienhart et al., 2019). For instance, before competitions parents experience

564   stressors associated with their child's psychological readiness for a game/match, the

565   extent to which children are experiencing pre-competition anxiety, their child's

566   physical and nutritional preparation, their child's performance expectations, and the

567   logistics of getting them to the competition (Burgess et al., 2016; Harwood &

568   Knight, 2009b; Hayward et al., 2017). During competitions parents have reported

569   numerous stressors arising from simply watching their child compete, including

570   witnessing or worrying about poor behaviour from their child, seeing their child be

571   disappointed or underperform, perceiving poor sportspersonship from opponents, or

572   experiencing unfair or unjust calls from referees or coaches. Additionally, witnessing

573   inappropriate behaviour from, or having negative interactions with, other parents can

574   also be a source of stress for parents during competitions (Harwood et al., 2010;

575   Harwood & Knight, 2009a, 2009b; Harwood et al., 2019; Knight & Holt, 2013a).

576   After competitions parents can experience stressors arising from trying to help their

577   child manage their emotions following a loss or poor performance as well as

578   physically recover. Additionally, seeing and hearing inappropriate or negative

579   comments and behaviour from other parents and coaches can be an issue after

580   competitions (Harwood & Knight, 2009b; Hayward et al., 2017).

581   When parents experience these stressors and situations, it can result in

582   numerous, usually negative, emotions such as anxiety, anger, and frustration

583   (Burgess et al., 2016; Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2008; Harwood et al., 2010; Hayward

584   et al., 2017; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). For instance, parents have reported

585   experiencing anger and frustration when watching their child compete if the

586   behaviours of referees, coaches, athletes, opponents, and other parents were seen as

587   unjust, uncaring, or incompetent (Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2008; Knight & Holt,

588   2013a; Omli & LaVoi, 2012; Pynn et al., 2019; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). Parents

589   have also reported feelings of boredom and frustration arising from the long duration

590   of competitions, along with becoming emotionally involved and affected by critical

591   time points within competitions (such as, the last minutes of a match or when scores

592   are close; Burgess et al., 2016; Holt et al., 2008). Moreover, due to the relationship

593   that exists between parents and children, parents often feel high levels of empathy

594   for their children and subsequently share the emotions their children experience and

595   display. Consequently, parents may experience disappointment and enjoyment along

596   with their children (Dorsch et al., 2009; Knight & Holt, 2013a, Holt et al., 2008).

597   The emotions parents experience at competitions can influence how they

598   respond to and support their children (Elliott & Drummond, 2017; Holt et al., 2008;

599   Knight et al., 2011). For instance, based on interviews with parents, as well as

600   substantial hours of observations of parents' behaviour, Holt et al. (2008) developed

601   a grounded theory of parents' involvement at youth soccer matches. They found that

602   parents' involvement ranged on a continuum from supportive to derogatory

603   comments with the types of comments parents made being influenced by, among

604   others, the empathy they felt for their child and the emotional intensity of the

605   situation. Furthermore, if parents experience negative emotions, and are unable to

606   appropriately manage these when watching their child compete, it can result in them

607   displaying anti-social behaviour, increasing children's perceptions of pressure, and

608   detrimentally affect the relationship that parents and children have with their coach

609   (Lauer et al., 2010a, 2010b; Teques et al., 2018).

610   Clearly, even despite parents' best intentions to be supportive, if they are

611   unable to manage the emotional demands of competition it can result in

612   inappropriate involvement or behaviours (Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2008; Holt et al.,

613   2008; Omli & LaVoi, 2012). This can subsequently impact on children's enjoyment

614   and quality of their sporting experience (e.g., Harwood & Knight, 2015; Knight &

615   Holt, 2013b; Pynn et al., 2019). As such, the development of effective coping and

616   emotional regulation strategies is important (Hayward et al., 2017). In an attempt to

617   manage such emotional demands and provide optimal support to children at

618   competitions, parents have developed various coping strategies, for instance

619   monitoring their own emotions, gaining support from other parents, and normalising

620   their experiences (Burgess et al., 2016; Dorsch et al., 2009; Knight & Holt, 2013a;

621   Leinhart et al., 2019; Pynn et al., 2019). Additionally, parents also explain that they

622   use strategies such as emotional release, self-talk, breath control, learning from

623   others, and avoidance/distraction (Burgess et al., 2016; Hayward et al., 2017;

624   Lienhart et al., 2019). Unfortunately however, the efficacy of such strategies is

625   relatively unknown (Hayward et al., 2017) and parents are often reliant upon trial

626   and error to identify strategies that may be useful (Burgess et al., 2016). As such,

627   providing parents with guidance regarding how to manage the emotional demands of

628   competitions and how to behave in an appropriate manner during competitions may

629   be beneficial (Bowker et al., 2009; Knight & Holt, 2013a, 2013b; Lienhart et al.,

630   2019).

631   *2.2.4 Maintain Healthy Relationships within the Sporting Environment*

632   Another important skill required by parents when supporting their children in

633   sport is to create and maintain healthy relationships within their children's support

634   network (Harwood & Knight, 2015), namely their child's coach(es) and other

635   parents. A key factor underpinning the formation of such healthy relationships is

636   open and honest communication, not least because it ensures that all parties can

637   share important sport specific and general information (Jowett & Timson-Katchis,

638   2005; Wall et al., 2019). For instance, in the context of parent-coach relationships,

639   when coaches share information with parents it can help them to understand their

640   child's sporting experience, create an appropriate emotional climate, and provide

641   optimal support (Gould et al., 2016; Knight & Holt, 2013a, 2013b, 2014).

642   Meanwhile, coaches can also benefit from enhanced communication with parents as

643   parents have greater knowledge of the child and can inform the coach of the child's

644   psychological and physical well-being (Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005). This

645   insight and knowledge from parents can help coaches to provide an appropriately

646   tailored approach, guidance, and training sessions (Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005).

647   When good quality relationships exist between coaches and parents it can also

648   improve the coach-athlete relationship because parents can reinforce information

649   provided to athletes from coaches, athletes recognise that their parents trust their

650   coach and thus are more likely to follow their ideas and suggestions, and parents are

651   also likely to increase the opportunities they provide for their child to engage with

652   the coach (Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Smoll et al., 2011; Wolfenden & Holt,

653   2005).

654   From the parents' perspective, maintaining a healthy relationship with

655   coaches is not easy, particularly in environments such as football academies where

656   communication is often limited and parents are expected to hand over the

657   responsibility of their child's development to the coach (Clarke & Harwood, 2014).

658   As such, coaches are often reported as a source of stress for parents, in particular if

659   there is a lack of feedback, poor quality communication, or limited advice provided

660   to parents (Harwood et al., 2010; Harwood et al., 2019; Harwood & Knight, 2009a).

661   Similarly, coaches have also indicated that parents are a source of stress for them

662   (Gould et al., 2016; Knight & Harwood, 2009). Coaches report that parents may

663   cause them stress if they are too active in their child's sporting lives, question the

664   coach, or expect coaches to do too much for their child (Knight & Harwood, 2009).

665   In addition, parents' perceptions of the coach, parents' understanding of their child's

666   sport, being negative and critical, or over emphasising winning/performance can also

667   cause coaches to experience stress (Gould et al., 2006, 2008; Gould et al., 2016;

668   Knight & Harwood, 2009). In fact, all members of the parent-athlete-coach triad

669   have indicated that they can, at times, feel concerned about their interactions with,

670   and reaction of, other members of the support network. Consequently, parents,

671   coaches, and athletes have indicated that they may choose to avoid each other to

672   minimise these concerns, which can actually exacerbate any problems within

673   relationships (Hayward et al., 2017).

674   In addition to developing healthy relationships with the coach, it is also

675   beneficial for parents to develop supportive relationships with other parents, not least

676   because this will increase opportunities for parents to socialise with other parents and

677   create friendships (Dorsch et al., 2009; Knight & Holt, 2013a, 2013b). By

678   developing these relationships, parents are then able to turn to other parents for

679   information, advice, and support, as well as share specific tasks such as transporting

680   children to training and competitions (Knight & Holt, 2013b; Lienhart et al., 2019).

681   Having the opportunity to socialise, share concerns, and gain support from other

682   parents can help to reduce the demands that parents experience, as well as increasing

683   their enjoyment of supporting their child within sport (Knight & Holt, 2013a,

684   2013b).

685   Unfortunately, however, relationships between parents are not always

686   positive (Holt et al., 2008) and witnessing negative behaviours of other parents or

687   having negative interactions can have a detrimental impact on parents' involvement,

688   experience, and the support they provide to their own child (Knight et al.,2016a). For

689   instance, when the opposing teams begin to become loud and cheer in a negative

690   way, parents can find it hard not to get involved and at times let this behaviour

691   negatively influence their own behaviour (Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2008; Knight &

692   Holt, 2013a; Omli & LaVoi, 2012; Pynn et al., 2019). Similarly, other parents can be

693   a source of stress for parents due to their inappropriate comments, interference, or

694   gossiping, particularly at competitions (Harwood & Knight, 2009b; Harwood et al.,

695   2019). Parents shared that they have to implement coping mechanisms, such as

696   avoiding parents who engage in negative behaviour, in order to maintain a healthy

697   relationship with other parents (Harwood et al., 2019; Lienhart et al., 2019).

698   *2.2.5 Manage the Organisational and Developmental Demands*

699   Beyond the demands associated with competitions, parents also have to

700   manage a range of organisational and developmental demands and stressors

701   (Harwood & Knight, 2015). Organisational stressors within sport have been defined

702   as the environmental demands relating to the organisation in which the individual is

703   engaging (Fletcher et al., 2006). These organisational stressors contain five key

704   dimensions: factors intrinsic to the sport, roles in the sports organisation, sport

705   relationships and interpersonal demands, financial issues, selection procedures, and

706   organisational structure and climate of the sport (Fletcher et al., 2012; Woodman &

707   Hardy, 2001). Specifically for youth sport parents organisational demands include:

708   financial demands, time commitment, logistics, lack of family time, disproportionate

709   amount of time spent with one child, lack of information from governing bodies,

710   scheduling, communication, quality of coaching and training, negative consequences

711   for career, impact on social/personal life, relationship with coach, and lack of

712   recognition and support (Burgess et al., 2016; Harwood & Knight, 2009a, 2009b;

713   Harwood et al., 2010; Harwood et al., 2019; Lienhart et al., 2019). The financial

714   demand of youth sport is often the most prominent stressor for parents, arising from

715   the cost of coaching, tournaments, and travel (Harwood et al., 2019; Kay, 2000).

716   This financial burden can result in other children having to go without (Harwood et

717   al., 2010) and have a negative impact on children's enjoyment and commitment

718   (Dunn et al., 2016).

719   Beyond organisational demands, parents have also reported experiencing a

720   range of developmental stressors arising from their child's sporting involvement

721   (Harwood & Knight, 2009b). Such developmental demands include concerns

722   relating to their child's development and progress, such as their child's education,

723   child's behaviour, child's well-being and happiness, sporting development, holistic

724   development, motivation, social interactions, opportunities to engage in other sports,

725   future transitions, and future career (Burgess et al., 2016; Harwood & Knight, 2009a,

726   2009b; Harwood et al., 2019; Lienhart et al., 2019). The most frequently mentioned

727   developmental stressors are usually concerns related to a child's progress in sport,

728   including selection pressures, progression in relation to peers, competitive rating,

729   and effort in training (Harwood et al., 2019). Within football academies, parents

730   have the added demand of the fear that their son could be released in an insensitive

731   manner with little communication or explanation (Harwood et al., 2010).

732   Parents often find managing the organisational and developmental demands

733   of youth sport challenging, resulting in them experiencing stress (Lienhart et al.,

734   2019). The stress caused by the organisational and developmental demands can

735   potentially lead to a negative impact on parents' behaviour and the support they are

736   able to provide to their children (Harwood et al., 2019). For instance, parents who

737   experience a greater number of stressors often displayed more negative parenting

738   behaviours, such as higher levels of punishment, or punitive actions (Deater-

739   Deckard, 1998; Rodgers 1998), whereas, those who experienced lower levels of

740   stress and higher levels of social support responded to their children in a more

741   positive manner (Respler-Herman et al., 2012). Consequently, developing and

742   implementing strategies to manage organisational and developmental

743   demands/stressors is pertinent.

744   Research has indicated that parents draw upon a range of strategies in an

745   attempt to manage such demands. Such strategies are often developed based on their

746   own experiences, experiences of other parents, and a process of trial and error

747   (Burgess et al., 2016; Lienhart et al., 2019). To manage the organisational stressors,

748   parents have indicated using time management strategies such as sharing

749   commitments with partners or scheduling time with other family members (Harwood

750   et al., 2019). Meanwhile, to cope with developmental stressors, parents seek

751   information from the youth sport environment, their child, sport science and medical

752   professionals, other parents, and by doing their own research to enhance their

753   understanding (Harwood et al., 2019; Lienhart et al., 2019; Knight & Holt, 2013b).

754   Unfortunately, implementing such strategies is not always possible. For instance,

755   parents report that working together as a team with their spouse and extended family

756   members enables them to provide the necessary support to their children and reduce

757   the stressors they experienced (Furusa et al., 2020; Knight & Holt, 2013b). However,

758   for single parent families and those without extended family support this is not an

759   option and thus parents in these situations can find it particularly challenging to meet

760   their child's sporting needs (Furusa et al., 2020). Similarly, if parents have other

761   children, extensive work commitments, or a lack of time/interest to commit to

762   learning about their child's sport, searching for information, or developing

763   relationships with others, their coping strategies may be more limited (Furusa et al.,

764   2020; Knight et al., 2016; Leinhart et al., 2019).

765   ***2.2.6 Adapt Involvement and Support to their Child's Development***

766   Over time, as children develop, their sporting experiences and needs change.

767   As a result, the sixth postulate of sport parenting expertise is that parents should

768   adapt and provide developmentally appropriate support for their child as they go

769   through the sporting journey (Harwood & Knight, 2015; Dorsch, 2018). As indicated

770   above, parents fulfil a range of important roles in their children's sporting lives.

771   However, these are not fixed throughout a child's sporting involvement because

772   participation within sport occurs over many years and is a journey shared between

773   the child and parent (Knight & Holt, 2014). Rather, parents' experiences and the

774   support they are required to provide to their child changes over time (Bloom, 1985;

775   Côté, 1999; Lally & Kerr, 2008; Wuerth et al., 2004; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

776   Overall, the extent to which parents are able to adapt their support and involvement

777   to the developmental changes and needs of their child largely influences the

778   appropriateness of the support they provide (Knight & Holt, 2014).

779   During children's initial years (approximately from the ages of 6 to 13 years)

780   in sport (named initiation stage by Bloom, 1985; Wylleman & Rosier, 2016, and

781   sampling phase by Côté, 1999), parents are the most influential person in their

782   child's sporting life. Parents are responsible for providing children with access to a

783   variety of different sporting opportunities, with an emphasis on fun and enjoyment

784   (Côté, 1999). Within this initial stage, parents provide the majority of the tangible,

785   informational, and emotional support to their child (Keegan et al., 2009; Lauer et al.,

786   2010b). For instance, parents transport children to training, facilitate practice through

787   encouragement, and engage with them in play at home (Keegan et al., 2014).

788   Accordingly, children's perceptions of parents' supportive involvement during this

789   stage are associated with their enjoyment, self-esteem, intrinsic motivation, and

790   positive parent-child relationship (Dorsch et al., 2016). Whereas, young children's

791   perceptions of pressure from their parents are linked to a fear of failure, anxiety,

792   conflict within the parent-child relationship, and burnout during this early stage

793   (Dorsch et al., 2016).

794   As children progress to around the ages of 13 to 15 years they often move

795   into the next stage of sporting development (named development stage by Bloom,

796   1985; Wylleman & Rosier, 2016; and specialisation phase by Côté, 1999). At this

797   point, parents are involved in the process of recognising a talent in their child and

798   supporting them to specialise in one or two sports. During this specialisation stage,

799   parents remain an important source of informational support, for instance parents are

800   required to emphasise to their child the importance of education and achieving

801   within their chosen sports (Côté, 1999; Lauer et al., 2010a). In terms of tangible

802   support, parents may start to make more of a financial and time commitment to their

803   child, as the expense and commitment of their chosen sports increases. With this

804   growing investment, also comes a growing interest from parents to the extent that

805   some may become involved in their child's sport as a coach or volunteer within the

806   sport (Côté, 1999; Lauer et al., 2010a). Clearly, despite children getting older they

807   are still heavily reliant upon support from their parents (Dorsch et al., 2020).

808   However, at this stage, children potentially experience the largest amount of pressure

809   to be successful through parents' unintentionally pressurising enthusiasm and

810   encouragement in relation to their children's training and competition engagement

811   (Lauer et al., 2010a).

812   Finally, as children reach approximately the age of 15 years, they move into

813   the next stage (named mastery by Bloom, 1985; Wylleman & Rosier, 2016, and

814   investment phase by Côté, 1999) where parents support their child to increase their

815   commitment to one sport. Parents now express a great level of interest in the sport,

816   support their child to overcome setbacks, manage injuries, overcome deselection,

817   and potentially support their children during retirement. As such, parents'

818   involvement often comprises more tangible and emotional support, but with less

819   logistical and organisational support (Lauer et al., 2010a). As parental involvement

820   reduces and parents take more of a back seat role, they are required to increasingly

821   entrust an expert coach with their child's development (Keegan et al., 2014; Lauer et

822   al., 2010a; Wuerth et al., 2004). Specifically, parents become more of a mentor

823   rather than coach, supporting their child's independence, providing emotional

824   support, and advising on career progression (Keegan et al., 2014). It is useful during

825   this stage for parents to understand some of the changes that may occur within

826   athletes' social relationships and the increased expectations (within and beyond

827   sport) that may be placed on them. In addition, parents should support athletes to

828   balance education and their sporting development, while also encouraging athletes to

829   engage in sport for self-improvement, rather than simply for fun (Elliott et al., 2018).

830   Particularly, as athletes transitioned into college, supportive and responsive

831   parenting that facilitates and enhances adjustment to the college environment is

832   particularly valuable (Kaye et al., 2019). However, managing this balance of

833   education and sport development was a key stressor for parents (Hayward et al.,

834   2017). To manage this stressor parents reported employing problem-focused time

835   management strategies. Finally, parents remain an important part of the deselection

836   and retirement process if there are sporting career decisions to be made (Lally &

837   Kerr, 2008; Neely et al., 2017).

838   **2.3. Parent Education and Support**

839   Overall, the six postulates of sport parenting expertise demonstrate that

840   parents are important and valuable for the development of youth athletes (Harwood

841   & Knight, 2015). Parents provide a great deal of support to their children and have to

842   manage a range of demands and stressors throughout the sport parenting experience.

843   In addition, parents have to be emotionally intelligent and adapt their support to meet

844   their children's ever changing needs. However, some parents are unaware of

845   children's support requirements or the optimal ways to be involved in their child's

846   sporting lives (Harwood & Knight, 2009a; Knight et al., 2011). Meanwhile, other

847   parents may intend to be involved in an appropriate way, but are influenced by the

848   sporting culture and environment, resulting in them engaging in inappropriate or

849   detrimental behaviours or types of involvement (Dorsch et al., 2015b; Goldstein &

850   Iso-Ahola, 2008; McMahon & Penney, 2015). In an attempt to minimise

851   inappropriate parental involvement and the subsequent negative impact this can have

852   on children's sporting enjoyment and development, many sporting organisations

853   have introduced parent education programmes or sessions in an attempt to influence

854   or change parent behaviour, enhance their involvement, and manage expectations

855   (Gould et al., 2006; Holt & Knight, 2014; Knight et al., 2017; Omli & LaVoi, 2012).

856   In addition to providing parents with education to minimise negative

857   involvement, providing parents with support and guidance is important to enhance

858   parents' own experiences of supporting their children in sport (Gould et al., 2008;

859   Gould et al., 2016; Harwood & Knight, 2015; Knight et al., 2017; Thrower et al.,

860   2016; Dorsch et al., 2019). If parents have positive experiences within the youth

861   sport environment, they are more likely to be able to, and importantly want to,

862   encourage their children's ongoing participation (Knight et al., 2016). Such support

863   and guidance may be particularly useful for those parents who, due to personal or

864   environmental factors (e.g., family make-up, work commitments, socio-economic

865   status), struggle to manage the demands associated with youth sport or provide the

866   support children require to take part (Furusa et al., 2020; Kay, 2000; Lienhart et al.,

867   2019; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005).

868   Recognising the potential value of providing parents with education and

869   support to enhance their involvement and experiences, a number of suggestions

870   regarding pertinent topics to cover with parents have been suggested. These include:

871   1) Information about the child's sport, including technical information, the

872   rationale behind a sports programme, and information about the sports

873   organisation (Furusa et al., 2020; Dorsch et al., 2019; Gilbert & Hamel, 2011;

874   Gould et al., 2016; Thrower et al., 2016).

875   2) Managing demands and developing coping strategies to make the parent

876   experience more enjoyable (Harwood & Knight, 2009a, 2009b; Harwood et

877   al., 2019; Lienhart et al., 2019).

878   3) How to develop relationships with, and communicate with coaches, and

879   others within their support network (Harwood, 2011; O'Connor, 2011; Smoll

880   et al., 2011).

881   4) How to create an autonomy-supportive environment and demonstrate

882   emotional intelligence (Harwood & Knight, 2015; Pynn et al., 2019).

883   5) Identifying and acting upon children's preferences for parental support

884   before, during, and after competitions (Dorsch et al., 2019; Elliott &

885   Drummond, 2017; Knight & Holt, 2014; Knight et al., 2016a; Knight et al.,

886   2011).

887   6) Changes required in parental support in line with children's developmental

888   needs and he journey ahead (Dorsch et al., 2019; Thrower et al., 2016).

889   The benefit of providing parents with information on these topics (which closely

890   align with Harwood and Knight's sport parenting expertise postulates) has occurred

891   through the evaluation of a number of different parent education programmes.

892   *2.3.1 Examples of Parent Education Programmes*

893   In the last decade there has been a sustained increase in the number of parent

894   education programmes being delivered and evaluated within youth sport.

895   Specifically, seven different programmes have been evaluated. Insights into the

896   specific programme, evaluation, and learnings from each of these programmes are

897   provided below.

898   **2.3.1.1 Parent Education within a Youth Gymnastics Setting.** The first

899   published example of parent education comprised practitioner reflections based on

900   the delivery of an education programme to parents of gymnasts in the United

901   Kingdom (Richards & Winter, 2013). The programme consisted of six-weekly 20-30

902   minute face-to-face sessions focused on helping 21 parents create a more task-

903   orientated motivational climate. The first session discussed the importance of their

904   children demonstrating competence and the impact of this on their children's self-

905   esteem, enjoyment, and motivation. The second session focused on the psychological

906   and behavioural characteristics of being ego and task-orientated and the subsequent

907   impact on self-esteem, enjoyment, and motivation. The third session examined the

908   parent role and how parents can impact on their child's goal orientation. The final

909   three sessions were focused on how parents could create a more optimal motivational

910   climate. These included; verbal communication and feedback, verbal communication

911   and the impact of certain parental behaviours, and a goal setting strategy to help

912   parents create a climate focused on process and long-term development.

913   An evaluation of the programme took place through the authors' reflections

914   and parents' feedback. From the 21 parents who provided feedback, 100% of them

915   reported that the programme was useful and 75% said they would use the strategies

916   provided. The authors detailed in their reflections that their familiarity with the club

917   and the lifestyle of the parents was critical to designing an effective programme, as

918   they understood the roles and responsibilities of the parents. This understanding

919   helped them to design a programme that lasted an appropriate time per week, choose

920   a suitable time, and a practical location. Along with this understanding, the coaches

921   and managers initiating the programme helped to drive parent buy-in. The authors

922   also felt that consistency throughout the design was an important element for

923   influencing parents, with them revisiting previous information at the beginning of

924   each session helping to transfer the information from one session to the next and

925   enhance understanding. However, the authors found that recognising the feelings

926   within the group, reflecting in-action, and being able to adapt the delivery was

927   important to ensure that the parents did not become bored or lose interest. The

928   practitioner also had to pay special attention to the discussions within the group to

929   minimise the risk of conflict arising. Finally, the sessions were designed to suit the

930   parents and the gymnastics environment, although the sessions were short this

931   appeared to suit the parents in this environment as attendance was high.

932   Consequently, based on the authors' reflections and parents' feedback it was

933   recommended that future parent education programmes should be short, designed

934   specifically for the environment, take in to consideration parents' logistical

935   constraints, have organisational buy-in, provide opportunities for reflections and

936   practical tasks, delivered with resources that can be taken away, and delivered by a

937   practitioner with inter and intrapersonal skills.

938   Although this programme appears to have been beneficial, on reviewing the

939   content and delivery, it seems to have been designed based upon a request from the

940   gymnastics club coaches and management team to 'fix' parent behaviour that was

941   seen as undesirable. Although the demands and logistical constraints being

942   encountered by parents were taken in to consideration when designing the

943   programme, it does not appear that parents' wants or needs were considered.

944   According to Deci and Ryan (2000), for self-determined behaviour change to occur

945   competence, autonomy, and relatedness need to be experienced to create intrinsic

946   motivation. Although the programme provided parents with the knowledge and skills

947   to change their behaviour towards creating a more task orientated climate, without

948   parents being intrinsically motivated the behaviour change that occurred would

949   likely have been limited. This is due to there potentially being limited motivation

950   from parents to create change through the application of the education. Therefore,

951   parent education programmes may potentially have a greater impact on parents'

952   behaviours and experience when they are designed based around parents'

953   experiences and with a desire to meet their psychological needs.

954   **2.3.1.2 Parent Education for Youth Soccer Parents.** The second parent

955   education programme published within the scientific literature, was delivered as a

956   series of four one-hour presentations to soccer parents in the United States and

957   reflections were provided on the challenges experienced (Vincent & Christensen,

958   2015). Each session was, on average, attended by 22 parents and was delivered

959   collaboratively through practical tasks, discussion, and reflection. The sessions were

960   designed around the following topics: the roles of sport parents; collaboration and

961   relatedness; increasing awareness of the relationship between thoughts, wants,

962   emotions, and behaviours; the parent role within the coach-athlete-parent triad; the

963   changes to the parent role as children develop; managing the demands of youth sport,

964   and; reflection on the workshops and as a sport parent. The practical activities within

965   the sessions included: designing their own ideal parent, interviewing their inner

966   child, watching a video of parents' sideline behaviour, organising roles using cards

967   of the organisations' mission statements, defining their role based on their

968   responsibilities and qualities, creating pie charts of their time, and a guided imagery

969   session. The programme was evaluated and learnings were provided based on the

970   authors' reflections and parents' feedback.

971   The feedback from the programme was largely positive, however four key

972   challenges existed. These were parent attendance, engaging parents who were

973   unfamiliar with each other, disagreements amongst the parents, and evaluation. The

974   sessions were delivered taking into consideration parent logistics and with the buy-in

975   from the organisation, however attendance was variable so each session was

976   delivered as a stand-alone presentation. Despite one of the challenges being that

977   parents did not know each other, through the facilitators' encouragement to introduce

978   themselves and participate, the parents reported that interacting with other parents

979   was their favourite part of the workshops. Unfortunately, due to the nature of the

980   content some disagreements occurred between the parents, as such it was

981   recommended that practitioners carrying out similar work in the future display an

982   understanding of parents and position parents as the experts. Finally, although the

983   feedback from parents was useful for considering how to improve the programme,

984   the authors felt that a more formalised evaluation of the programme would be

985   beneficial.

986   In reviewing this programme, it is clear that a creative and unique approach

987   was used to provide collaborative parent education, that considered the

988   psychological needs of parents. The evaluation provided detailed examples of how to

989   deliver education through activities that would appeal to parents from a range of

990   educational backgrounds and could be applied to a number of different sports.

991   However, there was limited evidence of the long-term impact of the programme,

992   whether it enhanced the parent experience, or affected the support provided by

993   parents to their children. This would potentially have been useful information for

994   sport psychology practitioners as there is little benefit to providing a parent

995   education programme that does not have an impact beyond the delivery. As such it

996   would be beneficial for future programmes to be evaluated based upon their long-

997   term impact.

998   **2.3.1.3 A Comparison of a Full and Partial Education Delivery.** Utilising

999   an alternative approach, Dorsch et al (2017) designed, implemented, and assessed an

1000   evidence-based education programme for parents within youth soccer in the United

1001   States. The total education programme consisted of a 33-page Sport Parent Guide

1002 and a 45-minute Sport Parent Seminar. The topics covered within the programme,

1003 included; youth sport participation, developmental processes of youth sport,

1004 communication, working with coaches, and sport parent behaviour. This study

1005 examined the impact of a full (guide and seminar) and partial (just the guide)

1006 intervention on parents' support, pressure, warmth, conflict, and children's

1007 enjoyment, competence, and stress in comparison to a control group. Through a

1008 quasi-experimental design, 81 parents were recruited and were assigned to the full (n

1009 = 18), partial (n = 36), and non-implementation (n = 27) conditions. The programme

1010 was evaluated through measures of parent support and pressure, parent-child

1011 warmth, parent-child conflict, child enjoyment, child competence, and child stress.

1012   Dorsch et al. (2017) found that the parents who received the full intervention

1013 demonstrated more support and less pressure towards their child, along with more

1014 warmth and less conflict than those parents in the partial and non-implementation

1015 groups. In addition, children whose parents were in the full implementation group

1016 reported more enjoyment, higher perceptions of competence, and lower levels of

1017 stress post-season. Therefore, based on these findings it appears that delivering

1018 parent education through a one-off seminar combined with a guide may be a useful

1019 approach for encouraging parents to provide more support and warmth towards their

1020 children, while reducing pressure and conflict. However, despite these encouraging

1021 findings, this study did not consider the experience of parents taking part or whether

1022 it met the needs of the organisation. For instance, there was no consideration as to

1023 whether parents themselves benefited from the content, if the delivery approach

1024 suited parents, their thoughts on the guide, or the impact on the wider sports

1025 organisation. For sport psychology practitioners to learn from parent education

1026 examples a full exploration into parents' experiences of the programme would also

1027 be useful.

1028   **2.3.1.4 Face-to-face Education for Tennis Parents.** An organisational

1029 action research approach was used to deliver a series of face-to-face parent education

1030 sessions at three British high performance tennis centres (Thrower et al., 2017).

1031 Thrower and colleagues (2016) had identified that tennis parents required a

1032 supportive learning environment, information on the areas that may influence their

1033 involvement (e.g., financial and time demands, reasons for involvement, and

1034 knowledge of the sport), information on the sports organisation, information on the

1035 talent development within the sport, parent roles at competitions, and child

1036   development. Based on these identified needs, Thrower et al. (2017) delivered an

1037   initial introductory session and six parent education workshops on the importance of

1038   parents, supporting their child, organisational information, child development, talent

1039   development, competition rules, and how to continue their learning. The programme

1040   was evaluated using a social validation feedback form, reflective participant diary,

1041   researcher reflexive diary, email correspondence, and focus groups.

1042   Through a process of thematic analysis, Thrower and colleagues identified

1043   that the programme was effective in changing parents' knowledge, attitudes,

1044   affective states, and perceived behaviours. Parents reported that they enjoyed the

1045   discussions, practical tasks, and opportunity to interact with other tennis parents,

1046   plus it went some way towards empowering and providing them with a voice. It was

1047   also found that once parents' desire for a safe and supportive learning environment

1048   were met, parents were able to learn and create new knowledge. Further, it was

1049   perceived that parent education programmes can provide a platform for a variety of

1050   beneficial learning methods, such as informal and self-directed learning. Based on

1051   these findings, it was recommended that, when practitioners are delivering to

1052   parents, they should create a safe inclusive learning environment, allow parents to

1053   input in to the content, make workshops accessible, link the programme to the sports

1054   organisation and needs of parents, build relationships, and provide supplementary

1055   material (Thrower et al., 2017).

1056   Despite the positive evaluation of the programme, only two parents from the

1057   150 invited attended the whole programme consisting of an introductory workshop

1058   and subsequent six sessions. This low attendance was consistent with earlier

1059   programmes and reinforces the potential benefit of parent education programmes

1060   including mechanisms to enhance parent engagement. In addition, again consistent

1061   with earlier work, the programme evaluation was carried out shortly after delivery

1062   and as such, the long-term impact of the programme remains unknown.

1063   Incorporating longer-term follow up within such programmes would be useful for

1064   future research. Additionally, drawing on other evaluation methods may also be a

1065   useful consideration for future research, as the authors struggled with participant

1066   engagement, particularly in the reflective diaries.

1067   **2.3.1.5 Online Parent Education.** As a consequence of the low attendance

1068   rate from parents combined with the further learnings identified in their earlier work,

1069   Thrower and colleagues (2019) subsequently developed and evaluated an online

1070   parent education programme in British tennis. After contacting three international

1071   high performance tennis centres, 16 high performance tennis centres, and 69

1072   performance tennis centres, 38 parents consented to take part in the parent education

1073   programme delivered exclusively via the internet. Similar, to the face-to-face

1074   education programme (Thrower et al., 2017), the topics covered; supporting your

1075   child, organisational information, child and talent development, competition roles,

1076   and continued learning and support. The data were gathered from the comment

1077   boxes and online discussion forum throughout the delivery, as well as email

1078   interviews.

1079   The findings suggested that online delivery may reduce the barriers that exist

1080   when delivering face-to-face as it allowed parents to engage at a convenient time and

1081   learn at their own pace. The programme content appeared to be most beneficial to

1082   those with limited knowledge and skills, thus specifically targeting parents at the

1083   start of their child's tennis journey may be useful. However, despite the benefits of

1084   the programme, some challenges were experienced, namely some performance

1085   centres were reluctant to promote the programme and the length of the evaluation

1086   questionnaire appeared to put some parents off from engaging. Although parent

1087   engagement was reported as better than the face-to-face programme, and the online

1088   delivery reduced some barriers to parent attendance, the interaction and engagement

1089   between parents was minimal. As such, despite the online programme being

1090   perceived to have a positive impact on parent-parent relationships, it was likely that

1091   this would have been even greater in a face-to-face delivery as parents indicated that

1092   they enjoyed this part of those programmes. Thus, a blended learning approach

1093   through a combination of face-to-face delivery and a self-directed learning resource

1094   may be most useful for parents.

1095   **2.3.1.6 Enhancing Parent-child Communication Through Reflection.** To

1096   specifically enhance parent-child communication and parental involvement, Azimi

1097   and Tamminen (2020) delivered a 45-minute workshop to soccer and hockey parents

1098   in Canada, plus provided parents with a handbook and a six-week reflective task.

1099   Prior to the delivery of the workshop, semi-structured interviews and surveys were

1100   carried out with the parents and players to provide baseline information from which

1101   to compare any changes arising following the educational workshop and reflective

1102   tasks. The 45-minute workshop included discussion topics on: parents' roles in sport,

1103   parent-athlete interactions, parents' behaviour in sport, developmental changes in

1104   parent-child communication, and preferred parental behaviour in sport. Following

1105   the education workshop and distribution of the handbook, parents completed a

1106   reflective practice task based on Gibbs' (1988) reflective cycle. Parents audio

1107   recorded their reflections for six weeks following a reflective cycle prompt sheet.

1108   They were asked to complete their reflections within 24 hours of their child's

1109   training or competition and were sent reminder text messages to complete them.

1110   After completing their reflective task, parents completed a post-intervention

1111   interview and survey.

1112   Overall, from the qualitative data from parents and children the educational

1113   workshop, handbook, and reflective task appeared to enhance parents'

1114   communication with their children before, during, and after training and

1115   competitions. In particular, the intervention increased parents' awareness of their

1116   communication, emotions, their child's development, and their role as a parent,

1117   along with recognising the importance of timing when communicating with their

1118   child. Some athletes felt that their parents' communication had improved, but others

1119   felt there was no improvement/change. For some, this lack of improvement was due

1120   to their parents already positively communicating, whereas for other children they

1121   felt their parents' behaviour had simply not changed. As a result of the intervention,

1122   parents also attempted to change their parenting style and provide their child with

1123   more autonomy. However, it was recognised that changing a parenting style would

1124   potentially take longer than six weeks.

1125   In critique of this study, reflective practice is a highly skilled activity

1126   (Cropley et al., 2010), as such the quality of parents' reflective practice and the

1127   overall impact of the intervention may have benefited from parents being provided

1128   within more education or guidance on how to carry out reflection. Even though

1129   parents had prompts regarding how to carry out their reflection they had otherwise

1130   limited guidance, which may have meant that the reflection they carried out was

1131   superficial. In future interventions using reflections, it may be beneficial for parents

1132   to receive more education or guidance regarding how to reflect. Parents within this

1133   study may have also benefited from group reflection and peer support to encourage

1134   deeper reflection, share ideas, gain support from each other, and provide reassurance,

1135   in a similar manner to neophyte sport psychology practitioners (Cropley et al., 2016).

1136   **2.3.1.7 Long-term Evaluation of the RiSPP.** Addressing the lack of long-

1137   term follow up in previous parent education programmes, Tamminen and colleagues

1138   (2020) explored the long term impact of a web-based education programme for

1139   youth parents on the psychosocial experiences of youth ice hockey players. The

1140   parent education programme was the 'Respect in Sport Parent Program' (RiSPP),

1141   which was developed in 2008 by subject experts and has been delivered in a number

1142   of sports throughout Canada including ice hockey (which requires at least one parent

1143   to complete the programme before their children can sign up for a hockey

1144   programme). RiSPP covers topics, including: setting realistic expectations, handling

1145   winning and losing, balance not burnout, concussion and injury management,

1146   misplaced enthusiasm, establishing positive relationships with all sport stakeholders,

1147   losing perspective, and creating a safe environment though understanding bullying,

1148   abuse, harassment, and discrimination. The programme was designed to take one

1149   hour, with parents completing a series of modules and watching videos before

1150   gaining access to supplementary material. The impact of the programme was

1151   evaluated by parents completing a survey on prosocial behaviour, the parental

1152   involvement in activities scale, and children completing the youth experiences

1153   survey for sport. These surveys were distributed to youth athletes three times through

1154   the season for three seasons. In total 366 youth athletes (aged 14-19 years)

1155   completed the surveys at least once.

1156   The findings suggested that athlete antisocial behaviour reduced over time

1157   with athletes displaying more prosocial behaviour, which was associated with

1158   parents' completion of RiSPP. Moreover, there were improvements in athletes'

1159   scores for their interpersonal experiences, along with development of personal and

1160   social skills. Despite the potential positive, long-term impact of the programme on

1161   athletes' experiences and development of skills, the extent of these changes may

1162   have been limited or muted as a result of the one off delivery only occurring prior to

1163   the season. For instance, although it may have been useful to have the information

1164   prior to their children engaging to manage expectations and prepare parents, parents

1165   may still need information and guidance once their child has progressed in the sport.

1166   A follow up programme specifically relating to their child's development may

1167   therefore benefit parents further. Moreover, there are also limitations as highlighted

1168   earlier with web-based parent education programmes delivered without an

1169   opportunity for parents to gain social support, which may limit the positive impact

1170   such programmes can have on parents' experiences. In addition, the mandatory

1171   nature of the web-based parent programme potentially meant that some parents did

1172   not fully engage with the programme and simply completed it to enable their child to

1173   play hockey, in contrast to parents who choose to attend to learn and enhance their

1174   parenting.

1175   **2.3.1.8. Critical Review of Parent Education Programmes.** Overall, from

1176   these examples of parent education it appears that parents benefit from the increased

1177   exposure to information and gain knowledge from their engagement (Richards &

1178   Winter, 2013; Thrower et al., 2017). Such programmes enhance the parent

1179   experience and that of their child too, for instance following engagement with these

1180   programmes it appears that parents provide more support, have better

1181   communication with their child, report increased parenting efficacy, and there is an

1182   increase in their children's enjoyment (Azimi & Tamminen, 2020; Dorsch et al.,

1183   2017; Tamminen et al., 2020; Thrower et al., 2019). Parents find the practical tasks,

1184   group discussions, and the opportunity to share experiences enjoyable, as they are

1185   able to enhance their relationship with other parents and gain social support

1186   (Richards & Winter, 2013; Thrower et al., 2017; Vincent & Christensen, 2015).

1187   Furthermore, parents find it useful to have resources that they are able to take home

1188   and supplement the sessions (Dorsch et al., 2017; Richards & Winter, 2013; Thrower

1189   et al., 2017).

1190   Further, based on the collective evaluation, it appears that parent education is

1191   likely to be most successful if it provides support based on parents' specific

1192   experiences and needs, is short and accounts for parents' logistical constraints,

1193   delivers key information and guidance, is inclusive and accessible for all parents, is

1194   delivered in a safe and supportive environment, provides an opportunity for parent

1195   reflection and group discussion, is delivered by someone with expertise, is linked to

1196   and supported by the sports organisation, and has a focus both on enhancing the

1197   parent's and child's experiences. There also appears to be value in providing parents

1198   with a take home resource to enable learning at one's own pace, while delivering

1199   face-to-face sessions during training sessions to minimise demands and increase the

1200   opportunities for parents to attend and develop relationships with others.

1201   In contrast, it is apparent that there are a number of challenges and issues that

1202   have been experienced and identified through the aforementioned parent education

1203   programmes. Most notably, parent attendance, which was a key issue across most

1204   programmes (Thrower et al., 2017, 2019; Vincent & Christensen, 2015). Although,

1205   the online programmes provided an alternative delivery method to overcome the

1206   issue of parent attendance, it potentially removed the opportunity for parents to

1207   interact and gain the social support that they benefited from in face-to-face sessions

1208   (Thrower et al., 2019). A further criticism of the current examples is that they only

1209   provided an evaluation of the programme and delivery at one time point (Azimi &

1210   Tamminen, 2020; Dorsch et al., 2017; Richards & Winter, 2013; Thrower et al.,

1211   2017, 2019; Vincent & Christensen, 2015), with the exception of Tamminen et al

1212   (2020). As such there is limited information about the long-term impact of parent

1213   education programmes on either parents or children.

1214   Reinforcing many of these conclusions, Dorsch and colleagues (2019) carried

1215   out a community case study to identify the perceptions of, and recommendations for,

1216   delivering parent education within youth sport. Based on semi-structured interviews

1217   with parents, coaches, and administrators regarding how, when, and what to deliver

1218   to parents, it was recommended that parent education should focus on increasing

1219   knowledge, creating mutual respect, enhancing communication, making the

1220   experience more enjoyable for everyone, and that sessions should be delivered by a

1221   sport psychologist or sport scientist (Dorsch et al., 2019). Barriers to engaging

1222   parents were also identified, including time-constraints, under-involvement, and

1223   parents believing that they already had all the information or it did not apply to them.

1224   To overcome these barriers, it was suggested that parent education should be

1225   mandatory, although, as detailed above this can come with its own issues.

1226   A further shortcoming with the research on parent education programmes

1227   was that the majority of the programmes (Azimi & Tamminen, 2020; Thrower et al.,

1228   2017, 2019; Vincent & Christensen, 2015) were delivered by an external researcher

1229   delivering to parents within the sporting environment. This approach to delivering to

1230   parents potentially reduced the relationships that were built with parents, reduced the

1231   understanding and empathy of their needs, and as a consequence negatively impacted

1232   on the buy-in that was received from parents and their desire to attend. As such

1233   future programmes being delivered may benefit from a greater understanding of the

1234   sporting environment, an understanding of the parent experience, and stronger

1235   relationships being built with the parents prior to delivery.

1236   **2.3.1.9. Moving from Parent Education to Parent Support.** As the above

1237   review and critique has demonstrated, literature to-date has generated some clear

1238   suggestions regarding what is likely to work when seeking to deliver programmes to

1239   parents, as well as the potential issues and barriers that may be encountered. As such,

1240   when striving to work with parents, attending to these issues is important. However,

1241   beyond these recommendations there is also an additional consideration, namely the

1242   importance of moving from a parent education to a parent support approach (Knight

1243   & Newport, 2018).

1244   All of the aforementioned parent interventions focused on the education of

1245   parents, to teach them information, knowledge, and change their behaviour (Azimi &

1246   Tamminen, 2020; Dorsch et al., 2017; Richards & Winter, 2013; Thrower et al.,

1247   2017, 2019; Vincent & Christensen, 2015). Yet taking an education approach

1248   implies that parents are the problem, that they needed fixing, and educating on how

1249   to be a better youth sport parent (Pankhurst & Collins, 2013). Such an approach

1250   implies that parents are solely responsible for their behaviours, minimising the

1251   potential impact of environmental or cultural factors and also positioning the

1252   programme facilitator as the "expert". As previously documented, the youth sport

1253   environment and parent experience are challenging for parents with many demands,

1254   stressors, and expectations (Harwood et al., 2019; Lienhart et al., 2019) that can

1255   influence their involvement and behaviours (Dorsch et al., 2015b; Knight et al.,

1256   2016). Shifting the focus from educating parents to supporting them, taking a parent-

1257   centred, humanistic approach recognises the varying pressures and demands parents

1258   experience, plus may be a more appealing and beneficial approach. Specifically,

1259   through such an approach, parents can experience support and encouragement to

1260   develop coping strategies, find ways to optimally support their child, and enjoy the

1261   youth sport experience, drawing on their own and others expertise and experiences.

1262   Such a parent support rather than education approach, if adopted, may help to

1263   minimise the misconception and scepticism from parents that an outsider is

1264   criticising how they are parenting or trying to teach them how to parent (Knight &

1265   Newport, 2018). It instead may recognise the complexity and individual nature of the

1266   parent experience.

1267   When recognising the complexity of the parent experience, the influence of

1268   the sport culture on parents' involvement and behaviours should be considered

1269   (Knight et al., 2016; McMahon & Penney, 2015). As such, accounting for,

1270   understanding, and subsequently seeking to change (if necessary) the culture appears

1271   necessary to maximise the impact of any parent support or education programmes

1272   (Knight & Newport, 2018). For instance, based on research to-date, it appears that

1273   creating a culture where parents are respected as having a valuable role within

1274   athlete development and supported to be a part of their child's development is likely

1275   to have a beneficial impact on parents' experience and the support they provide to

1276   their child (Knight & Newport, 2020; Omli & LaVoi, 2012). However, to-date,

1277   consideration of the cultures in which parent support or education is being provided

1278   has been limited, with no consideration given to how changes in the culture,

1279   alongside the delivery of a support programme to parents, may impact on parents'

1280   involvement.

1281   **2.4 Youth Football Culture**

1282   Football is often dominated by a 'need to win the next game' industry culture

1283   where there are high expectations, a high level of external pressures, and a large

1284   amount of finance at stake (Gilmore et al., 2017; Nesti, 2010). In recent years the

1285   introduction of the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) by the Premier League and

1286   Football Association has gone some way towards encouraging football academies to

1287   create a holistic and supportive environment focused on the development of

1288   individuals, rather than being focused on outcomes. The EPPP approach emphasises

1289   talent development within the young boys rather than winning, yet the outcome-

1290   focused, results driven, demanding culture within the first team environment often

1291   trickles down to the youth academies (Champ et al., 2020a; Chandler et al, 2020).

1292   Nevertheless, despite some changes within the culture of the youth football

1293   academy industry, the traditional masculine outcome focused culture often remains

1294   as a dominant element (Champ et al., 2020a, 2020b; Mills et al., 2014a, 2014b). As a

1295   result, anything other than that which has a direct impact on player development is

1296   often not considered as important (Champ et al., 2020b). There have, however, been

1297   some calls to change this culture, to facilitate an environment that is optimal for

1298   athlete development through coaches promoting an autonomy-supportive

1299   environment, supporting holistic player development, and including parents within

1300   the development of players (Mills et al., 2014a, 2014b). Thus, focusing more on the

1301   development of players as people, rather than an object with a financial value. The

1302   extent to which such changes have occurred appears to be quite minimal and varied

1303   across different academies (Mills et al., 2014a, 2014b).

1304   The importance of understanding, considering, and, making changes within

1305   academy environments is apparent when one considers the impact that they may

1306   have upon children's development. As articulated within the bioecological model,

1307   human development, particularly at a young age, is influenced by the interaction

1308   between the growing human being and their ecological environment

1309   (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, 1975, 1979). According to Bronfenbrenner, the ecological

1310   environment contains four structures which are each located within the next. These

1311   four structures are termed the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and

1312   macrosystem (see Figure 2.1).

1313

1314 **Figure 2.1**

1315 *Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Approach*
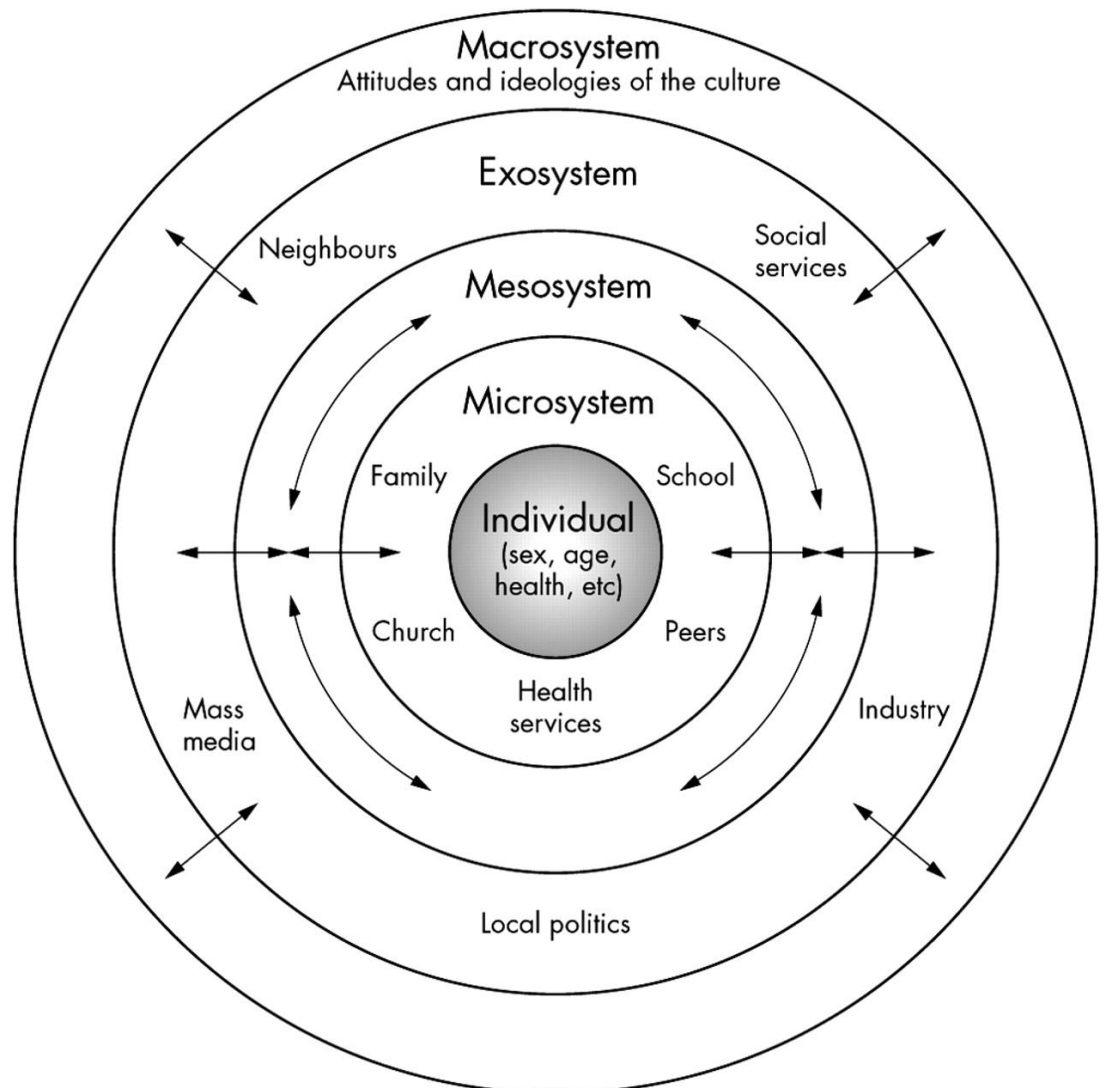
1316

1317 *Note.* Reprinted from "Ecological perspectives in health research," L. McLaren and

1318 P. Hawe, 2005, *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, *59*, 6-14

1319 (http://doi.org/10.1136/jech.2003.018044). In the public domain.

1320

1321   The microsystem is defined as the interpersonal relations and activities

1322 experienced within a particular and familiar location, such as the home, school, or

1323 football academy (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The mesosystem is the relationships

1324 between two or more settings in which the individual is involved (e.g., the

1325 relationship between home, school, and the football academy). The exosystem is one

1326 or more settings that did not directly impact on the individual, but the processes

1327 indirectly effect the individual through the microsystem (e.g., a school examination

1328   board or the Premier League). The macrosystem contains the social ideologies,

1329   values within the culture, social norms, and beliefs, which influences the other

1330   systems (e.g., British football academy system in comparison to the Spanish football

1331   academies). This macrosystem varies based on country, socio-economic status,

1332   ethnicity, religion, and other subcultural differences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The

1333   bioecological model provides a broad understanding as to how cultures can filter

1334   down to individuals and influence the behaviour and development of individuals.

1335   Based on the bioecological model, the Holistic Ecological Approach was

1336   created for evaluating talent development environments (Henriksen et al., 2010a,

1337   2010b, 2011). The aim of this model was to move away from talent development

1338   which focused almost exclusively upon individual athletes towards an approach that

1339   considered all elements within the talent development process, including the

1340   involvement of parents. The organisational culture, defined as a pattern or system of

1341   beliefs, values, and behavioural norms that influences behaviour and often becomes

1342   taken for granted (Schein & Schein, 2016) and subcultures were perceived to feed

1343   into each of the elements and influence the behaviours of the individual athletes and

1344   their support network (Henriksen et al., 2010a, 2010b, 2011).

1345   As well as parents being a part of the talent development process and

1346   influencing athletes, it is also apparent that the organisational culture can also

1347   influence parents' experiences and behaviours (Henriksen et al., 2010a, 2010b,

1348   2011). For instance, as parents' transition into the youth sport environment they

1349   become socialised to adopt the behaviours and norms of the environment (Clarke &

1350   Harwood, 2014; Dorsch et al., 2009; Kerr & Stirling, 2012; McMahon & Penney,

1351   2015). Through this socialisation process, parents' thoughts, feels, and behaviours

1352   appear to change to align with the sporting environment and culture in which they

1353   are situated, which can result in them adopting an 'athlete parent' identity (Dorsch et

1354   al., 2009; McMahon & Penney, 2015). Unfortunately, adopting such a role is not

1355   necessarily associated with positive parental involvement, rather it can result in

1356   parents reinforcing, supporting, and displaying negative, and at times, toxic and

1357   abusive behaviours (Kerr & Stirling, 2012; Jacobs et al., 2017). Thus, applying

1358   Bronfenbrenner's model within a football academy one could consider that, for

1359   instance, the values, ideologies, and general culture of British football/sport (the

1360   macrosystem) influence the actions, process, and procedures put in place to underpin

1361   the academy structure across the UK (exosystem). These influence the specific

1362   cultures created within individual football academies (part of the microsystem) and

1363   also impact on the demands experienced by parents and players in relation to the

1364   commitments and expectations associated with school, the academy, and home (the

1365   mesosystem). Subsequently, all of these aspects may affect parents' thoughts,

1366   feelings, and behaviours (part of the child's home and academy microsystems) and

1367   as consequence impact on the child.

1368   Given the influence that culture can have on parents' thoughts, feelings and

1369   behaviours, considering and subsequently (if required) altering academy cultures as

1370   they pertain to parents (first at the individual level in the microsystem but eventually,

1371   ideally, addressing the ideologies and values present in the mesosystem) may be

1372   particularly useful for enhancing parental involvement and support (Knight, 2019;

1373   Knight & Newport, 2018, 2020). For instance, evidence from numerous studies of

1374   talent development environments in a range of sports including track and field,

1375   sailing, kayaking, and orienteering (Henriksen, 2015; Henriksen et al., 2010a, 2010b,

1376   2011), suggests that an organisational culture which values parents' involvement and

1377   actively seeks to include them in the talent development process is most effective.

1378   Unfortunately, however, the current culture within academy football does not always

1379   align with this approach (Knight & Newport, 2018, 2020).

1380   **2.5 Changing Culture**

1381   As highlighted, culture is an important consideration when looking to support

1382   parents, however some organisational cultures do not see the value of involving

1383   parents, instead see parents as a problem to be dealt with (Knight & Newport, 2020).

1384   Retaining a culture that does not value the involvement of parents within a sports

1385   organisation when attempting to deliver support to parents could potentially create

1386   challenges and a reluctance amongst the individuals within the organisation to buy-

1387   in. When a culture is seen as dysfunctional or creating undesired behaviours then the

1388   culture will require changing and a process of culture change is needed (Schein &

1389   Schein, 2016). Based on Lewin's (1947) three stage process of change with groups

1390   (unfreeze, change, and refreeze), Schein and Schein (2016) suggested a process of

1391   creating change within a culture using a three step process:

1392   1. The first step is to unfreeze, where the motivation and desire to change is

1393   created through identifying the reasons for change and encouraging those

1394   within the organisation of the benefits towards change. One challenge that

1395   can occur within this step is the reluctance and resistance to change based

1396   upon the anxiety and fear of learning something new.

1397   2. The second stage is the change and learning process, this involves the

1398   implementation of a mechanism and process of learning to create a change

1399   within the culture.

1400   3. The third stage is refreezing, internalising, and learning agility. During this

1401   stage elements of the culture may need to be destroyed, a period of

1402   discomfort where individuals are adapting to the new culture, followed by

1403   the new culture becoming internalised.

1404   When applying this culture change process to sport and aligning it with the

1405   holistic ecological approach, Henriksen (2015) created a five-step process for

1406   changing cultures within sport. First, an initial needs assessment is carried out to

1407   define the current culture, identify the problems with the current culture, and create

1408   an opportunity for designing the intervention. The second step is for the individuals

1409   within the organisation to analyse the issues within the current culture and identify

1410   elements of the desired future culture. The third step is to design the new culture,

1411   which occurs through activities to include the individuals within the creation of the

1412   new culture. For the fourth step, the desired values and goals for the new culture are

1413   implemented into training sessions. This fourth step is to integrate the change into

1414   daily training sessions using creative activities to aid buy-in to the change. The final

1415   step involves the evaluation of the effectiveness of the change and for the

1416   organisation to 'say goodbye' to their previous culture. Although this process

1417   provides a clear and easy to follow step-by-step process for creating culture change,

1418   it appears to be rather simplistic and has been criticised for not considering the

1419   complexities of culture and using an integration perspective (Maitland et al., 2015;

1420   McDoughall et al., 2020a).

1421   The integration perspective is the reduction of the subcultures and individual

1422   identities that exist within cultures to focus on the most obvious single shared culture

1423   within the organisation (Martin, 2002). The use of the integration perspective for

1424   creating culture change within sport has been challenged, as it is seen as

1425   oversimplifying the complexities and ambiguities of athletes, coaches, managers, and

1426   support staff (Girginov, 2006; Maitland et al., 2015). Rather, it has been argued that

1427   organisational cultures within sport are likely to be a much more complex

1428   combination of multiple cultures, subcultures, and individual identities that work

1429   together, but also potentially create conflict (McDoughall et al., 2020b). When

1430   adopting this more complex view of culture, culture has been defined as the

1431   overarching "way we do things around here" (Cruickshank et al., 2013, p323). This

1432   includes the behaviours that people display, the relationships they have with each

1433   other, organisational policies, the structure of the organisation, as well as the

1434   conflicts and harmony within the group (Martin, 2002). Within this overarching

1435   culture there are also subcultures, which are groups of individuals within the culture

1436   who interpret the culture differently from others within the culture and potentially

1437   form their own group, but are still a part of the overall culture (Martin, 2002). These

1438   subcultures can overlap with each other in harmony, independence, and conflict.

