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Interrogating the Intersection of Participation and Performance Outcomes in School Sport: A Case Study of Sport in Educational Settings

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Finlay Sherlock Ludlow

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Abstract

The aim of this research was to explore the challenges faced by educators when attempting to offer both participation and performance pathways for pupils in a school setting. Education is often overlooked when performance sport is integrated into community, youth, and school settings. This research sought to explore the nuances of school sport delivery within New Zealand. Amidst falling participation rates of youth in sport, it is evident that schools play a critical role in offering quality sporting experiences to young people. One of the driving factors of the falling rates of participation is the professionalisation (including specialisation) of youth sport. To counter this, initiatives such as *'Balance is Better'* and *GoodSports* have been developed to prioritise youth development in sport. Yet schools and sporting academies can deliver sport how they see fit, and as such, do not need to align to these initiatives. It is therefore important to understand what the day-to-day delivery of youth sport looks like within schools. Specifically, this research considers the tensions that school sport staff face in delivering sport programmes within a complicated youth sport landscape. This thesis adopts a pragmatic paradigm, informing a qualitative case study. The primary tools for data collection were observations and interviews with nine staff across a range of roles within an independent school in New Zealand. Using Practice Architectures as a theoretical lens through which to analyse data, interactions within the school were grouped into social-political; cultural-discursive; and material-economic arrangements. Through the bundles of these arrangements, three key tensions emerge when considering some of the challenges faced by sport staff in education settings: 1) inconsistent and ineffective leadership to determine the direction of sport; 2) a disconnect in values between practitioners; 3) a need for processes to socialise the staff to the school values. The findings and implications of this study highlight the importance of schools offering opportunities for staff to align themselves with the values of the school, and the importance of the school having a sense of what day-to-day sporting delivery looks like to its students. Beyond this, it is argued that further research

and sport governance platforms (such as that of Sport New Zealand) should work to support schools to ensure that sport is delivered in accordance with school values and youth development initiatives.

Keywords: Youth development; Coaching; Practice Architectures

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Amidst concern surrounding the development of young people in modern society, research has turned to understanding how the role of sport could positively impact youth development (Côté et al., 2008; DiSanti & Erickson, 2021; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). Sport is often suggested to have the potential to address some of the most complicated problems in society, such as health promotion, economic growth, and homelessness (Jeanes et al., 2019; Sam, 2009). More specifically, there is clear evidence that participating in sport as a young New Zealander is beneficial for wellbeing and development (Wilson et al., 2022a). While acknowledging that sport might offer quality learning experiences to young people, it is also noted that the current sporting landscape is not offering positive experiences for all, with a high percentage of children 'dropping out' of sport before the benefits can reveal themselves (Moulds et al., 2022). There is also evidence emerging that young people who drop out of sport may experience long-term unfavourable impacts based on their negative sporting experiences (Upenieks et al., 2025). It might be reasonably suggested therefore, that in Aotearoa New Zealand, youth sport is undergoing something of a crisis, with the need to change and 'think differently' about youth sport widely accepted.

Research has highlighted a struggle with the internal contentions in youth sport – many youth sporting programmes are attempting to balance both participation, and prioritising youth development, with performance, thereby leading to the early professionalisation of youth sport delivery (Bergeron et al., 2015; Roberts et al., 2023; Walters et al., 2010). These contentions have been seen to be a contributing factor for children dropping out of sport (Walters et al., 2010). Tensions have also emerged between the national policy focus on appropriate developmental pathways, whereby coaches and administrators are encouraged to prioritise long term youth development and fun, and the real-life day-to-day delivery of sport that is often characterised by performance and competition (Walters et al., 2010). Beyond this, research shows that the context in which coaches and support staff work is

complex and is becoming more professionalised (Phelan & Griffiths, 2019; Pitchford et al., 2023). Alongside this notion, there has been a recent turn to directly including the voice of the participants within research (Bingham et al., 2025). More specifically, voices of coaches and those who deliver the sport within schools and youth academy structures have often been excluded from research (Sweeney et al., 2021).

Given these tensions, and many others, global sport participation rates in young people have been seen to drop by up to 35% annually (Battaglia et al., 2024; Crane & Temple, 2015). In New Zealand, current reports highlight that participation in physical activity drops by 23% between 12–14-year-olds and 18–24-year-olds (Sport New Zealand, 2025a). To understand the issues that contribute to these dropout rates it is important to explore the various policy and cultural issues that impact on youth sport.

Within the New Zealand context, thanks to the success of teams such as the All Blacks, Black Ferns and the medal tally of the Olympic games, national pride is dominated by a sense of sporting success, in particular the ability to 'punch above our weight' (Johnson et al., 2013). However, it seems that the expectations of adult performance have been replicated in youth sport. There is a growing discourse around the importance of winning and specialisation in youth sport, an attitude which is now informing youth development programmes (Walters et al., 2010). This attitude contradicts the evidence to focus on the long-term development of young people through sport (Côté & Hancock, 2014). Long term youth development in sport would look like a focus on building children's confidence, competence, connection, and character, by sampling a range of sports instead of specialising and committing to a singular sport (Côté et al., 2009; Côté & Hancock, 2014).

In response to growing tensions of professionalisation and youth sport drop off, there has been a change in how governments, sports organisations, and sport stakeholders (such as managers, athletes, and coaches) approach the governance and delivery of youth sport. National policy initiatives such as

"*Balance is Better*" have been launched to address the over-professionalisation and performance focus in youth sport (Balance is Better, 2025; Taylor et al., 2024). Although, responsibility for sport pathways is still largely devolved to national sporting organisations and schools (Sam, 2024). Yet little is known about how sport is delivered within school programmes.

School Sport

There is a clear notion that school sport is critical to the sporting success of New Zealand:

> "New Zealand dominates on the world stage in sports and if we want this to continue we need to invest in our young people and ultimately that begins with school sports" (Dyson, et al., 2018, p. 451).

However, arguments surrounding the place of sport in schools have been taking place for decades (Grant & Pope, 2000). Some arguments suggest sport can be a tool for learning (Holt et al., 2008). Whilst others argue that sport should sit completely separately to schools and Physical Education (PE) curriculum (Berkshire et al., 2024; Stevens et al., 2021). However, the current reality is that sport is consistently being delivered within school bounds. Talented athletes are often identified and supported first in secondary schools (Sam, 2024). Many secondary schools, oftentimes private schools, therefore, see value in developing talented athletes, and prioritise performance metrics over youth development through structures such as school sport academies (Brown, 2014; Sam, 2024; Thompson et al., 2022). These notions further perpetuate the professionalisation of youth sport.

Concerns about addressing the dwindling youth rates of participation evident in organised sport are compounded by the highly controversial televising of secondary school sport competitions and the creeping professionalisation of school sport 'academy' structures in New Zealand (Brown, 2015; RNZ, 2020). School sport academies are designed to support talented students to achieve sporting excellence (Brown, 2015; Roberts et al., 2023). For many of these schools and academies, it has been

evidenced that national guidelines rarely impact the daily operation of sport, and they can effectively operate as they please (Burrows & McCormack, 2011). Therefore, it is important to understand how school sport is delivered on a day-to-day level. As such, the New Zealand youth sport landscape will be the object of enquiry for this thesis, through the lens of school sport. There will be a specific focus on the nature and delivery of school sport, drawing on key stakeholders in the establishment and maintenance of such school sport cultures.

1.1 Situating Myself within the Research

It is critical that I situate myself within this research so that I can best explain the context and findings of this thesis. The background and knowledge of researchers is a critical element of qualitative research and informs the nature in which data are collected, analysed, and discussed (Lincoln et al., 2024; Townsend & Cushion, 2021).

I have either participated in, or worked in youth sport for my entire, albeit short, life and career. I have coached hundreds of young people who have been motivated by a range of influences and have witnessed those same young people grow as individuals and athletes. Many of these experiences have positively shaped my perspective on the value of participating in youth sport, and the important role adults play in shaping what these experiences look like. However, on the other side of these positive experiences lies the challenge of supporting young people in sport. I have felt pressured by people and systems above me to coach in a certain way (rarely athlete or person centric), and in most instances I did not question those very systems. I have struggled to balance the seemingly opposing outcomes of ‘performance' (and therefore professionalisation) and youth development in my coaching practice, sometimes leading directly to athletes dropping out of sport. It is what has led me to start this research journey and begin to ask questions of the systems I had so long taken for granted.

As a researcher, my experiences have led me to question those binaries that exist in and structure sport delivery in New Zealand. Specifically, I am challenged by the notion that the very contexts where we associate physical activity with educational and developmental outcomes (schools) are a major site of tension and inequitable outcomes. Throughout my research journey I have also been able to identify theories that have the potential to address some of these tensions, for example, how the Practice Architectures theory might be used to understand the operation and delivery of youth sport within organisations such as schools.

Alongside my research, I work at a Regional Sporting Trust in a sport development team. The primary goal of my work is to improve the quality of experience for young people in sport through the adults that deliver it, by building the capability of the coaching workforce. In this role I have been able to grasp the true depth of sports policy and initiatives that surround youth sport and have met with countless people in the community who are struggling to make sense of it all. Coaches and staff have made it clear to me that the frameworks that government agencies are suggesting are neither clear nor actionable and that they (coaches) are often being "left to their own devices", so are coming to me for support. Alongside this, I know many quality people who deliver youth sport programmes who are struggling with this ambiguity and are on the cusp of completely stepping away from youth sport. Phrases such as "kids are too soft these days, competition is good for them" and "school sport has gotten too competitive, they're just kids" highlight a growing polarisation in adult opinion and what it means to partake in sport. I therefore believe it is critical that researchers question the place of sport in the school environment and understand how we can support adults in delivering quality sporting experiences to young people.

1.2 Research Objective

As has been argued above, sport has the potential to offer young people a range of quality learning experiences, yet sport within educational settings is not meeting the needs of all young people,

contributing to the attrition from sport. It is, therefore, my contention that it is important that research considers investigating the ways in which policy makers and practitioners continue offering quality experiences to young people in school sport. Beyond this, there is limited research on the contemporary challenges of school sport delivery and the intersection between the professionalisation of youth sport and school sport, an intersection has been associated with the youth sport dropout rate (Brown, 2015). There is, therefore, a need to interrogate the ways in which sport is positioned and delivered within school contexts. It has also been recognised that although coaches and administrators are key in the delivery of youth sport, research has largely missed understanding their experiences in delivering school sport (Sweeney et al., 2021; Walters, 2010).

My objective, therefore, is to explore the relevant literature and understand the context that school sport staff work within while delivering school sport in New Zealand.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

To answer this question, I have purposely structured the thesis into six chapters. The introduction serves to situate the research in the broad field of sports research, while setting a clear structure that the rest of the thesis follows. Chapter two provides a scoping of the extant literature relevant to the policy landscape that youth sport exists within in New Zealand. This includes a summary of the over professionalisation of youth sport, and the various policies that actors such as Sport New Zealand take to address these concerns in the current educational landscape. Chapter two is also where I critique and explore literature that highlights where tensions in the delivery of school sport emerge, including the priorities of schools, coaches, sporting academies, and parents. Chapter three outlines the methodology chosen to respond to the research question. It begins by placing this research in a broader school of qualitative research, before moving to specific justifications of the methods used to capture the tensions that arise in contemporary youth sport. In Chapter four, I outline how the Practice Architectures theory can be used to understand the intricacies and nuances of the delivery of school

sport on a day-to-day level. The results and discussion chapter (Chapter five) presents the findings of this thesis, by thematically analysing the tensions that sport staff face in delivering youth sport on a day-to-day basis. Finally, chapter six provides clear conclusions and implications, both for the site of the case study and the wider field of research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter I outline the scope of literature that informs the context of this thesis. I begin by addressing the current landscape of youth sport, by noting the benefits of sport and the falling rates of participation. I point to possible reasons for this drop off and outline the policies that are aimed at supporting young people in sport. Through this I outline the literature covering the current landscape of youth sport in New Zealand (both through an educational lens and through community sport). It is here in the literature that tensions between the youth development centric ideals and the competitive delivery of youth sport in New Zealand are highlighted, both at a conceptual level and the pressures of day-to-day sporting delivery. Youth sport in Aotearoa New Zealand, therefore, provides an uncertain framework for practitioners (including teachers, coaches and those involved in the delivery of school sport) to navigate. These tensions are seen to arise through the key stakeholders in youth sport (coaches; schools; sports academies; and parents). By outlining this literature, I argue the need to understand the intersections of youth sport and school sport – both theoretically and in day-to-day delivery – amid a landscape of youth sport that is in turmoil.

2.1 Young People in Sport

In New Zealand, sport is considered a critical aspect of daily life (Fulcher et al., 2018). A 2016 report based on a national cross-sectional study, 68% of young New Zealanders (10–18-year-olds) reported engaging in sport-based activities (Wong et al., 2016). Looking at young New Zealanders' moderate-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) targets, Wong et al. (2016) found that sport plays a significant role achieving the daily recommended targets (31% of daily MVPA by time). Alongside these physical benefits, organised sport has been seen in New Zealand literature to offer benefits to young people's wellbeing that go beyond the benefits seen by general physical activity (Wilson et al., 2022a). It evident that sport is a useful means to help young people hit the recommended physical activity targets, such as MVPA, to live a healthy lifestyle along with supporting overall well-being (Gale et al., 2021; Wilson

et al., 2023; Wong et al., 2016). Yet, as addressed in the Section 1 of this thesis, many young people are dropping out of sport before the benefits can be recognised.

Researchers have considered the ways in which youth participate in sport for many years (Greendorfer & Lewko, 1978). More specifically, literature considering the youth sport drop off has been relevant since the 1980s, with researchers looking to understand the motivations and reasons for children being involved in organised sport (Petlichkoff, 1992; Weiss & Petlichkoff, 1989). It has been argued that the sport drop off can largely be attributed to five key factors: disengaging and unenjoyable experiences within sport; the perceived ability of the young athletes; social pressures (relevant most as the time commitment of sport increases); competing priorities (an increase in timetabling constraints); and physical constraints (such as that of injury and physical maturation) (Crane & Temple, 2015). It is worth noting that that each of these factors contains multiple influences and each athlete will have individual nuances that cannot be captured in wider categories (Crane & Temple, 2015). The drop off from sport, therefore, is complicated Battaglia et al. (2024. It has been argued that, on some occasions, it might be considered better for young people to have disengaged from sport if participating in sport is causing negative experiences (Battaglia et al., 2024). This work can be paired with the work of Upenieks et al. (2025) who pointed out that adults who played and dropped out of organised sport are at a higher risk of mental health challenges than adults who are either still playing sport or have never taken part entirely. It is evident that sport can be valuable for children to take part in, however it is vital that they have a quality experience in sport (Battaglia et al., 2024; Upenieks et al., 2025).

As noted in multiple papers, many sporting programs are demanding specialisation from young athletes, even where it is not positive for youth involvement in sport or the long-term development of the young person (Battaglia et al., 2024; Côté et al., 2009). Partly this could be because there are unclear and ambiguous priorities within youth sport (Bruner et al., 2022). However, there is more evidence that the push for professionalisation – and therefore performance – is driven by the benefits

of success that come from competing at a high level such as scholarships, travel opportunities, and high paying professional contracts (Brown, 2015; DiFiori et al., 2018). Ultimately, quality experiences in youth sport are challenged by the intersection of a range of goals, expectations, relationships, and outcomes of initiatives, programs, and pathways (Côté et al., 2016).

2.2 Professionalisation of Youth Sport

One of the most important factors that needs to be considered in the youth sport context is the over professionalisation of sport for young people (DiSanti & Erickson, 2021; Roberts et al., 2023). The over professionalisation of youth sport is largely rooted in the recent commercialisation of youth sport and senses of parental success (Camiré & Santos, 2019; Gould, 2019). The need to move away from professionalising youth sport has been argued in the literature for some time (Gould, 2009; Gould, 2019; Torres & Hager, 2007). Youth sport has been evidenced to become more professionalised when the primary objective of sport is winning (Gould, 2019). When this happens, common practice often includes “coaches yelling at young people for not performing well, coaches focusing their attention only on the most skilled children, increased early sport specialization and intense year-round training” (Gould, 2019, p. 154). The outcomes of this practice have been evidenced as burnout of young people (including dropout and injury) and a lack of enjoyment (Giusti et al., 2020; Soares & Carvalho, 2023).

The over professionalisation of youth sport is not only impacting specialisation and coaching practices, but also competition structures. Competition structures for young people becoming more rigid and reflective of adult competitions, thereby leading to tactical decisions being made (such as only letting the best children play) to better the chance of success (Merkel, 2013; Torres & Hager, 2007). Practices such as this are not promoting equity, or a quality of experience for everyone involved, and might be leading to the dropout of young people from sport.

One of critical sites of the over professionalisation of youth sport is in sporting academies. Put simply, “Football academies aim to produce elite-level players through specialised training” (Johnson et al., 2023, p. 1123). Stonebridge and Cushion (2025) echo this notion, with the point that academies are characterised by aim of building future professionals. These academies effectively have the goal of turning young players into adult professionals as quickly as possible. Güllich and Emrich (2012) point out that traditional academies can lead to insufficient athlete support and, as a product of this, lead to increased dropout rates. Beyond this, it has also been noted that young players who are at the academy level can have up to a 50% chance of a time-loss injury in their season (Johnson et al., 2023). Yet the rush to early-specialisation and over-professionalisation in youth sport through academy structures is showing no signs of slowing down (McQueen, 2024). New Zealand secondary school rugby coaches have been identified as being primarily focused on winning, in opposed to youth development priorities that are coming from modern coach development programmes and wider curriculum shifts (Bennett & Fyall, 2018).

Sport has the potential to give young people a range of opportunities to have fun and lasting enjoyment (Visek et al., 2015). Academies, on the other hand, are not characterised by fun but rather performance (Roberts et al., 2023). As a result of this, recent research has pulled from philosopher Ivan Illich to understand not only what might be leading to the push toward younger players being selected into academies, but also what the steps might be to move away from the over professionalisation of youth sport (Pitchford et al., 2023). This work considers how any notion of being an amateur in sport is being lost, which is ultimately leading to detrimental impacts on the athlete (injuries, or a complete drop off from sport). Pitchford et al. (2023) therefore suggest de-schooling sport, by letting young people have more choice in their pathways and practice, thereby allowing for creativity and individualism. As a similar piece of thought, Roberts et al. (2023) highlight the possibility of creating better pathways for youth in sport by considering the wider influences that impact on young athletes.

Other recent research highlights the importance of ensuring personal development is a core aspect of talent development pathways, and that is likely to give young athletes the skills to navigate the non-linear path to athletic success (Sweeney et al., 2021; Williams & MacNamara, 2022). The work of Côté et al. (2016) highlight that outcomes of participation, performance, and personal development are not mutually exclusive. However, traditional sport academies are yet to prioritise youth development over specialised sporting performance (Roberts et al., 2023; Sweeney et al., 2021). It is therefore evident that amidst a growing dropout rate of youth from sport, the over professionalisation of youth sport is deeply ingraining practices that are not aligned to a quality experience. To address this, a range of policies and initiatives have been developed to engage youth in sport. In the next section of this literature review I unpack this policy landscape in New Zealand.

2.3 The Sport Policy Landscape

In addressing the challenges in youth sport – such as the over professionalisation and increase in academy structures – a range of policies have been put in place to counteract the negative delivery of youth sport. There are, however, a range of tensions in enacting changes in the delivery of sport through policy change (Fulcher et al., 2018). For example, enacting true sport policy change in New Zealand, as argued by Lane et al. (2023, p. 430), “does not occur overnight”. Furthermore, there are a significant number of policy actors implicated in the development and delivery of sport policy, particularly as it relates to schools. One of the key actors is Sport New Zealand. Sport New Zealand is a Crown Agency, meaning it can operate as a section of the government, but without the strict ties of a Ministry (Lane et al., 2023; Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission, n.d.). It is the purpose of Sport New Zealand to lead community sport across New Zealand for better health outcomes and overall wellbeing of New Zealanders (Lane et al., 2023; Sport New Zealand, 2025b). A noteworthy moment in Sport New Zealand’s history was a $265 million investment from the New Zealand Government to support Sport New Zealand through the COVID-19 pandemic (Bezuidenhoudt & Sam,

2024). In a review of the rollout of this investment, Bezuidenhoudt and Sam (2024) argue that the investment opened the door for a wide scope of collaboration across the sporting sector, and empowered Sport New Zealand to address complex issues (such as that of the experience of the participant), while also addressing the immediate impacts of COVID-19. Although this review could only draw data from six regional sports trusts (RSTs) and one National Sporting Organisation (NSO), it highlights the connected nature of organisations in the sporting world of New Zealand, and the ability for Sport New Zealand to deliver initiatives across the sector.

