Title: Reflections on using visual methods in sports coaching

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Abstract

Learners are central to the coaching process, yet elementary-aged (i.e. 5-11 years) children's perspectives and experiences of sport are under-represented in the current sports coaching literature. One reason that research with these populations may not be forthcoming in these sporting contexts could be due to the employment of research methods. The purpose of this paper is to reflect on the viability of visual methods (i.e. photovoice and drawings) in offering a furthered understanding of elementary-aged children's perspectives and experiences of sport and sports coaching. The drawings and photographs provided as examples in this paper were generated from a combination of two different contexts (school and club) where children participated in two different sports (swimming and football). The processes of data generation allowed for the reflection on some benefits of using these methodologies as well as revealing some challenges. Although these methods proved challenging due to their time-consuming nature, the drawings and photographs provided stimuli for conversations between the children and the researcher. Specifically, children were able to speak freely and openly about their experiences related to the coaching and playing of sport in specific contexts. However, if children's experiences of playing sport are to be positive, researchers and practitioners must consider listening to respond to their perspectives and experiences, rather than merely listening. These methods may therefore be invaluable in enabling coaches to re-examine their taken for granted assumptions regarding children's perspectives and experiences.

Keywords: coaching; sport; children; qualitative; methods

Introduction

Learners are central to the coaching process (Lyle 2002) and it is important that research captures their perspectives and experiences of this process (Jones, Armour and Potrac 2004). A number of recent studies have examined the learner's perspectives and experiences of

sport, including perceptions of their coach and their coaching (e.g. Becker and Soloman 2005, Cumming, Smith and Smoll 2006, Gearity 2012), However, a large majority of these studies have been conducted in high school (e.g. Cumming *et al.* 2006), collegiate (e.g. Holt and Sparkes 2001), as well as semi-professional and professional level sports coaching contexts (e.g. Soloman, DiMarco, Ohlson and Reece 1998) with little research focused on elementary school-aged children (i.e. those aged 5-11 years old; Erickson and Gilbert 2013). This is of particular concern in countries such as the United Kingdom (UK), where a recent survey by Sports Coach UK (the organization responsible for coaching in the UK) found that children between the ages of 5-11 years account for nearly 50% of the entire population of sporting participants in the UK, with this participation taking place in recreational sports clubs and primary schools (Sports Coach UK 2011). The lack of research with this population is of further concern considering children's early sports experiences will most likely influence their future participation (Kirk 2005).

It is also important to acknowledge the methodologies used by researchers as these may limit or restrict what children are able to say about their experiences (Prout 2005). One reason that research with this population may not be conducted in these sporting contexts could be the lack of suitable methods, which provide ecologically valid and high quality data. For example, in questionnaires and structured interviews it is the researcher who decides what to ask, with the participant being the receiver of these questions (Christensen and James 2008). In the case of children, this has been suggested as problematic because they can find it difficult to express their meaning through these methods (Mauthner 1997). One suggested reason for this is that when presented with a questionnaire or placed within an interview context, it has been reported that children attempt to give an answer they believe the adult researcher wants to hear, rather than a true representation of their experiences and

perspectives (Clark 2005). This can lead to the data lacking authenticity (Coad and Lewis 2004); therefore researchers have to be mindful of making conclusions based on this data. Moreover, children sometimes perceive these methods as being interrogative in nature (McWilliam, Dooley, McArdle and Pei-Ling Tan 2009). In addition, in interviews and questionnaires, children's repertoire of language may be limited, thus restricting their ability to again convey what they actually mean and want to say (Mitchell 2006, Spyrou 2011), leading to monosyllabic answers (Tizard and Hughes 1984). Piggott (2010) questions whether such methods can genuinely enable children to express their perspectives and experiences. Consequently, careful methodological consideration is needed when attempting to determine the perspectives and experiences of children (Coad and Lewis 2004).

