Youth athletes' perceptions of the sport experiences led by coaches who participated in the Coaching for Impact Programme: An interpretive description

Ben Owers

A thesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master Sport, Exercise and Health

2026

SPRINZ, AUT School of Sport and Recreation,

Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences

Primary Supervisor: Simon Walters, Auckland University of Technology

Secondary Supervisor: Glenn Fyall, University of Canterbury

Abstract

This study explored youth athletes' perceptions of the sport experiences led by coaches who had completed Sport New Zealand | Ihi Aotearoa's Coaching for Impact coach development programme. Existing literature highlights that developing community sport coaches is complex and that the effectiveness of coach development initiatives should be evaluated beyond coach learning alone. Accordingly, this research examined how the coaching approaches of those involved in the contemporary, nationally led programme influenced the quality of youth sport experiences, as described by their participants.

The study was informed by the Personal Assets Framework and Self-Determination Theory, which together conceptualise quality youth sport as an interaction of activities, relationships, and settings, and explain the motivational processes through which coaching can shape participants' lived experiences. Aligned with a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, an Interpretive Description methodology guided the study design, enabling an in-depth enquiry that utilised youth voice while drawing on relevant literature and practitioner knowledge. Nineteen purposively sampled participants aged 13 to 18 years, representing both individual and team sports, participated in semi-structured focus group interviews. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis.

Four themes and four sub-themes were generated, describing factors that participants perceived to be influencing their sport experiences. Findings suggested that coaches positively impacted experiences through the development of quality coach-athlete relationships, effective leadership of sport delivery, and the application of autonomy-supportive and athlete-centred coaching approaches. In addition, they revealed that youth sport experiences were shaped by factors beyond the coach, including the influence of peers and family, the importance of achieving personal goals in sport, and the negative impact of ego-orientated goals. While coaches could not control all aspects of participants' experiences, the analysis reinforces that they were influential across all factors, positioning them as key contributors to the quality of youth sport environments.

Three practical recommendations are proposed, calling for continued investment in developing coaching effectiveness, intentional alignment between athletes' goals and their sporting environments, and greater consideration of the wider social and system context to support the delivery of quality youth sport experiences.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

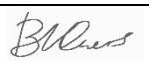
Attestation of Authorship

"I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning."

Signed:

Ben Owers

Artificial Intelligence Declaration

Specify the chapter number(s) in your research proposal/research component where AI was used.	
Chapter number(s):	One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven
Briefly explain why the AI tool was used (e.g., idea generation, summarization, data analysis, image creation, etc.).	
Purpose of AI Use:	Checking spelling and grammar errors
Clearly state the AI tools used.	
AI Tool(s) Used:	Microsoft Copilot
Exact prompts or queries entered into the AI tool. Include all relevant variations.	
Prompts Used:	You are a proofreading agent for a masters thesis. Your sole task is to identify and correct definite errors in: grammar, punctuation, spelling, incorrect word usage, sentence level grammatical clarity You must preserve the author's meaning, terminology, and academic voice at all times. Assume the author is a subject matter expert. You must NOT: rewrite for style or flow, simplify language, paraphrase, restructure sentences or paragraphs, add or remove content, suggest alternatives unless a correction is required for grammatical accuracy If correcting an issue would risk changing meaning, do not suggest a correction. Use New Zealand English spelling and conventions. Process all pasted text sentence by sentence. For each issue: quote the original sentence exactly, identify the specific grammatical issue, provide a corrected version of that sentence only.
A summary or description of the AI-generated output.	
Output Received:	Recommendations for spelling and improvements of grammar were provided. Only small amounts of text were entered at once (max. one paragraph), so small enhancements in flow between sentences were suggested.
Describe how the AI output was used, edited, or transformed.	
Post-AI Processing Methods:	All AI outputs were thoroughly reviewed. Where appropriate, AI recommended spelling were made and grammar changes were considered before being applied or modified by myself.
STUDENT DECLARATION	
By signing you are confirming that the AI use stated in the table(s) above are accurate and follow AUT's recommended guidelines detailed in the AI Hub and Postgraduate Handbook.	
Student Name: Ben Owers	Signature:  Date: 16/03/2026

Acknowledgements

I would like to begin by acknowledging the participants who took part in this research. Without your willingness to share your experiences, this project would not have been possible. I am grateful for your time, contributions, and openness during the focus group interviews. I was genuinely impressed by the depth and thoughtfulness of many of your responses.

To Sport New Zealand | Ihi Aotearoa, and in particular, Andy Rodgers, thank you for supporting this study and for trusting me to conduct this research.

To Simon and Glenn, I can't thank you enough for your guidance, patience, and support throughout this project. I have a great deal of respect for the way you both think about the sporting landscape. I came away from every conversation with something valuable, and your insights have not only challenged and guided my approach to research but have also influenced my thinking and have benefitted my approach to my work in sport development.

Finally, but certainly not least, a huge thank you to Pip. It is difficult to fully express my gratitude for your support. Balancing full-time work with part-time research over two years meant shared sacrifices, particularly time together. You have been a constant sounding board and quietly encouraged me at every step of this journey. I am looking forward to making up for my absence and spending more quality time together with the newest addition to our family.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was granted on 5 June 2024 by Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC): Reference: 24/86 (see Appendix A)

Glossary

Translations

Note on Terminology and Translation: This list defines terms appearing more than once throughout this thesis. For Te Reo Māori terms used only once, English translations or explanations are provided via footnotes or immediately follow the term in the text. To ensure alignment with national sector standards, the terms "tamariki" and "rangatahi" are defined according to the age-based categories used by Sport New Zealand | Ihi Aotearoa. Additionally, concepts such as "mana" are applied in accordance with the framework and definitions provided by Ara Taiohi.

Te Reo Māori	English Translation
Aotearoa	New Zealand
Kai	Food
Karakia	Māori welcome
Mana	The authority we inherit at birth
Rangatahi	Youth 13-18 years old
Tamariki	Children 5-12 years old
Whakawhanaungatanga	Connection focused conversation

Acronyms

Note on Acronyms: This list defines the acronyms used throughout this thesis. Each acronym is introduced in full at its first mention in the thesis or within a chapter, with the abbreviated form used in all subsequent instances.

Acronym	Full Title
AUTEC	Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee
ACC	Athlete Centred Coaching
BisB	Balance is Better
BPN	Basic Psychological Needs
CDP	Coach Development Programme
CDer	Coach Developer
ICCE	International Council for Coaching Excellence
ID	Interpretive Description
NSO	National Sports Organisation
NZ	New Zealand | Aotearoa
PYD	Positive Youth Development
RSO	National Sports Organisation
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
SDT	Self-Determination Theory

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Sport Participation and Coaching

Youth participation offers a range of potential benefits for those who engage regularly, including the development of personal aspects such as psychological, emotional and social attributes, as well as physical and sport-specific competencies (Gould, 2019; International Council for Coaching Excellence [ICCE], 2024; Vierimaa et al., 2012). Three long-term outcomes associated with engagement in sport have been identified by Côté et al. (2008) as: participation, performance, and personal development. Stakeholders, including participants, coaches and sport leaders, may prioritise one of these long-term outcomes or personal attributes over others. However, Côté et al. (2016) suggest that, to some extent, all three outcomes can be achieved when an appropriate environment and ongoing support are provided.