As I suggested earlier (see chapter 1), a significant policy initiative in the New Zealand sporting landscape is '*Balance is Better*'. '*Balance is Better*' is an initiative designed to keep young people involved in sport and address the significant youth sport dropout rate by giving clear guidelines for sporting codes to adhere to, including maximum training loads (no more hours participating than the age in years of the young person) (Taylor et al., 2024; Wilson et al., 2022b). '*Balance is Better*' is a direct response to the notion of professionalising youth sport (Wilson et al., 2022b). Critically, '*Balance is Better*' consolidates advice from the World Health Organisation and the New Zealand Ministry of Health, to ensure that participating in sport is not adversely impacting the wellbeing of young athletes (Taylor et al., 2024). '*Balance is Better*' now acts as both a resource hub for coaches, parents, teachers, and officials, and offers guidelines to support the people, programmes, and environments that sport encompasses (Balance is Better, n.d.). Limited evidence on the effectiveness of '*Balance is Better*' exists, however Taylor et al. (2024)'s findings on youth basketball performance metrics supports its offered guidelines.

Another targeted initiative to support the development of young people in sport within the New Zealand context is *Good Sports*. *Good Sports* was developed by an Auckland based sporting trust – Aktive – from funding from Sport New Zealand, with the intention of shifting the landscape of youth sport to be one of development and a long-term enjoyment of sport (Walters et al., 2022). *Good Sports*

supports parents, coaches, and those who deliver community sport by educating them on developmental principles, youth-voice, and links in other policy such as that of *'Balance is Better'* through community facing workshops (Aktive, 2024). Walters et al. (2022)'s paper, outlines the history of *Good Sports*, pointing to the many interpersonal influences that young people have in navigating a quality sporting experience. The research uses a pragmatic, mixed methods approach to understand how best to support young people by addressing how *Good Sports* could be scaled to educate the community on the benefits of a development approach to sport (Walters et al., 2022). Overall, it was seen that there was scope for scalability and the authors offered recommendations to deliver Good Sports across the country.

Despite recent moves to enact these changes, evidence from Fulcher et al. (2018) highlights some of the disconnect between governmental organisations offering sporting initiatives in New Zealand and the general population. In this research, an initiative of considerable investment targeted at reducing injury risk for those participating in sport was deemed to be useful yet challenging to take from a policy level to the participant, due to the range of stakeholders involved in delivering sport (coaches, support staff, and parents) (Fulcher et al., 2018). Similar challenges were found in another relevant policy, KiwiSport.

KiwiSport is an initiative designed by Sport New Zealand with the aim of getting more young people into organised sport (Keat & Sam, 2013; Petrie & lisahunter, 2011; Sport New Zealand, 2019). *KiwiSport* was delivered in response to criticisms from the 2008 New Zealand Government that Sport New Zealand (SPARC at the time) was too far from their core business of sport (Keat & Sam, 2013). It was therefore determined that the most effective way of getting young people into organised sport was to deliver a policy that funded programs directly to schools through the Ministry of Education, and into community organisations through RSTs (Keat & Sam, 2013; Sport New Zealand, 2019). In a mixed method review of *KiwiSport*, Keat and Sam (2013) note major challenges including the increase in

bureaucracy and reporting processes, highlighting push back from both schools and RSTs in the documentation requirements in the *KiwiSport* policy. Ultimately, Keat and Sam (2013) argue that the complex nature of *KiwiSport* and lack of true engagement from Sport New Zealand put at risk the ability for RSTs to work with schools to get more young people active. Policies such as *KiwiSport, 'Balance is Better'*, and *Good Sport*s highlights the complex and political nature of sport policy in New Zealand.

2.4 The Educational Landscape

As highlighted through the previous section, schools and educational settings play a significant role in youth sport in New Zealand. This next section will unpack the educational landscape that informs and delivers sport practice to young people. Arguments around the place of sport within the curriculum itself has been a contentious debate since the 1990s, with some arguing it belongs completely outside of the classroom, and others seeing sport as a genuine vehicle for teaching (Grant & Pope, 2000).

The lines between sport and education in New Zealand are blurred, partly due to policies such as *KiwiSport* (Penney et al., 2014). This has been the case for over twenty years, with authors such as that of Grant and Pope (2000) arguing that if sport is going to be linked closely to education, it is then important to understand how sport could be delivered in a classroom environment to best educate young people. Another point of discussion that has blurred the lines between PE and sport is that of neo-liberalism (Pope, 2013). In this critical paper, Pope (2013) highlights the impact of neo-liberalism reforms in New Zealand, such as that of privatisation and how these reforms have resulted in a constant need for measurement and micromanagement in classrooms. Pope (2013) further highlights how limited professional development opportunities are to ensure that teachers can deliver PE in alignment with government policies. An impact of this is that the delivery of PE and sport in curriculum time by those who are not qualified teachers, including external companies (employing sports coaches) and RSTs (Pope, 2013). The quality of these providers has been questioned by teachers in the

New Zealand schooling context in multiple studies, specifically surrounding the pedagogical approaches that are used by these external providers (Dyson et al., 2016; Gordon et al., 2016). All of the neo-liberal changes and increase in external providers delivering within curriculum time have ultimately led the health and PE curriculum to be "up for grabs" (Pope, 2013, p. 507).

Petrie (2017) argues that notions of 'Olympism'– an educational philosophy driven by the values of the Olympic games– can support PE educators in directing learning to relational and socio-cultural outcomes, not purely focused on movement. These arguments are put forward not in the view that sport is taking away from education, rather that sport is a vehicle that could be better used to support learning and the overall sporting experience of young people. Extending this, it is also considered how 'olympism' could be used as a framework and guiding philosophy for community organisations outside of the classroom to align the work within education settings and community sport (Petrie, 2017). Although this thought has merit, it seems that factors such as that of neo-liberalism are leading to the narrowing of PE and the drive towards sport based delivery is growing, thereby putting individual practitioners who deliver sport, such as that of teachers and coaches, as the ones who ultimately determine the level in which youth development is at the forefront of young people's experiences in sport (Penney et al., 2014; Petrie, 2017; Pope, 2013).

Private Schools

A critical element of this thesis, within the scope of the intersection between sport and the educational landscape, is that of private schools. Although the literature interchanges the terms 'interdependent' and 'private' schools, this thesis will use the term 'private' to explain their role in youth sport (Sparks, 2018). Private schools are schools that do not need to follow the specific educational curriculum and are generally funded by the parents of the students (Ministry of Education, 2025). Critically, "elite private schools in New Zealand are usually characterised as exclusive, well-resourced, with strong leadership and successful academic, sports, and arts programmes" (Sparks, 2018, p. 1500). Private

schools can influence the worldview of young people by weaving privilege and notions of success throughout the culture of the school, perpetuating privilege and hegemonic masculinity within their students (Sparks, 2018). In two standout papers in the literature, it is noted that the values of sport in elite/private schools are attached to external perceptions of school success, the development of successful young people, and excellence (Burrows & McCormack, 2011; O'Flynn, 2010). Sport has also been seen by students as a vehicle to contribute to the wider school culture and to relieve academic pressure in elite New Zealand schools (Burrows & McCormack, 2011). Paired with research from O'Flynn and Lee (2010) offering evidence that both young males and females involved in sport at an Australian private school see their involvement as one of supporting their journey towards a balanced and successful life, it is obvious to see how private schools justify the investment into sport. In an in-depth study of six independent (private) schools in the United Kingdom, Morton (2022) found overwhelming evidence that sport was used by the school as a point of institutional attractiveness, ultimately suggesting that having sporting success in a private school leads to more enrolments in the school. Not only is it likely that being successful at sport will lead to more enrolments, but it was also seen that by being successful the sporting ability of incoming students is also likely to be higher, therefore perpetuating the cycle of success (Morton, 2022).

There is also literature to suggest that private schools at a broad sense may not be characterised by equity. In Morton (2022)'s study it is questioned the structures surrounding private schools that support them in producing considerably more international level athletes than typical state schools. This is unsurprising given recent literature suggesting that more affluent schools typically have better athletic trainers within their sport departments (Barter et al., 2023). Beyond this, when referring to an elite girls' school, Burrows and McCormack (2011) point out that government sporting policies make very little impact on the delivery of sport within the school. At a legislative level, private schools are only required to 'make reference' to the national educational direction ("Education and Training Act

2020", 2025). It is therefore important to understand that these schools have the capability to dictate their own direction and move in and out of national policies as they see fit.

2.5 New Zealand School Sport

As made clear through the previous sections of this literature review, youth sport in New Zealand operates in a complex environment with schools, government agencies, and supporting agencies (such as that of RSTs) navigating a climate of policies and influences with the aim of having the best outcome for young people. Next, this literature review will unpack how these tensions unfold in practice on a day-to-day level in New Zealand, by looking at how school sport is delivered beyond the classroom.

Success in sport has been reported to be of extreme value to a school, especially where it relates to traditional sports such as that of rugby and rowing (O'Flynn & Lee, 2010). Across multiple studies it is evident that private schools value sport for the links to developing a 'well-rounded' student, excellence, and school tradition (Burrows & McCormack, 2011; O'Flynn & Lee, 2010). It is not overly surprising to see this, given evidence from Leong and Chorney (2020) that participating in sport can overall positively impact the educational experience of students. And, as has been argued, schools can also use sport as a marketing tactic to bring in more students (Burrows & McCormack, 2011; Morton, 2022). Therefore, it is clear and unsurprising that schools are the setting for many youth sport experiences. However, little is known about how school sport reflects, resists or augments the shifts evident in broader youth sport culture. It is therefore important to understand the stakeholders and delivery of school sport within.

2.6 The Actors of Secondary School Sport

Parents

Throughout the literature, it is evident that parents play a significant role in the quality of a young person's experience in sport (Dorsch et al., 2016; Elliott & Drummond, 2017; McQueen, 2024; Smith & Côté, 2024). Elliott and Drummond (2017) note that parents can create positive impacts on youth in sport, such as that of encouragement, however there can also be instances of verbal-abuse and pressure towards young people. Elliott et al. (2018) not only acknowledge the role of parents in supporting young athletes but also offer direction for schools to work with parents to support a quality experience for those involved in sport. Further evidencing this, Burke et al. (2021) note that parental educational programmes for sporting parents can be a positive tool for addressing issues that can stem from sporting parents. One of the challenges that can be addressed in parental education programs is the misalignment of goals between parents and coaches (O'Donnell et al., 2022).

It is obvious in the literature that there is an inextricable link between parents and coaches, with the relationship between them being closely linked to the experience of young athletes (Burke et al., 2021; Elliott et al., 2018). To unpack this, Santos et al. (2024) conducted a scoping review to understand this relationship. This review found evidence to support the claim that parents and coaches need to work collectively within an organisation to work towards the best outcomes in school sport. It was however noted that the literature surrounding the relationship between parents and coaches is limited and requires further study understanding the wider socio-cultural influences on the relationship (Burke et al., 2021; Elliott et al., 2018).

Coaches

Coaches are a dominant influence on whether young New Zealanders have a quality experience in organised sport (Clarke, 2025; Wilson, 2022a). As such, coaches form a fundamental part of athletic development (Bae et al., 2023; Côté et al., 2016). Beyond this, coaches in schools can be a positive influence on young people, especially where the coach is also employed in a teaching capacity (Martin et al., 2021). It is therefore important to understand the relevance of coaches in the delivery of youth

sport. Coaching expertise has been poorly defined throughout the literature, to address this, Côté and Gilbert (2009) consider three key components of coaching: the knowledge of the coach within the domain in which they coach (sport specific knowledge); athlete outcomes (the overall experience and ability of the athlete, where it relates to the athlete as a whole); and coaching contexts (the ability to change the dynamic of coaching dependent on the context). It is therefore presented that coaching is: "The consistent application of integrated professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge to improve athletes' competence, confidence, connection, and character in specific coaching contexts." (Côté & Gilbert, 2009, p. 314).

Coaching takes place in a complex political environment, with interpersonal conflict and resolution often happening across coaching practice simultaneously (Potrac & Jones, 2009; Thompson et al., 2015). Beyond this, coaching has considerable links with teaching with a vast range of pedagogical approaches to supporting the athlete/learner (Light & Harvey, 2015). As such, coaching research is aligned to the educational landscape (Potrac & Jones, 2009). This finding is consistent with the work of Jones (2007), where coaching science is presented as a similar practice to educational relationships, and therefore should be considered as a complex social activity with day-to-day nuances that inform delivery.

It has since been seen in a wide range of literature, from a range of research methods, that in navigating the complex social environment, coaches have to manage the impressions of a wide range of people and in doing so act using a range of behaviours and physical artefacts (Pope et al., 2014; Potrac & Jones, 2009; Stonebridge & Cushion, 2025; Zehntner & McMahon, 2014). For example, considerations of salaries and employment relations are a core aspect of the daily life of employed coaches and sport practitioners (Phelan and Griffiths, 2019). In the New Zealand context, Walters et al. (2017) further evidence the complexity of this space with young athletes identifying the impact of contracts and salaries on competitive coaching behaviour in rowing. University level coaches work beyond the demands of their contracts and are willing to work in sub-optimal conditions due to the

performance demands of their work (Krahn, 2024). Discussions such as salaries and contracts point to the fact that as sport generally becomes more professional, so too does the profession of coaching (Pitchford et al., 2023). The impacts of this, as discussed by Pitchford et al. (2023), lead to coaches driving athletes to fit a player profile that works with the employing organisation. The professionalisation of coaching and the continued development of coaching literature has opened research to consider the role of coach learning and development (Stodter & Cushion, 2017). In the next section of this literature review I unpack the existing literature on coaching learning and how it relates to socialising coaches to youth centric coaching practice.

2.7 Coach Learning & Power

Coach learning takes place in three key domains: formal learning, non-formal learning, and informal learning (Nelson et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2023). Formal education is often delivered by national bodies with a standard set of learning objectives and often work coaches towards some form of a qualification (Nelson et al., 2006). Informal learning, on the other hand, relates to the learning opportunities that coaches might take themselves to better their individual understanding of coaching or their sport (Nelson et al., 2006). Non-formal learning opportunities sits between these, with workshops and conferences being key sites of non-formal learning (Nelson et al., 2006).

It has also been argued that coach learning is an accumulation of the experience of coaches, with coach development and prior learning acting as the background for the knowledge of coaches (Stodter & Cushion, 2017). Extending these thoughts, Phelan and Griffiths (2019 p. 104) considered how a considerable amount of effective coach learning can happen “in situ”. This key paper considers how learning activities are influenced by the environment that coaches are in. For example, if coaches are working in an organisation that is competitive and drives coaches against each other, limited collaboration and learning opportunities will occur (Phelan & Griffiths, 2019). This paper is critical in understanding the impact that influences such as relationships and policy might have on coaches’

ability to learn (Phelan & Griffiths, 2019). Phelan and Griffiths (2019) employ the use of the Practice Architectures theory to understand the interactions within a sporting organisation. This theory is also used within this thesis to understand the impact of these interactions within an educational environment inform the delivery of sport (see Chapter 4 for a full exploration).

There is also research that points to the importance of addressing coach learning at various levels of sport (for example, youth sport, competitive sport, elite sport) (Walker et al., 2018). However, it has been noted that much of the current literature on coach learning has been focused on understanding coach learning where it is relevant to elite sport (Walker et al., 2018). Where it is researched, school-based coach education has been seen to be heavily influenced by health and safety information (such as that of concussion protocols), with less education considering positive youth development and logistical support (Atkinson et al., 2023). This research can be coupled with work considering gaps in knowledge that coach education might fill. Newman et al. (2020) found that coaches of youth often lacked positive youth development related knowledge. Newman et al. (2020) argues that filling that gap is a critical point in addressing the youth sport drop off. In a school context, research conducted by Collins and Medbery (2008) found that coach education is considered valuable by high school sporting administrators in the United States, specifically when it relates to coaches early in their career. Interestingly, in this research the administrators saw value in coach education and recognised a need for it at a broad level but thought that their programme offered enough opportunity for coach education (Collins & Medbery, 2008). Beyond this, a gap in literature exists of the learning experience of coaches within schools.

The experience of coaches reflects an accumulation of the knowledge they have built and the power dynamics around them (Denison & Mills, 2017). Bennett and Fyall (2018) identify that it critical that research considers how power is related to coach education. The impact of power on coaching practice is well documented (Jowett & Wachsmuth, 2020; Potrac & Jones, 2010; Stirling & Kerr, 2009; Stone et

al., 2020). Specifically, the relationship between coaches and athletes is a constant negotiation for power, informing the entire coaching process (Potrac & Jones, 2010). Extending this, regardless of the intentions and ideals of a coach, the act of coaching has disciplinary power woven through it (Denison et al., 2015). Power has also been seen as relevant when understanding how coaches are able to deliver sport, with the employing organisation having power over coaches to continue historic traditions of practice (Stone et al., 2020). At a coach education level, research has considered how individual coaches bring their own backgrounds and assumptions, which influence the power dynamics of learning opportunities and support (or detract) from the impact that coach education can have on shifting practice (Townsend & Cushion, 2015).

Ultimately, power is important to consider when understanding the social intricacies and nuances of contexts of institutions and those who inhabit them (Atkinson & Gibson, 2017l; Denison et al., 2015). More specifically, Atkinson and Gibson (2017, p. 77) note “Power helps define the ways in which socialization occurs, and social forms emerge that are the hallmarks of contemporary bodily practices and values”. Power is also an important consideration in understanding the practice of youth sport, and the discourse that informs it, given the range of stakeholders and settings that influence it (Walters et al., 2010). Therefore, it is evident that power is critical to understand when considering youth sporting institutions and people who run them.

2.8 Sport Academies in Schools

As part of the creeping professionalisation of youth sport alongside historical legacies of WW2 militarism, school sport ‘academies’ have gained prominence globally (Leong et al., 2022). In the New Zealand context, sports academies have been present in the schooling system since 1997 (Pope, 2002). As made evident in a review of existing sport academies in the early 2000s, shortly after their inception in New Zealand, sports academies were originally posed to engage students who struggled academically (Grant & Pope, 2007; Pope, 2002). However, as evidenced by Hokowhitu (2008), the

inception of school sports academies aligns with the timing of the professionalisation of rugby in New Zealand, coupled with evidence that school sporting academies largely built to continue the success of a school's 1st XV Rugby Team. Hokowhitu (2008, p. 86) also argue that "the Ministry of Education has little or no mandate of control regarding Sports Academy curricula.", thereby leaving schools to ultimately determine what a sporting academy is characterised by. It is worth noting that many of the characteristics of a sports academy are similar to those of private schools. School sport academies have been characterised by developing physical and sporting excellence in young people, often through notions of professionalisation (Thompson et al., 2022). Private schools are also incentivised to professionalise sport, thereby improving performance and increasing the profile of the school (Morton, 2022). Therefore, there are undisputable parallels between school sport academies and schools that prioritise sport, often in the form of private schools.