Visual methods, such as photovoice and drawings, have been used increasingly to study children's perspectives and experiences in educational settings (eg. MacPhail and Kinchin 2004, Oliver, Hamzek and McCaughtry 2009). We propose these methods have the potential to supplement or offer an alternative perspective to standard data collection methods (i.e. interviews and questionnaires) in furthering our understanding of children's perspectives and experiences of being coached in sport settings (Jones, Santos, Mesquita and Gilbourne 2012, Jones, Bailey and Santos 2013). Furthermore, these methods have arguably more congruence to contemporary learning theories such as constructivism, which posits that knowledge is constructed within specific socio-cultural contexts (Kirk and MacDonald 1998).

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to reflect on the viability of visual methods in offering insights into elementary school-aged children's perspectives and experiences of sport and sports coaching. This research will make a contribution to the literature as data was generated over multiple visits. As such, the data generation process in this study could be considered as iterative, as reflection was occurring during the process, instead of only after.

We argue that this potentially gives a more nuanced, richer and detailed picture of some of the challenges faced when employing visual methods. Moreover, we will posit that visual methods provide coaches with the opportunity to re-examine their coaching practice and, ultimately, heighten their levels of self-awareness through listening *and* responding to children's perspectives and experiences.

Research in children's sport

To understand what the employment of visual methods may offer researchers and/or practitioners, it is important to first outline what we already know about children's perspectives and experiences of sport in the extant literature, and secondly, consider the various methods used to collect these data. Through a review of literature, the predominant theme within youth sports coaching where children's perspectives and experiences have been considered, are their motivations for taking part, and remaining involved in sport (e.g., McCarthy and Jones 2007). The primary approaches used to generate these data have been psychometric methods. More specifically, questionnaires such as paired comparison inventories and participant motivation questionnaires (e.g. Barber, Sukhi and White 1999) have been commonly employed. These types of questionnaires provide a list of items for children to select that most closely relates to their reasons for participating in sport. There have also been a number of studies that have used purely qualitative data collection methods. Interviews have been a frequently used data collection method in generating data to help understand children's motivations for attending, as well as continuing to participate in sport (e.g. Keegan, Harwood, Spray and Lavellee 2009).

Child-centered research approaches

Visual methods place children at the center of the research process (Clark 2011), as research moves away from being collected *on* children to a consideration of collecting research *with* children (Ryan 2008). One method that has received considerable attention in enabling children to become an active part of research is the mosaic approach (Clark and Moss 2011). The philosophical underpinnings of the mosaic approach are based on knowledge generation, rather than knowledge extraction (Clark 2011). This aligns with a social constructivist view of learning in that knowledge is a co-constructed process. A central tenet to this approach is that children are given the opportunity to share experiences that are meaningful and individual to them through data generation methods such as drawings and photographs (Clark and Moss 2011, McHugh, Coppola & Sinclair.2013).

For example, Coates (2002) in her study of preschool and primary school children used drawings and accompanying explanation of these drawings to find out what the pupils liked doing in their free choice activities. Coates observed the children talking to themselves whilst drawing their pictures. Drawings were also the methodology for MacDonald's (2009) study that examined children's perspectives on their experiences of starting school. The drawings were complemented by semi-structured interviews to give the children the opportunity to explain *why* they drew their pictures. In a similar study, Einarsdottir, Dockett and Perry (2009) asked children to produce drawings that captured their personal experiences of things that they liked and disliked about primary school. Kragh-Müller and Isbell (2011) gained children's perspectives and experiences of childcare through children's drawings, followed up by individual, semi-structured interviews. These studies in educational contexts show that when the focus is on exploring perspectives and experiences, visual methods enable this enquiry.