1439   Individual identities vary between individuals and are based on our belonging to

1440   different subcultures, for instance gender, race, religion, ethnicity, family, class, and

1441   our previous meaningful experiences (Blodgett et al., 2015). Given this complexity

1442   and individual identities, it has been suggested that the Three Perspective Approach

1443   to culture change may be a more appropriate method of creating changes within the

1444   culture of sports organisations (McDoughall et al., 2020a, 2020b).

1445   The Three Perspective Approach considers organisational cultures,

1446   subcultures, and individuals from three different perspectives; harmony (integration),

1447   conflict between groups (differentiation), and a combination of ambiguity, paradox,

1448   and contradiction (fragmentation; Martin, 2002; Meyerson & Martin, 1987). This

1449   alternative approach considers culture beyond just the elements that are shared and

1450   obvious, instead exploring the elements within cultures that are often hidden (Martin,

1451   2002; Meyerson & Martin, 1987). For instance, the Three Perspective Approach

1452   identifies integration as the common language, shared values, and agreed behaviours.

1453   It considers the differentiation and diversity, which is a collection of different values,

1454   and subcultures within the group, and fragmentation considers the resistance,

1455   anxiety, and potential power struggles that exist within a culture. Therefore, this

1456   Three Perspective Approach intends to bring about an understanding of the deeper

1457   complexities within the group, provide an insight in to how change can occur, and

1458   identify any areas that may be resistant to change.

1459   A further critique of the holistic ecological approach to culture change

1460   (Henriksen, 2015), is that it implies that culture change is a change from one existing

1461   culture to a completely new one (McDoughall et al., 2020b). This critique arose due

1462   to the holistic ecological approach stating that the culture change process involved

1463 creating the values for the new culture and "ritualistic goodbye to the old culture"

1464 (Henriksen, 2015, p149), implying that the culture change process involved the

1465 removal of one dysfunctional culture to be replaced by an entirely new culture

1466 (McDoughall et al., 2020b). Rather, more often, when creating changes within a

1467 culture, the culture retains elements of the old culture, so it may be more appropriate

1468 to view culture as a fluid and ever changing pattern of beliefs, values, and

1469 behavioural norms (Schein & Schein, 2016). Consequently, when striving to create a

1470 youth sport environment which is supportive of parents, a series of cultural changes

1471 may be the best approach rather than the implementation of a whole new culture. For

1472 example, a series of cultural changes towards supporting parents within a football

1473 academy would change coach and support staff perspectives about supporting

1474 parents, while still retaining the existing coaching philosophy, taking into

1475 consideration the subcultures among the different age group phases, and

1476 acknowledging any resistance to change.

1477   Within sport environments, sport psychology practitioners are ideally placed

1478 to act as an agent to create cultural changes within a sporting environment, as their

1479 role is to enhance the optimal function of the sports organisation and the day-to-day

1480 experiences of those who operate within it (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012; Fletcher &

1481 Arnold, 2011; Henriksen, 2015; Henriksen et al., 2018; Nesti, 2010; Wagstaff,

1482 2019). Moreover, due to their social psychology knowledge and understanding of

1483 teams and organisations, plus their ability to build relationships, they were well

1484 positioned to influence behaviour change (Chandler et al., 2014; Mellalieu, 2017;

1485 Nesti, 2010). However, prior to introducing cultural changes it should be

1486 acknowledged that it is a complex process of constant acquisition, negotiation, and

1487 integration of perceptions and opinions, rather than a simple step-by-step process

1488 (Cruickshank et al., 2015). In addition, it should be acknowledged that due to the

1489 masculine culture that exists within football sport psychology practitioners can

1490 experience challenges when creating cultural changes as they are often seen as an

1491 outsider or their role is viewed negatively (Nesti, 2010). Therefore, creating cultural

1492 changes within a football academy environment is likely to be a lengthy,

1493 challenging, and ongoing process of negotiation to construct and re-construct the

1494 beliefs around supporting parents (Henriksen, 2015; Storm, 2020).

1495 **2.6 Thesis Aims**

1496   As outlined, parents play an important role in supporting their children's

1497 sporting experiences, particularly within academy football. However, the youth sport

1498 parent experience is complex and at times can be challenging, with parents having to

1499 manage many demands and expectations (Clarke & Harwood, 2014; Harwood et al.,

1500 2010; Harwood et al., 2019). As such, providing parents with support to help them

1501 manage these demands and expectations, while also providing guidance to help them

1502 optimise their involvement and support is necessary. Although a number of parent

1503 education programmes have been developed and evaluated over the last decade,

1504 there are various limitations associated with these individually and collectively,

1505 including a lack of consideration of parents' broader support needs and the potential

1506 impact of cultural changes. To this end, the purpose of this thesis was to develop,

1507 implement, and evaluate programmes of support for academy football parents.

1508 Specifically, utilising an action research methodology, the aims of this thesis were

1509 two-fold; firstly, to develop an in-depth understanding of the experiences of academy

1510 football parents and identify support that may be beneficial, and; secondly, to

1511 develop, implement, and evaluate a series of parent support programmes to address

1512 parents' support needs.

1513   **Chapter Three: Methodology**

1514   **3.1 Introduction**

1515   The previous chapters explored and considered the literature on sport

1516   parenting expertise, the need for supporting parents within sport, current examples of

1517   parent support, and the potential value of considering cultural changes when

1518   developing parent support programmes. Based on this literature, I deemed it

1519   appropriate and necessary to carry out an action research project focused upon

1520   developing, implementing, and evaluating a parent support programme within youth

1521   academy football. The purpose of this current chapter is to provide details of the

1522   philosophical underpinnings of this thesis and a description of action research. In

1523   addition, this chapter will provide an overview of the action research process that I

1524   undertook over a period of three years, while I was embedded within one football

1525   academy as a practitioner-researcher.

1526   **3.2 Philosophical Underpinnings**

1527   All research and methodological choices are underpinned by the researcher's

1528   paradigm, which is a basic set of beliefs that influences methodological actions and

1529   decisions (Creswell, 1998; Guba, 1990). A particular paradigm is a representation of

1530   our beliefs and values (Kuhn, 1996; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Specifically, these

1531   beliefs include the researcher's perceptions of reality, which is known as ontology,

1532   and the relationship between the researcher and the researched, otherwise known as

1533   epistemology (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002). Ontological and epistemological

1534   beliefs influence the ethical stance of the researcher, the methodological choices

1535   made, and the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Patton, 2002). Moreover,

1536   they also impact upon our understanding and appreciation of different research

1537   approaches (Mayan, 2009).

1538   Within sport psychology, the distinction is most often made between two

1539   paradigms – (post)positivism and interpretivism (Keegan, 2016). Post-positivists

1540   follow the ontological perspective of a realist, whereby they adopt an external view

1541   of reality and perceive that there is one single identifiable truth 'out there', which

1542   can be studied and measured (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). With regards to

1543   epistemology, post-positivists believe that the researcher and the researched are

1544   independent, consequently proposing that findings are objective and that they exist

1545   distinct from the researcher (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Therefore, the answer to a

1546   research question is written with authority and objectivity, as the researcher believes

1547   that the answer to their research question is the absolute truth (Mayan, 2009).

1548   In contrast, interpretivists look to find meaning in and understand human

1549   action (Schwandt, 2000). Interpretivists adopt a relativist ontology, whereby it is

1550   assumed that there are multiple truths and multiple realities in existence, as such the

1551   findings of a research study simply provide one interpretation of the data and the

1552   researcher recognises that other interpretations may also exist (Mayan, 2009;

1553   Schwandt, 2000). From an epistemological perspective, interpretivists assume a

1554   subjectivist, transactional, and constructionist epistemology (Schwandt, 2000;

1555   Sparkes & Smith, 2014). That is, research is thought to be subjective because the

1556   researcher is unable to separate themselves from the findings (Mayan 2009).

1557   Consequently, it is important to recognise the researcher's role within a study and

1558   research process, in particular the research questions, data collection, analysis, and

1559   interpretation of the findings (Mayan, 2009). Moreover, the production of knowledge

1560   is believed to be transactional because as researchers we are unable to separate

1561   ourselves from what we know. The assumption is made that who we are as a

1562   researcher, how we understand the world, our knowledge, and our previous

1563   experiences are all central to our understanding of others, others' experiences, and

1564   the world around us (Lincoln et al., 2018; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Finally,

1565   constructionist is the creation of a reality through the social interactions and

1566   argumentations we have within society and the interactions we with our

1567   surroundings (Lincoln et al., 2018). It is this interaction with others and the

1568   environment that helps us to construct knowledge and understand the world (Sparkes

1569   & Smith, 2014).

1570   This thesis was approached from an interpretive paradigm, drawing on a

1571   relativist ontology and a constructionist epistemology. A relativist ontology

1572   influenced how I developed and sought to answer my research questions,

1573   specifically, it guided my emphasis upon understanding the youth football academy

1574   parent experience and the impact of a parent support programme from multiple

1575   perspectives. Moreover, this ontology guided my selection of an action research

1576   methodology because this methodology enabled multiple individuals to be part of the

1577   research process and to share their individual experiences. This focus upon seeking

1578   multiple perspectives also influenced the data collection methods that I used,

1579   specifically encouraging me to use multiple techniques which increased the range of

1580   perspectives that I was able to incorporate and consider. Similarly, the data analysis

1581   approach that I adopted enabled me to consider and provide a representation of

1582   multiple experiences and multiple realities. Furthermore, when producing the results,

1583   I sought to illustrate, through the language used and the examples provided, that the

1584   data had been subjected to my interpretation and that this was not a definitive truth.

1585   In addition, my constructionist epistemology influenced the research process,

1586   as I recognised that knowledge was influenced by the social interaction and

1587   engagement with others and, as such, societal traditions cannot be separated from the

1588   data that were collected or the interpretation of such data (Schwandt, 2000). This

1589   recognition of societal influences resulted in my explicit consideration of how social

1590   interactions and organisational culture influenced parent support within the academy

1591   that I was situated. Particularly, it guided my research questions to focus upon how

1592   the organisational culture may impact upon parents' experiences, perceptions of the

1593   support provided, and further support required. An action research methodology was

1594   chosen as through the participatory and applied nature I could explore the

1595   experiences of parents while also encouraging and observing cultural changes within

1596   the football academy. Similarly, the use of observations, fieldwork, interviews, focus

1597   groups, surveys, and informal conversations, enabled the collection of data that

1598   considered how parents' experiences were influenced by the organisational culture

1599   within the academy, how their enjoyment of the sessions was influenced by the

1600   social support they received, as well as the impact of the cultural changes. The data

1601   analysis approach adopted sought to draw out the impact of social interactions and

1602   how changes within these social interactions could be used to change the experience

1603   for parents.

1604   **3.3 Positionality**

1605   In recognition of my assumptions, previous experiences, societal traditions,

1606   and prejudices and how these may have influenced the decisions I have made during

1607   my research process, it is important to acknowledge my positionality. At the time of

1608   starting this thesis, I was a white, female, educated with an undergraduate and

1609   postgraduate degree in sport and exercise psychology, and a trainee sport and

1610   exercise psychologist following the British Psychological Society stage two

1611   pathway. In addition, I was English but had lived in Wales for over two years. I was

1612   not a parent and had little football experience, having come instead from an

1613   equestrian and athletics sporting background. As such, when I entered the youth

1614   football academy and started this thesis I was naïve to football culture, the ways of

1615   football academies, the experiences of parents and some of the nuances of family life

1616   in South Wales. Nevertheless, it presented an opportunity for me to immerse myself

1617   in the football parent experience, with limited prior knowledge or assumptions, or

1618   allegiance to the football club.

1619   Having said this, over the course of the action research cycles my

1620   positionality and subsequently engagement with the project changed. Specifically, I

1621   became a parent for the first time, having had a daughter at the start of my third year

1622   of my PhD and by the time of writing up my thesis had achieved British

1623   Psychological Society and Health Care Professionals Council registration as a sport

1624   and exercise psychologist (see chapters five and six for more details). Through the

1625   process of gaining my sport and exercise psychology accreditation, I spent

1626   considerable time reflecting upon my practitioner philosophical approach, my role as

1627   a practitioner-researcher, and how these both influenced the work that I conducted,

1628   including within this thesis.

1629   ***3.3.1 Practitioner Philosophical Approach***

1630   An important element of being an effective practitioner is having a

1631   professional philosophical approach, as it guides every aspect of the practitioner's

1632   work, methods of behaviour change, and relationship with their clients

1633   (Pocwardowski et al., 2004). A professional philosophy develops and evolves over

1634   time through the practitioner engaging with practice, gaining experience, and

1635   reflecting on their experiences (Collins et al., 2013; Keegan, 2010). Through

1636   training, practice, and experience I have identified my personal values as: humility,

1637   passionate, commitment, determination, diligent, thoughtful, caring, and considerate.

1638   My professional values have been identified as: being professional, building rapport,

1639   honest and open, empathetic, knowledge-based evidence, and ethical. These values

1640   correspond with the characteristics of an effective and favoured practitioner by

1641   athletes, coaches, parents, and sports doctors (Chandler et al., 2014; Sharp & Hodge,

1642   2011; Longstaff & Gervis, 2016; Orlick & Partington, 1987; Thelwell et al., 2018).

1643   Aligned with my values and my earlier detailed interpretivist philosophical

1644   approach, as a practitioner I approached this action research study from a Humanistic

1645   perspective. Humanism is an ethical perspective which recognises that all individuals

1646   have equal rights and responsibility to give meaning to and shape their own lives,

1647   regardless of their characteristics, social, cultural, and religious background (Copson

1648   & Grayling, 2015; Ellis, 2012; McLeod & Wheeler, 1996). Simply put, Humanism is

1649   an optimistic view of human nature that considers the value of all humans as

1650   individuals (Palmer & McMahon, 1997; Scholl et al., 2012). The interpretivist

1651   philosophical approach and humanistic practitioner approach align, as both believe

1652   that understanding is collaboratively created between the client/research participant

1653   and the practitioner/researcher through social interaction and negotiation (Keegan,

1654   2016).

1655   Approaching this thesis from a Humanistic approach meant I recognised the

1656   value and uniqueness of each of the parents' experiences and collaborated with them

1657   through informal conversations and more formal methods (i.e., interviews and

1658   observations) to create an understanding of their experiences. By taking a

1659   Humanistic approach, it meant that I included the parents throughout the action

1660   research cycles and reflected with them on the impact of the interventions. In

1661   addition, the sessions were delivered in such a manner as to recognise each parent's

1662   unique relationship with their son and, although in general, parents' experience a

1663   similar journey, their experience is still unique to them and their son. The cultural

1664   changes I suggested were also influenced by my Humanistic approach as rather than

1665   encouraging the academy to control and regulate parents' involvement, cultural

1666   changes were supported which encouraged engagement and provided parents with

1667   autonomy.

1668   More specifically, within the delivery of the parent support sessions (see

1669   chapters five and six for more details), I drew upon Carl Rogers' (1951) client-

1670   centred/person-centred approach. The main principle of a person-centred approach is

1671   to provide each individual with autonomy to take responsibility for their own

1672   psychological progression and behaviour change through a warm, caring relationship

1673   (Rogers, 2003; Gillon, 2007). The practitioner has a genuine desire to help the

1674   individual through their role as facilitator (Dryden, 2006). Using a high level of

1675   empathy, congruence, unconditional positive regard, and respect, the practitioner

1676   encourages the client to discuss and reflect on their emotions and behaviours, plus

1677   consider how they may implement new behaviours (Dryden, 2006; Gillon, 2007;

1678   Katz & Hemmings, 2009; Rogers, 2003). Given these considerations, I anticipated

1679   that such an approach would be effective for providing support to parents within

1680   academy football as it allows for the individual differences of parents and

1681   encourages a collaborative working relationship (Katz & Hemmings, 2009), which

1682   has been recommended (Knight, 2019).

1683   ***3.3.2 Practitioner-researcher Approach***

1684   In order to draw upon my practitioner experiences within this thesis, as well

1685   as address calls for more focused applied research which unpacks the complexities

1686   and challenges of being a sport psychologist (Cotterill et al., 2017; Winter & Collins,

1687   2015), a practitioner-researcher approach was used. Moreover, by adopting a

1688   practitioner-researcher approach I hoped, through this thesis, to provide sport

1689   psychology practitioners and students with an honest and real insight into attempts to

1690   provide support to parents (Tod et al., 2011; Tod et al., 2007).

1691   The practitioner-researcher approach I drew upon was the practitioner-

1692   researcher model developed by Shapiro (1967). Shapiro's model is based on the

1693   ideology that clinical psychologists should apply their knowledge to research for the

1694   benefit of the National Health Service and advance the science of clinical

1695   psychology. Where evidence-based methods exist, practitioners were to use them,

1696   however where there was a lack of evidence the practitioner was to use scientific

1697   methods to produce new procedures (Shapiro, 2002). As such, the practitioner-

1698   researcher approach was a way of creating 'good practice and good science'

1699   (Lowman, 2012).

1700   The practitioner-researcher model contains three assumptions; 1)

1701   practitioners are consumers of new research findings, 2) practitioners are evaluators

1702   of their interventions and programmes using empirical methods, and 3) practitioners

1703   are researchers producing new data and can report this in a scientific manner (Hayes

1704   et al., 1999; Lowman, 2012). One way in which to produce new data and knowledge

1705   is for practitioner-researchers to use experiential learning (Barber, 2006).

1706   Experiential learning is the acquisition of knowledge through the accumulation of

1707   life experiences (Kolb, 1984). Experiential learning by a practitioner-researcher

1708   allows for an in-depth appreciation of "what happens when it happens" and an

1709   understanding of "how it happens", combined with why it happens (Barber, 2006,

1710   p4). Consequently, through a practitioner-researcher approach a practitioner can

1711   learn best-practice and advance knowledge by implementing research methods to

1712   facilitate a more in-depth understanding of the reasons for any changes in behaviour.

1713   To address the three assumptions of the practitioner-researcher model, I first

1714   drew together the latest and most relevant research knowledge to create an overview

1715 of recent findings, which can be found in the literature review in chapter two. To

1716 fulfil the second assumption, an action research methodology was adopted to enable

1717 me to design, deliver, and evaluate my own practice through experiential learning

1718 and reflection. Action research aligned with my practitioner-researcher approach,

1719 because, as a methodology, it was designed to be used by practitioners to evaluate

1720 their practice. Finally, to address the third assumption, the action research approach

1721 provided an opportunity to conduct research based upon the experiential learning

1722 that arose through being embedded within a football academy. By completing two

1723 action research cycles, I was able to conduct scientific research on my practice as a

1724 sport psychologist and create new scientific knowledge through the evaluation

1725 process. The research was also carried out in an ethical and rigorous way to create

1726 applied implications for future research and practitioners delivering to parents.

1727 **3.4 Action Research Methodology**

1728   Action research is a methodology used by practitioners to evaluate their

1729 action (i.e., work, interventions) to identify whether they have had an impact and if it

1730 has benefitted those for which it was intended (Lewin, 1947; McAteer, 2014; McNiff

1731 & Whitehead, 2006, 2011). It is recognised as a powerful and liberating process

1732 (Carlyle, 2017; McNiff & Whitehead, 2006; 2011) that considers and is empathetic

1733 towards others, while creating new knowledge (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). Action

1734 research contrasts with traditional social science research that is often carried out by

1735 professional researchers observing practitioners from the outside or carrying out the

1736 research and subsequently directing the actions practitioners should take (McNiff &

1737 Whitehead, 2006; Whyte, 2011).

1738   The overall purpose of action research is to create new practices through

1739 carrying out and reflecting on action, along with creating new theory through

1740 research (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). It has been defined as the process of carrying

1741 out action and creating new knowledge through research about how and why

1742 improvement has occurred as a result of the action (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011).

1743 Without this research process, action with reflection and improvement is merely

1744 personal-professional development. As such action research is an evaluation of

1745 learning through the justification of knowledge using scientific evidence and

1746 publishing this knowledge for others to critique and learn from (McNiff &

1747 Whitehead, 2006). Using action research has the potential to have a greater impact

1748   on professional practice and for guiding organisational and cultural change than

1749   conventional research (Carlyle, 2017; Whyte, 2011).

1750   As a methodology, action research originated in education settings but is now

1751   being commonly used by a range of other professionals, including nursing

1752   practitioners, health care professionals, and organisational practitioners (Carlyle,

1753   2017; Koshy et al., 2011). Within the last few years, it has proved a valuable

1754   methodology to provide insights in sport psychology. For instance, action research

1755   has been used to inform the implementation of interventions for injury rehabilitation

1756   (Evans et al., 2000b), choking under pressure (Hill et al., 2011), improving the

1757   soccer environment (Pain et al., 2012), developing emotion abilities and regulation

1758   strategies in sports organisations (Wagstaff et al., 2013), youth sport after school

1759   activities (Holt et al., 2013), and a face-to-face parent education programme

1760   (Thrower et al., 2017).

1761   An action research methodology was chosen for this research first and

1762   foremost because it is the most appropriate method to address the purpose of my

1763   thesis, which was to develop, implement, and evaluate the support provided to

1764   parents within youth academy football. Action research was appropriate to meet this

1765   purpose as it provided the opportunity to implement and evaluate a support

1766   programme as a sport and exercise psychology practitioner, while also creating new

1767   research evidence. Moreover, action research aligned with my ontology (relativist)

1768   and epistemology (constructionist). Within action research a key feature is the

1769   involvement of the participants who are included throughout the project and

1770   provided with autonomy within the change process (Koshy et al., 2011). This

1771   participatory element aligned with my relativist ontology as the participants were

1772   seen as equal partners to myself throughout the process and I attempted to

1773   incorporate and recognise each individual's perspective and experiences throughout

1774   (Koshy et al., 2011; McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). The inclusion of participants in the

1775   action research process also aligned with my constructionist epistemology, as I

1776   believe that knowledge is created through social interactions and the interactions we

1777   have with our surroundings. Action research involves working collaboratively with

1778   the participants throughout the research process, therefore creating socially

1779   constructed knowledge (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). By engaging with the

1780   participants through reflections, informal conversations, and formal data collection

1781   methods I was able to gain an understanding of parents' experiences and evaluate the

1782   parent support programmes delivered.

1783   Additionally, action research is undertaken by practitioners who regard

1784   themselves as researchers (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). Research that is carried out

1785   by practitioners is considered as living research, where the story of practice and

1786   learnings could create theories and knowledge that was relatable to practical

1787   application (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). This purpose of action research, to create

1788   applied knowledge by practitioners for practitioners, consequently, aligned with my

1789   applied practitioner-researcher approach to produce research to inform practice and

1790   carryout practice to inform research. Thus, it was the participatory and applied focus,

1791   as well as the purpose of carrying out action and evaluation to enable other

1792   practitioners to learn and develop better delivery of interventions, that made action

1793   research an appropriate methodology for this thesis.

1794   **3.5 Action Research Design**

1795   Action-research is carried out in a cycle, as it is an ongoing process of

1796   observations, reflections, actions, evaluations, and modifications, followed by

1797   changes to move in a new direction (Koshy et al., 2011; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011;

1798   see Figure 3.1).

1799   **Figure 3.1**

1800   *An Action-research Cycle*
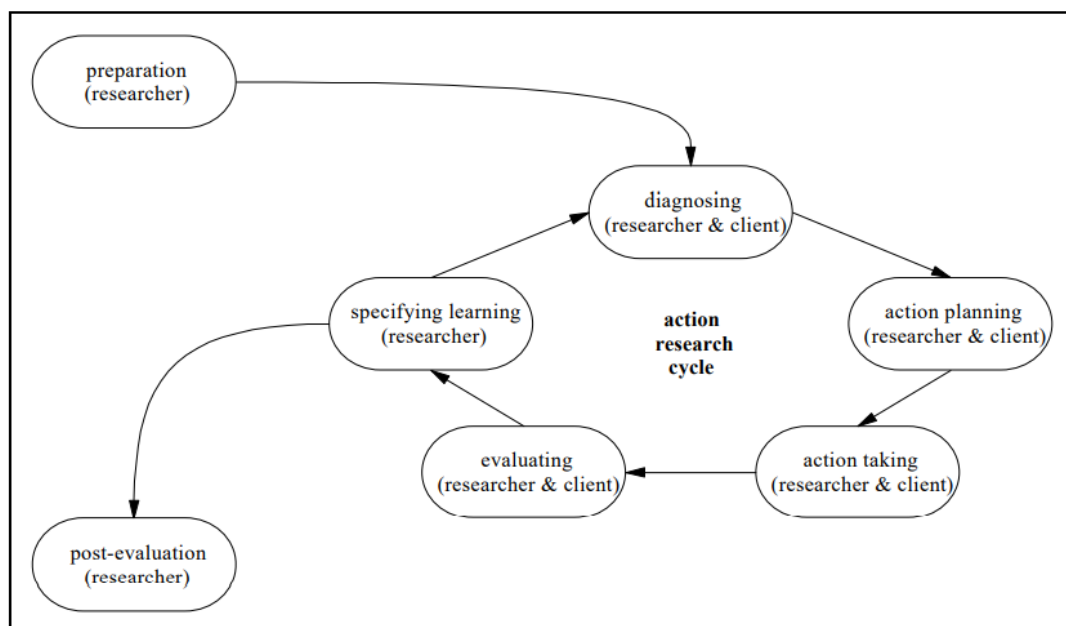
1801

1804   *Report No. 1995-5*, Department of Management Systems, University of Waikato

1805   (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237237869). In the public domain.

1806   Rather than existing as a discrete cycle as depicted in Figure 3.1, it has been

1807   suggested that the action-reflection cycle should be considered as a continuous cycle

1808   because as soon as one cycle is completed there is the possibility of moving on to a

1809   new cycle in order to further improve action (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). This

1810   process, which was adopted within the current thesis, is understood as an experiential

1811   learning process (Carlyle, 2017), and is displayed in Figure 3.2.

1812   **Figure 3.2**

1813   *Multiple Cycles of Action Research*

Observe
(Collect data)

Act
(Implementation)

Reflect
(Critical
reflexivity)

Plan
(Strategic
Action Plan)

Observe
(Collect data)

Act
(Implementation)

Reflect
(Critical
reflexivity)

Plan
(Strategic
Action Plan)

Etc.
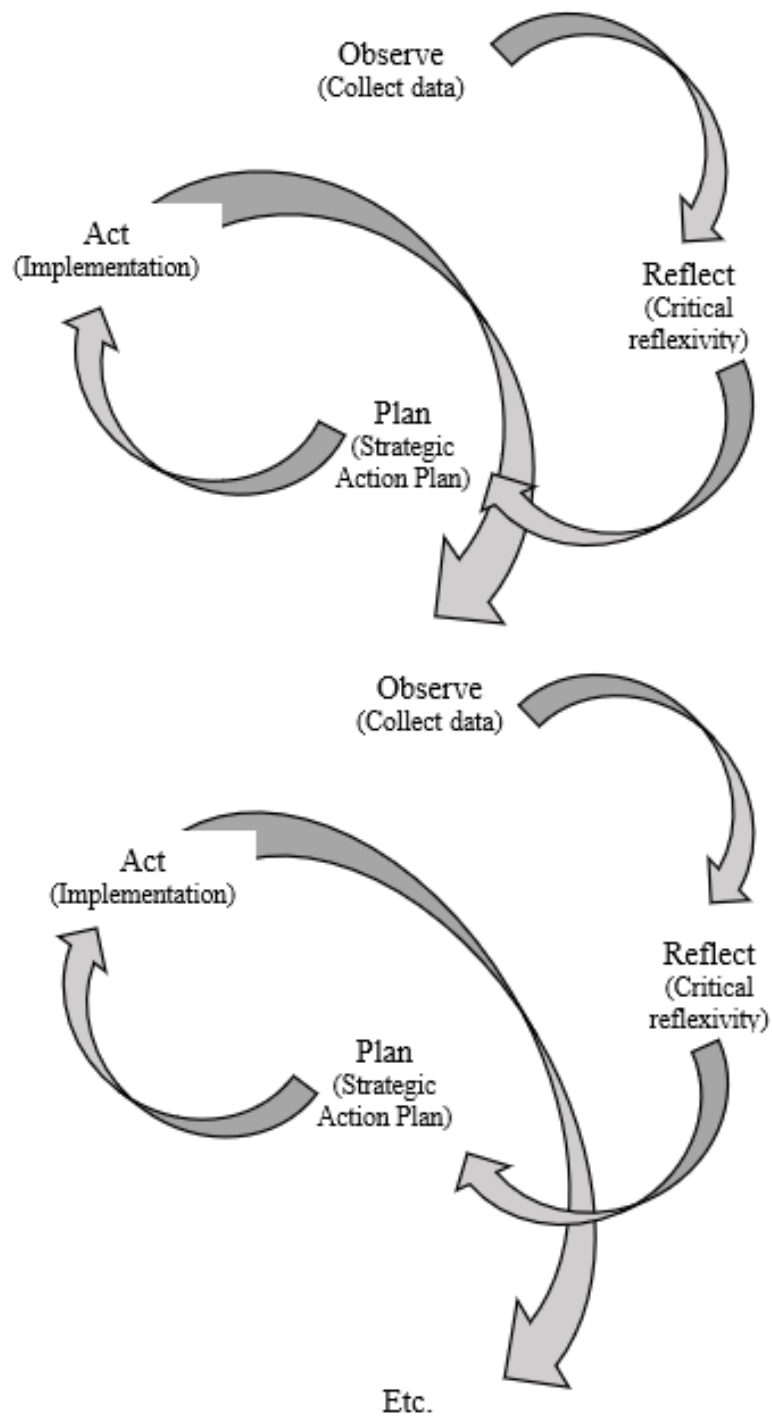
1814

1815   *Note*. Adapted from *The essential guide to doing your research project* (3rd ed.

1816   p.341) by Z. O'Leary, 2017, Sage.

1817

1818   Drawing on O'Leary's (2017) action research cycles, the first phase is to

1819   carry out observations. To complete such observations, the researcher uses a variety

1820   of data collection methods within a particular case to gain an understanding and

1821   gather knowledge of participants' behaviours and experiences in their natural setting

1822   (Carlyle, 2017; McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). For instance, for the purpose of the

1823   current thesis, observations were carried out focused upon parents' behaviour and

1824   social interactions at football matches, training sessions, and generally within the

1825   academy environment.

1826   Following observations, the second phase comprises reflection on these

1827   experiences, either formally or informally. Such reflection is a necessary starting

1828   point for action research as the researcher's learning that arises through this

1829   reflective process guides the subsequent change process (Carlyle, 2017; McAteer,

1830   2014). Reflection can be carried out through the use of personal reflective diaries,

1831   discussions with participants, and conversations with critical friends, with each

1832   individual's input being valued and considered (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006; Reason

1833   & Bradbury, 2008).

1834   Based on the reflections and subsequent learning that is produced, the third

1835   phase involves planning the anticipated action. During this phase the researcher

1836   answers critical questions and makes choices about the action phase, such as what

1837   their research question is and how they will go about carrying out the action (McNiff

1838   & Whitehead, 2006; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). For instance, in relation to this

1839   thesis, the planning action phase involved designing an intervention based on the

1840   support recommendations identified through extensive observations and interviews,

1841   developing the intervention resources, and organising the dates and times of when

1842   the intervention was going to be delivered.

1843   The fourth phase is then to carry out the action and afterwards reflect

1844   collaboratively with the participants to observe and identify transformations, plus

1845   recognise improvements for future action (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). For instance,

1846   for this thesis, this phase involved engaging in informal conversations with parents,

1847   coaches, and players, carrying out interviews post-delivery, and completing my own

1848   reflexive diary. Subsequently, further actions can be implemented or suggestions for

1849   future work provided.

1850   **3.6 Doing Action Research: The Process Used within the Current Thesis**

1851   Action research was used for this thesis with the intention of creating new

1852   knowledge through action (i.e., parent support programmes), where the action would

1853   be evaluated to understand the impact on parents (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006).

1854   Specifically, action research was used to develop new knowledge regarding the

1855   implementation of parent support programmes.

1856   Two extended action research cycles were implemented in line with the

1857   cyclical process as detailed earlier (O'Leary, 2017). However, given the limited

1858   research in this area, as well as a need to ensure that experiential knowledge from

1859   parents, coaches, and practitioners underpinned the planning of action (Koshy et al.,

1860   2011; McNiff & Whitehead, 2006; Schinke & Blodgett, 2016), the first observation

1861   phase of the first cycle was considerably extended (see Figure 3.3). Specifically, I

1862   adapted the initial phase of the action research spiral beyond observation and

1863   considered this as a period of exploration. During this period, to develop an in-depth

1864   understanding of parents' experiences and create recommendations for providing

1865   support, I conducted a case study of the youth football parent experience and co-

1866   created recommendations for providing support over a period of eight months (see

1867   chapter four). It should be noted, however, that although the focus of this period was

1868   on observing and seeking to understand parents' experiences and creating

1869   recommendations for providing support, simply my presence in the academy and

1870   focus upon this topic also acted as a stimulus for change and could be considered an

1871   initial action (although inadvertent). Further details on this are provided in section

1872   3.8.1.

1873   Based on the findings of this case study and subsequent reflection, I

1874   developed my first action (intervention), which was a six-session parent support

1875   programme accompanied by associated cultural changes. This programme was

1876   evaluated through engagement with the participants and my own observations and

1877   reflections (see chapter five). Based upon the reflections and evaluation of my initial

1878   parent support programme, I subsequently developed a new parent support

1879   programme which comprised a 90-minute session, associated parent booklet, and

1880   accompanying further cultural changes. This too was evaluated through personal

1881   reflections and engagement with the participants (see chapter six). Based on these

1882   evaluations and reflections, suggestions for future guidance were subsequently

1883   developed (see chapter seven).

1884   **Figure 3.3**

1885   *Action Research Cycles as Applied in the Thesis*

Exploration

Case study of parents'
experiences and
recommendations for support

Reflection

Reflection with participants,
observations, and personal reflections

Planning
Action

Planning and discussing plans for
delivery with the participants

Action

Delivery of the six-session
parent support programme

Evaluate

Evaluation with participants through
interviews, surveys, informal
conversations, and reflections

Reflection

Reflection with participants,
observations, and personal reflections

Cycle One

Modify
and Plan

Modifying the six-session
programme and planning
the second intervention

Action

Delivery of the 90-minute session and
booklet parent support programme

Evaluate

Evaluation with participants through
interviews, surveys, informal
conversations, and reflections

Reflection

Reflection with participants,
observations, and personal reflections

Future
Guidance

Six-session programme and 90-
minute session plus booklet
evaluated to provide future guidance

Cycle Two

1886

1887

1888   **3.7 Research Context: Youth Academy Football**

1889   To understand the importance and context for this research, it is first

1890   necessary to understand the football academy system. Within the United Kingdom,

1891   academies were initially set up to recruit young boys from eight years of age, with

1892   the aim of supporting their development to enable those with sufficient skill/talent to

1893 subsequently become professional football players. The academy system was

1894 designed by the Premier League, Premier League football clubs, the Football

1895 League, the Football Association, and other key football stakeholders as a strategy

1896 and process of holistically developing better quality British football players. Each

1897 football academy is associated with, and often financially dependent upon, a

1898 professional football club. The system is divided into four categories, with category

1899 one being the highest and four being the lowest. Each category has specific

1900 requirements they have to meet and the academies are audited on a regular basis to

1901 ensure they meet the specific criteria for their category.

1902   Category one academies (which was the focus of this thesis) are often

1903 associated with Premier League or English Football League Championship football

1904 clubs, as a result have a greater financial resource. This greater financial resource

1905 allows them to have a larger number of players (recruited from under-9 and an

1906 associated pre-academy), better quality and more training facilities (such as pitches

1907 and gym equipment), better quality coaching (such as Pro and A licenced coaches),

1908 better education provision for players (such as onsite college courses and A levels),

1909 increased welfare provision (including sport science, psychology, and nutrition), and

1910 more staff. This increased level of resource and support is aimed at producing higher

1911 quality of players who go on to play in the Premier League or English Football

1912 League Championship. In addition, category one academies are able to receive

1913 greater levels of compensation for a player who is sold or recruited by another

1914 football club. Consequently, making more money per player that is sold or is

1915 successful in becoming a professional footballer. In comparison, category four

1916 academies are often associated with lower league football clubs and often focus on

1917 recruiting 16-year olds who are released from other academies.

1918   The process of recruiting players to category one academies occurs through

1919 scouts, trial events, pre-academy training sessions aimed at five, six, and seven-year-

1920 olds, and locally based development training sessions. The boys can be recruited at

1921 the beginning of the season from the pre-academy or invited in for a 6-week trial at

1922 any point during the season. If the boys are successful, they and their parents sign a

1923 contract, have an induction, and begin training with the academy.

1924   The boys are split in to three age-specific phases; foundation phase (under-9

1925 to 12 years), youth development phase (under-13 to 16 years), and the professional

1926 phase (under-18 to 23 years). Children progress through the system with their peers,

1927   however, they could be released at the mid-season and end of season reviews if they

1928   are identified as not being talented or skilled enough, not coping psychosocially with

1929   the environment, or needing time to develop away from the academy. Players in the

1930   foundation and youth development phase train for eight to 12 hours per week over

1931   four or five days and have matches most weekends. At ten years old, players are

1932   given the option to attend the 'hybrid programme' where they attend the academy

1933   one day per week instead of school (completing compulsory education alongside

1934   their training).

1935   ### 3.7.1. The Research Setting

1936   This action research project was carried out in a category one British boys

1937   football academy, which was chosen for being a typical example. It offered access to

1938   a broad range of parents, coaches, and support staff. Many of the players live within

1939   the local vicinity of the academy, although some children travel up to 90 minutes to

1940   attend training. The children engage in regular home and away matches,

1941   tournaments, and festivals throughout the year. Within the academy there are full and

1942   part-time professional coaches with a range of playing and coaching experiences.

1943   Additionally, there are numerous support staff including an academy manager,

1944   education officers, welfare officers, medical staff, physiotherapists, and strength and

1945   conditioning coaches. The training venue contains a gym, classrooms, office space,

1946   and a mixture of grass, 3G, and indoor pitches. There is also a parents' lounge where

1947   parents could spend their time during training sessions.

1948   For the purpose of this thesis, the research was focused on the foundation

1949   (under-9 to 12) and youth development phase (under-13 to 16). The decision to focus

1950   on the foundation and youth development phases was made because during these

1951   ages parents are most involved in their son's development. Once the players get to

1952   16 years of age they often move away from home to live with host families and learn

1953   to drive for themselves. Host families are home from home environments sourced

1954   and compensated by the academy to provide accommodation and a family

1955   environment for football players to be close to the training ground. As a result,

1956   involvement of their parents in supporting their son is often reduced, particularly the

1957   tangible support provided. Focusing on the foundation and youth development phase

1958   parents meant that methodologically the research was focused on a smaller age range

1959   of players, which reduced the potential for developmental changes to impact on the

1960   results. However, the parent support programme potentially needs further

1961   modification if an academy wishes to deliver it to parents of older children.

1962   **3.8 The Research Process: Three Years Embedded in Academy Football**

1963   In order to carry out this action research project, I was embedded as a

1964   practitioner-researcher within the football academy for three years between October

1965   2016 to June 2020. Being embedded in this manner provided me with in-depth

1966   contextual-intelligence. Contextual-intelligence is key to understanding

1967   organisational structures, values, key-decision making processes, and customs

1968   (Terenzini, 1999). Being embedded in the academy allowed me to fully understand

1969   the environment, appreciate the experiences and perspectives of parents, and provide

1970   parents with support that met their specific requirements.

1971   In addition to the three years being embedded at the academy, I went on

1972   maternity leave for nine months (October 2018 – June 2019), as I became a mother

1973   for the first time, hence the total period spanned three years and nine months. The

1974   majority of the action research cycles were conducted prior to my maternity leave,

1975   with only the final reflections and development of future guidance occurring

1976   following my return to the academy. In addition to conducting the action research

1977   project, throughout my three years at the academy, I also delivered group and

1978   individual sport psychology support to the players, parents, coaches, and support

1979   staff.

1980   *3.8.1. Cycle One: Exploration and Reflection (October 2016 – May 2017)*

1981   Prior to starting my PhD in October 2016, a relationship between the football

1982   academy and my supervisors had already been established. The academy manager

1983   had indicated an interest in developing their sport psychology programme under the

1984   guidance of my supervisor and was also interested in improving their engagement

1985   with and support for parents. Through this relationship, the academy agreed to

1986   contribute funding towards a PhD focused upon the provision of support for parents,

1987   with the agreement that the PhD student would work within the academy as a sport

1988   psychology practitioner.

1989   On starting my PhD, I immediately became embedded at the academy,

1990   working there full-time, attending training sessions, meetings, and generally getting

1991   to know players, parents, and coaches. I also attended matches in the evenings and

1992   weekends. During my first month I submitted my ethical application to conduct this

1993   research and received approval which enabled data collection to begin. I held an

initial information sharing event for parents, players, coaches, and support staff,

during which they were informed of the details of this thesis and specifically made

aware that I would be conducting observations, fieldwork, interviews, and focus

groups for the purpose of research. Parents had an opportunity to ask any questions

and to explicitly state if they did not want to be included or contacted in relation to

any aspects of the research. Parents were also provided with an opportunity to share,

through an open-ended feedback sheet, their current views on the support they

received and any suggestions for improvement.

Over this eight-month period I spent 1120 hours carrying out observations

and fieldwork, engaging in informal conversations, delivering monthly parent

discussion sessions, delivering a sport psychology programme to players, supporting

the delivery of coach continued professional development sessions, attending

relevant multi-disciplinary meetings, and being around and present within the

environment. During these eight months, I also completed the first two phases of my

initial action research cycle: exploration and reflection.

3.8.1.1 Phase One – Exploration. The aim of this first phase of action

research (see chapter four) was to gain an in-depth understanding of parents'

experiences as an academy football parent and identify recommendations as to how

the action in the subsequent chapters should be developed and implemented. A case

study approach was used to bring together multiple perspectives for an in-depth

understanding, while also retaining the details of the context in which the case study

was carried out (Crowe et al., 2011; Yin, 2018). Through extensive fieldwork,

observations, reflections, informal conversations, informal parent meetings,

interviews, and focus groups an exploration of parents' youth football academy

experiences were carried out. Alongside this exploration, recommendations for

supporting parents within youth academy football were also developed.

3.8.1.2 Phase Two – Reflection. The second phase comprised a process of

personal reflection as well as the engagement in collaborative reflection with parents,

coaches, support staff, and my PhD supervisors as critical friends regarding the

parent support recommendations produced during the exploration phase. Having

developed an initial understanding of parents' experiences and potential avenues

through which to provide support, this reflection focused on creating action in the

form of a parent support programme.

2027   My reflections were carried out and documented within my reflexive diary

2028   using Gibbs' reflective cycle (Gibbs, 1988; Figure 3.4).

2029

2030   **Figure 3.4**

2031   *Gibbs' Reflective Cycle*
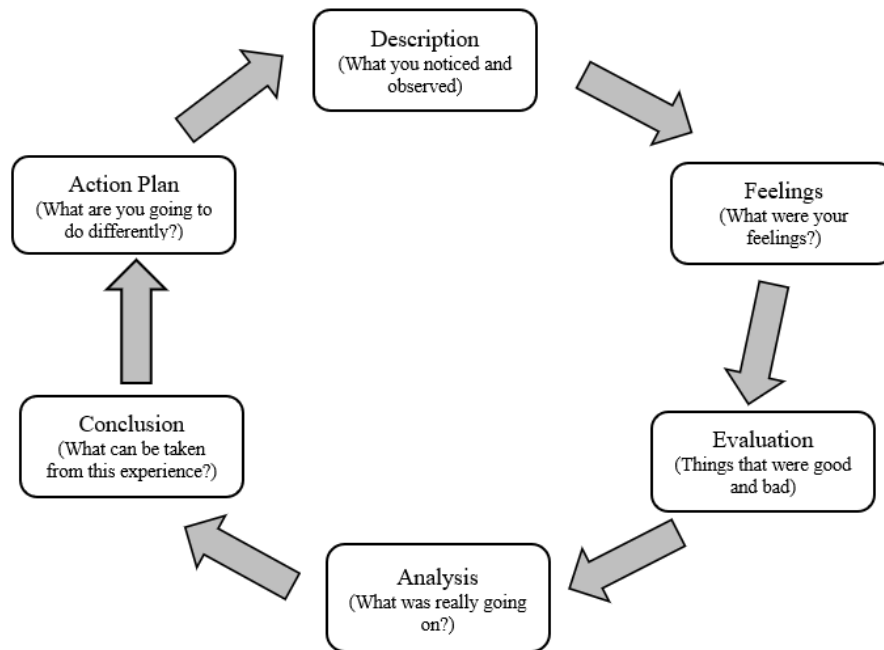
2032

2033   *Note*. Adapted from *Learning by doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods*,

2034   (p.50) by G. Gibbs, 1988, The Further Education Unit.

2035

2036   Gibbs' reflective cycle contains six stages of reflection: description, feelings,

2037   evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action planning. The description provides

2038   details of the actions that were taken and my observations. For instance, "I noticed

2039   some parents waiting in the parent's lounge for their sons' to finish training, so I

2040   decided to start an informal conversation with parents and see how things were

2041   going. One parent was doing work, another parent was looking at his phone, and

2042   another was watching the television that was on while drinking a coffee." Feelings

2043   are details of my reactions and emotions to my action and details of other people's

2044   reactions and emotions to my actions. Examples of feelings included, "Previously

2045   last season the parents would appear concerned and apprehensive about me entering

2046   the parents' lounge, however by now the parents are used to me entering the parents'

2047   lounge and talking to them in an informal way." Evaluation includes a judgement on

2048   the action, such as whether it appeared to come across as intended, whether it was

2049   perceived to be successful or not, and whether it provided any value. An example,

2050   "This was a valuable conversation as one parent began talking openly to me and

2051   expressing his feelings about a tough match experience at the weekend. This

2052   provided useful insight into his experiences and how he had supported his son." The

2053   analysis comprised me trying to make sense of the action and the response of others

2054   to the action, such as "This conversation was a useful insight into parents'

2055   experiences and gave me an idea of the support that may be useful to help them

2056   provide emotional support to their son." Finally, conclusions were drawn from the

2057   reflections and plans were made for future actions: "Following this conversation, I

2058   will add in a discussion topic on supporting your son emotionally after a loss."

2059   My reflexive diary focused on being reflexive rather than on a process of

2060   reflection because I went through a process of observing, processing my thoughts,

2061   writing them down, and also creating actions to enhance practice. For this thesis,

2062   reflection has been defined as reliving and reviewing the who, when, what, where,

2063   and why of a particular situation, plus what was thought about that situation.

2064   Whereas reflexivity moves beyond reflection enabling me to be able to question my

2065   attitudes, thoughts, assumptions, prejudices, and actions (Bolton, 2010). Therefore,

2066   being reflexive rather than reflective allowed me to move beyond detailing what had

2067   happened and what I thought about it, to in-depth questioning of why it had

2068   happened and why I thought what I did, as well as what I was going to do moving

2069   forward.

2070   *3.8.2: Cycle one: Planning Action, Action, Evaluation, and Reflection (June –*

2071   *December 2017)*

2072   Having completed my initial reflections, in June 2017 I began the process of

2073   planning action (i.e., developing my intervention) ready for delivery and evaluation

2074   from October-December 2017. I continued to be embedded throughout this time

2075   period, carrying out fieldwork, observations, informal conversations, and attending

2076   necessary multi-disciplinary meetings.

2077   **3.8.2.1 Phase Three – Planning Action.** During the football off-season and

2078   pre-season (June 2017 to August 2017) I was able to spend time planning, on my

2079   own and with parents, coaches, support staff and my thesis supervisors, the support

2080   that could be provided to parents. This phase involved planning the action based

2081   upon the findings in chapter four, the reflections and suggestions made by parents,

2082   coaches, and support staff, the reflections written in my reflexive diary, and a

2083   thorough search of the literature to learn from previous examples of parent support

2084   (e.g., Dorsch et al., 2017; Thrower et al., 2017; Vincent & Christensen, 2015). This

2085   planning phase also included an identification of the topics that would be covered

2086   within each of the support sessions, designing the accompanying resources, planning

2087   the activities and discussion topics, and developing strategies to encourage culture

2088   change.

2089   **3.8.2.2 Phase Four – Action.** In October 2017, phase four and delivery of

2090   the first parent support sessions began, with delivery completed by the end of

2091   November (see chapter five for details). This programme comprised the delivery of

2092   six support sessions to parents containing discussion topics and activities, plus

2093   targeted cultural changes. I delivered the support sessions, with the topics based on

2094   the six postulates of sport parenting expertise (Harwood & Knight, 2015).

2095   As indicated previously, although the action research followed the change

2096   process detailed in Figure 3.3 and the more formal process of action began at this

2097   time, it is important to note that from the moment I entered the academy in October

2098   2016 I began to instigate action by placing a focus on parents, which stimulated

2099   others to reflect and change their behaviours and the environment more broadly. This

2100   change was subtle and often unnoticed by those within the environment, however,

2101   throughout my process of exploration and reflection it became apparent to me that

2102   change was already occurring. Such change was stimulated by, for instance,

2103   discussions with academy staff about the importance of parents, informal

2104   conversations regarding the experience of being an academy football parent,

2105   highlighting the value of parents within the player development process, and raising

2106   questions regarding ways to enhance the support that was provided to parents.

2107   **3.8.2.3 Phase Five – Evaluation and Reflection.** Phase five, the evaluation

2108   and reflection of the programme, took place throughout the implementation of the

2109   programme and continued throughout December. The evaluation and reflection

2110   phases were used to identify the elements within the programme that were

2111   successful, unsuccessful, and where improvements could be made. It was a

2112   collaborative process including informal discussions with parents, coaches, and

2113   support staff to understand parents' experiences of taking part in the support

2114   sessions, the impact of the sessions and cultural changes, an evaluation of the topics

2115   covered, and recommendations for improvements. During this period, I spent

2116   approximately 160 hours observing and having informal conversations with parents,

2117   as well as approximately 980 hours observing the culture, coaches, players, support

2118   staff, and the general football academy environment and carrying out fieldwork. In

2119   addition to implementing the parent support programme, I continued to work as a

2120   sport psychology practitioner with the players and coaches. Further details are

2121   provided within chapter five.

2122   *3.8.3. Cycle Two: Modify and Plan to Evaluation (January – May 2018)*

2123   From January to May 2018, I remained embedded within the academy and

2124   continued to work as a practitioner-researcher with parents, players, coaches, and

2125   support staff carrying out approximately 800 hours of fieldwork, observations,

2126   informal conversations, sport psychology practice, and attending necessary multi-

2127   disciplinary meetings. In January 2018, phase six, the reflection and modification of

2128   cycle one took place, followed by the planning of cycle two. Cycle two ran from

2129   February 2018 until the evaluation and reflection was completed in March 2020.

2130   **3.8.3.1 Phase Six – Reflection and Modification.** Phase six was a further

2131   process of reflection using Gibbs' reflective cycle to identify areas for improvement

2132   within the parent support sessions and cultural changes. The reflection was carried

2133   out collaboratively with the parents, coaches, support staff, and my supervisors.

2134   These reflections were noted in my reflexive diary along with ideas for the changes

2135   that could be made. Following this phase of reflection, the planning of action for the

2136   second cycle of the research process began. This planning included considering the

2137   next delivery mechanism, timings and dates for the delivery, how the topics would

2138   be delivered, activities, discussion topics, and the process of informing parents.

2139   Specifically, for this programme (see chapter six), the planning of the delivery

2140   included designing and printing a booklet that would be delivered alongside a

2141   condensed parent support session and further cultural changes. Following the

2142   reflection and modification, the programme of support was delivered and evaluated

2143   during action research cycle two phases seven (action) and eight (evaluation).

2144   *3.8.4 Cycle Two, Phase Nine: Reflection and Future Guidance (June – September*

2145   *2018; June 2019-June 2020)*

2146   After the completion of the second parent support programme, I remained

2147   embedded in the academy engaging with parents, coaches, and players, carrying out

2148   observations, and fieldwork in the form of sport psychology support to parents,

2149   coaches, and players. This continued period of reflection allowed me to continue to

2150   observe and reflect on the cultural changes that were ongoing, plus develop ideas and

2151   recommendations for potential future parent support. During this phase of cycle two

2152   I was also writing up the thesis and reflections were carried out as I went through the

2153   analysis and writing up process.

2154   **3.9 Methodological Rigour of Action Research**

2155   Judgement of the quality of qualitative research has often been carried out in

2156   sport psychology through the application of a universal criteria (such as the criteria

2157   synthesised by Tracy, 2010), however this can be problematic as it does not align

2158   with a relativist ontology and constructionist epistemology (Smith & McGannon,

2159   2017; Sparkes & Smith, 2009). When adopting a relativist ontology, it is assumed

2160   that there is no one set truth, meaning that there are multiple truths and multiple

2161   realities. A constructionist epistemology assumes that knowledge is socially

2162   constructed from interaction with our surroundings. Therefore, applying one

2163   universal criteria to all qualitative research is problematic as it creates a fixed and

2164   rigid approach to the research without flexibility for different research choices based

2165   on different ontological and epistemological perspectives (Smith & McGannon,

2166   2017). One suggested alternative way to judge the quality of qualitative research is

2167   reflexively against the criteria for the specific chosen methodology (Sparkes &

2168   Smith, 2009).

2169   There are varying approaches to implementing and conducting action

2170   research (e.g., participatory research, critical action research, classroom action

2171   research, action learning, action science, soft systems approach, and industrial action

2172   research) and consequently a variety of criteria against which action research can be

2173   conducted (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; Mertler, 2019; McNiff & Whitehead,

2174   2006). For the purpose of the current thesis, the criteria specified by Evans et al.

2175   (2000a) was considered most appropriate due to its previous use within sport

2176   psychology literature. Evans and colleagues specified 12 criteria against which to

2177   judge an action research study:

2178   1) *An intention and commitment to solving practical real-life problems*. The

2179   real-life problem in this thesis was that within academy football the

2180   experience for parents was challenging and some academies had attempted to

2181   implement education programmes for parents, but drawing on a limited

2182   evidence base.

2183   2) *Carry out an intervention that would create change*. In this thesis, including
2184   cultural changes and changing perspectives regarding the parent experience
2185   was designed to stimulate meaningful lasting change.

2186   3) *Incorporates a cycle of critical reflection to enhance action*. For instance,
2187   within this thesis, personal and collective reflection was carried out
2188   throughout and following the actions, based on Gibbs' reflective cycle.

2189   4) *Carry out action based on research for the creation of knowledge*. Within
2190   this thesis the interventions were designed based on the evidence gathered
2191   and presented in the literature review (see chapter two). Subsequently, the
2192   action research cycles were developed and implemented with the aim of first
2193   understanding parents' experiences in detail, which would provide
2194   practitioners and researchers with important knowledge, and secondly
2195   providing novel insights into the success (or lack thereof) of implementing
2196   parent support programmes.

2197   5) *Being systematic in the approach to carrying out the action research*. As
2198   outlined above, the action research process within this thesis systematically
2199   followed the action research cycles detailed in Figure 3.3.

2200   6) *Being strategic and staying focused on the long-term purpose of the action*
2201   *research.* Throughout the action research cycles implemented within this
2202   thesis, I stayed focused on the long-term purpose of enhancing parents'
2203   experiences by improving the support they received and could access.

2204   7) *Being collaborative by including the participants within the research*
2205   *process.* The participants were included in the action research cycles
2206   conducted within this thesis through continuous reflection using informal
2207   conversations, surveys, and interviews.

2208   8) *Empowering the participants by providing them with a voice and input into*
2209   *the research*. The participants were empowered to be a part of the research
2210   process and were encouraged to provide input on the development,
2211   implementation, and evaluation of parent support programmes.

2212   9) *Research was conducted within a mutually accepted ethical framework*. The
2213   ethical approach to this thesis was approved and agreed by the academy as
2214   well as signed off by the College of Engineering ethics committee. Moreover,
2215   it was recognised that ethics is a continually negotiated process and as such,
2216   continual reflection around ethical aspects such as consent, sharing of

2217   information, my involvement, and potential negative impacts of the research

2218   were continually considered.

2219   10) *Must utilise recognisable research methods*. For this thesis, data were

2220   collected using numerous recognised methods, namely, a commonly used

2221   style of interview, survey, focus group, observations, and fieldwork.

2222   11) *The positionality of the researcher must be recognised and the researcher is*

2223   *also reflexive*. The positionality of the researcher has been clearly detailed in

2224   section 3.3 and changes to this positionality have been detailed in chapters

2225   five and six. In addition, I was reflexive throughout the research process and

2226   kept a reflexive diary.

2227   12) *The findings must be useful and have applied implications for both*

2228   *practitioners and researchers*. The main aim for this thesis was to provide

2229   useful and applied implications and suggestions on supporting parents within

2230   academy football. These implications and suggestions have been detailed in

2231   chapter seven (Evans et al., 2000a).

2232   Through the fulfilment of these criterion, I believe that I conducted appropriate

2233   research and action to culminate in action research (Evans et al., 2000a).

2234   To further ensure the trustworthiness of the data, critical friends (e.g., my

2235   PhD supervisors) were used to expand my understanding and deepen my reflections

2236   on the data. The use of critical friends created the opportunity for critical discussion

2237   about the data helping me to consider alternative perspectives on the data and

2238   encourage further reflexivity on my interpretations of the data. The use of critical

2239   friends advanced the trustworthiness of the data as it recognised that alternative

2240   perspectives and interpretations of the data may exist, plus it helped me to

2241   incorporate these alternative perspectives within the write up of my interpretations

2242   (Smith & McGannon, 2017).

2243   In addition to the use of critical friends, I also engaged in the co-production

2244   of the results through a process of discussing and reflecting on the results with the

2245   participants. This process of carrying out member reflections provided the

2246   opportunity within action research to work with the participants/community to

2247   explore any gaps within my interpretation of the data, as well as gain the

2248   participants' perspective on the data and interpretation (Schinke et al., 2013; Smith

2249   & McGannon, 2017). The member reflections collaboratively advanced the

2250   understanding and interpretation of the data to ensure that different perspectives

2251   regarding the data were considered during analysis, interpretation, reflection, and

2252   write up.

2253   **Chapter Four: Cycle One: Exploration and Reflection Phases**

2254   **4.1 Introduction**

2255   This chapter details the initial exploration and reflection phase in action

2256   research cycle one. Based on the pre-identified gap in the literature (see chapter one

2257   and two), combined with a desire to develop an action that would specifically

2258   address the needs of this population, the purpose of this exploration phase of action

2259   research cycle one was to develop an in-depth understanding of the experiences of

2260   parents across the lifespan of an academy footballer. Specifically, I sought to

2261   understand the experiences of parents with children aged from 8 - 16 years.

2262   Following this, the purpose of the reflection phase was to develop recommendations

2263   for supporting parents at different stages of their child's sporting journey.

2264   Recognising that parents do not know what they do not know (Thrower et al., 2016),

2265   and that parents' involvement in their children's sport does not happen in isolation

2266   (Knight et al., 2017) to enhance the reflection process and the subsequent

2267   recommendations produced, these reflections were carried out collaboratively

2268   between myself and parents, coaches, and support staff.

2269   **4.2 Methodology and Philosophical Assumptions**

2270   As detailed in chapter three, a case study of a British boys' category one

2271   football academy was conducted to complete the exploration and reflection phase of

2272   the first action research cycle. The case study was approached from an interpretivist

2273   perspective, drawing on a constructionist epistemology and relativist ontology. A

2274   case study design is congruent with an interpretivist perspective because it utilises

2275   multiple perspectives to gain an in-depth understanding of complex multi-faceted

2276   social phenomenon (e.g., person, group, project, event, programme, or organisation),

2277   while retaining the characteristics of the everyday context in which it was studied

2278   (Crowe et al., 2011; Yin, 2018). As such, this design enabled an appreciation of

2279   parents', coaches', and support staffs' individual thoughts, beliefs, and experiences,

2280   within the specific context of this academy (Schwandt, 2000). Moreover, an

2281   understanding of the parent experience and the development of recommendations for

2282   supporting parents could be co-constructed using the multiple perspectives and my

2283   interpretations.