Arguments for and against sports academies in schools have been reflective of the arguments surrounding the traditional sporting academy. For example, Leong and Chorney (2020) document arguments suggesting that traditional PE programmes have been designed to support the development of young people's physical literacy, whereas sport academies are characterised by the desire to increase specific sporting ability. Physical literacy, as defined by Roberts et al. (2019) is the relationship between a person and their movement through life, irrespective of singular sporting moments. A consistent position is taken by Leong and Chorney (2020), noting that the development of physical literacy is important as it will be useful in a range of instances throughout that young person's life. To extend this discourse, Thompson et al. (2022) conducted a systematic review of literature surrounding sporting schools, which are reflective of the characteristics of a school sports academy. This review found a range of positive outcomes for young people in school sports academies such as an increase in physical ability, an increase in well-being, life skills, and an ability to self-optimise for longer. Equally it was seen across the literature that school sport academies have negative impacts on young athletes, such as lower rates of attending higher education, an increase in injury risk, and an

increase in pressure from teachers and parents alike (Thompson et al., 2022). The lower rates of higher education for those in academies is not surprising when coupled by research Hokowhitu (2008) that school sports academies often offer qualifications that are not useful beyond the scope of the academy.

Specific research considering the state of school sporting academies in New Zealand recognised the notion that many of those involved in academies - whether a school senior leader, student, or coach - are doing it to “support really good people”, referring to the most gifted and talented young athletes Brown (2015, p. 448). This research further illustrates how coaches involved in secondary school sporting academies perpetuate notions of elitism and performance standards for the young people involved, thereby pointing to potential issues of youth development (Brown, 2015). There are, however, examples in the literature of a similar academy structure that seeks to support students in building the life skills through a combination of sport and education, through a Māori lens (Hapeta & Palmer, 2009). In this structure, the students and whānau (family) report notions of development, by noting that the academy helped their attendance rates, wellbeing, and overall ambition (Hapeta & Palmer, 2009). This evidence challenges notions from the work of Hokowhitu (2008) who highlights an overrepresentation of Māori in sporting academies that have less of an academic pathway. The juxtaposition across the literature highlights the complexity of prioritising targeted sporting success within the school context.

Sports academies in New Zealand have become so prevalent and contentious that a large news source, the New Zealand Herald, have offered New Zealand parents a three-step checklist to consider before enrolling their child into a school sporting academy to ensure that they are the right fit for both the sporting and educational aspirations of the parents for the child (Cleaver, 2015). It is also evident that coaches’ voices have been largely excluded from research considering their role in traditional sporting academies (Sweeney et al., 2021). So it is without doubt that research into sporting academies, and

schools that prioritise sport (such as private schools), needs to move to understanding how programmes could be delivered in an approach that supports youth development, while recognising the complicated policy landscape that surrounds youth sport generally in New Zealand. As succinctly summarised by Walters et al. (2010, p. 114) when referring to the New Zealand sporting landscape, “there is a clear clash however, between the discourses influencing policy, and the delivery of sport at grassroots level, even for children as young as five years of age”.

2.9 Conclusion

In this chapter I have summarised the relevant literature that informs this thesis, by first describing the importance of youth sport while situating it within the challenges of keeping young people involved in sport in New Zealand (Wong et al., 2016). It was outlined that young athletes not having a quality experience in sport may lead to them dropping out of sport entirely, and therefore not experiencing the benefits that can arise from taking part. One of the factors that leading to negative experiences in sport is the over-professionalisation and push towards competitive, performance pathways for young athletes. Pulling from literature considering how sport is delivered within New Zealand, this chapter highlighted the tensions that are arising in the delivery of youth sport at schools, both in the classroom and outside of it (Petrie, 2017; Pope, 2013). At a policy level, the New Zealand government and Sport New Zealand have worked to address these concerns through a range of policies and initiatives such as that of *KiwiSport* and *'Balance is Better'*. However, disconnect still emerges from the practitioners of sport. By considering stakeholders such as parents, coaches, and schools themselves, it is evident that the delivery of sport is influenced by pressures of remuneration, notions of success, and elitism. These influences have been seen to be exaggerated in school sport academies. This literature review has therefore noted the tensions of delivering youth sport in New Zealand in a way that is focused on youth development outcomes, influenced by the balance between policies such as *'Balance is Better'*, and the push towards competitive and performance pathways, often by coaches, parents, and schools

(Balance is Better, 2025.; Wilson et al., 2022b). Although the acknowledgement of these tensions exists in the literature, there is little that directly notes the tensions that are felt by those who deliver sport within schools, opening a clear gap in the literature for this research to sit. These gaps are relevant to understand and ultimately inform my research question – *what are the tensions that school sport staff face in the delivery of school sport in New Zealand?* – as they point to the lack of understanding as to how school sport is delivered and, therefore, the impact of that delivery on young people participating in sport.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this research is to understand the tensions that school sport staff face in the delivery of school sport amidst a contentious and complicated youth sport landscape. The previous chapter has outlined the vast landscape that this research is situated in and has pointed to the number of policies and actors that are influencing the experience of young athletes in school sport in New Zealand.

In this chapter, I provide an outline of the methodology used to understand the research question. Qualitative research will be introduced as the means of gathering data using pragmatism as the research paradigm. In keeping with this paradigm, the importance of identifying the clear problem within the research will be pointed out, along with arguments for why the inquiry will only produce meaningful data if the data is that which can be actioned to solve the problem

I justify the use of a case study within an independent school's sport department to unpack the current climate of youth sport. By using methods such as observations and semi-structured interviews, this thesis can provide a unique set of data to understand the day-to-day delivery of youth sport in schools. I then outline the clear steps that were used to successfully employ reflexive thematic analysis to assess the data before also underlining the importance of how my own reflexivity is critical to understanding the complete scope of the results and discussion. Finally, I outline the ethical considerations taken to ensure the safety of any involved participants.

3.1 Research Paradigm

Research paradigms offer researchers a way of thinking through a clear set of assumptions about the world (Morgan, 2014; Omodan, 2025). As clearly characterised by Smith and Sparkes (2020, p. 1003) "The beliefs that form a paradigm encompass both an ontological belief system and an epistemological belief system". Therefore, it is important when defining research paradigms to unpack both belief systems. Ontology asks, "what is the nature of reality" and in doing so seeks to understand what "can

be known" about that reality (Smith & Sparkes, 2020, p. 1002). To some schools of thought (those who come from a positivist paradigm), the answer to that question is that a single truth can be found, this is called ontological realism (Smith & Sparkes, 2020). To others (those from an interpretivist paradigm and aligning to ontological relativism), the answer is that realities are socially constructed between the perceptions of people. Epistemology situates the researcher within ontology and research by asking a further question, "how do I know that reality?" (Smith & Sparkes, 2020, p. 1002). As with the ontological belief systems, two key schools of thought emerge. Those who are considered an objectivist (and coming from a positivist paradigm), would suggest that truth can be found by using a set of methods that remove the notion of a researcher from the research method, thereby removing human bias from research (Smiths & Sparkes, 2020). Constructivists, on the other hand, would argue that that you cannot remove the researcher, and therefore their values and bias, from the research method and therefore researchers shape the production of knowledge through their biases (Smith & Sparkes, 2020). By understanding these views, paradigms thereby allow researchers to view the work of their own and others in a critical lens, recognising bias and articulating why researchers see the world in the way they do (Omodan, 2025). Various paradigms may, by standard and tradition, use a set list of methods to conduct research, but specific approaches to research (such as qualitative research) do not have a set list of methods that researchers are limited to practice (Denzin et al., 2024).

3.11 Pragmatism

> *"Pragmatists are committed to improving society by addressing power dynamics and considering issues of equity" (Hall, 2013, p. 24).*

Pragmatism is a research paradigm that seeks to address a particular problem and to produce actionable knowledge without 'getting caught' in the deep theoretical underpinnings and metaphysics of traditional paradigms (Jenkins, 2016; Lally, 2013; Morgan, 2014). The etymology of pragmatism is from the Greek word "pragma", meaning action, a concept that is central to pragmatism (Kaushik &

Walsh, 2019). Pragmatism finds its roots in the late 1800s as academics, Charles Sanders Peirce and William James conceptualised a philosophy that was focused on ideas that lead to action (Lally, 2013). The origins of this school of thought were clear; true ideas are those that can be validated and assimilated (Lally, 2013). Beyond that an idea must also hold up in action to be truly valuable (Lally, 2013). The definition of truth to a pragmatist is an idea that both offers actionable steps towards a better world and is examinable by others, it does not, however, need to be proven by deep philosophical ideas, as all knowledge is contextual (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). This is because, from the viewpoint of a pragmatist, "the world is changed through actions" (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019, p. 3). Thus, setting aside complicated philosophies that spend too much time considering complicated ideas, without putting said ideas to the test. Ontologically and epistemologically, pragmatism has been argued as a research paradigm that can bridge the gap between traditional positivist paradigms and constructivist paradigms (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019).

The view of pragmatism is that knowledge is contextual and needs to be relevant to a situation (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). A simple example used to illustrate this view is that of a table. A positivist would see four legs and a flat surface and call it a table; a constructivist might argue that it is a table if someone is eating from it, but if someone was sitting on it, it would called a bench; to a pragmatist, the object is what it is used for in that context, so if someone needs to eat, it is a table, if they need to sit, it is a bench (Goles & Hirschheim, 2000).

Pragmatism's third influential thought leader was John Dewey, an education academic who defended pragmatism against other philosophies in the early-mid 1900s (Grecic & Grundy, 2016; Lally, 2013). Throughout this time, Dewey worked with George Herbert Mead to offer clear steps for how pragmatism might be used in a research context. Pragmatism does not completely disregard the value of other research paradigms (whether constructivist or positivist), rather consider them as a means to understand a phenomenon or conduct research, without getting caught in the philosophical

complexities and minor distinguishable differences (Hall, 2013; Morgan, 2014). This has not left pragmatists without critics, with researchers and philosophers of other paradigms suggesting that by leaving the metaphysics out of research, pragmatists forget the possible social implications and outcomes of research (Morgan, 2014). This is exactly the point that Dewey and fellow pragmatists are highlighting; those from other paradigms spend too much time considering the wider context of the research through deeply held assumptions, with not enough time solving the very real problems that people face on a day-to-day. As made clear by Dewey (1929, as cited by Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p.19), "all reflective inquiry starts from a problematic situation". Therefore, for pragmatic research to take place, the problem the inquiry is trying to understand must remain a centrepiece of the process. In practice, this means that pragmatists select methods and theories that are most appropriate in answering the research question (Grecic & Grundy, 2016).

Finally, pragmatism has been argued that it is a useful paradigm for those considering how knowledge and action are linked in organisational contexts (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020). When defending the use of pragmatism in their research considering sport coaching, Grecic and Grundy (2016, p. 214) make clear that pragmatism was used as the study's "prime focus was to make a difference to coaching practice". Matching this with Hall (2013, p. 24)'s statement that pragmatists are interested in "power" and "equity". It is appropriate that this thesis aligns with pragmatism as the guiding paradigm to understand the challenges of youth sport.

3.12 Statement of the Problem

As pointed out by Hall (2013) the first step in using pragmatism in the research process is to clearly outline the problem. This process, deemed by John Dewey as intelligent action, leads the researcher to determine the scope of an issue, which will then allow for the solutions to be seen.

Therefore, based on the findings of the literature review, the fundamental problem of this research is that amidst a complicated youth sport landscape, school sport is becoming more professionalised and

is tracking further from youth development centric delivery. This is one of the reasons that young people are dropping out of sport. It is necessary therefore to understand more about the practical complexities of schools; particularly given their self-governing nature in a context in which school sport practices are under intense scrutiny. In keeping with the pragmatic theme, each stage of this research will consider this problem throughout.

3.2 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research has been described as a wide and fluid field of research that encompasses an array of philosophies, research methods, and practices to understand people, groups, and theory (Smith & Sparkes, 2020). Given the broad extent of qualitative research, it is acknowledged to be a challenge (and sometimes unhelpful) offer a definition that covers all of its parts that does not reduce it into something it is not (Smith & Sparkes, 2016a; Smith & Sparkes, 2020). However, by considering the characteristics and paradigmatic backgrounds, qualitative research can better be referred to by the things it is made up by (Smith & Sparkes, 2020). Firstly, qualitative research is interested a few key areas of human life: *meaning* (where and what humans find meaning in), *experiences* (the experiences that form views and actions), *language* (the semantics used to describe experience), *material* (the spaces, places, and objects that inhabited and used by humans), *context* (and how it informs research analysis), and *reflexivity* (the process of researcher reflection during the production of ideas and knowledge) (Smith & Sparkes, 2020). Within qualitative research, researchers as not seen as separate to the research (and therefore cannot objectively view phenomenon), rather they are an important part of the research, guiding the direction and interpretation of the data (Smith & Sparkes, 2020). Qualitative research, therefore, situates the researcher within the research process, acknowledging the human impact on research and the complexity of the human experience (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Morse & McEvoy, 2014). Methodologically, this often leads to researchers understanding the meaning of a situation (whether specific or broad), rather than considering only the binary outcomes of the

given situation (Erickson, 2024; Morse & McEvoy, 2014). Qualitative research then offers further context to a phenomenon, unpacking not only the meaning of said phenomenon, but the social relevance to those who are experiencing it.

As observed by Labuschagne (2003, p. 100), “for many scientists used to doing quantitative studies the whole concept of qualitative research is unclear, almost foreign, or 'airy fairy' - not 'real' research”. This criticism reflects an ongoing dialogue between social scientists in what has been known as the ‘paradigm wars’. The paradigm wars refer to the struggles within academia of the merits of various paradigms and research methods (Denzin et al., 2024; Williams, 2020). The most significant of the paradigm wars to this research was that of the 1980s. During this period, qualitative and quantitative academics engaged in critique of the opposing’s methods and paradigms, ultimately leading to changes in the camp of positivism and gave the rise to post-positivist and constructivist paradigms (Denzin et al., 2024). Post-positivism takes the key elements of positivism (including that of following a scientific method), while acknowledging the limitations of research, thereby using approximation to understand nature as a whole (Erickson, 2024). Constructivists on the other hand note that meaning is constructed throughout the research, between the researcher and the research itself (Erickson, 2024).

As a product of the paradigm wars of the 1980s, the 1990s set the scene for the possibility of using both qualitative and quantitative research methods, otherwise known as mixed methods research (Denzin, 2010; Denzin et al., 2024). It was here that the pragmatic view of focusing on what works, regardless of the epistemology and ontology of the research (especially given the potential compatibility of qualitative and quantitative research methods) became prominent (Denzin et al., 2024; Morgan, 2014). It is important to note, however, that not all academics subscribe to the possibility of mixed methods approaches, nor pragmatism. In fact, the mere conception of qualitative research being as valuable as quantitative research has been recently debated in open forums such as

the British Medica Journal, as seen in the open letter Greenhalgh et al. (2016) calling for a brighter spotlight on qualitative research, and the response from Loder et al. (2016) acknowledging the importance of it, but arguing qualitative research is less generalisable than qualitative research.

The place for qualitative research in coaching has been argued for some time (Griffo et al., 2019). As argued in a formative article in the field, Cushion (2007a) notes that coaching research had, at the time of writing, been dominated by largely positivist paradigms and research methods, thereby reducing coaching research to what could be measured. These positivist paradigms are not aligned with the nature of coaching, given that coaching is a complex social activity that is characterised by interaction, and therefore is relational in nature (Cushion, 2007a). It was therefore argued that to capture the essence of coaching, research should turn to understanding the dynamic nature of coaching through referring to a consistent model or framework (Cushion, 2007a). The claim that coaching research should continue to understand the complex nature of coaching itself accepted by a handful of coaching academics in response (Gilbert, 2007; LeUnes, 2007); Lyle, 2007). Although Lyle (2007) agreed that coaching research should be broad, the critical component of coaching research needs to work towards understanding the experience and intentions of the coaches, which may not always fit into a clean theoretical model. Gilbert (2007) commented that to get to this, coaches need to be a part of the research process (through the design and implementation). This thesis aligns with this sentiment, as I bring a current and nuanced perspective from not only my research background but also my own background as a coach. The problem this research is aiming to understand is grounded in my experiences and perspectives as a coach. As a response these commentaries, Cushion (2007b) pointed that coaching research needs to avoid getting caught in paradigm debates as these may take away from capturing the complexity and nuance of coaching. This thought supports the decision of this thesis to align to a pragmatic paradigm, ensuring that the research is not caught in theoretical debates but rather addresses the problem of this research.

3.21 Rigour, Generalisability and Credibility of Qualitative Research

A commonly used method of assessing rigour in qualitative research is the notion of universal criteria that was produced by Sarah Tracy (Burke, 2016; Smith & McGannon, 2017). The universal criteria method offers researchers eight criteria to assess the rigour and relevance of qualitative research (Tracy, 2010). The criteria largely capture the extent to which a given piece of research is relevant to the field it contributes to, the process in which the researchers took to define and apply the choice of methods, the ethical decisions surrounding the research, and the underlying theorical backgrounds (Tracy, 2010). Issues arise with the use of the universal criteria method as researchers often make small note of Tracy's criteria as a method of building credibility without the effort to point to the areas of research in which it is aligned to the criteria (Smith & McGannon, 2017). Beyond this, the notions of set criteria that is universal in determining the credibility of research has been driven by positivist notions, which has the scope to reduce areas of qualitative research (Burke, 2016). Burke (2016) therefore suggests the use of a relativist approach, in that the criteria of qualitative research should be study specific. This should not be confused to mean that "anything goes", but rather the rigour research is contextual to the findings, methods, and paradigm of the study (Burke, 2016, p. 485).

As previously alluded to, the interrelated notions of generalisability, validity, and reliability in qualitative research have been widely used as a lens through which to justify and assess the quality of qualitative research (Greenhalgh et al., 2016). The primary difference between the generalisability of qualitative and quantitative research is the lack of statistical generalisations that are produced within quantitative research (Smith & Caddick, 2012). Debates surrounding generalisability of qualitative research have been dominated by positivist definitions of generalisations (seeing statistical generalisations as the sole generalisation tool), thus making it a challenge for qualitative researchers to define the extent to which qualitative research is generalisable (Carminati, 2018; Smith, 2017). In Smith (2017, p. 138)'s paper, it is argued that qualitative research should use an "expanded vision of

generalisability. In this paper, Smith (2017) highlights a handful of methods that might inform the generalisability of qualitative research, including naturalistic generalisability. Naturalistic generalisability, as defined by Smith (2017, p.140), can be seen when research "ring(s) true" to a reader and evokes reflection, thought, or emotion. If this reflection from the reader rings true, then it is argued that the research is likely generalisable to other parts of life, beyond what statistical generalisations might suggest. To be able to offer naturalistic generalisations, research needs to ensure that an adequate view into the lives of the participants is provided (through context, interview responses, or experiences) (Smith, 2017). Naturalistic generalisations have been used in similar coaching/youth sporting research to this thesis (Black & Holt, 2009). This thesis maintains the view that naturalistic generalisations could be made from the findings of this thesis, so long as the reader evokes thought to the transferability of the findings from this study to broader experiences of coaching and youth sport.

To offer qualitative evidence that is considered rigorous, researchers need to make clear their ontological and epistemological underpinnings (Smith & McGannon, 2017). Thus, it is important that this thesis considers how this research is credible by pointing to the pragmatic underpinnings of this research.

The credibility of any evidence or knowledge is hard to determine, rather Dewey's preference was to consider the warranted assertion of evidence (Dewey, 1941; Hall, 2013). This speaks to the likelihood that the findings of the research are capable in addressing the problem. Using pragmatism as a paradigm to guide research, Dewey clearly outlines how research findings emerge throughout the process "(a)s the problem progressively assumes definite shape by means of repeated acts of observation, possible solutions suggest themselves" (Dewey, 1941, p. 180). In that regard, the methods of this thesis are continually looking to solutions to the problem, as new information arises through the process.

It should also be noted that while using pragmatism, the outcomes of research cannot be fully established until probable solutions to the research problem are tested, and the best solutions will be those that are transferable and thorough in solving the problem (Hall, 2013; Lally, 2013). Although this research will not ultimately test the solutions to the problem, it will use the pragmatic approach to research by constantly addressing the problem and consider findings and evidence based on the warranted assertion of their ability to help solve the problem outlined above. Therefore, this work should be evaluated based upon each of the finding's ability to solve the problem at hand. Each of the evaluations will ultimately be made by the primary researcher, so it is important that the process of reflexivity throughout the research design is clearly defined, as done in the following section.