Child-centered methods in sport

In sports contexts, visual data generation methods remain sparse, albeit they are beginning to gain more attention as exemplified by the 2010 special edition in this journal. A number of studies, particularly in physical education contexts have recently begun to embrace these methods. For example, Oliver *et al*. (2009) asked girls to take photographs of things that either encouraged or prevented them from engaging in physical activity. In an earlier study, MacPhail and Kinchin (2004) elicited pupil's perceptions of Sport Education in a physical education context using drawings, the findings from which helped inform future teaching and learning practices. Adopting a slightly different approach, Azzarito (2009) amalgamated pictures from a variety of magazines to explore physical education pupil's constructions of the 'ideal' body. Georgakis and Light (2009) gained physical education pupil's perspectives on what meaning sport held for them via drawings. These drawings provided a stimulus for later discussion with both pupils and teachers. Darbyshire and colleagues' (2005) study into the meaning that physical activity held for children both in and out of school, used photovoice as the primary data collection method, with Enright and O'Sullivan (2012) also using this method to explore the barriers young people face to their participation in physical education and physical activity in and out of school contexts. The photovoice method relies on participants taking photographs, and then explaining why these have a particular personal meaning to them. These methods and how they are used provides insightful information which supplements the current knowledge base of young people's experiences and perspectives from a range of physical activity contexts. We propose that by using similar methods, data could be generated with children in sports coaching contexts to help reveal their perspectives and experiences. O'Sullivan and MacPhail (2010) published an edited volume titled 'Young Peoples Voices in Physical Education and Sport', which offered recommendations for valuing the 'student voice'. While this volume was a welcome addition to the youth sport literature, the volume, like other research, lacks a specific focus on the

147 perspectives of children in the sports coaching literature (Darbyshire, MacDougall and
148 Schiller 2005). This is concerning given that visual methods have been found to enable
149 practitioners the opportunity to re-examine their current practices (Gravestock 2010),
150 something which is of particular need in coaching given coaches poor levels of self
151 awareness (Partington and Cushion 2013)

152 Whilst visual methods in sports settings are gaining increasing prominence, many of
153 these studies fall short in suggesting how the data generated from these methods need to
154 impact on practice. Researchers, who pay particular commitment to listening and responding
155 to learner's perspectives and experiences, rather than merely listening, are Oliver and
156 colleagues (Oliver 2001, Oliver and Lalik 2001, Oliver and Oesterreich 2013). The focus of
157 Oliver's work has been with the purpose to help better prepare teachers to work with young
158 people, in particular, to engage girls in physical education. We believe the work by Oliver
159 and colleagues in listening to respond to young people is something, which needs addressing
160 in the field of sports coaching, if coaches' practices are to achieve greater developmental
161 appropriateness (Côté and Gilbert 2009).

162 **Contexts**

163 The drawings and photographs provided as examples in this paper were generated from a
164 combination of two different contexts where children participated in two different sports (see
165 Table 1). Given that children predominantly participate in sport in both club and school
166 contexts (Sports Coach UK 2011), it was important to generate data from each of these
167 contexts. Furthermore, we wanted to study two sports that are uniquely different to one
168 another in terms of their categorisation (Griffin, Mitchell and Oslin 1997), as this would
169 provide data on children's perspectives and experiences from two different ends of the

sporting spectrum. In total we had four different sites from which the data was generated (see Table 1).

Insert Table 1 here. Data collection sample

Swimming club

The swimming club is a competitive club, where each swimmer is expected to compete once they reach the UK's legal competition age of 9. The club is made up of three different squads; a) 'skills', b) 'development', and c) 'performance'. The decision of what squad a swimmer is placed in is based on their age and ability level. The youngest and least experienced swimmers, who formed the participants for this study, were part of the 'skills' squad where the focus of the coaching was on the mastery of basic technique. All of the swimmers who were part of the 'skills' squad trained for 3 hours each week, for 46 weeks of the year, and were aged between 7-11. All of the children (N=32) in the 'skills' squad were provided with the opportunity to take photographs, however of the 32 children, only 22 consented to take photographs. The number of photographs taken by these children was left for them to decide and as such, the number of photographs taken by each child varied from some only taking 1 to others taking as many as 6.

The head coach of the swimming club was a volunteer who had a national governing body (NGB) accredited level 2 swimming coaching qualification. She had been coaching at the swimming club for 9 years and had always coached the 'skills' squad. She was solely responsible for deciding the coaching content. She was, however, assisted in the delivery of the swimming sessions by 3 assistant coaches. Their role was to reinforce to the swimmers, the content delivered by the head coach.

