

**Development of expertise in British international and national Rugby League Players: a comparison of practice experiences**

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## INTRODUCTION

- Research has investigated how individuals reach an expert level by examining the number of hours engaged in specific types of practice<sup>[1]</sup>
- Here we compare the micro structure<sup>[2]</sup> of these practice hours experienced by elite and sub elite British rugby league players
- The purpose was to compare the perceptions of pre academy elite and sub elite British rugby league players' practice histories, in order to identify characteristics of what they considered to be effective practice designs**

## METHODS

- Sixteen** professional British rugby league players were interviewed
- Eight were **domestic level (sub elite)** having played a total of 1,664 domestic games (233 ± 77 mean (SD) games per player)
- Eight were players who had also represented their countries **internationally (elite)** having played a total 3,062 domestic games (383 ± 92 mean games per player) and 135 (14 ± 4 mean games per player) international games
- Semi structured** interviews explored relevant issues such as exposure to deliberate play, amateur sport, and professional sport practice
- A combination of inductive and deductive thematic analysis involved the development of lower-order themes, higher-order themes, and general dimensions<sup>[3]</sup>

## RESULTS

- The thematic analysis of the data highlighted a total of 32 lower order themes, 13 higher order themes, and 4 dimensions across the two player groups

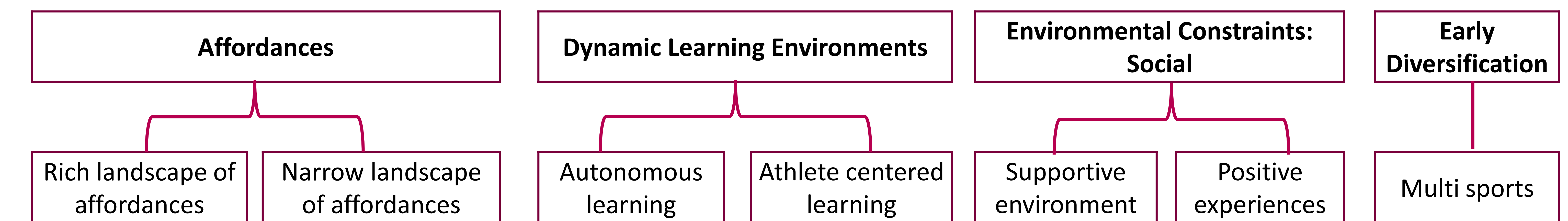


Figure 1. Thematic map of international players

**Narrow landscape of Affordances**  
 "the game has gone really structured with all these block plays. This kid he's the best half back in the country but you put three defenders in front of him and he's looking to put a play on, rather than run at them and just beat them"

**Task Constraints**  
 "you know with tackle technique he'd have you tackling holding tennis balls so you couldn't grab and stuff like that. We'd never done that kind of stuff before. He used to put plastic ties between your ankles so your feet couldn't get too far apart in D (defence), so to keep your feet closer together so you didn't get splayed so you didn't get beat back on your inside"

**Rich Landscape of Affordances**  
 "we had like scenario training and we got to where we had to score a try on the last play. And we never knew it was going to come down to a playoff game but it came down to that and we ended up scoring from keeping the ball alive"

**Positive Experiences**  
 "I just remember them being good blokes, I never remember being under any pressure from the coaches. Good blokes, want hard on the kids and let you enjoy it, and quite a few good players came out of those teams. I don't ever remember feeling under pressure"

## Applied Implications

- International players' insights highlighted the importance of *scenario based practice* in providing specifying information through a rich landscape of affordances to support and regulate actions
- Players should be exposed to *dynamic learning environments* to support the emergence of an adaptive functional relationship with the performance environment
- Coaches' should allow players to move between highly structured and highly varied tasks based on the individual needs of a performer at any one point in time.

## Referecnes

[1] Ericsson, K., Krampe, R., Tesch-Romer, C. (1993). The role of deliberate practice in the acquisition of expertise performance. *Psychological Reviews*, 100(3), 363-406.  
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 [3] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101