Given the broad definitions of qualitative research, it is important to situate this thesis within the field. Pragmatism is used as the paradigm informing this thesis as it is the most aligned to action and solving real-world problems. Although pragmatism allows for the use of both qualitative and quantitative research, the primary tool to understand the complexities of youth sport will be through qualitative research methods. However, pragmatism will be used to ensure that the findings and implications of this study are focused on creating action. Therefore, the methods of this thesis need to be working towards finding actionable ideas. The next section of this thesis will outline those ideas.

3.3 Research Design

3.31 Case studies

A case study is a qualitative tradition that seeks to explore a specific example, whether that be an organisation, phenomenon, or experience, strictly bounded by time or place (Hodge & Sharp, 2016; Morse & McEvoy, 2014). Case studies can act as the bounds of search, but importantly case studies do not act as a method within itself, as the methods lay within the scope of a case study (Hodge & Sharp, 2016). Case studies allow researchers to first understand a specific instance, then to make generalisations beyond it (Hodge & Sharp, 2016). A case study allowed for me to first understand the

day-to-day interactions between school sport staff delivering youth sport. It also allowed me to use my own background and knowledge of the school to inform the data collection and analysis (Morse & McEvoy, 2014).

The duration of the case study was six months. The context of the case study can be found in sections 3.22 and chapter 5. During the case study I would spend an interchanging amount of time at the school. Some weeks I would spend an hour at the school talking to staff, other weeks I would spend multiple hours at the school as I coached within the rowing programme. It is important to note that throughout the case study I was specifically looking to understand the problem of youth sport delivery, rather than understanding any of the wider cultural life at the school. To understand this, I might have used an ethnography. For discussion on the choice of case study over an ethnography, see section 6.3.

Context

The site of research for this case study is an independent (private) boarding school located in the North Island of New Zealand. The school is well-resourced and has a successful history both academically and in school sport. Throughout this thesis, the school will be referred to by the pseudonyms “Fieldston School” or “Fieldston”. In the 5 years leading into the production of this thesis, I have been involved with Fieldston in various capacities. First and foremost, I spent three years as a full-time rowing coach and sport coordinator. Beyond this, I have external relationships with many of the participants, many of which are a product of living in the small town in which the school is located. I know many of the processes and policies of the school, many of which were the same during my time as an employee. Although I am no longer employed, I contracted my coaching services to the school on multiple occasions throughout this case study, including supporting on a multi-disciplinary (strength and conditioning coach, manager, and rowing coach) rowing tour while conducting the research. During the case study, beyond that of the tour, I coached at training sessions and regattas on 11 occasions. Given ethical considerations, I did not choose to interview any other rowing coaches.

During my time at working at Fieldston I uncritically accepted many of the traditions, norms, values and expectations – what we might broadly refer to as 'culture' of the school – as progressive and effective. Thus, I can speak firsthand to the competitive culture that exists among the sport staff and the problematic practices that can occur when youth-centric practices do not occur. I feel it is also important to note that during my time working at Fieldston I used to "drink the Kool-Aid", in so far as I would treat the students as athletes and trained them accordingly – all while I was studying towards a degree that was teaching me the importance of youth development and a long-term enjoyment of sport and physical activity. Only after leaving a full-time role at Fieldston, I realised how easily I was socialised to the competitive culture of Fieldston. This is important to bring up as it hopefully paints a picture of the complex nature of working at a school like Fieldston. The staff, though often have confronting and controversial views, are not villains. Rather they are people who have been taught to treat sport in a certain way and deliver youth sport in a way that aligns with that. Further context to the site of research is pointed to throughout chapter 5, where it is relevant to the findings of the research.

3.32 Data collection

Observations

Observations as a research method situate the researcher within a context observing interaction, behaviour, and culture (Corsby & Townsend, 2025; Thorpe & Olive, 2016). The observations and reflections are then written down as fieldnotes (Corsby & Townsend, 2025; Thorpe & Olive, 2016). Observations can help researchers by understanding the culture of a research site that can help inform interviews (Thorpe & Olive, 2016)**.** Observations are useful in answering this research question because they gave me insight into the day-to-day practice of school sport delivery and allowed me to better frame my questions during semi-structured interviews. Researchers using observations as a research method can be categorised as a complete participant (someone completely emersed in the

site of research, for example if I was a fully employed sport coordinator); a participant as observer (someone who access to the site to as a lesser extent but is accepted as part of the group, such as a part time staff member); an observer as participant (someone who might not naturally be involved in the site of research but has knowledge of the practices, for example, a visiting coach); or a complete observer (someone who has zero involvement in the site of research) (Corsby & Townsend, 2025). Within this research, I was a participant as observer, given my minor contract coaching role within the school. By being involved as a participant I brought my own background and interpretations to the observations and interactions (Corsby & Townsend, 2025). This therefore points to the importance of my reflexivity (see section below on reflexivity). Within observation, researchers navigate access to opportunities that provide data (Corsby & Townsend, 2025). Therefore, it is important I note that on occasions it was not possible for me to have access to conversations that may have helped inform me of the accepted practices within the school. On the other side of this, my access changed throughout the case study. For example, by the end of the rowing tour I had built relationships that helped inform me in more informal situations, such as that of car rides with staff members. This highlights the importance of situational ethics (see section) during observations (Thorpe & Olive, 2016).

Interviews

The other key data collection method for this case study was semi-structured interviews. Interviews, as stated by Smith and Sparkes (2016), are infrequently justified and examined to ensure they are the best fit for collecting the data from the research. Interviews offer researchers the chance to understand the experience of participants, specifically within the context that someone spends their time (Smith & Sparkes, 2016b). Interviews thereby allow the researcher to build their understanding directly from those who are experiencing a problem, rather than sifting through theoretical guesses as to what the experience of those people may be (Hoffmann, 2007). Interviews are often combined with observations as a mixed method approach by researchers of pragmatism (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019).

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the best means for data collection based on a range of factors. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to dig further into the responses of the participant and allows for the conversation to move in the direction of the participants experiences, producing insight that might not have surfaced prior (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018; Skinner et al., 2015). Semi structured interviews have been used in other studies with similar aims (Phelan & Griffiths, 2019; Rothwell, 2018; Rumbold, et al., 2020). Open-ended questions were used where possible as a means for gathering depth in the data and allowing the interviewer to understand the complete experience of the participant without a strict preset direction of the interview (Hoffmann, 2007). This posed useful as it allowed me to dig deeper into areas of the participants' experiences that may not have been anticipated in the building of the interview guide.

The interview process was largely guided by two key interviewing frameworks. Firstly, Kallio et al. (2016)'s review of interview guides offers researchers a five-step framework to successful semi-structured interviews. Each step of the framework highlights the aim and how that step builds trustworthiness. For example, step two suggests researchers should, alongside their literature review, consult a range of experts to ensure that the final interview guide is credible and recognises the existing knowledge in the field (Kallio et al., 2016). Based on this, to ensure I was producing a relevant guide, I shared my ideas and thoughts with various academics in the United Kingdom to test my thinking before sitting down with any participants. Ultimately, this framework allowed the me to be confident in the use of semi-structured interviews, along with tools to ensure that I had a strong theoretical underpinning to the research questions and process.

The other guide to successful interviews was produced by Smith and Sparkes (2016b), and was equally useful in the day-to-day interview process, highlighting the importance of the small details in interviews and noting how these details contribute to the building of the relationship between the researcher and the participant. This guide is at times prescriptive, for example step 18 instructs

researchers to “watch out for signs of tiredness from yourself and the research participant. Suggest a break when appropriate” (Smith & Sparkes, 2016b, p. 114). While it may be prescriptive, it allowed me to be confident in my approach and importantly, gave me the steps to follow when the interviews would not go as planned.

An interview guide was produced by the research team to guide the semi-structured interviews. Themes based on the literature were categorised and formulated into prompts and questions to ensure that the general nature of the conversations worked towards answering the research question. Although the questions and conversation were free flowing, the general structure of the interview was grouped by theme and progression through the theory. This is a critical aspect of semi-structured interviews (Galletta, 2020; Smith & Sparkes, 2016)Smith & Sparkes, 2016b). Examples of this included asking the participants to discuss their views of the role of sport in youth development; their day-to-day practices and what information they might use to inform their practice (including collaboration between roles); policies or values that might shape their practice; and the participants views on the role of performance or participation pathways in youth sport.

3.33 Sampling

The sampling for this research was a balance between the demands for the research, including the sheer size of the topic at hand, while also balancing the constraints of master’s level research. In qualitative research there is no golden number on how many participants one should use, rather it is the task of the researcher to uncover the necessary information, thereby unpacking the research phenomenon (Smith & Sparkes, 2016b). Given the wide range of questions that the research hoped to unpack, it was determined that an initial 8-10 interviews should be targeted, each interview ranging from 30-60 minutes in length. After nine interviews it was determined that the research team had enough data to answer the research question.

To generate insights from the case study a wide range of stakeholders were interviewed, including senior leadership (those who determine the direction of sport); Coach (those who deliver the sporting experience); and support staff (often in admin/student facing roles during the school day). The participants were then purposefully sampled to ensure that each of the groups were represented, and that each group would give enough insight to understand the inner workings of each role and how they contribute to the wider culture of the school. Many of the participants worked in a range of roles, for example, some were classed as a 'senior leader' due to their primarily role but also supported in the coaching of sport. For further context of the participants, see Table 1. Participant Information.

A total of nine interviews took place. The shortest interview was 32 minutes long, with the longest interview being 48 minutes. Interviews took place online or at the site of research (the school), at the discretion of the participant. This was critical to ensuring the participant felt comfortable sharing their views in a private and safe setting (Skinner et al., 2015). All interviews were recorded via audio, using a digital dictation device. The interviews were all conducted following an information session with each participant. These sessions gave the participant a chance to understand the scope of the study, mechanisms of the research process, and the chance to ask questions.

Table 1. Participant Information.

Pseudonym	Role	Context
Christopher	Senior Leader	Christopher sits on the school Board of Trustees and therefore is a high-ranking senior leader. He has previously worked as a Director of Sport for a prestigious school overseas.

Rachel	Senior Leader	Rachel leads the day-to-day operation of the school sport, including the coordination of the directors of sports, coaches and sport coordinators.
Lewis	Senior Leader	Lewis works as a senior leader to the school, supporting the delivery of education, arts, and sport. He has previously coached for the school and supports Rachel in coordinating the sporting initiatives of the school.
John	Support Staff	John supports coaches and coordinators with athlete preparation and management advice of a range of sports.
Emily	Support Staff	Emily works alongside John to support with the delivery of day-to-day sport initiatives such as sport in the curriculum
Frank	Support Staff	Frank works in a range of roles across the school. He primarily works as a director of a sport, alongside working as a teacher, leader in a boarding house, and a coach of a first team.
David	Coach	David is a head coach of a major sport. He is involved in the management and coordination alongside the day-to-day delivery of that sport.
Edward	Coach	Edward is a coach that has been intermittently coaching at Fieldston over the last 10 years. He is a coach with considerable experience and respect throughout the school sport department.

Jackie	Coach	Jackie is a junior coach within the school. She is an alumnus of the school and therefore knows the system well. Before becoming a coach, Jackie was a successful athlete within the school.

3.34 Transcription

Following the interview process, the interviews were transcribed verbatim. The participants were then sent the interview transcript with the chance to review and, if necessary, remove anything from the record. This process, member checking, is a commonly used method of ensuring qualitative work is that of rigour and truth (Motulsky, 2021; Smith & McGannon, 2018; Thomas et al., 2024). Member checking allowed the participants the opportunity to take a further role in the research and for any transcription errors or inaccuracies to be removed before the data was analysed.

3.35 Thematic Analysis

Once the data were transcribed and the member checking process was complete, thematic analysis took place. Broadly, thematic analysis refers to the process of identifying themes from the research data, where they are relevant to supporting the answering of the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Braun et al., 2016; Clarke & Braun, 2017). Reflexive thematic analysis leans on the underlying subjectivity of the researcher's interpretations of the data, including that of unconscious bias and experience (Braun & Clarke, 2021). It is therefore important to highlight that a key driver in the outcomes of the analysis process was my own reflexivity.

Keeping this in mind, the reflexive nature of this method of analysis does not lead the themes to "emerge" in the way that they can be uncovered (which would lean more towards a positivist approach), rather the themes lie in a space populated by the researchers "theoretical assumptions,

disciplinary knowledge, research skills and experience, and the content of the data themselves" (Braun et al., 2016, p. 196).

The process of reflexive thematic analysis can be broken down into six key steps, "1) data familiarisation; (2) data coding; (3) generating initial themes; (4) reviewing and developing themes; (5) refining, defining, and naming themes; and (6) writing the report", though it is important to note that these steps "shouldn't be viewed as a baking recipe", whereby the researcher is locked into a linear process, it must be flexible and critical (Braun & Clarke, 2024, p. 390). Working through these six steps, it was also appropriate to use Braun and Clarke (2006)'s 15 step checklist to successful thematic analysis. These points guide the researcher through the process of analysis, giving the researcher the confidence to move to the next step in analysis, or in my case, reflect on areas of my analysis that could be improved.

3.36 Ethics

This research project was granted ethical approval by way of the University of Waikato Human Ethics Committee (Project Number - HREC(HECS)2024#54). The informed consent process was critical to ensuring ethical integrity, the participant information sheet and consent forms can be found in the appendix section. Informed consent is only a small part of the ethics of interviews, with much of the ethical decisions ultimately relying on the integrity and actions of the interviewer themselves (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). To account for this, situational ethical considerations also took place. Situational ethics involve the ethical considerations that the researcher takes beyond the approval process of their institution (Reid et al., 2018). Based on my background in the school, it was critical that I allowed the participants the option to share their experiences (or opt out of the study), without feeling as if they were letting me down. To ensure this, I consistently had clear conversations reminding the participants of the bounds of the research, what I was interested in, and how their input was valued but not crucial for the outcomes of the study.

3.37 Reflexivity

Reflexivity has been a contested topic within qualitative research (Foley, 2002; Kenway & McLeod, 2004; Townsend & Cushion, 2021). At its broadest level, reflexivity refers to how the role, identity and place of the researcher is critically reflected upon in the research process (Lincoln et al., 2024). Reflexivity is "somewhat of an imperative, a doxa of post-positive educational research that has the researcher situate themselves, 'own' their investments and constructions in the research process and in the production of both meaning and 'partial truths'" (Kenway & McLeod, 2004, p. 527). The reflexive turn in qualitative research recognises that the researcher is a part of the process of research, beyond the simplicity of uncovering one truth that positivist research may suggest, rather the meaning and findings of reflexive research can only be considered when considering the researcher themselves. Recently, coaching researchers have argued that that truly reflexive research is not complete until the process has made clear how the researcher themselves impacts the research (Townsend & Cushion, 2021). This thesis has woven reflexivity throughout the research process. For a breakdown of my own reflexivity, see sections: 1.1; 3.22; Chapter 5).

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have made clear the importance of qualitative research and its role in understanding the complexity of the human experience. Beyond this I situated the place for qualitative research in academia. To extend this I outlined how pragmatism can be used as a paradigm to ensure that the research process is not clouded by philosophical intricacies and is instead focused on offering a path of action to address the complicated landscape of youth sport, especially where it relates to the challenges delivering quality experiences to young people in sport. This, in turn, provided the scope to outline the criteria that this research should be judged upon.

I also pointed out my own background and noted how my experience working at the site of research offers a unique insight into the process of observations, semi-structured interviews, and the reflexive

analysis of the transcripts, ultimately producing research data that might be used to answer the research question, and solve the research problem. The specific methods including the sampling strategy was defended. These methods were used to identify and interview nine participants who could bring depth to the case study through their experience in their role and their deep understanding of the New Zealand sporting sector. The ethical considerations that were taken by me and the wider research team were also identified to ensure that the process was smooth and transparent. In the next chapter I outline how the use of the Practice Architectures theory is valuable in understanding the day-to-day delivery of school sport within New Zealand.

Chapter 4: Theory

In this chapter I introduce the theory that guides this thesis. I outline the scope of Practice Architectures (PA) and speak to the production and development of the theory over time. Beyond this, I outline how the arrangements of the cultural-discursive, social-political, and material-economic elements of practice that inform and govern behaviour. I then unpack where PA has been used in similar educational and sporting research, before outlining the value of PA and defending its use as a guiding theory for this thesis.

4.1 Introduction to Practice Architectures

PA is a theory rooted in the acknowledgment that individuals interact in sites of common ground, considered sites of practice (Hemmings et al., 2013). It originates from theorist Theodore Schatzki, who pointed out that much can be learned from considering what is said and how individuals act in a site of practice, in his book 'The Site of the Social' (Hemmings et al., 2013; Kemmis, 2010; Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008). Researchers Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008) have extended that view to include how the relationships between those who inhibit a practice, and the steps in which they take to act, are bundled between three key arrangements: the cultural discursive; the social-political; and the material economic (Hemmings et al., 2013). These adjustments to the theory point primarily to the importance of considering the relationships between practitioners and to the wider world, seen as the social-political arrangements (Edwards-Groves & Grootenboer, 2015). Within PA, a practice is not just the physical location, but the actions and traditions that are driven from the people who inhabit it (Phelan & Griffiths, 2019). Throughout this thesis, those who inhabit and work within a practice will be referred to as practitioners.

The cultural-discursive arrangements are the makeup of words and language traditions that afford the 'sayings' of a practice, or in other words, what the practitioners can say and how it could be said

(Kemmis et al., 2014). Specifically, the sayings of a practice are often what is said in justifying behaviour and articulating the norms of a practice. The cultural-discursive arrangements therefore highlight what may be considered appropriate to say, and how one might say it, in a given practice (Kemmis et al., 2014; Phelan & Griffiths, 2019). Taking this a step further, it can also be considered that the cultural-discursive arrangements help researchers understand what the understandings of the practitioners are within a practice (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008).

The 'doings', or actions, of the practitioners are captured through PA by considering the material-economic arrangements of a practice. The material-economic arrangements refer to the physical space, whether the physical setup of an organisation or the resources that allow for action to occur (Kemmis et al., 2014; Phelan & Griffiths, 2019). The domain of the 'doings' also considers what the skills and capacities of the practitioners are, both as individuals and as a group (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008). As evidenced by Phelan and Griffiths (2019), even if the physical space itself does not change, the way in which the practitioners used the space (claiming equipment or even sections of a building) is also an example of how the material-economic arrangements of a practice set up for the acceptable doings of the practitioners.

The social-political arrangements of a practice are those that consider how power and solidarity influence the relationships between practitioners, or the way practitioners relate to the things around them, thus considered the 'relatings' of a practice (Kemmis et al., 2014). This might look like the makeup of roles, rules, or policies that a practice has accepted, and the practitioners are navigating. It is also where, in analysis, one would consider the values and emotions of the practitioners (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008). As an example, teachers may have differing views to the national educational policies that they are asked to educate to (Goodyear et al., 2017). Another example, applied in the sporting context, the social-political arrangements of a coaching site may lead coaches to act less collaboratively if there the structures of the sport are innately competitive (Phelan & Griffiths, 2019).

PA is a theory that highlights the interconnected nature of the sayings, doings, and relatings of any given practice (Hemmings et al., 2013; Phelan & Griffiths, 2019). As stated by Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008), these arrangements are more than likely found packaged together, reflecting the nature and complexity of reality. Therefore, when used as a tool of analysis, it is appropriate that one speaks to each of the individual arrangements and how that arrangement impacts practice. It is also important to ensure that evidence is given to outline how the overlap of multiple arrangements provides a view of practice that one singular arrangement cannot consider (Kemmis et al., 2014).