Swimming school

In the school swimming context there was no element of preparing children for external competition. The children in this context were in years 5 and 6 (aged 9-11 years). Collectively, there were 33 children who were split into 2 groups. Therefore, the swimming coaching sessions were replicated twice, once for each group of children. Of these 33 children, 11 children did not consent to being involved in data generation, leaving 22 who did.

An externally employed swimming coach delivered the sessions (i.e. not a member of staff at the school). The coach had a NGB accredited level 2 swimming coaching qualification. This was the first year that she had coached this group; however she did have 4 years experience of coaching children of the same age. The coach delivered sessions that enabled children to meet National Curriculum for England and Wales programmes of study for key stage 2 (QCA 2007), and was solely responsible for delivering all of the sessions. Because the school had their own swimming pool, the children swam everyday for 30 minutes, but only in one six-week block during the summer term.

Football club

The children in the football club were 10-11 years of age, and competed once a week in an U11's local, recreational divisional league. The team had mostly experienced playing in a 7-a-side format, and was currently in transition, moving up to play 9-a-side games. The team trained once a week for an hour and a half, and played a match every Sunday. There were 12 players on the team in total; however, rarely did every child attend each weekly training session. All of the children took part in taking photographs.

The coach of the team was a parent of a child who played on the team. He coached as a volunteer and possessed 2 years coaching experience, all of which had been accumulated in this football club context. He had a NGB accredited level 1 football coaching qualification. The coach was solely responsible for deciding the content of the coaching sessions, but was sometimes assisted in delivery by another parent-coach.

Football school

Just like the swimming school context, in the football school context there was no element of preparing the children for external competition. The children involved were in years 4 and 5 (aged 8-10 years). The sessions were delivered as part of an after school extra-curricular program. As it was an after school extra-curricular programme, it was the children's choice as to whether they wanted to attend. 15 children attended the sessions, all of which were involved in data generation.

A paid football coach who was a full-time employee of a local community-coaching scheme delivered the sessions. He had been coaching for 2 years as a community sports coach, and has a NGB accredited level 2 football qualification. Coaching sessions were delivered once a week, for an hour during term time on the schools own playing fields. The coach was solely responsible for deciding the content of the sessions and delivered all of the sessions himself, with no assistance from other coaches.

Data generation

Drawings

The children were asked to draw pictures of anything related to their perspectives and experiences of being involved in coaching sessions. Prior to this study, drawings and

236 photovoice methods were trialed in both sports and in both contexts. In the two school
237 contexts, children had lessons before and after the coaching sessions so no time was available
238 to show them how to use the cameras. Moreover, the school sessions for both swimming and
239 football were much shorter than in the club contexts. As such, the research staff decided that
240 having the children conduct post-session drawings would ensure they maximised the short
241 learning time available, rather than compromise this by asking them to take time out of the
242 sessions to take photographs. Consequently, children were asked to engage in drawings at a
243 time arranged between the researcher and the school. Children were asked to draw pictures
244 displaying positive and negative experiences. Interviews with the children about their
245 drawings took place one week after they were asked to do their drawings in a classroom at
246 the school. Children were interviewed in pairs, but questioned individually about their
247 drawings. The interviews lasted up to ten minutes per child.

248 ***Photovoice***

249 The photovoice method was used to enable the children the opportunity to express specific
250 instances that highlighted their perspectives and experiences. In the same way as with the
251 drawings, children were asked to take photographs of anything that captured their
252 perspectives and experiences of the coaching sessions they participated in. Where the
253 photovoice method was used, children were given a disposable camera by the research staff
254 at the beginning of the training session. An order was created, with children taking in turns in
255 different sessions to use the camera (i.e. three children were given the camera in session one,
256 with three different children being given the camera in session 2 etc). The camera was the
257 children's to use for the entire session. After each session, the photographs were developed
258 and presented to the children at the next session for them to provide an explanation of the
259 photo(s) that they took.

Reflections

The purpose of this paper was to reflect on the viability of employing visual methodologies, in offering a furthered understanding of elementary-aged children's perspectives and experiences of sport and sports coaching. This section will show how photographs and drawings enabled children to demonstrate their perspectives and experiences. Examples of children's photographs and drawings will be provided from the two different sports, and the two different contexts.