2284   There are various types of case studies (e.g., instrumental, intrinsic, and

2285   collective) and for the current study, an instrumental case study was used. An

2286   instrumental case study uses one particular case to gain a broad understanding of a

2287   phenomenon (Hodge & Sharp, 2016). For these phases of the action research, an

2288   instrumental case study provided the foundations for an exploration of parenting

2289   within academy football, drawing upon the experiences of parents and perspectives

2290   of other stakeholders within one specific academy as the case (c.f. Stake, 1995).

2291   Beyond enabling a detailed insight into the phenomenon of being a parent of

2292   an academy footballer, a case study was deemed useful because it gave a voice to

2293   those whose voices are less heard (Schwandt & Gates, 2018). Although there is an

2294   ever growing body of evidence pertaining to sport parents, within sporting

2295   environments parents' voices are often not heard or acknowledged as the culture

2296   dictates that parents relinquish control over to their child's coach and stay in the

2297   background (Kerr & Stirling, 2012; Jacobs et al., 2017). Additionally, parents are

2298   often deeply immersed within the sporting culture and live the role of a sport parent,

2299   so do not question the sporting culture (McMahon & Penney, 2014). This is

2300   particularly true within football academies where parents often have limited input

2301   due to the cultural expectations and codes of conduct restricting their involvement

2302   (Clarke & Harwood, 2014). As such, a case study approach was seen as a beneficial

2303   approach to ensure that parents' voices could be acknowledged within a naturalistic

2304   football academy environment.

2305   One of the main limitations of using a case study methodology is that the

2306   research is carried out within just one case. This limitation of single case study

2307   research has been well recognised. It is acknowledged that case studies are not

2308   generalisable to different populations, but rather case study findings provide

2309   theoretical propositions than can be transferred to other situations (Yin, 2009). As

2310   such the findings from this case study may be applicable to other academies.

2311   Conversely, it is also recognised that there are likely to be cultural and contextual

2312   variations amongst other academies, which may affect the application of the findings

2313   (Henriksen et al., 2010a; Hodge & Sharp, 2016). In an attempt to overcome this

2314   limitation of one case, multiple sources of data were used (Yin, 2009). These

2315   multiple sources included as many different parents from different contextual

2316   backgrounds as possible, plus coaches and support staff. However, generalisability

2317   as a limitation should be considered within the issues raised of trying to generalise

2318   qualitative research. The strength of qualitative research is to gain a breadth of rich

2319   knowledge through a small sample, rather than the limited sample restricting the

2320   generalisability of the findings being a weakness (Smith, 2018).

4.3 Procedure

Following University Ethics Board approval, an information sharing event was held for parents, players, coaches, and support staff to explain my initial research plans. At this session, I informed parents of the purpose of my research and the combination of informal and formal data collection methods that I would be using. Parents were also given a brief open-ended questionnaire which asked for their initial thoughts on the support that may be beneficial to them, as well as their current experiences. One example of the questions included was, "please indicate the key areas in which you think you need support or guidance as a parent of a child at the football academy." The foundation phase session was attended by 58 parents and the youth development phase session by 42 parents. The majority of these parents consented to participate in the exploration and reflection phases. There was one parent who did not wish to participate, so I ensured that I did not collect any formal or informal data from this parent. To maintain anonymity and ensure the academy staff and other parents did not know who had consented to take part and who had withdrawn the parents were asked to contact me directly either via email or by speaking to me face-to-face. During informal conversations, I would also ensure that I did not observe or collect informal data from the parents who were interacting with the parent who had withdrawn until they had finished conversing and that parent had moved locations. To ensure that the son of the parent who had withdrawn was not unfairly disadvantaged I continued to provide sport psychology support to him and the parent also had the opportunity to attend any of the parent support sessions without any data being collected/recorded.

Following the introductory session, it was decided with academy staff that, as part of my practitioner-researcher role, I would deliver monthly parent meetings. These meetings were introduced to enable parents to share their experiences, learn from each other, and seek information from me that may enhance their or their son's football experience. There was a total of 26 sessions delivered across all age groups over the course of the season from October to May. The meetings were discussion-based sessions with minimal structure covering seven topics: the challenges and stressors of being a football parent, their role within reviews, drop-in session during reviews, role clarification of the support network, the ideal parent, communicating with their son, and coping strategies for release. Each of these sessions last for an hour to an hour and a half. These meetings played an important role in the data

2355   collection process, providing a 'real-life' opportunity to identify the types of support

2356   parents needed and wanted. These meetings were also important in ensuring that

2357   rather than only *using* participants for their insights, I was able to provide immediate

2358   feedback and information to parents, enabling them to benefit directly from their

2359   involvement. This mutually beneficial arrangement facilitated the development of

2360   relationships, enabled both the participants and I to have our needs met, and gave

2361   parents an opportunity to reflect on information they were provided with and

2362   subsequently indicated if this information did/did not address their needs.

2363   Attendance at these meetings was voluntary, with attendance ranging from one to 58

2364   parents each month. At the beginning of the season parent attendance numbers were

2365   quite high, especially of parents from the age groups under-9 to under-14. The

2366   highest number of attendances was 24 parents at one session. However, as the season

2367   progressed the numbers of parents attending decreased to some sessions not being

2368   attended at all or only being attended by one parent. The average parent attendance

2369   was 17 parents. The parent attendance numbers were impacted by a number of

2370   sessions being cancelled or having to be rearranged due to not being seen as a

2371   priority within the academy.

2372   **4.4 Data Collection**

2373   *4.4.1 Fieldnotes and Observations*

2374   As outlined in chapter three, this case study occurred over an eight-month

2375   period, during which I was embedded at the academy to gain an in-depth

2376   understanding of the academy environment and culture. During this time, I carried

2377   out 1120 hours of observations, which were guided by Thorpe and Olive's (2016)

2378   procedure. Specifically, based on Thorpe and Olive's guidance regarding when, how,

2379   and where to observe, I carried out observations of parents, coaches, and support

2380   staff at training sessions and matches, during player signings, at performance review

2381   meetings, and parent meetings. Fieldnotes based on observations pertaining to parent

2382   behaviours, discussions with parents, discussions about parents, the information that

2383   was provided to parents, and the academy culture in relation to parents were

2384   recorded. An example of the fieldnotes and observations gathered can be found in

2385   Appendix A.

2386   To ensure observations occurred in an appropriate manner, parents, players,

2387   coaches, and support staff were informed, at the aforementioned information sharing

2388   event, that observations would be taking place during this exploration phase. An opt-

2389   out consent was used for the observations and informal conversations where at the

2390   information evening or via email parents, players, coaches, and support staff could

2391   withdraw from being observed. Additionally, prior to each observation, I would greet

2392   those present and make them aware that I was observing. This allowed anyone who

2393   did not want to be observed to explicitly indicate this to me or move away if they

2394   wished. I paid careful attention to parents' reactions to my arrival so that I could

2395   identify any parents who appeared uncomfortable and moved away so as to ensure

2396   that I did not include them in my observations. Following each observation, I

2397   thanked and said goodbye to those present to provide a clear ending to the

2398   observation.

2399   *4.4.2 Reflexive Diary*

2400   Throughout the exploration phase and reflection phase, I maintained a

2401   reflexive diary documenting my experiences, thoughts, and reflections. As stated

2402   within chapter three I recorded my reflections using the Gibbs' (1988) reflective

2403   cycle, which contained six stages of reflection; description, feelings, evaluation,

2404   analysis, conclusion, and action planning. The reflections were completed at the end

2405   of each day that I was at the academy, after each conversation that had occurred with

2406   parents, coaches, or support staff, and after each match that was observed. If

2407   reflections were noted where I felt it would be useful to follow up, I would create

2408   questions and actions at the bottom of the reflections which would guide future data

2409   collection. More details of this process can be found in chapter three. An example of

2410   an entry from my reflexive diary can be found in Appendix B.

2411   *4.4.3 Informal Conversations*

2412   A conversational approach was used throughout the exploration and

2413   reflection phase to gain rich, naturalistic data and collaborative reflections from

2414   parents, players, coaches, and support staff throughout the data collection period.

2415   These were free flowing conversations that took place in a variety of locations,

2416   including at home and away matches, the parents' lounge, office space, and in the

2417   canteen. Informal conversations included discussions around the tangible support

2418   parents were provided, coaches engagement with parents, and the emotions parents

2419   experienced on match days. Informal conversations were recorded at the end of each

2420   conversation or series of conversations if one conversation flowed in to further

2421   conversations or multiple conversations took place during match observations.

2422   ***4.4.4 Formal Data Collection***

2423   To supplement all the observational and informal data collected, 29 semi-

2424   structured interviews and three focus groups were also conducted. Participants were

2425   purposefully sampled to capture a range of experiences from across the age groups

2426   within the youth football academy. Before each of the interviews and focus groups

2427   took place, further informed consent was gained from the parents, coaches, and

2428   support staff. The sampling criterion were: 1) being a parent, guardian, or carer of at

2429   least one boy within the youth football academy, and; 2) their son trained and played

2430   matches for the under-9 to under-16 teams. The sampling criterion for the coaches

2431   and support staff were; 1) be a full or part-time member of staff within the youth

2432   football academy, and; 2) to work with the under-9 to under-16 age group teams. An

2433   example of the participant information sheet and consent form can be found in

2434   Appendix C.

2435   The formal data collection occurred with 36 participants; 26 parents (three

2436   parents took part in an interview and focus group), five coaches, and five support

2437   staff. The parents were aged between 30 and 60 years, of children aged 9 to 15 years

2438   old, and 72% described their ethnicity as White-British[2]. A sample size of 36 was

2439   chosen to ensure parents from each of the eight age groups across the academy were

2440   represented, to enable experiences and recommendations for support to be

2441   understood developmentally. Coaches and support staff were aged 20 to 60+ years

2442   (see Tables 4.1 and 4.2 for further details).

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[2] Due to the small number of category one academies in the UK, and the relatively small numbers of parents associated with the academy, there were concerns regarding protecting the anonymity of the participants. The collection of any further demographic information (e.g., family structure, parental employment, household income) relating to each parent was deemed to threaten their anonymity and thus was not collected.

2443   **Table 4.1**

2444   *Parent Descriptive Information*

Age of parent	Parent Gender	Age of child	Age group	Time at the academy	Children's years in football	Distance travelled to academy	Children in football
-	Male	8	U9	On trial	-	-	-
-	Male	9	U9	On trial	-	-	-
-	Female	8	U9	-	-	-	-
31-40	Male	9	U9	11 mths.	3 yrs.	50 mins	1
31-40	Male	9	U10	3 yrs.	6 yrs.	5 mins	1
41-50	Male	10	U10	1.5 yrs.	4 yrs.	60 miles	3
31-40	Female	10	U10	1 week	7 yrs.	60 mins	5
31-40	Female	10	U10	2 mths.	10 yrs.	56 miles	1
31-40	Male	11	U10/U11	6 yrs.	8 yrs.	2 miles	2
-	Female	10	U11	-	-	-	-
-	Female	11	U11	-	-	-	-
41-50	Female	10	U11	1.75 yrs.	6 yrs.	1.5 hrs.	1
41-50	Male	11	U11	3.5 yrs.	4 yrs.	52 miles	2
41-50	Female	11	U11	4 yrs.	6 yrs.	20 miles	1

Age of parent	Parent Gender	Age of child	Age group	Time at the academy	Children's years in football	Distance travelled to academy	Children in football
31-40	Male	10	U11	2 yrs.	5 yrs.	15 mins.	1
31-40	Female	11	U12	4 yrs.	7 yrs.	15 mins.	1
41-50	Female	11	U12	4 yrs.	9 yrs.	5 miles	2
41-50	Male	11	U12	2 wks.*	8 yrs.	20 miles	1
51-60	Female	12	U13	1.5 yrs.	8 yrs.	40 mins.	2
41-50	Female	12	U13	7 mths.	13 yrs.	45 mins.	2
51-60	Female	13	U13	5 yrs.	7 yrs.	30 mins.	1
41-50	Female	14	U14	2.5 yrs.	7 yrs.	60 miles	1
41-50	Female	14	U14	2.5 yrs.	7 yrs.	1 hr.	2
51-60	Male	15	U15	5 wks.	11 yrs.	4 miles	1
41-50	Female	15	U15	6 wks.*	5 yrs.	45 mins.	1
31-40	Female	15	U15	3 yrs.	7 yrs.	20 mins.	2

2445   * Child was previously at the academy but was released at a younger age.

2446 **Table 4.2**

2447 *Coach and Support Staff Descriptive Information*

Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Time involved in football
20-30	Male	White - British	1.5 yrs.
20-30	Female	White - British	12 yrs.
20-30	Male	White - British	3 yrs.
20-30	Male	Mixed White and Asian - British	20 yrs.
31-40	Male	White - British	30 yrs.
61 +	Male	White - British/ Australian	61 yrs.
31-40	Male	White - British	5 yrs.
61 +	Male	White - British	50 yrs.
20-30	Male	White - British	6 yrs.
20-30	Male	White - British	-
41-50	Male	White - British	-

2448

2449   ***4.4.4.1. Interviews.*** The purpose of the interviews was to gain rich in-depth

2450   data and reflections from parents, coaches, and support staff and to provide an

2451   opportunity to explore ideas that had arisen from the informal data collection.

2452   Interviews were arranged for a mutually convenient time and took place in a semi-

2453   private room. The interviews started after I had been embedded in the academy for

2454   three months. The interview guide was based upon previous research examining

2455   parent experiences and support (Clarke & Harwood, 2014; Harwood et al., 2010;

2456   Thrower et al., 2016) and my observations and informal conversations. A copy of the

2457   interview guide can be found in Appendix D. Initial questions focused on

2458   participants' history and experiences within football (e.g., "what has been your

2459   experience as a football parent this season so far?"). These were followed by the

2460   main questions that focused upon the transition from grassroots to academy level

2461   football, their experiences, perceptions of the current parent support provided, and

2462   recommendations for future parent support. There were further specific questions for

2463   parents, for example, their beliefs on providing support to their son and relationships

2464   with coaches/support staff (e.g., "how would you describe your relationship with

2465   your child's coach?"). Coaches and support staff also discussed their relationship

2466   with parents (e.g., "what has been your experience of coach-athlete-parent

2467   relationships?"). Interviews concluded with summary questions and an opportunity

2468   for participants to provide any further information (e.g., "overall, summarise your

2469   experience of being a football parent this season").

2470   Interviews ranged from 15 minutes to 113 minutes (M=38 minutes, SD=21

2471   minutes), with additional time spent before and after the interview discussing ideas

2472   more informally. To minimise additional pressures for parents, interviews took place

2473   while their son was training. However, this resulted in parents, on occasions, being

2474   called away unexpectedly to support their child (i.e., when injured) and interviews

2475   were cut short. Despite the short length of some interviews they still provided

2476   valuable insights, especially when combined with the other data.

2477   ***4.4.4.2 Focus Groups***. Three focus groups were conducted with 10 parents,

2478   of whom three also completed an individual interview too. Focus groups ranged

2479   from 43 minutes to 77 minutes (M=46 minutes, SD=18 minutes) and were conducted

2480   to enable group discussion among parents to facilitate more explicit identification of

2481   similarities and differences in parents' experiences and recommendations for

2482   support. Focus groups began with parents detailing their background and experiences

2483   within football, followed by discussions regarding their relationship with the coaches

2484   and support staff, their experiences of attending their sons' matches, the support they

2485   felt was currently available, and the support they may benefit from. These topics

2486   were selected based on the earlier interviews and observations. A copy of the focus

2487   group guide can be found in Appendix E.

2488   **4.5 Data Analysis**

2489   I analysed all data using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2018,

2490   2019, 2020; Braun et al., 2016). Reflexive thematic analysis is a flexible process in

2491   which a researcher creatively identifies patterns of meaning within a dataset relating

2492   to the research questions through reflexive and thoughtful connection with the data

2493   (Braun & Clarke 2018, 2019). Reflexive thematic analysis was chosen for the

2494   exploration and reflection phase as it enabled insights into each participant's

2495   individual thoughts, beliefs, and experiences to be identified, which aligned with my

2496   philosophical approach. Moreover, this analysis approach recognised my role as a

2497   researcher in constructing the findings from the information shared by the

2498   participants.

2499   To conduct the analysis, I first became immersed in the interview and focus

2500   group data by listening back to the audio files and reading through the transcripts

2501   several times. Alongside, I also re-familiarised myself with my observations,

2502   fieldnotes, informal conversations, and notes recorded in my reflexive diary.

2503   Throughout this process, I reflected on my reading of the data and documented my

2504   reflections in a notebook. Initial thoughts were shared with critical friends (i.e., my

2505   PhD supervisors) to help me expand my thoughts and reflections by questioning my

2506   understanding. I subsequently spent time contemplating the data, before writing

2507   further reflections and considering how it would have felt to be a parent of an

2508   academy footballer in order to fully immerse myself within the detailed experiences.

2509   Next, I identified initial themes based upon the features that I recognised

2510   within the data and added meaning to this data through the use of codes. Themes

2511   were developed by collating the codes generated and grouping them together. A

2512   mind map was used to combine the raw themes together and integrate data into main

2513   themes and subthemes. For example, data relating to parents' initial experiences,

2514   transitioning into the academy, excitement experienced, the professionalism of the

2515   environment, and amazement of the opportunity, were coded under the sub themes of

2516   *amazement of the opportunity* and *overwhelmed with excitement*. Following this, the

2517   main themes were refined, reviewed, and reflected upon and subsequently defined

2518   and named. For instance, a main theme was *excited and amazed* with the sub themes

2519   of *amazement at the opportunity* and *overwhelmed with excitement by the transition*.

2520   Specifically, the initial interpretations of data were questioned, and varying

2521   representations of the initial themes were produced (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

2522   To enhance my reflexivity, other members of the research team (my

2523   supervisors) continued to serve as critical friends to provide an alternative

2524   perspective and encourage enhancement of thought (Smith & McGannon, 2017). As

2525   the data were being interpreted and the themes developed, I wrote analytical notes as

2526   preliminary ideas for the final themes. I spent some time going through a process of

2527   contemplating the themes, spending time away from the data and then returning to

2528   revise and edit as appropriate. Finally, the themes were organised in relation to the

2529   aims of these phases and a coherent account of parents' experiences and

2530   recommendations for support were detailed. The process detailed helped me to

2531   identify not just the overt themes on the surface of the data, but also the implicit

2532   meaning behind the detail within the data.

2533   **4.6 Methodological Rigour**

2534   Aligned with my relativist approach for judging rigour (Sparkes & Smith,

2535   2009), the specific criteria for evaluating case studies were considered and applied

2536   throughout these exploration and reflection phases (Stake, 2005). The first criterion

2537   is to clearly identify a unique case where maximum learning can occur. In an attempt

2538   to fulfil this criterion, the unique case of a British category one boys youth football

2539   academy where the parent experience and support recommendations would be

2540   explored was selected and a detailed description provided. To create maximum

2541   learning from a variety of perspectives the exploration and reflection phase included

2542   the triangulation of multiple views through the use of interviews, focus groups,

2543   observations, informal conversations, and my reflexive diary.

2544   Stake's second criterion was to research a small number of cases at length.

2545   This was fulfilled by me focusing on one particular case in the form of one football

2546   academy, which was then studied in-depth over an eight-month period. The third

2547   criterion was the appropriateness of the chosen case. Given the purpose of the

2548   exploration and reflection phases was to examine parents' experiences and support

2549   recommendations in academy football, an established top level academy was

2550   selected. Specifically, aligned with the overall action research methodology, the case

2551   in which the subsequent action would be implemented was selected to ensure that the

2552   intervention that was developed was targeted specifically to this population. The

2553   final criterion was the extent to which the researcher advocated their position and

2554   was themselves within the research process. To fulfil this final criterion, I kept a

2555   reflexive diary before and during the data collection process, and throughout data

2556   analysis. Within the diary I reflected on my previous experiences and my perceptions

2557   of the current case. In addition, my PhD supervisors were used as critical friends to

2558   provide an alternative perspective, thus challenging and developing my

2559   interpretations of the data.

2560   **4.7 Findings**

2561   The purpose of this exploration phase was to understand parents' experiences

2562   and the desired outcome of the reflective phase was to offer recommendations for

2563   supporting parents within youth academy football. In particular for the exploration

2564   phase, the aim was to understand the experience of parents across the lifespan of an

2565   academy footballer, and for the reflection phase the aim was to develop

2566   recommendations for supporting parents at different stages of their child's sporting

2567   journey. With regards to the exploration phase it appeared that parents' experience

2568   an ever-changing journey in the academy, comprising four distinct phases,

2569   accompanied by two overarching themes (see figure 4.1). In relation to the reflection

2570   phase the development of a parent supportive culture, alongside the delivery of

2571   specific parents' support sessions appeared to be particularly beneficial.

2572

2573   **Figure 4.1**

2574   *The Parent Journey Through Youth Academy Football*

2575

Enjoyment, opportunity, and development

| Excited and amazed | Dawning of reality | Accepting and rationalising | Focusing on the future |

Sacrifice, commitment, and consequences
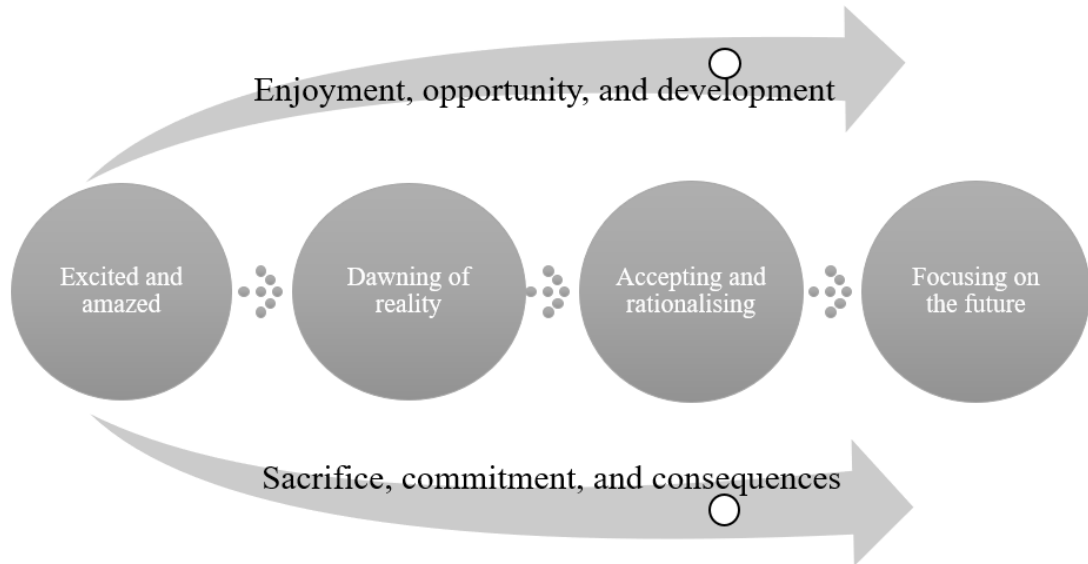
2576

2577

2578   *4.7.1 Exploration Phase: The Football Parent Journey*

2579   **4.7.1.1. Excited and Amazed.** Players usually join the academy system at

2580   eight years of age (under-9 team), but they can be recruited after this. The excitement

2581   that parents experienced as their son completed their initial signing with the academy

2582   was evident throughout this exploration phase. Parents described being proud of

2583   their son achieving something other children had not and potentially having a

2584   successful football career ahead of them. Gaining a place at an academy and the

2585   potential that it could bring was exciting for parents and this was reinforced by a

2586   number of individuals associated with the child. One mother described during an

2587   informal conversation, "you get a wider circle of friends that want to celebrate your

2588   achievement because you never know he could be that whatever, percentage… They

2589   think they've already made it [as a professional footballer]." A place at the academy

2590   gave parents and those associated with the child the belief that they could be a

2591   professional footballer, and subsequently the potential of fame and fortune.

2592   Extending this view, a member of the support staff added, "what you tend to

2593   find is the parents initially they're all excited, they're all buzzing to come in here to

2594   see what we've got, to see what's on offer." Parents supported this comment,

2595   recognising the privileged position their son was in and how exciting the opportunity

2596   was for them. One father shared during an informal conversation the experience as:

2597   He knows he's in a privileged position being here. He knows that his brothers

2598   have got to look at the weather that most of the games will be called off, he

2599   gets to play every week… Its [the] experience for us, for me especially

2600   because I'm football mad, always have been so it's been lovely going around

2601   these grounds and you know seeing him playing at some fantastic facilities

2602   and you know enjoying himself.

2603   Overall, it was clear that parents understood that their sons had the opportunity to

2604   train at facilities and play against teams that most children could only dream about.

2605   From an alternative perspective, the academy environment is very different to

2606   parents' and players' previous football experiences. So, although the parents were

2607   excited by the opportunity their son had, they also appeared to be somewhat amazed

2608   by the professional nature of the environment, the facilities that were available, and

2609   the opportunities provided. For instance, professional coaching up to five nights per

2610   week, large amounts of free kit, and national and international travel. One under-9

2611   father shared during an interview:

2612   It was amazing. Still is amazing. Like I still can't get over it. You want to

2613   slow time down, because it's already January… I thoroughly enjoy it. I come

2614   down here with a smile on my face. You go and see where he's training. The

2615   facilities he's using. The people he's playing with. The people he's met.

2616   Where he's travelling… it's really incredible.

2617   One example of parents' amazement was recorded in my reflexive diary at the first

2618   match of the season:

2619   As we arrived at the venue, I could see a swarm of under-9 parents greeting

2620   us, I couldn't believe they had travelled for 5 hours in that awful weather on a

2621   weekday. For most of them this was the first time their son would put on a

2622   club shirt and represent the club. The children and the parents were excited,

2623   yet nervous, but the incumbent weather was certainly not going to put them

2624   off.

2625   It appeared that parents' own excitement for both them and their child meant they

2626   were willing to make work and life sacrifices to be part of their son's amazing

2627   opportunities.

2628   Another area in which parents were amazed was how different the academy

2629   set up was to grassroots and the amount of support that was provided to their son.

2630   For example, one under-10 mother commented during an interview on the

2631   professionalism of the support provided to the boys for injuries:

2632   Obviously, there is a big jump from grassroots to academy in the way that

2633   everything is run… especially with physio, if they're injured and obviously

2634   they get looked after. With grassroots I suppose it is, you have to look at

2635   getting aftercare for them if they are injured… the standard of football is

2636   [also] much higher.

2637   **4.7.1.2 Dawning of Reality.** Once children had been at the academy for

2638   around two years, the demands and expectations of being involved appeared to

2639   become draining. Parents described the challenges and their frustrations about the

2640   commitment they needed to maintain for their child's development, as the constant

2641   demands and travel commitments became wearing. They found the logistics of

2642   getting their child to training and prepared for matches a struggle. One father

2643   expressed:

2644   [My experience is] not the best personally, the only enjoyment I get from it is

2645   seeing him enjoy it. Everything else, I find really hard work. Difficult.

2646   Logistically, financially,… what doesn't help is the distance we've got to

2647   travel really. I mean if he's training five times a week. It's fifty-two mile

2648   here, fifty-two mile back, so that's a hundred mile every training session. So

2649   he's doing five hundred mile a week maybe, plus away games, home games,

2650   and the hours we've got to put in really as parents is so difficult,… without

2651   sounding too dramatic, it's life changing for us as well.

2652   In an interview one member of the support staff recognised the challenges that parent

2653   experience :

2654   The expectations of the number of training sessions, the expectations of

2655   transporting them to and from games, the commitment mum and dad have to

2656   give in terms of having to bring them back and forth to the academy on their

2657   night, if they've got other children its difficult, I couldn't do it.

2658   When joining the academy, parents had recognised the need to be committed,

2659   but the extent of the support required exceeded expectations. For instance, although

2660   parents were fully aware of the commitments required by the academy when signing,

2661   the reality of the commitment becomes wearing over time. I recorded my reflections

2662   on the discussions with parents in my reflexive diary:

2663   Throughout the discussions with parents I was bombarded with them

2664   offloading moans, frustrations, and complaints. These included not having

2665   enough time to feed their children a healthy meal, not seeing their children

2666   much, and the brutal nature of the release process.

2667   In addition to the day-to-day support needed to maintain their son's place,

2668   parents described encountering numerous unexpected demands. These included, for

2669   example, completing online tasks, encouraging children to watch video clips, and

2670   facilitating additional training sessions. As one under-11 mother shared during a

2671   focus group, "we didn't realise what kind of commitments it involved, it's not that

2672   you don't know you're coming to training three times a week, but you don't realise

2673   now with the add-ons, with the extras involved in it." I also described such

2674   frustrations in my reflexive diary following an informal conversation with some

2675   parents:

2676   During a monthly meeting I had with the U11 and U12 parents, they

2677   appeared to be frustrated. They do not feel they are being listened to, their

2678   views are not being heard and have become frustrated by the system. My

2679   view is that the system needs to change rather than this continuous frustration

2680   from both sides and continually arranging individual meetings to 'problem'

2681   manage.

2682   These frustrations were supported by an under 11 father who described how

2683   parents often did not feel welcome within the academy, as the parents' lounge was

2684   regularly closed and prior to that they had nowhere to wait while their son attended

2685   training. "It's great you travel all that way and that's the sort of reception you get.

2686   And again this is closed today, obviously match day today, the first [first] team

2687   [match] of the year. If your boy was training out[side], you wait out on the road and

2688   things like that. It just makes that part of it really hard for us." Parents felt that not

2689   having a comfortable and warm space to wait for them to finish training made them

2690   feel unwelcome and the experience harder for them.

2691   Combined with the additional demands, parents also described becoming

2692   increasingly aware and anxious of the review and release system[3]. During an

2693   informal conversation one under-11 mother talked about her fear of release, "that's

2694   my only fear that you've got to be prepared for it and there's been horror stories in

2695   the past [from parents] you never mentioned before that he was no good, and now

2696   they've released him today." Parents started to discuss their concerns with each

2697   other, the coaches, and me. They explained that being out of control, and unable to

2698   influence the decision regarding their son's future was particularly hard. One under-

2699   12 mother shared during an interview, "he had a warning at Christmas last year and

2700   he took that hard. He took that really, really hard. Thank god I didn't go in with him

2701   because I probably would have cried." Parents' concerns regarding their son being

2702   released was made more difficult because they were unsure of how to provide the

2703   necessary emotional support. In an interview one under-11 father described:

2704   The hardest part of being a parent in the academy, is trying to prepare them

2705   for that [review]. Because you never know, every review they go to, you

2706   don't know whether they are going to say this is the last game you're

2707   playing… or not, so it's quite difficult to try and juggle that as well as trying

2708   to keep their moral quite high as well… it just seems really cutthroat for

2709   children so young.

2710   **4.7.1.3 Accepting and Rationalising.** After approximately four years at the

2711   academy, parents seemed to have accepted the sacrifices and commitment needed to

2712   support their son. Following a series of informal conversations with parents and

2713   coaches, I reflected on the accepting and rationalising phase:

2714   These parents appeared to be in the process of accepting of the challenges

2715   with the daily hassles having less of an impact. Parents still appeared to

2716   experience general stressors, but they felt that their son was now more

2717   independent which had made it easier. They were less concerned about the

2718   expense of travelling to away matches and the impact on siblings because

2719   their son was more independent so would go to away matches without them.

2720   This allowed more time to be spent with other siblings and reduced the

2721   impact on family life.

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[3] There are two times during each season (usually mid-season and towards the end of the season) when players may be released from the academy.

2722   Parents became accustomed to the culture and developed strategies to

2723   manage the demands; they made changes to their lifestyle to maximise their time and

2724   reduce the impact on their careers and family life. One mother explained during an

2725   informal conversation how she used the parent's lounge to make the most of the time

2726   she spent waiting for her child to finish training:

2727   You've just got to make the best of the travelling and things, it is a

2728   commitment, but when I come down here I come down with my laptop

2729   usually and I'll do some work or I'll do something when I'm here so it feels

2730   more constructive.

2731   Parents described actively reducing their social life and focusing on gaining social

2732   support from other parents within the academy. One under-13 parent explained in an

2733   interview:

2734   Your friends change. Your friends become the other parents of the under-13

2735   boys. We've started staying, now the academy allows you to travel up the

2736   night before, a group of us will all go up together, so we'll have a social

2737   event around that, rather than, it does stop you on an away game weekend

2738   going out on a Saturday night for example.

2739   Such changes were made because parents accepted that they were necessary

2740   if their son was to progress. As one under-13 mother shared in an interview:

2741   …it's the acceptance of, actually, if you want to support your son through

2742   this process you have got to give things up. So, it's either, we carry on as

2743   normal and [son] loses out on the opportunity, or your friends change. Your

2744   friends become the other parents of the academy boys.

2745   Accepting the demands of supporting their son, combined with their son becoming

2746   more independent, resulted in parents feeling that the 'football parenting experience'

2747   was now less demanding. For instance, their sons could now prepare their own food

2748   and kit before training reducing organisational demands, as one under-14 mother

2749   described in an interview:

2750   It's easier now that he's getting older and he can come home from school and

2751   he can get himself ready and get his own food ready. But those earlier years

2752   were tough, because the academy are putting their sessions on earlier because

2753   they're younger, but it's that logistic of picking them up from school and

2754   getting them fed and getting them to [training venue].

2755   Along with accepting the changes that needed to be made within their lives in

2756   order to accommodate their son's engagement in academy football, parents also

2757   rationalised the challenges they faced. For example, during an informal conversation

2758   one parent said, "it's only [a] transitional period in your life so you've got to make

2759   the most of that, but know that at some of stage you will move on." This

2760   rationalising helped parents to accept the changes that they needed to make within

2761   their lives as they were only temporary because their son's place within the academy

2762   was not permanent and potentially may come to an end soon.

2763   I also recalled some reflections about this rationalisation process within my

2764   reflexive diary after I spoke to parents following the end of season reviews:

2765   From having seen a number of their son's friends being released from the

2766   academy, parents at this stage of their journey recognise that their son's

2767   position within the academy is not permanent and there is always a risk that

2768   he will be released at the end of the season. The relief on parents' faces as

2769   they leave the end of season reviews with the news that their son will be

2770   continuing for another season shows just how fragile they believe their son's

2771   position within the academy is. One way I have seen parents rationalise and

2772   put the demands in to perspective is for them to encourage their son to enjoy

2773   and work hard every season, as it might be their last.

2774   **4.7.1.4 Focusing on the Future.** As parents reached this final phase, they

2775   recognised that their sons had become more independent and were now able to

2776   realise for themselves why they were in the academy and what they wanted from the

2777   experience. One father stated during an informal conversation:

2778   He's, I think, at a point where he is maturing as a young person and, both

2779   physically and mentally he's a little bit, more able to realise, what and why

2780   he's doing it, and what he wants to get out of it.

2781   Although their son was now more independent they did still rely on their parents for

2782   emotional support. However, parents found that providing this emotional support,

2783   could, at times, be particularly challenging. For instance, although parents wanted to

2784   help their son manage the pressures of football and school, they struggled to

2785   communicate with their son and often asked me for advice on the adolescent brain.

2786   Numerous fieldnotes were recorded on this topic, such as, "today parents raised

2787   concerns about their lack of communication with their son. They described how they

2788   try to engage in conversation, but he just grunts. They know he thinks deeply yet

2789   can't get any information from him."

2790   One particular area that parents did require support to help their son was after

2791   a "bad" match or when their team had lost, as parents found it difficult to respond in

2792   the appropriate way and balance this with allowing their son space to reflect on the

2793   loss or poor performance. I recorded in my reflections after an informal conversation

2794   with parents at a match, "another area that may be useful to include within the parent

2795   support is providing them with guidance on how to support their son following a loss

2796   and re-building their confidence, as parents appeared concerned about how they were

2797   going to support their son following the lose."

2798   Finally, as the children approached the end of compulsory education (age

2799   15/16 years), parents appeared to become more aware of the pressures that their son

2800   was under at school and the need to perform in football to secure a scholar[4] contract.

2801   One mother described:

2802   You know, they've got their homework, they've got everything else and they

2803   come here with the training that they've got, and things, and, for me, as a

2804   parent with a business and all these things, I'm old, I'm more mature, and I

2805   still struggle with some of those things sometimes to try and balance my time

2806   management, and you're asking 15-year olds and children to be able to do

2807   this. It's difficult. It isn't easy for them.

2808   Due to this exceptional pressure on their sons and recognising the chances of

2809   not getting a scholarship contract, parents wanted their sons to have a backup plan in

2810   case they did not get a contract. One way parents helped their sons to develop a

2811   back-up plan was to identify the transferable skills they had gained from being at the

2812   academy. One mother talked about the life skills her son had gained during an

2813   informal conversation:

2814   I think what my son has gained I'd like to think is that in life, it's what it

2815   takes to succeed, really, more than anything. That's going to come back to a

2816   job, to anything really that he wants. Whether it's just fitness or any of these

2817   types of things, it's hard work. It's really hard graft.

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[4] The scholar contract is the first contract a player receives that involves being paid to play football. As a scholar, players will attend the academy daily, while also completing some educational qualifications.

2818   Although parents wanted their son to have a back-up plan they were unsure

2819   of the options available, so relied on their social support network to provide them

2820   and their sons with the information needed. One under-15 mother said during a focus

2821   group:

2822   The child then has to make a decision really whether it's a football career that

2823   they want, at this stage, or whether they want to continue on with A Levels?

2824   So, say, my son was absolutely academically graded, A-Star grade in Maths

2825   and English and Science, and he wanted to be a doctor,… then he would have

2826   to follow that route and football wouldn't necessarily be the way forward for

2827   him.

2828   **4.7.1.5 Enjoyment, Opportunity, and Development.** Throughout the

2829   process of navigating the aforementioned individual phases, parents described

2830   feelings of enjoyment arising from seeing their son's enjoyment and development.

2831   One under-12 father said during an interview, "if it wasn't for the fact that he's

2832   enjoying it I wouldn't want to do it… it's a good job I like football." An under-10

2833   mother added during an interview, "seeing him happy is great and I just love

2834   watching him play football you know I love watching him… I've enjoyed it, I've

2835   met some really nice people." The mutual enjoyment of football between parents and

2836   sons created a shared passion and was one of the main reasons parents continued to

2837   support their son's involvement. Describing such enjoyment, one under-10 father

2838   shared in an interview:

2839   It is a journey, my son's journey that he's taking me on. I'm just happy to be

2840   part of it. The hours have gone up massively, but so has the joy. I love

2841   watching him play. I'm the one that will just stand and watch him and enjoy

2842   watching him play, and he loves the training.

2843   The shared enjoyment between parents and their sons regarding their

2844   involvement in academy football was also apparent in an informal conversation I had

2845   with a coach relating to a match that had taken place one weekend:

2846   The parents were emotional and over excited at the weekend. They drove the

2847   match on and wound up the players. It was great they were enjoying the

2848   match, but it was too much and the put some players off. I had to tell them to

2849   be quiet.

2850   Clearly. although parents' enjoyment of football helped them to overcome or manage

2851   challenges, at times coaches felt this enjoyment became too much. As such parents'

2852   enjoyment and excitement then negatively impacted on matches.

2853   Additionally, parents enjoyed supporting their son in the academy because

2854   they believed they had an opportunity to gain more than just football skills. They

2855   recognised that it was unlikely their son would become a professional footballer, but

2856   they thought the life skills their son gained were equally, if not more, important. For

2857   instance, explaining why she supported her son's involvement, an under-13 mother

2858   recalled during an interview:

2859   He [her son] said "the academy has taught me so much". That was coming

2860   from his words and I thought, the confidence, the comradery, what I really

2861   like is the respect he has for the coaches; the shaking of the hands, the high

2862   fives. He takes that into his everyday life, he has confidence to go up to

2863   anyone of our friends and shake hands whereas a lot of boys their age don't

2864   like that or are uncomfortable.

2865   During an informal conversation, an under-10 father explained how he hoped his son

2866   would gain more than just football skills from the experience:

2867   I want him to have fun yes but I want him to learn behaviour as well which is

2868   really important, it is more important for life in general. Because when you

2869   turn up for work, you've got to be professional, you've got to be respectful,

2870   you can't turn up and just be mucking around, so I think it sets them up a

2871   little bit for life.

2872   Similarly, parents described the value they placed on the opportunities their sons had

2873   to attend tournaments and festivals, which provided them with their first

2874   opportunities to stay away from home and travel abroad. Parents particularly valued

2875   these opportunities because they knew they were not available to many children, as

2876   an under-11 father shared during an interview:

2877   We've had a good couple of trips away. He's been to Poland, and he played

2878   in a tournament over there and they won the tournament which was a great

2879   experience… Then he went to Holland last year… which was great, it was a

2880   really good tournament. It's all great experience for him, and he really enjoy

2881   it see, so that keeps me going.

2882   Beyond seeing their son enjoy football and recognising the opportunities they

2883   were being given, parents also valued their son being coached by highly skilled

2884   coaches and developing their football skills. One mother said during an interview,

2885   "it's been really great to see my son sort of flourish and be happy." Parents

2886   recognised that this chance to develop their skills would not be possible in the same

2887   way if they had remained at their grassroots club and not chosen to enter the

2888   academy. For instance, during an informal conversation an under-9 parent said to

2889   me:

2890   It is amazing how much he has developed since being here…the coaches are

2891   great and they have bought out the best him. His football has developed so

2892   much more since being here,… it's the best experience for him to really push

2893   himself and learn against top opposition. Very appreciative of the attention

2894   the young players have received.

2895   Another under-10 parent added during an informal conversation, "I feel my son has

2896   developed not only in terms of his game/skill but has also matured and developed

2897   great bonds with both his team mates and his coaches."

2898   **4.7.1.6 Sacrifice, Commitment, and Consequences.** Although parents

2899   experienced continual enjoyment throughout the football journey, they also

2900   experienced an ongoing sense of sacrifice and commitment, which had negative

2901   consequences for them and their sons. One under-12 mother highlighted, "it's not a

2902   negative, but a sacrifice, because it's a choice." Particularly, parents were concerned

2903   by the sacrifices their sons made to be part of the academy, as one under-10 father

2904   shared in an interview:

2905   Knowing what I know now I may have held him back from the whole

2906   academy structure and kept him playing with his friends longer…I would say

2907   he's lost a lot of the friendships through school and sleepovers on a Saturday

2908   night. He can't have them now, it's gone.

2909   Parents within the under 16 age group also recognised this sacrifice during an

2910   informal conversation, "our son's change schools and leave behind their friends.

2911   They make sacrifices and I worry they no longer have a social life as they are

2912   training so much."

2913   In addition to their children, parents encountered their own sacrifices, one

2914   under-13 mother described the sacrifice on family life, "the biggest impact is on

2915   family life at the moment and making sure my eldest son doesn't feel left out or,

2916   farmed out to different people." This sacrifice was recognised by a coach during his

2917   interview:

2918   The amount of time the parents spend driving their kids, picking them up,

2919   driving them quite a number of days of the week plus on a Sunday morning

2920   when it is a very early start, supporting them in that is massive, the mileage

2921   on their cars must be unbelievable.

2922   Throughout my informal conversations with parents about the sacrifices they had to

2923   make to support their son to attend the academy, a consistent theme was struggling

2924   to maintain family time and take family holidays. In my reflexive diary I noted:

2925   Today again parents talked about the sacrifices they have had to make to their

2926   family time in order to accommodate their son's academy training. I really

2927   felt for them when they said, 'they no longer get to have family meals

2928   together, which really upsets his wife' and 'if we get to have holidays, our

2929   son misses pre-season training which he doesn't like.' It is a challenging

2930   balance between family life and academy football.

2931   These sacrifices had personal consequences for parents. For example, parents

2932   described limits to their career progression due to the time they had to commit to

2933   football, an under-10 father shared in an interview, "it's probably held [me] back a

2934   little bit […]because I would say up until [son] started with the [academy] football I

2935   …was thought of really highly but I've had to take more of a back seat because I

2936   need to get him to training." Beyond their career progression, the hardest thing for

2937   parents was sacrificing time with other children and family members. One under-14

2938   mother described during a focus group, "it does sometimes make me feel guilty

2939   about my other kids, because they're obviously left alone… sometimes I do feel,

2940   well I'm leaving them there on their own again."

2941   *4.7.2 Reflection Phase: Recommendations for Supporting Parents*

2942   Through the exploration phase I gained an understanding that parents

2943   experience an exciting but challenging journey as their son progresses through the

2944   football academy. Following on from this journey a series of recommendations were

2945   developed. Using my reflections from being embedded, the journey experienced by

2946   parents, coach and support staff data, along with the recognition that parents do not

2947   know what they do not know, a series of recommendations for supporting parents

2948   were created. As a result of this interpretation, two key considerations were deemed

2949   to be most likely to positively influence on parents' experience and address their

2950   support needs. Namely, the creation of a "parent supportive culture" alongside the

2951   embedding of a "programme of support".

2952   **4.7.2.1 Creating a Parent Supportive Culture.** My observations and

2953   informal conversations indicated that the experience for parents was largely

2954   influenced by the culture that was created within the academy. I noted in my

2955   reflexive diary:

2956   After being embedded within the academy for eight months it has become

2957   clear that the parents' experiences and journey is influenced by more than

2958   just their role of supporting their son. Their experiences are influenced by the

2959   way the coaches and support staff interact with them, the behaviours of other

2960   parents, the way in which they are socialised in to the environment, and the

2961   actions that are taken by the academy towards parents. As such I feel more

2962   needs to be done to support parents that simply providing them with a series

2963   of workshops.

2964   A parent supportive culture, created through small day-to-day actions, may

2965   help promote a positive culture regarding parents, which might increase the support

2966   they receive and perceive is being provided. I recorded in my reflexive diary,

2967   "parents do not want big changes to be made, but simply a small helping hand to

2968   make their lives a little easier. For example, a working coffee machine, somewhere

2969   warm to wait for their child, and to be included in their son' progression.

2970   Particularly, it appears that the creation of a parent-positive culture, in which parents

2971   feel *welcomed*, *respected*, and *valued* as a positive member of their son's support

2972   team, rather than a problem to be dealt with, may lead to parents feeling better

2973   equipped to manage the academy parent journey – minimising the overarching

2974   concerns, while increasing the feelings of enjoyment.

2975   *4.7.2.1.1 Facilitate an Environment that is Welcoming for Parents.* An

2976   academy environment where parents receive a friendly greeting and are included as

2977   part of their son's learning and development appears valuable because, as

2978   highlighted above, when entering the academy environment, parents are excited and

2979   amazed before they enter the dawning of reality phase. I reflected on this:

2980   Potentially if parents feel the environment is welcoming to them it will help

2981   them use the facilities available to develop coping strategies to manage the

2982   demands before they become overwhelming in the dawning of reality phase.

2983   A number of parents had informed me of how much more welcoming other

2984   academies were and this helped those parents manage the demands and

2985   challenges of being an academy parent. For example, I went to one academy

2986   that provided parents with a warm indoor café area where hot food and drinks

2987   could be purchased at minimal cost.

2988   Creating a welcoming atmosphere may help parents adjust to the academy

2989   structure more quickly and experience a smoother transition from grassroots to

2990   academy football. A coach described the current transition for parents as:

2991   Very, very big, completely different. You come from a grassroots club which

2992   possibly trains one hour a week, maybe two, to an academy system where at

2993   under sixteen level you could be training every night of the week. Some of

2994   the boys come in in the day too. So, it's that adjustment of their personal

2995   lives to come into the academy and the parents because obviously some of

2996   the kids live 30 minutes' drive away, they can't get here themselves, so

2997   obviously a parent then has to make quite a lot of sacrifices.

2998   As such it may be beneficial for parents to experience a welcoming environment

2999   where they feel a part of their son's development. I wrote thoughts on this after

3000   talking to some of the new academy parents:

3001   Following a conversation with some new parents within the academy, it

3002   made me realise that potentially if parents were welcomed in to the

3003   environment, rather than pushed to one side, they would feel more involved

3004   in their son's development. Parents potentially have gone from being their

3005   son's coach to now just seen as the taxi driver, so I believe having parents

3006   more involved will help the transition.

3007   One member of the support staff added during an interview that parents could be

3008   welcomed into the academy through a more in-depth introduction and help them to

3009   feel more involved with their son's development:

3010   Coaches could do a session saying this is what we've been working on with

3011   the players, philosophy of the club, how we work, and what we want the end

3012   product to be. Parents would get a better understanding of what we're trying

3013   to do, as they need to know what's happening to their child.

3014   Moreover, if parents feel welcome in the academy, they will likely spend

3015   more time there, engage with the support provided, and get to know other parents I

3016   noted in my reflexive diary following a match observation, "parents appear to really

3017   enjoy talking to other parents and sharing their experiences with each other. I really

3018   feel that parents would benefit from this social support being facilitated earlier in

3019   their journey." Subsequently they can access valuable information which will help

3020   them understand their son's experience, develop coping strategies, and create a

3021   support network with other parents, all of which may be useful as they enter the

3022   second phase of the journey. One under-13 mother commented during an interview:

3023   The parental support, having this building and the room upstairs is a big one,

3024   there's only so much shopping that anyone can do. It's nice to be able to

3025   come up here and you can have a chat, sort of find out what other information

3026   or confirming whatever was in an email or stuff like that.

3027   One coach recognised during her interview how the environment was not always

3028   welcoming to parents and that potentially had a negative impact on their experience:

3029   I don't think [the academy] is very welcoming for parents. They have to

3030   sometimes wait outside the gate. And the players have to be here an hour

3031   before. Some have travelled, so I think making the area more accessible.

3032   Whether that's the classrooms open, with tea and coffee in there. And just a

3033   box of biscuits. It costs nothing. And even as coaches we can go in there after

3034   and tidy it up if need be. An extra ten minutes at the end isn't a big issue. But

3035   I think go to a lot of the other clubs the parents are right there's a café, or

3036   there's something there for them.

3037   Overall, one member of support staff summed up, "it's important to embrace them

3038   [parents] as much as we can, because they're an integral part of what we do."

3039   *4.7.2.1.2 Respect and Appreciate Parents' Commitment.* Throughout their

3040   child's footballing journey, parents commit much time, money, and emotion, and

3041   make sacrifices in other areas of their lives. These sacrifices and commitments are

3042   ever present, but particularly exacerbated during the second stage of their journey.

3043   To support parents and help them to cope with the sacrifices they are making it

3044   appears important to recognise their commitment and ensure that parents are treated

3045   with respect. As a member of the support staff suggested:

3046   You've got to respect the amount of time, financial commitment, effort,

3047   parents put in and you have to respect that and you can't be blasé about it.

3048   Because when they're here 4 or 5 times a week and they're travelling

3049   distances, you've got to give them that respect, you've got to really

3050   appreciate what they do.

3051   Although coaches and support staff say that they respect the commitment and effort

3052   that parents put in, their actions and reactive nature often portrays a different

3053   message to parents. For instance, I recorded an informal conversation with parents

3054   about what would help them, "if you could sort out the communication that would be

3055   a big help… often emails are received late or not sent. This makes it difficult to plan

3056   and make arrangements for my other children."

3057   Such respect is important as it demonstrates to parents' empathy and

3058   understanding of the challenges, stress, and pressure they experience. Following an

3059   informal conversation with parents relating to the upcoming reviews I reflected:

3060   Parents were frustrated and annoyed that they had rushed home from work,

3061   picked up their child, and battled through the traffic for an hour, only for the

3062   performance review with the coach to only be 10 minutes. Parents may

3063   benefit from the coaches recognising their commitment to attend the reviews

3064   by going in to their son's progress in more depth, making it a valuable

3065   experience for parents.

3066   Overall, providing parents with respect may be beneficial through all phases

3067   of the parent journey, but particularly useful to aid parents transition into the

3068   *acceptance and rationalising* phase. I noted in my reflexive diary, "respect and

3069   support from the academy through enhanced communication may help parents to

3070   feel more supported and improve the development of coping mechanisms." I

3071   recorded a reflective informal conversation with one parent on what would be useful

3072   to enhance the experience for parents, "if possible more advanced notice of training

3073   session time changes and squad lists. Both my wife and I juggle full time careers

3074   around getting our son to and from the academy and it is extremely difficult to

3075   change things at short notice."

3076   Numerous strategies to demonstrate respect for parents are available. For

3077   instance, recognising the organisational demands that parents may be facing and

3078   ensuring information, particularly regarding changes to training or matches, is

3079   communicated in advance. As one coach recognised, "[parents] need to know what is

3080   going on because they put a lot of time in, so keep them informed about what we

3081   do." I further noted in my fieldnotes, that "when parents aren't communicated with

3082   they feel pushed out and that the academy does not appreciate their commitment and

3083   the sacrifices they make." Thanking parents for their time and commitment may also

3084   be an easy way to enhance parents' feelings of respect, as one under-11 father shared

3085   during an interview, "that's all we want is just more respect. Sometimes we feel like

3086   there's no understanding there about what we've actually got to go through to make

3087   this happen." One of my reflections supported this:

3088   When parents are not communicated with early enough it makes the

3089   experience incredibly challenging. Coaches could easily make the decisions

3090   on who is in a squad earlier than the day before, which would really help

3091   parents to plan and make arrangements.

3092   Finally, recognising the challenging decisions that parents and players are

3093   having to make during the final stages of the journey (*focusing on the future*) and

3094   respecting parents' concerns and decisions relating to the educational offerings that

3095   are made available within and beyond the academy seems valuable. I wrote in my

3096   reflexive diary, "whenever I talk to the under-10 parents about whether their son is

3097   going to attend day release next season, I am always surprised by how little

3098   knowledge they have about day release." Within my fieldnotes it was recorded, "for

3099   some the academy has a positive impact on their education, as it gives them

3100   motivation and focus. However, for others they appear to have a tough time

3101   combining education and then find it challenging making career choices at 16."

3102   Thus, working with parents to try and accommodate individual desires to study

3103   specific courses or qualifications may be useful.

3104   ***4.7.2.1.3 Value Input and Feedback from Parents.*** To maximise parents',

3105   and subsequently players' experiences, the final consideration within the culture that

3106   appears to be important based on my reflections and reflections with others is

3107   ensuring parents are valued. It was noted in my reflexive diary,

3108   From my conversations with parents it appears that an opportunity for them

3109   to share their concerns beyond the performance review meetings would be

3110   beneficial for parents, as they are reluctant to discuss their concerns in front

3111   of their son.

3112   Valuing parents for their role within their son's footballing development is

3113   important, especially as parents' transition into the academy. For example, one

3114   parent of an under-9 boy said during an informal conversation, "involve parents

3115   more in events giving them option of keeping players with them during overnight

3116   stays if parent thinks it is in their child's best interests to do so." Parents are excited

3117   that their child has been chosen as one of the best youth footballers in the area and

3118   want to support their son to maximise the opportunity. During a focus group a father

3119   of an under-10 said:

3120   I say to him "okay perhaps you need to have a look at this," but I'm not sure

3121   what they [the coaches] are telling them in the training session, what they

3122   need to work on,… I'd like to know the answer…personally I get frustrated

3123   that I can't help [my son].

3124 I reflected, "through my conversations with parents, I have often found they want to

3125 say the right thing to their son before, during, and after matches, but not know what

3126 the right thing is."

3127   Demonstrating the feedback parents provide is valued and acted upon can

3128 help parents to feel more involved in their son's development. For instance, one

3129 support staff member suggested to me:

3130   Everyone can learn from feedback…If parents do suggest things, then it's

3131   taken on board and one person might not be giving you the right information,

3132   but I hope that it is taken on board and we can learn from that kind of

3133   feedback that we get and improve and implement different things.

3134 Similarly, parents shared during informal discussions that open lines of

3135 communication between parents and coaches, with formal and informal opportunities

3136 to provide feedback and suggestions for improvement, would help them feel heard.

3137 From my reflective informal conversations with parents I wrote in my reflexive

3138 diary, "parents are really keen for the parents' panel or forum to take place where

3139 they can share their feedback and feel involved." This may subsequently minimise

3140 some of the frustrations parents encountered, particularly during the second and

3141 fourth stages of their journey. I recorded in my reflexive diary from the under-

3142 11/under-12 monthly meeting:

3143   The parents erupted into an explosion of emotion, they had kept all of these

3144   frustrations to themselves for quite some time as there was limited

3145   opportunity to express their feelings or have their voice heard. Therefore,

3146   offering them an opportunity to have these feelings heard on a regular basis

3147   may help to reduce this built up emotion.

3148   Additionally, getting to know the parents individually and understanding

3149 their experiences may help coaches and support staff to build strong relationships

3150 with parents and show that the academy values their involvement. For instance, one

3151 support staff member recommended in an interview, "parents have only got the

3152 coaches to work with every six weeks. Having a structure where there's constant and

3153 regular opportunity to discuss what's going on with people other than the coaches, is

3154 important." This genuine interest in parents could help to minimise the challenges

3155 experienced throughout the journey, but particularly during the dawning of reality

3156 phase because parents may perceive themselves as valued and supported and

3157 subsequently more capable of managing the demands they encounter. I recorded in

3158 my reflexive diary:

3159   During a period of staff changes, parents became frustrated that their son's

3160   fixtures were no longer a priority to be filmed and analysed. However, my

3161   feelings were if the staff shortage was explained to parents and there were

3162   open lines of communication many of parents' frustration would be reduced.

3163   Parents would understand that these shortages were only temporary and once

3164   the academy had recruited a new analyst their son's fixtures would be filmed

3165   once again.

3166 One coach recalled in an interview the challenges that one family faced:

3167   From past experience of working with boys who have nothing, they tend to

3168   be the ones that the parents will do anything to get them here… one lad used

3169   to get a train in on his own. Fifteen and he would cycle from the train station

3170   up to the training ground and cycle back. We found out the kid had nothing,

3171   he had no money, the parents used to let other siblings of his go without just

3172   to give him money to come on the train.

3173 By understanding this child's family circumstances, the coaching staff were able to

3174 provide more tailored support both to him and his parents to help enhance their

3175 experience at the academy.

3176   **4.7.2.2 Deliver a Programme of Support.** In addition to cultural

3177 considerations, the provision of a formal programme of support, tailored to different

3178 stages of the parent and child's journey, was deemed valuable by parents, coaches,

3179 and support staff. One under-13 mother recommended during an interview, "help us

3180 be more supportive of our children that is conducive to their success,… anything that

3181 the academy can give me to help me be a better parent to support him through the

3182 process would be more than welcome." In support of this recommendation from

3183 parents, I reflected on my interviews with parents:

3184   Consistently throughout the interviews was that parents found the journey

3185   challenging and would like support, however they are unaware of what this

3186   support looks like and how it may be delivered. As such a parent support

3187   programme tailored to their journey may be beneficial.

3188   The provision of a parent support programme may help parents to anticipate

3189 the next phase of the journey and the upcoming demands. After a number of

3190   informal conversations with parents, I noted in my reflexive diary, "my hope from

3191   creating a support programme tailored towards the parent journey is that it will help

3192   them to understand things, make better decisions, and be more prepared for the phase

3193   ahead." When considering the development of such a programme, focusing upon

3194   tailored content with a flexible and creative delivery approach, seemed most

3195   important as an informal conversation with a coach illustrated, "some element of the

3196   delivery will need to be through informal drop-in sessions or other resources to allow

3197   parents the opportunity to come in at a time that suits them, rather than putting extra

3198   demands on parents."

3199   ***4.7.2.2.1 Provide Developmentally Tailored Content.*** At the first phase of

3200   the journey (*excited and amazed* phase), offering parents a formal induction may be

3201   beneficial. I noted in reflexive diary:

3202   Having attended induction events and talked to most of the parents, they

3203   appreciate the induction pack (a pack of rules and policies) they are given,

3204   but this doesn't tell them about the realities of what it is like to be a parent of

3205   an academy player. Whereas this is what I believe would be useful for

3206   parents, and I think this is what they are looking for when asking for the

3207   parent of a first team player to speak to them. They want to know what is

3208   really takes to support a young boy to be a professional footballer.