PA recognises that the social-political, material-economic, and cultural-discursive arrangements of any given practice are not static, rather they are constantly changing and therefore reshaping the landscape of a practice. Beyond this, any given practice will have practice traditions: the accumulation of the sayings, doings, and relatings over time (Phelan & Griffiths, 2019). As clearly stated by Kemmis (2010, p. 21), “no socialised human being lives outside of practice-traditions”. This is because the social-political, material-economic, and cultural-discursive arrangements simply encompass all interactions that form the bounds in which humans act and interact.

It is worth noting that practice traditions differ from Schatzki’s original considerations of “practice memory” (2010, pp 104–105, as cited in Kemmis et al., 2014). Where practice memory considered the individualised memory of practitioners, practice traditions also consider how the history of an organisation is reflected within the practice, whether that be through relationships between roles or a physical space being left as it is over time, as that is how it has always been (Kemmis et al., 2014).

4.2 Use of Practice Architectures in Sport and Education

There is strong evidence for the efficacy of PA in educational research (Edwards-Groves & Grootenboer, 2015; Goodyear et al., 2017; Hemmings et al., 2013). Goodyear et al. (2017) argue that PA is an appropriate theory to use when understanding the impact of curriculum change, given the range of

factors that impact on the effectiveness of a classroom, not merely the ability of the teacher. This thought is relevant to the work of with sport being a key point in the New Zealand school physical education curriculum since the 1970s (Grant, 1992). Petrie (2016) showcases the usefulness of PA in changing education practices as it allows for researchers to understand how the ‘sayings', 'doings’, and 'relatings’ of education practice are constrained by the wider practice arrangements of a classroom, and the discourse that surrounds it.

PA has had limited use in sport-related research. Phelan and Griffiths (2019) explored how the continual learning of coaches in situ could be understood using PA. In this research, the authors studied the practice traditions and experiences of the practitioners by unpacking the sayings, doings, and relatings of a high-performance training centre. A further use of PA in sport was in a case study conducted by Kitson et al. (2023), exploring how PA might help researchers to understand the building of knowledge required in elite futsal pathways. In this study, Kitson et al. (2023, p. 95) argues that “in order to think differently about the creation of professional sports coaches, PAs demand that we consider the broader ecology of the coaching workplace, namely, the space, time and language within which it operates”. Coupling this with evidence from Kemmis (2010), that only by understanding the traditions and architectures of a given practice, which can only be truly understood by those within it, can researchers change the educational landscape of curriculum and practice. Therefore, to best understand and enact change in education, research must turn to those within the practice itself.

4.3 Situating Practice Architectures in this Thesis

PA has been described as a theory rooted in practicality (Kemmis et al., 2014). It does not just seek to describe the world but rather works to addressing the complications and challenges within it (Kemmis et al., 2014). Given the challenging context of youth sport in New Zealand (see chapter 2), PA serves to offer this thesis a lens to articulate the innerworkings of a site of practice. More specifically, it helps consider how the tensions of delivering youth development outcomes in sport while being situated in

a performance-centric environment might play out on a day to day. As seen in chapter 2 of this thesis, the delivery of positive youth sporting experiences is often in the hands of coaches and support staff. Yet those practitioners work in an oftentimes complicated environment with national policies pointing to a specific way of delivery, when the sites of coaching (schools or academies) may have different priorities. Therefore, PA gives language to this research and suitably addresses both the wider constraints that might act on youth sport delivery (policy, leadership, a site of practice), and the micro interactions such as the relationships between coaches, employers, parents, or athletes. Beyond this, by understanding these interactions through the arrangements of a site, solutions to solving these issues may emerge.

4.4 Conclusion

To conclude, this research employs the use of Practice Architectures as a lens to understand how the tensions of delivering youth sport might play out on a day-to-day level. PA has been used in similar studies, such as that of Phelan and Griffiths (2019), in which it was observed that PA can provide researchers with the language to articulate the complex environments that sport takes place within. By understanding how the social-political; material-economic; or cultural-discursive arrangements of a site of practice impact the actions and interactions of practitioners (both through traditions and contemporary pressures), this thesis will be better able to articulate the challenges felt by those delivering youth sport. Beyond this, through articulating the challenges, this research takes a step closer to improving the experiences of those involved in the delivery of youth sport.

Chapter 5: Results and Discussion

Within this chapter I present the findings of this research alongside commentary and literature to situate those findings within the field of youth sport. The results are presented as a combination of interview transcripts with the participants, under pseudonyms – for a summary of the primary pseudonyms and their context, see Table 1. Participant Information in Section 3.33 – and context from both fieldnotes and my own reflections, having previously worked at the site of practice and currently working in the field of school sport. As outlined in section 3.3, the school that the case study takes place at will be referred to by the pseudonym, Fieldston.

I present the findings through the lens of the Practice Architectures by presenting the data in three key subchapters, each considering one of the following arrangements of the school: the social-political, and how those arrangements influence the relationships within the school; the cultural-discursive arrangements, and how they impact on what is said and thought within the school; and the material-economic arrangements, impacting on the 'doings' of the staff within the school. Each of these arrangements are presented alongside literature pointing to how the interactions within Fieldston impact the delivery of school sport. Finally, I discuss how the various arrangements of the school need to be considered as 'bundled together' and not in isolation from one another. I point to how, collectively, the bundles of practice demonstrate the tensions of delivery that school sport staff face in New Zealand, thereby addressing the aim and question of this research.

5.1 The Social-Political Arrangements of Fieldston

The social-political arrangements of a site of practice influence the 'relatings' of the practitioners, in that they inform the nature of the ways that relationships are managed, continued, and relevant (Kemmis et al., 2014). The social-political arrangements of Fieldston are clearly culminated in two key areas: the relationships between those who could drive the school direction (Heads of School, parents, staff, and students); and the relationship between the school and the wider policy landscape that the

school inhibits. In this subchapter, I unpack how these relationships inform the delivery of school sport and highlight the tensions that staff face in delivering school sport at Fieldston.

5.11 The Social-Political Context

The context of this study is one of constant change and challenging political and philosophical nuance. In the five years leading up to this research, there have been continual changes to the hierarchy of the educational setting in which this case study is situated. Four years before this case study, a long-term Head of School (HoS), Patrick, resigned followed by a turbulent period of two years with a secondary leader stepping into an acting HoS role, before the appointment of a new HoS, Albert. Less than 2 years later, Albert resigned, with the school Board of Trustees soon after announcing the appointment of another, Richard. Richard was well liked and had worked in a leadership position at Fieldston a decade earlier, meaning some staff had an existing relationship with him. This case study took place following Albert's resignation, before Richard started as HoS.

The long-term HoS who first resigned - Patrick – was a 'results driven' HoS.

> *"He loved his sport and was quite driven. Yeah, there was definitely a bit of outcome focus with Patrick... but he definitely knew the value of sport for a school, from both a marketing point of view, and from a student development point of view and the life lessons" – Lewis (Senior Leader)*

With a focus on driving up admissions rates, Patrick viewed sport to bring attention to the school and convince parents that Fieldston was the right school for their child. In Patrick's time as HoS, performance sporting academies were marketed and delivered to students considered to have promise in athletic performance. Patrick considered competition as a key element of youth development in sport. For a more in-depth discussion on the academy model driven by Patrick, see section 5.2.

The most recent HoS - Albert - cared deeply about the long-term development of young people, with a focus on building well-rounded individuals. In delivering these philosophies, Albert made clear to staff that the students should be "able to lose", and that winning was not a priority to the school.

> *There was one comment that Rachel said to me early on, when she was sort of asking if I consider coming back to coach, she said, 'our principal has said it's okay to lose, it's fine to lose'. And at that time, I thought, yeah, well, that's, that's great. It is okay to lose'" – Edward (Coach)*

As such, each HoS brought with them a considerably different philosophy and set of values that informed the direction of the school and subsequently the place of sport both in the curriculum and as part of the school culture. The changes in leadership over this time also provided an uncertain terrain not only for the experiences of the students, but also critically for the learning and socialisation of the staff responsible for sport delivery. This will be explored below.

5.12 Whose Voice Matters?

To demonstrate the social-political arrangements of Fieldston, I highlight the challenges that emerge from setting the direction of school sport. However, while the HoS commands the loudest voice and, through relationships and the power dynamics afforded through their role, has the ability to position sport within the school as they see fit, there are a range of staff and dedicated positions in the school whose primary function is the delivery of sport. These roles range from a Director of Sport, through to specific team coaches and support staff. For example, the Director of Sport, alongside other senior leaders, works to convey the strategic direction of the school into policies that can be used to drive expected coaching behaviours and outcomes. Coaches are unique in their ability to deliver sport at Fieldston as they must align to the overall direction and policies set by the HoS and Director of Sport yet also control the specific semantics that are used when delivering sport to the students. As such, Fieldston represents a complex and stratified site of school sport in which conflicting power relations and shifting personal politics play significant roles in defining and shaping the provision of school sport.

Beyond this, voices such as parents and staff are negotiated through relationships between the 'school' and their stakeholders. As the school navigates these relationships, the ability for the students to dictate the direction of school sport dwindles, thereby challenging the delivery of youth development-centric sporting experiences.

Head of School/Leadership

Across the data, it was evident that a lack of continuity in senior leadership across Fieldston has impacted the experience of staff. Many of the staff aligned themselves to a previous HoS and their philosophy, and others were waiting for Richard to provide a clear and refreshed direction. With Richard established, this brought an end to the period of upheaval for many and there was a sense of relief throughout the staff.

> *"I'm very excited and confident that we now have a sort of a consistent spine from the incoming headmaster, when he starts" – Christopher (Senior Leader)*

This clearly points to one of the major relationships that is impacting the delivery of sport at Fieldston. When using the lens of the social-political arrangements of a practice, it is evident that the relationships within an organisation hugely influence the staff within it (Kemmis et al., 2014). Thus, Christopher points to the incoming – and in his view, positive – influence that will be impacting the direction and delivery of sport. Within this, Christopher also highlights how the previous Heads of School did not have 'a consistent spine' and did not have positive relationships with many of the staff. Therefore, to best unpack the importance of the incoming HoS, it is important to highlight the relationships that staff have with previous Heads of School. For example, Lewis (Senior Leader) made evident how the direction from Albert was not one that he aligned with.

> *"There's, you know, making sure that we know we've got a reasonable equity across the sports. That's challenging in itself, like equity. And our previous boss was very much equity, to the point of equity leading to mediocrity" – Lewis (Senior Leader)*

This quote begins to evidence one of the key issues within Fieldston, that each of the staff members has their own set of values which they align their delivery of sport to. This will be further unpacked in the following subchapter (5.2). For some of the staff, their views on the delivery of sport are not conducive to equitable delivery, allowing all students the chance to experience a quality experience. In the case of Lewis, he believes that the school should not be solely focused on providing equity as this, from his perspective, does not align with sporting performance. These notions are not aligned to the evidence put forward by Côté and Hancock (2014), that performance outcomes in youth sport do not have to come at the expense of quality experiences and youth development opportunities for all young people. However, it does highlight the notions of perpetuating sporting elitism within New Zealand private schools (Brown, 2015). It is important to note that although the social-political arrangements of Fieldston are impacting on the relationships between staff (including that of historic staff), the power to dictate the direction of the school still lies ultimately with the HoS. Regardless of whether Lewis (senior leader) agreed with Albert (previous HoS), Albert still had the power to influence the overall direction of the school. Therefore, although the social-political arrangements (and power dynamics) of the school are under constant negotiation, the HoS is the most critical of the roles within the social-political arrangements (Kemmis et al., 2014). The HoS, regardless of whether they are agreed with by the body of staff, get to dictate the direction of the school.

Lewis' experiences and alignment with a single HoS were not isolated. Other staff members noted a sense of preference between a previous HoS. For example, during a conversation around pressure from the school on performance, Edward (Coach) noted that Patrick was not focused on long term athlete development, rather he was only interested in performance outcomes. This, from Edward's perspective, made Patrick challenging to work with.

> *"It [the pressure to perform] probably came from one source at the time, which was the principal, because he would make comments about players. He would make comments about performance. He didn't really care about where a player started and where they improved to" – Edward (Coach)*

It is evident here that one of the critical influences on whether the delivery of school sport is one of youth development is that of the HoS. In this case, Patrick acted on views that were not aligned with initiatives such as that of '*Balance is Better'* or youth development-centric sporting delivery, but by considering the power afforded to him by the social-political arrangements of the school, Patrick's voice was heard the loudest. Although this demonstrates that the HoS voice is important in determining the delivery of sport at Fieldston, it is by no means the only voice. In the next section I unpack the role of parents within Fieldston and the social-political arrangements that further inform the delivery of sport.

Parents

It is widely agreed that one of the critical stakeholders in youth sport are parents (Elliott & Drummond, 2017; Walters et al., 2010). In a study considering the impact of parents on young talented athletes, it was evidenced that parents can impact the way in which sport is delivered to their children, prioritising possibilities that might lead to future athletic success of the young person, regardless of their enjoyment of the sport (Elliot et al., 2017). This furthers the notion that parents in New Zealand can prioritise performance outcomes over fair play and fun in sport (Walters et al., 2010). In the context of Fieldston, the power of parents to dictate the students' experience of sport is no different. This leads to a challenging relationship between the school and parents and given that the tuition fees at Fieldston are one of the highest in New Zealand, parents have an important power dynamic that affords them a voice to determine the direction of sport, as will be demonstrated throughout this section. For example, when asked if parents are the critical voice in the direction of school sport, Lewis responded:

> *"They are a voice; I wouldn't call them a critical voice. I think the student is the most important. Yep, parents are a part of it because they have to be... we're a private school, so we answer essentially to them, if they're happy with things, they'll come and they'll pay and they'll keep the doors open" – Lewis (Senior Leader)*

Christopher agreed,

> *"Everything is student centric... that's what parents pay for. That's what they think they're paying for when they send their kid here. 'My kid will be special to the members of staff, they will get special attention, they will be allowed to wear their gumboots into school because that's what we are, we're a kiwi school'" – Christopher (Senior Leader)*

This demonstrates one of the primary challenges that sport staff at Fieldston must navigate with parents. On one hand, the students are the centre point of decision making, and yet Lewis and Christopher both openly agree that practically, the parents are the stakeholder that the school must answer to.

It is also evident that some of the 'student-centric' decisions that Fieldston take are purely appearance-based, unlikely to influence their development as a young person. For example, allowing the students to wear their gumboots to school signals to parents an alignment in values from the school. Many of the Fieldston families come from a rural, farming background, where wearing gumboots reflects daily life and hard work. To Christopher, allowing the students to wear gumboots is the school's nod to the parent body that the school recognise who the parents are and what the parents want for their young people.

Although the school can justify the importance of aligning to the wishes of the parents, this relationship causes tensions when the desires of the parents may not align with youth development, especially where it relates to sport. As highlighted in the literature review, parents have the potential to negatively impact the experience of young people in sport (Elliott & Drummond, 2017). Athletes have noted that their parents are often a key influence in the programmes they enter, and how those programmes are delivered (Elliot et al., 2017). This, therefore, opens the door for a potential disconnect between the parents and the school. If the parents believe that a certain way of delivery is important (a way which may not be aligned to the youth development-centric goals of the school), the relationship between the school and parents may be challenged. It is therefore important that schools

work with parents to bring everyone to a shared understanding of the value of sport and where it fits in the school (Burke et al., 2021). Lewis highlighted that the school has thought about this but is challenged by how the school might navigate that.

> *"How often do you see the parent on the sidelines so invested at year 9-10, kid gets old enough to say no, and they leave the sport. Often, they're quite good, but they've just been so hammered by dad on the sideline they just pull out at that point, you know? So it's about how do we educate and support them to be better parents in that space?" – Lewis (Senior Leader)*

Misalignments in goals between coaches (which in this case can be seen as the goals for wider delivery of sport across the school) and parents are common. To address this, there is evidence that educating parents on the goals of the coaches through workshops can be a useful way to address these misalignments (Burke et al., 2021; O'Donnell et al., 2022). Yet, the experience of Lewis is also reflective of examples within the literature in which regional organisations have been challenged by aligning parents to a youth development-centric model to delivering sport (Walters et al., 2010). If the parents do not agree with the delivery of school sport, the school needs to navigate the challenge of educating them on the importance of youth development in sport and the value of long-term involvement, without signalling a complete lack of alignment with the parents. It is here that the clearest tension between parents and the school can be seen. The school sees parents as an important influence on the students' experience in sport and therefore sees value in educating the parents on how to best support young people in sport. However, as has been demonstrated by both Lewis and Christopher, parents "keep the doors open", and without them, the school would cease to exist. The school needs to ensure that they do not appear to be opposing the parents' authority, otherwise the parents may take their children, and their money, somewhere else. The parents are acting as shareholders while not always having the depth of understanding of youth development that the school claim to have.

Students

Given that the school are having to manage the voice – and therefore relationship – of the parents while maintaining a focus on youth development within the delivery of school sport, there was a notable absence of opportunities for student voice and input into their school sport experiences.

> *"To be honest, the ones with the least voice are probably the kids. They just come in and do what they're told" – John (Support Staff)*

The implications of this are that the delivery of sport is not aligned with youth centric delivery of sport. Beyond this, without having a clear focus on youth development, the school is diverging from national priorities (such as *Balance is Better*) and recommendations within the literature on the importance of keeping youth engaged in sport through quality experiences (Walters et al., 2022). To unpack this further, I asked Frank (a support staff member, but also a first team coach), the extent to which students should be able to be involved in determining the direction of sport.

> *"I don't think they should be deciding what the overall sport looks like, because they're going to come and go" – Frank (Coach)*

In Frank's view, the school needs to primarily consult with staff to determine sport's direction. It is worth reiterating that Frank holds various positions at the school, including living on site due to his role in the boarding house. This is relevant as, in Frank's view, giving the students voice to share their views on the shape of sport, he is potentially putting his way of life at risk, and in some ways, the life of his family. Fieldston is informally referred to as 'the island' by staff, in that it has everything the staff might need on site (food, income, housing, all in a tight-knit community). For many people, including Frank, Fieldston is then home to not only their work life but also their family. If sport were to become a purely social aspect of school life, Frank's role at the school may be redundant, and the flow-on effects of this might result in changes and upheavals to his entire life. Therefore, Frank is hesitant to offer any suggestion that the direction of the school should be dictated by anyone but staff. This is consistent with literature suggesting that coaches within the New Zealand secondary school sporting system wield significant influence and are unwilling to release that influence to prioritise the quality

of experience for students (Bennett & Fyall, 2018). At a broader level, through the lens of the social-political arrangements of Fieldston, it also furthers the notion that although the school is built around the student cohort, the student cohort are not deeply considered in discussions of sporting direction. Although senior leadership (such as Lewis) has noted the importance of student voice, the relationships and power dynamics within the school prevent the student body from putting forward their voice and, in doing so, limit the personal engagement – and therefore the chance of youth development – of students in sport. While the school may outwardly claim that youth development is a priority, a sense of personal engagement from the students is limited. Students are not given the chance to share their views and dictate their experiences within sport at Fieldston which, as evidenced by Côté et al., 2008, is a critical part of engaging young people in sport long term.

Staff

A final relationship of interest within the social-political arrangements of the school is the position of the staff in the hierarchy of the school. As has been demonstrated in the previous section, the staff have more voice than the students, but they still do not have the power to dictate the complete direction of the school. This hierarchy, when looked at through the lens of the social-political arrangements of Fieldston, captures the nuances of these relationships and how the organisation of power is layered. For example, it is clear that the staff have the ability to dictate the day-to-day delivery of sport to the students. As previously pointed out, the students "do what they're told" and have little opportunity for personal engagement. However, as evidenced below, the staff themselves are also navigating a challenging position within the school's structure; adhering to 'top-down' messaging and internal dynamics laced with unequal power relations. For example, when talking about the ineffective chains of communication within the school (such as meetings), John mentioned something that stopped me in my tracks.