Photographs

Club swimming context

Insert figure 1 here

This photograph shows the coach explaining what she wanted the children to do during a session that worked on the front crawl stroke. When the child was asked why she took this photograph she replied:

> "Well Amy (head coach; pseudonym), instead of just telling us what to do she like explains it over and shows us what we have to do. I really like this because like if you do it and you're not really sure what to do then she explains it again so you get it" (explanation of photograph from club swimmer, aged 9).

This child makes reference to the coach providing visual demonstrations as well as verbal instructions in order to explain what it is that she wanted the children to do. It is clear from this child's explanation that the coach's use of demonstrations are an effective method

in providing information of what they need to do, to further improve their performance of this particular stroke.

Another child took a photograph that highlighted their positive experience through the support her coach provides via a demonstration.

Insert figure 2 here

"This shows the coaches explaining to people if they have gone wrong or if they need to work on it a lot more. Amy, and the lane end coaches do this all of the time, and it is so helpful because if you are doing it wrong and then you think you are doing it wrong they tell you and help you to improve on it" (explanation of photograph from club swimmer, aged 9)

Therefore, this photo helps the child to explain the way in which she believes her coach impacts on her learning to swim. In addition, it provides some of the underlying perceptions that the child attributes to the way in which the coaches provided feedback.

Football club

In a recreational football club context, the children were also able to display their perspectives and experiences through the medium of photographs. When prompted, one child took this picture:

Insert figure 3 here

"Well that is us in our two teams because they have different coloured bibs on to each other. So we were just getting ready to play a game, which I really like doing because we get to practice our skills like properly and we get to be with

our friends. I just really enjoy the game" (explanation of photograph from club footballer, aged 10)

This child alluded to not only having positive experiences of playing games as they get to practice their skills, but also because they get the opportunity to work collaboratively with their friends.

Another child displayed the knowledge that they had acquired concerning their understanding of one particular aspect of game play:

Insert figure 4 here

"Well they are all spreading out and the person at the back there with the ball, he is running into space so, because there is nobody there and so he has more opportunity so he can pass, because then they will all go towards him. This is important because when somebody is going to pass it to you, you have got more space to run into so you're not going to get tackled as much" (explanation of photograph from the club footballer, aged 10)

Thus, not only were some children able to articulate parts of the coaching sessions where they had positive experiences, they were also able to evidence some of the technical and game understanding skills they had acquired as a consequence of being placed in this type of learning environment.

Drawings

Swimming school

In the swimming school context, one child highlighted an experience through a drawing:

Insert figure 5 here

"Well I like playing ball games in the pool, and I put, and it's active and it is quite unusual, and I like doing things which are active and unusual because I like doing a lot of sports. This is a ball game where you have to catch it, and when you have it you're not allowed to move, and then you shoot through the goals. I just find these really fun because I usually do these outside, you know out of the pool because I do lots of sport, and it is just something different for me and I found it really fun" (explanation of drawing from school swimmer, aged 10).

This child has used his experiences of playing other sports and relating these experiences to what he found as a positive part of the swimming sessions

Alternatively, one child identified a particular part of the session that they didn't enjoy:

Insert figure 6 here

"I don't like it when it is cold, it made me shiver and I didn't look forward to swimming. When it was cold it didn't make me want to swim, and standing around at the start made it worse because you would be in the pool cold, and getting out at the end it would be really cold" (explanation of drawing from school swimmer, aged 10).

As the swimming pool was outdoor and not heated, on days when the weather was bad, many children would be cold whilst in the pool, and immediately as they got out. Added to this, this child describes how 'standing around' made it worse. So whilst the coach cannot

control the weather, they could more carefully consider how to structure practice to reduce the amount of inactive wait time.

Football school

Within the football school context, one of the children drew a picture of himself scoring a goal as something which he liked doing when playing:

Insert figure 7 here

"Well I really like it when I score a goal because all of my teammates like me for when I score a goal. It makes me feel really good, and it makes me feel included" (explanation of drawing from school footballer, aged 10)

Whilst this child drew a picture of himself scoring, the explanation of this revealed that the reason he likes scoring is because he believes it allows him to gain acceptance from his peers and makes them happy.