3209   For first time academy parents, a formal induction may be particularly

3210   beneficial because, as parents enter excited and amazed, they may inadvertently

3211   increase the pressure children feel to succeed. In an interview one coach suggested:

3212   The biggest one for me is the parent's expectations and managing them. You

3213   know because the minute that their son steps over the gate to sign, the

3214   majority of parents think that their son's going to be a world beater and he's

3215   going to be a multi-millionaire in a few years and the stats back up that that's

3216   not going to happen.

3217   Helping parents to manage their expectations from the outset of the journey by, for

3218   instance, offering parents realistic prospects of their son becoming a professional

3219   footballer may be particularly valuable. One member of the support staff

3220   recommended during an interview:

3221   I think it's just educating them when they come in on the way we do things

3222   and why we do things the way we do. Because a lot of parents don't

3223   understand it, they come in here and see us. They see the facilities and a lot

3224   of them can't grasp the idea that their son might not be ready to be here when

3225   they think they are.

3226   Additionally, helping parents to understand the range of psychosocial benefits and

3227   life skills their son will be gaining at the academy may provide parents with a better

3228   perspective of the upcoming journey. I noted within my fieldnotes:

3229   The under-9s and under-10s were keen to learn more about the journey ahead

3230   for them and their son as they were unsure of what to expect. This may

3231   include the psychosocial benefits and life skills their son is likely to learn by

3232   being a part of the academy, as this may help parents to recognise that there

3233   is more to the experience than their son's developing football skills.

3234   Beyond the initial induction event, ongoing support sessions that comprise

3235   key information and guidance tailored to parents' and players' current phase may

3236   help parents manage their own experiences and provide more optimal support to

3237   their son. For instance, when parents are approaching or in the *dawning of reality*

3238   phase, it may be useful to have support sessions tailored to them offloading their

3239   demands, normalising their experiences, and developing coping strategies. I reflected

3240   following the first monthly parent meeting:

3241   Following the initial monthly meeting, I was amazed by the huge amount of

3242   demands and stressors that they have to manage. Some of these I believe can

3243   be reduced through changes within the academy or academy culture, however

3244   for other parents they may benefit from being supported to offload,

3245   normalise, or cope with these stressors. Anything I can do to lighten the load

3246   a bit I think would be useful.

3247   Plus, increasing their awareness of the performance review process and increasing

3248   their feelings of being in control of the retain/release process. I recorded a reflection

3249   following a monthly meeting, "when asking the under-9 and under-10 parents about

3250   their expectations of the performance review meetings, it was surprised to realise

3251   that they knew very little about the process or what to expect of the mid-season

3252   review." It was recommended by a support staff member during an interview,

3253   "understanding the review process, release process and how the decisions have

3254   arisen… have workshops where the parents actually put themselves in our shoes and

3255   they understand what it's like to sit at the table and give a review."

3256   Leading into and during the *acceptance and rationalising* phase parents may

3257   find support focused on enhancing the effectiveness of their coping strategies, plus

3258   guidance and information on the psychological and social development that occurs

3259   during the teenage years helpful. From the informal conversations I have had with

3260   parents:

3261   It appears that parents are not aware of the potential challenges they will face

3262   when their child is injured, until they are injured when at times it can be

3263   particularly challenging. The challenges of injuries are often not helped by

3264   the lack of communication from the physiotherapists with parents. As such,

3265   parents may benefit from guidance on injuries before they occur.

3266   Additionally, parents suggested that information to help them support their

3267   child through injuries and becoming more independent may be useful at they reach

3268   the *focusing on the future* phase. I noted in my fieldnotes from the first monthly

3269   meeting, "the parents of the under-15 and under-16 players wanted support to help

3270   them with the teenage years and overcoming challenges, such as injuries and losing."

3271   Following this monthly meeting, I noted in my reflexive diary:

3272   It was interesting to know that parents wanted support and guidance on how

3273   to communicate with and understand their son's teenage brain. I recognise

3274   that this information would not be useful for all parents, but at this current

3275   phase they wanted help to provide the best support possible to their son who

3276   transitioning in to a young man.

3277   Finally, leading up to and during the *focusing on the future* phase it may be

3278   helpful for parents to be provided with more information regarding the scholarship

3279   process, expectations, and their son's education options should they be provided with

3280   a scholarship. From my many informal conversations with parents, I reflected:

3281   In the next few weeks parents will be provided with the news that their son

3282   will either be given a scholarship or will have to try to find one at another

3283   academy. However, parents appear to have little knowledge of what a

3284   scholarship involves, including the education options.

3285   Parents may also benefit from guidance regarding providing emotional

3286   support to their son during particularly pressurised football and schooling phases. I

3287   had noted my fieldnotes, "managing the pressure on their children and the emotional

3288   demands of football was a prominent stressor for parents."

3289   ***4.7.2.2.2 Adopt a Flexible Delivery Approach to Meet Parents' Needs.*** As

3290   illustrated, providing parents with various information and support through different

3291   sessions may be useful. However, these sessions will only be useful if the delivery

3292   accounts for parents' competing demands and interests. I recorded in my reflexive

3293   diary, "the demands and stressors on parents appears to be all consuming, so even

3294   though they want the support, engagement is challenging." Thus, considering the

3295   best way to deliver such sessions to minimise additional demands is important. For

3296   instance, face-to-face sessions (which appeared to be most desirable within this

3297   academy) may be particularly beneficial because they provide an opportunity to get

3298   to know parents and understand their background (e.g., education levels, football

3299   experience, work demands etc), which is useful to help guide the specific

3300   information they need and how they would like to receive it (e.g., through formal

3301   PowerPoint presentations, informal discussions, Q & A sessions etc). I noted in my

3302   reflexive diary:

3303   One key coping strategy for parents is being able to lift share with other

3304   parents, where depending on their work schedule the days in which they

3305   attend the academy may vary. Therefore, parents being able to fit their

3306   attendance in on the days they are attending and catch up on other sessions

3307   would show support for parents lift sharing as an important coping strategy.

3308   One under-14 mother suggested during an interview, "dynamic, interactive, a

3309   classic group sort of thing. You could get loads of flowing discussion…sit round a

3310   table discussing and debating…come away thinking about all of those things."

3311   However, attendance at face-to-face sessions may be an issue, as one under-12

3312   mother said during an interview:

3313   It's the time factor, because you have already got the traveling, getting them

3314   to training…that's my time that has gone. Whereas if it was delivered in a

3315   different way, or it was online, through newsletters or information, something

3316   interactive I could do that any time.

3317   Thus, scheduling sessions to coincide with training but also offering catch-up or

3318   drop-in sessions that parents can attend around their busy schedule could facilitate

3319   maximum engagement from parents within all phases. I noted in my reflexive diary,

3320   "it appears from my discussions with parents that the best time to run sessions is

3321   when they are already at the academy, as this maximises their time and does not add

3322   any additional demands on to their already busy lives." To minimise demands and

3323   increase attendance, it might also be beneficial for parents to be able to bring other

3324   children or for other family members (e.g., grandparents) to attend in their place.

3325   After an informal conversation with a parent as to why they were unable to attend a

3326   monthly meeting I reflected:

3327   When parents have other children they often apologise for not being able to

3328   attend the monthly meetings, I was disappointed that parents felt unable to

3329   bring their other children along and they needed to apologise for having other

3330   children. One thing that would potentially increase parents' attendance is

3331   making sessions family friendly and encouraging them to bring other

3332   children.

3333   By encouraging parents to bring other children and making sessions family-friendly,

3334   it may reduce parents' guilt. A coach recommended in an interview, "when the

3335   sisters and brothers can come, the kids and the siblings have got an activity to do. It

3336   could be some multisport thing, someone who did face paints, some balloon making,

3337   like that type of thing."

4.8 Discussion

3339   The purpose of this exploration and reflection phase of this action research

3340   project was to understand parents' experiences and offer recommendations for

3341   supporting parents within youth academy football. In support of Côté's (1999) work,

3342   it was evident that parents' experience a complex journey with their sons and the

3343   support parents may benefit from changes in line with both their and their son's

3344   development. Given such complexity, simply educating parents regarding

3345   "appropriate" behaviours or involvement seems insufficient. Rather, the findings

3346   from my personal and collaborative reflections offer recommendations for providing

3347   support to parents, taking into consideration their experiences across the

3348   developmental phases (Knight & Holt 2013b; Thrower et al., 2016). Moreover, the

3349   recommendations point to the importance of not only targeting support to parents

3350   through formal education or support programmes, but also addressing the broader

3351   culture to enhance the overall sport parenting experience (cf. Knight & Newport,

3352   2018; Knight, 2019).

3353   Through the initial exploration phase, it was identified that parents first

3354   experience a period of excitement and amazement. This experience supports

3355   previous research suggestions that parents go through a transition when entering a

3356   new sporting environment, such as a football academy, which requires parents to

3357   adapt to different relationships, expectations, and experiences (Clarke & Harwood

3358   2014; Dorsch et al., 2015). Based on the current data, combined with this literature,

3359   my recommendation is that it is important to consider this first phase of parents'

3360   journey when developing support for parents, as parents' excitement may need

3361   managing to prevent it from inadvertently adding increased pressure on to their son.

3362   As many researchers have suggested, parents may start off providing support with

3363   good intentions, but even well-meaning support can result in adding pressure to a

3364   child and reducing their enjoyment (Anderson et al., 2003; Dorsch et al., 2009;

3365   Gould et al., 2006). From my reflections, it appears important to manage parents'

3366   expectations and to help them to prepare for the journey ahead.

3367   Additionally, supporting suggestions from previous literature (e.g., Burgess

3368   et al., 2016; Knight & Holt 2013b), although parents appear to learn necessary

3369   information as they progress through the journey, being provided with this

3370   information sooner is likely to be beneficial. That is, rather than leaving parents to

3371   learn things on their own or wait until they have encountered an issue or a challenge

3372   and thus sought guidance, providing specific guidance and information upon

3373   entering the academy seems valuable (Gould et al., 2016). This is particularly

3374   important because parents might enter the academy environment either mis-informed

3375   or with preconceived ideas and expectations, which may further add to pressure or

3376   expectations children perceive (Holt et al., 2008; Knight et al., 2016). As such, a

3377   particular recommendation for action is parents are provided with an induction

3378   meeting early on in their journey to help manage their excitement, and establish

3379   realistic prospects for their child. In addition, creating a culture where parents feel

3380   *welcomed* may help to maximise attendance at this session as well as encouraging

3381   parents to proactively seek information from coaches and support staff when

3382   required.

3383   After a phase of excitement, the realities of being an academy football parent

3384   appear to become apparent and the effects of the demands start to weigh heavily on

3385   parents. This second phase aligns with the competitive, organisational, and

3386   developmental stressors previously identified in football and tennis (Harwood et al.,

3387   2010; Harwood & Knight 2009a; 2009b). These demands can have a negative impact

3388   on the parent experience (e.g., Wiersma & Fifer 2008) and are often mutually shared

3389   between the parent and child (Hayward et al., 2017). It was identified in the

3390   reflections that the parent experience could potentially be enhanced by helping them

3391   to cope with their emotions, and manage the organisational demands. Furthermore,

3392   treating parents with respect and appreciating the commitment that they give to

3393 supporting their child will go a long way towards creating a supportive culture for

3394 parents and potentially reduce the demands they encounter.

3395   In addition, somewhat unique to academy set ups, parents experience stress

3396 from the review and potential release process. Such stress may arise due to parents

3397 having adjusted their identity and increased their sense of responsibility to aid their

3398 son's football development (Clarke & Harwood, 2014). Thus, providing a support

3399 programme to inform parents about this process and supporting them to subsequently

3400 support their child through this process is particularly valuable. Within this

3401 information it may be useful for parents to be able to talk about their concerns should

3402 their child be released, whether there were options to come back in to the academy,

3403 and what the options were for them to play football following the release. This

3404 information and discussion may help to ease some of the fear parents have of their

3405 son being released from the academy.

3406   Although parents experience a number of stressors and demands, after

3407 becoming accustomed to the culture and commitment required, they develop coping

3408 mechanisms such as *acceptance and rationalisation* which enables them to more

3409 effectively manage the demands associated with their child's football. The suggested

3410 strategies align with previous research (e.g., Burgess et al., 2016; Harwood et al.,

3411 2019), in which parents have explained employing coping strategies to manage the

3412 demands and gain a sense of control. Particularly, as parents have identified

3413 previously, these strategies are learnt through trial and error and based on past

3414 experiences. This learning through trial and error is concerning because it inevitably

3415 requires parents to make mistakes before the learning can occur, which could have a

3416 negative impact on their son's enjoyment and development (Burgess et al., 2016).

3417 Additionally, within the data, it was apparent that it could take up to four years of

3418 being an academy parent before parents learnt to manage the demands. This is four

3419 years in which their and their son's experiences may be muted or diminished. Thus,

3420 actively creating a culture that seeks to understand and minimise demands on parents

3421 could reduce the emphasis on learning through trial and error, while also maximising

3422 parents' chances of providing optimal support to their son (Knight, 2019). However,

3423 not all the stressors and demands on parents can be reduced or avoided. Therefore, as

3424 highlighted in the reflection phase, combining a parent positive culture with an

3425 evidence based programme of support is important (Lienhart et al., 2019).

3426   Finally, in line with previous literature (e.g., Harwood & Knight 2009b;

3427   Lauer et al., 2010), as players aged and approached the end of their compulsory

3428   schooling, parents started to become increasingly concerned about their son's future.

3429   Parents wanted more information regarding how to support their son to make career

3430   choices, as well as providing teenagers with the emotional support to manage the

3431   increased sport investment and educational demands (Elliott et al., 2018).

3432   Unfortunately, parents did not feel they had the necessary information or skills to

3433   provide the appropriate emotional and informational support to their son. Thrower

3434   and colleagues (2017) previously demonstrated that educating parents may go some

3435   way to address this concern, but based on my reflections it was recommended that a

3436   parent positive culture, combined with support sessions, may be most effective. This

3437   combination of a culture and support sessions may be most helpful for parents as

3438   they are provided with the information and guidance on how to best support their

3439   son, while also feeling included within their development to fully understand the

3440   experiences that their son is going through. Such guidance may be particularly

3441   valuable because prior to entering the football academy, parents often take on the

3442   role of their child's "manager" and in many instances their coach too. However, once

3443   within the academy, parents had to relinquish this role and hand over responsibility

3444   to the coach (Clarke & Harwood, 2014). Therefore, for many parents this took some

3445   adjustment and some parents struggled with this transference of power. Clarke and

3446   Harwood (2014) suggested that one potential way to aid this adjustment was to

3447   involve parents in their child's development and communicate with them. This is

3448   supported by Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach of human development (1979)

3449   where it was suggested that the development potential of a child is enhanced if their

3450   transition in to a new setting is made with the support of a familiar individual, such

3451   as a family member. Therefore, not only does the involvement of parents help

3452   parents to transition, but it also aids children's development within the academy.

3453   Running throughout the parent journey was a sense of *enjoyment,*

3454   *opportunity, and development* as well as *sacrifice, commitment, and consequences*

3455   for parents and their sons. This sense of enjoyment arising from seeing their son

3456   succeed and enjoy their sport, as well as recognising the opportunities they were

3457   gaining, supports previous research (e.g., Holt et al., 2011; Wiersma & Fifer 2008).

3458   When parents enjoy the experience of being involved in their child's youth sport and

3459   feel supported, they are more likely to be positively involved in their child's sport,

3460   support their child on a competition day positively, and provide optimal support to

3461   their child (Knight & Holt, 2013b). As such it is recommended that parents should

3462   be provided with the support and the cultural environment where they can enjoy the

3463   youth sport experience, subsequently supporting their son in a positive and optimal

3464   manner. However, this enjoyment and pleasure that parents gain from watching their

3465   child develop can be negatively impacted by the demands they experience and the

3466   restrictions imposed on parents that limits how much they are able to watch training

3467   and matches.

3468   Countering their enjoyment, throughout their journey, parents shared

3469   numerous concerns regarding not only their own sacrifices and commitments, but

3470   also those of their sons. Such concerns echo previous literature pertaining to

3471   parenting stressors (e.g., Harwood & Knight 2009a, 2009b, Burgess et al., 2016), but

3472   also illustrated parents' awareness of the demands being placed on their sons. The

3473   stressors and demands that parents experienced throughout the youth academy

3474   football journey resulted in parents having to make sacrifices in order cope with the

3475   demands (e.g., reducing work hours to manage the work/football role conflict).

3476   However, some of these coping mechanisms may be seen as ineffective or

3477   maladaptive if they were seen as undesirable by the academy culture or the child

3478   (Knight et al., 2010). As such emphasising the importance of parents providing the

3479   right types of support to their child at the right time (Knight & Holt, 2014) and the

3480   need for parents to be provided with guidance on coping with the demands rather

3481   than learning as they go along (Burgess et al., 2016).

3482   Furthermore, beyond their own sacrifices parents also recognised the

3483   negative impact of the overly demanding training schedule on their children.

3484   However, parents felt that their children had to engage with this schedule in order to

3485   develop and maintain progress with their peers, when often this was at the expense

3486   of other areas of their lives (Furusa et al., 2020). As such parents wanted to protect

3487   their child from the excessive demands of the academy by balancing out the

3488   sacrifices that their son was making by focusing on the opportunities he was being

3489   given, which was beyond the experiences of most other children (Clarke &

3490   Harwood, 2014). Therefore, to minimise the impact of the training schedule on

3491   children and the demands on parents, consideration should be given as to whether it

3492   could be adapted to allow children and families to make fewer sacrifices and engage

3493   in more quality family time. In addition, parents could also be provided with

3494   guidance on the development of coping strategies to ensure that the strategies they

3495   are creating are effective.

4.8.1 Concluding Reflections

3497   Overall, from being embedded in the youth football academy for eight

3498   months I found that the journey for parents is challenging and complex, as such my

3499   suggestion is that parents would benefit from support sessions tailored to the

3500   individual phases of their journey and these are flexible to allow for the demands

3501   they experience. There are a number of topics that may be useful to cover in the

3502   sessions, including coping strategies to manage the demands, guidance on child

3503   development, managing expectations of reviews, coping with the emotions

3504   experienced during matches, and creating more family time. However, in order to

3505   have maximum impact on enhancing the parent experience, it is clear that more than

3506   just a series of psychoeducational sessions are needed. Rather, I would recommend

3507   that, to be effective, the support programme should also comprise a series of cultural

3508   changes within the environment to create a parent supportive culture. These cultural

3509   changes may include enhanced communication between parents and coaches,

3510   considering a more family friendly schedule, and reducing the amount of last minute

3511   changes to the schedule.

Chapter Five: Cycle One: Planning Action, Action, Evaluation, and Reflection

5.1 Introduction

Chapter four (the exploration phase and initial reflections) sought to understand the experiences of parents across the lifespan of an academy footballer and identify suggestions for supporting parents throughout this journey. The exploration phase highlighted that the parent journey comprises four main phases encapsulated within two overarching themes. Specifically, it was apparent that parents enter the academy feeling excited and amazed by the opportunity before the demands and challenges associated with their child's academy involvement start to dawn on them. Subsequently, parents start to develop strategies to accept and rationalise the experience before their attention shifts to focusing on their child's future in and beyond the academy. Throughout these phases, parents also indicated that they were continually aware of many positive aspects of academy involvement, specifically their son's enjoyment, their access to opportunities, and their ongoing development. However, there was also a continuing negative aspect associated with academy involvement, namely the sacrifices they and their son had to make, the commitment required from them as parents, and the consequences this has on their personal life. In sum, it was apparent that parents' experiences within academy football are complex, ever-changing, and associated with a range of positive and negative aspects.

Taking these findings into consideration, through personal and collaborative reflection, I identified a number of suggestions to support parents within academy football. Specifically, it was apparent that providing parents with a programme of support sessions while also striving to encourage the development of a parent supportive culture was key. This emphasis on carrying out cultural changes was a novel finding, which, although alluded to in previous literature (Clarke & Harwood, 2014), has yet to be incorporated within evidence-based parent support programmes. Meanwhile, the delivery of a specific support programme to parents aligns with previous suggestions regarding the benefits of parent education programmes or workshops (Tamminen et al., 2020; Thrower et al., 2017). However, clear suggestions were provided regarding the necessary considerations to enhance the impact of these sessions for parents. That is, given the dynamic experience parents have within the academy, their support needs were also ever changing, and thus ensuring support was adapted to parents' needs, while minimising the demands on

3546   parents, was viewed to be critical (Knight & Newport, 2018). Moreover, recognising

3547   that there is not a "one size fits all" approach to parent support that can be applied to

3548   all parents also appeared to be important (Dorsch et al., 2019, p20).

3549   Overall, based on my initial exploration and reflections, it was apparent that,

3550   within this football academy, there was a need to develop and evaluate the impact of

3551   a parent support programme that meets the needs of parents throughout their

3552   academy journey and integrates cultural changes with support sessions. To this end,

3553   in progressing through this action research cycle I sought to develop, implement, and

3554   subsequently evaluate a support programme for parents within this academy.

3555   **5.2. Planning Action Phase: Developing the Parent Support Programme**

3556   During this phase, I first considered my earlier findings and reflections to

3557   highlight the key considerations for the parent support programme. I also critically

3558   examined previously evaluated parent education/support programmes to identify

3559   what I could learn from previous studies to enhance the likelihood of my programme

3560   being both beneficial and effective.

3561   *5.2.1. Previous Support/Education Programmes*

3562   Over the last few years, a small number of parent education programmes

3563   have been developed and evaluated within a variety of settings (Dorsch et al., 2017;

3564   Thrower et al., 2017; Vincent & Christensen, 2015; see chapter two for more

3565   details). These programmes have highlighted a range of aspects that may be useful to

3566   consider within parent support programmes such as delivering collaboratively with

3567   parents, gaining buy-in within the environment, and research-informed strategies are

3568   useful for parents to enhance their experience.

3569   However, although previous parent education programmes (Dorsch et al.,

3570   2017; Thrower et al., 2017) have been shown to be beneficial, there are some

3571   criticisms/limitations of these programmes that were important for consideration

3572   when developing my programme. First, as Knight et al (2017) highlighted, when

3573   education programmes are delivered, practitioners have tended to overlook the

3574   complexities of the youth sport parenting experience. For instance, not considering

3575   the sport cultures, parent development, and the journey they experience within sport.

3576   The exploration phase of my work emphasised how the parent experience is

3577   constantly changing over time and thus it is likely that parents will require

3578   continuous support that is dynamic and meets their ever-changing needs. Thus, I

3579   deemed it important that my support programme should be delivered to account for

3580   parents changing needs and be adjusted to different age groups and experiences.

3581   Second, as discussed by Lafferty and Triggs (2014), previous examples of

3582   parent education programmes have often been designed to teach parents how to

3583   parent, how to behave within a sporting environment, and how to respond to their

3584   child more effectively. That is, the programmes have often focused on the needs of

3585   the child and the sporting organisation, rather than supporting the parents. For

3586   example, Thrower et al. (2019) developed workshop content, such as; "how to

3587   control emotions during a match". Such an approach has been criticised because it

3588   can be perceived as patronising or suggesting that 'parents are the problem' and their

3589   behaviour should be corrected or managed through education (MacNamara &

3590   Collins, 2018). From my earlier exploration and reflection, it was apparent that

3591   parents were largely influenced by the demands and expectations they were

3592   encountering and simply telling them what to do in different situations may not be

3593   beneficial. Thus, rather than focusing on educating parents or training parents, I

3594   wanted to adopt a more supportive approach in which I worked collaboratively with

3595   parents to help address their needs within the constraints of the environment.

3596   Third, although previous examples of education programmes have been

3597   identified as effective and beneficial for parents, these programmes have not

3598   considered the impact of youth sport culture on parents – something which was

3599   clearly identified in the earlier phases of my work. Parents' behaviours, thoughts,

3600   and feelings in many respects are influenced by the organisational culture and

3601   environment (Knight et al., 2017). For example, McMahon and Penney (2015) found

3602   that parents embraced the role of a youth sport parent and reinforce to their child the

3603   cultural ideals through their interactions. Therefore, it was particularly important to

3604   me that, when developing my parent support programme, an emphasis must also be

3605   placed on developing a parent supportive culture to maximise benefits/change.

3606   Fourth, youth sport is a social system of coaches, support staff, children, and

3607   parents, and the behaviours of others within the environment influences all other

3608   parties (Hayward et al., 2017; Omli & LaVoi, 2012). Considering this within

3609   Bronfenbrenner's social ecological approach, parents and the academy sit within the

3610   child's microsystem, and the parent supportive culture and relationship between the

3611   parents and the academy are within the mesosystem. Within the exosystem, there is

3612   their parents' workplace, community services, and potentially distant family

3613   members. Although the exosystem has no direct impact on the child, there may be

3614   some indirect impact. For example, for the players the culture and the organisation in

3615   which their parents work for may have an impact on them and family life, including

3616   for example, their availability to transport children to training or attend matches or

3617   education sessions. In addition, the macrosystem also indirectly influences the child

3618   and the parents through, for example, religious values, the laws within a country, and

3619   the socioeconomic climate. Within the particular academy situation, this may also

3620   include the culture and academy rules designated by the Premier League, English

3621   Football League, and the Football Association.

3622   Previous research has shown that parents' experiences and behaviours are

3623   influenced by, for example, the ever-changing youth sport context, the behaviours of

3624   other parents, and the behaviours of coaches (Knight et al., 2016). Moreover, parents

3625   have identified feeling more supported and benefitting from a youth sport

3626   environment in which all members of the support network work together to support

3627   each other (Knight & Holt, 2013). However, the broader support network, beyond

3628   the role of coaches, has received limited attention in previous parent education

3629   programmes (Thrower et al., 2017). Consequently, I perceived that, when seeking to

3630   develop a support programme for parents, their role within the sporting environment,

3631   the individuals they will be interacting with, as well as the broader environment or

3632   culture of the organisation, should be considered (Harwood et al., 2019; Knight &

3633   Newport, 2018). As such, acknowledging that the culture among the academy

3634   parents could potentially influence the player was important and I felt that strategies

3635   should be put in place that were likely to enhance the culture and improve the

3636   players' (and parents') experiences.

3637   Finally, within parent education programmes, it has been suggested that

3638   integrating opportunities for parents to engage in reflection may be useful (Azimi &

3639   Tamminen, 2020; Vincent & Christensen, 2015). However, there has only been one

3640   study that has utilised reflection with parents (Vincent & Christensen, 2015).

3641   Recognising the individual experiences of parents, combined with my desire to work

3642   with them to help them identify the areas that they would like to change or enhance,

3643   I wanted to incorporate opportunities that facilitated learning through reflection and

3644   through discussions with other parents within my support sessions.

3645   *5.2.2 My Programme: Being a Football Parent Support Programme*

3646   I planned a support programme that comprised the delivery of six parent

3647   support sessions combined with the implementation of a series of targeted cultural

3648   changes. The support programme was developed based upon the extended data

3649   collected during the exploration phase of this action research cycle (detailed in

3650   chapter four), subsequent reflection (phase two of the action research cycle), as well

3651   as the latest parenting in sport research and parent programmes (e.g., Burgess et al.,

3652   2016; Clarke & Harwood, 2014; Dorsch et al., 2019; Dorsch et al., 2015b; Harwood

3653   et al., 2019; Harwood et al., 2019; Knight et al., 2017; Thrower et al., 2016).

3654   Drawing together my reflections and previous literature, the aim of the support

3655   sessions was to provide parents with guidance and support in a relaxed environment

3656   where they could discuss any current concerns, share experiences with other parents,

3657   and gain insight into the running of the football academy. The parent supportive

3658   culture focused on 1) the creation of an environmental structure that considered

3659   parents as a key part of youth football development and 2) an organisational culture

3660   that respected and valued parents. I sought to create this parent supportive culture by

3661   being embedded within the football academy environment, actively challenging the

3662   thoughts of individuals within the academy on parents, role modelling positive

3663   behaviour towards parents, and encouraging the development of parent and coach

3664   relationships.

3665   Considering this support programme in terms of Bronfenbrenner's ecological

3666   systems theory (1979), the support sessions were designed to influence the

3667   microsystem that was around the players. For instance, the support sessions provided

3668   support to the parents with the intention of directly influencing parents' behaviour

3669   and the support they provide to their child. Meanwhile, my attempts to create a

3670   parent supportive culture by influencing the coaches actions and perceptions of

3671   parents targeted the mesosystem. The cultural changes within the broader academy

3672   environment and academy support staff were within the macrosystem.

3673   **5.2.2.1 Support Session Content.** The programme covered six-topics over

3674   six-sessions with each of these topics based on the six-postulates identified by

3675   Harwood and Knight (2015) as the key competencies for optimal sport parenting and

3676   informed by my findings from the exploration phase (chapter four). Each session

3677   was designed to facilitate group discussion and reflection through activities and

3678   tasks. For example, parents were provided with scenarios to discuss. The order of the

topics delivered was decided based upon parents' experiences and the frequency of
parents raising it as an area in which they needed support within the exploration and
reflection phases (chapter four).

The programme started with *Tackling the football parenting game* where
parents were offered support on managing organisational demands and providing
tangible support to their son. The second topic was *Communicating with the team* to
offer discussion on how they could develop supportive relationships with other
parents and enhance their relationship with the coaches. The third topic was *Being a
football parent,* which facilitated reflections on their parenting style and information
on adopting an autonomy supportive parenting style. The fourth topic focused on
Supporting your child, which was delivered to create discussion on the support that
their son required and how this had changed as they developed. The fifth topic was
The ups and downs of matches encouraging parents to reflect on the emotions they
experience when watching their son during a match and how they may be able to
manage their emotions more effectively. The final session was *Bumps in the road,* a
session offering parents insight on some of the future challenges that may occur and
encouraging them to consider how they may go about managing them (see Table 5.1
for further details on the sessions).

Importantly, recognising that parents at different stages have different
experiences, it was decided that each session would be delivered multiple times
targeted at different ages groups. Specifically, parents of children in the U9 and 10
age groups, U11 and 12, U13 and 14, and U15 and 16 attended together. This
enabled the content of each session to be adapted and aligned with their specific
needs. The adaptations for example included, for U9 and 10 parents the sessions
being focused on transitioning in to the academy, the potential for their son to join
day release at U11 and preparing them for their first performance reviews. Whereas,
the sessions for the U15 and 16 parents were focused around scholarship decisions,
supporting their son to be more independent, and their son's current education
demands.

3708   **Table 5.1**

3709   *Content of the Parent Support Sessions*

Session	Aims	Content	Evidence from Exploration and Reflection Phase	Underpinning research
Tackling the football parenting game (Postulate 5*:)	Manage the demands of being a football parent	Provided parents with an overview of the academy environment. Discussion on current stressors and demands. Explored ways to effectively manage their demands and stressors.	Experienced organisational and developmental demands throughout their journey. Experience a huge amount of sacrifices. Potentially takes four years to develop coping strategies.	Harwood & Knight (2009a, 2009b) Harwood et al. (2010) Burgess et al. (2016)
Communicating with the team (Postulate 4*)	Develop better relationships and effective communication with coaches, support staff, their families, and other parents	How to gain social support from other parents, as this has been identified as a key coping strategy for parents. Parents were tasked with introducing themselves and networking with other parents. Parents were informed of the communication process within the academy. Scenarios were discussed in relation to coach-parent-son relationships.	Frustrations with the communication from the academy. Desire for enhanced relationships with coaches. Use other parents for social support.	Burgess et al. (2016) Smoll et al. (2011)
Being a football parent (Postulate 2*)	To understand how to create a healthy emotional climate and what their current parenting style involves	Parents were offered information on creating an autonomy-supportive environment in the home and in football. Parents were provided with scenarios to initiate discussion on the parenting style and approach they would take in different football situations.	Balancing the pressure, encouragement, and support that parents provide for optimal child development was a concern.	Darling & Steinberg (1993) Grolnick (2003) Holt et al. (2009)

Session	Aims	Content	Evidence from Exploration and Reflection Phase	Underpinning research
Supporting your child (Postulate 1*)	Explore the support that parents provided to their son and optimising their son's enjoyment of football.	Discussions on the positives and negatives of sampling sport and early specialisation in football. The support (tangible, informational, and emotional) required when sampling, specialising, and investing in sport.	Parents unsure of how best to provide informational and emotional support to their child.	Côté et al. (2009) Côté (1999) Kay (2000)
The ups and downs of matches (Postulate 3*)	Facilitated parents' reflection on the emotions they experience during matches and offer suggestions on how best to manage these emotions.	Encouraged parents to reflect on their emotions before, during, and after a match, followed by exploring their coping mechanisms. Suggestions on further coping mechanisms that parents may wish to try were provided.	The match experiences were stressful and came with many emotional demands.	Burgess et al., (2016) Harwood & Knight (2009b) Omli & LaVoi (2012)
Bumps in the road (Postulate 6*)	Adapting to the future challenges that may occur along the journey of being a football parent.	Offered parents guidance on managing future transitions. Facilitated discussion amongst parents on the challenges they have previously experienced to encourage learning.	Preparing children for reviews was challenging. Concerned about potential injuries.	Lally & Kerr (2008) Neely et al. (2017) Podlog et al. (2012)

3710 *Postulate 5: Parents manage the organisational and developmental demands placed on them as stakeholders in youth sport; Postulate 4: Parents foster and maintain healthy
3711 relationships with significant others in the youth sport environment; Postulate 2: Parents understand and apply an authoritative or autonomy-supportive parenting styles;
3712 Postulate 1: Parents select the appropriate sporting opportunities for their child and provide necessary types of social support; Postulate 3: Parents manage the emotional
3713 demands of competition and serve as emotionally intelligent role models for their child; Postulate 6: Expert parents adapt their involvement and support to different stages of
3714 their child's athletic development and progressions

3715

3716   **5.2.2.2 Parent Supportive Culture**. By being embedded in the environment,

3717 it created the opportunity for me to influence the academy culture, both directly and

3718 indirectly. In addition to the consideration of how the academy parent culture could

3719 influence the players, it was apparent through the exploration and reflection phases

3720 (chapter four) parents required, alongside parent support sessions, a parent

3721 supportive culture. This finding was supported by the recommendation by Knight

3722 (2019) and Knight and Newport (2018) that support sessions in isolation are not

3723 sufficient to enhance the youth sport experience for parents. Specifically, as detailed

3724 in chapter four through my exploration and reflections, I believed that parents would

3725 benefit from a culture that welcomed them within the environment, respected them

3726 for the role they play within their son's development, and valued their input and

3727 provided them with a voice.

3728   When considering the cultural changes with Bronfenbrenner's ecological

3729 systems theory, it is clear that having a good relationship and communication

3730 between the parents and the academy (elements of microsystem) will benefit the

3731 development of the child. However, there also needs to be an understanding and

3732 appreciation for the situations that are occurring at home and within families (the

3733 mesosystem). By making cultural changes where parents are welcomed in to the

3734 environment, respected, and more involved in their child's development it may

3735 restore parents' responsibility for teaching their child, gives the parents' pride, and

3736 brings together parents and coaches as partners who work together to develop the

3737 child (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Providing a more parent supportive culture can also

3738 demonstrate an understanding of the potential impact of parents' work and broader

3739 life commitments on the child through an appreciation of the exosystem.

3740   Over the seven-month period that I was embedded within the academy to

3741 design, deliver, and evaluate this action, a number of changes were encouraged and

3742 facilitated within the environment which helped to change the culture. Schein and

3743 Schein's (2016) three step process was used as a guiding process for creating change

3744 within the culture. This process included unfreezing the existing elements of the

3745 culture by emphasising to the coaches and support staff the benefits of changing

3746 elements within the culture. This unfreezing process was followed by creating (or

3747 attempting to make) changes within the culture. Subsequently, I attempted to engage

3748 in "refreezing", encouraging academy staff to internalise the changes. However, this

3749   process of creating changes within the culture also took into consideration the Three

3750   Perspective Approach, as this provided an understanding of the subcultures,

3751   individual identities, and multiple cultures that exist within academies.

3752   Specifically, to alter the culture I encouraged changes to increase the access

3753   of the parents' lounge, as well as providing refreshments for parents to purchase

3754   during training and matches. Prior to these actions, parents who had dropped their

3755   son off and wanted to stay to watch the matches, along with those parents who had

3756   travelled with away teams, were unable to stay at the academy while waiting for kick

3757   off. This meant that parents were unable to get a tea or coffee while waiting, which

3758   added to parents feeling rejected and not welcome within the environment.

3759   I also tried to stimulate more effective working relationships between

3760   coaches and parents, encourage schedules to be distributed sooner, and for parents to

3761   be given (where possible) more notice regarding schedule changes. For instance, I

3762   advised that parents would benefit from at least two weeks' notice prior to the

3763   publication of training and fixture schedules for holiday periods and that schedules

3764   should take into consideration working families. It was common during the holiday

3765   period that training would take place in the middle of the day, which resulted in

3766   parents having to take annual leave to be able to ensure their son could attend. Plus,

3767   some training sessions would start at 4.30pm, which working parents struggled to

3768   support their son to attend.

3769   In addition, I also sought to have parents' involvement in the academy

3770   enhanced, by encouraging coaches to consult parents regarding changes to things

3771   such as training schedules and actively seeking feedback from parents. Specifically, I

3772   sought to introduce a parents' voice forum to provide parents opportunities to ask

3773   questions and seek information. The use of videos within player performance

3774   reviews to provide parents with greater insight into their son's development was also

3775   encouraged.

3776   **5.3: Action Phase: Implementing the Being a Football Parent Support**

3777   **Programme**

3778   The parent support sessions were advertised to parents through an email sent

3779   out one month prior to delivery starting, followed by an email reminder a week

3780   before the start of each session. In addition, the support sessions were advertised

3781   through word of mouth during informal conversations with parents, which occurred

3782   as a result of being embedded within the football academy.

3783   *5.3.1 Support Session Delivery*

3784   The delivery of the support sessions began at the beginning of October and

3785   ran over eight weeks. I decided to deliver the programme over a six week period

3786   based on my reflections and collaborative reflections with parents, coaches, and

3787   support staff within the reflection phase (chapter four). For instance, within the

3788   exploration phase a large number of parents engaged with the monthly meetings,

3789   however as the sessions continued the numbers dropped. As such I thought it may be

3790   easier for parents to remember that sessions were running and to attend when the

3791   sessions were within a condensed period of time. Additionally, at the beginning of

3792   the season I was aware that there were fewer demands on parents, which may enable

3793   them to attend more sessions.

3794   Unfortunately, although the programme was initially planned to occur over a

3795   six-week period (once a week) due to schedule changes for half-term and a week of

3796   illness I had to reschedule two sessions. The sessions were delivered in the football

3797   academy classrooms, as this was within the football environment and a space with

3798   which parents were familiar. It was a large enough room that provided the space

3799   should all parents attend from the respective age groups and all the necessary

3800   facilities were accessible. Refreshments, including a light buffet of food, were

3801   provided. I decided to provide refreshments as many parents transported their

3802   children to training immediately from work. Although all parents ensured that their

3803   children were provided with the necessary food before training, they often sacrificed

3804   their own need for food to ensure their child attended training on time. Once their

3805   child was at training, I was aware that parents would often go to a local coffee shop

3806   to seek refreshments for themselves. As consequence, I wanted to provide them with

3807   refreshments to demonstrate my understanding of the demands on parents and to

3808   show I was appreciative of their time. I also scheduled the sessions to take place at

3809   the same time as training, to reduce the demands on parents and ensure I did not

3810   impinge on family or down time. Time demands were identified by parents as

3811   potential barriers to their attendance at support sessions during the reflection phase

3812   (chapter four), as such, I tried to minimise time demands as much as possible to

3813   reduce barriers to their attendance (e.g., inviting siblings, providing refreshments,

3814   and considering the timing of the delivery).

3815   The sessions were delivered in an interactive and engaging manner. The

3816   sessions were structured to provide an introduction to the topic and background

3817   information, followed by topic related questions being presented to provide parents

3818   with an opportunity for discussion. A copy of the presentation slides used within the

3819   delivery can be found in Appendix F.

3820   Through this delivery style I aimed to create a relaxed atmosphere, in which

3821   parents felt comfortable sharing their experiences with other parents, as well as

3822   learning from others. This interactive, engaging, and supportive delivery approach

3823   was taken to create an environment that met the support needs identified in the

3824   exploration and reflection phases (chapter four), where parents felt welcomed,

3825   respected, and a valued part of the organisational culture. In addition, during the

3826   collaborative reflections in the reflection phase (chapter four) parents and coaches

3827   mentioned the benefits of being provided with support that was flexible and

3828   interactive, potentially in the form of being able to ask questions or discuss. This

3829   approach also aligned with my practitioner philosophy (see chapter three for more

3830   details).

3831   In addition to aligning with the suggestions from my earlier findings, I also

3832   aligned the delivery to my practitioner philosophy, such an approach has been

3833   recommended by other researchers (Keegan, 2016; Poczwardowski et al., 2004). For

3834   instance, Dorsch et al. (2019) suggested that when providing support to parents it

3835   should be delivered via engaging face-to-face sessions and delivered by an

3836   individual who has scientific authority, but can also relate to the experiences of

3837   parents. Parents hold the support that they gain from other parents in high regard and

3838   often benefit from surrounding themselves with a support network to gain emotional

3839   support (Knight & Holt, 2013; Burgess et al., 2016). As a result, by adopting this

3840   interactive discussion-based approach I aimed to facilitate discussion to offer parents

3841   emotional support, enhance their perceptions of managing their stress, and increase

3842   their feelings of support.

3843   *5.3.2 Implementing Cultural Changes*

3844   The cultural changes for this action research cycle took place between June

3845   2017 (start of pre-season) and December 2017 (mid-season). The cultural changes

3846   were carried out in consideration of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory,

3847   where the relationship between parents and the academy within the mesosystem is

3848   important for the development of players. The sharing of communication and

3849   knowledge between the intersecting links of the mesosystem, plus the mutual trust,

3850   positive relationship, goal consensus, and an evolving balance of power enhances the

3851   developmental potential of the player within the academy. As such, the cultural

3852   changes were important from a multi-level perspective.

3853   To carry out the recommended changes within chapter four of creating a

3854   parent supportive culture, the process of organisational culture change was carried

3855   out using the Three Perspective Approach (Martin, 2002; Meyerson & Martin,

3856   1987). The Three Perspective Approach was chosen to create the cultural changes

3857   within the academy as it allowed for a consideration of the complexities within the

3858   academy, provided guidance on how the cultural changes could be made, and

3859   highlighted where there may be conflict and resistance to change. For instance, the

3860   different age group phases and departments within the academy created subcultures,

3861   along with the varying backgrounds of the coaches and support staff that created

3862   individual identities. These subcultures and individual identities may have created

3863   further complexities and impacted on the engagement with the cultural changes.

3864   Within the integrated and shared element of culture, Schein and Schein's

3865   (2016) three stages; unfreeze, change and learning, and refreezing, internalising, and

3866   learning agility were used to create a series of cultural changes. Unfreeze is the

3867   process of creating the desire for change through anxiety and highlighting that

3868   change is necessary. For instance, providing the organisation with a vision for the

3869   future and how this will improve productivity. Individuals then acknowledge that

3870   change is necessary, and the implementation of behaviour change occurs. Finally, the

3871   new values and behaviours are internalised within the organisation and the change is

3872   reinforced. See Table 5.2 for specific details of the cultural changes as I sought to

3873   apply them.

3874   For the differentiation element of culture change, the subcultures within the

3875   academy were considered and each of the shared cultural changes were

3876   individualised for each of the specific subcultures. Specific subcultures were

3877   identified within each of the different age group phases, due to the foundation phase

3878   and the youth development phase having a different lead coach this resulted in a

3879   different culture towards parents. For example, the age group phase coach was more

3880   comfortable and open to engaging informally with parents in comparison to the

3881   foundation phase lead coach. These variations within the different subcultures of

3882   each age group and the willingness to engage in the cultural changes consequently

3883   influenced which changes were implemented within that age group. Finally for the

3884   fragmentation element of the cultural changes, it was recognised that the desired

3885   cultural changes would be open to interpretation and not all academy staff would

3886   buy-in in the same manner. For example, suggestions may be made for how to

3887   enhance the communication between academy staff and parents, but this may

3888   encounter some fear, anxiety, and scepticism.

3889

3890   **Table 5.2**

3891   *Application of Schein and Schein's (2016) Stages of Change*

Stages of change	Definition	Application
Unfreeze	Create an anxiety towards the culture and a desire to change.	Offering an alternative perspective in multi-disciplinary meetings when challenges arise regarding parents or parent behaviour.
		Highlighting through informal conversations the benefits of a positive relationship with parents.
		Role modelling a positive relationship with parents.
		Emphasising to coaches the benefit of creating a parent supportive culture and involving them in their child's development.
Change and learn	Developing new values and implementing new behaviours within the environment.	Helped coaches and support staff to develop positive relationships with parents, through guidance and supporting meetings with parents.
		Provided guidance for academy staff on best practice when engaging with parents, such as performance reviews.
		Offered suggestions to the management team on making parents feel more welcome within the environment.
		Parent feedback provided to the senior management team with suggestions as to how the environmental structure could be changed to include parents and enhance their experience.
Refreeze, internalise, and learning agility	Establishing the new behaviours as habits.	Finally, for the refreeze stage of the culture change, I praised the efforts of the academy, coaches, and support staff by highlighting the benefits and positive outcome of the changes that had been made. The aim was for the academy to eventually internalise these behaviours to allow them to become the norm.
		Feedback from parents on the benefits of the changes were provided to the academy management staff at the end of the season to reinforce the positive impact of the cultural changes.

3892

5.4: Action Evaluation: Evaluation of the Impact of the Being a Football Parent Support Programme

Throughout the delivery of the programme and following the completion of the sessions, a number of methods were used to collect evaluation information. Over the course of this action, approximately 130 parents (based on the assumption that each player was represented by one parent) were invited to take part in the parent support sessions. Although not all parents took part in the support sessions, it was hoped that all parents within the academy would benefit from any changes within the culture. A total of 52 parents attended at least one of the support sessions and ten parents attended all six-sessions. At the first session a total of 26 parents attended across the age groups. At the second session a total of 22 attended across the age groups. At the third session a total of 18 parents attended across the age groups. At the fourth session a total of 15 parents attended across the age groups. At the fifth session a total of 7 parents attended across the age groups. At the sixth session a total of 8 parents attended across the age groups. On average the sessions were attended by 16 parents across the different age groups.

Through their attendance in the support sessions, all 52 parents contributed to the evaluation through sharing their own thoughts and reflections during sessions which informed my reflections and fieldnotes. These parents, as well as parents who did not participate in the sessions, also had an opportunity to contribute to the evaluation of the overall programme (i.e., the support sessions and the cultural changes) through engagement in an online reflective survey (completed by 37 parents), providing their reflections through informal conversations, and as part of my observations and reflections carried out throughout the programme delivery period. Pre and post intervention interviews were also conducted with eight parents. Overall, this range of evaluation methods was used to gain feedback from parents regarding the content covered, the delivery methods, the approach adopted and suggestions for a revised programme (action research cycle two).

5.4.1 Formal Interviews

Eight participants (three mothers and five fathers) volunteered to part in formal semi-structured interviews pre and post the parent support sessions. Demographic information pertaining to the parents who completed these interviews is provided in Table 5.3. A copy of the email invite that went out to parents can be found in Appendix G.

3927   **Table 5.3**

3928   *Participant Demographic Information from the Formal Interviews*

Parent No.	Formal data provided	Age group of son	Parental role	Age (years)	Ethnicity	Travel time to academy	Years involved with football	No. children in football	Time at academy
1	Interview	Under-9	Father	51-60	White-British	25 minutes	22 years	3	2.5 years
2	Interview	Under-10	Father	31-40	White-British	50 minutes	4 years	1	3 years
3	Interview	Under-11	Father	31-40	White-Welsh	5 minutes	5 years	1	4 years
4	Interview	Under-11	Mother	41-50	White-British	10 minutes	12 years	2	8 years
5	Interview	Under-14	Mother	31-40	White-British	40 minutes	10 years	2	3 years
6	Interview	Under-14	Mother	41-50	White British	60 minutes	8 years	1	3.5 years
7	Interview	Under-14	Father	41-50	White-British	55 minutes	9 years	2	2 years
8	Interview	Under-16	Father	51-60	White-British	15 minutes	12 years	1	1 year

3929

3930   To maintain confidentiality, the date and time of the interviews was arranged

3931   directly with the participant via email. In addition, I did not discuss the identity of

3932   the participants with anyone. Interviews were arranged for a mutually convenient

3933   time and took place within the football academy in a semi-private room. The

3934   participants were offered to choose a time, day, and location that was convenient for

3935   them, but all participants chose for the interviews to take place while their son was

3936   training and located at the academy. This allowed the parents to utilise time when

3937   they would already be at the academy.

3938   All participants were provided with a participant information sheet detailing

3939   the purpose of the interview and how their information would be used and stored. If

3940   they were happy with this information, they were then offered the chance to ask any

3941   questions prior to the interview taking place. Following this, the participants signed a

3942   written consent form agreeing to take part in the interview and to be contacted after

3943   the programme to complete a post-support session interview. The interviews were

3944   recorded using two Dictaphones and transcribed verbatim. The interviews ranged in

3945   length from 22 minutes to 200 minutes pre-support session (M=60 minutes, SD=58

3946   minutes) and from 20 minutes to 72 minutes post-support session (M=41 minutes,

3947   SD=19 minutes).

3948   Interview questions were guided by the current understanding of the parent

3949   experience within football academies (e.g., Clarke & Harwood, 2014) and their

3950   support needs (e.g., chapter four; Thrower et al., 2016), along with the experience of

3951   parents taking part in the parent support programme (e.g., Dorsch et al., 2017;

3952   Dorsch et al., 2019; Lafferty & Triggs, 2014; Thrower et al., 2017, 2019; Vincent &

3953   Christensen, 2015). In addition, there were specific questions focused upon each of

3954   the topics covered within the parent support sessions. Each interview followed the

3955   same procedure with introductory questions aiding the participants to relax and build

3956   rapport. For example, these included 'what has been your experience as a football

3957   parent so far this season?'. Once each participant appeared comfortable with the

3958   interview process, the interviewed moved on to the main questions covering the

3959   support they provide to their son, the support they receive, and their experience of

3960   taking part in the parent support programme (post-support sessions only).

3961   Interviews were chosen as one of the evaluation methods to gain an in-depth

3962   understanding of parents' experiences. Interviews are a social conversation between

3963   two individuals with the purpose of creating knowledge and gaining an

3964   understanding of the world around them (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The benefit of

3965   using semi-structured interviews was that it allowed the participants to guide the

3966   conversation and offer a perspective on the programme that I may not have

3967   previously considered (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Specifically, the pre-session

3968   interview process was important as it provided the opportunity for parents to directly

3969   impact on the decisions made within the action research cycle and ensured that the

3970   programme was developed with, rather than simply for parents. I was able to seek

3971   insights into parents' hopes for the sessions. Meanwhile, the post-session interviews

3972   ensured parents could provide a clear steer for future work and that their voices were

3973   heard. Moreover, the interviews also provided an opportunity to gain detailed

3974   feedback on session content, delivery style, and to seek suggestions for future

3975   improvements.

3976   Following each interview, I produced extensive reflexive notes on my

3977   perceptions of the interview, the dynamics and the rapport with the participant, the

3978   content covered within the interview, and any learnings from the interview process.

3979   These reflections were used to improve the interview process and the interview guide

3980   where appropriate. In addition, this formed part of the initial analysis process,

3981   whereby common patterns within the content were noted. These reflections informed

3982   phase three the planning of action and phase five the evaluation of the action.

3983   *5.4.2 Online Reflective Survey*

3984   In order to collaborate with as many parents as possible, all academy parents

3985   were invited to share their reflections, including those who chose not to attend any

3986   support sessions, a week after the completion of the support sessions. Unfortunately,

3987   the initial distribution of the online reflective survey coincided with Christmas, a

3988   particularly busy time for parents. Therefore, a reminder to complete the online

3989   reflective survey was sent out to parents a month later. A total of 37 parents

3990   completed the survey, which included 23 parents who attended and 14 who chose not

3991   to attend the parent support sessions. Of those who attended the support sessions,

3992   two parents indicated that they attended six sessions, six parents attended five

3993   sessions, four parents attended four sessions, three parents attended three sessions,

3994   three parents attended two, and five parents attended one session.

3995   The aim of the online reflective survey was to further explore parents'

3996   reflections regarding the parent support sessions and evaluate why parents may not

3997   have attended and how attendance may be improved. Questions were piped to enable

3998   the survey to be tailored depending on whether parents had attended sessions or not.

3999   If a parent indicated they had attended, they were asked questions regarding reasons

4000   for attending, the usefulness of each topic, the perceived purpose of the support

4001   sessions, whether they found the sessions beneficial, if anything prevented them

4002   from attending sessions/what would facilitate greater attendance and whether there

4003   were any improvements that could be made. A copy of the online reflective survey

4004   for parents who attended the support sessions can be found in Appendix I.

4005   Meanwhile, parents who did not attend were asked why they chose not to attend, if

4006   anything prevented them from attending sessions/what would facilitate greater

4007   attendance and any suggestions for future topics. A copy of the online reflective

4008   survey for parents who chose not to attend the support sessions can be found in

4009   Appendix J. Both surveys also sought reflections on whether parents observed or

4010   identified any changes within the football academy culture in relation to parents.

4011   *5.4.3 Reflexive Diary*

4012   I completed reflections following each session, guided by Gibbs' (1988)

4013   reflective cycle. Specifically, I documented an outline of the discussions that

4014   occurred within the sessions, feedback from parents, information relating to the

4015   content of the sessions, observations of parents' engagement with the sessions, and

4016   details of any organisational cultural changes that have occurred (an example can be

4017   found in Appendix K). Following this, I documented why this had potentially

4018   occurred, and whether any improvements for the next session could be made.

4019   The aim of the reflexive diary was to enable me to reflect on the delivery of

4020   each session with parents and adapt the delivery of each subsequent session to better

4021   suit the parents' needs (Holt et al., 2014). The reflexive diary allowed me to capture,

4022   within close proximity to the delivery, the emotions, reflections, thoughts on the

4023   engagement with parents, and any potential learnings for future sessions (Day,

4024   2017). The completion of the diary within close proximity to the delivery allowed

4025   me to capture my current thoughts without the lapse of time to minimise the impact

4026   from vagueness of memory and potential for the censorship of information (Didymus

4027   & Fletcher, 2012).

4028   *5.4.4 Observations and Fieldnotes*

4029   At the time of developing, implementing, and evaluating the parent support

4030   programme I was not a parent, therefore, one way to collaborate with parents, fully

4031   understand the experiences of being a parent and understand their meanings, was

4032   through being immersed within their world. I wanted to be able to empathise with

4033   parents within the football academy and collaborate with them to gain an

4034   understanding of the changes, from the parent perspective, that were occurring

4035   within the culture in relation to the implemented action. I spent seven months

4036   embedded within the youth football academy while developing, delivering, and

4037   evaluating the parent support programme (having already spent 12 months within the

4038   academy).

4039   Over the seven-month period I carried out approximately 160 hours of

4040   observations and informal conversations with parents at the football academy. For

4041   example, I observed introduction events where the boys were provided with their kit,

4042   signing events where the boys' success of joining the academy was celebrated, home

4043   and away matches, meetings between coaches and parents, and performance review

4044   meetings. I also carried out approximately 980 hours of observations of the culture,

4045   coaches, support staff, and the general football academy environment. I observed

4046   multi-disciplinary meetings, evening and weekend training sessions, pre-match team

4047   talks, travelling with the team, match analysis, and informal social occasions such as

4048   mealtimes. In addition, I engaged in informal conversations and gained reflections

4049   from parents, children, coaches, and support staff. The observations, fieldwork,

4050   informal conversations, and reflections enabled the action research to be

4051   collaborative. Parents, coaches, players, and support staff continually provided input

4052   regarding how they believed the action should be delivered and their reflections on

4053   the delivery of the action to support the evaluation of the action.

4054   Guided by Thorpe and Olive (2016), I carried out observations that aligned

4055   with the interpretivist paradigm and action research. I recorded fieldnotes through a

4056   process of unstructured note-taking after each observation within the football

4057   academy. As Creswell (1998) stated, carrying out observations takes a special skill,

4058   as it is easy for the researcher to be deceived and distracted by those being observed.

4059   For example, a parent may unintentionally distract or redirect my attention away

4060   from the desired observation by engaging them in a conversation about an unrelated

4061   topic. To minimise this, I followed Creswell's (1998) steps for carrying out

4062   observations; 1) select the site to be observed, 2) identify who or what to observe,

4063   when, and for how long, 3) determine a role within the environment, 4) design a

4064   process of recording notes, 5) introduce yourself and be friendly, and 6) thank the

4065   participants for their time.

4066   Drawing on this guidance, to evaluate this programme I selected situations

4067   that would provide an overall perspective of the experiences of an academy parent

4068   and experiences that may have changed as a result of the parent support programme.

4069   I identified the need to observe the behaviour, social interactions, relationships, and

4070   conversations that took place within the specific observation situations, such as

4071   matches. My role, as stated in chapter three, was as a practitioner-researcher who

4072   was collaborating with parents to deliver a parent support programme. The process

4073   of recording notes followed the recommendations by Babbie and Huitt (1975),

4074   record mental notes, jotted notes, and fieldnotes. The mental notes were stored

4075   within my memory to aid writing the full fieldnotes. The jotted notes were written on

4076   my phone as a method of discreetly noting any key information. Subsequently, the

4077   mental notes and jotted notes were used to write the fieldnotes. The fieldnotes

4078   contained a description of the situation and the people within the observation, a

4079   detailed description of behaviours observed, informal conversations, and the

4080   relationship observed between parents-children-coaches.

4081   I wrote up a number of fieldnotes based on my observations and reflections

4082   in relation to youth football academy parents and the culture within the academy

4083   environment (Emerson et al., 2007). The fieldnotes were documented within close

4084   proximity to the observations to ensure that as much detail as possible was recorded.

4085   Emerson et al. (2007) defined fieldnotes as a form of representation and a way of

4086   writing down observations and reflections on the observed. Therefore, an

4087   observation is a moment in time where behaviour occurs, and fieldnotes are written

4088   accounts which can be revisited (Geertz, 1973). I recorded accounts of people,

4089   interactions, personal experiences, reactions, behaviour, and interpretations of the

4090   culture within the academy.

4091   **5.5. Analysis of Evaluation Data**

4092   The data analysis process started with the transcription of all interview data

4093   verbatim. To maximise time and due to time constraints arising from being

4094   embedded within the football academy, the interview data were transcribed by an

4095   institution approved transcription company who had signed a confidentiality

4096   agreement. The data analysis process followed the seven phases recommended by

4097   Miles and colleagues (2014), 1) organisation of the data, 2) immersion within the

4098   data, 3) generating the first cycle of codes, 4) second cycle of coding, 5) creating

4099   assertions, 6) offering interpretations, and 7) writing the report to present the data.

4100   This method of data analysis was chosen to provide a clear step-by-step process of

4101   reducing the large volume of data collected down to a manageable amount to enable

4102   the writing up of results. This step-by-step process was a rigorous and robust method

4103   of evaluating and identifying the value of the action while also considering all

4104   individual perspectives as equal, which is an important element of action research

4105   (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006).

4106   The first stage was to organise the transcripts, collect the online reflective

4107   survey data, organise the reflexive diary notes, observations, and fieldnotes. Second,

4108   I spent a substantial number of hours immersed within the data, reading and re-

4109   reading to gain an empathy and understanding of the experiences of parents within

4110   youth academy football and the impact of the parent support programme. Third,

4111   based upon the questions asked within the interviews and the organisation of the

4112   online reflective survey data, deductive categories were created to aid the

4113   organisation of the data and explore where change occurred. For example, these

4114   categories were: 'overall benefit', 'content evaluation', 'improvements', and

4115   'cultural changes'. This process involved pulling out potentially useful raw data and

4116   organising it within the pre-defined categories.