"You almost felt like you had no voice talking up" – John (Support Staff)

By ‘up’, John is referring to the management and administration of the school. Painting a clear, hierarchical picture, John notes that he is challenged by his relationship with the school as a staff member. Although staff deliver sport to the students as they see fit and believe they should have considerable voice in determining the direction of the school sport programme, it is clear that they themselves are not feeling heard by the school. This evidences that the social-political arrangements of Fieldston are complex, in the way that the direction and delivery of sport depends on the relationships between multiple groups of people and just because a group has the ability to impact ‘down’ the hierarchy (for example, staff to student), it does not mean that that same group wields the power to influence ‘up’. Thus, it is clear that the social-political arrangements of Fieldston perpetuate the hierarchy of whose voice matters.

Overall, the complicated relationships between parents, staff, and senior leadership at Fieldston have resulted in a hierarchy with students at the bottom. This has resulted in a dominant power-over dynamic in staff’s relationship with the students, in which students “do as they’re told”, even if this is counter to youth development. However, it was also noted that staff themselves do not always have the power to speak up and share their views. Senior leadership have more of an ability to participate in conversations that dictate their experience in delivering youth sport – for example, the voice of the HoS is critical, and one that is driven by the relationship and power affordances of the social-political arrangements of the school. Whereas other, lower-ranking staff members are challenged by a notion that the school isn’t hearing their requests. The systems of the school are therefore not conducive to open communication, and this is, in turn, driving complicated ‘relatings’ (Kemmis et al., 2014). Instead, the social-political arrangements of the school are perpetuating power dynamics that limit the sharing of voice, the positive delivery of youth sport (by not offering the students personal engagement), and the quality of experience for those who deliver sport. The tensions that staff face in the delivery of school sport, therefore, are deeply political. It is important that the school continues to educate parents and staff about the importance of personal engagement and student voice, as well as opening

communication channels to ensure staff feel heard when bringing their concerns about the direction of sport to school management.

5.13 Integration of Policy

As pointed out by Kitson et al. (2023), the social-political arrangements in PA can also refer to the relationship between practitioners and the wider system they inhabit – for example, the policy landscape that the practice sits in. As noted earlier in section 2.3, the youth sport policy landscape in New Zealand is complicated. There are a range of policies and actors that are impacting and directing the delivery of youth sport. For example, *'Balance is Better'* encourages programmes to ensure a quality experience for young people in sport by refraining from specialisation (Balance is Better, 2025; Wilson et al., 2022b). Alongside this, initiatives such as *Good Sports* work to directly impact the delivery of sport to ensure a quality experience for young people (Walters et al., 2022). Further contributing to the landscape are a range of actors that govern and inform the delivery of *school* sport. In the New Zealand context, Sport New Zealand and national sporting organisations (including Secondary School Sport New Zealand) provide a considerable amount of guidance and direction for school sport (Sam, 2024). These policy actors, although often driven to support youth development in sport, are not always aligned with its delivery within schools (Walters et al., 2010). This, in turn, formed a wider network of available discourses that the staff at Fieldston had to navigate (Kemmis et al., 2014). Individuals often would align themselves with specific policies where systems within the school influenced and encouraged them to do so (Kemmis et al., 2014). On the flipside, where if the social-political arrangements of the school were not encouraging the staff to align to them, the policies were disregarded.

It was obvious that coaches and support staff alike had a range of interpretations of the same policies and initiatives – based on the social-political arrangements surrounding the individuals – with some leaning to support the guidance from national bodies, and others suggesting that some of the

governmental recommendations, such as *'Balance is Better'*, are impractical or unrealistic. In order to exemplify this, below I include a larger discussion with John (support staff). The below transcript follows a conversation on the competitive side of school sport delivery, where we were talking about the emphasis on the first XV rugby team.

> *John (Support Staff): "Not that you're allowed to use 'high performance' in school... that's a New Zealand Secondary School Sport initiative, yeah, yeah, you can't use high performance. That's for after school"*
>
> *Researcher: "What do you think that looks like, from message to practice?"*
>
> *John (Support Staff): "Giving everyone the same support to achieve"*
>
> *Researcher: "Do you think that happens?"*
>
> *John (Support Staff): "Nah, heck no. No, we pour our resource into the first 15, the second 15 get pushed to the side"*

Clearly, John is not afraid of diverging from the perceived recommendations from policy actors such as that of Secondary School Sport New Zealand[1]. This, in the case of the social-political arrangements of the school, clearly shows that the school staff's relationships with the wider policy is not aligned or productive. John, in saying that he is aware of the policies and guidance but chooses not to abide by them, is highlighting a power dynamic within the secondary school sporting system, in that the delivery of sport is ultimately up to the coaches and staff in the day-to-day delivery of sport. Therefore, although Fieldston might outwardly highlight the value of giving all students equal opportunity, the reality of the day-to-day practice clearly looks different. The school might claim to incoming parents that each student is given an equal chance to succeed, but the reality is that the "second 15 get pushed to the side" – delivery that is not aligned with the youth development policies suggested by those who govern and direct school sport policy. As pointed out in chapter 2, the lack of alignment between

[1] It is worth noting here that in none of the policies from Sport New Zealand or School Sport New Zealand explicitly ban the use of phrases such as 'High Performance' from being used in a school context. However, Fieldston's website does specifically refer to 'High Performance' in the context of its own sport department.

schools and national direction might be exacerbated by the economic and societal successes that may come from being (or supporting) competitive young athletes (DiSanti & Erickson, 2021; O'Flynn & Lee, 2010). As evidenced by Burrows and McCormack (2011), by highlighting sporting success, the school is also more likely to attract more students of that calibre. By considering the social-political arrangements of the school, it becomes clear that the wider cultural landscape of New Zealand sport might be influencing the relationship between Fieldston and the integration of policy. When I spoke to Jackie (coach) about this, she thought that the New Zealand culture of sporting success influence the delivery of school sport.

> *"I think that's just the nature of sport, to be honest, especially in New Zealand, like the rugby culture here and the football culture that's growing, everyone wants to do well. You don't want to be seen, I guess, not doing well for your team or your school" – Jackie (Coach)*

The sport culture in New Zealand is that of dominance and success (Johnson et al., 2013). To Jackie, working within the sporting sector in New Zealand means continuing the traditions and success that has been achieved internationally. Jackie is here reinforcing the evidence seen in the literature in New Zealand that suggests that coaches and administrators of school sport believe that their coaching to young athletes is critical to the continued international success in sport (Dyson et al., 2018). From a youth development perspective, this furthers notions of youth sport becoming more professionalised and programmes treating young people the same as they might professional – and critically, adult – athletes, which may lead to burnout of young athletes (Roberts et al., 2023). This is problematic as burnout is one of the key factors that is influencing the current youth sport landscape and a driving factor for the rates of youth dropping out of sport (Wilson et al., 2022b).

Regardless of the reason for diverging – whether a sense that the school has a better grasp on the needs of their students or the desire to contribute to the wider sporting success of New Zealand Sport – from the perceived polices, the practitioners feel that national policies are not relevant for the school. This is reflective of Burrows and McCormack's (2011, p. 309) observations of a similar school

in New Zealand, in which it was seen that national policies "barely touch Rowbury walls. They know how to play the 'game', and which game they wish to play". In diverging from national direction, the school ultimately take sport in a direction of their own. When discussing the tensions between the school's policies with national guidance, Rachel (Senior Leader) clearly suggested that the school is better placed to make decisions around the direction of sport than external sporting bodies.

> *"You can go after courses, or you can go off to different NSOs [National Sporting Organisations] or RSOs [Regional Sporting Organisations], and you can get all this information, and then sometimes it can be [an] overload... then you're going off on a tangent. So, I think, you know, our purpose and our vision, and our values is something we all go back to" – Rachel (Senior Leader)*

Rachel feels as though the recommendations from NSO's and RSO's are too complicated, and therefore, to keep it simple, the school itself should dictate the delivery of school sport through its own policies and 'vision'. This is relevant to understand within the context of the following subchapter (5.2), as the cultural discursive arrangements of Fieldston are related to the school's ability to articulate these policies and values, which thereby influences what can be said and thought by the staff.

The social-political arrangements of a site of practice are negotiated using power (Phelan & Griffiths, 2019). In the case of Fieldston, by the nature of being a self-governing private school, the school has the ability to dictate its own direction of sport and thus wield more power than the wider governmental policies that are aimed at providing quality, youth centric, experiences in sport. This, however, points to a tension in delivering school sport. Schools feel as if they have the best ability to dictate the experience of sport, leaving national policies and initiatives largely redundant.

5.2 The Cultural-Discursive Arrangements of Fieldston

The cultural-discursive arrangements of a practice is an accumulation of 'what' can be said, and how it can be articulated (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008). These arrangements are resourced by specific discourses that are interchanging based on the practitioners, location, and traditions of the practice (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008). Within Fieldston, this includes the choice of language and

interpretation of that language dependant on the context. Beyond these, the cultural-discursive arrangements of a practice also influence the thoughts of practitioners within a practice, for example, what is an acceptable viewpoint or idea for a practitioner to be able to hold within a practice (Phelan & Griffiths, 2019). Within Fieldston there are several viewpoints that are being informed by the cultural-discursive arrangements of the school. In this chapter I examine the divide between viewpoints of the staff and those who deliver sport and unpack what can be said and thought within the gates of Fieldston. I then showcase how the divide in the viewpoints of the staff impacts the consistent delivery of school sport.

5.21 The Cultural-Discursive Context

Fieldston, from a marketing point of view, highlight on their website that they are a school where all children can succeed and that the school will offer all students the opportunities and resource required to support them on their journey through sport. There is explicit marketing from the school that at Fieldston every student can succeed in sport, whether that be performance aspirations or participating in sport for pure fun and enjoyment. Alongside this, there is also clear marketing highlighting a culture of excellence. As an organisation, their marketed values are 'respect', 'engagement', 'aspiration', and 'leadership'. These values are published on their website, through school newsletters, and in the sport strategic plan. Within the sport strategic plan there are an extra four key pillars underpinning the delivery of these values: 'Creating a foundation' (with specific reference to the long term plan of developing students from participation athletes to performance athletes); 'Transformational environment' (with specific note to recruiting and developing world class coaches); 'Sustainability and pathways' (delivering equitable and enjoyable experiences through consistent delivery and resourcing); 'Planning for future success' (enhancing participation, growth, and performance). As such the delivery of school sport is responsive to a range of national priorities (including aligning to '*Balance is Better*' and Sport New Zealand's guidance for prioritising participation and quality experiences),

while at the same time aligning with the strategic direction of the school, which is weighted towards performance, excellence, and elitism.

Although these values and the school direction are articulated clearly, the next section of the discussion will speak to the misalignment in values across the delivery of sport at Fieldston and how the misalignment is perpetuated through challenges surrounding the discourse of youth development within competitive sport. As I unpack in this chapter, this misalignment leads to a critical clash of ideas, with some staff members outright rejecting school policy and discourse, others adapting what is said dependent on the site of practice, with little resolve from the senior leaders of the school in addressing the inconsistencies across the discourse. For many of the participants, the lack of clarity around the language of the school values and direction has come from the constant turnover of senior leadership in Fieldston.

5.22 Sport in the Timetable

To best explain the cultural-discursive arrangements of Fieldston, I explore the school initiative '*Sport in the Timetable*' as the bounds for highlighting the disconnect in discourse. Sport in the timetable was an initiative that was brought to Fieldston by Albert (previous HoS) to replace a school sport academy structure that existed at Fieldston. The academy structure at Fieldston was characterised by competitive initiatives designed to further the athletic ability of the students, much like that of the school sporting academies seen in the work of Grant (2007). Students were invited into the academy (both formally and informally) that corresponded with their code (rugby, netball, hockey, and so forth) where they would work with code-specific coaches and strength and conditioning coaches to better their performance in their sport. Academies took place during school time and was a class that students could elect to take, as one might choose to study history or geography.

During my time working at Fieldston the academy system was used, so in talking to the participants of the study, they spoke to me often in reference to how things had changed since my time at Fieldston.

This meant that I heard many different explanations as to how sport in the timetable came to be, how it was delivered, and if it was useful.

> *"With sport in the timetable... the whole idea was like to try and ease up students time, you know, so they can do a cultural activity, or if they've got a job, or if they've got family commitments or service"- Rachel (Senior Leader)*

Here Rachel outlines a simple explanation for why sport in the timetable exists. The school had a sense that students were busy and by offering sport during class time, their busy timetables would be relieved. Extending this, there is also evidence that participating in school sport improves the experience for students outside of sport, with students using sport as a time to switch off from their studies and extra-curricular activities (Burrows & McCormack, 2011). It also aligns broadly with policy initiatives such as *KiwiSport* (in which sport during curriculum time is used as a means of getting more children into organised sport) and *'Balance is Better'* (in which sport should be a part of the lives of young people, but should not take away from their ability to engage in other activities) (Keat & Sam, 2013; Wilson et al., 2022b). Thus, sport in the timetable – conceptually – is a response to both external and internal policies encouraging youth development centric sport delivery. However, it was suggested by another senior leader that sport in the timetable was actually to drive performance metrics in students, and in so doing largely failed:

> *"From a point of view of improving kids in their ability in sport, the sport in the timetable just didn't work." – Lewis (Senior Leader)*

This juxtaposition in definition and concept of sport in the timetable between key stakeholders highlights the first of many issues around the delivery of sport in the timetable. With management being inconsistent on the language and discourse around sport in the timetable, then those who deliver it are pulled in multiple directions themselves.

Given that the cultural-discursive arrangements of a practice (including discourse) inform knowledge – and therefore what can be 'thought' – it is no surprise that inconsistencies in knowledge across the

school were seen (Kemmis et al., 2014). Some of the inconsistencies in knowledge can be evidenced by staff getting caught in specific semantics of the name 'Sport in the Timetable'.

> *"Some really embraced it (Sport in the timetable). Others were like, "oh, I'd rather 'academies' because of the name", I don't know. But also, you know, I was saying, "well, you can still run it as an academy. It might not have the name, but you can still stream your groups, you know" – Rachel (Senior Leader)*

Whereas the name change changed things considerably for Frank,

> *"I feel like it's devalued a number of our programmes, from bringing it into the timetable compared to what an academy was." – Frank (Coach)*

Here we see the impact of practice traditions within Fieldston's environment. Practice traditions refer to the sum of all interactions and beliefs that have occurred within a site of practice over time and in turn influence future action (Kemmis et al., 2014). Practice traditions can be understood as not only the views of the practitioners that they bring into the practice, for example, a belief that competitive sport should be highly valued within a school environment, but also how the collective memory of a site exists, for example, the semantics that have been used in the past (such as that of 'academies'). Therefore, within Fieldston the cultural-discursive arrangements are impacted not only by the staff themselves, but discourse around what has been prioritised in the past impacts what discourse is acceptable in the present. For example, for private schools such as Fieldston, the marketability of the school is a critical aspect of their operation (Morton, 2022). Private schools use sport as a marketing tool to encourage parents and students through their gates and to pay for the operation of the school (Burrows & McCormack, 2011; O'Flynn, 2010). In the case of Fieldston, historic considerations of how sport was viewed externally had considerable impacts on the practice traditions of the school and the discourse of the staff. As pointed out by Lewis, the semantics used in the school are influenced by both marketing and external policy.

> *Lewis (Senior Leader): Do we go back to an academy model? Do we call it 'academies?' Is that the right word? I was against it initially when it started, but then marketing liked it. So, things like that. "Academy" doesn't send the right*

> *picture. I think it'll end up just being "year 10 rugby", right? Just really simple, but it's not... (you) can't call it "high performance", because you're not allowed to.*
>
> *Researcher: Who said you're not allowed to?*
>
> *Lewis (Senior Leader): Secondary School Sport have passed the thing around that. Not that you'd want to.*

It is evident that at a management level, the staff are struggling with aligning the language that can be used to the perceived policies of Secondary School Sport, while working within a school that values the marketability of the programmes within it. It is also worth noting that coaches bring their own contexts and histories to a site of practice, thereby influencing the sayings of an organisation (Phelan & Griffiths, 2019). On one hand, many of the staff noted their inherent competitive nature.

> *"As sports coaches... we're competitive, we want the best, we want to win and all that stuff" Emily (Support Staff)*
>
> With others echoing that notion,
>
> *"So, when people say we're dead against performance sport, I find that a little challenging. I think, I actually think you're against sport." – Lewis (Senior Leader)*

These findings mirror that of Brown (2015), in that coaches of elite school academy structures perpetuate notions of elitism in sport. It also points to the potential for problematic delivery of school sport, with coaches being a major influence in young people's experience of sport (Clarke, 2025). Coaches who are competitive are likely to coach in a professionalised way (competitive, structured, with a sense of playing to win) and contribute to young people dropping out of sport (Stonebridge & Cushion, 2025; Wilson et al., 2022b). However, not all staff at Fieldston reported being focused on winning, for some staff, the competitive sides of sport were less important than improving the overall ability of the participants.

> *"You might get a sport come to you and say, oh, we need to improve our upper body pulling, rowing, so that we pull better in the boat. Oh, yeah, I understand that. But ultimately, they're still children. They need a holistic development, so whether they're really good at doing pull ups is irrelevant to me". – John (Support Staff)*
>
> Or to Christopher, the quality of experience is what matters,

> *"A successful sporting experience is one that makes the participant want to keep coming back and probably helps them get progressively better at whatever the sport or the skill or whatever is" – Christopher (Senior Leader)*

The above data presents a clear argument that there is a large disconnect in the values of the practitioners of Fieldston. This disconnect is not only between staff roles (for example, just support staff), but rather within layers of leadership there is a disconnect. The issues that the support staff are sensing can also be seen on the top of the school. The disconnect in values of the practitioners themselves are determining the cultural-discursive arrangements of the school, perpetuating inconsistent ideology of the best form of practice in supporting young people through sport. The cultural-discursive arrangements of the school are then informing the sayings of the practitioners, denouncing what specifically can be articulated (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008). Therefore, so long as there is a disconnect in the values of the staff of the school, it seems there will continue to be inconsistent sayings, and by extension, delivery and experience of school sport.

5.23 "Waiting for a New Direction"

Adding to the disconnected nature of the values across the school, there was a clear disconnect in articulating the values of the school itself. For example, the data below presents a divide that can be seen within one specific group (senior leadership), which demonstrates the current lack of cohesion between staff. One leader unpacks how important it is the school is equitable across sports, regardless of the ability of the students within that sport.

> *"I know that it's great to be able to aspire to get up to those top teams, but you all pay the same to come here. You all pay the same to play your sport. So, yeah, having more equitable, I guess, resourcing experiences. And then I always think results take care of themselves" – Rachel (Senior Leader)*

With another senior leader suggesting,

> *"There has to be like, 'these are our sports, and we're going to do them pretty well and put some good resource around them'. So sometimes it's figuring out what sports they are and how much we do resource them accordingly whether it be with coaches, costs, etc". – Lewis (Senior Leader)*

This contradiction points to a clear tension and challenge within the school, the senior leaders cannot agree on a clear direction for school sport, thus influencing the cultural-discursive arrangements that impact other members of staff. The challenge of articulating concise values and a consistent direction of the school was acknowledged by another senior leader, Christopher, especially in relation to the turbulent leadership in changes of the HoS. This highlights a clear disconnect between the published policies and direction from the school (in the sporting strategic plan) to the staff themselves.

> *"Undoubtedly it's been challenging for most members of staff, having quite rapid turnover of head of school that's brought with it some ups and downs of overall philosophy and, of course, sport fits within the school's overall philosophy" – Christopher / Senior Leader*

Here Christopher notes how the overarching leadership of the school impacts the direction and subsequent 'philosophy' of the school, and, in turn, what ideas are considered valid and acceptable. To staff, there was a sense of having to wait for the incoming HoS to set the direction of the school.

> *"It's been hard Fin, aye, because we had so much change in leadership, so it's really hard to know actually what our values are anymore. You get someone come in, and then it all flips on its head... so what comes next? We've got to wait till the next guy". – John (Support Staff)*

This this clearly demonstrates a connection between the cultural-discursive arrangements of Fieldston and the social-political arrangements. The cultural-discursive arrangements highlight what knowledge is accepted – and thereby what can be thought and said – whereas the social-political arrangements point to how power dynamics (such as the power of the HoS) are impacting whether the staff are willing to align themselves to the direction of the school (Kemmis et al., 2014). Within the context of this thesis, this points to the importance of not only having consistent youth-development centric policies in school sport but also having consistent and effective leadership to communicate and socially connect them to the ideas. This will be further unpacked in section 5.4.