Fundamental to realising the positive effects of sport participation is the individual's decision to continue engaging over time. Bailey et al. (2013) suggest that the foundations of this decision can be traced back to motivation, and to the extent to which the sport experience aligns with the psychological interests of the individual. One psychological theory of motivation that has received substantial attention in sport-related literature is Self-Determination Theory (SDT), proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985). A core concept within SDT is that individuals must experience the fulfilment of three fundamental psychological needs to be self-motivated: autonomy, relatedness, and competence. As Deci and Ryan (1985) propose, positive satisfaction of these needs contributes to intrinsic motivation and enhanced psychological well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2017). When these needs are realised and sustained in sport settings, the likelihood of more self-determined motivation and continued engagement in sport is increased.

The quality of the sporting experience and associated motivational climate are influenced by a range of factors. Of particular significance in this study is the impact of coaching, and the environment encountered by the participants as a result of the prevailing conditions and social influences (Côté et al., 2016; 2020; Flaherty & Sagas, 2021). Although the influence of the coach as a social factor is the primary focus of this study, other social figures such as peers and family also contribute to shaping the quality of the sporting experience for the young athlete. An increasing research focus on the influence of the coach, and how coaching behaviours influence athlete experience, has led to the development of conceptual models, including definitions of coaching effectiveness (Côté & Gilbert, 2009) and models of long-term coach development (LTCD) (e.g., Côté et al., 2013; Holmes et al., 2025). These models have supported researchers and practitioners in translating theory into practical coach development

initiatives. For example, the International Council for Coaching Excellence (ICCE) (2024) has drawn on such models as guiding frameworks to develop a 'global' coaching development structure known as the International Coach Developer Framework. The likes of Alder (2017), Subijana et al. (2021) and Turnnidge and Côté (2017) suggest that coaches are well positioned to lead and shape the motivational environments in which participants experience sport, and therefore play a significant role in shaping the quality of sport experiences that impact individuals' motivation (Bailey et al., 2013; Brown et al., 2023; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

It is now widely accepted by sport coaching researchers that the development of community sport coaches is a complex endeavour (Hassanin & Light, 2014; Holmes et al., 2025; Ryou et al., 2025). This complexity has emerged, in part, from an acknowledgement that traditional conceptions of sport coaching, that focused primarily on physical, technical and tactical skill development, may limit opportunities for holistic participant development (Fyall et al., 2024; ICCE, 2024) and, in turn, contribute to participant attrition. This complexity of coaching and coach development is shaped by a range of factors, including individual athlete needs, coaches' knowledge and expertise, and the context in which coach-athlete interactions occur (Abraham et al., 2014; Bowes & Jones, 2006). Acknowledging the significance of coach development, many sport systems worldwide have implemented various forms of coach development programmes (CDPs), albeit with varying levels of success (Jones et al., 2023).

1.2 The New Zealand Context

As the crown agency responsible for play, active recreation and sport in Aotearoa[1] New Zealand (NZ), Sport New Zealand | Ihi Aotearoa (Sport NZ) provides leadership and stewardship for the sector. Their vision, stated in the 2020-2032 strategic direction as "Every Body Active", reflects an aspiration to lead the NZ sport system in supporting quality physical activity across active leisure settings (Sport New Zealand [Sport NZ], 2020). Driven by a belief in the value of sport to enable 'Happier, Healthier People', 'Better Connected People', and 'A Stronger Aotearoa', as articulated in the Value of Sport Report (Sport NZ, 2017), Sport NZ promotes the importance of quality sport experiences to increase physical activity levels, with the intention of positively influencing the wellbeing of New Zealanders.

As leaders of NZ's sport system, Sport NZ has taken a strong philosophical position on youth sport. Building on the Sport Talent Plan (2016), Sport NZ subsequently launched the "Balance is Better" (BisB) approach (Sport NZ, n.d.) which states that:

[1] Aotearoa, Te Reo Māori name for New Zealand

> Quality sport experiences have the power to improve young people's wellbeing in many ways. We want all young people to benefit from the added value a positive sport experience can provide to their life. The Balance is Better Philosophy is Sport New Zealand's approach to leading the changes needed to enable the New Zealand sport system to provide that positive experience for all our Tamariki[2] and Rangatahi[3] (Sport NZ, n.d., para. 1).

Theoretically, BisB promotes lifelong engagement in sport through a balanced approach to winning, skill development, and enjoyment, while acknowledging the diverse needs of youth, tempering adult expectations, and allowing flexibility in sport participation alongside other life commitments (Balance is Better [BisB], n.d.). Over time, the language used by Sport NZ has evolved, with current messaging being framed around the key phrase "Sport for all, sport for life" (BisB, n.d.), and the approach being defined as:

> Balance is Better is about a balanced approach to sport. This approach young people with quality sport opportunities and experiences to help them be happier, healthier and supported to optimise their potential in sport and life (BisB, n.d., para. 1).

Supported by research, the BisB approach highlights several issues currently identified in the NZ sport system. Specifically, it draws attention to the problematic prioritisation of winning over developmental goals, the influence of adult expectations on youth sport experiences, and the risks associated with early specialisation (BisB, n.d.). Whilst Sport NZ does not have direct control over each individual sport system, the launch of BisB, and subsequent efforts involving regular consultation and partnerships with national sporting organisations (NSOs) and regional sports organisations (RSOs), have led to the development of a range of sport development–focused initiatives, including coach development programmes.

In addition to this philosophical repositioning, BisB is promoted alongside new coach development initiatives aimed at transitioning coaching practices in NZ towards a more person-centred approach (Kidman & Keelty, 2015; Walters & Kidman, 2015). This approach has disrupted the foundational structures of coach education in NZ. Specifically, as suggested by O'Connor et al. (2024), collaboration between Sport NZ and NSOs has evolved coach development from traditional, formal, content-based accreditation systems towards more flexible, context-driven approaches. Importantly, emphasis has been placed on Coach Developer Aotearoa, a national coach development programme aimed at developing a network of coach developers responsible for coaching the coaches (Eade & Reid, 2015; Fyall et al., 2024; Walters et al., 2019). Subsequent iterations of this

[2] Tamariki – children aged 5–12 years.
[3] Rangatahi – youth aged between 13-18 years.

foundational programme have resulted in programmes such as Coaching for Impact, which informed the focus of this research.

1.3 Coaching for Impact: Setting the Scene

The design of Coaching for Impact (CfI), first implemented in 2021, was heavily informed by BisB and academic literature related to positive youth development, coaching, and coach development. The programme is led by Sport NZ staff, academics and experienced graduates of the CDA programme. The core aim is stated as:

> Growing a collaborative network of coaches who influence positive change in youth sport aligned with the BisB philosophy. (Sport NZ, 2023, para 1).