4117   The fourth stage of analysis was to develop inductive codes from the data.

4118   The displaying of this process was guided by Miles and colleagues (2014) effects

4119   matrix to focus on and illustrate the change that occurred as a result of

4120   implementation of the parent support sessions and the parent supportive culture. This

4121   method of coding was chosen due to the complexity of the change that occurred.

4122   This method provided a process of displaying the data to illustrate the change that

4123   occurred following the support programme and provided conceptual clarity through a

4124   structured approach. Within each of the earlier deductive codes the data was

4125   reflected upon and relevant inductive codes were detailed in the column next to the

4126   data. For example, 'I learnt a lot about the academy process that I didn't know

4127   before' was coded as 'learnt information'.

4128   The fifth stage of analysis was the interpretation and refinement of data by

4129   collapsing and compressing categories into a reduced number of codes. For example,

4130   three codes were refined from "different perspective", "Reflection and discuss with

4131   other parents", and "Helping others" down to one code of "Opportunity for reflection

4132   on own and others' behaviour". The sixth stage of the analysis process was to revisit

4133   the raw data and check that the interpretation was a good representation of the raw

4134   data and the changes that had occurred. In addition, I discussed the data with my first

4135   supervisor who acted as a critical friend to consider the data from an alternative

4136   perspective and advance my understanding of the data. Finally, the data was written

4137   up and presented within the results section.

4138   This data analysis process has been written up implying a linear process,

4139   however it is important to note that data analysis was carried out in an iterative

4140   manner. I was fluid in moving between the stages until a point of being comfortable

4141   that the analysis was a satisfactory representation of the data and the changes that

4142   had occurred from the implementation of the parent support programme (support

4143   sessions and support-culture).

5.6 Evaluation of Findings

4145   Evaluation data focused upon the overall impact of the programme, thoughts

4146   on the specific content of each of the sessions, perceptions of the delivery and

4147   structure of the programme, as well as the changes made to the culture within the

4148   academy.

5.6.1 Overall Evaluation of the Programme

4150   Overall, the evaluation highlighted that parents felt that the parent support

4151   programme provided them with the opportunity to gain more information, they

4152   gained reassurance and support, and they were also able to reflect on their own

4153   behaviour and that of others. However, the delivery of the support programme was

4154   faced with some challenges, which included scheduling and cultural issues.

4155   The parents who attended the sessions and were impacted by the cultural

4156   changes indicated that they benefited from and enjoyed them. One parent wrote

4157   through the online reflective survey that, "I thought the course was very good and

4158   informative." Another parent added that they provided, "an opportunity to

4159   understand the academy environment." The parent support programme helped to

4160   provide parents with access to more information and gain a greater understanding of

4161   the academy environment. In addition, it was found that the sessions provided

4162   parents with the opportunity to gain support and seek reassurance for any concerns

4163   they may have. For instance, one parent reflected on the sessions through the online

4164   reflective survey, "the sessions were very useful and helpful in managing the issues

4165   that can arise." Two further parents wrote, "helped parents cope and understand the

4166   children's journey as well as their own through the academy path" and "an

4167   opportunity to chat to other parents in same position and Rachael herself was very

4168   supportive and encouraging." Furthermore, parents reported that the support sessions

4169   were a useful opportunity to reflect on their own and others' behaviour. I also

4170   recorded in my fieldnotes from one of the mid-season matches, "one parent spent

4171   some time talking through with me their positioning and behaviour while watching

4172   their son, demonstrating his consideration of his behaviour and whether it was

4173   meeting the needs of his son."

4174   In addition to the support sessions the cultural changes were also seen to have

4175   led to some gradual changes in the perception of parents and their role within the

4176   academy. This change was evidenced in my reflexive diary:

4177   There has been a clear culture shift within the academy environment over the

4178   last three months (October to December), in that there have been many more

4179   discussions about the role of parents and what the club could do more of to

4180   support the part that parents play within their child's development. The club

4181   used to view parents as over empowered and having too much say into their

4182   child's position within the club. Coaches would then feel undermined and

4183   perceive parents as 'problem' parents. However, many of the coaching staff

4184   now understand that there can be more done to support parents, rather than

4185   seeing the parents as problems to be dealt with. They understand that the

4186   academy needs to change their approach to the way parents are supported.

4187 Following the cultural changes coaches were beginning to recognise the role of

4188 parents within the development of the youth footballers and were considering how

4189 they could enhance the experience for parents.

4190 **5.6.1.1 Increased Access to Information Through Better Communication**

4191 **and Sharing.** Prior to the support programme, I identified through my informal

4192 conversations and observations that parents lacked knowledge about the academy

4193 organisational structure. For example, when attending a signing event for parents and

4194 players to celebrate the new under-9s and under-18s players contracts I noted within

4195 my reflexive diary, "during a discussion with some under-9 parents, I realised that

4196 parents require more information and knowledge about the academy structure.

4197 Parents are currently unaware of what a scholarship is and how their son gets there

4198 from joining at under-9." It appeared to me that such understanding, or lack thereof,

4199 of the organisational structure was particularly important for parents who had just

4200 started their academy football journey because they needed the information to help

4201 them prepare and understand the journey that was ahead of them. Unfortunately,

4202 although parents were keen for their son to join the academy structure, they did not

4203 seem to understand the development pathway needed for their son to become a

4204 professional. As the academy parent journey continued parents still found that they

4205 lacked information and knowledge when making decisions about their son later on in

4206 the journey. This was particularly true when one under-11 mother detailed her

4207 experience of an education decision she had to make for her son and not feeling like

4208 she had enough information, "we didn't know what to do for the best." In addition,

4209 parents also identified that they found it challenging not knowing what their child

4210 was working on in training. One under-11 father said, "it's the not knowing that is

4211 hard. Maybe somebody could say, what we've worked on in training this week is

4212 this…" This lack of understanding of the training covered in each session, meant that

4213 parents struggled to have conversations with their son afterwards or feel as though

4214 they were supporting their son when away from the academy.

4215 Following the delivery of the support sessions, parents explained that they

4216 had found them beneficial because they gained information and knowledge from

4217 attending the support sessions (see the next section for reflections on each session).

4218 For instance, through the online reflective survey, one parent reported, "the sessions

4219 were run very well and were very informative" and another parent wrote, "extremely

4220 informative." Similarly, one under-10 parent stated during an interview "the learning

4221 has all been from these courses, being open to them and going to them, because

4222 otherwise I still wouldn't know anything." Specifically, parents indicated that the

4223 sessions were particularly useful because they had an opportunity to gain knowledge

4224 and information on topics that were not usually considered, as one under-9 father

4225 said, "I think it's helped to understand and its helped to ask questions occasionally

4226 that you know perhaps there wouldn't have been another natural opportunity to ask."

4227 Additionally, the parents found that the content of the support sessions helped them

4228 to know more about the academy structure than they previously did. For instance,

4229 one under-16 father interviewed after the support sessions said the sessions helped

4230 him to:

4231   Learn more about how the academy works and understand the academy

4232   structure. Some of the other parents explained what they had experienced and

4233   talking about those things, you learn what you should do and what you

4234   shouldn't do. It's understanding the academy a lot more is very helpful.

4235   Knowing how to support my son to get the most out of it.

4236 **5.6.1.2 Gained Support and Reassurance.** Prior to the support programme

4237 parents reported in the interviews that they felt anxious and worried about the

4238 support they provided to their son, as an under-14 mother simply stated, "the worry

4239 [is] that you're not doing it the right way." Further, one under-10 father said, "you're

4240 never going to know if it's right or wrong the way you're approaching it. I think I'm

4241 doing it right, but you're never going to know."

4242   As a result of being embedded within the academy for a year prior to

4243 delivering this programme I had developed a good rapport with many of the parents.

4244 Consequently, when delivering the sessions parents often felt comfortable offloading

4245 about their stressors and demands, which many of them found to be particularly

4246 beneficial. For example, I recorded in my reflexive diary that one under-15 father

4247 had shared his current struggles at the beginning of one of the sessions.

4248   A father disclosed today that he had attended the session to seek support in

4249   relation to the demands he was facing at home. He was caring for his elderly

4250   mother who had been unwell, which had caused tension within the family

4251   home. The extra pressure on top of the organisational demands resulted in an

4252   argument between him and his wife. He felt guilty for arguing in front of his

4253   son. I was pleased and felt privileged that he felt that he could share within

4254   the session his current stressors, demands, and tensions regarding his

4255   personal life.

4256 As a result of offloading and discussing their stressors within the sessions parents

4257 were relieved of the emotional burden they were carrying, which appeared to have an

4258 almost immediate positive impact on their parenting experience, although this may

4259 have been short-lived

4260   As well as offloading, parents reflected that the sessions had allowed them to

4261 talk about their concerns and gain reassurance both from other parents and from me.

4262 One parent detailed through the online reflective survey that the support sessions

4263 allowed them to, "iron out any concerns I may have had," while another parent

4264 explained "it was a good opportunity to talk through any worries and hear other

4265 parents' opinions and points of view." By discussing their concerns with me and the

4266 other parents, parents were able to view things from an alternative lens, which

4267 allowed them to learn different strategies for managing their concerns or coping with

4268 their stressors. In addition, by listening to other parents talk about their experiences,

4269 parents gained comfort knowing that they were not alone and that other parents

4270 experienced the same concerns. For instance, in the online reflective survey one

4271 parent said the programme was, "a good opportunity to come together as a parent

4272 group and listen to each other's concerns and how others deal with things."

4273   As a result of the cultural changes being made to make parents feel more

4274 welcome in the environment, parents reflected on how they felt better able to

4275 communicate with their son's coach and build a relationship with them. For instance,

4276 one under-9 father said, "I think it's professional and if I've had anything that I've

4277 wanted to raise, its more or less been answered." While another under-14 mother

4278 added, "they're very helpful and give us a lot of information in the review." The

4279 change in relationships was also noticeable to me in my conversations with both

4280 parents and coaches, as I noted in my reflexive diary, "I was pleased to see that after

4281 training had finished the coaches were now informally talking to parents at the

4282 academy gates about their son's development. This was a small improvement, but

4283 one I believed would benefit parents." Further still the coaching staff were seeking

4284 continued professional development opportunities within schools to understand how

4285 they could better support parents. I recorded within my fieldnotes, "all of the coaches

4286 went over to a local school to have a discussion with the head teacher about how

4287   they worked with parents and how the academy could improve their relationship

4288   with parents."

4289   **5.6.1.3 Opportunity for Reflection on Own and Others' Behaviours.** Prior

4290   to the support sessions, parents reported that being a parent of an academy footballer

4291   was demanding and stressful. One under-14 mother described the youth football

4292   academy experience as, "juggling children, work, and all sorts of things really, and

4293   then also squeezing in and nagging to get the homework done and catching up

4294   because obviously they've got day release." Academy parents found that the

4295   experience could be stressful due to all the different demands and resulted in a lack

4296   of family-time. One under-11 father described the experience as challenging because

4297   of a "lack of family time, as we're doing a hundred and thirty miles to every training

4298   session."

4299   Following the support sessions, parents reflected on the sessions positively

4300   stating that they had impacted on their overall experience of being a parent at the

4301   football academy. This positive change appeared to occur because attendance at the

4302   sessions gave them an opportunity for reflection on their involvement and

4303   behaviours. One under-14 mother reported, "what's been interesting is to see other

4304   parents' views as well and how they tackle certain issues, as all children are

4305   different. But I suppose it's certainly made me think, I'm doing everything great."

4306   Through such reflection and reassurance, parents gained confidence in their actions

4307   and felt more capable of providing appropriate support to their son.

4308   In contrast, for some parents, the discussions in sessions encouraged them to

4309   think about their behaviour and consider how they may wish to change their

4310   behaviour or approach towards parenting their son. For example, one parent stated in

4311   the reflective survey that the sessions were, "thought provoking on how I behave."

4312   Another parent added, "they helped identify the best approach we can use with our

4313   children, also look at things from other parents' perspectives." For some parents

4314   these subsequent reflections and changes in behaviour may have contributed to

4315   improved relationships between them and their son. As one under-11 father said:

4316   I'm not saying it's a direct correlation to what you've done, or if it's an

4317   indirect correlation I couldn't tell you, but my relationship with my son is

4318   much better than it was. And I've been going to some of your sessions, so if

4319   it has worked great, take the credit. I don't know what the one catalyst was, I

4320   didn't walk out of the sessions and go right I am going to change this…but

4321   the relationship is improved.

4322 In addition, some parents had changed their behaviour to improve their family life.

4323 For example, I recorded in my reflexive diary:

4324   One mother thanked me for the session from the previous week, because

4325   instead of feeling guilty for missing her son's away match she had a

4326   discussion with her son about not going to his away match, and to her

4327   surprise he was happy for her to not go. So, she subsequently spent the time

4328   with her daughter and had a really great day.

4329   **5.6.1.4 Scheduling and Cultural Issues.** Delivery of a parent support

4330 programme within a football academy was challenging and there were a number of

4331 environmental and cultural factors that impacted on the delivery of the support

4332 sessions in particular. The initial challenge I faced was fitting the programme around

4333 the already busy schedule that existed within the academy. The academy events

4334 made scheduling in a series of six sessions running consecutively challenging and

4335 was made even more difficult as the schedule frequently changed at short notice. For

4336 example, despite scheduling in my sessions a number of weeks in advance, to give

4337 parents as much notice as possible, there was one session where a match for one age

4338 group was added into the schedule, and training was cancelled for another age group

4339 so they could go and watch the first team play. This highlighted the issues within the

4340 culture and how matches and first team fixtures were prioritised over providing

4341 parents with support. I noted within my fieldnotes that consequently, "this session

4342 ended up taking place on a night when there was an under-11 match taking place and

4343 the under-12s were not training, due to being away for a tournament the day before

4344 so were given the night off." As to be expected, I found that if a match was

4345 scheduled on for the same time as the support session, parents' preference was to

4346 watch their son play in a match. Therefore, for this particular session only one parent

4347 attended. I was frustrated by the negative impact such changes had on the delivery of

4348 the support sessions and the potential perception by parents that the academy did not

4349 value the sessions that I was delivering. I recorded within my reflexive diary:

4350   I am disappointed, but know there is also nothing I can do about it. I have

4351   done my best in this difficult and challenging environment. It has been

4352   incredibly challenging to deliver a programme in an environment that is

4353   continuously changing and where scheduling changes occur that are out of

4354   my control. Regardless of the time and day that I run sessions, things are

4355   always changing and always preventing it from going as planned.

4356   As well as encountering scheduling and environmental challenges, I also

4357   experienced my own personal challenges which impacted on the delivery.

4358   Unfortunately, during the delivery I encountered a sickness bug, which started

4359   without warning during one of the sessions. The sickness bug resulted in me ending

4360   one of the sessions I was delivering early and rescheduling the session due to be

4361   delivered the following day to the week afterwards, which pushed two age groups

4362   back by a week within the series. I recorded in my fieldnotes:

4363   I began to feel ill during a conversation with a parent, so apologised and left

4364   the room for a couple of minutes to get some fresh air. At this point, I

4365   brought the session to an end 30 mins before the session was due to end as

4366   my health was deteriorating. I quickly went through the take home messages,

4367   despite the parents looking rather confused by the delivery of the session and

4368   abruptness of the ending, I thanked them for their time and apologised.

4369   **5.6.1.5 Challenges with Attendance.** The biggest challenge throughout the

4370   delivery of the support sessions was gaining and maintaining parent attendance. The

4371   attendance numbers started low and slowly dipped across the course of the

4372   programme. Within my reflexive diary I noted that the fifth session for the under-9s

4373   and under-10s was not attended by any parents:

4374   Once again, I am disappointed with the lack of attendance, I understand why

4375   attendance is low. It is now getting closer to Christmas and everyone is in the

4376   depths of winter colds. I appreciate that some parents will be preparing for

4377   Christmas and would rather be Christmas shopping than attending the

4378   sessions. However, I am still disappointed that there weren't any parents

4379   from the under-9 and under-10 age groups attending.

4380   Poor attendance was a disappointment and frustration throughout the programme,

4381   particularly as I had put the time and effort in to send out email reminders, book the

4382   room, and arrange to have refreshments available. For those parents who had taken

4383   the time and effort to attend the programme, the lack of attendance from other

4384   parents was equally frustrating. One parent through the online reflective survey

4385   reflected:

4386   It would have been great if all parents had attended, on a few of the

4387   workshops there were only 4/5 people there, the more people the more views,

4388   the sessions were also a great opportunity to meet other parents, so it is a

4389   shame not everyone managed to make it.

4390   When parents were asked why they were unable to attend, the majority

4391   stated, "a busy schedule" and "work and other children's commitments." One parent

4392   who completed the online reflective survey said:

4393   There is a lot of time and commitment already given by parents with ensuring

4394   the boys attend all their training sessions and home and away matches.

4395   Where I appreciate that the football academy provides these sessions for the

4396   benefit of both parents and children, unfortunately the further commitment

4397   proves to be unrealistic for working parents and families with other children.

4398   Another parent simply explained that, "personal circumstances meant I couldn't

4399   attend. I would have loved to have attended them all. Extremely worthwhile."

4400   As these reflections highlighted, although parents may see the benefit of attending

4401   sessions, the additional demand or other commitments may be too great and

4402   outweigh the potential benefit.

4403   Parents reported that having other children to look after was also a limiting

4404   factor and prevented them from attending. The programme was advertised to parents

4405   as welcoming to other children and some parents did bring other children along. The

4406   children were provided with refreshments and could join in with the discussions

4407   where they wanted. However, most parents did not want to bring their other children

4408   along, as they did not feel it was fair for them. When asked if there was anything that

4409   would improve attendance, one parent mentioned in the online reflective survey:

4410   Nothing as it is down to childcare as I don't think it would be fair to bring my

4411   young daughter along as she already has to come along to drop off and pick

4412   up my son to training and sometimes come to matches. Also, my husband

4413   doesn't finish work in time to attend the sessions.

4414   Other reasons that parents reported for being unable to attend, were that they did not

4415   drop their child off at training on the evenings that the programme was running due

4416   to lift sharing with other parents, "unfortunately I don't always take my son on a

4417   Wednesday so could only attend one" and "I don't always drop to training on the

4418   night of the sessions". Despite parents being invited to attend on other nights, better

4419   communication of this option was clearly needed.

4420 *5.6.2 Session Evaluation: Perceptions of Topics*

4421   From the interviews, online reflective survey, informal conversations, and my

4422 reflexive diary it appeared that parents engaged well with the chosen content. From

4423 their reflections, parents felt that many of the topics were novel and consequently

4424 they found them beneficial, as one parent reflected through the online reflective

4425 survey, "it was beneficial to interact with the other parents on some valid topics that

4426 would perhaps not normally be discussed." Another parent added, "the course

4427 content was very informative and very well presented." One under-14 mother also

4428 said, "all topics were really helpful." However, some issues with the topics covered

4429 were also identified, for example I noted in my reflexive diary, "today it was

4430 challenging to get parents to engage in the topic as they were preoccupied by their

4431 frustrations with the academy communication."

4432   In addition, better communication of the purpose of the sessions and the

4433 broader programme may have been useful. Although most parents appropriately

4434 indicated that the purpose of the sessions were to support them or to gain

4435 information/education, one parent stated that they did not attend due to, "work

4436 commitments allied with no clear vision of what I could gain from the sessions."

4437 Consequently, the programme could potentially have benefited from parents being

4438 provided with greater clarity of the purpose of the programme.

4439   **5.6.2.1 Helped to Manage Stressors.** Parents reported that they particularly

4440 found topic one (*Tackling the football parenting game*) useful as it helped them to

4441 manage their stressors and develop ways of coping with their demands. For instance,

4442 when reflecting on the content of the sessions in his interview, an under-14 father

4443 said:

4444   It was helpful in regard to the demands of travelling, and we talked about

4445   pre-planning meals that was really helpful. Managing family life as well as

4446   the football. And then the tips, the support for parents in the academy

4447   environment.

4448 The content facilitated discussion among parents regarding the demands they faced

4449 and coping strategies they had found useful. The parents found this discussion with

4450 other parents helpful as the content resonated with their current experiences, plus

4451 they could get tips and ideas from other parents to better cope with their demands.

4452 From a discussion on coping strategies, I recorded in my reflexive diary:

4453   They initially were unsure of the coping strategies they had developed,

4454   because in their eyes they just felt that they got on with it. However, parents

4455   shared that having grandparents around was a key strategy to help them cope,

4456   and others felt the boys developing their own strategies to manage the

4457   environment was beneficial. For example, one player was doing his

4458   homework in the car on the way into training to ensure that all his homework

4459   was done.

4460   **5.6.2.2 Strengthened Relationships with Academy Staff and Other**

4461 **Parents.** Following the second parent support topic (*Communicating with the team*),

4462 parents reflected and described feeling more able to talk to the coaches honestly

4463 about how they felt, with the intent of helping the coaches see situations from the

4464 parent perspective. One under-10 father explained:

4465   I think it's important for the coaches to know how we feel sometimes as

4466   parents because there's definitely a boundary between the parents [and the

4467   coaches]. They still look at them [their children] as players, not as our little

4468   children or [their own] personalities, so it was good to tell them how much it

4469   meant to my son.

4470 Consequently, parents believed that their relationship with the coach(es) had

4471 improved following the sessions, as they felt they were able to be honest with them.

4472 In addition, parents reported that they found the content beneficial because it gave

4473 them the confidence to express their concerns and ask academy staff questions when

4474 unsure. For instance, one under-9 father said:

4475   It was quite thought provoking in terms of being confident to challenge when

4476   something came up that did clash and making the right priority decision and

4477   not feeling guilty about that. I think that was helpful because that sort of

4478   helped to take that anxiety away.

4479 Before this session, parents indicated feeling apprehensive about engaging with

4480 coaches in case it had a negative impact on their son's place within the academy. By

4481 getting to know the coaching staff, understanding the process for raising concerns,

4482 and being encouraged to communicate with coaches, some of this apprehension

4483 appeared to dissipate.

4484   Beyond developing relationships with coaches, through the sessions, parents

4485 were encouraged to enhance their relationships with other parents as a mechanism of

4486   support. This was evidenced in my reflection from the under-13 and under-14

4487   session:

4488   What was wonderful to see was once the session had ended, the parents were

4489   chatting to each other outside the parents' lounge. It was nice to see one of

4490   the trialist's parents was being introduced into the academy environment and

4491   supported by the other parents. They continued their discussion for at least 15

4492   minutes after the session had ended.

4493   This reflection demonstrated that getting the parents together to start talking resulted

4494   in them building relationships with new parents and strengthening their existing

4495   relationships with others. In addition, an under-9 father described the programme as

4496   a networking opportunity for parents, "networking's been a good part of it. I've got

4497   to know some of the other parents better." Therefore, a positive benefit of the content

4498   was parents being able to network and build relationships with other parents.

4499   **5.6.2.3 Learnt How Best To Support Their Son.** Through the online

4500   survey, parents reflected on the content and said that topic four (*Supporting your*

4501   *child*) in particular had offered them an opportunity to consider how best to support

4502   their son before, during, and after a match. One parent reflected stating that the

4503   benefit of the support sessions was, "having a better idea how to support our kid

4504   before, after and during the game." I noted in my reflexive diary:

4505   Previously I would see parents wanting to rush over to their son or the coach

4506   to talk to them after a match, but now since the parent support sessions,

4507   parents seem more relaxed and able to allow their child time in the changing

4508   room to reflect before talking to them.

4509   Parents also reflected on how they were supporting their son and whether it

4510   was beneficial for him. For instance, one under-10 father said since the support

4511   sessions something he had, "…stopped doing is critiquing him in a negative sense

4512   which I learnt, I wouldn't say early on or quick because it has taken me nearly the

4513   whole season, but I have learnt that." By providing parents with some information on

4514   how best to support their son, it seemed that they subsequently had an opportunity to

4515   reflect on the support they provided to their son and change it to be more supportive

4516   if needed. In addition, during session four, parents were encouraged to have

4517   conversations with their sons to learn about the types of support they would like.

4518   Subsequently, an under-10 father stated that now, having spoken to his son, rather

4519   than agreeing with his son when he had played badly, he would encourage him and

4520   look at positive aspects of his match, "I've learnt to deal with that a lot better and I

4521   find that I'm picking him up now after games where before I'd agree with him."

4522   **5.6.2.4 Enhanced Control of Emotions.** Following the delivery of topic five

4523   (*The ups and downs of matches*) parents reflected on their match experience and felt

4524   that they were now more in control of their emotions. For example, one under-9

4525   father said, "I feel more in control of my emotions perhaps and I wasn't out of

4526   control, but I think I was trying to input a bit too much and I wasn't alone with that."

4527   Prior to the session, parents did not think that their emotions were out of their control

4528   or that they were behaving inappropriately during a match because others were

4529   behaving in a similar way. However, following session five they were now more

4530   aware of their emotions, as one under-11 father shared:

4531   I used to [be] anxious before a game, I used to be worried, stressed and I look

4532   back now, and I don't know why I was like that, but I was. And now it's

4533   more of a "que sera" type approach. I find it far easier to manage my

4534   emotions.

4535   As a result of being more emotionally aware, parents felt that they could keep their

4536   son's games more in perspective and that they could also manage their emotions

4537   more appropriately. One under-10 father described how he has learnt to manage his

4538   emotions, "I've learnt to control my emotions on the side and what's good for my

4539   son, what's not." I noted within my reflexive diary that, "the parents were able to

4540   recognise their emotions during a match and one mother has felt that her youngest

4541   child with them was her distraction and coping mechanism."

4542   One of the reasons that this topic may have encouraged learning was

4543   potentially due to the emotions that it elicited. For instance, one under-14 mother

4544   described watching matches as, "enjoyable, I'm proud, it can be stressful at times, I

4545   have butterflies, but just try not to show the boys, that I'm not nervous." Although

4546   watching matches was an experience that created nerves and tension among parents,

4547   watching their son play in matches, particularly when their son was playing well or

4548   the match had a positive outcome, also resulted in feelings of enjoyment and

4549   happiness. Therefore, it may have been the topic of matches that elicited positive

4550   emotions and feels of enjoyment that created a desire within parents to learn and

4551   engage with the topic.

4552   **5.6.2.5 Appropriateness of the Supporting your Child Topic Detail and**

4553   **Information.** Due to the broad range of educational backgrounds of the parents,

4554   selecting the amount and level of detail to provide regarding topic four (*Supporting*

4555   *your child*) to facilitate learning was challenging. For example, after topic four I

4556   reflected on the delivery of the content having felt that for some parents the content

4557   around child psychology and development was too complex. However, for other

4558   parents, particularly those who were teachers or health care professionals, just

4559   having a broad overview of basic child development was too simplistic and they

4560   wanted more detail. I reflected:

4561   I was aware that for some parents this session was going to be the most

4562   content heavy, due to covering the cognitive and social development of

4563   children. I felt that I was not truly aware of how much each parent knew

4564   about child development, so would have to cover the area briefly, trying not

4565   to overwhelm them with content, but ensure understanding. For other parents,

4566   they would want to go in to detail about this topic.

4567   The challenge of getting the level of detail right regarding child development

4568   to meet the educational needs of all parents was demonstrated in my fieldnotes, as in

4569   one session for topic four, a parent had asked for me to explain 'adolescence',

4570   whereas in another session on this topic other parents were asking questions in

4571   greater depth about their child's maturity compared to his peers. I had recorded, "one

4572   mother asked was it a good thing that the players are advanced beyond other children

4573   as they have grown up or were they missing out on their childhood?" Consequently,

4574   I found it difficult to pitch the level of knowledge for topic four to an appropriate

4575   level to meet all the educational needs of parents.

4576   **5.6.2.6 Limited Engagement with Being a Football Parent and the Ups**

4577   **and Downs of Matches Topics.** During topic three (*Being a football parent*) and

4578   topic five (*The ups and downs of matches*) there was limited engagement with the

4579   content and the activities that were provided. For example, within topic five (*The ups*

4580   *and downs of matches*) the parents from the under-9 and under-10 age groups did not

4581   engage as much in the discussion as I would have liked. Instead, parents became

4582   distracted talking about a recent match and the behaviour of the parents from the

4583   opposing team. This was potentially due to the emotion from the last match, only

4584   three days ago, still being fresh and parents not yet having had time to process the

4585   emotion. As a result, I decided that the subsequent sessions would benefit from an

4586   additional activity. I recorded in my reflexive diary:

4587   Due to the limited discussions in the U9/U10 session, I thought it may be

4588   worth adding in some further activities to keep parents engaged in this

4589   session. However, as per previous experience, it resulted in the parents

4590   initially taking some time to decide who is going to do the writing and

4591   debating about this for a little while, before one volunteered.

4592 Even though activities were added in to topic five to encourage parents to engage in

4593 greater discussion around the emotions and coping strategies at matches, parents

4594 actually spent some time talking about who was going to do the writing for the

4595 activity. Therefore, although the intention was to create more discussion about the

4596 topic, parents then became distracted by the logistics of completing the task.

4597   In a similar manner I found that in the under-11 and under-12 session for

4598 topic three (*Being a football parent*) the parents did not appear to connect as well

4599 with the scenarios provided as I was hoping. I recorded in my fieldnotes, "the parents

4600 did not discuss their responses in any great depth and appeared very clear on what

4601 they would do in each of the scenarios." Therefore, although topic three (*Being a*

4602 *football parent*) may have had a positive outcome, it potentially did not impact on

4603 their parenting style as much as I hoped due to the limited engagement with the

4604 activity. In future, an activity that may challenge parents further to consider their

4605 parenting approach in certain situations may be more effective to really encourage a

4606 reflection around individual parenting styles impacts on a parent's behaviour and the

4607 decisions they make.

4608   **5.6.2.7 Uncomfortable Discussing Release from the Academy and**

4609 **Academy Communication.** A further challenge during topic six (*Bumps in the*

4610 *road*) was that parents felt uncomfortable discussing their son's potential release

4611 from the academy because although most admitted that it was inevitable at some

4612 point, they did not want it to happen. I recorded parents' response to discussing their

4613 son's release in my reflexive diary, "as soon as I began talking about release, I could

4614 feel the parents all become very uncomfortable and nervous." Although parents

4615 found it uncomfortable to talk about their son's potential release, they did find it

4616 beneficial to understand the process and what might happen afterwards. One under-

4617 10 father reflected, "nice and reassuring [talking about the release process] because I

4618 never get to speak to any of the parents that have been released, or the children, so I

4619 don't know what process they've been through in the reviews." By developing a

4620 greater understanding of the release process and being more prepared, parents

4621   subsequently felt better able to prepare their children. As one father reflected on a

4622   conversation he had with his son after this session, "I've said to him, if he was to get

4623   released at Christmas, he would have learnt so much from it. It will always stand him

4624   in good stead."

4625   In addition to struggling to talk about their son's potential release from the

4626   academy in topic six (*Bumps in the road*), during topic two (*Communicating with the*

4627   *team*) parents struggled to engage as it elicited feelings of frustration with the

4628   academy communication and the communication process. As a result, these

4629   frustrations detracted from their engagement with the topic, for example, one under-

4630   10 mother said, "the coach doesn't speak to anybody really, you can't gauge

4631   anything from them, they are pokerfaced." One under-11 father added, "they detach

4632   themselves from you, and that's understandable because one day the door opens, and

4633   they tell you you're gone." Due to these frustrations and the belief that coaches do

4634   not communicate or engage with parents, the parents struggled to engage with the

4635   session and understand why it was worthwhile learning about how to build

4636   relationships with the coaches.

4637   Another issue related to this topic was recorded within my fieldnotes, "there

4638   was some confusion about who was continuing to be their age group coach, because

4639   there had been changes within the staffing structure and the parents had not been

4640   informed of what was going on." Therefore, in the future, to reduce feelings of

4641   frustration and exclusion, parents may benefit from a copy of the staffing structure as

4642   soon as changes are made. It reflected, "one of the parents commented during the

4643   session that she could not remember the staffing structure and it would be nice to be

4644   provided with a copy, so that they knew who everyone was."

4645   *5.6.3 Session Evaluation: Positioning, Delivery, and Structure*

4646   Prior to delivering the sessions substantial consideration had been given to

4647   how the sessions were structured and delivered because I wanted them to attract

4648   parents and encourage their engagement. The method of delivery and structure of the

4649   sessions appeared to be particularly important for parents. One under-16 father

4650   reflected on why it was important to consider the delivery method:

4651   Parents have been in work all day generally; you don't want to challenge

4652   them too much in any task based things. So, I think it's useful to be in a

4653   pleasant environment where you're not going to be asked to work too hard.

4654   But just talk about experiences and therefore learn a bit more from other

4655   people with similar experiences or different experiences. Sandwiches were a

4656   good idea. Food is always a good thing.

4657   **5.6.3.1 Framing of the Sessions.** When designing the programme, the

4658   perspective was taken that parenting is challenging enough without adding further

4659   pressure to parents by teaching them how to parent. Therefore, as discussed

4660   previously, the programme was delivered with the intention of being framed as a

4661   support programme, rather than an education programme. The topics for discussion

4662   were delivered with a small amount of information at the beginning, followed by an

4663   activity to encourage discussion and reflection amongst the parents. However,

4664   despite my intentions, as I was not a parent, I was nervous at the start of the delivery

4665   about not wanting to come across as teaching parents how to parent. I wrote in my

4666   reflexive diary:

4667   I went in to the first session knowing that I did not want to teach parents how

4668   to parent. I had to get across my key messages without trying to educate

4669   them. I was nervous at the start and waffled for a little bit, but once we got

4670   into the session, I felt that I was able to relax.

4671   I found the delivery of the first session and topic three (*Being a football parent*) to be

4672   a challenging experience because I did not want to teach parents how to parent. Once

4673   into the discussion and when the parents began to open up about their experiences,

4674   however, I relaxed and the sessions seemed to progress as I had intended.

4675   As well as my concerns regarding the framing of the sessions, the parents

4676   also highlighted this as a consideration to encourage further attendance and

4677   engagement in the future. One under-16 father highlighted, "you've got to be very

4678   careful about how you frame it and support is, parent support, but even then, you've

4679   got to be careful you don't suggest they need support." Despite the support

4680   programme being framed as a support programme there were a number of parents

4681   who reported seeing the support programme as a way of educating parents, "to

4682   educate parents and preparing for the future with or without football." Another

4683   parent described it as a mechanism to teach parents about the journey and how to

4684   manage the challenges, "to educate parents about the journey, to provide parents

4685   with the tools to deal with both positive and negative aspects of your child's journey

4686   and to provide parents with a platform to air any concerns they might have." The

4687   feedback from parents showed that there had been some misinterpretation of the

4688   purpose of the programme and rather than a programme to support parents, they had

4689   seen it as a method for the academy to educate parents.

4690   The feedback from the online reflective survey further provided insight in to

4691   how some parents did not understand my intended purpose of the programme at all.

4692   One parent wrote how the programme was to just fulfil the outcomes of the research

4693   project and their involvement was, "to help with the study." Another parent

4694   perceived that the programme was an opportunity for them to voice concerns, "voice

4695   our concerns about how we as parents are being treated by the academy." Therefore,

4696   the feedback through the online reflective survey highlighted that even when the

4697   purpose was detailed and distributed to parents there may still have been a

4698   misunderstanding of the purpose.

4699   **5.6.3.2 Interactive, Relaxed, and Group-based Discussion**. Each session

4700   was designed to be engaging and interactive with parents taking part in group

4701   activities, discussions, and reflections. The feedback regarding this approach was

4702   that parents enjoyed the interactive element and benefited from engaging with other

4703   parents, as one under-14 mother reflected, "it was interactive, it was two way, it

4704   wasn't just we all sat there and looked at the slides." One under-14 father added that

4705   the sessions were, "light-hearted and high level and draw a little bit of detail out or

4706   got a bit of information over," while one of the under-9 fathers shared that he

4707   enjoyed the sessions because, "topics have been kind of discussion based haven't

4708   they really and not too mentally taxing." Overall, it appeared that an interactive

4709   approach worked well for parents because they felt that it was relaxed and they were

4710   learning and reflecting on their behaviour without feeling as though they were

4711   having to put in too much work.

4712   Although parents reported that they enjoyed the discussion-based activities,

4713   some of the interactive activities did make some parents feel uncomfortable.

4714   Specifically, greater consideration needed to be given to the background and

4715   knowledge of parents when the sessions were designed. For example, the written

4716   group activities were not always positively received because, as one under-10 father

4717   reflected, "one of the parents made me write the one day, which I was uncomfortable

4718   about because my spelling isn't the best." Similarly, one under-14 father stated,

4719   "when you've got to interact with the other parents, that can be a bit tricky, especially

4720   if your spelling isn't very good. That can be a bit stressful." Thus, it appears that

4721   parents may have preferred the sessions if there were fewer activities that involved

4722   writing, with a greater focus simply upon discussion.

4723   **5.6.3.3 Timing of Delivery**. The importance of delivering the sessions at the

4724   right time was very important because, as highlighted by one under-11 mother, "I

4725   suppose we're all so busy and there's a huge commitment down here and getting

4726   people to come and commit to the meetings is tough." Recognising the time

4727   pressures on parents, after some collaborative reflection it was decided that sessions

4728   should run alongside training, as it was anticipated parents would already be in

4729   attendance at the academy. Additionally, it was mutually agreed that sessions should

4730   all take place in the first two months of the school term, which are generally quieter

4731   for players and parents because there are fewer fixtures, parents are not yet planning

4732   or organising Christmas, and academy football tours were not taking place.

4733   Parents reported that having the sessions condensed into a period of two

4734   months was beneficial. For instance, one under-11 mother explained that having the

4735   sessions delivered close together helped her to remember to attend, "if you've got

4736   one every few months, it's easier to miss it, even though we get an email. I found it

4737   good that they were every week." Similarly, parents were positive regarding the

4738   delivery of sessions alongside their son's training sessions. For instance, one under-

4739   14 mother said, "really helpful the fact that they were factored into the actual times

4740   that we were down here for the training." Many of the parents travelled a long

4741   distance to support their child to attend the academy, as a result were not keen on

4742   travelling to the academy for a parent session unless their son was training.

4743   Nevertheless, there were a number of parents who reported that the timing of

4744   the support sessions did not allow them to attend and they could not find time to

4745   attend. One under-16 father reported that despite attending the programme, "the time

4746   was a bit of a challenge for us." Another parent, explained why they had not attended

4747   any sessions, reiterated the time challenges in their survey response, "having other

4748   children who also were in activities on the same evenings and my workload as a

4749   teacher."

4750   **5.6.3.4 Provision of Refreshments**. The general consensus among the

4751   parents was that the food and refreshments created an environment that was pleasant

4752   and relaxed, encouraging them to attend. However, despite a positive response to the

4753   refreshments, they did not meet all the parents' needs. Specifically, parents had been

4754   encouraged to bring their other children along to sessions if this would enable them

4755   to attend. However, as I was not a parent, I was unfamiliar with the food choices of

4756   children and parents were disappointed with the food provided, as it did not suit their

4757   children. I recorded in my reflexive diary:

4758   As one parent was entering the room, she was saying that her son was

4759   looking forward to getting some food for dinner. However, when her and her

4760   son came to have some food, they said it was too posh for him. I felt awful,

4761   as her son was so excited about having food, and now he was just eating a bit

4762   of fruit and that was it. I did not expect wraps, vegetable spring rolls, and

4763   fruit to be considered too posh for some children. This did come as a surprise

4764   to me and something I will be aware of when catering for the next sessions.

4765   Similarly, it was apparent that the food was not to all the adult's tastes either. Thus, a

4766   challenge for the sessions was that, having decided to provide refreshments I then

4767   needed to identify what was suitable for all the different people attending.

4768   *5.6.4 Evaluation of Cultural Changes*

4769   The cultural changes within the support programme occurred through

4770   continual, informal comments I made and conversations I had to informally

4771   challenge social norms and perspectives to encourage coaches and support staff to

4772   proactively support parents. While implementing these cultural changes a number

4773   were positively implemented, however, there were also a number of challenges

4774   encountered and resistance to implement. The evaluation of the cultural changes

4775   aligned with attempts to create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for

4776   parents, increasing respect for parents created through enhanced relationships, and

4777   valuing parents' role within their son's development.

4778   **5.6.4.1 Welcoming and Including Parents.** A key cultural change that made

4779   parents feel welcome within the environment was their improved relationship with

4780   their son's coach. Through conversations with academy staff, I highlighted the

4781   importance of building relationship with the parents, understanding their

4782   background, and getting to know them so that they could help academy staff to

4783   enhance their son's development. These conversations took place informally as I

4784   worked alongside the coaches and more formally within multi-disciplinary meetings.

4785   The intent was always to help reframe and change academy staff perspective on

4786   parents.

4787   As part of the data collection for the exploration phase (chapter four), it was

4788   recommended that having the parents lounge open and available more often, which

4789 included being open on match days, would be useful. In implementing this support

4790 programme, I met with the academy management team to discuss the feedback I had

4791 received from parents and it was agreed that the parents lounge could be made

4792 available to parents before, during, and after matches. This immediately changed

4793 parents' perceptions of the culture, with them indicating that they were made to feel

4794 more welcome within the environment, as an inviting and pleasant space had been

4795 made available for them to wait for their son's match to kick off or wait for their son

4796 to get changed. One parent reflected using the online reflective survey that, "always

4797 having access to the parent room every training session" had improved their

4798 experience. In addition, following the feedback and request from parents,

4799 refreshments and snacks were made available to them at the academy. This was

4800 particularly beneficial to parents on a match day when they may have bought the

4801 whole family along to watch their son and required refreshments. Again, seeing that

4802 there was a change in the academy as a result of their feedback helped parents feel

4803 more welcome within the environment as recorded in my reflexive diary, "as I was

4804 watching a match with a family, their youngest son had become hungry and bored, it

4805 was satisfying to see that the vending machines had helped to improve their

4806 experience by being able to get him some snacks."

4807   Despite the positive changes associated with creating a more welcoming and

4808 inclusive academy culture for parents, there was some reluctance from coaches and

4809 support staff to embrace all the suggested changes. I wrote in my reflexive diary:

4810   I had questioned the coaches and support staff as to why the parents were

4811   unable to have access or a greater understanding of the training sessions that

4812   took place. From my understanding this would help parents to feel less

4813   pushed out and more welcome within the academy. However, the response

4814   that I got from the coaches was 'they will put the boys off their training' and

4815   the support staff said, 'it is a health and safety issue'. Both of these reasons I

4816   found really hard to believe that parents would negatively impact on the

4817   training session and how parents could be a health and safety issue, as often

4818   on a training night parents would watch through the bushes the other side of

4819   the fence or even climb the trees to watch their son.

4820 For an unknown reason coaches and support staff were reluctant and resistant to

4821 consider welcoming parents in to the academy to be able to watch training, despite

4822 my encouragement that it would enhance the experience for parents, make them feel

4823 more welcome, and included within their son's development.

4824   **5.6.4.2 Respecting Parents Through Enhanced Relationships.** When

4825 reflecting with me after the programme it appeared that parents felt more respected

4826 within the environment, particularly with regards to a recognition of the time and

4827 commitment they give to supporting their son. Parents indicated that this feeling of

4828 respect resulted from a reduction in the amount of criticism they received from

4829 coaches and fewer rules to try and manage their behaviours. For example, if parents

4830 had concerns about their son's development or the amount of game time that their

4831 son was getting the coaches would invite them in for a meeting to discuss their

4832 concerns. Whereas, previously, parents felt that raising such a concern was met with

4833 criticism and a simple reinforcement that their son was only required to receive 50%

4834 game time. Although it was not possible to allocate this change to one specific

4835 action, the continuous discussions that I had with the coaches (informally and in

4836 multi-disciplinary meetings), reframing of their perspective on parents' behaviour,

4837 and encouraging them to understand the potential reasons behind parents'

4838 behaviours, may have all contributed. One example of the improved communication

4839 between coaches and parents was provided through the online reflective survey,

4840 "although my son moved from his favoured position the communication from

4841 coaches informing us, he has a more promising future in his second favoured

4842 position was excellent."

4843   In addition, an important change, which substantially altered how parents'

4844 felt about the academy, was a reduction in the amount of last-minute changes made

4845 to the training schedule and match fixtures. For example, before the support

4846 programme, if the weather had been forecast to be incumbent and potentially a risk

4847 to their boys' safety, then training may not have been called off until the last possible

4848 moment to give the boys every chance of being able to train. However, while this

4849 was done to increase the chances of the boys being able to train, it resulted in parents

4850 making arrangements and travelling to the academy expecting training to be going

4851 ahead, only to arrive and find that their training session had been cancelled. An

4852 example of this was noted in my fieldnotes from an informal conversation with a

4853 parent, the parent said "there were a lot of last minute changes to the schedule, this

4854 caused a lot of problems for me as I have to juggle work with bringing my son to

4855   training. I would like the schedule to be stuck to as much as possible." This was

4856   added to by another parent who reflected using the online reflective survey:

4857   Communication wasn't the best during last season. Fixture days and times

4858   were sent later and later sometimes not arriving until the Friday before games

4859   which isn't ideal when you have to organise family and travel arrangements,

4860   especially when you live more than an hour away from the academy.

4861   As part of the cultural changes within the parent support programme, I

4862   highlighted the impact of these last-minute schedule changes and decisions on

4863   parents to the academy management team. Through further discussions, coaches and

4864   support staff began to understand the impact of last-minute changes to the training

4865   schedules and the inconvenience that it caused on parents. In a number of meetings, I

4866   proposed solutions to overcome this issue and it was agreed that they would be

4867   implemented, namely that, where possible, 24 hours' notice of any changes to

4868   training would be provided and that squad lists for weekend fixtures would be

4869   published by Wednesday. These changes allowed parents to make the necessary

4870   organisational arrangements regarding work, transport, food, washing clothing, and

4871   childcare for their other children. These changes were advantageous for parents,

4872   specifically parents reflected through the online reflective survey that

4873   "communication has improved dramatically. It also works really well having the

4874   academy secretary available for questions. He is always willing to help and is quick

4875   to respond." Although there was some recognition of the importance of providing

4876   parents with more notice and better communication, this was not implemented by all

4877   coaches or always adhered to. For instance, some coaches felt that there was no need

4878   to provide parents with greater notice, as the parents had agreed to their child being

4879   within the academy and other coaches felt that the benefits of a last minute fixture

4880   outweighed providing parents with more notice.

4881   **5.6.4.3 Valuing Parents Involvement within Their Son's Development.**

4882   Within the feedback from parents in the exploration phase (chapter four), parents had

4883   stated that they did not find the performance reviews beneficial and felt removed

4884   from their son's development. Consequently, as part of the cultural changes within

4885   the support programme, video clips were added in to the performance reviews of

4886   goalkeepers to aid parents understanding. It was found to be successful and there was

4887   a positive response from the parents, children and coaching staff. One under-9 father

4888   said, "I found the video review by far the most effective." In addition, one under-10

4889 father was thrilled to be involved in his son's performance review, "they were asking

4890 me if I thought my son had improved and it's quite strange, but I felt it was from a

4891 football point of view, a good review." Despite parents' positive feedback about the

4892 use of videos during performance reviews, beyond the goalkeeper coaches, the other

4893 coaches felt that it would take too long to organise the video clips and deliver the

4894 reviews. As such it was decided that they did not have the time to carry out reviews

4895 using videos and were going to continue with the current review process. As such, it

4896 was apparent that, even if parents valued changes, unless the coaches either entirely

4897 brought into them or perceived that there would not be negatively influence or

4898 expending effort they were unlikely to implement them.

4899   Following the exploration phase (chapter four), I recommended that a

4900 mechanism for obtaining and drawing on parents' feedback should be used more

4901 regularly. It was agreed with the academy management team, that a "parents' voice

4902 forum" would be set up to gather feedback and information from parents on a regular

4903 basis. It was decided that the head of safeguarding would run the forum on a monthly

4904 basis with one parent representative from each age group. This was a beneficial

4905 change for parents as it emphasised that their views and opinions were valued. One

4906 under-14 mother said, "I think the introduction of the parents' forum will provide

4907 huge benefits to the parents and a positive and effective channel for parents to

4908 communicate with the academy and coaching staff." Conversely, although it was

4909 agreed that the forum would be started and delivered on a monthly basis to parents it

4910 did not materialise. Despite the intention to improve the parent experience within the

4911 academy and listen to their suggestions, it resulted in parents feeling more frustrated

4912 and not listened to. It was recorded within my reflexive diary,

4913   I am frustrated and annoyed that although parents had been promised and

4914   parents had been allocated to be a part of the parents' voice forum, it had not

4915   materialised. Parents have asked whether it was going ahead as they had

4916   things they wanted to raise. They reported feeling infuriated that it did not

4917   appear to be going ahead.

4918 **5.6.5 Future Recommendations**

4919   Following the delivery of the parent support programme, parents were asked

4920 to provide any improvements that could be made to the programme. Parents detailed

4921 a number of recommendations regarding how to improve the programme, these

4922 included: focusing the delivery of the programme as the parents and children were

4923   transitioning into the academy, providing parents with a voice, and increasing

4924   attendance to the support sessions.

4925   **5.6.5.1 Transition into the Academy.** The parents explained that the

4926   greatest benefit of the programme would be when they first entered the academy

4927   system, because by later ages they had "worked it out." Parents recognised that they

4928   found being a parent of an academy footballer was the hardest during the younger

4929   age groups, so this was where the support was thought of as most beneficial. One

4930   under-14 mother suggested, "at under nines, tens, maybe elevens, and twelves how

4931   do you support your child to build mental resilience because I found that quite a

4932   challenging period…when they're like eleven and twelve years of age, how do you

4933   support them, how do you help them through the transition between primary and

4934   comp and cope with being in an academy environment." Moreover, it was suggested

4935   that providing information to parents when they first joined the academy would be

4936   useful as it may help them to adjust to the environment and the demands placed upon

4937   both parents and players. One under-11 father stated, "I definitely think, for the

4938   newbies coming in they need somebody there to talk to because they don't know

4939   what they don't know." One under-14 mother expanded this view by suggesting that:

4940   Where it's the organisational and demand stuff by the time you're seven

4941   seasons in you've kind of got that balance working. From the perspective of

4942   under 9s parent, it was a bit of a slap in the face for us because we had no

4943   idea what was coming. [Therefore,] different modules could be done at

4944   different levels. The first season would be how to manage the organisation,

4945   [and] demands. Then as they get older, the demands on us as a parent change,

4946   [and] it is more around the emotional support, how do I help them understand

4947   what it is they want out of being in the academy and do they really want to be

4948   going on for a scholarship, are they just enjoying the social aspect of it, are

4949   they seeing football as a career option and how do we start helping them

4950   prepare mentally and psychologically.

4951   Thus, overall, when making recommendations for the future, parents felt that

4952   sessions that specifically focused on supporting the under-9s parents to transition in

4953   to the academy would be useful.

4954   **5.6.5.2 Provide Parents with a Voice.** Through the online reflective survey,

4955   a number of parents explained that they would like to see the opinions and

4956   recommendations shared in the sessions being taken to the academy management

4957   team, as one parent suggested "it would be more helpful if there was the opportunity

4958   through the programme for questions to be taken away to the academy management

4959   for them to respond with feedback." Parents felt that if the opinions of parents were

4960   listened to by the academy management team then positive changes within the

4961   environment may occur, "these sessions are very good only if the management of the

4962   academy listen and take on board some of the comments." Therefore, one method to

4963   enhance the programme may be to offer a way for parents to have a voice and an

4964   avenue of input to the academy management team. One parent requested through the

4965   online reflective survey, "give us results, show us change within the parent role, give

4966   parents the respect we deserve for our commitment and hard work." An avenue to

4967   feedback, offer opinions, and input into decision making within the academy may

4968   potentially allow for parents to feel listened to and offer them a greater level of

4969   respect for their commitment.

4970   **5.6.5.3 Increase Attendance**. Finally, parents suggested that greater

4971   attendance was needed at the sessions to maximise the benefits to all parents. As one

4972   parent reflected through the online reflective survey, "I think perhaps there should be

4973   more of an emphasis on all parents attending to ensure each session has as much

4974   participation as possible." One way to potentially improve attendance was making

4975   the support sessions mandatory for all parents, as one under-11 father recommended,

4976   "I think it should be almost mandatory." The parents who attended the sessions

4977   believed that the sessions were beneficial and that all parents should be attending

4978   them, as one parent reflected in the online reflective survey, "given some of the

4979   recent academy issues raised by the 'No hunger in paradise' documentary these

4980   workshops should be mandatory." This parent thought that, given issues regarding

4981   children being rejected at a young age, having to retire early, and the huge sacrifices

4982   required to become a professional footballer that were raised recently by Calvin

4983   (2017, 2018), ensuring all parents attending sessions would be useful.

4984   Despite this suggestion that sessions were mandatory, parents cannot be

4985   made to attend if they do not want to or do not have the time to attend, as one father

4986   stated, "you can't make people turn up." Thus, it was suggested that if parents do not

4987   want to attend, they could be provided with a guide instead of attending a face-to-

4988   face session. One under-14 father suggested, "to give parents some guides as to what

4989   they should do under certain situations because the kids are very young. I would

4990   imagine they're very vulnerable, and emotionally vulnerable, particularly if they

haven't done very well." Parents described how they may benefit from being provided with a guide or a booklet that would support them and their son through certain situations that may occur during the football academy journey. The guide may provide them with tips and offer recommendations on how to manage and support their son through the situations.

A second way to potentially increase attendance was to change the day and time that the sessions were delivered, as due to the aim of fitting the sessions around the existing training schedule, all the sessions were delivered on set days during the week. A small number of parents recommended that it would be useful for the sessions to be held on alternative days, "possibly a different time/day" or held at a later time, "a slightly later start time, after 5.30pm." One parent further suggested that, "if this was held on weekends" it may increase attendance. One reason it may be useful for sessions to be held on alternative days or at the weekends was due to parents sharing lifts. For instance, one parent wrote in the survey, "we lift-share so I went to the workshop that was on my turn."

Finally, despite the improvements that had been made to the relationships between parents and coaches, parents requested that coaches were more involved with the support programme to enhance the parent-coach relationship further and encourage more parents to attend. One under-11 father suggested that to improve attendance the coaches could run a drop-in session where they are able to ask the coaches questions directly:

> I always wish that the relationships were stronger, because I think it would
> benefit the club, the coaches, and the parents. Even if it is just once a month
> maybe having a parents' meeting with the coaches. Or something like where
> 15 minutes just come in, if anybody wants a chat, like an open surgery.

Other parents supported this suggestion of increasing engagement by delivering a drop-in session. For example, one parent wrote on the survey that, "possibly a drop-in session on a match day (prior) as we have to be there one hour before the match starts." Parents explained that a drop-in session prior to a match may be beneficial and encourage attendance, as parents as required to be at the academy an hour before kick-off. Therefore, parents could maximise their time by attending at a time that suits them, which may increase attendance numbers.

5023   **5.7 Discussion and Reflection**

5024   Overall, the qualitative evaluation data indicated that programme was

5025   beneficial to parents for a range of reasons – arising both from the support sessions

5026   and the cultural changes. The quantitative data was limited due to a lack of

5027   participants completing the questionnaire post programme. Nevertheless, there were

5028   some significant changes following the support programme namely within the

5029   Parent-parent Relationship Efficacy, Tangible Support Efficacy, Developmental

5030   Efficacy, and Pre-match Role Efficacy. Unfortunately, however, I encountered a

5031   number of challenges when delivering the support sessions and implementing the

5032   cultural changes. Particularly, attendance was poor throughout the support sessions

5033   and there was some reluctance to implement the suggested cultural changes,

5034   especially the parents' voice forum. Based on this evaluation, as well as a critical

5035   consideration of the existing literature, a series of reflections regarding why the

5036   programme may have been useful as well as suggestions to inform a subsequent

5037   action research cycle were produced.

5038   *5.7.1 Overall Impact of Sessions and Cultural Changes*

5039   Reflecting upon the evaluation of the programme, as well as pre-existing

5040   literature, there are numerous reasons regarding why the support sessions were

5041   useful for the parents. Aligned with previous parent education studies (e.g., Dorsch

5042   et al., 2017; Richards & Winter, 2013; Thrower et al., 2017), most apparent was

5043   parents' increased access to information across the six different topics and

5044   specifically a greater understanding of the academy organisation. Parents' benefitting

5045   from increased information makes sense because previous research has highlighted a

5046   lack of understanding and access to information as a key source of stress for parents

5047   (Harwood & Knight, 2009b; Harwood et al., 2010; Harwood et al., 2019).

5048   Particularly, parents have indicated that a lack of understanding can leave them

5049   feeling ill-prepared to support their child (Clarke & Harwood, 2014) or result in an

5050   inappropriate provision of support (Knight & Holt, 2014, Furusa et al., 2020).

5051   Consequently, parents often spend considerable time trying to upskill themselves

5052   through their own research using popular books and other (often online) resources

5053   (Burgess et al., 2016; Dohme et al., 2020; Lienhart et al., 2019). However, there are

5054   concerns regarding the accuracy of such information (Knight & Holt, 2013). Thus,

5055   through their access to accurate and appropriate information, parents' concerns

5056   regarding their knowledge likely reduced, while their opportunities to enhance their

5057   support for their child were increased. An additional benefit of being provided with

5058   information, although not one explicitly highlighted by parents, is that it may also

5059   save them time, as they are not having to search for it themselves (Furusa et al.,

5060   2020). Given the substantial demands on parents' time (Harwood & Knight, 2009a,

5061   2009b; Harwood, et al., 2019) this may be an unexpected positive consequence of

5062   the programme and a way to "sell it" to parents in the future.

5063   Although not examined within the current action research cycle, an increase

5064   in parents' access to information and knowledge may directly influence players'

5065   experiences, as children have reported that when their parents have an appropriate

5066   level of knowledge they are happy to receive, and often actively seek out, technical

5067   advice from their parents (Knight et al., 2010; Knight et al., 2016b). This desire for

5068   advice from their parents is something that is often a concern for coaches, who

5069   perceive that parents' may provide contradictory or inaccurate information or that

5070   children may feel under pressure to fulfil their parents' expectations, at the detriment

5071   to team goals (Gould et al., 2016; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). This concern regarding

5072   parents' knowledge and the subsequent impact on players was apparent among the

5073   coaches within the current action research cycle. However, as a result of the targeted

5074   cultural changes regarding coaches' perceptions of parents, this concern began to

5075   reduce. Coaches recognised that, as parents were likely to provide feedback to their

5076   sons anyway, rather than attempting to minimise their engagement, increasing their

5077   knowledge so that they could provide more accurate guidance and support was a

5078   better approach.

5079   In spite of the numerous benefits associated with the increased access to

5080   information, when I reviewed this programme, it was apparent that it was not simply

5081   the provision of information that was important. Rather, providing information and

5082   then ensuring parents had an opportunity to discuss it with others appeared to be key.

5083   As with previous programmes (e.g., Vincent & Christensen, 2015), parents found

5084   such discussion to be both enjoyable and useful, as it enabled them to share

5085   concerns, seek support from others, and reflect on the materials. Social interaction

5086   and debate have been recognised as an important process to enhance learning

5087   through the collaboration of knowledge and encouraging individuals to go beyond

5088   their current point of understanding (Palincsar, 1998). Particularly, discussion

5089   combined with reciprocal questioning (helping peers through questioning) has been

5090   identified as a valuable method for creating new information and to help process

5091   existing knowledge (King, 1990; Sullivan, 1998). Such discussion-based approaches

5092   have been well documented as a pertinent method to enhance the learning of

5093   coaches, due to the strong peer influence within sport (Cushion et al., 2003; Nelson

5094   & Cushion, 2006). However, this approach has received less consideration within the

5095   sport parenting literature. The findings of the current action research cycle clearly

5096   emphasise the value of providing parents with the opportunity for face-to-face peer-

5097   to-peer discussion and debate to enable them to learn from each other and enhance

5098   their knowledge. Unfortunately, however, as will be discussed below, this is not

5099   always easy to achieve as attendance is a consistent challenge across parent

5100   education programmes (Thrower et al., 2017; Vincent & Christensen, 2015).