A further drawing from this child revealed something that he associated as being a negative experience, that being him having to head the ball, which he describes:

Insert figure 8 here

"I don't like headers. Mainly because I don't like the ball touching my head, I don't know why but I just don't. I don't mind it when it is coming softly but I hate it when it is coming fast at me" (explanation of drawing from school footballer, aged 10)

When probed further about what type of activities required the child to head to ball, he explained in more detail about things not directly related to his initial drawing:

> "Sometimes we practice corners and we have to header it in and I don't really like that. However I wouldn't change anything about the sessions. Tom is a good coach because he doesn't just tell us what to do, but he does stuff with us, like having a laugh. Also some of my friends come here so it is good to be with them" (explanation from school footballer, aged 10)

Through using the drawing as a prompt, the child was able to discuss how they positively experienced some of the behaviours his coach would use.

Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to reflect on the viability of using visual methods in offering a furthered understanding of elementary-aged children's perspectives and experiences of sport and sports coaching. This discussion section is split into two parts. The first part considers some of the data that was generated from using these methods, and how this may enhance our knowledge and understanding of children's perspectives and experiences of sport and sports coaching. In doing so, we discuss the need for coaching practitioners to more carefully consider the relevancy of their practices. The second part of the discussion reflects on the use of these methods, offering insights into the challenges faced, but also some potential benefits of employing these methods. Whilst this data was collected in sport coaching contexts, as Oliver (2001) has previously shown, the utilisation of visual methods as a data generation tool has implications for any researcher in helping to assist children in their learning.

Children's perspectives and experiences of sports coaching

Activists of visual method research suggest that one of the primary reasons for using these methods is because it allows children the opportunity to authentically express their perspectives and experiences (Coad and Lewis 2004). The social constructivist tenet of this method encourages a shift in power relations between the researcher and participant and promotes children to become 'critical consumers' (Kinchin and O'Sullivan 2003). Siedentop (1995) previously coined the term 'critical consumers' to describe learners who have developed a sense of awareness of the sporting environment within which they participate. With accompanying explanations, the children's photographs and drawings represented a broad range of their personal perspectives and experiences (Mills and Hoeber 2013), and, as evidenced from the exemplar data provided, these methods served as a prompt, or starting point to a conversation between the child and researcher. These methods also allowed the children the opportunity to speak freely and openly about their experiences and the relationships between themselves, the coach, and the learning environments in which they were currently engaged (Veale 2005). By presenting children with a visual stimulus, they were able to describe and explain which aspects of the learning environment facilitated and inhibited their learning.

Regardless of sport or context, children spoke in depth about how they learned better when their coaches gave additional explanations and demonstrations so that they understood what they were required to do. Other children talked about valuing the interpersonal behaviours of their coach such as their ability to have a 'laugh'. In regard to certain practices and activities that children associated with being positive, they expressed an enjoyment for games. Children related other positive experiences through playing and interacting with their friends, and learning new skills. Alternatively, the visual methods employed gave the children the opportunity to outline negative experiences, something that has not been overly

410 reported in the current literature (McHugh *et al.* 2013). These included the physical
411 environment, such as the cold weather, which was made worse by 'standing around'. Other
412 negative experiences centered on 'boring activities', such as running too much and a focus on
413 specific drills. It is our contention that using these methods and uncovering these perspectives
414 and experiences may be one way of initiating 'shifting the locus of power in youth sport from
415 adults towards young people themselves' (Harvey, Kirk and O'Donovan 2011, p. 19), and
416 thus encouraging young people to become 'critical consumers' and co-constructors of their
417 own learning.

418 Building on this previous point, this study re-affirms findings from coaching literature
419 that children's positive experiences are affected by the behaviour of the coach (Conroy and
420 Coatsworth 2007, Smoll and Smith 2006), and the way they structure practice and/or set the
421 environment for learning (Côté and Hay 2002, McCarthy and Jones 2007). However, using
422 visual methods has enabled a depth of explanation from children, which has not been
423 achieved from previously used questionnaires and/or structured interviews. This greater level
424 of explanation allows for an understanding of not only what children perceive as leading to
425 positive or negative experiences of playing sport and being coached, but also their
426 accompanying rationale as to why this is the case. Without this, coaches are at risk of
427 constructing a curriculum based on an incomplete picture (Cook-Sather 2002).