Participants in the CfI programme were coaches working with secondary school-age participants (rangatahi), aged between 13 and 18 years. The aim was that coaches would be informed and equipped with the principles informing BisB, an understanding of relevant underpinning literature, as well as the pedagogical behaviours aligned with these. In turn, it was anticipated that participating coaches could then provide the high-quality sport experiences for their athletes that the philosophical shift demanded.

Following the completion of the first iteration of CfI in 2022, Sport NZ identified an opportunity to shift from a solely Sport NZ-led approach towards a collaborative model involving NSOs. This second 18-month iteration took place from July 2023 to December 2024. The programme was delivered across three urban hubs in NZ: Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch.

The 90 coach participants took part in online webinars, residential learning camps, communities of practice, and received some individual coach developer support. Each of the three hubs was led by experienced ‘Trainers’, who were selected due to their knowledge of coaching, coach development, and the research underpinning positive youth sporting experiences. The programme reflected a collaborative, co-design approach that enabled coaches to identify “focus concepts” based on challenges they faced or topics of particular interest. The programme was flexible, and each hub had variation in its delivery model, determined by the Trainers and participants. Online webinars were utilised as platforms for international experts to deliver content related to principles of quality coaching, leading team culture, building resilience through sport, and storytelling. Webinar delivery enabled all 90 participants to join live sessions or access recordings, providing a consistent base level of core content.

Another fundamental component of the CDP was the in-person residential learning camps, with a minimum of three, one-to-two-day workshops delivered in each hub. These camps served as important opportunities for connection, accelerating collaboration and the construction of knowledge among coaches, and were used to facilitate the exploration and contextualisation of key content, with concepts from the 'expert' webinars woven throughout. Reflective practice was encouraged as the coaches worked together to unpack coaching outcomes, self-awareness, coaching philosophies, attributes of quality coaches, cultural awareness, building positive team culture, developing leadership in others, strategies for conducting challenging conversations, effective teaching methods and skill acquisition theory. In addition to developing a personal development plan, participants were also encouraged to share successes and challenges they were currently facing, as well as those encountered throughout their coaching journeys.

The final aspect of CfI was the social support and learning systems established through partnerships between the CfI Trainers and the coaches. Multiple communication avenues were created, including private Facebook pages for members of each hub. In addition, smaller group chats among sub-groups were established, and a number of coaches informally met in person outside of scheduled sessions to talk about coaching. To help foster these connections, Trainers also connected small groups with predominantly RSO-based CDers, who were tasked with leading communities of support. These developers were responsible for facilitating group discussions, sharing expertise, and, where requested, supporting individual coach observation and/or feedback.

Overall, CfI provided coaches with opportunities to dedicate time to structured development sessions, as well as to self-organise more informal connections. Together, these opportunities supported the sharing of ideas, the generation of new knowledge, and innovation across sporting codes. In collaboration with Trainers and fellow coaches, participants sought to gain a deeper understanding of the philosophical, psychological and pedagogical foundations of the programme, thereby creating favourable conditions for greater understanding and application of a person-centred coaching approach and the creation of positive and motivating experiences for the athletes they coached.

1.4 Why this Research

Given the relative 'newness' of CDer programmes globally, there is growing momentum in the international research evaluating the impact of coaching programmes that have similarly repositioned themselves (Dohme et al., 2019; Eather et al., 2021; Li et al., 2024; Santos et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2024). However, in the NZ context, while a small number of studies investigated recent advances in coach development (e.g., Cassidy, 2022; Fyall et al., 2024; O′Connor et al., 2024; Rogers et al., 2024; Walters et al., 2019), to date there is no research evaluating

a national programme such as CfI. Furthermore, there is little evidence in NZ of research investigating coaches' experiences of these programmes, as well as a lack of representation of athlete voice regarding how members of such initiatives impact the youth sporting experience. This research aims to explore the latter, using perspectives of youth athletes who have been coached by coaches who completed CfI, to build on Sport NZ's practical evaluation of CfI and better understand how coaches who participated in a contemporary, research informed CDP, are influencing youth experiences.

A further contributing factor to why this research was undertaken arose from an unexpected opportunity. During the first two iterations of CfI, Sport NZ collected data on coaches' perceptions of the programme's influence on their coaching practice, alongside survey-based feedback from athletes they coached. While these data provided initial indications of programme effectiveness, Sport NZ subsequently sought support from Auckland University of Technology to develop a more robust understanding of whether CfI was producing its intended impact on youth sport experiences. Given the programme's distinctive design, Sport NZ's commitment to learning and growing the programme, and the scope and timing of my Master's research study, I willingly embraced the opportunity to conduct this research in partial fulfilment of the Master of Sport, Exercise and Health.

1.5 The Research Question

To guide this in-depth analysis, a primary research question was established:

> *What are youth athletes' perceptions of the sport experiences led by coaches in the Coaching for Impact programme?*

1.6 Reflexivity

In line with the methodology employed in this research (see Chapter Four: Methodology), it is important to make my positionality in relation to the study clear. As the lead researcher, I have a strong connection to sport and believe it has had a positive impact on my life, from a young age as a sport-enthusiastic child through to experiences in NZ and abroad in competitive field hockey, both as an athlete, coach, and CDer. Having worked in sport development for over 10 years, I believe sport has the potential to benefit individuals and wider society. Not only did I seek to conduct this research to better understand the phenomenon under investigation, but I was also motivated by a desire to give something meaningful and practical back to the discipline that has given so much to me.

While this study was driven by this motivation and informed by my positionality and the lens through which I see sport and coaching, recent experiences abroad and exposure to concepts such as critical reflection and differing worldviews have heightened my awareness of alternative perspectives. Ongoing reflection on this throughout the project had a positive influence on the quality of this investigation, as well as on the findings and the recommendations produced.

1.7 Structure of the Report

This report is presented in seven chapters. Following this chapter, Chapter One: Introduction, Chapter Two: Literature Review, provides a detailed synthesis and critique of relevant literature on youth sport participation, coaching and coach development. Chapter Three: The Conceptual Frameworks, outlines and critiques the conceptual frameworks utilised throughout the research process. Chapter Four: Methodology, presents the research methodology and methods applied, including a detailed description of researcher positionality and reflexivity, as well as an overview of ethical considerations. Chapter Five: Findings, details the study's findings, articulated in the form of thematic summaries, supported by participant data extracts. Chapter Six: Discussion, provides an interpretation of the findings, including how they relate to existing literature and their implications for applied practice. Chapter Seven: Conclusion, summarises the report, acknowledges study limitations, and presents final recommendations for applied practice.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In this chapter, a detailed outline, synthesis and critique of relevant literature is provided. First, a review of sport for youth development is presented. Second, an overview of sport coaching and a description of a participant-centred approach are provided. Third, an analysis of both international and NZ sport coaching trends is explored. Finally, this chapter links and justifies the present research by identifying gaps in the literature and reinforcing the objectives guiding the investigation.

Much of the literature for this review was sourced through Google Scholar, SPORTDiscus, PsycINFO, and Scopus databases accessed via the Auckland University of Technology library system. Searches were conducted for peer-reviewed literature, published in English, with a focus on sport coaching and youth sport participation. In addition, reference lists from relevant articles were examined, and selected grey literature relevant to the research background was included.