Frank, broadly speaking, thought it was important that the school had clear policies and values to align the delivery of sport to, but also that the sporting values were reflective of the wider school values. Frank's views echo that of literature pointing to the importance of having a clear set of values across an entire organisation (Rothwell, 2020). Although, in speaking about the school values, Frank did not feel there was a clear direction from the school. This highlights an interesting disconnect that is happening within the cultural-discursive arrangements of the school, in that the circulated information of the sporting strategic plan is either being unconsidered or outright rejected by staff. As such, although policies such as the sporting strategic plan are encouraging the staff to think and act in a certain, youth-centric way, the staff are not connecting to the information without a HoS to lead it.

> *"If we've got a clear overarching message or theme that not only sport people can hold students accountable to, but if a classroom teacher, if we're all on the same page with the same simple message, then I think that's going to benefit our school wide culture hugely, because, you know, there's not different messages being passed around, then whatever culture we establish within our own sporting areas, or whatever, that can all link back. So, I feel like that's coming... with the new head of school coming in." – Frank / Coach*

At the broadest scale, the site of practice (the school) has a range of ideas that might exist within it, or, as pointed out by Kemmis et al. (2014), ideas that are continually being brought into it. This explains the importance of the ideas that are being brought into the organisation. Given that Richard (incoming HoS) had previously worked at Fieldston, some of his ideas were known and agreed with. Although Christopher, John, and Frank all value the ideas that are likely to come into the school with the appointment of Richard, a question is raised surrounding the delivery of sport to the current values and knowledge of the organisation (such as the delivery of the strategic sport plan). This can be further considered through the use of PA, whereby researchers are encouraged to consider the individual thoughts and actions of the practitioners (Kemmis et al., 2014). Therefore, in the following section I will unpack the nature in which the school is capable of influencing a change in knowledge of the staff to one that is wholly aligned with their policies (such as the sporting strategic plan), wider sporting policies (such as *'Balance is Better'*), and youth centric sporting delivery.

5.24 Socialisation of Values

As has been argued throughout this subchapter, the cultural-discursive arrangements of Fieldston illustrate a range of disconnected ideas and semantics about how the school might deliver sport. For some coaches, sporting delivery needs to be inherently performance driven and therefore competitive. For other coaches, sport is more about building a capable young people through quality experiences. Semantically, these views lead to disconnects in the conceptualisation of initiatives 'Sport in the Timetable' and 'Academies'. From the school's perspective, the values and direction are clear. Although there are traditions of school marketing and a wider culture surrounding private schools, the move towards 'Sport in the Timetable' is aligned with national policies. However, there is a clear group within the school staff who do not agree with this move and are instead motivated by keeping the school sport delivery primarily focused on performance outcomes. Thus, a critical tension that Fieldston faces is the socialisation of values across its staff. It is clear the staff would like more direction from the school on the values of the organisation, beyond what has been offered, whether through the incoming HoS or through clear advice from the school. It is therefore evident that the school needs to determine the best route of socialising the school values to the staff who deliver sport on a day-to-day basis. The challenge therefore is going from a general ambivalence towards the values of the school, as is pointed out by David:

> *"I'll be honest, I don't actually know the exact school values, but it's just, as I said, part of it is just keeping the school happy" - David / Coach*
>
> To the staff being clear on the direction defined by senior leaders,
>
> *"So Fieldston, fundamentally, whatever way we couch it, whatever values we write down, is about the holistic development of individually students, like individual personal growth and development through holistic education. Mix and match those words, you land in the same place. Every student matters". – Christopher / Senior Leader*
>
> During this case study, a critical point for aligning the language and ideas of the staff were weekly meetings consisting of staff across the entire sport department (coaches; coordinators; wider support staff). These meetings operated as a chance for different sports to speak about their programmes and challenges they

> are facing, while giving the Director of Sport and Sports Administrator a chance to pass messages on from the senior leaders of the school, and to speak to relevant policies or initiatives that may impact sport at Fieldston: *"To my understanding the Director of Sport brings the coaches together quite regularly, and they share examples and practice". – Christopher (Senior Leader)*

Meetings can act as a useful initiative to shift the cultural-discursive arrangements of a practice (Kemmis et al., 2014). They are also commonly found within sites of practice that are similar to Fieldston, such as professionalised football academies (Roberts et al., 2023; Stonebridge & Cushion, 2025). Effective meetings, as pointed out by Kemmis et al. (2014), can influence the cultural-discursive arrangements of schools and staff towards more of a collaborative and learning orientated culture. Yet, in speaking with the staff members throughout the department, it became evident that the meetings were not useful in shifting practice and aligning the staff to the direction of the school.

> *"They're very irrelevant... I know other coaches probably around the school that probably say the same thing. I know Seth (Coach and Teacher) said the same thing... Sometimes it's just a meeting for meetings sake" – David (Coach)*
>
> Other staff don't attend the meetings at all,
>
> *"If I'm honest, I don't go to many meetings, I'm not clocked on then" – Emily (Support Staff)*

The role of the meetings at Fieldston are to bring the coaches to the same page and ultimately better the flow of communication. Yet the cultural-discursive arrangements of Fieldston were not conducive to bringing the staff together and therefore to socialise the staff to the values of the school. The meetings are often highly administrative and are not connecting to the needs of the practitioners. There is a clear connection here to the role of the material-economic arrangements of Fieldston, which influence the 'doings' of practitioners (Kemmis et al., 2014). Given that that meetings are not influencing the cultural-discursive arrangements, and therefore, what is said and thought, the school clearly lack specific ways to influence their own staff and socialise them to the values of the school. This will be further unpacked in the next subchapter (see 5.3).

5.25 Conclusion

Within Fieldston, the cultural-discursive arrangements impacted what could be said and thought. Across the school there was a clear disconnect in the values of the staff. For some staff (and those who prefer the previous academy structure), school sport is about competition, performance, and winning. For others, school sport should be more aligned to the national priorities, providing quality experiences in sport with a sense of developing young people into the best they can be, with less of an emphasis on winning. Critically, at Fieldston, central to the potential for youth development were the coaching and sport staff, however they displayed inconsistent and variable alignment to school values, which thereby influenced the extent to which they were willing to deliver on them. Therefore, without a consistent set of values that sport is delivered to, practitioners are left to operate according to their own beliefs about what is 'good' school sport, and subsequently where to direct resources and attention. Although there is evidence to suggest that performance outcomes and youth development are not mutually exclusive of one another, it is important that the delivery of sport is consistent (Côté et al., 2016). Beyond this, one of the Fieldston's key sporting initiatives is to ensure the equitable delivery across the programme – something that is explicitly marketed to prospective families – the practitioners themselves do not all align with these notions, therefore pointing to challenges in the delivery of school sport. Extending this, coaching does not exist within any single arrangement of a practice, instead it is informed and constrained by all three of the arrangements of a site of practice (Phelan & Griffiths, 2019). Clearly the cultural-discursive arrangements of Fieldston – such as the values and thoughts of the staff - impacted materially on the delivery practice, with those very thoughts influencing what sport looks like on a day-to-day basis. Therefore, it is only by also looking at the material-economic arrangements of the Fieldston can the tensions of school sporting delivery be understood through the 'doings' of staff.

5.3 The Material-Economic Arrangements of Fieldston

So far, in this analysis I have argued that staff at Fieldston – senior leaders, coaches, and support staff – have either struggled to or refused to deliver sport in a way that prioritises youth development while working towards performance outcomes. Whether influenced by the social-political arrangements, informing the power dynamics and ability for various stakeholders (most commonly senior leaders) to determine the direction of sport, and the extent to which external policies are integrated into the practice, the 'relatings' of the staff highlight an array of tensions. Beyond this, the 'sayings' within the gates of Fieldston are being influenced by the cultural-discursive arrangements, made up of a range of values and ideas that inform the extent to which Fieldston can offer both performance and participation outcomes to its students. Both arrangements are useful in understanding some of the delivery of school sport, but do not completely unpack the capacities and capabilities of the staff. In the following section, I unpack these by outlining the material-economic arrangements of Fieldston. The material-economic arrangements of a site of practice inform the specific 'doings' of the practitioners, including how they interact with space, and the production of work (Kemmis et al., 2014). This is useful in understanding the limited extent to which the school have a grasp on the delivery of sport and why coach development opportunities would be a useful method in aligning the 'doings' of the practitioners to the values and direction of the school sport department.

5.31 Material-Economic Context

Coaches and sport staff at Fieldston are largely 'left to their own devices'. The school has a track record of hiring experienced international coaches to deliver sport (both as an extra-curricular activity and through 'sport in the timetable' (see section 5.22, and the hired coaches often are considered the experts in their field. Where sports are considered of utmost importance to the school – rugby, netball, rowing, football, cycling, hockey – the school employs a sport 'director' for that code (for example, Frank). The director is also typically the first team coach and is responsible for the day-to-day

administration of that sporting programme. These 'priority sports' are also prioritised in the use of athletic facilities (such as time scheduled with a strength and conditioning coach in the gym). For smaller (and less prestigious) sports – such as table tennis, water polo, and badminton – the sport is administrated by a sporting 'coordinator' (who coordinates multiple sports), and an external (and often less qualified) coach is contracted to lead the delivery of that sport. By standard, the school has a deeper understanding of the administration of sports with a 'director', as those sports are of high priority and have a dedicated staff member to communicate the challenges, success, and issues across that sport. However, given the ultimate purpose of the school, based on their values, is to make student centric decisions, the data is suggestive of a variable consistency and quality.

5.32 Lack of Coach Education

In speaking with the practitioners, it was evident that everyone – from sport directors through to coaching staff - was aware that the values and practice across the body of staff was inconsistent.

> *The quality of the experience that the student has is almost 100% dependant on the quality of the coach" – Christopher (Senior Leader)*

This is not surprising, considering that the school offered an uneven cultural-discursive terrain for the socialisation of coaches and relatively loose entry criteria for coaching roles – largely based on prior experience as an athlete or coach. However, this was further exacerbated by the lack on 'in school' professional learning and development for the staff.

> *"Real important is the coach education side of things. Like, how do we know what our coaches say to the kids?" – Lewis (Senior Leader)*

A significant body of literature has shown that the most powerful mode of coach learning is *in situ* – where coaches gain practical experience working with athletes in material coaching contexts (Askew et al., 2024; Mallett et al., 2014; Phelan & Griffiths, 2019). As such, Fieldston provides a powerful site for socialisation and learning for coaches. It has already been argued that coach education in schools is important, but challenging, to ensure that the delivery of sport is positive for youth development

and addressing the dropping rates of participation in youth sport (see section 2.6) (Collins & Medbery, 2008; Newman et al., 2020). Coach education, therefore, is important in shaping the way in which coaches understand and act (Stodter & Cushion, 2017). However, such opportunities within the school were rare, with sport staff getting limited opportunity to engage in professional development and learning opportunity beyond the occasional sport specific coaching conference or coaching certificate for those who work in the administration of sport. Therefore, by not giving the coaches clear learning opportunities within the school, Fieldston are limiting the opportunities for coaches to develop and align to the values of the school. During a discussion about how the sport department weekly meetings were unhelpful and ineffective, David pointed out that coach learning opportunities were missing from the school and could sit in the weekly department meetings, which would boost their usefulness and relevance.

> *"If they had some sort of sport educational stuff to them. Maybe they could get some speakers in occasionally." - David (Coach)*

Here David is clearly looking for the school to provide non-formal learning opportunities (such as a workshop) to the coaches. This, through the lens of the material-economic arrangements of Fieldston, would influence him to change his 'doings'. It would extend the usefulness of the meetings (and addressing the challenges raised in section 5.24 regarding the lack of appropriate means to socialise the staff to the desires of the school) and would influence the delivery of coaching within the school (Stodter & Cushion, 2017).

The benefits of coach education for Fieldston go beyond that of addressing the quality of the practice. It also may address other challenges identified through this chapter. For example, it would support the school in addressing the challenging power dynamic with parents that was identified through the social-political arrangements of the school (see section 5.12). It would also address the extent to which the staff are aligned to the values of the school as identified through the thoughts and values of the staff through the cultural-discursive arrangements of the school (see section 5.2). Ultimately the

opportunity for coach education is that it could foster a common framework for communication and delivery. This is vital for aligning coaching delivery with broader school values and goals, particularly in a private school such as Fieldston where coaches have the potential to unconsciously reinforce dominant norms that are not aligned to positive youth development, because of the cultural-discursive and social-political arrangements that influence it. Therefore, the challenge of having a lack of coach education opportunities is of critical importance to address. This was also identified by Lewis (Senior Leader),

> *"I don't think we educate them (coaches) enough.... I'd like them to speak the same language to the kids, the kids to go home and speak the same language to their parents, and the parents to get the same language and philosophy from the seminars you give them and you hope they listen". – Lewis (Senior Leader)*

Throughout the literature review and discussion (See sections 2.5, 5.1, 5.2) I have argued that there are a range of actors that influence youth sport in educational settings like Fieldston. The quote above makes evident the fact that Lewis would like to see a complete alignment of the semantics and delivery of youth sport across those actors. This would, at a school level, address the challenges of staff and parents influencing the delivery of sport, and, from a policy perspective, allow the school to better work in accordance with their sporting strategic plan. Through the lens of PA, this further evidence how the arrangements of a site of practice are interconnected and bundled together (Kemmis et al., 2014). This will be discussed further in the following section (See 5.4).

Overall, the lack of coach education highlights a continuation of the tension related to the staff (among other actors) not being aligned to the overall values and direction of the school. Beyond this, it highlights that if the organisation is not actively working to align the staff, the actions of the coaches have potential to be counter to the delivery of youth development-centric delivery of sport.

5.33 “Manpower”

The material-economic arrangements of a practice not only impact the actions of the practitioners, but also the capacities of them (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008). Within the case of Fieldston, the capacities of staff include their day-to-day workload, and the extent to which they can resource their programme (for support staff, directors of sports, and sport coordinators). Although some sports had more capacity and resource than others (see section 5.31 for a summary of the prioritised sports), throughout the case study it was evident that many participants felt as if the school’s resourcing, the contractual requirements of the staff, and renumeration of staff all impacted the experience of those working in sport, and thus the ability to deliver sport consistently to all students. Lewis felt that the extent to which teachers were willing to support with the out of curriculum delivery of sport was less than it had been in the past.

> *There's that real strain on our teaching staff and like, since COVID even a little bit, but even before that, people (staff) are more precious around their after-school time, they won't just give it up – Lewis (Senior Leader)*

The flow on of this, from the perspective of Lewis, was that the school was no longer able to rely on the teachers to support with the delivery of sport, putting pressure on the sport specific staff to coach. Another senior leader had similar reflections, Christopher noted that there was a sense of the school not having enough resource – whether personnel or funds – to fill all the roles necessary to deliver sport to the desired level.

> *“The biggest challenge, I think, is manpower. It’s really, really hard” – Christopher (Senior Leader)*

Although senior leaders acknowledged the challenges of manpower, it was evident that they did not have a true sense of how these challenges were impacting the coaches on a day-to-day level. As pointed out by John, a sense of being underappreciated was across the staff.

> *“I reckon some people are overworked. Overworked, underpaid, and underappreciated in sport” – John (Support Staff)*

This finding adds supports the literature in New Zealand that the employment relations of coaches in school sport impacts on the delivery of sport (Walters et al., 2017). In Walters et al. (2017)'s study, it was made evident that even where coaches might be willing to coach in a youth development-centric way, the pressure from their employer to 'perform' ultimately drove coaches to coach through performance centric delivery. This was, simply, because the coaches were concerned about the possibility of losing their job (Walters et al., 2017). In the case of Fieldston, it is obvious that although staff such as John are struggling with the workload, remuneration, and acknowledgement, the material-economic arrangements of the school influence the 'doings' of the staff to working in an environment they feel is unfair (Kemmis et al., 2014). The school, from John's perspective, were actively limiting opportunities to take pressure and work from the staff. Yet, he continues to work within the very system that he feels underappreciated in, highlighting the impact of the wider system and material economic arrangements on the capacities of staff. Beyond this, it is worth drawing attention to the similarities between the capacities of John, and the power dynamics through the social-political arrangements of the school[2]. In this case, the material-economic arrangements limit the capacity of John, and social-political arrangements impact the extent to which he can influence change.

There were a number of staff who acknowledged that the resourcing of the school was impacting their ability to deliver youth sport in accordance with school policy, directly aligning to the capacity of the staff. Like John, Emily (Support Staff) felt that the resourcing of the school did not allow for all students to have a quality experience in sport. When asked about the extent to which all students have access to the same resource and delivery, regardless of their ability or sport, she said:

[2] See section 5.12 for a discussion on the impact of how the power relations within the school dictate the extent to which staff can share their voice

> *"There definitely is a gap there, but also like, how do you do fill that gap? Like it's all well and good, but you need a whole other staff (member), and you need a whole other gym" – Emily (Support Staff)*

Emily clearly sees a tension in the equitable delivery of sport across Fieldston. By not having the appropriate resource required to deliver school sport, it seems that some students are missing out. The students who are the most competitive at the sports with the highest priority are granted access to the best equipment and staffing, and those who do not fit that criteria are given less opportunity. This, in the case of youth development in sport, points directly to the issue that policy initiatives such as *Good Sports* are aiming to solve, with less of a focus on the performance programmes, all children can have quality experiences in sport (Walters et al., 2022). However, the capacity of staff is not conducive to this happening at Fieldston. In this case, they are incapable of offering both 'performance' programmes and 'participation' programmes, as they claim to do through their marketing (see section 5.13).

Although John and Emily (Support Staff), and Christopher (Senior Leader) all feel as if resourcing is holding them back, Rachel felt the opposite:

> *I'll always give them (sport coordinators) the resources. I'll never say, "oh, we can't afford another coach". I'll always say, "go find them". You know, "go find someone" – Rachel (Senior Leader).*

This demonstrates another clear disconnect within the body of staff. Not only is the staff disconnected on values and a sense of what positive day-to-day delivery might look like (see section 5.24), but there is a clear disconnect on how the material-economic arrangements of the school are causing clear challenges and tensions in the delivery of sport. Yet the senior leaders are not aligned on whether that is a problem that is easily solved. Drawing from literature from a similar school in New Zealand, where it was evident that, for private schools, resourcing is rarely an issue (Burrows & McCormack, 2011). In this case, it was evident that where extra support is needed, the parents are likely to be able to pay for it. Therefore, it is likely that what Rachel is saying is true, the school would offer the staff more funding

and staff if it were necessary to deliver sport equitably to all students. However, the processes of influencing the 'doings' and capacity of the staff are not working well. The staff do not command enough power to highlight the issue of delivery and, as a result, their capacity to deliver youth development-centric youth sport (that was promised to the parents through marketing) is limited. This, therefore, is a relevant tension to understand in the context of my research question. The challenge, in this case, that the staff have is to openly and effectively communicate their capacities to deliver youth sport aligned with the school policy, national initiatives, and the literature of youth sport delivery.

5.4 The 'Bundles' of Practice

To be able to transform practice, you need to be able to understand the intricate arrangements that influence a site (Kemmis et al., 2014). Throughout this discussion I have pointed to the tensions that rise across the delivery of sport at Fieldston. Fieldston is impacted by the social-political arrangements that influence the doings of the practitioners (the inconsistent leadership; the school's relationship with parents and coaches; or the complicated policy landscape that school sport is situated in). Cultural-discursive arrangements impact the sayings and ideas of Fieldston (the values divide, as evident through the 'Sport in the Timetable' initiative; the sense of waiting for a new direction from an incoming HoS; or the ineffective use of meetings to align the sport staff to the school sport policy). Finally, Fieldston is impacted by material-economic arrangements, influencing the capacity and actions of staff (the lack of coach education; or the issues of 'manpower' and resourcing). The delivery of school sport at Fieldston is constrained across all of the spaces that constitute a practice (Kemmis et al., 2014; Phelan & Griffiths, 2019). The final section of this discussion will point to the interconnected nature of these arrangements, and how they collectively shape the delivery of sport at Fieldston. As pointed out by Kemmis et al. (2014), one can only truly consider social interaction and life by considering the arrangements of a practice as interlinked and bundled together.