5101   Through the discussions and information provided, the parents also had an

5102   opportunity to reflect on their own behaviours and involvement. Such reflection is

5103   vital to increasing the success of such support sessions because learning has been

5104   defined as the transformation of an experience into knowledge, with reflection being

5105   a core part of this process (Kolb, 1984). The benefits of engaging in reflection have

5106   been discussed widely within sport settings, particularly for coaches (e.g., Irwin et

5107   al., 2004; Knowles et al., 2006) and sport psychology practitioners (e.g., Cropley et

5108   al., 2007; Knowles et al., 2012; Knowles et al., 2014). Moreover, reflection has

5109   previously been recognised as useful within sport parent education programmes

5110   (Azimi & Tamminen, 2020; Vincent & Christensen, 2015), although explorations

5111   have been limited. Within the current action research cycle, it appeared that group

5112   reflection, which is the transfer of knowledge from one individual to another through

5113   discussion, critical discourse, and self-reflection (Peel et al., 2013), was particularly

5114   beneficial. For the parents in the current intervention, the opportunity for group

5115   reflection appeared to help them to critically discuss their experiences, share

5116   knowledge, and facilitate self-reflection to help make future decisions. Thus, actively

5117   integrating such opportunities within parent support sessions seems pertinent.

5118   An additional benefit of reflection was that when encountering stressors, such

5119   as those experienced by parents, it can help individuals to identify the link between

5120   their experience and potential coping strategies (Cropley et al., 2016). By having the

5121   opportunity to reflect on their experiences within the support sessions, parents

5122   adapted their family or professional life to manage the football related stressors and

5123   demands (Lienhart et al., 2019). Moreover, for the parents who participated in the

5124   current intervention, reflecting on specific behaviours also helped to stimulate

5125   behaviour change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983). Specifically, by reflecting on

5126   their behaviours, and those of others, parents were able to adapt their family life,

5127   consider their parenting approach, and subsequently enhance their relationship with

5128   their son. Consequently, it is clear that reflection was a pivotal part of enhancing the

5129   learning opportunity for parents and potentially a requirement to optimise parent

5130   support in the future (Vincent & Christensen, 2015).

5131   One further benefit of the discussion-based sessions was that they provided

5132   parents with an opportunity to get to know other parents and gain support directly

5133   from them. The opportunity to gain support from other parents provided parents with

5134   the prospect to expand their support network, which has previously been found to

5135   positively influence the quality of parenting, as well as parents' perception of stress,

5136   mental health, and their child's development (Belsky, 1984). The importance of

5137   having access to a support network to help parents manage their demands is

5138   consistently identified within sport parenting literature because it provides parents

5139   with access to tangible support as well as a group with whom their experiences are

5140   typical (Burgess et al., 2016; Knight & Holt, 2013a, 2013b). The need for such

5141   support is particularly apparent for single parents and parents with no other family

5142   nearby, who are potentially at risk of becoming isolated (Hearn, 1991), as well as

5143   families with additional demands such as large families, and dual-earner families

5144   who have restrictions on the amount of time they have available (Holt et al., 2011;

5145   Kay, 2000). Thus, creating a programme in which parents had an opportunity to

5146   expand their social support network, may not only have helped them to support their

5147   child, but also helped to enhance their own wellbeing (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984).

5148   Clearly, this is another very important benefit of face-to-face parent support

5149   programmes. However, with such poor attendance and parents not perceiving they

5150   have capacity to commit to a face-to-face programme, establishing or identifying

5151   other mechanisms to enhance parents' access to support networks needs further

5152   consideration.

5153   Along with the positive benefits of the support sessions, the cultural changes

5154   that were implemented within the academy appeared to have a positive impact on

5155   parents. The increased communication with parents and education regarding the

5156   impact of last minute changes to the schedule potentially reduced the negative

5157   impact of the demands and stressors on parents. The communication between the

5158   academy and parents was a key stressor (Harwood et al., 2010) and frustration

5159   throughout the parent journey, especially the dawning of reality phase (chapter four).

5160   Providing parents with an enhanced level of communication and a more welcoming

5161   environment may potentially help them to maintain more of a balance, as they have

5162   previously reported struggling with the all-consuming nature of youth sport (Burgess

5163   et al., 2016). By increasing the communication between the academy and parents it

5164   may have given parents the opportunity to enhance their ability to cope with the

5165   stressors of youth sport by planning and organising family life more effectively and

5166   creating balance (Burgess et al., 2016; Harwood et al., 2019).

5167   A welcoming environment with refreshments may have enabled parents to

5168   create coping mechanisms, such as catching up on work time while at the academy

5169   and bringing other family members along to matches at the weekend. A further

5170   benefit of the academy enhancing the communication and welcoming parents into

5171   the environment more was that the parents were better able to provide their sons with

5172   the support required, which was seen as an important factor for developing

5173   psychological skills (Dohme et al., 2020) and becoming an elite youth footballer

5174   (Mills et al., 2012). Therefore, although attending the face-to-face support sessions

5175   was beneficial for enhancing the youth football academy parent experience, if

5176   parents were unable to attend sessions, then the cultural changes may still have

5177   positively impacted their experience.

5178   Although these cultural changes had a positive impact on parents'

5179   experiences, not all the suggested cultural changes were implemented or bought into

5180   by the academy staff. For instance, some coaching staff wanted to retain player

5181   development being their sole responsibility and avoid parents 'interfering' (Clarke &

5182   Harwood, 2014), so did not buy in to some suggestions. A further critical discussion

5183   of the cultural changes will be presented later. Overall the implementation of cultural

5184   changes alongside the delivery of support sessions was beneficial to parents as the

5185   parent experience and journey (chapter four) was influenced by coaches, support

5186   staff, and the culture within the academy (Knight, 2019; Knight & Newport, 2020)

5187   and without changing the culture within the environment the parent experience may

5188   not have been enhanced. As such, it appears important to implement cultural changes

5189   alongside support sessions to truly enhance parents' experiences.

5190   *5.7.2 Session Content*

5191   Despite the general overall benefits of the parent support programme, the

5192   content of the support sessions received a mixed response from parents. The

5193   '*Tackling the football parenting game*', and the '*The ups and downs of matches*'

5194   sessions had a positive response from parents, whereas others did not. There may be

5195   a number of reasons why parents engaged in a positive way with these specific

5196   topics. One of these reasons may be due to the managing the demands topic being

5197   the first session of the series and attendance numbers were higher for this topic than

5198   any of the others. Thus, it may simply have been a result of the novelty of the

5199   sessions. However, the specific content also seemed to help because it resonated with

5200   the majority of parents, as they had all at some point found the experience

5201   challenging and demanding (Harwood et al., 2010; Harwood & Knight, 2009a,

5202   2009b; Harwood et al., 2019). Therefore, the majority of parents had personal

5203   experiences from which they could relate to this session, which has been shown to

5204   increase engagement with information and a desire to learn more (Donovan et al.,

5205   1999). Parents also asked questions and had interactive discussions based directly

5206   upon their own experiences of demands and stressors, which subsequently helped

5207   them to develop new and appropriate coping strategies (Ambrose et al., 2010), which

5208   they could utilise immediately.

5209   Another topic the parents positively engaged with was regarding emotions

5210   experienced by parents at matches. As with the parental demands session, this topic

5211   again seemed to resonate with most parents in attendance, as they could relate the

5212   content of the topic to their own experiences, as well as the experiences of other

5213   parents. Plus, the content appeared to elicit a positive emotional response from

5214   parents, which enabled parents to connect with the topic and potentially had a

5215   positive impact on learning (Rowe et al., 2015). Specifically, positive emotions were

5216   fostered within this session by encouraging parents to reflect on positive experiences,

5217   using humour, showing concern, and facilitating connections with other parents. The

5218   positive emotions created during the sessions appeared to have a positive impact on

5219   learning, specifically by broadening parents' attention and thinking (Rowe et al.,

5220   2015; Fredrickson, 2004). Creating these positive emotions made the learning

5221   experience enjoyable for parents and increased their motivation to want to learn.

5222   Given such findings, ensuring that future support sessions are framed and delivered

5223   in a manner that resonates with parents and elicits a positive emotional response may

5224   be useful. This could be done, for instance, by drawing on real-life examples,

5225   providing opportunities for parents to share their specific experiences, and including

5226   scenarios that may lead to emotional reactions.

5227   In contrast to the positive impact the emotional response had during the

5228   sideline emotions session, the emotional response by parents during the session on

5229   'Communicating with the team' appeared to have a rather detrimental impact on

5230   engagement. This was likely due to the personal nature of the content (Vincent &

5231   Christensen, 2015). Specifically, this topic bought to the surface the frustrations that

5232   parents felt in regard to the communication from the academy, which detracted

5233   entirely from the intended delivery of the content and subsequently any learning or

5234   engagement (Rowe & Fitness, 2018). During this session I was unable to deliver the

5235   desired content as the parents were focused on expressing their frustrations regarding

5236   the academy communication. Cognitive engagement and learning within educational

5237   environments have been shown to be influenced by emotional engagement and

5238   interaction with others (Pietarinen et al., 2014). Thus, regardless of how this

5239   particular session was delivered, parents may still have negatively engaged with the

5240   topic due to their undesirable day-to-day interaction with others within the youth

5241   football academy. This negative emotional response to the content emphasised the

5242   need to not only provide information to parents through support sessions, but also

5243   ensure environmental and cultural changes, such as encouraging a positive

5244   relationship between parents and coaches (Knight, 2019; Knight & Newport, 2020),

5245   occur to maximise the effectiveness of sport parenting interventions.

5246   Another session that I, personally, found particularly challenging to engage

5247   parents with was the '*Being a football parent*' session on parenting styles, as this

5248   was the topic that I was most concerned and nervous about delivering. This in many

5249   respects was due to not being a parent myself and wanting to avoid teaching parents

5250   how to parent. Previous recommendations have suggested that parent education

5251   sessions should be delivered by someone in a position of authority with well-

5252   respected knowledge, such as a sport psychologist or a sport scientist (Dorsch et al.,

5253   2019; Richards & Winter, 2013). Based upon this assumption, as a Sport and

5254   Exercise Psychologist (in training) within the academy, I appeared to be well suited

5255   to the delivery. However, when sessions are delivered by a person of authority from

5256   within the sporting organisation, in this case the academy, there is the potential for

5257   parents to see this person as having an ulterior motive (i.e., reporting back to the

5258   academy) or to be 'parent training' to align with the specific desires of the

5259   organisation (MacNamara & Collins, 2018). This was something I particularly

5260   wanted to avoid as this is not helpful and potentially patronising towards parents

5261   (Pankhurst & Collins, 2013).

5262   In an attempt to avoid the parents perceiving the sessions as 'parent training'

5263   and engage the maximum number of parents, I delivered the sessions using a

5264   humanistic perspective with parents being seen as the experts (Vincent &

5265   Christensen, 2015). Despite this approach being useful for initiating discussion

5266   among the parents about their parenting style, it appeared to be limited when

5267   attempting to encourage a change in parenting style. On reflection, this may have

5268   been due to my own concerns and worries about delivering this particular topic and

5269   not wanting parents to perceive that I was telling them they were doing something

5270   wrong. Additionally, I was less familiar with information regarding parenting styles

5271   and had not covered this within any of my sport psychology training. Given that

5272   parents are an integral part of the youth sport environment it may be useful to ensure

5273   that information pertaining to parenting and parenting styles is incorporated into the

5274   training of Sport and Exercise Psychologists, with some best practice examples to

5275   aid trainee practitioners' development (cf. Gardner & Moore, 2006). In addition,

5276   practitioners, particularly trainee and neophyte practitioners, may benefit from

5277   having opportunities to learn how to deliver to audiences with whom they are less

5278   familiar, such as parents (King & Watson, 2010) to increase their confidence as well

5279   as their understanding.

5280   *5.7.3 Engagement Challenges*

5281   Although I had been embedded within the football academy for a year at the

5282   time of initiating delivery of the support sessions and having developed informal

5283   relationships with parents, in line with other parent education programmes (Thrower

5284   et al., 2017, 2019; Vincent & Christensen, 2015) numbers of parents attending

5285   sessions were low. Parents' experience many demands on their time outside of youth

5286   sport, which can result in conflicts such as that between work and family, where the

5287   number of hours or the volume of work required can make it difficult to meet the

5288   day-to-day demands of family life (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Add to this the

5289   additional time pressures that arise in relation to youth sport, and particularly

5290   football academies, (Harwood & Knight, 2009a, 2009b; Harwood et al., 2019; Kay,

5291   2000; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008) and it is understandable that parents may be unable to,

5292   or not want to, commit time to their child's sport, even if this time is for parent

5293   support sessions. Despite my best efforts to encourage parents to attend and

5294   minimise the demands on parents (e.g., making sessions family friendly, providing

5295   refreshments, providing as much notice as possible, and avoiding scheduling

5296   changes; Knight & Newport, 2018, 2020), some parents simply experienced too

5297   many conflicting demands. Based upon the feedback provided by parents, delivery

5298   may benefit from being condensed to fewer sessions, delivered on a weekend, and

5299   some of the information provided through other resources that parents can engage

5300   with in their own time, such as a parent guide (Dorsch et al., 2017), online material

5301   (Kwon et al., 2020; Thrower et al., 2019), or drop-in sessions. Clearly, there cannot

5302   be a "one size fits all approach" to delivering parent support (Dorsch et al., 2019,

5303   p20).

5304   Alongside this, another useful piece of feedback that parents provided was

5305   that the framing of the session may have impacted on attendance. The sessions were

5306   framed as support sessions, to provide support to parents and go beyond educating or

5307   just providing them with information (c.f. Dorsch et al., 2017; Thrower et al., 2017,

5308   2019). This decision was made to avoid being perceived as attempting to tell parents

5309   how to parent, which may arise through the labelling of sessions as education

5310   sessions (Pankhurst & Collins, 2013). However, parents potentially perceived that

5311   they did not need support, or were unaware of what support they may gain, and thus

5312   the framing of sessions as support sessions may have had a negative impact on

5313   parent attendance. As a result, the framing and wording of future support sessions

5314   may need further exploration to find the wording that may attract more parents to

5315   attend.

5316   In addition to the demands on parents' time, there may also have been

5317   cultural reasons why parents did not attend the support sessions. Specifically, parents

5318   often demonstrate behaviours that are guided by the cultural norms within sporting

5319   environments (McMahon & Penney, 2014; Knight, 2019), which in this instance

5320   may have been 'playing the role of the sports parent' as set by the culture within the

5321   academy (McMahon & Penney, 2014). It is common practice within youth football

5322   academies to keep parents at a distance due to the predominantly negative attitude

5323   held by stakeholders towards their involvement (Pankhurst & Collins, 2013).

5324   Moreover, parents feel obligated to hand over responsibility of their child to the

5325   coach/academy and not to interfere (Clarke & Harwood, 2014). As such, although

5326   the sessions within this programme were specifically aiming at supporting parents,

5327   they may have felt that it was better not to take up the opportunity in case they

5328 oversteppen their role. Alternatively, as the culture within the academy becomes

5329 more supportive towards parents and it becomes the norm that parents are provided

5330 with support, parent attendance at support sessions may increase.

5331 ***5.7.4 Cultural Changes***

5332   Recognising the negative stereotypes pertaining to parents within academy

5333 football, as well as harbouring a desire to promote a more positive attitude towards

5334 parents, numerous cultural changes were attempted alongside the support programme

5335 (Knight, 2019; Knight & Newport, 2020). However, despite some positive changes,

5336 a negative attitude towards engagement with parents remained among some coaching

5337 and support staff. For instance, some of my suggestions to involve parents more

5338 within the academy, namely through the introduction of a parents' voice forum, did

5339 not materialise. This may have been because there was a reluctance or fear by some

5340 staff to accept the perspective of an outsider (i.e., me) regarding engaging with

5341 parents, despite me moving towards becoming an insider over the time I was

5342 embedded at the academy (Gibson & Groom, 2019). In addition, it may have been

5343 due to me being a female member of staff within the male-dominated football

5344 industry and seen as less competent than the male staff (Kilty, 2006). This reluctance

5345 could also be due to my academic and university background, which meant I was

5346 perceived to lack football knowledge (Champ et al., 2020b; Pain & Harwood, 2004).

5347   Aside from the perceptions of me, attempting to make changes to a culture

5348 can lead to a number of other challenges within sporting environments. Cultural

5349 changes are complex, and it can take an extended period of time to create the change

5350 (Henriksen, 2015), particularly in football where social norms are well established

5351 (Champ et al., 2020a). Despite, the potential benefits of the culture changes, some

5352 individuals within the environment may not see the benefit of changing their

5353 behaviour, not want to change, and even when they do make steps towards change

5354 they may then revert back to their original behaviour (Gibson & Groom, 2018). In

5355 addition, staff within football who experience repeated cultural changes within a

5356 short time frame, which can often occur due to the fast paced environment, may

5357 become cynical of changes and lose motivation due to the repeated effort required to

5358 adapt to the changes (Wagstaff et al., 2016).

5359   A further explanation for the reluctance to change may be due to the results

5360 driven culture within football. Within football there is often a focus on the areas that

5361 are perceived to have an immediate direct impact on performance or the

5362   development of players, as this creates results or financial income, whereas those

5363   that are not seen as having a positive impact are perceived as not important (Champ

5364   et al., 2020b; Gilmore et al., 2017). Consequently, parent support may not have been

5365   seen as important as it would require investing time and resources in an area that

5366   potentially would not have immediately impacted on the performance of the players

5367   and produce positive results.

5368   Conversely, there were some positive changes that occurred within the

5369   organisational culture. As a consequence of the cultural changes, there now appeared

5370   to be more of an appreciation for the experiences and journey of youth football

5371   academy parents when supporting their son (chapter four). In particular, the demands

5372   that parents face, and the logistical challenges created from last minute changes to

5373   the schedule and poor communication. Thus, the academy providing this recognition

5374   of the demands and challenges that parents faced may have reduced the

5375   organisational stress experienced by parents (Harwood et al., 2019), particularly

5376   within the second phase of their journey (dawning of reality phase; chapter four).

5377   Therefore, as highlighted earlier there are many benefits to parents attending face-to-

5378   face support sessions, but if they simply experience too many demands to attend,

5379   parents can still benefit from a parent supportive culture.

5380   Cultural changes such as, offering refreshments to parents, avoiding last

5381   minute schedule changes, and providing greater notice to parents may have occurred

5382   when others did not due to these not requiring increased involvement with parents or

5383   providing them with greater power. One of the reasons for this may be due to the

5384   continuous to and fro of social power (or at least the perceptions of) within sporting

5385   organisations, particularly during cultural changes (Cruickshank et al., 2013, 2014).

5386   It has been recommended that power within sporting organisations should be

5387   dispersed or shared out amongst key stakeholders (Cruickshank et al., 2013).

5388   However, involving parents by providing them with a voice or enabling them to

5389   watch training may have been perceived as providing parents with too much power

5390   and impacting on the power flow and risking a negative impact on performance. As

5391   such the manager and the management team may have been wanting to protect the

5392   "cultural bubble" from outside influence as this could potentially negatively

5393   influence performance (Cruickshank et al., 2015). Consequently, to increase the

5394   chance of these cultural changes being the norm within football academies and

5395   reduce the reluctance, it may require support from national governing bodies through

5396   changes within their policies and practices (Kwon et al., 2020; Thrower et al., 2019;

5397   Harwood et al., 2019).

5398   *5.7.5 Concluding Reflections*

5399   This chapter sought to detail the planning action, action, evaluation, and

5400   reflection phases of my first action research cycle. Overall, based on my evaluation

5401   and reflections (both alone, with others, and in relation to the literature), I felt that

5402   the support sessions were a beneficial mechanism for parents to gain information and

5403   social support, including enhancing their ability to manage their stressors and control

5404   their emotions within youth academy football. In addition, the cultural changes

5405   appeared to have a positive impact on their experience and created progress towards

5406   a parent supportive environment. Together the support sessions and cultural changes

5407   provided a combined approach to supporting parents, which recognised the influence

5408   of coaches, support staff, and the culture on the experiences of parents. This unique

5409   combined support programme provided parents with the information, guidance, and

5410   social support required within an environment of which they feel a part and

5411   proactively minimised the additional demands placed on parents.

5412   Despite these benefits, I experienced a number of challenges, such as limited

5413   attendance and scheduling difficulties with the sessions and a lack of buy-in to some

5414   of the suggested cultural changes. These challenges were disheartening and

5415   frustrating for me as a practitioner-researcher, however, understandable given the

5416   demands on parents and the challenges that exist when delivering in academy

5417   football. To continue to gain the benefits of this parent support programme, while

5418   overcoming previous challenges, a revised programme comprising a 90-minute

5419   support session and information booklet, alongside further cultural changes will be

5420   implemented. These further cultural changes will include the implementation of a

5421   parents' voice forum, providing parents with an open evening, a parent feedback

5422   survey, and encouraging the academy to further reflect on how they can enhance the

5423   parent experience.

5424   **Chapter Six : Cycle Two: Modify and Plan to Evaluation**

5425   **6.1 Introduction**

5426   Building upon the first cycle of action research (chapters four and five), the

5427   current action research cycle sought to develop, implement, and evaluate a revised

5428   parent support programme within the same football academy. In the exploration

5429   phase of the first action research cycle, it was identified that parents experience an

5430   ever-changing journey while parenting their children at the academy, and it was

5431   recommended that they were provided with a variety of support. Consequently, it

5432   appeared that parents would benefit from the delivery of support sessions, combined

5433   with the development of a parent supportive culture. Based on these findings, as well

5434   as previous examples of parent education delivered within other sport settings

5435   (Dorsch et al., 2017; Thrower et al., 2017; Vincent & Christensen, 2015), the first

5436   action (chapter five) focused on the development, implementation, and evaluation of

5437   such a parent support programme within a football academy. The programme

5438   comprised six parent support sessions, combined with targeted cultural changes. The

5439   content of the six sessions was informed by the football parent journey and the

5440   recommendations identified within the exploration and reflection phases (chapter

5441   four), plus based on the six-postulates of optimal sport parenting proposed by

5442   Harwood and Knight (2015). In addition, the cultural changes were based upon the

5443   recommendations made in the exploration and reflection phases (chapter four).

5444   Overall, evaluation of the initial parent support programme indicated that the

5445   parents benefited from the support programme. Parents reported an improved

5446   relationship with their son, felt more comfortable in managing the demands that they

5447   faced, and perceived that the programme had strengthened their relationship with

5448   coaches and other parents. Additionally, parents indicated that the support

5449   programme provided them with the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and

5450   gain insight from other parents, which subsequently helped them to feel better

5451   prepared to support their son. In addition, parents indicated that they felt more

5452   welcomed within the environment, valued being more involved in their son's

5453   development, and appreciated the greater consideration of their perspective.

5454   Despite these benefits and the apparently positive impact of the parent

5455   support programme, caution must be used when making conclusions both due to the

5456   numbers of parents attending the sessions, as well as the limited number of parents

5457   who engaged in the formal evaluation process. Issues with parents attending such

5458   support programmes is not unique to my intervention, in fact it has been consistently

5459   identified as the main challenge for researchers in previous parent education

5460   literature (e.g., Thrower et al., 2017; Vincent & Christensen, 2015). As such, seeking

5461   alternative methods for delivery or strategies to engage parents in such programmes

5462   is much needed (Knight, 2019). Additionally, in my previous programme, a range of

5463   challenges were encountered in stimulating a change in the academy culture towards

5464   a more parent supportive environment. Such challenges were anticipated because

5465   culture change takes considerable time (Henriksen, 2015). However, some small

5466   changes such as better communication between parents and coaches, the availability

5467   of refreshments for parents, and the introduction of videos within performance

5468   reviews started to help parents to feel more welcome, valued, and respected within

5469   the academy. Nevertheless, it was apparent that a continued focus upon cultural

5470   changes was needed to enhance the programme further.

5471   These cultural changes were implemented with a continued focus on the

5472   application of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development (1979).

5473   The interaction between two microsystems to create the mesosystem is important, as

5474   positive interactions between parents and the academy may enhance the

5475   developmental potential of the academy on the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

5476   The involvement of parents within the mesosystem can provide additional security,

5477   develop the child's interaction skills, and reinforce their initiative. In addition,

5478   coaches considering and having an understanding of the exosystem that surround the

5479   child can benefit their development. For instance, if coaches have an understanding

5480   of parents' work place and the potential impact this has on them or their child being

5481   able to attend training then this could positively influence their development. The

5482   cultural changes within the academy environment and the wider academy staff can

5483   positively influence player development by creating a positive environment in which

5484   parents feel welcomed. Therefore, despite the progress that was made in chapter five,

5485   there was still a need to create positive relationships between parents and coaches

5486   through a series of cultural changes.

5487   Recognising the benefits and limitations of the parent support programme

5488   developed and evaluated in action research cycle one, the purpose of this action

5489   research cycle was to develop, implement, and evaluate a condensed parent support

5490   programme. Specifically, I sought to develop, implement, and evaluate a 90-minute

5491   face-to-face support session combined with a parent support booklet, which were

5492   delivered alongside the ongoing implementation of parent supportive cultural

5493   changes. In consideration of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory this

5494   parent support programme sought to influence the microsystem through the support

5495   session, the booklet was designed to influence the exosystem, and the cultural

5496   changes within the academy were designed to influence the macrosystem.

5497   **6.2. Modification and Planning Action: Developing a Revised Parent Support**

5498   **Programme**

5499   Based on the evaluation and subsequent reflections, combined with a further

5500   critical review of existing evidence-based, evaluated parent-support/education

5501   programmes, I first planned my revised parent support programme.

5502   *6.2.1. Alternative Method Parent Support/ Education Programmes*

5503   To overcome the challenge of low attendance numbers within face-to-face

5504   parent support programmes, some researchers have recently tried to implement

5505   alternative methods, such as an online delivery (Thrower et al., 2019) and a 45-

5506   minute Sport Parent Seminar combined with a Sport Parent Guide (Dorsch et al.,

5507   2017). Thrower and colleagues (2019) developed and implemented an online

5508   education programme for parents of young tennis players and concluded that such an

5509   approach may be an effective way to educate and support sport parents. However,

5510   despite using an online method of delivery to maximise engagement the number of

5511   parents completing the programme was low. One reason provided for the lack of

5512   engagement was potentially due to the extensive programme evaluation

5513   questionnaires. In addition, the researchers found that some tennis performance

5514   centres and coaches were reluctant to promote the education programme to parents

5515   because it had not come through the governing body for the sport, which may have

5516   further contributed to the low number of parents who engaged. Given that parents'

5517   behaviours, thoughts, and feelings regarding their child's sport and their involvement

5518   in their child's sport can be influenced by coaches and other support staff (Hayward

5519   et al., 2017; Knight, 2019; Omli & LaVoi, 2012), ensuring coach buy-in and support

5520   for parent programmes may be particularly important (Knight & Newport, 2018).

5521   Consequently, to enhance parents' attendance and engagement with my revised

5522   programme I wanted to ensure that it was fully supported by all staff within the

5523   academy and avoid the use of extensive evaluation methods that added an additional

5524   burden to parents.

5525   In contrast to Thrower and colleagues' (2019) online delivery, Dorsch and

5526   colleagues (2017) adopted a shorter delivery approach, comprising a 45-minute

5527   seminar and/or a parent guide. Adopting an experimental method to facilitate

5528   comparison, Dorsch and colleagues split girls' and boys' soccer teams in suburban

5529   northern Utah in to three implementation groups and parents self-selected to take

5530   part. Parents who took part in the seminar and were provided with a copy of the sport

5531   parent guide demonstrated a positive improvement in the amount of support they

5532   were offering to their child and a reduction in the pressure, plus increased warmth

5533   and reduced conflict. However, those who only received the guide did not show any

5534   significant improvement in any of their scale scores. Thus, based on these findings it

5535   appears that a one-off session combined with a supporting booklet of information

5536   may be beneficial for parents. Given the lack of attendance with my previous more

5537   extensive programme of support, but the substantial benefits associated with having

5538   face-to-face sessions and gaining support and insights from other parents, this

5539   combination of a one-off face-to-face session with a booklet of information seemed

5540   appropriate for my environment.

5541   *6.2.2 Addressing Culture*

5542   As indicated in the exploration phase (chapter four) and the first action

5543   (chapter five), it appears that the most effective parent support will occur when there

5544   is not only the provision of information but also attempts to change culture. Culture

5545   change, however, is a lengthy and complex process and requires the support and

5546   desire to change by key stakeholders (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012; Henriksen,

5547   2015). This was a challenge in my previous cycle, due to some coaches not

5548   supporting or appearing to buy-into some of the suggested cultural changes.

5549   It has been recognised that changing the culture within football academies

5550   can be incredibly challenging, because despite the guiding principles being on youth

5551   development the focus still often remains on performance (Flatgård et al., 2020).

5552   This focus on performance and desire to win has been described as 'short-termism'

5553   where cultures within football are often driven by the immediate need to win the next

5554   match and satisfy the expectations of key stakeholders (Larsen, 2017). In addition, a

5555   culture change can be challenging within football due to the short-term nature of

5556   employment contracts and often a reluctance to change traditional approaches

5557   (Champ et al., 2020a). Despite such potential challenges, I did manage to action

5558   some change in the academy culture during my initial programme and these changes

5559   were received positively by parents. As such, continuing to target such changes

5560   appeared to be warranted in the revised cycle.

5561   *6.2.3 My Programme*

5562   Following on from the six-session support programme designed and

5563   delivered in action research cycle one (chapter five), this parent support programme

5564   comprised the delivery of a 90-minute support session, a 'Being a Football Parent'

5565   booklet, and a series of cultural changes. The support programme was developed in

5566   consideration of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. The session was

5567   designed to influence the microsystem by providing support directly to parents to

5568   influence their behaviour and the support they provided to their child. The cultural

5569   changes, through engaging with the coaches, were designed to influence the

5570   relationship between parents and coaches within the mesosystem. The booklet was

5571   an addition for this support programme that was designed for parents to engage with

5572   in their own time and was located within the exosystem. The cultural changes that

5573   were developed to change the academy environment and the support staff was

5574   located within the macrosystem.

5575   **6.2.3.1 Session Content.** The inclusion of a face-to-face support session was

5576   deemed appropriate because the evaluation of and reflection on the initial

5577   programme (chapter five) identified that parents found the opportunity to engage

5578   with their parent peers and interact with me as the programme facilitator useful for

5579   gaining information, social support, and an opportunity to reflect on their

5580   experiences. In particular, through the collaborative reflection it was found that the

5581   parents really enjoyed the opportunity to share their experiences and gain support

5582   from other parents. The decision to reduce the face-to-face sessions from six to one

5583   and include a booklet, was made in an attempt to increase attendance numbers by

5584   reducing the time demands on parents, while continuing to provide a range of

5585   content.

5586   The topics included in the support session and the booklet remained the same

5587   as those delivered within the first intervention. Although not all the topics were

5588   perceived to be as beneficial as others within the initial intervention, it was unclear if

5589   this was due to my uncertainty around some of the topics and the activities selected

5590   to help illustrate these or if it was the specific content that was the issue.

5591   Consequently, given that overall the content of the sessions in the initial intervention

5592   was found to be useful for parents as it helped them to manage their stressors and

5593   emotions, learn how to provide optimal support to their son, enhanced their

5594   relationship with their son and academy staff, and that the topics are well supported

5595   by literature (Harwood & Knight, 2015), I decided to continue with the topics but

5596   change some of the presentation and activities. A copy of the slides used in the

5597   support session for under-11 can be found in Appendix L

5598   **6.2.3.2 Booklet Content**. The topics included in the booklet were the same

5599   six topics covered in the initial programme and in the support session (see Table

5600   6.1). Within the booklet, a very brief explanation of each topic was provided,

5601   followed by an activity to encourage discussion or reflection and one take home

5602   message. The booklet was designed to offer parents a self-paced curriculum of

5603   information (Dorsch et al., 2017), with the recognition that each parent is an expert

5604   on their own experience and their child. As such, although the booklet offered

5605   guidance based on the latest research, the information was provided to facilitate

5606   reflection on their parenting approach and behaviours. The booklet was A5 size and

5607   contained 100-200 words per page. The academy's media department was utilised

5608   for the production of the final booklet and PowerPoint slides used within the session.

5609   A copy of the booklet can be found in Appendix M.

5610   **Table 6.1**

5611   *Content of the 72-page Parent Support Booklet and 90-minute Support Session*

Topic	Aims	Content	Evidence from the First Action Research Cycle	Research Underpinning
Tackling the football parenting game (Postulate 5*)	Manage the demands of being a football parent	Provided reflection on the stressors parents experienced and suggestions for potential coping strategies. The support session encouraged parents to offload, learn from each other, a form of support to other parents, and gain reassurance.	Experienced organisational and developmental demands throughout their journey (chapter four). Found that the topic resonated with them and could relate to the demands covered in the session (chapter five).	Burgess et al. (2016) Harwood & Knight (2009a, 2009b) Harwood et al. (2010) Harwood et al. (2019)
Communicating with the team (Postulate 4*)	Develop better relationships and effective communication with coaches, support staff, their families, and other parents	Facilitated parents understanding of who was in their support network and how they could foster beneficial relationships with these individuals (such as; coaches, support staff, and other practices and discussion topics). Dorsch et al. (2017) was only delivered to parents of children aged seven to ten years and within the sampling developmental stages. The family systems approach highlighted the value of all members within the family (spouses, grandparents, siblings, and extended families) working together towards growth and group development.	Desire for enhanced relationships with the academy (chapter four). Emotionally charged session and although some improvements were made, parents remained frustrated (chapter five).	Hayward et al. (2017) Jowett & Timson-Katchis (2005) Pam (1993) Smoll et al. (2011)

Being a football parent (Postulate 2*)	To understand how to create a healthy emotional climate and what their current parenting style involves	Provided guidance across the booklet and support session on the creation of a supportive emotional climate for their son, along with the application of an autonomy-supportive parenting style.	Creating a healthy emotional climate at home was a concern for parents (chapter five). Are more aware of their parenting style now compared to previously (chapter five).	Darling & Steinberg (1993) Deci & Ryan (1985; 2000) Grolnick (2003) Holt et al. (2009) Knight et al. (2016b)
Supporting your child (Postulate 1*)	Explore the support that parents provided to their son and optimising their son's enjoyment of football.	Parents were encouraged through activities to reflect on the emotional, informational, and tangible support parents were providing their son and whether this support would change as the journey progressed. Parents reflected on whether they had asked their son if the support they provided was what they wanted and whether they had asked if there was any further support would be beneficial for their son.	Parents unsure of how best to support their son (chapter four). Feel more knowledgeable about how to support their son (chapter five).	Bremer (2012) Côté (1999) Côté et al. (2009) Kay (2000) Wolfenden & Holt (2005)
The ups and downs of matches (Postulate 3*)	Facilitated parents' reflection on the emotions they experience during matches and offer suggestions on	Parents were tasked with identifying the stressors that they experienced on a match day and the coping mechanisms that they put in place to manage these stressors. Parents were encouraged to develop a match debrief strategy, such as 'rules of the road', where children could identify the conversations	The match experiences were stressful and parents experienced many demands (chapter four). More in control of their emotions at matches now (chapter five).	Burgess et al., (2016) Clarke & Harwood (2014) Elliott & Drummond (2015) Harwood & Knight (2009b) Knight& Holt (2014) Omli & LaVoi (2012) Tamminen et al., (2017)

	how best to manage these emotions.	they wished to have in the car and ensure these conversations remain supportive.		
Bumps in the road (Postulate 6*)	Adapting to the future challenges that may occur along the journey of being a football parent.	Helped prepare and develop the skills for parents to cope with potential challenges that they may be faced with along the football academy journey through reflection. This topic also covered a range of other developmental challenges that talented athletes may experience, such as injuries, playing up an age group, and maintaining education.	Preparing children for the reviews ahead was challenging (chapter four). Feel they know more information now about what would happen should their son be released and about the journey ahead of them (chapter five).	Lally & Kerr (2008) Neely et al., (2017) Wolfenden & Holt (2005)

5612
5613   *Postulate 5: Parents manage the organisational and developmental demands placed on them as stakeholders in youth sport; Postulate 4: Parents foster and maintain healthy
5614   relationships with significant others in the youth sport environment; Postulate 2: Parents understand and apply an authoritative or autonomy-supportive parenting styles;
5615   Postulate 1: Parents select the appropriate sporting opportunities for their child and provide necessary types of social support; Postulate 3: Parents manage the emotional
5616   demands of competition and serve as emotionally intelligent role models for their child; Postulate 6: Expert parents adapt their involvement and support to different stages of
5617   their child's athletic development and progressions

5618   **6.2.3.3 Parent Supportive Culture.** In combination with the booklet and

5619   support session, I continued to work within the academy, building upon chapter five

5620   to develop a supportive and encouraging parent culture. The cultural changes within

5621   the first action research cycle (chapter five) went some way towards changing the

5622   culture within the academy and subsequently enhancing parents' experiences. For

5623   example, the initial programme helped academy staff to recognise and appreciate the

5624   journey that parents go through and the demands they face. This included providing

5625   parents with the opportunity purchase refreshments, attempts were made to enhance

5626   the communication between parents and academy staff, and some performance

5627   reviews were altered to include parents more in the development of their son.

5628   However, not all my desired changes were implemented as not all academy staff

5629   bought in to them and a negative attitude towards parents still remained within some

5630   academy staff. Thus, a continued focus on specific cultural changes remained.

5631   From the evaluation and reflection phase it was decided for this programme

5632   that the cultural changes would focus on providing parents with a voice, increasing

5633   the amount of meetings with parents to create more open communication, and

5634   creating a parent open evening. Through discussions with the management team, the

5635   academy was persuaded that it would be useful for parents to have an opportunity to

5636   discuss their experiences, provide their perspective on any potential changes within

5637   the academy, and to generally be given a voice within the setting. As such, the first

5638   cultural change focused on implementing a parents' voice forum. This was designed

5639   to offer parent representatives the chance to speak to academy staff on behalf of the

5640   other parents and their sons within the age group they were representing. In

5641   consideration of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory this cultural

5642   change aimed to influence the macrosystem around the player by creating a voice for

5643   parents and for parents to have an input in to the wider academy environment and

5644   culture.

5645   The second cultural change, following the concerns raised in chapter five that

5646   communication needed further improvement, was for the coaches and support staff

5647   to hold more meetings with parents to enhance the communication. Although it was

5648   hoped that the parents' voice forum would go some way to improve the

5649   communication between the academy and parents, it was agreed with the

5650   management team and in multi-disciplinary meetings that more meetings could be

5651   held with parents to create more open communication. For instance, for international

5652   tours and tournaments a meeting may help to clarify who was attending and share the

5653   necessary details. Along with these meetings a calendar of fixtures was trialled on

5654   the PMA system. The third cultural change was to implement open evenings where

5655   parents could view training, gain an increased understanding of their son's

5656   development, and feel more involved in their son's development. In consideration of

5657   Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory these cultural changes were

5658   designed to influence the mesosystem around the player by enhancing the

5659   relationship and communication between parents and coaches.

5660   **6.3 Action Phase: Implementing the Condensed Being a Football Parent**

5661   **Support Programme**

5662   As email was the main form of communication with parents at the academy,

5663   parents were invited to take part in the support session through this method. After

5664   gaining University ethical approval for the revised programme, an email was sent to

5665   all under-9 to 16 parents providing details of the session and booklet. These emails

5666   were sent one month prior to the delivery starting, followed by an email reminder

5667   one week prior to the delivery of the support session. In addition, the support session

5668   was advertised to parents through word of mouth during informal conversations at

5669   matches, when seeing parents around the academy building, and in the parents'

5670   lounge.

5671   *6.3.1 Session Delivery*

5672   In the initial programme parents continually highlighted the benefits they

5673   gained from talking to other parents within the sessions. Thus, it was deemed

5674   important to retain this element within this programme, albeit it in a shorter and

5675   more diluted form. Parents were, therefore, provided with a 90-minute session in

5676   which they could talk to other parents and the researcher while receiving the booklet.

5677   Following the recommendations for reducing the demands on parents in an attempt

5678   to increase engagement in chapter four, it was planned that the delivery would occur

5679   over two weekends covering times that were deemed appropriate for all age groups.

5680   Each session took place in a classroom at the academy when the children

5681   were training. The classrooms were deemed an appropriate delivery location during

5682   action research cycle one as they provided enough space for the volume of parents

5683   that may attend, the parents were familiar with them, and the tables and chairs

5684   created an appropriate environment. Refreshments (i.e., tea, coffee, fruit juice,

5685   sandwiches, fruit, and light bites) were provided to create a comfortable and

5686   welcoming environment, as recommended in chapter four. Based upon the

5687   reflections from action research cycle one (chapter five) and the reduced time for

5688   delivery, it was decided to not include any pen and paper activities. Rather, the

5689   session focused on briefly introducing each of the six topics and providing an

5690   overview of the booklet and the activities within it. The session was delivered once

5691   to foundation phase parents (under-9 to 12) and twice to the youth development

5692   phase parents (under-13 to 16) based on their availability. The session was planned

5693   for 90-minutes, but in reality it often lasted longer, with discussions extended for up

5694   to 30 minutes after the delivery had finished. Each session was specifically tailored

5695   to the age group in which it was being delivered, through adaptations to the content

5696   and the discussion topics. For instance, within the foundation phase the session

5697   covered children being given the option to take part in day release, whereas within

5698   the youth development phase it covered managing the pressures of exams.

5699   The session was delivered in an interactive manner with discussion amongst

5700   the parents being encouraged. The session was delivered with a recognition that

5701   parents have varying beliefs, identities, and experiences (Knight, 2019) and that each

5702   parent-child relationship is unique. Thus, rather than prescribing set ways of

5703   interacting with their sons, the session provided suggestions from which parents

5704   could engage in reflection and discussion to tailor it to their own needs and

5705   experiences.

5706   *6.3.2 Cultural Changes*

5707   The cultural changes took place between January 2018 (mid-season) and May

5708   2018 (end of season) using the Three Perspective Approach as used in chapter five

5709   (Martin, 2002; Meyerson & Martin, 1987). These cultural changes built upon the

5710   changes that had previously occurred with the first action research cycle to focus on

5711   valuing parents' input and feedback by creating a parents' voice forum and gaining

5712   more feedback from them, welcoming them and involving them in their son's

5713   development, and respecting parents' commitment through enhanced communication

5714   through more regular communication and meetings to discuss tours and international

5715   tournaments.

5716   *6.3.3 Evaluation Methods*

5717   As with the initial programme, this parent support programme included two

5718   elements; the 90-minute support session delivered to parents on three occasions and

5719   the parent supportive culture. Over 130 parents, based on the assumption that one

5720   parent participated on behalf of each player within the academy aged between under-

5721   9 and under-16, were invited to take part in the support session, while all parents

5722   who engaged with the academy experienced the cultural changes.

5723   In total, 21 parents took part in one of the three sessions that were scheduled.

5724   Three of these parents had previously attended the six-session parent support

5725   sessions within chapter five. Session one was attended by 12 parents from the

5726   foundation phase. Session two was attended by four parents and session three was

5727   attended by five parents from the youth development phase. Recognising the issues I

5728   experienced in my initial programme as well as those reported by other researchers, I

5729   decided to minimise the requirements on parents with regards to formal feedback by

5730   removing the interviews, instead asking parents to provide feedback and their

5731   reflections via an online reflective survey which could be completed in their own

5732   time. Despite numerous reminders, only six parents completed the survey. Three

5733   were females and three were males. They all described their ethnicity as White-

5734   British and were aged between 41 and 60 years. The parents had been involved with

5735   football as a parent for between five and 14 years, and their son had trained at the

5736   academy for between ten months and five years. They travelled between 45 miles to

5737   60 miles to attend each training session.

5738   In addition to the reflections of the parents through the online survey, the

5739   session, booklet, and cultural changes were evaluated using data obtained through

5740   informal conversations with parents, coaches, and support staff, observations,

5741   fieldnotes and my reflexive diary. These data included all parents who attended a

5742   session, as well as other parents who were present in the academy when I was

5743   completing observations and fieldnotes.

5744   **6.3.3.1 Online Reflective Survey.** Feedback was sought through an online

5745   survey on the usefulness of the session and booklet, along with any

5746   recommendations for improvements. A link to the online reflective survey was sent

5747   out via email to all those parents who had attended the session and received a copy

5748   of the booklet. As the survey sought feedback both on the session and the booklet, I

5749   decided to distribute the survey to parents two months after they received the booklet

5750   in the session. It was hoped this would allow parents the time to read and work

5751   through the booklet. An online reflective survey was chosen because parents' time is

5752   limited, and previous experience had highlighted the challenges of scheduling

5753   interviews with parent participants. Thus, the online reflective survey was identified

5754   as a practical and convenient method to gain feedback from parents (Bundon, 2016).

5755   A copy of the online reflective survey can be found in Appendix N.

5756   **6.3.3.2 Reflexive Diary.** My thoughts and emotions during the delivery of

5757   the session and booklet were recorded, as were any identified changes in parent

5758   behaviour or culture within a reflexive diary. As with all other reflections conducted

5759   in the earlier phases of this work, they were structured using Gibbs' (1988) reflective

5760   cycle. The use of a reflexive diary allowed me to collect longitudinal data to capture

5761   the impact of the programme and note changes within the culture as they occurred

5762   (Day, 2016). Additionally, I was able to capture data within close proximity to the

5763   situation, preventing any information about the experience or delivery process from

5764   being lost to memory vagueness (Didymus & Fletcher, 2012).

5765   **6.3.3.3 Observations and Fieldnotes.** Building on the previous 15 months

5766   spent in the academy during action research cycle one (chapters four and five), for

5767   the planning, implementation, and evaluation of this specific programme I spent five

5768   months embedded in the academy. During these five months I carried out

5769   approximately 800 hours of observations and informal conversations with parents,

5770   coaches, support staff, and in relation to the culture. Observations were carried out at

5771   general parent meetings, home and away matches, meetings between coaches and

5772   parents, performance reviews, an end of season celebration event, coach CPD

5773   sessions, training sessions, multi-disciplinary meetings, pre-match team talks,

5774   travelling away with teams, and informal social occasions such as meals in the

5775   canteen area. As detailed in chapter five, observations were carried out based on

5776   Creswell's (1998) six step process and my field notes were recorded using the

5777   recommendations of Babbie and Huitt (1975).

5778   *6.3.4 Analysis of Evaluation Data*

5779   As with the evaluation of the initial programme (see chapter five), all data

5780   were analysed following the process detailed by Miles and colleagues' (2014) data

5781   analysis process. This process involved seven key steps, 1) organisation of the data,

5782   2) immersion within the data, 3) the first cycle of coding, 4) second cycle of coding,

5783   5) creating assertions, 6) offering interpretations, and 7) writing the report and

5784   drawing conclusions. The initial stage of the data analysis was to download the data

5785   from the online reflective survey and organise my observations, reflections, and

5786   fieldnotes. Next, I immersed myself within the data by reading and re-reading to put

5787   myself back in the moment of delivery and being a part of the culture. Using Miles

5788   and colleagues' (2014) conceptually clustered matrix the third stage of coding was

5789   carried out. The table was used to cluster the data based on the deductive categories

5790   of 'overall benefit', 'content evaluation', 'improvements', and 'cultural changes'.

5791   The fourth stage involved generating inductive themes and clustering the data further

5792   based upon these themes. During the fifth stage of analysis, assertations were trialled

5793   and reflected upon to identify meaning within the data. The final stage was to create

5794   interpretations, write the report, and draw conclusions.

5795   **6.4 Evaluation**

5796   Based on my reflexive diary, participant observations and fieldnotes, and the

5797   online reflective survey data it appeared that parents benefited from the booklet and

5798   support session as it aided their learning and increased their knowledge, while also

5799   providing an opportunity to reflect on their journey. On the whole it appeared from

5800   my observations and collaborative reflections that parents potentially found the

5801   content of the support session and booklet useful. However, despite these benefits,

5802   attendance to the session continued to be low. Alongside, the booklet and support

5803   session attempts to change the academy culture were also made. Similar to the

5804   previous action research cycle, there appeared to be some positive cultural changes

5805   within the academy, but there remains further areas for improvement. Numerous

5806   recommendations to further enhance the parent support programme and increase the

5807   benefit for parents were also identified.

5808   *6.4.1 Overall Evaluation of the Booklet, Support Session, and Cultural Changes*

5809   Overall, parents said that they, "found it good" and the booklet was "a

5810   supportive tool" that was "very well set out". Similarly, I recorded within my

5811   reflexive diary that the parents appeared to benefit from the support session as, "the

5812   parents were able to speak freely and ask about any concerns, they could talk to other

5813   parents, and understand the experience a bit more." Parents detailed, and I observed,

5814   that the support session and booklet was useful because they helped parents to apply

5815   previous learning and increase their knowledge, while also being able to reflect on

5816   their current journey (see Figure 6.1). For instance, through informal conversations

5817   and the online reflective survey, parents said that, "I can only speak for myself, but I

5818   was happy with the booklet." They also reported that it was "informative and offered

5819   good advice" that "reminds me of my role and how I fit into my child's support

5820   system." Additionally, it was found to provide "some useful info on who to contact

5821   and the process ahead", plus it "made me feel part of the experience" and "all

5822   information given to us is useful and helps us make better decisions/understand

5823   things."

5824   Furthermore, the cultural changes also had a positive impact on parents'

5825   experience within the academy. For example, through the reflective online survey

5826   one parent said, "thank you as a club for your support." Another parent, during an

5827   informal conversation, recognised the value in changing the season dates for the

5828   academy children to fall in line with the school holidays allowing them to have a

5829   summer holiday away from school and the academy, "I'm glad that the boys and us

5830   parents have had a longer summer break this year."

5831   **6.4.1.1 Application of Learning and Increased Knowledge.** Through my

5832   reflections and the collaborative reflections, it appeared that parents found the

5833   support session and booklet useful for reinforcing and condensing the knowledge

5834   gained from the previous support session in chapter five, and they were able to gain

5835   useful information, specifically on education decisions.

5836   *6.4.1.1.1 Reinforced Learning.* Parents seemed to benefit from the

5837   condensed programme as it helped reinforce the topics covered in the previous six-

5838   session programme (chapter five). I recorded within my reflexive diary:

5839   One of the parents, who had attended the six-session programme, now

5840   appeared to understand and be able to relate to the topics a bit more because

5841   of the experiences he had been through with his eldest son.

5842   Moreover, the booklet and session allowed parents the opportunity to freely talk

5843   about any concerns and further apply the messages covered in the previous

5844   programme. For instance, I observed parents talking about the strategies they had put

5845   in place to support themselves and their son manage the emotions of the review

5846   process. They had been able to do this by supporting their son to write down prior to

5847   the review the things they wished to discuss. Further, one parent wrote, "it helped

5848   pull together many of the learnings from the session I had attended previously."

5849   *6.4.1.1.2 Gained Useful Information.* Parents who had only attended this

5850   session (i.e., not attended the previous support programme in chapter five), indicated

5851   that the booklet was beneficial for increasing their knowledge and understanding the

5852   mechanisms they could use to help them along the academy journey. I recalled a

5853   conversation with a parent in my reflexive diary:

5854   She had come in from a friendly grassroots club where there was a nice social

5855   group and she knew everyone, and even though she worked for the football

5856   club, she did not understand what went on at the academy and what the

5857   experience would be like. From the booklet and session, she now had an

5858   understanding of what goes on at the academy.

5859 Through this conversation it was apparent that the booklet and support session may

5860 help parents adjust and transition into the football academy environment from

5861 grassroots football.

5862   In addition, the information that parents had gained was helping them to

5863 make informed education decisions at the later stages of the journey too. During an

5864 informal conversation with an under-16 parent, her increased knowledge and

5865 awareness of the processes was potentially helping her plan for the next stage of her

5866 son's development. I had recorded within my reflexive diary:

5867   I was delighted to hear how the information and knowledge that she had

5868   gained from the booklet and support session had helped her feel empowered

5869   to support her son when supporting him to make a decision about his

5870   education in preparation for scholarship decisions.

5871   **6.4.1.2 Reflection on the Journey.** The group discussions and reflective

5872 tasks appeared to be beneficial for parents to encourage consideration of their child's

5873 whole journey, creating a more balanced approach to academy football, and

5874 reflecting on the knowledge they had gained.

5875   *6.4.1.2.1 See the Whole Journey.* The booklet and support session,

5876 particularly the *Bumps in the road* topic were found to be useful because they helped

5877 parents to reflect on their journey and where they may still have to go on. One parent

5878 wrote in the survey, "it [the programme] helped me to sit back and look at the whole

5879 picture." I witnessed such reflection when delivering the under-9 and under-10

5880 session. I recorded in my observations:

5881   We discussed and reflected on some of the challenges that they may face

5882   going forward. The parents talked about how they may face challenges in

5883   relation to the pressures that the children may experience going forward and

5884   decisions around whether their child attends day release. The parents also felt

5885   that a challenge may also be the reviews and receiving critical feedback from

5886   the coaches.

5887   As well as reflecting alone, parents enjoyed being able to share experiences

5888 with others and learn from their journey. For example, one parent commented on the

5889 online reflective survey that it was useful to engage with parents from the older age

5890   groups, "it was good interacting with parents within the ages above my son to learn

5891   from their experiences." Another parent added that they liked the, "shared feedback

5892   from other parents/experiences."

5893   ***6.4.1.2.2 Balanced Approach.*** In addition to reflecting on the overall

5894   academy parenting journey and experience, the programme facilitated parents to

5895   reflect on their parenting approach. One parent said the support session had helped

5896   them to learn how to, "provide a more balanced approach [to parenting]."

5897   Particularly, the booklet, through its various activities, appeared to have had a

5898   positive effect on parents' ability to reflect on their experiences and journey as an

5899   academy football parent. For example, following a support session, I noted down the

5900   following informal conversation with a parent:

5901   He talked about how his parenting style was quite relaxed as he was so young

5902   when they had their first child. He said that now he has more of a friendship

5903   with his son rather than a father-son relationship with him. He had

5904   encouraged his son to give this opportunity everything, as he did not want

5905   him to live his life with regrets. He then compared his parenting to one of the

5906   others, who had said she would not want her son to take part in day release

5907   because her son's education was so important.

5908   ***6.4.1.2.3 Opportunity to Reflect on Knowledge.*** The activities included in the

5909   booklet appeared to have had a positive effect on parents' ability to reflect on their

5910   experiences and journey as an academy football parent. For example, following a

5911   support session, I noted down the following informal conversation with a parent:

5912   He talked about how his parenting style was quite relaxed as he was so young

5913   when they had their first child. He said that now he has more of a friendship

5914   with his son rather than a father-son relationship with him. He had

5915   encouraged his son to give this opportunity everything, as he did not want

5916   him to live his life with regrets. He then compared his parenting to one of the

5917   others, who had said she would not want her son to take part in day release

5918   because her son's education was so important.

5919   Over the subsequent few months following the session, I continued to see parents

5920   who had attended the session appearing to be reflecting upon their experience as one

5921   under-10 parent said to me during an informal conversation, "I feel as though my life

5922   is get up early to go to the gym, go to work, bring my son to training, go home, eat,

5923   and go bed, and then repeat. It is an endless cycle."

5924   *6.4.2 Session and Booklet Evaluation*

5925   The topics covered within the booklet and support session were: '*Tackling*

5926   *the football parenting game*', '*Communicating with the team*', '*Being a football*

5927   *parent*', '*Supporting your child*', '*The ups and downs of matches*', and '*Bumps in the*

5928   *road*.' An evaluation of the support session and accompanying booklet will be

5929   provided based on my observations, fieldnotes, reflexive diary, informal

5930   conversations with parents, and the online reflective survey.

5931   *6.4.2.1.1 Learnt Coping Strategies.* Parents found it useful talking about the

5932   demands they experienced and were able to develop some new coping strategies.

5933   One parent reported through the online reflective survey that discussing the demands

5934   was beneficial as it, "highlighted general everyday problems that occur to

5935   accommodate academy football." Specifically, the booklet and support sessions

5936   helped parents to reflect on the strategies that they can put in place to help the

5937   demands. In the weeks following the delivery of the session, parents were seen

5938   implementing new coping strategies to manage their demands. I noted within my

5939   fieldnotes:

5940   It was pleasing when talking to parents that the suggestion of car sharing as

5941   much as possible was having a positive impact on their experience. Although

5942   they felt guilty for sending their child off with a stranger, they were able to

5943   spend more time with other family members as a result.

5944   Even with this positive change, parents were often experiencing such high

5945   levels of demands that once they began reflecting on the stress and pressure they are

5946   constantly under, prior to developing the coping mechanisms, they became

5947   overwhelmed with emotion. I noted in my reflexive diary:

5948   Not long into this conversation one of the parents became upset by the

5949   demands she was experiencing. She began saying that she puts a lot of

5950   pressure on herself and him [her son] to do well, as she is the only parent for

5951   her children.

5952   Thus, although for most parents the session did help them to develop coping

5953   strategies, for some parents the session involved them offloading all their emotion

5954   first.

5955   *6.4.2.1.2 Learnt from the Age Group Above*. Prior to the session starting, the

5956   under-9s parents in particular indicated that they were unaware of some of the

5957   challenges that may occur along the developmental journey and how they may

5958   support their son through these situations. Consequently, I recorded in my reflexive

5959   diary:

5960   Parents were all keen at the beginning of the session to learn new things

5961   about the academy and understand what it is going to be like. However, they

5962   did at times struggle to think about what may occur in the future while their

5963   son is in the academy. That's when I found was useful combining age groups

5964   and encourage the sharing of experiences.

5965   The discussions on the academy journey appeared to help parents to prepare for the

5966   journey ahead and the challenges that they may be faced with situations, such as

5967   injury or being released. One parent wrote in the online reflective survey that the

5968   booklet had helped them by, "trying to understand what could happen along the

5969   way."

5970   Parents reported that they enjoyed listening to parents from the age group

5971   above and learning from their experiences for topic six (*Bumps in the road*), as it

5972   helped prepare them for the journey ahead. I noted within my observations, "one

5973   parent said she enjoyed the session and enjoyed hearing the experiences of the next

5974   age group up." By listening to others, parents could gain a direct insight into the

5975   experience ahead of them, for example educational decisions regarding day release.

5976   ***6.4.2.1.3 Recognising Effort***. The managing emotions at matches (*The ups

5977   and downs of matches*) topic was found to potentially be useful because it helped

5978   parents to manage their emotions and recognise that their son's effort was more

5979   important than the outcome of a match. For instance, one parent wrote in the online

5980   reflective survey, "key one for me has been an improved ability to manage my

5981   emotions. Understanding that effort is a more important focus than outcome."

5982   Similarly, topic four (*Supporting your child*) was useful for parents to adjust

5983   the support they are providing to their son and recognise their son's effort more. I

5984   recorded within my reflexive diary:

5985   Many of the parents were confident that they knew the support their son

5986   wanted from them, including what their son wanted to talk about in the car on

5987   the way home. However, when I asked the parents whether they had talked to

5988   their son about the support he wanted, most of them said they had not. I was

5989   pleased in this moment to offer parents an alternative perspective that may

5990   have true impact on them and their son.

5991   Thus, although this may have been a topic that, in advance of the session, the

5992   parents were most confident about, when posing questions and encouraging

5993   reflection parents found themselves re-considering how they could support their son

5994   and focus more on their son's effort than the outcome of a match.

5995   *6.4.2.1.3 Lack of Engagement Due to Existing Frustrations*. Parents

5996   struggled to engage with the topic on building relationships with their child's coach

5997   and support staff (*communicating with the team*) topic due to being pre-occupied by

5998   their frustrations with the communication from the academy. I recorded in my

5999   reflexive diary, "the parents talked about the communication and how frustrated they

6000   were by it, as they felt that a last-minute email was not good enough."