2.1 Sport for Development: Youth Athlete Experience

Astle et al. (2018) suggest that the purpose and clarity of research examining sporting experiences vary, as it is often not well defined. They argue that this lack of clarity is problematic when distinctions between sport development models, such as development of sport versus development through sport, are not clearly articulated. Within the broader sport development literature, scholars also highlight the importance of clearly distinguishing the intended outcomes of the different models, alongside the need for rigorous evaluation, and caution against untested assumptions regarding sport's capacity to generate positive social impact (Bateman et al., 2020; Crowther, 2025; Gould, 2019). Despite this, and central to the focus of this research, the International Olympic Committee states that the goal of youth sport is to support the holistic development of young people and to foster long-term participation habits alongside sporting achievements (Bergeron et al., 2015). This position aligns more closely with a sport-and-development lens, which recognises sport as an inherent vehicle for personal growth, through which both sport-specific outcomes and individualised, transferable development can be achieved (Astle et al., 2018).

Research has identified a range of individual benefits associated with regular and long-term participation in sport. For example, Turnnidge et al. (2014) suggest that, in addition to the development of sporting skills, cognitive, emotional, and social attributes can also be fostered when appropriate settings are in place. As such, sport programmes can serve as platforms through which positive youth development may occur. Furthermore, there is general consensus within sport research that quality sport experiences are those that align with the needs

of participants, and when such experiences are sustained over time, there is potential for holistic development, including positive physical, psychological and social outcomes (Brown et al., 2023; Côté et al., 2014). Moreover, theoretical frameworks commonly used in youth sport, such as Positive Youth Development (PYD) models, including the PYD through sport (Holt et al., 2017), the 4Cs framework (Vierimaa et al., 2012) and PYD informed coaching approaches such as the Compete Learn Honor philosophy (Scales, 2023), highlight that young people benefit from participation in meaningful and well-designed activities. Such activities support not only the development of physical skills, but also the growth of cognitive, emotional, social, and moral capabilities (Moore et al., 2021; Stuntz & Weiss, 2010; Turnnidge et al., 2014). Indeed, Ault et al. (2024) suggest that student athletes value positive relationships with coaches, parents and sport leaders, particularly when these groups support the learning and practice of life skills development within sport.

In the NZ context, Sport NZ has made related claims regarding the value of sport to New Zealanders and the wider society (Sport NZ, 2017). Drawing on the findings of The Value of Sport report (Sport NZ, 2017), which captured insights from key stakeholders including participants, coaches, parents and sport leaders, we can conclude that:

- 92% of people believe being active helps them to stay physically healthy whilst relieving stress.
- 88% believe sport and physical activities provide opportunities to build confidence and experience success.
- 84% believe sport and physical activity support a sense of belonging and bring people together.
- 86% believe that high performance sport contributes to the nation's identity.

Whilst the literature and these Sport NZ insights reinforce the potential benefit of sport for the broader population, there has also been focused research dedicated to understanding the youth sport landscape. For example, in the NZ context, Wilson et al. (2022) analysed national data from 6771 young New Zealanders and found that individuals who were supported by coaches and participated in a variety of sports had a stronger association with wellbeing. Furthermore, Wilson et al. (2022) suggest that involvement in positively coached sport experiences may provide young people with greater opportunities to form meaningful social connections. They argue that such environments foster a greater sense of relatedness, competence, and achievement when compared with those who participate in physical activity alone (e.g. fitness-related activity).

However, while there is increasing recognition of the potential for youth sport to contribute to positive youth development, it is well documented that participation alone does not automatically result in holistic developmental outcomes (Crowther, 2025; Turnnidge et al., 2014). Indeed, as Côté et al. (2024) and Holmes et al. (2025) suggest, sport and coaching environments are inherently complex, and effectively navigating the associated

social and structural factors is crucial for supporting individual motivation and enabling participants to realise the potential benefits. Given this complexity, some scholars suggest that the benefits of participation may also be accompanied by physical, psychological and social risks (e.g., Gould, 2019). As Bergeron et al. (2015) suggest, the culture of youth sport is driven by performance-centric agendas, in which adults' traditional views of sport, alongside business and media motives, can present physical and psychological risks to youth participants.

Furthermore, literature suggests that when youth sport experiences are not aligned to positive development principles and the needs of the participant, they are more likely to result in a negative experience and an increased risk of drop out (Balish et al., 2014). Supporting this claim, a systematic review of 43 peer-reviewed sources conducted by Crane & Temple (2015) identified five consistently reported reasons for youth sport drop out: injury or physical issues, lack of enjoyment, low belief in one's ability, pressure from influential social figures, and competing priorities. In addition, a recent qualitative study by Saarinen et al. (2020), exploring the perceptions of Finnish student athletes, found that many participants felt disempowered due to the ego-orientated nature of competition, the controlling influence of others who provided limited support, and the lack of attention to life outside of sport. Similarly, Witt and Dangi (2018) suggest that core reasons for drop out include structural constraints within sports system (e.g. resource limitations), interpersonal issues such as poor parents, teammates or coach interactions, and issues associated with motivation and enjoyment.

In the NZ context, national participation data, such as the Active NZ survey (Sport NZ, 2024), suggest that young people reduce their overall sport participation during adolescence. This apparent dropout begins in the early to mid-adolescent years. Specifically, while average weekly participation peaks at 5.1 hours for those aged 8–11 years, this declines to approximately 3 hours per week among 15–17 year olds (Sport NZ, 2024). However, as Crane and Temple (2015) caution, although statistics provide an indication of dropout trends, organisations must look more deeply to identify underlying factors and ask broader questions. For example: Why are young people moving out of sport or towards other activities? Where do these participants go? Are they increasing time investment in other sport activities?

Research highlights that dropout may be influenced by, and associated with, negative sport experiences, such as early specialisation and overuse injuries (DiSanti & Erickson, 2019). Early specialisation involves athletes investing a large proportion of the year in a single sporting context, thereby reducing opportunities to participate in other activities and engage in broader social and peer group developmental experiences (DiFiori et al., 2014; DiSanti & Erickson, 2019). Overuse injuries, as the name implies, result from the repetitive overuse of specific body parts, are often linked to early specialisation, and may be compounded during adolescence due to periods of accelerated growth and misalignment between training and competition demands within youth sport (Arnold et al., 2017; Bell et al., 2018; Jayanthi, 2019). In both scenarios, youth participants, often influenced by significant adult

role models, are encouraged to continue participation, which can lead to an increased risk of physical and psychological harm (Bergeron et al., 2015; McGowan et al., 2021). Despite literature highlighting these concerns and indicating that there are no proven long-term athletic performance benefits associated with early specialisation (Bergeron et al., 2015; DiSanti & Erickson, 2019), this phenomenon continues to undermine the sport experiences of many community and youth participants.