The Tensions of Fieldston

In this section I put forward an argument highlight the interconnected nature of the arrangements of Fieldston. This helps highlight the overarching tensions that impact the delivery of school sport programmes. The three tensions are: inconsistent and ineffective leadership (impacting the extent to which staff feel they can align to the direction of the school); a misalignment in the values of the staff (directly impacting the delivery of school sport); and ineffective processes of socialising the staff to the values of the school (which impacts the ability to ensure that the day-to-day coaching delivery becomes more aligned with the values and purpose of the school).

It has been seen that inconsistent and ineffective leadership impacts the values of the school staff. As demonstrated through the cultural-discursive arrangements of Fieldston, staff wait for a consistent direction from leadership before acting in accordance with the school values. The challenges of inconsistent leadership can also be viewed as complex through the relational lens of the social-political arrangements, with staff applying their own views and values rather than school policy, national policy, or direction from leaders.

A tension that arises in the delivery of school sport can be seen bundled between the social-political and cultural-discursive arrangements of Fieldston. Within the social-political arrangements of Fieldston it has been argued that staff often fall back to their own set of values. Whether because of a complicated set of policies being improperly communicated, or factors such as staff treating the school as “an island” that their life revolves around, the values of staff are inconsistent, and so too is the delivery. By considering the cultural-discursive arrangements, this is further highlighted. Here it can be argued that the misalignment in values is clearly manifested in what can be said and thought within Fieldston, with staff having preference to a method of delivering sport (sport in the timetable or academies). It is therefore up to the school to offer methods of socialisation.

Finally, tensions that staff face in delivering school sport continue to arise when there is a clear lack of process to socialise the school staff to the values of the school. Specifically, by considering the cultural-discursive arrangements of the school, it is evident that initiatives such as department meetings are an ineffective way of changing what can be said and thought within the delivery of school sport. The material-economic arrangements of the school further evidence this, with staff across various layers of leadership noting that the lack of effective coach education inhibits the school from effectively aligning the practice of day-to-day sport delivery to the values of the organisation. By not having coach education initiatives, the school cannot be sure that the delivery of sport is aligned to policies such as the strategic sport plan.

Concluding Thoughts

> *"From time to time we talk about... how do you cater for the top performer and the recreationist in the same programme fundamentally?" – Christopher (Senior Leader)*

As evident here, the senior leaders talk with intent to the exact issue of the school: how do you offer performance outcomes for competitive students, while prioritising youth development and a quality sporting experience for all students? The reason it seems that Fieldston are unable to achieve this challenge of catering to all students can ultimately be explained through the following quote that came from a conversation with Christopher asking for what would need to happen to have Fieldston reach a theoretical utopia:

> *"Right people, in the right roles, doing the right thing" – Christopher (Senior Leader)*

In this quote, Christopher largely captures the crux of the issue at Fieldston. Without the right person in the HoS position to clearly articulate a consistent direction of the school by taking the school policy and connecting the policy to staff, staff have resulted to using their own values to drive the delivery of sport or waiting for the next HoS to start. This has largely resulted in the potential to have inconsistent and inequitable delivery to students. For the top performing students, they are likely to have access to

more skill development opportunities and resourcing (as evidenced by the views of support staff and coaches who are 'inherently competitive'). For the less talented students (and their parents), they were marketed a vision that was inclusive and put every student first, yet the staff are not willing or able to deliver consistent sporting outcomes for them. On top of this, the systems to educate and socialise the staff to know what "*the right thing*" is, is limited. Coaches are encouraged (whether through external factors such as that of renumeration, or an internal sense of being inherently competitive) to work towards competitive pathways, thereby prioritising performance sides of the school and "*push the second 15 to the side*". Beyond this, there are no simple ways for the school to know if the coaches are "*doing the right thing*". Therefore, without having systems in place to connect the values of school to the sport staff of Fieldston, it will continue to be challenged by the tensions outlined throughout this discussion. As pointed to by Kemmis et al. (2014), PA can be used not only to understand how practice is situated in a site, but also to understand how change can occur. Therefore, by using PA as a theory to unpack the sayings, doings, and relatings of Fieldston, I have addressed the underlying issues preventing quality organisational change within the school environment. This, therefore, supports that of Phelan and Griffiths (2019), in that PA can support organisations in addressing the wider influences on behaviour. Beyond this, it points leaders and practitioners alike to the arrangements of an organisation that are constraining specific desirable behaviour. More specifically, it gives Fieldston the specific language to unpack why the desire to offer all students both performance pathways and youth development outcomes is challenged.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Implications

To conclude this thesis, I will briefly summarise the findings of this study and situate the findings within the wider field of literature that it contributes to. I will also provide clear implications for Fieldston, including pointing to a framework that may support the school in addressing the tensions that its staff are facing. This will then be extended to offer brief implications for future research in the field of youth development in school sport.

This thesis has identified the challenges within youth sport, specifically where they arise in the delivery of an independent school system, where both performance and youth development are desired outcomes of sport for students. By using Practice Architectures, one can understand both the influences that impact delivery within school sport and how schools can adjust the processes to better the experience of those involved.

6.1 Summary of Findings

As I have suggested earlier in the thesis (see section 5.4), the practical utility of Practice Architectures is in mapping out the conditions or arrangements of a particular social system (a practice) with a view to highlighting opportunities for change. Within PA, these arrangements are the social-political – the arrangements that inform and influence the 'relatings' of a practice, meaning an acclamation of the relationships within a practice, both between practitioners and between the practitioners and the world around then (including the policies that their work is informed by); the cultural-discursive arrangements of a practice – influencing the 'sayings' of practitioners, including the specific semantics and a sense of what 'can be thought'; finally, the material-economic arrangements of a site of practice – influencing the 'doings' of the practitioners through their capabilities and capacities to work within the practice (Kemmis et al., 2014). As will I demonstrate below, breaking these arrangements down has allowed me to highlight the complexities of school sport delivery, especially where it relates to the tensions that those who deliver sport (the school sport staff) face. This offers new insight to the field

of youth sport, highlighting areas that can be addressed to better the quality of experience for young people in sport, regardless of if they are on a performance pathway, or a recreationist.

The Relatings of School Sport

Considered through the lens of the social-political arrangements of a site of practice, it was identified that the 'relatings' of the school impacted the extent to which practitioners could share their voice and dictate the direction of school sport. It was evidenced that the HoS had the power to ultimately dictate the direction of sport, and the staff would follow that direction, regardless of if they philosophically aligned to that direction. The parents of the students were a key relationship that the school had to manage, as the parents 'keep the doors open', and have the potential to encourage a model of school sport that is counter to youth development. The role of staff voice was presented as inconsistent, and the extent to which it was valued depended on the specific role (support staff, senior leader, coach) of each staff member. Although sport staff had the ability to determine the day-to-day delivery of sport, they did not have enough power to have their concerns on the direction of sport addressed by the school. Beyond this, it was argued that the 'relatings' of the school go beyond the interactions between those within the gates of the school but also include the relation between the school and the policy landscape around it. Some of the staff outright rejected perceived policies, with others claiming that the policy landscape was too complicated. As an outcome of this, the school instead elected to use the school's own policies and values as the policy that outlined the scope of sporting delivery.

The Sayings of School Sport

It was also identified that by considering the cultural-discursive arrangements of a school, the 'sayings' of those who work within it can be identified. The 'sayings' in this case can refer to the thoughts and semantics of practitioners (Kemmis et al., 2014). The cultural-discursive arrangements of the school were presented by unpacking a disconnect in values across the body of staff, through the semantics and delivery of the initiative "sport in the timetable". By considering the inconsistent views

surrounding “sport in the timetable”, a clear values divide was evident. Some staff were comfortable with the importance of youth development-centric initiatives to engage young people in sport, whereas others were more interested in working towards performance outcomes through traditional academy structures. Beyond this, some staff felt as if they had to operate using their own values in the place of a consistent HoS, given the importance of the HoS in setting the direction of sport. Finally, it was argued that although there is a divide among the values of the staff, there were limited opportunities to socialise the staff to the values of the school, as published in the strategic sport plan. All of these ‘sayings’ highlight a potential to have inconsistencies in the delivery of sport, with the experience of the student largely dependent on the values of the individual who delivers sport.

The Doings of School Sport

In looking at the material-economic arrangements of Fieldston, it was pointed out that the ‘doings’ of the staff within school can highlight further tensions in the delivery of school sport. For example, there was a sense across the school that the implementation of coach learning opportunities may align the staff to the values and direction of the school. Beyond this, by implementing coach education initiatives into the school, the school would have a better understanding of what the delivery of sport looks like on the day-to-day basis. The material-economic arrangements of the school also impact the capacities of those within it (Kemmis et al., 2014). In the case of Fieldston, there was a sense of “lacking manpower”, in that, the capacity of stuff was not at the level required to deliver sport in accordance with the school direction. It was also seen that the school likely do have the resource to address these concerns, however the staff are not able to properly communicate the challenges of delivery to the school. This finding furthered the notion that there are key disconnects between staff across the school which may impact on the delivery of equitable sporting experiences for the students. As, so long as the staff are at working capacity, some students are missing out.

The Interconnected Nature of all Interactions in School Sport

The social-political, material-economic, and cultural-discursive arrangements of a site of practice are interconnected and bundled (Kemmis et al., 2014). Therefore, it was argued that all the previous arrangements cannot be truly considered in isolation and therefore to best understand the tensions of delivery, one must consider how the arrangements work together, informing practice and school sport delivery. It was argued that the combination of these arrangements, three key tensions could be seen. 1) Inconsistent and ineffective leadership within the school impacts the extent to which staff are willing to align themselves with the direction of the school, this is because the HoS has the most power to not only set the direction of sport but to communicate those ideas to the staff. 2) A misalignment in the values of staff means that the extent to which the delivery of school sport is aligned with national policies or school direction is ultimately up to each individual staff member. 3) Clear processes and initiatives are needed to socialise the staff to the values and direction of the school. In the case of Fieldston, coach education is a missing piece of the sport department's operation and one that would not only work to socialise the staff to the values of the school, but it would also give the school the ability to have a better sense of what the delivery of sport looks like on a day-to-day basis. These tensions overall highlight the challenges that school sport staff face in delivering school sport and therefore give schools the language to address these challenges moving forward. It also provides a scope to understand why the youth sport dropout rate is so high when it is related to school sport delivery. For so long as the above tensions exist, schools will continue to struggle to deliver both performance and participation pathways for students engaged in school sport.

6.2 Implications for Fieldston

Given my background at Fieldston and in the youth sport sector, it seems appropriate to not only highlight the tensions but also to point to a direction the school might take in solving some of the key issues. As pointed to in Chapter 3, by using a pragmatic paradigm, data is only useful so long as it may lead to positive steps towards addressing the problem of research (Lally, 2013). One of the possible solutions might be developing a Department of Methodology (DoM). A DoM recognises the

importance of having a range of experts from different backgrounds in a sporting organisation (leaders; coaches; teachers; support staff within a school), and seeks to remove barriers between these experts by offering a framework that will allow for greater collective collaboration under shared principles (see Davids et al., 2023; Otte et al., 2020; Otte et al., 2022; Rothwell et al., 2020; Rothwell et al., 2021). In the context of a DoM, 'ecological dynamics' refers to the wide range of influences that impact on a practitioner within sport (Otte et al., 2022). A DoM situates an organisation within the ecological dynamics it is impacted by and offers a framework to align the practitioners to a clear way of working that acknowledges and adjusts for the dynamics that impact it (Otte et al., 2022). There is limited research considering how a DoM might be used in a youth sport environment. It is, however, recognised that future research should take place to address these points (Davids et al., 2023). Within sport at Fieldston, it has been evident that the practitioners are influenced by policy, leadership, values, and relationships with other practitioners and stakeholders. Further research might consider how the intervention of a DoM resolves the tensions and issues that arise as staff work to deliver a positive sporting experience to all participants. A DoM might support the leadership in providing a shared set of language, a consistent set of values, and a process to align practitioners' views to address the goals of the school (Rothwell et al., 2020). Before setting up an effective DoM, researchers would need to consider how the social-political arrangements and power dynamics across Fieldston are currently situating the practitioners reasonably far from one another by way of values. An effective DoM would need to consider how the intervention could influence practitioners' willingness to change their way of life on "the island" of Fieldston.

6.3 Implications Beyond Fieldston

As argued by Giacobbi et al. (2005, p. 27) researchers aligned to pragmatism must take steps "to disseminate the study findings to people who might benefit from this knowledge" which, in the case of Fieldston would be the staff who deliver sport, senior leadership, and parents of the school.

However, I believe it is equally important to offer recommendations to actors such as Sport New Zealand, schools, and other researchers.

At a broad level, the discourse surrounding the tensions of youth sport delivery provide an uncertain terrain for those responsible for its delivery, and these tensions are magnified in schools and academy structures where performance and participation outcomes are both marketed and expected. This furthers the research of Walters et al. (2011), in that the discourse across youth sport is layered and influenced by a range of actors. More specifically, these tensions put youth sport in a challenging situation whereby practitioners must individually navigate the priorities of youth development, while delivering competitive – and potentially harmful – youth sport outcomes (often within school sport academies). The findings of this thesis therefore highlight the need for schools to align their school values to the day-to-day sporting delivery of coaches. Importantly, and perhaps concerningly, many of these findings are not 'new', but reflect broader historical concerns with the intersections of physical education and youth sport. For example, this research echoes that of Burrows and McCormack (2011) in that external policies (such as that of '*Balance is Better*') are unlikely to enact change in the delivery of school sport at independent schools. Rather it is up to the school to determine what successful delivery looks like. Therefore, sport policymakers and influencers should work alongside schools to determine how the school can best support their young people and prioritise youth development. Once the school has a clear direction, it is important that it has clear and effective leadership to align the values of the staff to the values of the school. This could be in the form of coach learning opportunities, such as informal coach development within the bounds of the school. In doing this, the school can be explicit as to the desired behaviour and delivery outcomes of school sport and can hold coaches accountable to those standards. It is possible, just as with Fieldston, that schools around the country will have staff challenged by these notions. These staff, likely those who perpetuate notions of elitism and professionalisation in school sport may, like some of the participants of this study, find a move towards more equitable – and youth development centric – delivery off-putting. In that case,

schools might look to adjust the workforce of the school to ensure that school sport is delivered by "the right people, in the right roles, doing the right thing".

Further Research

Although this research has justified the use of observations and interviews, further research might like to consider the use of ethnography to understand more of the inner workings of the complex environment of schools. Ethnographic studies situate the researcher within the environment in question, allowing the researcher to conduct interviews and draw qualitative data from observations, like that of a case study (Reeves et al., 2013; Skinner et al., 2015a). Ethnographic studies have been used in similar research projects that consider the interactions within in a sporting organisation, such as that of Phelan and Griffiths (2019) and Rothwell et al. (2022). They are useful in understanding the cultural innerworkings of an organisation as the researchers can completely immerse themselves and understand the traditions that impact the practitioners (Rothwell et al., 2022). Within the specifics of this research, an ethnography would have allowed me to understand how the tensions that were experienced by the sport staff directly impacted the students. For example, it would have allowed me to understand how the practice traditions and arrangements of the school develop over time (Kemmis et al., 2014). For example, I would have been able to understand how the delivery of sport changes based on specific cohorts of students – for example, if there was a particularly competitive cohort, it is possible that the 'doings' of the staff may have changed. Beyond this, ethnography would have allowed me to grasp the true extent that the power dynamics of parents impacted on staff. Although ethnography would be a useful tool to unpack the topic of this research in more depth, the time commitments of conducting an ethnography in a way that provided a truly in depth understanding of the culture of the school was unattainable for this thesis.

6.4 Concluding Thoughts

Throughout this thesis I have unpacked the current landscape of school sport in New Zealand and have pointed out some of the clear challenges and tensions of delivery. In doing so, I have addressed the question of this thesis: *What are the tensions that school sport staff face in the delivery of school sport in New Zealand?* In answering to this question, I have pointed to the importance of the day-to-day interactions within a school as the school aimed to deliver both performance and participation outcomes through sport. In talking to participants, it was obvious that the tensions they face are nuanced and complex through a range of relationships, interactions, and values. Thus, these tensions are a product of the bundles of social interaction that drives experience in schools, such as the role of leadership in aligning the direction of a school, or the importance of using coach education to align the values of those who deliver sport. The outlined tensions, if not addressed, have the potential to negatively impact the delivery of youth sport. By using Practice Architectures, I not only pointed out how these tensions are formed (as an acclamation of the arrangements of a practice) but also how schools might address these tensions, by having consistent leadership, an alignment of values within the school, and processes to continue to align the values and delivery of sport. It is therefore up to schools to continue this work, by being clear on their direction, and holding those who deliver sport accountable to that.

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Appendix 1: Participant Consent Forms

Informed Consent Form

(to be completed after Participant Information Sheet has been read)

Navigating the Climate of Performance and Youth Development at an Independent School's Sport Department

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this study any time up to two weeks after I have received the transcript from my interview, and that I will not be required to explain my reasons for withdrawing.	Yes☐ No☐
The purpose and details of the research have been explained to me. I understand that all procedures have been approved by the University Human Research Ethics Committee.	Yes☐ No☐
I have read and understood the information sheet and this consent form. I have had an opportunity to ask questions about my participation. I understand I am under no obligation to take part.	Yes☐ No☐
I understand that all the information I provide will be treated in strict confidence.	Yes☐ No☐

Your name:

Your signature:

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Research Title:

Navigating the Climate of Performance and Youth Development at an Independent School's Sport Department

Who is doing the research?

Will Roberts is the lead supervisor for this project. Will has been involved with higher education for 17 years. Will is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Waikato.

Dr Robert Townsend is a supervisor for this this research. Rob is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Waikato who has an extensive background in interdisciplinary qualitative research, specifically relating to disability sport.

Finlay Sherlock will be conducting the research. Finlay has recently finished a Bachelor of Health Sport and Human Performance at the University of Waikato.

What is the purpose of the research?

The research aims to understand the current climate of youth sport coaching, facilitating and collaboration. This research aims to unpack the barriers to effective co-design of youth sport outcomes within a school environment.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked about your experiences working in sport in a school environment. Themes of the interviews are listed in the appendices below. These interviews will be captured through audio recordings.

Can I bring a support person to the interview?

Every participant is welcome to have a support person sit in on the interviews, though this is not a requirement.

How long will it take?

Each interview will take a maximum of 30 minutes.

What personal information will be required from me?

Your role and experiences working in sport.

Do I have to be involved?

Participation is entirely voluntary; you may withdraw your involvement at any point up to two weeks after you have received your transcripts from the interview. You do not need a reason to withdraw, and withdrawal will not affect you in any way.

Are there any risks in taking part?

The research poses no risks to participants.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Any personal data (names, consent forms, identifying data, etc.) obtained will be kept strictly confidential and will only be available for the researcher. In order to protect the participant's identity, pseudonyms will be assigned, and other identifying characteristics will not feature in this research. Under the data protection act, interview audio data will be saved onto a password

protected file and destroyed after the project has finished. The transcripts from the interviews will be stored securely on an encrypted, password protected drive for five years, as required by University of Waikato policy.

What will happen to the research?

The research will be used to help academics, coaches, and sports leaders to make decisions that will promote the best collaboration between staff for better outcomes for coaches and athletes. The main output of this research will be a thesis as part of Finlay Sherlock's Master's degree. It is possible that this research will also result in the publication of journal articles, conference presentations, book chapters, media releases, teaching and learning materials, and research showcases on the findings of this research to the industry.