6001   Communication was an issue for the parents and until change occurs within the

6002   academy culture, it is unlikely that parents are going to positively receive the content

6003   on the communication topic.

6004   A further topic in which parents' engagement was impacted by existing

6005   frustrations was topic three (*Being a football parent*) where parents were asked to

6006   "reflect on how they could be more autonomy supportive in their approach". Rather

6007   than addressing this topic, the parents were pre-occupied with the coaches'

6008   understanding of child development rather than their own parenting approach and it

6009   was clear there was a lot of emotion associated with an issue that had occurred. I

6010   reflected:

6011   When delivering on parenting styles, one parent interrupted me to ask

6012   whether the coaches were educated on the development of children. I was

6013   annoyed by this as I felt under time pressure to get through all the

6014   information. However, I believe this was probably due to the parents being

6015   pre-occupied by the safeguarding issue that had occurred yesterday.

6016   Understandably, the parents wanted to find out information on a topic that was on

6017   their minds, but it prevented their engagement with my specific material. On

6018   reflection, knowing that this situation had occurred, I should have prepared a

6019   response prior to the session and directed them to discuss this with me at a later time.

6020   In addition, for future sessions, the parenting styles session could be reframed

6021   towards suggestions and tips on being autonomy-supportive, as the framing of the

6022   session potentially implied that parents were the problem and resulted in their

6023   defensive and deflecting response.

6024   ***6.4.2.1.4 Informing Without Telling***. Despite feeling more confident in

6025   delivering the parenting styles (being a football parent) topic than during the

6026   previous programme (chapter five), I still found it challenging to deliver the content

6027   without feeling as if I was telling parents how to parent. For instance, I recorded in

6028   my reflexive diary:

6029   One mother stated that her approach was autonomy-supportive, whereas her

6030   husband was authoritarian in his approach. I did not want to come across as

6031   telling them how to parent, so I opted to discuss the benefits of her husband

6032   becoming more autonomy-supportive. The balance of discussing parenting

6033   styles without coming across as telling parents how to parent was

6034   challenging.

6035   I also found it challenging in relation to topic four (*Supporting your child*) to

6036   inform parents without telling them how to support their child. In particular, one

6037   situation occurred with a parent where I thought I was enhancing the parent's ability

6038   to support their son through reflection and discussion. However, rather than helping

6039   the child, it appeared to cause more anxiety for one parent about the support he was

6040   providing to his son. It was recorded within my fieldnotes:

6041   At a match I began a conversation with a parent who was talking about the

6042   support he was providing to his son and it appeared that he was looking for

6043   reassurance from me that he was providing the 'right' support for his son

6044   during the match. I offered him reassurance that if his support was meeting

6045   the needs of his son then he was doing great.

6046   ***6.4.2.1.5 Elicited High Levels of Emotion***. The demands and stressors

6047   (*Tackling the football parenting game*) topic elicited high levels of emotions among

6048   the parents. Some parents experienced such high levels of demands that as they

6049   reflected on the stress and pressure they became overwhelmed with emotion. I noted

6050   in my reflexive diary:

6051   Not long into this conversation one of the parents became upset by the

6052   demands she was experiencing. She began saying that she puts a lot of

6053   pressure on herself and her son to do well, as she is the only parent for her

6054   children.

6055   Thus, although the purpose of this session was to help parents become aware of their

6056   experience with the intent of helping them to reflect on and develop coping

6057   strategies, it was not always received in this manner. Rather, for some parents the

6058   discussion triggered negative emotions and they became upset, which prevented

6059   them from subsequently focusing on the suggested coping strategies. Consequently,

6060   this was clearly a sensitive topic, which needed to be handled with care.

6061   During the delivery, I also found that topic 5 (*The ups and downs of matches*)

6062   elicited high levels of emotion. For instance, a parent in the under-13 session

6063   described and reflected on the emotions she experienced while watching her son play

6064   football, this was recorded in my observations:

6065   One of the mother's detailed how she has to walk away from her husband, or

6066   she has to go somewhere else on the pitch. This coping mechanism she had

6067   learnt through trial and error. The parents felt that the academy matches were

6068   not as bad as the local league matches, as at one match all of a sudden, a fight

6069   erupted between some of the parents.

6070   The discussions around parents' experiences of watching their son play in football

6071   matches had elicited high levels of emotion. The parents were able to recall the

6072   emotions that they experienced while watching their son play in academy matches,

6073   but also their experiences of watching their son play in local grassroots football.

6074   Although for some parents this meant recalling negative emotions and experiences,

6075   on the whole most parents enjoyed recalling their experiences of watching their son

6076   play in football matches. Therefore, when planning topics for parents to engage with

6077   the potential emotional response of parents should be taken into consideration and

6078   sessions adapted to offer support to parents who become upset.

6079   ***6.4.3 Evaluation of Cultural Changes***

6080   Changes within the academy culture towards a more parent supportive

6081   culture began in the first action research cycle (chapter five) with changes such as

6082   opening up of the parents lounge on match days, providing access to refreshments,

6083   reducing the amount of last-minute changes to the schedule, publishing squad lists

6084   for matches at the weekend on a Wednesday, and delivering performance review

6085   meetings using videos to aid parents understanding. These changes were seen as the

6086   first step towards increasing parents' feelings of being welcomed, respected, and

6087   valued. However, there was a need for further cultural changes which were

6088   integrated within this programme over a period of five further months. Specifically, I

6089   focused upon encouraging coaching and support staff to give further consideration to

6090   the demands on parents and optimise communication through the academy secretary,

6091   introducing parent feedback meetings, obtaining end of season parent feedback, and

6092   introducing coach-led parent information evenings and open training sessions were

6093   created. These additional cultural changes were implemented by the academy and

6094   subsequently enhanced the communication between parents and the academy. This

6095   helped parents to keep up to date with the progress within the academy, manage their

6096   organisational demands, and feel more involved in their son's development.

6097   Overall the cultural changes, in addition to and extending the previous culture

6098   changes introduced during the initial programme, were perceived to further increase

6099   how welcome, respected, and valued parents felt. Specifically, the culture changes

6100   appeared to be a beneficial in helping parents and supporting them to enjoy the

6101   parent experience of the football academy. For instance, as the season came to an

6102   end, one parent reported to me during an informal conversation that, "both my son

6103   and we as parents received a high level of support from the academy." These culture

6104   changes demonstrated that the delivery of the parent support programme had the

6105   potential to benefit parents beyond those who engage with the booklet and support

6106   session. However, a number of challenges were also encountered when attempting to

6107   make these changes.

6108   **6.4.3.1 Involving Parents in Their Child's Development.** From the first

6109   action research cycle (chapters four) it was apparent that parents felt removed from

6110   their son's development and wanted to be more involved. As a consequence, one

6111   cultural change that I targeted in chapter five was to increase parents' involvement in

6112   their son's development through increasing how welcome they felt in the academy

6113   and creating open evenings. However, it was only partially implemented in chapter

6114   five, so was further progressed within this action.

6115   *6.4.3.1.1 Welcoming Parents into the Academy.* Through discussions within

6116   multi-disciplinary meetings, talking informally with the coaches, and engaging with

6117   the academy management team I sought to highlight the benefits that would arise if

6118   parents had a greater understanding of their children's training. Specifically, it was

6119   emphasised to coaches, support staff, and the management team that parents would

6120   benefit from a greater understanding of their son's training and the aims of their

6121   training to be able to provide the best possible support to their son before, during,

6122   and after matches. For instance, parents would be able to provide specific

6123   informational support to their son before a match relating to their progress goals and

6124   development aims. Over time, it became apparent that this was starting to have an

6125   impact. For instance, after one of the multi-disciplinary meetings I recorded:

6126   The academy manager recognised in the meeting that parents were a key part
6127   of the players development, and we should be doing everything to ensure that
6128   they understand the process. If an open day was carried out where the parents
6129   were able to see around the grounds, understand the support that is available,
6130   ask questions to each of the members of staff about their role and how their
6131   son could use them to benefit their performance it would go a long way. This
6132   does not take away from it being an elite environment it merely adds to the
6133   parents understanding of what it is like for their son to be here, what to
6134   expect and how they can support their child more effectively, as they give up
6135   so much time and effort to ensure their son has this footballing opportunity.
6136 This reflection within my fieldnotes highlighted that parents' roles were now being
6137 recognised and the logistics of open training sessions were being considered.
6138   Two weeks after this reflection was documented, the first information
6139 evening and open training session took place. The information evenings and
6140 attendance at training were optional for parents, so as not to add further demands
6141 upon them and occurred during the regular training time. The information session
6142 occurred while the players were getting ready and warming up. They provided
6143 parents with information on training and match objectives for the month. The
6144 coaches delivered a presentation, provided video clips, and were available to talk to
6145 parents. Following the presentation, parents were then invited to watch a training
6146 session from the outside of the 3G pitch. After the first information evening, I
6147 recorded in my fieldnotes:
6148   The room was full of parents sitting at the tables and standing at the back of
6149   the classroom. They all listened attentively and asked the coaches questions
6150   afterwards. Speaking to a number of the dads on the way down to the pitch,
6151   we chatted about the session. They were all very impressed with how
6152   professional it was and were excited to watch their son training.
6153 On reflection, it appeared that sharing the training experience with their son helped
6154 parents to understand their son's development and be able to support their
6155 development away from the academy. This session also highlighted that when
6156 coaches buy-in to sessions and make an effort to welcome parents into the academy
6157 it enhances parent attendance at sessions. As such, making sure that parents feel that
6158 the coaches are welcoming parents and involving them in their son's development is
6159 key to enhancing attendance at parent support sessions.

6160   ***6.4.3.1.2 Surprised by Engagement but Still Not Fully Welcome.*** Through

6161 informal conversations coaches reported that they were surprised by the number of

6162 parents who attended. I recorded in my fieldnotes from the informal conversation, "it

6163 was actually really positive, and I did not expect all those parents to attend."

6164 However, although the open evenings initially had a positive response from the

6165 coaches, some found the additional workload of preparing a presentation for the

6166 parents of their session began to become tiresome. One coach said during an

6167 informal conversation near the end of the season, "I still have to prepare a

6168 presentation for this evening for these parents. I don't see why we should include

6169 them. They probably won't turn up anyway." As this quote illustrates, the shift in

6170 perceptions of parents or the creation of a welcoming environment was still not

6171 present among all staff.

6172   This was reflected within the parent support session as it became apparent

6173 that, despite my attempts at creating cultural changes for parents to be more involved

6174 within the environment, some parents still did not feel welcome within the academy

6175 or listened to. I recorded in my reflexive diary from the third support session that:

6176   This parent said that parents did not feel welcome in the academy and did not

6177   feel listened to. This I was surprised and disappointed about as I thought

6178   things had changed and improved in relation to the experience for parents.

6179   This highlights that although in some areas the experience has improved

6180   there is still the need for further improvement.

6181 This may be due to the open evenings only being offered to the youth development

6182 phase parents, as the foundation phase coaches did not see the benefit of engaging

6183 with parents in this way. A further foundation phase parent added during an informal

6184 conversation, "it was disappointing that we were promised open evenings, but they

6185 never appeared to happen." This finding highlighted that although small changes

6186 were made to the culture to make parents feel welcome within the environment, not

6187 all parents did feel welcome.

6188   **6.4.3.2 Enhanced Communication with Parents.** Respect towards parents

6189 was enhanced within the organisational culture by further improving the

6190 communication between the academy and parents. Through discussions within

6191 multi-disciplinary meetings, informal conversations, and engaging with the academy

6192 management team a number of suggestions regarding improvements to

6193 communication were provided. For instance, it was recommended that

6194   communication is further enhanced with parents, including further reducing last

6195   minute communication and holding meetings with parents prior to team selection for

6196   tours and international trips.

6197   *6.4.3.2.1 Reduction in Last Minute Communication.* Prior to the culture

6198   changes taking full effect parents experienced last minute changes and cancellations

6199   to the schedule, which made the experience more stressful for parents. One example

6200   of the last minute communication, I recorded in my fieldnotes:

6201   A match for the U11 and U12s was called off 20 mins before the players

6202   were all due to arrive, so a number of parents and children still arrived at the

6203   academy. There were parents who were understandably annoyed that they

6204   had travelled all the way to the academy.

6205   These last-minute changes and cancellations were frustrating for parents, although

6206   they recognised that some were unforeseeable, parents were often annoyed that

6207   training schedule changes and cancellations were not communicated earlier. As such,

6208   it was recommended that the academy worked towards reducing the amount of last

6209   minute communication with parents. One suggestion that was trialled for the final

6210   three months of the season was a fixture schedule on the PMA system to help parents

6211   to plan and organise family life around the fixtures. This fixture schedule provided

6212   parents with a list of all the fixtures for the remainder of the season and was only

6213   changed when the change could not be avoided.

6214   *6.4.3.2.2 Tour and Tournament Meetings Introduced.* Previously, before a

6215   tour or international tournament an email would be sent out with all the information.

6216   However, this left parents with lots of questions, such as sleeping arrangement, game

6217   time, and who to contact. One change to enhance the communication was to

6218   introduce meetings to cover all the information and provide parents with the

6219   opportunity to ask questions. I wrote this reflection when attending the first tour

6220   meeting held within the academy:

6221   Parents were asking lots of questions and the key bit for them was who was

6222   in the team and who would be going on the tour. The information about

6223   flights, accommodation, and the staff attending was useful, but it was all

6224   irrelevant unless they were told their son was attending. On reflection I

6225   would advise the academy manager to have started with this information and

6226   then answer any questions afterwards.

6227   The introduction of the tours and international tournaments meetings was a positive

6228   step towards enhancing the communication with parents. However, as highlighted in

6229   my reflection my key learning was that the most important information that parents

6230   wanted to know was whether their son was attending and how much game time he

6231   would be given. Consequently, for future meetings I recommended that the academy

6232   manager announced the squad list first via email and then held a meeting to cover all

6233   details.

6234   ***6.4.3.2.3 Further Improvements to Communication Required.*** Despite the

6235   attempted changes to enhance communication, not all the parents agreed that the

6236   academy communication with parents had improved. One parent reflected on the

6237   communication during an informal conversation at the end of the season:

6238   Poor communication throughout the year. When the kids are on parent free

6239   events there's no formal communication point where we can find out what

6240   times our kids will return home, it's normally just a text if that. Mostly we

6241   would hear of other age groups.

6242   Although the focus of this culture change was to enhance the communication

6243   channels within the Academy/parent relationship, it was only in part successful. It

6244   appeared that some coaches remained reluctant to engage with parents. For instance,

6245   although steps had been taken within the academy to enhance the communication

6246   with parents, they still felt that the communication was late and lacking detail.

6247   Through the reflective online survey one parent said, "poor communication, late

6248   communication for game selections." Another parent added through the reflective

6249   survey, "very poor communication, late notice what the selection is for the weekend

6250   especially when families have other siblings to organise."

6251   **6.4.3.3 Listening to Parents' Feedback.** The third cultural change

6252   introduced was the inclusion of additional feedback methods from parents and using

6253   this feedback to enhance the parent experience and perceived value of parents. It was

6254   agreed with the academy manager that parent feedback could be sought and then

6255   used to inform decisions made by the management team.

6256   ***6.4.3.3.1 Changes Made Based on Parent Feedback.*** Parents had fed back

6257   during the first action research cycle (chapter four) that they struggled to take a

6258   family holiday and struggled to manage work and the holiday training period. To

6259   value the support of parents within the academy the management team were

6260   encouraged and supported to adjust the season dates for children under-9 to under-14

6261   to align with the school term. This would allow parents and children to take a family

6262   holiday together without the risk of missing pre-season training. It was noted in my

6263   fieldnotes from a parent meeting that the academy manager had said:

6264   The change of dates was done to help the parents and players, by allowing

6265   them to have a solid break away from training and school, plus maximise the

6266   amount of time that they are at the academy by avoiding players and parents

6267   taking holidays during their pre-season training time.

6268   This culture change was created from the feedback that parents had provided within

6269   chapter four. Despite it taking a season to convince the academy management team

6270   that it would benefit parents, it meant that parents could plan a family holiday and

6271   gain a much needed break away. Within my observations, I recorded a conversation

6272   with a parent in relation to the parent culture and their feedback being valued:

6273   A father asked, "do these things [information shared within the support

6274   sessions] get fed back to the academy?" I said, "yes, they do, and changes

6275   have been made." He said, "what changes have been made?" I highlighted,

6276   "that as a result of the feedback from parents the biggest things that have

6277   changed are the dates of the academy season and the holiday training has

6278   been moved to the evening, rather than during the day to allow parents to

6279   continue to work throughout the school holidays." He agreed that these were

6280   good changes.

6281   ***6.4.3.3.2 Creation of the Parents' Voice Forum.*** Another change that has

6282   had a positive impact on parents was the creation of the parents' voice forum, which

6283   had been recommended to the academy during the first action research cycle (chapter

6284   five), but unfortunately encountered resistance from some academy staff and did not

6285   materialise. During this action research cycle, through further persuasion of the

6286   benefits, the academy decided to implement a parents' voice forum. After attending

6287   the first parents' voice forum, I recorded in my reflexive diary:

6288   The first parents' voice forum took place this evening which I found

6289   challenging and uncomfortable, but enjoyable. The parents came armed with

6290   a list of questions they wanted answers to, ranging from "where can I get

6291   more socks?" to "why was the fixture cancelled last weekend?" Many of

6292   these questions we did not have the answers to and were unable to provide

6293   them with the answers they wanted. It was clear they were frustrated and

6294   angry, but this was a positive step towards listening to them and

6295   acknowledging their concerns.

6296   Once the parents' voice forum had got started it was recognised by parents that this

6297   was a beneficial improvement to the academy. During an informal conversation a

6298   parent said, "I think the introduction of the parent's forum will provide huge benefits

6299   to the parents and a positive and effective channel for parents to communicate with

6300   the academy and coaching staff." Although it was challenging for coaches being

6301   posed numerous questions and not having the answers to them, it did at least provide

6302   parents with the opportunity to voice their concerns and feel as though they were

6303   being listened to. For instance, during an informal conversation one parent said, "I

6304   feel the parent forum is a positive step forward."

6305   *6.4.3.3.3 End of Season Feedback Survey.* A supplementary way to listen to

6306   parents was through the introduction of the end of season feedback survey.

6307   Following the benefits of the information gathered on the parent experience (chapter

6308   four), it was agreed with the academy management team that it would be useful to

6309   understand the parents' experiences of the season and whether there were any

6310   changes that could be made to improve the experience of parents and support them to

6311   enhance their son's experience too. At the end of the season, parents reported that

6312   they felt included within their son's football development and involved within the

6313   academy. One parent wrote in the online reflexive diary, "able to see a positive

6314   growth in my son's development and maturity. Feel that I have been kept informed

6315   and they have delivered the best within their control." I recorded within my

6316   fieldnotes that by the end of the season the parents were much more involved in their

6317   son's football development, but also within the decisions that were being made as an

6318   organisation:

6319   The end of season feedback was continuing which was a positive step

6320   forward in listening to parents to understand their experiences and their

6321   suggestions for further increasing their involvement. In addition, the academy

6322   had also listened and acknowledged the feedback from parents on the end of

6323   season celebration event.

6324   *6.4.4 Challenges and Suggestions for Improvements*

6325   To further improve the parent support programme, parents were asked

6326   through the online reflective survey and informal conversations to provide feedback

6327   and reflect regarding how the programme could be enhanced to further meet their

6328   needs and benefit other parents. Alongside, the recommendations from parents I also

6329   identified a number of suggestions based on my reflections, observations, and

6330   fieldnotes.

6331   **6.4.4.1 Enhance Parent Attendance.** The delivery of this session was

6332   substantially condensed compared to the first action (chapter five) in the attempt to

6333   increase attendance and engagement with the programme. However, despite this,

6334   only 21 parents attended the support sessions and received a copy of the booklet. As

6335   such, session attendance and engagement were substantial challenges for this

6336   programme. A number of reasons for this poor attendance were provided. The

6337   solutions to enhancing attendance are potentially to increase coach buy in to the

6338   parent support programme, ensuring that the facilitator keeps the sessions positive

6339   and not overrun with complaints, and providing alternatives for when parents are too

6340   busy to attend.

6341   *6.4.4.1.1 Encourage More Coaches to Buy-in.* During an informal

6342   conversation with an experienced coach within the academy, I asked them for advice

6343   on how to enhance the attendance of parents. I documented in my reflexive diary:

6344   When asking advice from the coaches, I felt incredibly disheartened about

6345   being able to increase attendance numbers, as their suggestion was that I

6346   should give up with the parent programme and just focus on the support for

6347   players and coaches.

6348   Clearly not all coaches within the academy saw the value of engaging or supporting

6349   parents, which potentially negatively impacted on parent attendance. The solution to

6350   potentially increasing parents' engagement with and attendance at the sessions is to

6351   create buy in from the coaches. Further education and training on the benefits of

6352   engaging with parents may be required to ensure that all coaching staff buy in to the

6353   support programme and encourage parents to engage.

6354   *6.4.4.1.2 Positively Focus Sessions.* It was raised by parents that they did not

6355   attend the support sessions as they found other parents moan too much within the

6356   sessions. The parents were interested in their son's development rather than other

6357   parents' complaints, hence did not wish to listen to other parents complaining. When

6358   informally talking to a parent during an open evening, it was suggested that the

6359   amount that other parents moan and complain was putting them off. I recorded in my

6360   fieldnotes, "sorry I don't attend your sessions, but after a long day at work the last

6361   thing I want is to listen to the parents having a moan and complaining." A solution to

6362   overcome this issue is to ensure that sessions focused on positives and effectively

6363   and efficiently manage complaints/issues. For instance, parents could be directed to

6364   discuss their concerns afterwards or encouraged to arrange a meeting with their son's

6365   coach to discuss their concerns. An alternative solution is offering parents the

6366   opportunity to engage in the booklet without attending the session.

6367   *6.4.4.1.3 Create a Parent Newsletter.* Some parents have such a busy

6368   schedule that they are unable to make the time to attend a session. One of my

6369   reflections was:

6370   The demands remain high for parents and although they are all keen to

6371   engage with the support available, some simply do not have the time to

6372   attend a face-to-face session, even for 90-minutes. Potentially the support

6373   needs to be made more accessible for all, either through an electronic format

6374   or distributed to all parents as part of the induction.

6375   Some parents may simply be too busy to attend and may find it useful to have

6376   access to the booklet without attending the session or being provided with an

6377   electronic copy. For example, one parent suggested through an informal

6378   conversation, "monthly communication to parents (i.e. newsletter)." Therefore, one

6379   solution to providing support to parents who are too busy to attend, could be

6380   providing parents with information on a monthly basis via a newsletter. This may

6381   help to distribute information and content without the need to attend face-to-face.

6382   **6.4.4.2 Content Improvements.** Parents reported that overall the programme

6383   was useful and it was organised in to an easy to follow format. However, there are

6384   still improvements that could be made to the content of the booklet and support

6385   session.

6386   *6.4.4.2.1 Electronic Copy to Keep Booklet Up-to-Date.* One challenge that

6387   occurred was that between printing the booklets and the distribution, the staffing

6388   structure had changed and was out of date. Parents suggested having an electronic

6389   copy of the booklet, so that it could be adjusted or amended should any changes

6390   occur. One parent reflected through the online reflective survey, "having the staff

6391   structure but with the option of changing elements through an interactive book so

6392   amendments can be edited online and the information is always current." This

6393   suggestion was particularly pertinent because when developing the booklet, I

6394   decided to include the staffing structure to aid parents' understanding of the football

6395   academy environment and the structure. However, providing parents with an out of

6396   date booklet potentially created rather than solved issues.

6397   *6.4.4.2.2 Autonomy-supportive Examples.* Through my reflections I

6398   recognised that parents are unlikely to change their parenting style during a session,

6399   potentially due to the sensitivity of the topic and my reluctance to create a 'parent

6400   training' environment that would specifically challenge parents parenting style.

6401   Therefore, to enhance the session it could be framed towards encouraging parents to

6402   become more autonomy-supportive in their approach, for instance by using specific

6403   autonomy-supportive examples. For example, providing more specific examples of

6404   what autonomy-supportive parenting is through relatable examples and specific

6405   situations. Within my reflexive diary I recorded:

6406   From reflecting on the mother's struggles to provide her son with more

6407   chance to do things for himself, I felt awful for making her feel

6408   uncomfortable by asking her what she was going to change. In the future I

6409   would have provided her with specific examples of the things she could do

6410   and empower her to want to positively change her parenting approach

6411   towards being more autonomy-supportive.

6412   Rather than risking making parents feel uncomfortable, sensitive topics such as

6413   parenting styles could be covered through examples of autonomy-supportive

6414   behaviour and through empowering parents. For instance, one solution to overcome

6415   the sensitivity of this topic may be to provide specific case examples for parents to

6416   learn from of how parents have increased the autonomy-support they provide to their

6417   child.

6418   *6.4.4.2.3 Include Other Sport Science Experts.* Another improvement could

6419   be to involve other sport science experts within the delivery of the session and the

6420   development of the booklet material. During a number of informal conversations, it

6421   was noted that parents had reflected, "they were unsure of the food to provide their

6422   son on a training night when they are late home or when they are coming to training

6423   straight from school. Examples of meal plans would be useful." Parents may find it

6424   useful to have other experts delivering content within or alongside the current

6425   content that focuses on nutrition to help parents plan meals and reduce the stress of

6426   coming up with meal plans. In addition, including physios may be useful to deliver

6427   session on supporting their son while injured and when returning from injury.

6428   **6.4.4.3 Future Delivery Recommendations.** Despite the changes made to

6429   the structure and delivery of the current parent support programme based on the

6430   evaluation of the initial parent support programme (chapter five), a number of

6431   challenges were still apparent.

6432   *6.4.4.3.1 The Right Time for Delivery*. The academy schedule is

6433   continuously changing depending on the weather, facilities available, opposition, and

6434   availability of physiotherapists. As such, even though it was only one session, I still

6435   found it challenging to schedule the session. I recorded in my fieldnotes:

6436   Delivery was impacted by fixtures being rearranged. Therefore, rather than

6437   two sessions being delivered to cover eight age groups the sessions ended up

6438   being split in to three sessions. I was disappointed and frustrated by this

6439   fixture cancellation, as I knew it would negatively impact on attendance.

6440   Consequently, when delivering to parents it is important to ensure that the sessions

6441   are prioritised within the schedule, other sessions or matches are not scheduled over

6442   the top, and parents value the sessions and believe they are worthwhile.

6443   *6.4.4.3.2 Engagement Makes the Sessions Enjoyable*. Discussions made the

6444   session enjoyable for parents to attend and it created a relaxed atmosphere. I

6445   recorded in my reflexive diary, "this was a really enjoyable session. I facilitate

6446   discussion and the parents talk. It is nice when they engage, and it becomes relaxed."

6447   To create this discussion, it is recommended that these relationships should be built

6448   prior to the session to gain maximum engagement and encourage parents to disclose.

6449   In addition, allocate time for parents to continue these discussions informally

6450   following the session.

6451   Although the discussions between parents were beneficial, at times during the

6452   delivery the discussions drifted away from the content or parents were using the

6453   session to air their concerns. I recorded in my reflexive diary:

6454   I believe it is valuable for parents to be able to offload and complain when

6455   needed, but not to the detriment of others' experience. If I do recognise that

6456   the complaints of parents are dominating the session, I will in future redirect

6457   the discussion back to the content and encourage them to talk to me

6458   afterwards.

6459   It is important for parents to feel listened to and be able to offload any concerns if

6460   needed and providing a parents' voice forum may help, but it for future programmes

6461   it may be beneficial to set out ground rules and manage expectations at the beginning

6462   of the session to ensure that the purpose of providing support to all those attending is

6463   achieved.

6464   **6.4.4.4 Further Cultural Changes.** During the process of embedding the

6465   cultural changes there were a number of challenges, including not all open evenings

6466   happening, not all academy staff seeing the value in creating a parents' voice forum,

6467   and parents continuing to be frustrated by the last minute changes to the schedule.

6468   Therefore, further cultural changes are recommended for the parent support

6469   programme to have an even greater impact on the experience of parents within

6470   academy football. These cultural changes include equitable support to all age groups,

6471   tracking the cultural changes over time, and providing a list of dates in advance.

6472   *6.4.4.4.1 Equitable Support for All Age Groups.* Despite my best efforts, I

6473   was unable to persuade the coaches within the foundation phase that the open

6474   evenings would be useful for parents. As a result, this created inconsistency within

6475   the support that was provided to parents and led to parents having different

6476   perceptions of the support available to them depending on the age of their child. The

6477   foundation phase coaching staff were unable to recognise that it would help parents

6478   to understand more about their son's football and as a result this would help them

6479   support their son's development. Instead the coaches saw it as an additional demand

6480   on their own time with the belief that parents would not attend. I recorded within my

6481   fieldnotes from a conversation with a foundation phase coach, "I don't see the point

6482   in doing them, so we are not doing them. If parents want to talk to me about their

6483   son's development, they can do it in the review." Therefore, further cultural changes

6484   to encourage all coaches within the academy to provide consistent and equitable

6485   support to all parents within the academy would be useful. For example, open

6486   evenings being provided to parents from all age groups.

6487   *6.4.4.4.2 Track the Benefits.* Despite the academy now delivering the

6488   parent's voice forum, there still remained some scepticism among the academy staff

6489   as to the benefit and value of having a parents' voice forum. As such it may be useful

6490   to track and highlight the organisational cultural changes and environmental benefits

6491   of continuing the parents' voice forum and the end of season feedback. Continuing

6492   with this feedback could potentially help to identify which changes are beneficial for

6493   improving the parent experience and identify the changes that have not be beneficial

6494   for parents. It was recorded in my fieldnotes from a conversation with the academy

6495   manager, "although at first I wasn't keen, it has been really useful to understand the

6496   way they are thinking."

6497   *6.4.4.4.3 Provide a List of Dates.* One of the challenges that still occurred

6498   amongst the cultural changes was that the communication still needed improving as

6499   parents felt that it was still on occasions was last minute and did not give them

6500   enough notice to make arrangements. It was identified based on my reflections and

6501   informal conversations with parents that it may be helpful if parents are provided

6502   with a list of key dates at the beginning of the academy season. For example, parents

6503   may be provided with a list of all the parents' voice forum dates, the support session

6504   dates, other parent meeting dates, open evenings, and any meetings in relation to

6505   specific trips. This was trialled at the end of the season and appeared to be useful for

6506   parents, as it may help parents when planning their schedules and organising the

6507   demands of being an academy football parent. In addition, it may help parents to

6508   arrange any childcare for siblings if required to attend the meetings by giving them

6509   as much notice as possible. One parent reflected during an informal conversation,

6510   "longer notice of tournaments would be useful to be able to book hotels and annual

6511   leave earlier."

6512   **6.5 Discussion and Reflections**

6513   This action research cycle focused on the development, implementation, and

6514   evaluation of a 90-minute support session and a 72-page 'Being a football parent'

6515   booklet, combined with a series of cultural changes. The aim of the programme was

6516   to enhance the parent experience as identified in the exploration phase of action

6517   research cycle one (chapter four) and provide an alternative programme considering

6518   the key learnings from the first parent support programme I implemented (chapter

6519   five). Specifically, based upon evaluation and reflection of the first programme, the

6520   revised programme of support was designed to provide parents with the necessary

6521   support while reducing the time commitment needed to engage with a series of face-

6522   to-face support session. Overall, evaluation of the revised programme indicated that

6523   it increased parents' knowledge, provided an opportunity for them to reflect on their

6524   involvement, and the cultural changes enhanced parents' experiences. However, I

6525   encountered a number of challenges during the delivery of this programme and

6526   consequently a number of recommendations have been made regarding how to

6527   further enhance a parent support programme.

6528   *6.5.1 Overall Benefit of the Support Session and Booklet*

6529   This session and booklet were designed based upon the parent experience and

6530   support recommendations identified in chapter four, plus the evaluation and

6531   reflections detailed within chapter five. The content remained the same as the initial

6532   support programme, as it met the specific needs of parents that were identified in

6533   chapter four. However, the delivery was condensed to one 90-minute session and a

6534   booklet. The purpose of this was to increase attendance and parental engagement.

6535   Overall, it appeared that parents benefitted from gaining more information

6536   particularly as they transitioned in to the academy because it helped them to learn

6537   about the structure, culture, and the journey ahead. This information may potentially

6538   be beneficial for parents as they transition in to the academy, due to parents' change

6539   in identity, increased responsibility, and having to adapt to the social norms of

6540   academy football (Clarke & Harwood, 2014). During the socialisation process

6541   parents adjust their behaviour, the way they think, feel, and relate to others in the

6542   youth sport setting (Dorsch et al., 2009). However, when support is not available to

6543   help them adjust they rely on their social interactions with coaches and other parents

6544   (Clarke & Harwood, 2014). Thus, providing an opportunity to gain knowledge and

6545   learn from others in an appropriate way is potentially beneficial for parents

6546   socialising and transitioning in to the academy (Clarke & Harwood, 2014; Dorsch et

6547   al., 2015a), especially when developing coping mechanisms to manage new demands

6548   (Burgess et al., 2016).

6549   In addition to gaining more information, parents also benefited from the

6550   opportunity to discuss and reflect on their experiences with other parents in the

6551   support session. As with the initial programme (chapter five) this face-to-face

6552   support provided the opportunity for the parents to share experiences, reflect as a

6553   group, and seek support, a strategy that has previously been identified as useful by

6554   sports parents (Knight & Holt, 2013b). Group support sessions or group therapy

6555   sessions have the benefit of providing individuals with the sense of belonging,

6556   normalising experiences, and gaining a sense that 'others are in the same boat'

6557   (Sochting, 2014). Given that parents can often feel unprepared, unsupported, and

6558   alone on their sport parent journey (Harwood & Knight, 2009a), this opportunity to

6559   normalise experiences can be particularly useful (Burgess et al., 2016; Lienhart et al.,

6560   2019; Tamminen & Holt, 2010). Group sessions or interactions can also be useful in

6561   enabling the identification of unhelpful or maladaptive coping mechanisms and

6562 replacing them with more helpful skills or adaptive coping strategies (Sochting,

6563 2014). Effective coping strategies are important for parents who have children

6564 involved in sport, because literature has indicated that parents can experience a range

6565 of stressors when supporting their children (Harwood et al., 2019). As such, although

6566 there are clear benefits of providing information to parents through a booklet or in

6567 remote manners (e.g., Thrower et al., 2019), as shown in both of the programmes

6568 that I delivered, there is great value in ensuring parents have access to group

6569 interaction. The one off support session appeared to be just as useful for providing

6570 social support to parents, reinforcing the benefits of providing support to parents in

6571 the same way as chapter five.

6572 ***6.5.2 Content Evaluation***

6573   Overall, similar to the evaluation of my first programme, there was a mixed

6574 response to the topics included in the support session and booklet. Specifically,

6575 although parents found some of the topics useful, for others they elicited negative

6576 emotions and resulted in conversations going off topic. In comparison to the

6577 previous parent support programme (chapter five), the content within this condensed

6578 version appeared to have a similar impact on parents as the more extended version,

6579 which is an important finding when considering future development of programmes

6580 and there continued to be similar challenges with specific topics (*Communicating*

6581 *with the team and Being a football parent*).

6582   One topic that parents found particularly useful in the current programme

6583 was the final topic of *Bumps in the road* which focused on supporting parents to

6584 adapt their involvement to align with their son's progression and development.

6585 Parents' behaviours and the support they provide to their child in sport changes over

6586 time, especially as children transition from the specialising to investment stage and

6587 coaches are more prominent in players lives while parents begin to move further in

6588 to the background (Lauer et al., 2010a). This topic was particularly useful for parents

6589 as it highlighted and prepared them for how their role and the support they provide to

6590 their children may change over time. Providing the opportunity for parents to gain an

6591 understanding and feel prepared was particularly useful because often parents felt

6592 unprepared for the challenges they faced (Knight & Holt, 2013) and this could cause

6593 them to feel anxious or worried (Burgess et al., 2016; Harwood & Knight, 2009a,

6594 2009b; Harwood et al., 2019).

6595   In contrast to the positive response to the transitions topic, the

6596   'Communicating with the team' topic elicited high levels of negative emotion as it

6597   bought to the forefront parents' frustrations with academy communication to parents.

6598   Parents spent time and energy offloading their frustrations and anger during the

6599   session impacting on the time I had to cover both this and subsequent content. The

6600   sharing of these emotions was not unexpected because poor communication with

6601   parents and coach incompetence have both previously been identified as sources of

6602   anger for parents (Omli & LaVoi, 2012). Nevertheless, such a strong reaction from

6603   parents reinforces both the importance of parents and coaches having open and

6604   honest lines of communication (Hayward et al., 2017) as well as a need for

6605   individuals hosting parent support programmes that include this topic to have

6606   appropriate strategies to manage discussions if they derail. Potentially, focusing

6607   upon addressing this issue through environmental or cultural changes, rather than

6608   attempting to address it in a group discussion with parents may be more appropriate

6609   or effective going forwards. However, cultural changes were attempted within this

6610   programme to enhance the academy's communication with parents, but clearly

6611   greater emphasis on this was needed.

6612   **6.5.3 Delivery of the Support Session**

6613   Despite having been embedded within the academy for 15 months, already

6614   implementing a series of parent support sessions, and supporting the implementation

6615   of some cultural changes regarding parents, I still encountered a number of

6616   challenges when attempting to schedule the one-off sessions for this programme. To

6617   enable the sessions to run I had to embrace adversity, be flexible in my approach,

6618   while also remaining true to my values and aims for the support programme

6619   (Chandler et al., 2020; Gandhi & Schneider, 2020). However, on reflection it may

6620   have been that I needed to consider how I was "selling the programme" to the

6621   academy. That is, the scheduling challenges may have arisen due to the perception

6622   within the academy that my role and the parent support sessions were potentially

6623   'not important' as they did not have a direct impact on performance or player

6624   development (Champ et al., 2020b). The pressurised environment of football, where

6625   there is a need to show impact through winning or the development of players, can

6626   result in academy staff prioritising areas that are perceived to have a larger impact on

6627   outcomes (Gandhi & Schneider, 2020). Therefore, greater success may have

6628   occurred if there was greater coach buy-in and if the delivery of the support

6629   programme had it been more specifically tailored to individual player development

6630   or improving performance outcomes of the team.

6631   ***6.5.4 Cultural Changes***

6632   The initial programme (chapter five) introduced some small cultural changes

6633   that began to lead to a shift in perceptions of parents and the support they could

6634   access within the academy. However there remained the potential for further cultural

6635   changes to be carried out. Unfortunately, as with the initial support programme

6636   (chapter five), I encountered challenges when implementing these cultural changes

6637   during this support programme, particularly around staff buy-in. One reason for this

6638   may be that individuals belong to many different cultures and subcultures within and

6639   outside of a sporting organisation, plus they have their own personal identity

6640   (McDoughall et al., 2020b). These personal identities include; race, ethnicity,

6641   religion, gender, family, class, education, and previous experiences (Blodgett et al.,

6642   2017). Personal identity and individual experiences are unlikely to be forgotten when

6643   creating change within a culture and will impact on individuals' engagement with

6644   cultural changes (McDoughall et al., 2020b). Consequently, different subcultures and

6645   the personal identity of academy staff potentially impacted on the engagement with

6646   the cultural changes. For instance, overall the identities of the coaches within the

6647   academy was that of a young male, who was not yet a parent themselves and as such

6648   did not appreciate the challenges of being a parent or the impact of their actions on

6649   parents.

6650   Although there were challenges implementing the cultural changes, there

6651   were some changes that were successful. For example, the academy created open

6652   evenings for youth development phase parents, feedback was sought through a

6653   parents' voice forum, and meetings were introduced to improve communication.

6654   Using an approach of creating small cultural changes rather than seeking wholesale

6655   changes appeared to have been a beneficial approach. Previously cultural changes

6656   within sporting organisations have been documented as changing from an "old"

6657   culture to an entirely new one (Henriksen, 2015). However, this alternative approach

6658   focused on small changes within the culture that take into consideration the existence

6659   of traditional artefacts (McDoughall et al., 2020b). Therefore, despite the challenges

6660   that existed within the academy when creating these changes, accepting that

6661   traditional artefacts will always remain appeared to be the most appropriate approach

6662   to enhance the parent experience.

6663 ### *6.5.5 Suggestions and Reflections for Improvements*

6664   Despite the benefits, parents' attendance and engagement with the

6665 programme remained low, even though the programme was substantially slimmed

6666 down compared to the earlier intervention. Attendance has been found to be a

6667 common challenge when delivering parent support programmes (Thrower et al.,

6668 2017; Vincent & Christensen, 2015). Time remains a key barrier to parents engaging

6669 in support (Dorsch et al., 2019). One of the suggestions to facilitate parents' ability

6670 to engage in support is to create an electronic copy of the booklet, similar to the

6671 format of the online programme by Thrower et al. (2019). However, the face-to-face

6672 support sessions remained enjoyable and a beneficial part of the delivery for parents.

6673 As a consequence, it is recommended that future parent support programmes could

6674 be provided online through an electronic format, but would also benefit from a

6675 complementary face-to-face element.

6676   Despite there being a number of positive cultural changes, the academy

6677 would benefit from further cultural changes to enhance the parent experience and

6678 ensure that even parents who are not attending specific support sessions may still

6679 experience increased support. These include equitable support provided to all age

6680 groups, tracking the benefits, and providing a list of dates to parents at the beginning

6681 of the season. As previously highlighted cultural changes are a lengthy and slow

6682 process, so it may take time for individuals to adjust to the changes (Cruickshank &

6683 Collins, 2012; Henriksen, 2015). Consequently, it may be beneficial to evaluate the

6684 potential impact of the cultural changes a year or two years after the completion of

6685 the programme, in a similar manner to Henriksen (2015). The continuation of the

6686 end of season feedback and the parents' voice forum may help to track progress and

6687 explore whether this had an impact on the parent experience. Tracking the cultural

6688 changes may highlight the extent to which the changes have been embedded within

6689 the environment, whether the culture has reverted back to before to the programme,

6690 and whether any further changes have occurred since the programme was completed.

6691 This would highlight the true extent of whether the cultural changes were embraced

6692 and embedded in the environment, plus the impact on parent experience within youth

6693 academy football.

6694 ### *6.5.6 Concluding Reflections*

6695   The purpose of this action research cycle was to build upon the previous

6696 action research cycle (chapter five), by implementing a parent support programme

6697   containing a 90-minute support session, booklet, and a series of cultural changes.

6698   From my reflections and the collaborative reflections with parents, coaches, and

6699   support staff it appeared that the session, booklet, and cultural changes were

6700   beneficial for enhancing parents' experiences within academy football. The session

6701   and booklet provided parents with the opportunity to enhance their knowledge and

6702   gain support from the other parents. The parents also benefited from a number of the

6703   changes that were implemented within the academy culture, even when they were

6704   unable to attend the support session. However, I experienced a number of challenges

6705   during the delivery of the support programme, including the booklet becoming

6706   quickly outdated, attendance numbers remained low even when taking in to

6707   consideration the learnings from chapter five, and not all the academy staff bought in

6708   to the cultural changes.

6709   Overall, I was pleased that the condensed session and booklet had been able

6710   to have an impact on parents, beyond the initial action research cycle (chapter five)

6711   and there continued to be changes within the culture. Conversely, I remained

6712   disappointed and frustrated with the lack of attendance by parents, while also

6713   appreciating the demands and challenges they experienced to attend. In addition, I

6714   felt encouraged from the changes that had occurred within this action research cycle

6715   that given further time more cultural changes within the academy environment could

6716   be made to further enhance the experience for parents. As such, for future action

6717   research cycles it may be beneficial to provide parents with an electronic copy of the

6718   booklet as well as the face-to-face session, focus the support on parents transitioning

6719   in to the academy, and continue to track the cultural changes over a longer period.

6720   **Chapter Seven : General Discussion: Final Reflections and Future Directions**

6721   **7.1 Introduction**

6722   There were two overall purposes of this thesis; firstly to understand the

6723   experiences of parents within youth academy football and identify the support that

6724   may be beneficial, and; secondly, to develop, implement, and evaluate two support

6725   programmes that were delivered to parents of youth academy footballers. To address

6726   these, two action research cycles were conducted to understand the youth football

6727   parent journey, develop recommendations regarding parental support, and evaluate

6728   two parent support programmes. This chapter details the final stages of the action

6729   research cycles, focused on my final reflections of the programmes and suggestions

6730   for future directions for supporting parents of academy footballers. Moreover,

6731   drawing on reflections regarding my own personal development, I provide a number

6732   of suggestions for future researcher-practitioners aiming to work in this area as well

6733   as the overall training and development of practitioners. Finally, this chapter

6734   concludes by highlighting the main strengths and limitations of the thesis and

6735   suggestions for future research.

6736   **7.2 Learning from the Action Research Cycles**

6737   Overall, from the action research cycles, I have learnt that understanding and

6738   appreciating the journey and experience of parents over time is important when

6739   seeking to provide them with support. The findings within the exploration and

6740   reflection phases (chapter four) expanded upon our previous understanding of the

6741   parent experience, including an expanded understanding of the parent experience by

6742   Harwood and Knight (2015). One of the first areas that was added to this work was

6743   the understanding of the transitions that parents have to make when supporting their

6744   son. It was highlighted that parents experience substantial and sustained changes and

6745   transitions beyond those experienced when their child enters a football academy

6746   (e.g., Clarke & Harwood, 2014). As such, the findings within the exploration and

6747   reflection phases (chapter four) expanded upon postulate six (Harwood & Knight,

6748   2015), as it identified the specific journey that parents go on within academy football

6749   and how this changes over time. Given that parents' experiences of academy football

6750   are not static, parents will gain the greatest benefits from support if it matches both

6751   their and their child's developmental stage (Knight & Holt, 2013b; Thrower et al.,

6752   2016). Therefore, for future researchers and practitioners seeking to work with

6753   parents ensuring a full understanding of the parent experience over time will be

6754   important and beneficial.

6755   Moreover, across these changes and transitions, parents have a range of

6756   positive and negative experiences and feelings, which extend beyond the stressors

6757   that have previously been identified (Harwood et al., 2010). Consequently, the

6758   findings within this thesis advanced postulate five of Harwood and Knight (2015) by

6759   highlighting the demands that parents' experience across the whole journey of being

6760   a football parent and how a support programme can help parents to manage these

6761   demands. Linked to this, and extending insights into postulate three, it was found

6762   that parents had developed some coping strategies for managing their emotions

6763   during matches through trial and error. However, often parents were unsure whether

6764   this was the most appropriate response as the only guidance they have had

6765   previously was a code of conduct and many had not asked what support their son

6766   would like. As such the findings within this thesis demonstrated the importance of

6767   discussing parents' emotions and encouraging them get to know the support their son

6768   would like during a match.

6769   Finally, this thesis also increased our understanding regarding both postulates

6770   one and four (Harwood & Knight, 2015). With regards to postulate four it was found

6771   that although parents wanted to develop a relationship with their son's coach this

6772   was not always easy and there were many challenges experienced when

6773   communicating with the coach. Similarly, parents were encouraged to consider the

6774   social support they were currently providing to their son and reflected that this was

6775   often developed through trial and error. This expanded upon Harwood and Knight's

6776   (2015) first postulate, as it shed light on how important support sessions can to

6777   ensure that children receive the best support from their parents.

6778   Moreover, the findings articulate how important it is to expand parent

6779   support beyond just education sessions, which place all the emphasis and

6780   requirement for change on parents themselves, without acknowledging why or how

6781   the environment in which they are functioning impacts on their involvement (Knight,

6782   2019). As detailed in chapter four, and consistent with an ever growing body of

6783   literature (Knight & Newport, 2018, 2020), there are often a number of challenges

6784   within the culture of sport (in this case the specific academy) that negatively impact

6785   on parents' experiences and subsequently the ways in which they are involved in

6786   their child's sporting lives. With this in mind, practitioners and researchers seeking

6787   to extend the influence of their work with parents should be mindful of the

6788   environment in which parents are situated and, if feasible, seek to work with clubs or

6789   organisations to action changes that may lead to a more parent supportive

6790   environment. Without such an approach (discussed in more detail below) the

6791   potential impact of any support for parents is likely to be limited, not least by

6792   parents' ability or interest to attend and engage with sessions.

6793   Acknowledging these two key considerations, my first attempt to implement

6794   an action based on the observations and reflections from within the academy

6795   comprised a parent support programme consisting of six individual sessions for

6796   parents combined with a series of targeted cultural changes (chapter five). This

6797   initial programme had a number of successes but also a range of challenges and

6798   issues. Consequently, in an attempt to enhance the efficacy of the programme, a

6799   second action research cycle comprising the delivery of one parent support session

6800   and a booklet along with further cultural changes, was implemented (chapter six).

6801   Building on the aforementioned considerations, and reflecting on these two

6802   programmes, there are a number of consistent findings that should be considered

6803   when seeking to support parents in the future.

6804   First, delivering support to parents within youth academy football is

6805   challenging and complex. Parents attendance at sessions was low in both of the

6806   interventions, despite relationships being built, the programme being embedded

6807   within an academy set up, and adaptations being made to make it as accessible and

6808   convenient as possible. This low attendance is potentially the result of parents

6809   experiencing too many demands within their role as an academy football parent

6810   (Harwood et al., 2010) combined with the demands of everyday family life or work

6811   commitments (Harwood et al., 2019). Consequently, working with parents from the

6812   outset, to create a programme that works for them in terms of mode of delivery, day

6813   of delivery, timings etc. is required to try and maximise attendance.

6814   Moreover, further consideration of appropriate theories, such as those related

6815   to behaviour change and enhancing intrinsic motivation may be beneficial to

6816   increase attendance. For instance, as proposed within self-determination theory

6817   (Ryan & Deci, 2017), by providing the opportunity for parents to satisfy their basic

6818   psychological needs (competence, relatedness, and autonomy) during sessions they

6819   may perceive their action to attend sessions as more internalised and self-determined.

6820   As such their intrinsic motivation to attend the support sessions may increase and

6821   subsequently overall parent attendance increases. There are a number of means

6822   through which the parents' basic needs could be met:

6823   • Competence could be increased by creating more opportunity for parents to

6824   feel as though they are successful as a parent and doing well. This

6825   suggestion supports the findings that parents found it beneficial to be able to

6826   reflect on their knowledge during action research cycle two (chapter six), as

6827   it provided them with confidence and reassurance. Parents' perceived

6828   competence could be further enhanced by getting the players to highlight all

6829   the things their parents do well or more positively framing sessions and the

6830   cultural changes.

6831   • Autonomy could be created by parents being more involved in the

6832   development of the parent support programme. It was found during action

6833   research cycle one that the framing of the sessions may have put parents off

6834   from attending. Therefore, if parents are provided with more autonomy and

6835   opportunity to be involved in the development of the support programme

6836   then engagement and attendance may increase. For instance, beyond the

6837   collaborative reflections, parents could be more involved in the design and

6838   development through a working group. They may meet on a monthly basis

6839   to provide input on the development process and also bring their own

6840   expertise to the support sessions.

6841   • From the evaluation of the programme, within action research cycles one

6842   and two (chapters five and six) it was identified that parents enjoyed being

6843   able to share experiences and build stronger relationships with other

6844   parents. Therefore, more opportunity for parents to experience relatedness

6845   could be created by facilitating social opportunities for parents or further

6846   encouragement to share experiences.

6847   A further theory for consideration when attempting to increase parent

6848   attendance is the transtheoretical model of change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983).

6849   In a similar manner to the suggestions provided for targeting participants of smoking

6850   cessation programmes, parents could be grouped based on the stage of change in

6851   which they are located. The parents who are within the contemplation stage of

6852   attending the support sessions, those who may be considering attending but have not

6853   yet attended, could be provided with information about the support sessions and

6854 details of the benefits to raise their consciousness of the support sessions. This

6855 supports the recommendation that was made in action research cycle two (chapter

6856 six) that parent attendance may increase through greater coach buy-in as this would

6857 raise the profile and raise parents' consciousness of the support sessions. It should

6858 also be recognised that attendance or action, according to the transtheoretical model

6859 of change, does not have to mean physical attendance at a support session, as some

6860 parents may prefer to gain support through self-help booklets (Prochaska &

6861 DiClemente, 1983). Further emphasising that there cannot be a "one size fits all

6862 approach" to parent support (Dorsch et al., 2019, p20) Thus, there may be a further

6863 need to enhance the effectiveness of the parent support booklet and as suggested

6864 within the recommendations in action research cycle two (chapter six) the booklet

6865 could be distributed electronically to ensure that it reaches all those parents who

6866 wish to gain support through a self-help method.

6867   Given the low rates of attendance at support sessions, considering other

6868 avenues, such as cultural changes, through which to improve the support parents

6869 receive and subsequently stimulate change in their involvement is particularly

6870 important. However, despite some successful cultural changes within the two

6871 interventions I developed, gaining buy-in from the coaching and support staff was

6872 challenging and a lengthy process. Despite the introduction of the EPPP within

6873 academy football, many of the traditional masculine outcome focused cultural

6874 artefacts remain within academy football (Champ et al., 2020a, 2020b; Mills et al.,

6875 2014a, 2014b). These cultural artefacts can negatively impact on the ability to create

6876 cultural changes and gain full buy-in from all academy staff. As such, to move this

6877 work forwards, ensuring practitioners are embedded within environments for

6878 extended periods of time is necessary. Moreover, gaining support for initiatives from

6879 the key influencers (e.g., managers, head of coaching etc.) is needed to help to

6880 enforce cultural changes.

6881   Second, in both programmes, parents appeared to benefit from the support

6882 sessions being provided face-to-face. Parents enjoyed being able to share their

6883 experiences, learn from other parents, reflect as a group, and gain support from other

6884 parents, which supported the findings of other sessions delivered to parents (Thrower

6885 et al., 2017; Vincent & Christensen, 2015). This support gained from engaging

6886 directly with other parents helped parents to normalise their experiences and develop

6887 potentially more effective coping mechanisms, which has previously been identified

6888   as useful for parents given the demands experienced by parents within youth sport

6889   (Burgess et al., 2016; Lienhart et al., 2019). Although in the first action research

6890   cycle, the six support sessions provided multiple opportunities for parents to gain

6891   support from other parents, the one off support session within the second action

6892   research cycle seemed just as beneficial for parents in facilitating group reflections

6893   and support. Therefore, although parents enjoy engaging with each other and gaining

6894   support from one another, when their time is limited a one-off support session may

6895   be just as useful for parents. Importantly, even if the in-person contact reduces down

6896   to just one session, it should not be removed entirely because it appeared to be an

6897   important benefit of the support sessions for parents and as previously found it is not

6898   always possible to replicate this in an online environment (Thrower et al., 2019).

6899   When delivering in-person sessions, however, it was apparent that as a

6900   programme facilitator, there is a need to have appropriate strategies to ensure that

6901   parents stayed somewhat on topic and that personal issues or complaints did not

6902   derail or detract from conversation. Such management of difficult or emotional

6903   conversations is of particular importance because a perception of parents just using

6904   the sessions to complain may actually be a barrier to other parents attending. For

6905   instance, parents may not wish to attend or may be put off from attending future

6906   sessions if the discussions within the group are not managed appropriately or one

6907   parent appears to 'take over' the session with their concern. Emphasising the

6908   challenge of managing group dynamics that practitioners face when delivering parent

6909   support sessions (Vincent & Christensen, 2015), which is in a similar way to group

6910   therapy sessions (e.g., Wendt & Gone, 2018).

6911   One suggestion that has been made to help manage the group dynamics

6912   within group therapy sessions is for the practitioner to create group-based decision-

6913   making guidelines to help practitioners know how far to allow discussions to deviate,

6914   while allowing flexibility within the discussion (Wendt & Gone, 2018). Therefore,

6915   given this suggestion it may be useful prior to future delivery creating group-based

6916   decision-making guidelines to facilitate meaningful discussions within the sessions.

6917   However, within these guidelines practitioners should be flexible as there may be

6918   times when they need to adapt sessions to the challenges and frustrations

6919   experienced by parents. In addition, it may be useful to have a process to ensure that

6920   parents' personal issues and complaints are still voiced and listened to by the

6921   academy, as otherwise this may cause further frustration. For example, if a parent

6922 has a particular complaint they wish to raise they could be directed towards a one-to-

6923 one meeting after the session to ensure the complaint is heard without derailing the

6924 session. These complaints could then be used to guide future sessions and potentially

6925 future cultural changes.

6926   Third, the sessions and booklet within the two parent support programmes

6927 covered the same six topics based upon Harwood and Knight's (2015) six postulates

6928 of sport parenting expertise. However, parents' engagement with these six topics

6929 varied based on the specific content, parents' emotional response to the information,

6930 and how confident I felt about being able to deliver the topic. The topics that parents

6931 successfully/best engaged with were those that initiated a positive emotional

6932 response, potentially due to an association with positive memories, a general feeling

6933 of enjoyment, or providing clear ideas to help them prepare for the future. In turn,

6934 the positive emotional response that was elicited by these topics appeared to enhance

6935 learning, likely due to an increased interest and excitement for the topics and

6936 subsequently motivation to learn (Rowe et al., 2015). For instance, the '*Tackling the*

6937 *football parenting game*' was found to be useful for parents to consider their coping

6938 mechanisms for managing the demands, '*The ups and downs of matches*' reminded

6939 them of how much parents enjoyed watching their son play football, and '*Bumps in*

6940 *the Road*' was a useful session for parents as they were able to hear about and plan

6941 for the journey ahead of them. Given these findings, when looking to create

6942 programmes in the future it may be useful for parent support sessions to focus on

6943 topics that stimulate positive emotions or are perceived to be practically useful for

6944 the journey ahead of them.

6945   In contrast the '*Communicating with the team*' topic was not as well received

6946 or engaged with by parents within both support programmes. The '*Communicating*

6947 *with the team*' topic appeared to generate negative emotions among the parents and

6948 subsequently they did not engage with the topic. Although progress was being made

6949 to enhance the communication between the academy and parents, this topic elicited

6950 feelings of anger and frustration due to the communication not being as good as

6951 parents would have liked. Previous evidence has suggested that creating feelings of

6952 anger within a learning environment can enhance learning (Rowe & Fitness, 2018).

6953 However, in this situation, this did not appear to be the case. Rather, the anger and

6954 frustration was a distraction away from the learning outcomes of the topic and

6955 parents began simply offloading and sharing their frustrations. Consequently, it may

6956   be more useful for academies or youth sports clubs/organisations to target changes in

6957   communication directly, rather than it being considered or addressed in sessions with

6958   parents.

6959   Finally, one of the limitations of delivering a series of six support sessions

6960   within action research cycle one (chapter five) was the commitment required and

6961   time demands it placed on parents. During the delivery of the six sessions,

6962   attendance began to tail off as sessions progressed and it got closer to the Christmas

6963   festive period. However, as a consequence of wanting to reduce the time demands

6964   placed on parents, the delivery was condensed to one session and a booklet of

6965   information for action research cycle two (chapter six). It was found that the booklet

6966   provided parents with information and an opportunity to reflect. Parents reported

6967   being able to enhance their knowledge, get the contact details, and reflect on their

6968   parenting through the activities within the booklet. Therefore, in support of previous

6969   research (Dorsch et al., 2017), when time is limited for parents it can be beneficial

6970   for parents to be provided with a condensed support session and a booklet. The

6971   booklet provided the opportunity for parents to be able to take the information and

6972   content away with them. It was hoped that through developing the booklet it would

6973   also enable those who had not been able to attend the sessions to gain access to the

6974   content. As such creating take home resources for parents can be important to

6975   reinforce messages, plus access those parents who may otherwise not engage.

6976   **7.3 Suggestions for Future Parent Programmes**

6977   Based on the reflections from the two action research cycles, I have a number

6978   of suggestions for future parent programmes. First, I believe it is important that

6979   parent support programmes are provided at the start of the journey into the academy

6980   (either when players join at under-9 or later on if they join through a trial process).