It is clear from the research that youth who engage and participate in sport can experience both positive and negative outcomes. Negative experiences appear to increase the likelihood of dropout and, consequently, the loss of potential long-term participation benefits. As Gould (2019) suggests, it is therefore important that youth sport systems are designed with careful consideration of these issues. Furthermore, global debate highlights the impacts of negative sport experiences for youth, including compromised athlete wellbeing and the thwarting of basic psychological needs (Bartholomew et al., 2011), particularly within performance-orientated sport systems (Lundberg et al., 2025). As Lundberg et al. (2025) propose, defining and implementing quality youth sport experiences within high-performance environments remains a challenging task.

2.2 Holistic Development as a Youth Athlete Philosophy

As highlighted by youth sport researchers, it is increasingly acknowledged that youth sport programmes should support the holistic development of participants (Côté et al., 2024; Moore et al., 2021; Vierimaa et al., 2012). This is particularly important given the competing interests of both youth sport goals and the wider, and arguably dominant, sport narratives that prioritise competition and commercial outcomes (Bergeron et al., 2015; Gould, 2019). However, as Turnnidge et al. (2014) and others suggest, there is growing recognition of the importance of incorporating the perceptions, needs, and characteristics of young people when shaping the design and intended outcomes of contemporary youth sport programmes (Flaherty & Sagas, 2021; Harris et al., 2023). Despite this, Gould (2019) suggests such approaches remain far from reality in many sport programmes, which continue to focus primarily on supporting the most talented individuals. As a result, insufficient attention is displayed to those who may benefit the most from long-term wellbeing outcomes associated with sustained sport participation (Gould, 2019).

Lundberg et al. (2025) call for national sport leadership to demonstrate quality sport experiences through evidence-informed and flexible principles that promote holistic, long-term benefits alongside more traditional practices of talent identification and sporting achievement. Second, they argue that, to support improved outcomes and experiences for youth sport participants, greater attention must be given to the appropriate design and delivery of competitions, as well as to more effective coaching. Finally, they acknowledge that successful implementation

of positive youth sport programmes depends on three key elements: (i) the programme (the what), (ii) the environment (the where) and (iii) the people (the who) that contribute to a quality sport experience.

In many ways, the BisB approach (BisB, n.d.), outlined earlier in the introduction, provides an example of how government agencies can draw on this holistic youth sport research to create guidance for national sporting organisations. Despite the alignment between the BisB philosophy and broader literature, there is limited academic research that addresses the effectiveness of Sport NZ's intended goals of positively influencing youth athlete experiences. With the exception of research on a basketball programme's adherence to the total training load recommendations associated with BisB (Taylor et al., 2024) and commentary on youth sport system change (Cassidy, 2022), the only peer reviewed study that directly references support for BisB is Wilson et al.'s (2022) investigation into the wellbeing benefits of participating in multiple sports and physical activities.

One additional NZ-based study explored the influence of the theory-informed adult education initiative 'Good Sports' in promoting cultural change in youth sport, with 95% of adult participants reporting a shift in their views regarding the role and purpose of youth sport (Walters et al., 2022). Despite this, Walters et al. (2022) emphasised the need for further change in NZ sport systems' structures (e.g. competition structures) to generate a meaningful improvement in the quality of the youth sporting experience.

2.3 Sport Coaching

Often positioned as the leaders of the sporting environment, coaches are considered to influence many aspects that contribute to quality experiences and positive youth sport outcomes (Bailey et al., 2013; Bowes & Jones, 2006; Brown et al., 2023). However, as research in sport coaching highlights, coaching is a complex and dynamic social process that continues to be shaped by a range of historical, social, and political factors (Day et al., 2025; Hassanin & Light, 2014; Partington & Cushion, 2025). As Bowes & Jones (2006) outline, these factors include (i) the objectives of the programme or environment that they are operating within, (ii) the needs of participants, (iii) the coach's knowledge and expertise, and (iv) the context in which coaching interactions occur.

In addition, Falcão et al. (2019) have highlighted the importance of the coach's role in supporting youth participants' holistic development alongside performance-related outcomes. Similarly, Bailey et al. (2013) highlight that young people's sport experiences are influenced by coaches, and that the environment that coaches create has an influence on the participants' motivation to engage with sport. Furthermore, Jowett (2024, 2025) proposes that, to have a positive influence, a key feature of quality coaching is the enhancement of coach-athlete relationships. In her work, Jowett (2025) highlights the significance of the dyadic nature of the coach-athlete relationship in terms of closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation. When these elements align,

the resulting quality relationship can lead to enhanced athlete motivation, well-being, and resilience, whilst reducing the risk of overload, burnout, and eventual dropout.

Sport research has also drawn upon athlete voice to reinforce the importance of coaching (Silva et al., 2019). For example, in a qualitative study with Portuguese handball players, Silva et al. (2019) reported that athletes believed coaches played a critical role in their development of both technical and personal skills. Further, Booth et al. (2025) suggest that, given the role requires interactions between individuals, groups and different contexts, coaching is a multidimensional phenomenon. In line with notions of holistic development, as described above, researchers suggest that the coaching process is becoming more complex (Cassidy, 2022). This appears to be due to a redefining of what the role involves, whereby coaches are expected to coach beyond traditional notions of sport skill development alone, to create learning environments that capture much wider educative goals and life-skill development for youth participants (Falcão et al., 2020; Light & Harvey, 2017; Scales, 2023).

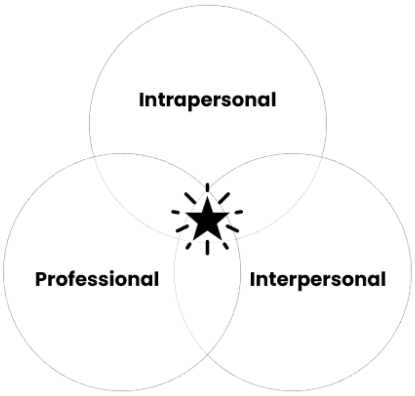
This conceptualisation is not lost on current sport governing bodies, such as the ICCE (2024), where holistic development references are consistently reinforced, for example:

> Quality coaching can not only be described as 'effective' in terms of meeting the desired coaching outcomes, but also as taking a holistic (encompassing the 4Cs: competence, confidence, connection and character) and values-based athlete-centred approach (p. 10).

Similarly, in the NZ context, Sport NZ coach development initiatives, such as Coach Developer Aotearoa and the Coaching for Impact (CfI) programme (Sport NZ, 2023), are also focused on holistic developmental outcomes for youth and community participation programmes, as outlined previously.

Many of these coach development frameworks are informed by an increasing interest from sport coaching researchers (e.g. Abraham et al., 2014; Kidman & Lombardo, 2010; Jowett, 2025; Turnnidge & Côté, 2017;). For example, drawing on Côté and Gilbert's (2009) and Côté et al. (2013) definitions of coaching effectiveness and excellence, the ICCE's Coach Development Framework (ICCE, 2024) states that coaching effectiveness 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. 316);

Figure 1: *The Three Knowledge Components of Effective Coaching*



Note. Developed from the definition provided by Côté and Gilbert (2009) and Côté et al. (2013). Coaching effectiveness is illustrated here as the seamless integration of a coach's intrapersonal, interpersonal and professional knowledge.