428 Building upon the work of Oliver and colleagues, we contend that if children's
429 coaches' practices are to achieve greater developmental appropriateness, then visual methods
430 provide a means of generating data, which will enable them to respond rather than merely
431 listen. For this to happen, children's coaches need to carefully consider the appropriateness of
432 the learning environment, and reflect on action alongside their participants so that practice
433 activities, coaching behaviours and desired developmental outcomes are congruent and, thus,

434 achieved (Côté, Young, North and Duffy 2007). Consequently, visual methods could serve as
435 an additional coach education tool in allowing coaches' to re-examine their practices and thus
436 improve their self awareness. According to Enright and O'Sullivan (2012, p. 48), visual
437 methods 'produce different knowledge and are a method of producing knowledge
438 differently'. By reflecting on using such methods in sports coaching contexts and considering
439 how they can be utilized in an ongoing manner akin to assessment *for* learning (Hay 2006),
440 we can affirm that they produce data from children's perspectives that can inform coach
441 reflection and subsequent session planning and delivery.

442 ***Reflections on the viability of using visual methods***

443 While we believe visual methods have much to offer coaching researchers and practitioners,
444 there were a number of feasibility issues that impacted on the generation of these data. The
445 greatest difficulty experienced through asking the children to take photographs was the
446 amount of time it took them to undertake this task. Often, children would be so immersed in
447 participating in their sport that they would often forget to take photographs. We were mindful
448 of becoming too involved in continually asking children to take these, as we wanted to ensure
449 that the decision was completely their own at a time that they believed captured their
450 perspectives and experiences.

451 A further issue was that on some occasions the children simply did not wish to take
452 photographs of anything. So whilst it has been suggested that a photographic method is an
453 enjoyable activity for children (Mitchell 2006), not all children wanted to be involved in this
454 process. Upon being presented with the camera at the start of the sessions, some children
455 stated that 'they didn't feel like it today, or they 'would do it some other time' Having said
456 that, for the majority the prospect of taking photographs appeared exciting and enjoyable.

As more time was spent in the field, the children started to willingly take more photographs. Some children even took themselves out of practice to take a photo. It has been suggested that building up a strong rapport with the children will increase the likelihood of them fully co-operating in the research process (Hill 1997). Visual methods research is a time-consuming and lengthy process, and to truly build rapport with participants requires extensive time in the field (Oliver 2001). In this case, it was several months before the children started to become familiar with using the camera. Yet, the more time the researcher spent in the company of the children, the more they were willing to share their perspectives and experiences of being coached and playing sport (Brock, Rovegno and Oliver 2009, Spyrou 2011). As such, investing time in the field through adopting a multiple, rather than singular visit approach is a necessity in better understanding children's perspectives and experiences. What then resulted were the occurrence of interviews between the children and us that were more representative of a conversation, as both parties had an equal input into what was being said. One problem with methods such as questionnaires and interviews and is that conversation is predominately researcher led with them deciding the direction the questioning should take. Visual methods are aligned with a constructivist theory of learning in that knowledge is created and shared within specific socio-cultural contexts (Light 2008).

Furthermore, children being given a camera could be seen as a novelty for them as everyday practice does not necessitate them to take photographs. Because of this, the children may have acted differently to what they would do normally, and thus, not give a true reflection of their thoughts and beliefs (Emond 2005). However, by asking the children to explain the photographs they had taken ensured that there was a rationale supporting each photo taken. Conversely, we found that the drawings presented fewer problems. One possible explanation might be that children are more familiar doing drawings, than they are taking photographs (Einarsdottir *et al.* 2009). Another explanation was that in the contexts where

children were asked to do the drawings, the researcher had spent a longer period of time before asking them to undertake this task. As such, a greater rapport may have been built between the researcher and the children, which led them to being more open in their illustrations and explanations (Hill 1997). Finally, given the nature of drawings compared to taking photographs, children have more time to construct a drawing, where as photographs are more of an instantaneous act that are not as pre-meditated. There were, in some instances, times when children would be presented back with a photograph they had taken, but fail to remember why they had taken that photograph. For this reason and reflecting on these methods, drawings potentially represent children's perspectives and experiences more so than photographs, although taking time out of coaching sessions to construct drawings may present a barrier to this method.