6981   This was identified as a particularly pertinent time by the parents in action research

6982   cycle two (chapter six) and also acknowledges the reflections from parents who had

6983   been in the academy for a few years and felt that some of the information provided

6984   would be more useful at the start before the journey began. For instance, parents

6985   reported in chapter six that although the information and knowledge gained from the

6986   session and booklet was useful, it would potentially be more useful for parents as

6987   they entered the academy. Additionally, the transition for parents from grassroots

6988   clubs in to an academy is challenging and requires a process of adjustment (Clarke &

6989   Harwood, 2014), as such support for this transition and guidance regarding what is

6990   coming next is particularly important.

6991   I would recommend that the support sessions are delivered by a sport

6992   psychologist or sport scientist with an appreciation and understanding of the parent

6993   experience. It has been recommended that sessions are delivered by a sport

6994   psychologist or sport scientist who has the skills and knowledge to be able to deliver

6995   the content, facilitate discussion, and reflection appropriately. Although it is

6996   recommended that coaches and support staff play an active role in supporting

6997   parents, including running parent open evenings and providing meetings, in order to

6998   cover the required the content this would be better suited to being delivered by a

6999   sport psychologist or sport scientist. The support sessions should be focused on

7000   providing information and creating an environment that encourages parents to

7001   support each other. These sessions should be delivered in a discussion-based format

7002   that encourages reflection, is family-friendly, and includes refreshments. This

7003   discussion-based format creates a welcoming and inviting environment for parents to

7004   attend, plus will go some way to recognising and appreciating the demands and

7005   commitment placed on parents.

7006   The topics covered within the sessions should be directed towards helping

7007   parents to manage their demands, build effective relationships with coaches, detail

7008   how to be more autonomy-supportive, help parents to understand and meet their

7009   son's before, during, and after match needs, be aware of and learn to manage their

7010   emotions during a match, and adapt their support to their son's development. Parents

7011   found these topics useful and beneficial, however the content delivered within the

7012   topics should be adapted appropriately to the development of their children and the

7013   position of parents along the football parent journey.

7014   Given, the time challenges associated with the longer programme, but also

7015   the challenges of condensing all the material into one session that was encountered

7016   in the second programme (chapter six), a support programme of three sessions may

7017   be most useful. Within the findings it was shown that parents enjoy sharing their

7018   experiences, reflecting as a group, and engaging in discussion. However, a series of

7019   six sessions was found to be too long for parents, whereas one session was

7020   challenging for me as a facilitator, particularly if the discussions went off topic.

7021   Consequently, a series of three sessions where two topics per session could be

7022   covered may be most useful/effective. This would enable parents to have in-depth

7023 discussion and get to know other parents, something that was highly valued in my

7024 programmes without requiring an extensive commitment from parents. Combining

7025 these three sessions with a booklet, and supporting parents through cultural changes

7026 would further enhance the benefits of the programme.

7027   Given the limited numbers of parents who attended sessions (particularly

7028 those with older players in the academy) and the often cited timing issues, combined

7029 with a recognition that parents are individuals with unique challenges and

7030 experiences, it may be useful to supplement formal workshops with flexible drop-in

7031 sessions or short "catch-up" opportunities. These would help parents of older boys at

7032 the academy gain any information or support that may be useful to manage the

7033 developmental changes that will occur as they progress, while also providing parents

7034 with an opportunity to ask personal or specific questions that they did not feel able or

7035 comfortable asking in front of other parents. In addition, this more informal approach

7036 may be useful as demands on parents' time increase over the course of their child's

7037 football participation.

7038   Alternatively, given the desire for, and benefits associated with, in-person

7039 discussions but recognising the challenges some parents encountered with attending

7040 sessions, it may be worth evaluating the impact of a blended learning approach,

7041 where in person support is combined with online information and activities. These

7042 online activities could support the discussions that occurred in person, or provide

7043 information for those who were unable to attend. The benefit of an online platform

7044 over the printed booklets, that were provided to parents within my intervention, is

7045 that the content can be easily edited and updated, ensuring it remains accurate.

7046 Moreover, using an online platform, especially if it can be accessed on a phone or

7047 tablet, means that the information is always available to parents and can be easily

7048 considered when parents have a few minutes to spare as they are waiting to pick-up

7049 their son or "killing time" during training sessions. Previous online parent education

7050 programmes have been trialled and appear effective (Tamminen et al., 2020;

7051 Thrower et al., 2019), but these programmes lacked the opportunity for parents to

7052 share experiences and gain further support in-person. Additionally, to my

7053 knowledge, there has been no consideration of online programmes through an app.

7054   I would recommend that alongside the delivery of support sessions, clubs,

7055 academies, and organisations create a parent supportive culture by communicating

7056 effectively with parents and listening to their feedback. When creating the parent

7057   supportive culture, it is recommended that this is done using a multi-layer approach

7058   and considering Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979). For instance,

7059   the support sessions should be delivered in consideration of their influence on the

7060   players' microsystem, which is the parents directly through the support they gain

7061   from attending the sessions. Consideration should also be given to the cultural

7062   changes and how these influence the relationship between parents and coaches

7063   within the mesosystem. For example, the open evenings and increased number of

7064   meetings potentially positively influenced the relationships and communication

7065   between parents and coaches. Improving the relationship between parents and

7066   coaches can occur by involving parents in the development of their children and

7067   implemented through performance review meetings that are meaningful for parents,

7068   allowing parents to attend training sessions, and informing parents of the team

7069   learning outcomes. The support sessions also influenced the relationships that

7070   parents had with other academy parents within the exosystem. The booklet within

7071   action research cycle two was designed to provide information and reflective tasks

7072   and influence the exosystem. Finally, the cultural changes within the academy

7073   environment and those with the wider academy staff were designed to influence the

7074   macrosystem. For example, the introduction of a parents' voice forum, avoiding last

7075   minute communication, and providing schedules in advance were cultural changes

7076   within the macrosystem designed to create a more parent supportive culture. I would

7077   also recommend that clubs/academies welcome parents in to the environment by

7078   opening up spaces for parents and providing them with an opportunity to get

7079   refreshments. All of these recommendations will help parents to manage the

7080   demands of being an academy football parent, reduce the frustration that parents

7081   experience from poor or last minute communication, maximise their experience, and

7082   support them to provide optimal support to their son.

7083   When delivering this complete programme of support (i.e., one that includes

7084   support sessions as well as targeting environmental/cultural changes) there are some

7085   important considerations for clubs/academies. Specifically, ensuring parents are

7086   being provided with equitable support across all age groups is necessary because, as

7087   detailed within chapter six, parents are likely to be very unhappy if they do not feel

7088   they are all being supported and respected in the same ways. Moreover, if parents are

7089   encouraged to provide feedback (i.e. through surveys or forums), it is important that

7090   they receive some acknowledgement of their comments and an indication of what

7091   changes have been made as a result or, if no changes have been made, and why this

7092   is the case. Additionally, if clubs/academies or organisations provide parents with a

7093   list of dates for matches, tours, and tournaments early in the season consideration of

7094   the likelihood of changes needing to be made must be considered. This is particularly

7095   important because changes can be particularly frustrating and challenging for parents

7096   to deal with. A potential solution is to provide information in quarterly chunks,

7097   which will hopefully provide sufficient detail for planning without requiring too

7098   much change. Finally, while meetings and regular communication are very important

7099   for parents, requiring travel for meetings which are short (i.e., review meetings of 15

7100   minutes) can be an unnecessary burden. Thus, holding such meetings online would

7101   minimise the need for parents to travel while still ensuring parents had a chance to

7102   access the necessary information.

7103   Finally, and importantly, although the idea of cultural changes or a

7104   programme of support for parents may seem daunting or onerous this is not the case.

7105   In fact, academies/clubs and organisations can see great benefit from focusing on

7106   relatively simple changes that produce a more welcoming environment for parents.

7107   For instance, a small space where parents can purchase refreshments and work in a

7108   comfortable environment may alleviate demands and stressors parents experience

7109   and make them feel like they want to spend time in the space. Knowing parents'

7110   names, saying "hi" when they arrive, and asking how they are doing can also create a

7111   more friendly and open environment. Similarly, thanking parents for their

7112   commitment and asking for their thoughts on their son's development is an easy way

7113   of showing respect. Such small changes do not require considerable time or effort,

7114   but may overcome a lot of the challenges and frustrations that parents experience and

7115   subsequently lead to more positive parent-coach and parent-player interactions.

7116   It is also important to recognise that some academy coaches and support staff

7117   may not wish to support parents or create a more parent supportive culture despite

7118   the evidence. Therefore, for all academy staff to recognise the value of supporting

7119   parents and implement the cultural changes it may take a shift in culture within the

7120   macrosystem that is guided by the Premier League, English Football League,

7121   Football Association, and the Football Association of Wales. For example, if the

7122   Premier League and English Football League required all category one to four

7123   academies to welcome and value parents through open evenings this may begin to

7124   change the culture within all football academies.

7125   **7.4. Reflections on my Personal Development as a Practitioner-researcher**

7126   Throughout my PhD journey I have learnt a lot as a practitioner-researcher,

7127   in particular around three key areas: overcoming my initial nerves regarding

7128   delivering to parents (while not being a parent); balancing being an 'insider' and

7129   'outsider' within the academy, and; managing frustrations arising from a lack of

7130   attendance at sessions. Based on these reflections, I have a number of suggestions

7131   regarding how practitioners could further enhance their practice and development.

7132   *7.4.1 Managing Nerves*

7133   I began my journey of developing a parent support programme nervous and

7134   apprehensive about not being a parenting expert or a parent myself. I was concerned

7135   about what I was going to teach parents and whether anything I was going to say to

7136   them would be useful. After a discussion with my PhD supervisors, I had made a

7137   plan to go in to the first session simply with the intention of exploring the demands

7138   and stressors they were experiencing. Although this seemed simple enough, during

7139   this first session I was blown away and overwhelmed by the volume of stressors

7140   discussed, the frustration that parents were experiencing, and the emotion within the

7141   room. After reflecting on this first meeting with each of the age groups, it

7142   highlighted to me just how much the parents needed and wanted support. At this

7143   point I realised that I needed to stop worrying about being a parenting expert and the

7144   knowledge I was going to provide to parents, and instead focus on trying to

7145   understand their experience and identify how this could be improved. Parents need

7146   support and a helping hand, not educating on how to raise their child.

7147   Based on this experience, I would encourage future practitioners to reflect on

7148   what they are hoping to share with parents ahead of working with them and ensure

7149   they are focused on supporting rather than educating parents. By adopting such an

7150   approach, the practitioner delivering does not need to be a "parenting expert" or even

7151   a parent themselves. In fact, since becoming a parent myself and having bought into

7152   marketing aimed at parents by so called 'parenting experts', I am increasingly

7153   concerned about the idea that there can be experts in something so individual and

7154   complex as parenting. In my experience, "parenting experts" – either within or

7155   beyond sport settings – are often seeking to capitalise on the anxieties of new and

7156   naïve parents, providing unrealistic guidance and unhelpful education. As such,

7157   rather than seeking to demonstrate expertise, practitioners need to be empathetic and

7158   willing to listen to parents' experiences, be able to provide support, and share

7159 information to develop their skills. Being honest and open about the skills and

7160 knowledge that you do have as a practitioner will likely lead to parents valuing the

7161 time you are giving them, and the opportunity for them to share their concerns and

7162 challenges.

7163 *7.4.2 Balancing My Position as an Insider/outsider*

7164   Throughout my time within the academy, I have juggled a constant balance

7165 of being an 'insider', but also an 'outsider' and how this changed as my PhD journey

7166 progressed. I first joined the academy as an outsider of academy football and as a

7167 parent. Football was a relatively new sport to me as a researcher and practitioner. I

7168 had previously worked in many different sports and watched some football, but was

7169 certainly not familiar with the football language and culture. My only personal

7170 experience with football academies was my cousin's experience of being a part of

7171 two category one academies, until being released at 16. To help me become more of

7172 an insider within the academy I spent the first year developing my understanding of

7173 the culture within the academy, the parent experience, and increasing my knowledge

7174 of football.

7175   This initial position as an outsider gave me the chance to get to know the

7176 environment and experiences of being a parent without any preconceived ideas or

7177 thoughts about the academy process or parenting in general. This was beneficial

7178 because I could question academy staff to aid my understanding, while also

7179 challenging their perspectives. Being able to inadvertently challenge perspectives

7180 was, in my opinion, beneficial in helping to change the culture. However, being

7181 viewed by academy staff as an outsider in general, potentially negatively impacted

7182 on their perceptions of my knowledge and the value of the work that I was doing. On

7183 reflection, I believe this underpinned some of the scheduling challenges I

7184 experienced and reluctance to buy-in to some of the cultural changes.

7185   For understanding the parent experience within the exploration phase

7186 (chapter four) being an outsider within the academy and as a football parent helped

7187 me as parents were not threatened by me and felt comfortable talking to me at length.

7188 As I progressed with my thesis, I still felt very much an outsider due to my lack of

7189 parenting or football experience. However, once I began delivering the support

7190 programmes it became clear from conversations that, in the parents' minds, I was a

7191 member of academy staff (and thus an academy "insider"). I wore academy kit and

7192 looked like a member of the academy, and thus they perceived that I had some

7193   influence and input within the academy and potentially their son's future. Despite

7194   my academy-related appearance, particularly during the initial year or so in the

7195   academy, I had very little influence or input on academy decisions and throughout

7196   my time at the academy I was never in a position to influence a child's progress.

7197   Concerned that parents viewing me as an insider might influence what they shared, I

7198   worked hard to try and demonstrate that I was outside the academy system and that

7199   parents could share their emotions and frustrations. However, there was some benefit

7200   to being viewed as an insider, not least because parents came to talk to me about the

7201   academy as they thought I had some influence.

7202   Given the challenges I encountered, I would suggest to future practitioners

7203   that you need to be aware of your positionality and insider/outsider role and the

7204   potential implications this has for your work, and then embrace it. There will be no

7205   perfect position, as there will be advantages and disadvantages to being more or less

7206   of an insider or an outsider. Recognise the advantages and disadvantages of your

7207   position. The position you hold at the start of working as a practitioner-researcher

7208   will undoubtedly change as you progress on your journey and your experiences

7209   change. Feel confident in your position, recognise when it is changing, and use any

7210   questions or challenges to help you reflect on your influence and impact.

7211   ***7.4.3 Parental Attendance Frustrations***

7212   Similar to other researchers/practitioners who have worked with and

7213   provided support to parents, attendance at sessions was a major challenge throughout

7214   my interventions. The lack of attendance from parents was something I found

7215   incredibly frustrating and challenging at times, both as a practitioner because I really

7216   wanted to help the parents and as a researcher because I needed parents to attend the

7217   sessions to produce rigorous and valuable findings. Initially, when parents did not

7218   attend the sessions, I felt maybe the message was not communicated or something

7219   else was going on on that day. However, as I tried different things to increase

7220   attendance such as changing the times, dates, messages sent out, frequency of the

7221   messages, and increasing the informal advertising of the sessions and saw no change

7222   in numbers, I began to feel more and more frustrated with the lack of attendance and

7223   started to question my own competency as a practitioner. Specifically, as I am at the

7224   early stages of my practitioner career, I often find judging my impact and evaluating

7225   my work to be challenging, but it is quite obvious that if parents do not attend

7226   sessions there is no opportunity to have any impact at all.

7227   As I progressed and built stronger relationships with parents and academy

7228   staff, I started to accept that it was not me that was at fault, nor the quality of what I

7229   was delivering that was preventing parents from attending. Rather, parent attendance

7230   was low because parents were trying to manage their other demands and did not have

7231   time or availability to attend. Many of the parents indicated that they wanted to

7232   attend, but there were always other priorities that they needed to attend to. As such

7233   by the end of my three years as a PhD practitioner-researcher, I became much more

7234   comfortable accepting attendance numbers for what they were. Rather than focusing

7235   on who I was not helping, I targeted my attention on whoever did attend, knowing I

7236   may help them and that the broader cultural changes may help others.

7237   Based on my reflections, my suggestion for other practitioners is that while I

7238   understand the desire to want all parents to attend your sessions, it is not practical for

7239   them to do so. Try being as flexible as possible when delivering the sessions and

7240   advertise this to parents, allow them to attend at suitable times for them, which may

7241   even include running drop-in sessions rather than more structured sessions. In

7242   addition, consider how you can get your messages across to parents when they are at

7243   the academy. For instance, if they are waiting for a match to kick-off can you bring

7244   them together to discuss a key area or can you distribute resources to them

7245   electronically. Finally, do not worry about whether every parent has attended your

7246   sessions. It will not be possible to reach everyone. Recognise the impact you have

7247   made on the parents who have attended and consider how you can be creative to

7248   implement support through other avenues that does not require face-to-face

7249   attendance.

7250   *7.4.4 Suggestions for Practitioner-researcher Development and Training*

7251   Based on the findings of my research, as well as my reflections as a

7252   practitioner-researcher, I believe additional support or training may be useful for

7253   practitioners/practitioner-researchers. Specifically, I believe it would be beneficial

7254   for sport psychologists and practitioner-researchers to be required to complete

7255   training/study explicitly focused upon understanding and appreciating the important

7256   role of parents within the development of talented youth athletes, as well as how to

7257   work with parents. In my experience, sport psychology support that is provided

7258   within youth sport settings is often focused solely around the child-athlete, without

7259   considering how it may be beneficial to provide parents with support alongside (e.g.,

7260   Foster et al., 2016). This may be due to a lack of awareness of the potential benefits

7261   of working with parents, a lack of experience in this area, or a lack of confidence in

7262   doing such work. Whatever the reason, if we are to truly maximise the influence of

7263   sport psychologists within youth sport, there is a need for trainee and experienced

7264   sport psychologists to fully appreciate the broad ranging influence of parents within

7265   youth sport, and the impact parents' own experiences (both positive and negative)

7266   may have on their involvement in their child's sporting life. With greater training,

7267   knowledge, and experience, practitioners may feel less apprehensive and nervous

7268   about providing support to parents, as they are simply another client group.

7269   In addition, it may be useful for practitioner-researchers to share and learn

7270   from ways of engaging with parents within education, health care, and social service

7271   settings. Education, health care, and social service settings have been providing

7272   support to parents for decades and in many different formats. For example, antenatal

7273   classes are readily available for new and expectant parents (e.g., Billingham, 2011;

7274   Gagnon & Sandall, 2007). Likewise, within family support/social services parenting

7275   programmes, specifically the Triple P - Positive Parenting Programme is commonly

7276   used and provided to help parents (e.g., McConnell et al., 2012; Wiggins et al.,

7277   2009). Therefore, future practitioner-researchers should explore in more detail the

7278   learning that has taken place within education, health care, and social service settings

7279   to advance the parent support programme further. For instance, learning from the

7280   delivery of the well established Triple P - Positive Parenting Programme may

7281   provide solutions and guidance on how to increase attendance numbers or other

7282   innovative ways to fully engage parents.

7283   Finally, providing practitioners with more support, guidance, and training

7284   regarding identifying areas within a culture to change and subsequently

7285   implementing cultural changes is needed. For instance, within the first three months

7286   of being embedded within the academy, a flippant throw away comment was made

7287   to me by a coach, "you could write a PhD on this place, this place is crazy." At the

7288   time the coach was referring to the fast-paced changes that were occurring within the

7289   environment and culture. It was seemingly unpredictable and catching them off-

7290   guard. It drew my attention to the culture within the academy and, given my focus,

7291   particularly how the academy considered parents. I realised that, despite investing in

7292   a PhD to support parents, among staff at the academy parents were often seen as

7293   'another problem to deal with,' as parents demanded time from the coaches that they

7294   felt they did not have and were perceived to be challenging to 'manage.' However,

7295   without realising it, this perspective that the coaches held was creating the problem.

7296   Parents did not want to be a problem, they just wanted support to be able to provide

7297   the best support possible to their son. Having had my attention drawn to the culture

7298   as it related to parents, I was drawn to try and make changes. As I have shown within

7299   this thesis, as a sport psychology practitioner I was ideally placed to implement these

7300   cultural changes within the academy because I was embedded within the

7301   environment. However, I did not always feel prepared or fully trained to do so – I

7302   was often working off instinct or intuition regarding how best to broach

7303   conversations or make suggestions regarding changing aspects within the running of

7304   the academy. If more emphasis had been placed on this within my training I believe

7305   it would have been easier and more effective and thus, I believe it is something that

7306   would be valuable for other practitioners.

7307   **7.5 Strengths of the Research**

7308   There are a number of strengths of the research carried out within this thesis,

7309   which helps it to add and extend to the existing research on the youth football

7310   academy parent experience and parent support programmes. First, the exploration

7311   and reflection phases (chapter four), to my knowledge, was the first piece of research

7312   to explore and understand how the parent experience changes over time within

7313   academy football and provide recommendations based upon this experience. The

7314   research within chapter four provided new insight in to, and is the first piece of

7315   research to detail, the journey that parents' experience as they support their son

7316   through academy football. The research within chapter four also expands upon the

7317   parent support needs identified by Thrower et al (2016), to provide specific

7318   recommendations regarding how parents could be supported within academy football

7319   based upon the journey they experience.

7320   A second strength of this research was the action research approach to

7321   developing, implementing, evaluating, and reflecting on the parent support

7322   programmes. This was a unique and useful approach as I was able to go through a

7323   cycle of developing, delivering, evaluating, and reflecting on each of the parent

7324   support programmes to feed the learnings from the first action research cycle in to

7325   the development and progression of the second action research cycle. These cycles

7326   of action research allowed continuous development of the programmes by utilising

7327   my ability as a practitioner-researcher to reflect and learn alongside the parents

7328   (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006).

7329   Finally, another strength of this thesis was my position of being embedded

7330   within the academy and working as a practitioner-researcher. Although there are

7331   many parent education programmes and workshops being delivered in varying

7332   settings, to my knowledge, this is the first evaluation of a series of parent support

7333   programmes where the practitioner delivering the programme is embedded within

7334   the environment. Often parent education programmes are delivered by a practitioner

7335   who is employed by the sporting organisation to deliver a one-off parent support

7336   programme and is an outsider to the organisation (e.g., Richards & Winter, 2013;

7337   Thrower et al., 2017; Vincent & Christensen, 2015). By being embedded within the

7338   football academy I was able to fully immerse myself within the culture of the

7339   organisation and (hopefully) create long lasting cultural change. In addition, I was

7340   able to build relationships with parents and observe their journey as they progressed

7341   through the academy while collecting data on the impact of the parent support

7342   programme.

7343   **7.6 Limitations and Future Directions**

7344   Although this programme of work has resulted in a number of suggestions

7345   for future practice these should be considered within the limitations of the work, as

7346   well as the need for additional research. Specifically, although the findings of the

7347   exploration and reflection phases (chapter four) were based on eight months of

7348   observations, informal and formal interviews, group discussions, and extensive

7349   reflections, there are limits to the transferability of the findings. Specifically, the

7350   exploration and reflection phases were carried out as a case study and although these

7351   findings can be transferred to other environments, it was recognised that this

7352   research was carried out in one academy and may not apply to all parents in all other

7353   football academies or other sport settings. There may be cultural and contextual

7354   variations, for example the extent of the travel demands and ethnicity of the parents

7355   within a club (the majority of the participants within my setting identified as White-

7356   British, so this may need consideration). Alongside this, the family structures of the

7357   participants within the case study are not known and as such may not be

7358   representative of a diverse range of family arrangements. Consequently, future

7359   research would benefit from exploring parent experiences within and beyond youth

7360   academy football across a range of family structures and cultures to gain a deeper

7361   understanding of the range of experiences parents have over the course of their

7362   children's sporting participation.

7363   A second limitation of this thesis was that the planning, action, reflection,

7364   and learning phases of action research cycle one (chapter five) and action research

7365   cycle two (chapter six) only explored the impact of the support programme on

7366   parents, with no consideration of the subsequent impact on the players.

7367   Understanding whether parents transferred the information they learnt into their

7368   interactions with their son would be useful. Thus, future research evaluating the

7369   impact on players as well as parents may be useful. Additionally, examining the

7370   impact of parent support programmes on broader family life may also be beneficial.

7371   It is well documented that organised youth sport has an impact on the relationship

7372   between parents and also on siblings (Kay, 2000). Understanding the impact of these

7373   programmes on the wider family, particularly if it is positive, may provide more

7374   evidence to support the implementation of such programmes while also allowing for

7375   programmes to be tailored to the individual needs of families. Thus, future research

7376   which includes siblings, partners, and grandparents in the evaluation process might

7377   be useful.

7378   Likewise, this thesis did not explore the impact of the booklet, support

7379   sessions, and cultural changes on the coaches and support staff. Although the

7380   programmes may have been beneficial for parents, they may have created more

7381   demands on the coaches and support staff, which could subsequently impact how

7382   they interact with and view parents. As consequence, it may be beneficial for future

7383   research to consider the impact of parent support programmes on children, coaches,

7384   and the support staff. This is particularly important when considering implementing

7385   cultural changes, because without an understanding of how these changes are

7386   influencing all those within the culture, the overall effectiveness of such changes

7387   remains unknown.

7388   A third limitation and specifically of action research cycle two (chapter six)

7389   was that the booklet was delivered in paper format. As highlighted earlier, and as

7390   recommended by a number of parents, the booklet may be more useful for parents in

7391   an electronic format. An electronic format may facilitate increased engagement as

7392   they could have access whenever is convenient by just following a link. Plus, this

7393   may mean parents could engage with it whenever they had a spare five minutes, for

7394   example waiting to collect their son from training. In addition, an electronic format

7395   may be useful for national governing bodies to engage with and to roll out to other

7396   academies. As previously recommended, online information and support may be

7397   most useful when supplemented by face-to-face support sessions using a blended

7398   learning approach (Thrower et al., 2019) and cultural changes (Knight, 2019). Future

7399   research examining different combinations of modalities across different settings is

7400   needed to enable comparison across different approaches and also to identify any

7401   cultural or individual variables that may impact on outcomes. Specifically, using a

7402   realist evaluation approach, which allows for a more nuanced evaluation of

7403   interventions, identifying what works for whom and in what conditions, may be

7404   particularly useful as we push for more complex interventions with and for parents.

7405   A fourth limitation of this thesis is that within the action research cycles the

7406   formal evaluation/feedback from parents was rather limited. For instance, in the first

7407   action research cycle (chapter five), only eight parents completed interviews, ten

7408   parents completed the questionnaire, and 37 parents completed the online survey. In

7409   comparison, in the second action research cycle (chapter six) only six parents

7410   completed the online survey. For the second action research cycle, this may have

7411   occurred because there was a long time gap between the distribution of the booklet

7412   and the distribution of the feedback survey. In order to allow for parents to work

7413   through the booklet and the activities, the survey was not distributed immediately.

7414   However, two months between the distribution of the booklet and online survey was

7415   potentially too long. If this online survey had been distributed to parents one week

7416   after the support session, as recommended by McNiff and Whitehead (2006), the

7417   reflections may have been at the forefront of the parents thinking and I may have got

7418   a greater response from parents. Moreover, the time commitment of parents may

7419   have limited parents' engagement with the formal interviews and the additional

7420   demand of completing the questionnaire after the session may have been challenging

7421   for parents. In future research consideration should be given as to the logistics of

7422   data collection to ensure that it is as easy as possible for parents to complete without

7423   adding further demands. For example, the informal conversations and observations

7424   worked well as data collection due to the limited impact on parents' time and

7425   commitments.

7426   Finally, there may be a limitation with the two parent support programmes,

7427   as I have delivered and evaluated both. As a result, participants may have been

7428   providing me with socially desirable responses during the evaluation process,

7429   particularly the informal conversations. In addition, as the person delivering the

7430   sessions, my evaluation may have been biased towards more positive outcomes

7431   when I was evaluating the data. I tried to overcome the social desirability of the data

7432   by collecting data in multiple forms, as well as collecting data longitudinally, plus

7433   ensuring that challenges and issues were a key focus of the evaluation and that I

7434   engaged with critical friends (Grant et al., 2008). Nevertheless, the potential for

7435   socially desirable responses and biased evaluation remain and future research may

7436   benefit from incorporating an external deliverer or evaluator for programmes.

7437   **7.7 Conclusion**

7438   This thesis has provided new insights in to the journey that parents

7439   experience and how this changes over the lifespan of a youth academy footballer. In

7440   addition, this thesis has provided recommendations aligned to this journey regarding

7441   how to support parents and the development, implementation, evaluation, and

7442   reflections of two parent support programmes. The findings from these action

7443   research cycles has shown that it was beneficial for parents to be provided with

7444   support sessions, take home resources, and a series of cultural changes that created a

7445   parent supportive environment. Future research has been recommended to build

7446   upon these findings and refine the parent support programme through focusing future

7447   sessions on parents transitioning in to the academy, an electronic form of the booklet

7448   be trialled, further cultural changes be implemented, and consideration given to the

7449   broader impacts of the parent support programme than just the parents.

7450

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8412   **Appendix A: Fieldnotes and Observations Example (Chapter Four)**

8413   **Reflections U12 match against Millwall**

8414   My initial thoughts up on the bus was that the U12s would beat Millwall and lose to
8415   Chelsea, based on the expectation that Millwall are a less accomplished academy
8416   than ourselves and Chelsea are well established.

8417   The U12s were clearly slow to warm up and took their time to get into the match.
8418   The comments from the coaches was that this is a common characteristic of this
8419   team. A conversation had already taken place on the bus about Cardiff having a
8420   structure for bus journeys for all the players to help with rest and match preparation.
8421   This I feel is a good idea and if the coaches were willing to buy into it, the players
8422   could be provided with a clear structure for their journey and aid them in managing
8423   their own match preparation. It would take a little bit of managing and effort from
8424   the coaches initially to get it set up then manage for the first few seasons, however
8425   beyond this point providing everyone buys in it should manage itself and the players
8426   do it automatically without chasing or causing too much hassle for the coaches.

8427   This I feel could be of benefit and might help the players to be switched on as soon
8428   as they get onto the pitch, as they have rested on the bus and saved their energy for
8429   the match rather than being silly messing around on the bus. The players who were
8430   on the subs bench for both halves knew the answers and were able to dictate to the
8431   players on the pitch what they needed to do, but were unable to put it into action.
8432   This has been something that has cropped up previously with not only this team, but
8433   with the other teams too. How do we overcome this? This is something that needs
8434   further work.

8435   Beyond this, the players appeared intimidated by the size of the opposition and
8436   unwilling to get stuck into the game, through fear of being physically challenged and
8437   potential injuries.

8438   Following the Millwall match, there was just enough time for a quick team talk
8439   before the players were asked to go back onto the pitch to play against Chelsea.

8440   The players responded well to the challenge of Chelsea. The players worked hard
8441   and performed as a team. There were still a few mistakes, but weren't afraid to give
8442   up trying. Although the match was close and they won 2-1, it showed that the players
8443   can beat good teams because Chelsea played really well and did not give up. I think
8444   they were expecting to win. The coaches appeared relaxed and laid back about the
8445   situation. The subs were not watching the match, they were off messing around
8446   playing football behind the dug outs.

8447   Looking over towards the parents, they were quiet and respectful throughout. There
8448   were a few comments from our parents when things were not going so well, but on
8449   the whole they were supportive of the players.

8450   There were three parents who came over to near where the coaches had set up a
8451   match debrief. This was clearly to hear what was being said, but also to take their
8452   children away from the team before they all got on the bus. One parent had agreed
8453   this in advance with the coach. There was another parent who took her son and one

8454 of the others of the Mum she brought up with her. She had got her son to inform the
8455 coaches that she would be driving him back. However, the agreement with the
8456 coaches was that they could only go with their parents if they were staying up in
8457 London. Once asked the parent, who was obviously not aware of this, and I had only
8458 heard this once I had spoken to the GK coach, as she had said to me that she was
8459 taking him as her daughter was ill and she had to get back. Well, although I may be
8460 here to support parents, this was clearly an extension of the truth. Why would you
8461 leave your daughter at home for 10 hours if she was that unwell, surely she is not
8462 alone and she cannot be that sick otherwise you would be with her. My thoughts are
8463 that it is simply to get home earlier.

8464 Why did she feel the need to lie about this situation and why does she not see the
8465 value in encouraging the players to travel with their team mates, regardless of the
8466 extensive cost of the bus for the club.

8467 Can I make it clear of travel expectations?

8468

Appendix B: Reflexive Diary Example (Chapter Four)

Reflections from the end of season reviews 18.05.2017

8471   CK and I had a box to ourselves, which was nearer the stairs so all parents had to
8472   walk past us. The Foundation phase and goal keepers was on Tuesday, followed by
8473   the Youth development phase on Thursday. CK and I attended from 4pm until
8474   7.30pm on Tuesday and until 8pm on Thursday.

8475   The end of season reviews were tough for parents. Most of the parents for the U-9
8476   and U-10 age group were concerned that their son may be released. The coaches had
8477   warned the players that they all may be released. I believe the intentions of this was
8478   to ensure that none of them became complacent and continued to play at their full
8479   potential. Almost a scare tactic. There were many parents who were nervous. There
8480   were a number of parents who had arrived 20 minutes early for their 4pm review,
8481   probably due to nerves and wanting to get it over with. OJ reported that not all
8482   parents were nervous, these tended to be the parents who were confident that their
8483   son was a good player. However, OJ described an example of JB's Mum and Dad
8484   had come into the box appearing very tense due to the last review being a severe
8485   warning that he would need to improve, and once OJ had given them the news that
8486   he was staying, the Mum breathed a sigh of relief, and said could she have a glass of
8487   water as she had not eaten or drunk anything all day! She had been that nervous and
8488   scared that he would not be retained. OJ described SD Dad also being very nervous
8489   that he may be released, and once he had said that he was staying, Dad admitted that
8490   he may have been too harsh on him this season. OJ described how SD hates it when
8491   his Dad comes to watch, especially if they are losing as he will shout at him from
8492   behind the goal. Another parent JC's Dad stood up with relief when told that he was
8493   going to stay, nearly knocking the table over, and shock OJ's hand.

8494   For the players parents who were released, the majority were expecting it. However,
8495   CD's Dad and EB's Dad reacted badly to the news. They both apparently stormed
8496   out of the room. CD's Dad apparently said that the academy don't want small
8497   players. He apparently then walked very swiftly downstairs. I peeked out of the
8498   window shortly after he had received the news to see both parents what looked to be
8499   sat in the car reading through the review for about 5 minutes or so and then drive off.

8500   An U9 player who is on trial had come to his 5th week by the review date. I met him
8501   and his parents in the corridor. They mentioned that he had not been signed, but was
8502   offered a further 6 week trial next season. They appeared to have mixed emotions.
8503   They were praising their son, but still apprehensive about what the decision may be.
8504   The U9 player did not appear to be able to process it at the moment. I recommended
8505   that he just goes home and relaxes until July.

8506   I also met NP's family on their way out. They were pleased to say that he had been
8507   asked to sign a further contract. AP was happy. NP appeared fairly laid back about it.
8508   AP then asked whether I organised the life skills, I advised them to speak to TA.

8509   On the Thursday, I popped down to see how they were doing for timing. I bumped
8510   into MJ, who had just finished with AG. They had run 45 minutes over time.

8511   CK popped out a little while later, and came back to say that she could hear one of
8512   the Dad's having a good in NR's box. The Dad was not happy about the previous
8513   review and that he had not been given a fair chance in training. When I explained the
8514   situation to CK this appeared to fit with the current shouting. CK was surprised to
8515   hear for the older age group that the children were present and that the parents spoke
8516   like that in front of their children. However, once I had gone out the U15 player now
8517   had his chance to speak and was communicating calmly and clearly his point. This
8518   was pleasing.

8519

8520

8521   **Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet (Chapter Four)**

Applied Sports Technology Exercise and Medicine Research Centre (A-STEM)
Sport and Health Portfolio, College of Engineering

8522   **PARTICIPANT (Parent) INFORMATION SHEET**
8523   **(Version 1.1, Date: 20/10/2016)**
8524
8525
8526   **Project Title:**
8527   An examination of parental needs, behaviours, and involvement in youth academy
8528   football.
8529
8530   **Contact Details:**
8531   **Lead researcher -** Rachael Newport BSc MSc MBPsS, Email:
8532   ████████████████████████████
8533
8534   **Supervisors -** Dr Camilla Knight, Email: ████████████████, Phone: ██████
8535   ███████0
8536   Dr Thomas Love, Email:████████████████, Phone: ██████
8537   ██████
8538
8539   **1. Invitation Paragraph**
8540   You are invited to participate in this study, which is part of a PhD programme. The
8541   purpose is to gain an understanding of parental needs, behaviours, and involvement in
8542   youth academy football from the perspective of parents, coaches, and players. The
8543   overall aim of this study is to provide us with sufficient information to identify what
8544   support and guidance may be beneficial to optimise parental involvement and support
8545   in academy football.
8546
8547   **2. What is the purpose of the study?**
8548   The study aims to answer the following questions:
8549   1) What are the needs of parents of academy youth footballers?
8550   2) How are parents of academy youth footballers involved in their children's
8551   sport experience?
8552   3) What help or guidance might be beneficial to optimise the involvement of
8553   parents in academy youth football?
8554
8555   **3. Why have I been chosen?**
8556   You have been chosen because you are the parent of an U9 to U16 player at the
8557   academy and are likely to have experienced the areas in which we are interested in
8558   learning about. Participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at

8559 any time without any risk or need for explanation. There will be no penalty for
8560 withdrawal.
8561
8562
8563 **4. What will happen to me if I take part?**
8564 You will be required to read this information sheet and sign the following consent
8565 form demonstrating your agreement to take part. If you consent to take part, then at a
8566 later date you will be contacted to be given the opportunity to engage in one-to-one
8567 interviews and/or focus groups. These will be to discuss the experiences of your child
8568 in football, the stressors in which you have faced as a parent and what you feel is
8569 needed to support parents. Additionally, information gained informally through
8570 conversations at matches or around the academy will be noted as field notes.
8571
8572 **5. What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?**
8573 You will not experience any physical risks or discomfort. No psychological risks are
8574 anticipated. However, the recollection of negative emotions can cause stress. If there
8575 are any areas that you do not wish to discuss or questions that you do not wish to
8576 answer you are able to decline at any point.
8577
8578 **6. What are the possible benefits of taking part?**
8579 It is hoped that from your engagement in this study you will have a better
8580 understanding of the stressors that you have and are experiencing as a result of your
8581 child engaging in academy football. The interviews and/or the discussions prompted
8582 during the focus groups may provide insight into how to better manage and cope with
8583 the stressors. The long-term aim is to create a support programme based on the
8584 perceived need for parents from this study.
8585
8586 **7. Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**
8587 All information gathered during this study will be kept strictly confidential, unless a
8588 criminal offence is disclosed or it is deemed that you are at risk of harming others or
8589 yourself. All data from the interviews and/or focus groups will be stored securely. It
8590 will be labelled without a name or with a false name. Only the members identified
8591 above have access to the data (which is stored securely) and are able to identify the
8592 participants. The procedures for handling, processing, storage and destroying data will
8593 be compliant with the Data Protection Act (1998) and Swansea University guidelines.
8594 No members of the academy (outside the research team), including the manager, will
8595 be aware of what information is provided from any parent, or which parents decide to
8596 take part in the study. Your information will only be shared between the research team
8597 of Rachael Newport, Dr Camilla Knight and Dr Tom Love.
8598
8599 **8. What if I have any questions?**
8600 If you have any questions during or after the study has been completed, please feel
8601 free to contact one of the named contacts above. If you have any questions pertaining
8602 to the ethical nature of this study, please contact Professor McNamee
8603 ██████████████████). Many thanks for taking the time to read this letter and
8604 consider being involved in this project.
8605

Applied Sports Technology Exercise and Medicine Research Centre (A-STEM)
Sport and Health Portfolio, College of Engineering

8606
8607
8608   **PARTICIPANT (Parent) CONSENT FORM**
8609   **(Version 1.1, Date: 20/10/2016)**
8610

8611   **Project Title:**
8612   An examination of parental needs, behaviours, and involvement in youth academy
8613   football
8614

8615   **Contact Details:**
8616   **Lead researcher -** Rachael Newport BSc MSc MBPsS, Email:
8617   ████████████████████, Phone: ████████████
8618
8619   **Supervisor -** Dr Camilla Knight**,** Email: ███████████████████**,** Phone:
8620   ████████████
8621   Dr Thomas Love, Email: ███████████████████, Phone:
8622   ████████████
8623
8624
8625   **Please initial box**
8626
8627   1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated   ☐
8628   20/10/2016 (version number 1.1) for the above study and have
8629   had the opportunity to ask questions.
8630
8631   2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to   ☐
8632   withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, without my medical
8633   care or legal rights being affected.
8634
8635   3. I understand that sections of any of data obtained may be looked
8636   at by responsible individuals from the Swansea University or
8637   from regulatory authorities where it is relevant to my taking part in   ☐
8638   research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to
8639   these records.
8640
8641   4. I understand that informal conversations that happen in and around   ☐
8642   The academy or at away matches will be
8643   recorded in the form of field notes.
8644
8645   5. I agree to take part in the above study.
8646
8647   _____ _____ _____
8648   Name of Participant   Date   Signature

8649

8650 _____ _____ _____

8651 Name of Person taking consent   Date   Signature

8652

8653 _____ _____ _____

8654 Researcher   Date   Signature

8655

8656   **Appendix D: Interview Guide for Parents (Chapter Four)**

8657   I appreciate you coming along today and giving up your time to take part in this

8658   study.

8659   This interview is part of a study to gain knowledge on what players, coaches/ support

8660   staff, parents and the manager think about the experiences of parents of young

8661   footballers at the academy. Your participation is voluntary and you are free to

8662   withdraw at any time without any risk. If there is a question that you do not want to

8663   answer, that is fine.

8664

8665   All information shared today is confidential. Your data will be labelled without a

8666   name or with a false name, so that it cannot be identified. Only the research team

8667   will be able to identify the participants.

8668

8669   There are no wrong or right answers to the questions that I am about to ask. Please

8670   try to answer all questions honestly and truthfully.

8671

8672   Do you have any questions?

8673

Area of question	Question
Football History	Can you tell me a bit of your history as a football parent? - Which clubs has your child/have your children played for? - How did your son come to play at the academy?
General experience as a football parent	How would you describe your experience of being a football parent? - What has been good about the experience? - What was bad about the experience? - What has had the biggest impact on your experience?
Grassroots/ academy development to the academy	Can you describe the experience of your son transferring into the club? - Was it a good or bad experience? - What do you wish you had known during the transfer?

Developing and learning	What have you learnt as a football parent? - How do you feel you have developed as a football parent? - What skills have you learnt from being a football parent?
Knowledge	What do you wish you had known as a football parent when your son had first started? - Think back to when your son first started in football, is there anything you wish you had known? - What advice would you give to other parents of young footballers?
Previous support	If you think back to when your son first started training in football, what was the support like? – 0% being a complete lack of support and 100% being the best support you could possibly think of. What was the support like on this scale? - What have the club/s offered to you as support? - Have other parents supported you?
Support needs	What support would have been beneficial for you as a football parent?
Summary Questions	Please could you summarise your overall experiences as a football parent?
	Overall, what recommendations do you have for improving parents' experiences in academy football?

8674

8675   *These questions/probes may be subject to minor change depending on what is said

8676   by the participants.

8677   **Appendix E: Focus Group Guide for Parents (Chapter Four)**

8678

8679   I appreciate you all coming along today and giving up your time to take part in this

8680   study.

8681   This focus group is part of a study to learn more about the culture and gain

8682   knowledge on what players, coaches/ support staff, parents and the manager think

8683   about the experiences of parents of young footballers at the academy.

8684

8685   Your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time without any

8686   risk. If there is a question that you do not want to answer, that is fine.

8687

8688   All information shared today is confidential. I also ask that you respect each other's

8689   privacy by not sharing any information that has been discussed within this focus

8690   group with anyone else.

8691

8692   There are no wrong or right answers to the questions that I am about to ask. If you

8693   disagree with what anyone has said, I am interested in hearing why this is the case.

8694   Please try to maintain the flow of conversation, rather than waiting for me to ask a

8695   question.

8696

8697   Does anyone have any questions?

8698

Area of discussion	Probe
Background/history	• What is the background to you being a football parent?
Experience as a football parent	• What is your experience as a football parent?
Relationship with the club and coaches	• How do you perceive your relationship with the club and the coaches?
Reviews	• What are your experiences of the review process?

Experiences at football matches	• What has been your experience when attending football matches? – Home and away.
Support for parents	• What support do you feel is needed? • What would you have liked when you initially became a football parent? • What support do you feel you need now?

8699

8700   *These questions/probes may be subject to minor change depending on what is said

8701   by the participants.

8702

8703

8704   **Appendix F: Support Session Example Presentation Slides (Chapter Five)**

8705

8706

8707

8708

8709   **Appendix G: Email Invite to Take Part in an Interview (Chapter Five)**

8710

8711   Dear ,

8712

8713   Many thanks for your earlier interest and engagement in my PhD programme. The

8714   parent support sessions are due to start in October, with a further email to follow

8715   regarding the dates and times of the sessions. I am currently in the process of

8716   recruiting parents and those who identify with the parent role to take part in 30 to 60-

8717   minute interviews on the experiences of the support you receive within the academy

8718   football environment. The interviews will cover your academy football experiences,

8719   what you would like to gain from the sessions this season and a follow-up interview

8720   after the sessions to provide feedback. The sessions are designed to optimise the

8721   parent experience, help you and your child gain the most from the environment, and

8722   assist in your child reaching their sporting potential.

8723

8724   If you are available and interested in taking part, please respond directly to this email

8725   with times and days in September that are convenient for you to take part. I am also

8726   happy to answer any further questions you have regarding the parent support

8727   sessions.

8728

8729   Many thanks,

8730

8731   Rachael Newport

8732   PhD student in Sport Psychology

8733   School of Sport and Exercise Sciences

8734   Swansea University

8735   Swansea

8736   SA1 8EN

8737 **Appendix H: Demographic Questions**

Please provide your initials (your information and identity will remain confidential. Your initials will only be used to match up the data you provide at the beginning and end of the programme)
Please circle your relevant age range
20-30 years
31-40 years
41-50 years
51-60 years
61+ years
How would you describe your ethnicity? – please describe in the box below.
How far do you travel for your son to attend training?
How long have you been involved in football as a parent or guardian/carer?
How many children do you have that play football?
What age is your child/are your children that are involved in football?
Which age group does your child/are your children playing in?

How long has your child/ have your children trained at the academy?
Has your child/ have your children always trained at academy?
How would you describe your career? – Please estimate your household income.
What experience do you have of football/sport? – Please add details of relevant knowledge and experience of sport. – E.g. playing or taking part yourself in sport.
Have you attended previous parent support sessions? If so, how many have you attended?
Please provide your email address for me to send out a follow-up questionnaire.

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8740   **Appendix I: Online Reflective Survey Example (Parents Who Attended)**

8741

Q10 Please rate the usefulness of the week 1 'tackling the football parenting game' workshop.

👍   **(no label)**

Q11 What do you think the main message was from the week 1 'tackling the football parenting game' workshop?

the messages were about organisation. I think this is useful for U9 parents but after 5 seasons, a lot of our issues cannot be supported

Page 11

Q12 Please rate the usefulness of the week 2   Respondent skipped this question
'communicating with the team' workshop.

Q13 What do you think the main message was from the week 2 'communicating with the game' workshop?

Helpful hints on communicating with the coaches and what we can and can't do.

Page 12

Q14 Please rate the usefulness of the week 3 'being a football parent' workshop.

👍   **(no label)**

Q15 What do you think the main message was from the week 3 'being a football parent' workshop?

Can't remember the specifics but remember that the further in they became more helpful

Page 13

Q16 Please rate the usefulness of the week 4 'supporting your child' workshop

👍   **(no label)**

Q17 What do you think the main message was from the week 4 'supporting your child' workshop?

This was really useful as it touched on the psychology elements

Page 14

Q18 Please rate the usefulness of the week 5 'ups and downs of matches' workshop.

👍   **Useful**

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Page 21

Q27 Please add any further feedback you wish to provide.

Rachael is very knowledgeable and has a supportive presentation style.
It would be more helpful if there was the opportunity through the programme for rachael to take away some of our concerns to Academy management and for them to respond with feedback to us rather than Rachael being put on the spot and not having responses. Maybe the chance on one of the sessions for management to do a Q&A aswell.
The changes to the training schedule where the Foundation phase and YD phase swap Saturday morning training would have been a great opportunity to discuss, especially with the impact on teenagers who need more sleep and who have already done their 4 years of early Saturday mornings.

Q28 What do you think the overall purpose was of the 'Being a ▆▆▆ Parent' workshops?

To provide advice and support on how we can best help our children in elite sport

Q29 What improvements could be made to the 'Being a ▆▆▆ Parent' workshops?

Thought provoking on how I behave

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8747   **Appendix J: Online Reflective Survey Example (Parents Who Did Not Attend)**

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Page 18

Q24 What were your reasons for not attending the 'Being   **Other commitments**
a ▇▇▇ Parent' workshops?

Page 19

Q25 What prevented you from attending the 'Being a ▇▇▇ Parent' workshops?

Have to take my daughter to swimming club and athletics club which clashes with the workshops unfortunately.

Page 20

Q26 What would have encouraged or enabled you to attend more of the 'Being a ▇▇▇ Parent' workshops?

I have other commitments every day of the week.

Page 21

Q27 Please add any further feedback you wish to   **Respondent skipped this question**
provide.

Q28 What do you think the overall purpose was of the 'Being a ▇▇▇ Parent' workshops?

To gather information to help support parents and players.

Q29 What improvements could be made to the 'Being a ▇▇▇ Parent' workshops?

Can't really comment as I've not attended any workshops.

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Appendix K: Reflexive Diary Example After Delivery (Chapter Five)

Reflections on First session of 'Being an Academy Parent' Parent Support Programme U9/U10 06.10.2017

There were a number of parents waiting in the parents room for the session with one parent playing on the fifa games console that had been set up in the parents room. I said don't worry he can have another 5 mins on there to see if any more parents turn up. His wife, then said no take him off of it he's done, he also commented that he was reliving his childhood. One parent then commented that they thought training finished at 6pm, not 6.30pm. I did however, doubt myself during this moment, but double checked on the schedule and it was correct that it finishes at 6.30pm. This slightly confused me, but we all seemed to agree that this is what time training finished. We then went through to the classroom, as we did we could see one parent running into the academy, so I asked the other parents to head through to the first classroom and I would meet them in there in a minute. The other parent did take a little while to arrive, as I believe she probably took her youngest child to the toilet. The parent was surprised to see that I had waited for her, but I explained that we could see her walking in.

As we got into the classroom the parents had not touched the food and were being polite, and had begun reading the information sheet and completing the questionnaires. I persuaded them that once they had finished the sheets they should grab some food, as it all needed to be eaten. I briefly went through the programme and explained what it was all about, plus the topic that we would be covering today. It was difficult to concentrate as one of the players younger siblings was attending the session and was grabbing extra food or pulling funny faces, so it meant that I got distracted during some of my sentences and they did not make sense. I was aware of this at times and tried to correct myself, but was almost over compensating for the distraction. That was a challenge, but for the parents to attend the sessions have to accommodate younger siblings.

The parents got into the discussion and began talking about the demands that they had faced and there was certainly some misunderstanding about the environment. Although I left the parent journey vague in order not to concern them or create too many worries about the environment. Hopefully they got lots out of the session because they were able to ask questions that they did not know the answer to and they may not feel that they can ask the question because they may appear like they should know and that it is a silly question. The parents asked questions about whether the players could play other sports and how the club would feel about it. Some parents had said to other parents that the club did not want them to play other sports, although some of the parents did not feel this was right they did not question it because of the privilege of being in this environment.

8795   **Appendix L: 90-minute Support Session Example Presentation Slides (Chapter**

8796   **Six)**

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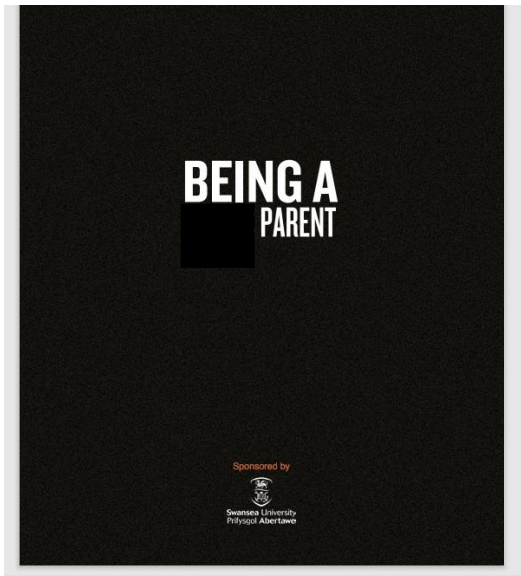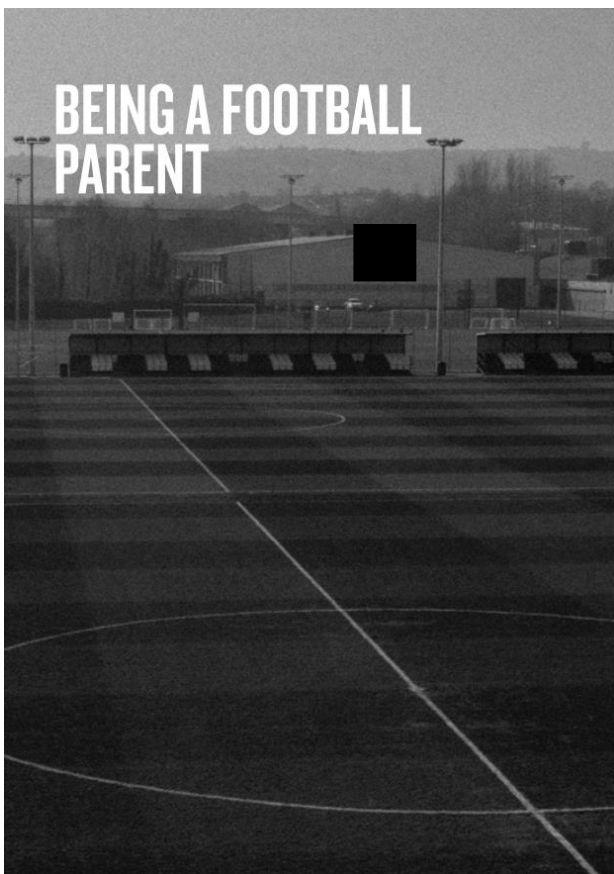

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8803   **Appendix M: Being a Football Parent Booklet Example**

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AIMS AND OVERVIEW

As a parent, you play a vital role in your child's development and are key throughout their sporting involvement. In this section, this booklet will to look at the environment created by parents within football and at home.

You will be given the opportunity to reflect on the influences on your parenting, your parenting style and your role.

INFLUENCES ON PARENTING

It is important to consider the influences on your parenting approach. The way you choose to parent at home and in football is based on your experiences. For example, your history in sport, your background, your current sporting activities, and your other children's sporting involvement.

List 5 experiences that you think have influenced your parenting within football and reflect on the consequences of these influences:

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2.

3.

4.

5.

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PARENTING STYLE

A parenting style refers to your general outlook and approach to parenting across different environments. It is guided by your goals and ambitions for your child.

Having an autonomy-supportive parenting style can help your child to develop independence, create the motivation to become better and gain enjoyment from the activities they take part in.

CREATING AN AUTONOMY-SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT AT HOME

By creating an autonomy-supportive environment at home for your child, you provide the best opportunity for your child to learn and develop. A supportive environment can be created by:

- **Promoting choice and input into joint decision-making**

- **Having consistent boundaries and discussing why the boundaries exist**

- **Allowing your child to make decisions for themselves within limits**

- **Providing opportunities for your child to take responsibility and demonstrate initiative. For example, allowing them to pack their own kit bag before a match**

- **Giving your child structure, for example, having a predictable routine the night before and morning of a match**

- **Recognising your child's feelings and perspectives**

38

PROVIDING OPTIMAL SUPPORT IN FOOTBALL

Each child is an individual and will have a different experience within the football environment. Your child's experiences will change over the course of a season and their football journey.

3 ways in which you can improve their enjoyment within football are:

- **Create shared goals and continually review them. It is recommended that you discuss with your child what they would like to gain from the football experience as a long-term goal and what they are working towards developing at the moment as a short-term goal. These will often change over time and should be reviewed on a regular basis**

- **Seek to show an understanding of the football environment and your child's experience. This understanding of football does not have to be through gaining football knowledge, it is about appreciating and relating to the experiences they are going through, then sharing this appreciation with them**

- **Identify what your child finds supportive at matches. This can be achieved by asking your child what they find helpful before, during and after a match. You could do this by rating how helpful they find you are at these 3 time points and what support they might prefer from you**

CHILD

COACH   PARENT

YOUR CHILD'S ENJOYMENT AND DEVELOPEMT

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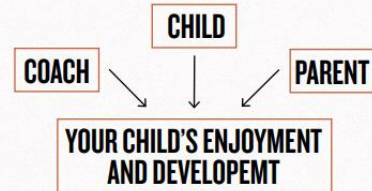
SHARED GOAL FOR FOOTBALL

It is important that you and your child are involved in football for the same reasons. For example, become a professional footballer, make new friends, learn respect and take responsibility for themselves.

Ask your child to write down what they want to achieve through football. At the same time, write down what you would like your child to achieve through football. Discuss with your child, what you both would like to gain from the football experience.

Top tip: With the right support, a child will gain far more from sport than just learning how to play better football.

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UNDERSTANDING THE FOOTBALL EXPERIENCE

Within football, children will experience **highlights** and **challenges**.

Highlights may include performing well and playing against big teams. Challenges may include losing matches and making mistakes.

It can be tough for you and your child to face challenges, especially when you want them to do well. However, these challenges are just as beneficial for children as experiencing highlights. When your child experiences challenges, it can be helpful for them to discuss them, know that you will listen and understand what they are going through. It can be beneficial to show understanding by allowing your child to **learn from their mistakes**, **keep football in perspective**, and remember the other **benefits of football**.

What are some of the highlights and challenges that your child has experienced so far in football? Reflect on how you managed these and how you may wish to improve on them next time.

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MATCH SUPPORT

As you know your child is unique, and each child wants different things from their parents. What one parent does for their child may not be appropriate for another child. Therefore, to meet the needs of your child, their needs should be understood.

Ask your child what they would like from you before, during and after the match.

PARENT ROLE

As a parent, you carry out a number of important roles within your child's football. The way in which these roles are carried out is influenced by your parenting style and the environment you wish to create.

These roles are:

Supporter - offering general encouragement and allowing them to express themselves, helping them to enjoy football.

Provider - setting up opportunities for the child to develop and progress.

Role Model - displaying sportspersonship that supports the benefits of taking part in sport.

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TAKE HOME MESSAGES

For you and your child to gain the most enjoyment from football it is beneficial to:

- **Provide an autonomy-supportive environment at home**

- **Create shared goals for football**

- **Show an understanding of your child's football experience**

- **Offer support at matches based upon what your child preferences**

- **Recognise the value and importance of the roles you have as a parent, plus how these roles may change over time**

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8816   **Appendix N: Online Reflective Survey Example (Chapter Six)**

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Page 2

Q2 Did you attend the 'Being a ▮▮▮▮ Parent' booklet   **Yes**
introduction session?

Page 3

Q3 What were your reasons for attending the 'Being a   Other (please
▮▮▮▮ Parent' booklet introduction session?   specify):

                                                                 This was my first opportunity

Page 4

12 / 27

Being a ▮▮▮ Parent Booklet Feedback

Q4 Please rate the usefulness of the 'tackling the football parenting game' topic.

👍   **Useful**

Q5 What do you think the main message was from the 'tackling the football parenting game' topic?

Gaining a balance on what the children are doing

Page 5

Q6 Please rate the usefulness of the 'communicating with the team' topic.

👍   **Useful**

Q7 What do you think the main message was from the 'communicating with the game' topic?

Two way is important

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