According to Turnnidge and Côté (2017), a major barrier to achieving such coaching effectiveness is coaches' ability to apply their knowledge through interactions with their athletes. To address this, researchers (e.g., Erikstad et al., 2021; Hummel et al., 2023; Turnnidge & Côté, 2017) and organisations such as the United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee (2020) have advocated for the use of transformational leadership as a key interpersonal approach for operationalising effective coaching. Centred on empowering the follower, this approach is characterised by idealised influence (gaining trust and role-modelling set values), inspirational motivation (inspiring individuals and groups), intellectual stimulation (actively engaging athletes in learning or decision-making), and individualised consideration (showing genuine care for each individual's needs) (Hummel et al., 2023; Turnnidge & Côté, 2017). The use of this approach has been linked to positive youth athlete outcomes (Erikstad et al., 2021; Subijana et al., 2021) and therefore presents an evidence-informed process that could help coaches to maximise their coaching effectiveness.

2.4 Athlete (Youth Participant) Centred Coaching

Literature outlining the importance of coaching holistically is prominent in the coach development literature (Gould, 2013; Vierimaa et al., 2012; Walters & Kidman, 2015) and in resulting youth development frameworks (e.g., Coach Development Framework, ICCE, 2024; Coaching for Impact, Sport NZ, 2023). It appears that the redefining of the coaching role challenges traditional notions of performance and skill development and extends towards wider educative goals, where cognitive, social, emotional, and moral goals are included in the participant

outcomes. In this sense, the coach's role changes from coach-controlled learning environments (coach-centred, where all decisions around the learning environment are determined by the coach) to an environment where the athletes are actively encouraged to contribute to their learning environment (athlete-centred) (Bennett & Fyall, 2018; Fyall et al., 2024).

Coach-centric approaches have been challenged due to the controlling manner and isolated focus on sport performance outcomes (Bartholomew, 2011; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003) which have generally privileged the coach's technical and tactical knowledge (Subijana et al., 2021). This focus appears to be at the expense of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, where learning and development are judged primarily by athlete or team achievement. Sport sociology and pedagogy literature suggests that this interpretation of coaching has likely formed over time and is the result of wider historical, social, and political influences and contexts that both coaches and athletes navigate (Hassanin & Light, 2014; Partington & Cushion, 2025). This socio-culturally ingrained norm has helped embed coach-centred approaches, often without questioning their effectiveness or whether they align with youth participants' characteristics, needs, and assumptions (Day et al., 2025; Kidman & Lombardo, 2010; Ryou et al., 2025).

Holistic coaching approaches, on the other hand, also termed humanistic or athlete-centred coaching (ACC) approaches (Cassidy et al., 2016; Kidman & Lombardo, 2010; Walters & Kidman, 2015), are described as environments where coaches prioritise effort, enjoyment, positive social connections, athlete involvement in decisions, and improvement over competition outcomes (Bailey et al., 2013; Griffin et al., 2018; Kidman & Lombardo, 2010). ACC practices are strongly supported and promoted in the youth sport psychology literature (Fry & Moore, 2019; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). For example, Kidman and Lombardo (2010), strong advocates of ACC methods, call for adjustments in coaching priorities by placing a greater importance on the coach-athlete relationship, where coaches foreground athletes' emotions and social needs in addition to the traditionally privileged skill development and achievement-oriented methods (Cassidy et al., 2016).

Within ACC, sport-specific knowledge is still essential, but as described above, youth sport environments require clarity on their objectives (Abraham et al., 2014; Astle et al., 2018) and the methods required to deliver those outcomes. In my interpretation of the literature presented, this includes clarity on the coach's roles and responsibilities, as well as clarity on the outcomes intended from these roles and responsibilities. Therefore, and in order to achieve the wider educative outcomes outlined in the literature, it appears that coaches are required to demonstrate an understanding of technical and tactical knowledge, as well as effective interpersonal and intrapersonal coaching skills (Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Lefebvre et al., 2016; Silva et al., 2020). Essentially, this approach provides a guide for how coaches can better engage, empower, and support athletes to achieve their desired outcomes from sport engagement.

While ACC approaches adopted in youth sport environments have been called for in the coaching literature for over 15 years (Gould, 2019), and there is some uptake, there is still more research to be done to understand how this is being applied by coaches and what impact this has on participants (Dohme et al., 2019; Gould, 2016). For example, Subijana et al. (2021) suggest that there is a need to explore how athlete outcomes are impacted by coaches' interpersonal skills. Similarly, as Falcão et al. (2019) suggest, there is a gap in the literature relating to the participants' perceptions, that is, those who are actually affected by the coaches' behaviours, to better understand the impact of coaching on the participants' experiences and outcomes.

2.5 International Coach Development Trends and Frameworks

Building on the preceding sections' emphasis on youth sport quality, holistic outcomes, and the importance of coaching relationships, contemporary international coach development has increasingly been positioned as a primary lever for changing coach behaviour and, by extension, participant experiences and outcomes.

While coach development programmes (CDPs) are now widespread, they have historically privileged sport-specific professional knowledge (the "what to coach") over interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions (the "how to coach"), contributing to variable impact across contexts (Jones et al., 2023; Lefebvre et al., 2016). Research evidence indicates moderate positive effects on relational and engagement outcomes in some interventions, alongside a larger proportion of studies reporting limited impact and/or weak reporting of athlete outcomes (Li et al., 2024).

In response, research and practice have increasingly advocated for CDPs that are more context-embedded, learner-centred, and practice-connected, including greater emphasis on reflective and intrapersonal learning and real-world problem-solving (Gould, 2013; Hassanin & Light, 2014; McQuade & Nash, 2015; Ryou et al., 2025). There are emerging examples of targeted CDPs showing promising effects on coach practice and participant experiences (Eather et al., 2021; Falcão et al., 2020; Hummell et al., 2023), alongside cautious uptake of technology-enabled approaches that still require practical application support (Santos et al., 2019).

A related international shift is the attempted formalisation of the coach developer role that is aligned with ICCE's (2024) International Coach Developer Framework. In this view, coach developers (CDers) are increasingly expected to facilitate coaches' learning and transfer of this learning into practice rather than merely deliver accreditation, although evidence also suggests that role clarity and CDers' effectiveness remain uneven and under-specified across systems (Dohme et al., 2019; ICCE, 2024; Jones et al., 2024).

2.6 New Zealand Coach Development Trends and Frameworks

In NZ, coaching and coach development broadly mirror these international shifts toward holistic, participant-centred coaching and ongoing, context-driven learning, while also reflecting distinctive national policy drivers and system changes (Fyall et al., 2024). Early leadership efforts promoted an athlete-centred coaching (ACC) approach that is now widely endorsed across many NSOs/RSOs (Kidman & Keelty, 2015; Walters & Kidman, 2015), informing subsequent national initiatives. This is most notably seen in BisB, a Sport NZ philosophy that has further reinforced participant-centred, developmentally appropriate youth sport principles through public-facing guidance and resources (BisB, n.d.). In parallel, Sport NZ's coach education system has shifted over the past two decades from a more formalised, content-based accreditation model toward a more flexible, learner-centred model that values formal and informal learning and seeks to meet coaches' needs within their local contexts (Cassidy & Kidman, 2010; Fyall et al., 2024; O'Connor et al., 2024; Rogers et al., 2024; Walters et al., 2019).