However, an important part of using these methods is the interview process with the children, which was found to be a crucial component, certainly in terms of shifting power relations. During the interview process, the children would hold their drawing(s) and/or photographs(s), which represented a sense of ownership on their part. Moreover, it gave researchers the opportunity to understand the affective aspects of the coaching sessions they participated in. Asking the children to talk about these required them to reflect on their experiences, thus uncovering previously sub-conscious thoughts (Moon 2013).

The purpose of using photography and drawings was to provide a stimulus for children to be able to discuss more openly their perspectives and experiences regarding their participation with specific coaching contexts. It became clear through the interviews with the children that what was taken or drawn was not necessarily always of primary importance; it was more that these served as a starting point or a prompt for a conversation between the researcher and the children. Using only interviews can lead to children feeling pressured into

giving an answer straight away (Punch 2002). Yet, the photographic, but particularly in the drawing method, gave children time to think and reflect on their experiences (Einarsdottir *et al.* 2009). This was revealed through the in-depth conversation that took place when the children came to elucidate their reasons for their particular photographs and drawings. We contend that the time taken to generate these data was time well spent as it gave an in-depth and nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences, which provide coaches' with a means to respond to these in their practices.

Implications for children's coaches

Children providing their perspectives and experiences have important implications for problematising the existing and dominant discourses in sports coaching contexts. In recent years, the phenomenon of athlete-centered coaching (ACC) has been suggested as the best approach in order to develop holistic athletes (Kidman 2001, 2005). That is, developing a range of different skills including social, psychological and physical, amongst others. The use of visual methods such as the ones employed in this paper could offer new insights which further support an ACC approach and increase an understanding of the affective aspects of the child's perspective and experiences of children's sports coaches. It can be seen from the examples in this paper that children have much to say about many things concerned with the environment they are coached in, when given the opportunity to, enacting to some extent the role of 'critical consumer'. Though, we must also make clear that what we are not advocating are coaching approaches that simply accept everything children say they like doing or want to do. We believe it is at the discretion of the coach to 'orchestrate' (Jones 2006), but being equipped with children's perspectives and experiences will likely allow them to do this with greater effectiveness (Côté and Gilbert 2009) when they have an increased appreciation and awareness of the child's experience.

Conclusion

Building on the work of researchers in education and physical education, particularly that of Oliver and colleagues, the purpose of this paper was to reflect on the feasibility of using visual methods in children's sports coaching contexts, whilst also considering the use of these methods in the wider context of qualitative research. Therefore, this research makes a contribution to the sport literature as it highlighted how multiple visits were required to get a detailed and nuanced picture of children's perspectives and experiences. As our experience of using these methods have shown, they require a level of skill on the part of the researcher to ensure that children 'buy-in' to the data generation process. Time in the field to build up a rapport with the children is a necessity before any data generation commences. Furthermore, researchers must be willing to be patient and allow children the time to take photographs and undertake drawings when they feel ready to do so. By investing this time, the data produced will be invaluable to enhancing knowledge and understanding of children's perspectives and experiences.

It makes a further contribution by considering how the generation of visual methods data could increase self-awareness of both the learner, which in this case was children, but also of the coach. It is our contention these methods and those similar, will further advance researchers and practitioners understanding of what children determine as leading to positive and negative experiences. By disrupting and shifting power relationships between the researchers/practitioners and children, these methods will encourage children to become 'critical consumers' rather than passive receivers of coaching. By doing so, pedagogical practices should become more effective as coaches' not only listen but also take the next step and respond to children's perspectives and experiences, through reflecting on their practices and thus promoting heightened self-awareness.

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