This evolution has been supported by deliberate investment in a national network of CDers and CDer trainers to help embed learning in day-to-day coaching challenges and to enable sustained professional learning for a largely volunteer coaching workforce (Fyall et al., 2024; O'Connor et al., 2024; Ryou et al., 2025). However, recent scholarship also highlights ongoing tensions and challenges, such as shifting national sport policy objectives, the need for stronger socio-cultural and critical reflection within coach learning, and increased demands for cultural responsiveness and diversity across coaching pathways (Cassidy, 2022;Cassidy & Hapeta, 2024; Fyall et al., 2024; O'Connor et al., 2024).

It is within this evolving national landscape that the influence of coaches who participated in CfI is positioned as the focus for the present study. Specifically, this research investigates youth sport participants' perceptions of their experiences which were led by coaches who have completed the CfI programme in NZ.

2.7 Justification for the Study

The preceding literature review has established two related claims; first, quality youth sport experiences are not guaranteed by participation alone, and second, coaches are pivotal in shaping the relational and motivational conditions that support (or undermine) positive youth sport experiences and longer-term engagement (Crane & Temple, 2015; Jowett, 2025; Turnnidge et al., 2014). At the same time, contemporary coach development, both internationally and in NZ, has increasingly shifted toward participant-centred, holistic, and context-embedded

learning. However, the evidence of impact is not clear, with many studies reporting limited athlete outcome data and variable impacts (Lefebvre et al., 2016; Li et al., 2024). This creates a clear need for research that examines whether and how "better" coach learning translates into "better" participant experiences in real-world youth sport environments shaped by local socio-cultural conditions (Li et al., 2024; Partington & Cushion, 2025).

Within this landscape, Sport NZ's CfI programme provides a timely and policy-relevant context for investigation. CfI is explicitly positioned to strengthen coaches' capacity to influence youth participants' experiences in ways aligned with BisB and broader participant-centred coaching aims. Evaluating the potential influence of coaches who participated in CfI on participant experiences offers an opportunity to examine multiple elements and outcomes of a national coaching system. Specifically, how these coaches and the everyday coaching environment can interact to produce the intended outcome of quality youth sport experiences, rather than assuming that system changes automatically translate into improved participant experiences.

Critically, while there is substantial literature describing NZ's evolving coaching system and the strategic, professional debates it navigates (e.g., Cassidy, 2022; Fyall et al., 2024; O'Connor et al., 2024; Walters et al., 2019), there remains limited empirical work that centres on the end user (youth participants) when assessing the value of coach development initiatives. A participant-voice approach is warranted because young people's accounts can illuminate how coaching is actually experienced "on the ground", including the relational and motivational features that theory suggests are consequential for enjoyment, belonging, perceived competence, and sustained engagement (Crane & Temple, 2015; Falcão et al., 2020).

Accordingly, this study investigates youth sport participants' perceptions of their experiences in environments where their coach has completed CfI, providing context-specific insight into whether participants in a national coach development initiative are meaningfully contributing to quality participation experiences. The research question is (restated):

What are youth athletes' perceptions of the sport experiences led by coaches in the CfI programme?

It is important to state that, by design, the questions positioned the research aim towards better understanding youth athletes' perceptions of coaching and the associated impact in relation to their broader experience and motivation, and not whether the CfI itself contributed to any direct impact on participants' experiences. By doing so, this enables a deep exploration into participant experiences and coaches' influence, without being bound by searching for a translation of CfI content and objectives into practice. Considering models of long-term coach development (LTCD), which recognise coach learning as a complex, non-linear, and multifaceted journey (Côté et al., 2013; Holmes et al., 2025), analysing a direct translation of CDP learnings into practise would likely be a challenging endeavour and risks overlooking other factors that have shaped individual

coaching approaches. Furthermore, as outlined throughout Chapter Four: Methodology, is not appropriate or feasible through the research approach applied.

Finally, this justification leads directly into the rationale for the conceptual frameworks adopted in this study. The study requires a lens that can (a) conceptualise quality youth sport as an interaction of activities, relationships, and settings in full view of developmental outcomes, and (b) explain the motivational processes through which coaching relationships may shape participants' lived experiences. The Personal Assets Framework (PAF) provides the conceptual structure (Côté et al., 2016; Côté et al., 2020), while Self-Determination Theory's (SDT) basic psychological needs (BPN) and motivation continuum (Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2017) provide a robust account of how coach-created climates and relationships support, or hinder, young people's psychological needs and motivation. These factors, autonomy, competence, and relatedness, strongly align with the PAF framework, specifically the 'quality social dynamics' (The "who" cog), as described below (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). This combined framing therefore offers a coherent and theoretically defensible basis for interpreting youth participants' perceptions of sport experiences shaped by CfI-trained coaches.

Chapter Three: The Conceptual Frameworks

3.1 Models of Youth Sport Development: The Personal Assets Framework (PAF)

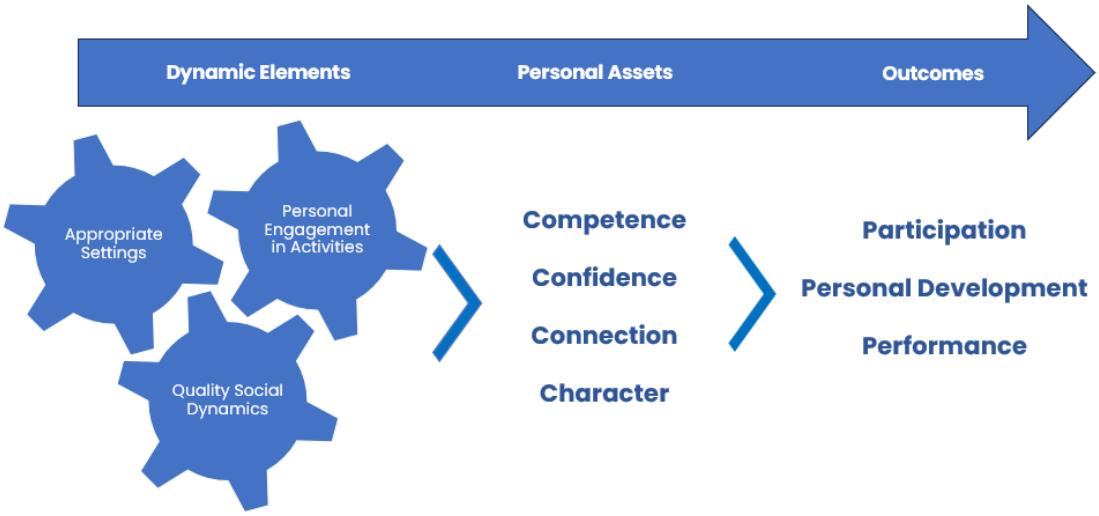
The literature provides multiple conceptualisations of what positive youth development (PYD) programmes look like. For example, Bailey et al. (2013) conducted a literature review spanning 53 youth sport studies and concluded that positive youth sport resulting in continued sport participation is influenced by five factors: fun and enjoyment, feelings of competence, developing new skills, friends and peers, and parents. Moreover, Visek et al. (2022) break down the concept of fun, suggesting the priority components of fun are: trying hard, positive team interaction and quality coaching. Further research by Witt and Dangi (2018) highlights the importance of giving participants ownership of their experiences, shifting the focus away from winning and towards enjoyment, engaging in sport at an appropriate age, and balancing parent influence.

Also, the literature provides recommendations and models to help (re)conceptualise, (re)design, and implement sport systems (Holt et al., 2017; Scales, 2023; Turnnidge et al., 2014; Vierimaa et al., 2012). For example, Vierimaa et al. (2012) suggest the revised 4Cs (competence, confidence, connection, and character) provide a framework for measuring youth athlete outcomes. In addition, Turnnidge et al. (2014) identify two distinct approaches to Positive Youth Development (PYD): an explicit approach, in which PYD is clearly defined and articulated as being part of programmes, and an implicit approach, where programmes are informed by PYD principles but are not specifically promoted as PYD initiatives. Furthermore, Holt et al. (2017)'s model of PYD in sport identifies three essential programme components: ongoing positive adult-youth relationships, life skill activities, and leadership opportunities.

Importantly, in this research I have adopted the Personal Assets Framework (PAF) developed by Côté et al. (2016). According to Côté and colleagues, the PAF is an ecological, process-oriented model that explains how youth sport contexts can generate developmental benefits over time. It proposes that three interacting dynamic elements of sport participation, often depicted as "cogs", shape athletes' experiences and medium to long-term outcomes: (1) personal engagement in activities (the what), (2) quality social dynamics/relationships (the who), and (3) appropriate settings (the where). Within the PAF, these dynamic elements are understood to interrelate like gears, creating immediate experiences during sessions and seasons (e.g., enjoyable and appropriately challenging experiences that build interest). Those immediate experiences are proposed to accumulate into short-term personal assets commonly summarised as the 4Cs (competence, confidence, connection, and character). Over longer timeframes, these assets are proposed to support long-term outcomes summarised as the 3Ps (continued participation, performance, and personal development). The cogs act like gears and depict that when one of these elements is not in sync with the others, the gears fail and it is less likely that engagement in sport will continue to

provide the desired positive developmental outcomes. These dynamic elements have been described in further depth by Côté et al. (2024) where they outline a need to focus on these elements and suggest that they should be the priority for sport system designers in order to create positive experiences. Figure 2 displays the three layers of the PAF framework and is further detailed below.

Figure 2: *Personal Assets Frameworks' three layers of: dynamic elements, personal assets and outcomes.*



Note. Adapted from "Personal Assets Framework," by J. Côté, J. Turnnidge, and M. Vierimaa, 2016, in K. Green and A. Smith (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Youth Sport* (pp. 243–256). Routledge.

Since 2016, the PAF has been used as a guiding framework across qualitative case studies and applied and quantitative work to interpret mechanisms and outcomes in specific sport contexts (Crowther, 2025; Erikstad et al., 2021; Kelly et al., 2022; Vierimaa et al., 2017). For example, Vierimaa et al. (2017) examined coaches' perceptions of a successful recreational community youth basketball league to better understand not only positive youth development outcomes but also the mechanisms through which they occur, addressing gaps in literature dominated by competitive sport settings. Analysis of interview data from twelve volunteer coaches (aged 16–59), using both inductive insights and the PAF framework, described league structures and processes (activities, social relationships, and settings) that fostered positive experiences and were linked to immediate outcomes (e.g., enjoyment), short-term assets (e.g., competence, confidence, connection, and character), and longer-term developmental outcomes (e.g., contribution). Overall, the study highlights that enjoyable, positive in-the-moment experiences, as well as their accumulation over time, are central to sustained developmental benefits for young people in recreational sport.

A major post-2016 development is Côté et al.'s (2020) conceptual elaboration of the PAF that argues the framework's utility is clear but that the specific factors within each dynamic element remain under-specified and insufficiently tested in the field, prompting calls to clarify mechanisms and associated influences. Related critique also appears in methodological/scoping work showing youth sport research often under-represents the diversity of sport contexts and participants, raising concerns about how confidently any single framework (including the PAF) can be generalised across settings (Robertson et al., 2019). More recent critical scholarship has explicitly reworked the PAF for relationally complex environments, arguing the original framing needs adaptation to better account for power and context (Crowther, 2025). Crowther (2025) states that "the Personal Assets Framework (Vierimaa et al., 2017), although helpful for identifying broad developmental principles, remains limited in its attention to context, coercion, and culture" (p. 520).

Finally, conceptual debate continues about how youth development programmes in sport, such as PAF, are positioned and labelled within "athlete development" discourse. For example, Grainger et al. (2025), drawing on psychological and sociocultural perspectives, argue that unclear use of "athlete," "talent," and "player" can confuse how development stages are defined and how research is applied across different groups. They encourage practitioners to define key terms and urge sport communities to agree on shared language before making broad recommendations for youth sport development.

Although the PAF has been critiqued for needing clearer specification and testing of the factors and mechanisms within its three "dynamic elements" across varied real-world contexts (Côté et al., 2020), and more broadly for youth-sport research often under-reporting or under-representing contextual diversity (Robertson et al., 2019), the model remains particularly useful because it offers a useful map of how sport environments produce developmental outcomes through the interaction of activities, relationships, and settings (Côté et al., 2016; Côté et al., 2020). Importantly for this study, the PAF explicitly highlights quality social dynamics/relationships (the who) and therefore provides a strong conceptual basis for analysing the coach-athlete relationship as a central mechanism underpinning immediate experiences and longer-term assets and outcomes. Therefore, this study aligns with how the framework has been increasingly mobilised in applied youth-sport research to interpret developmental processes in community and performance settings (e.g., Erikstad et al., 2021; Kelly et al., 2022; Vierimaa et al., 2017).

3.2 Dynamic Elements: A spotlight on Quality Social Dynamics

With this in mind, and in recognition that sport occurs within socio-cultural settings, some suggest that collectively, coaches, parents and peers may have the most influence on athlete experiences (Gardner et al., 2016; Keegan et

al., 2014; O'Rourke et al., 2014; Smith & Ullrich-French, 2020). Clearly then, coaching plays a significant role in the youth sport experience and associated outcomes, which is highlighted in detail below. However, parents are another factor and as Rouquette et al. (2020) suggest both parent behaviour and their views have a significant impact on the youth sport experience. Additionally, Smith and Ullrich-French (2020) suggest that even though coaches and parents have influence over the structure and experience of sport environments, peers are critical social figures who can influence motivation and well-being. Taken together, while the literature outlines a consistent theme suggesting that coaches, parents and peers impact either positively or negatively on youth sport outcomes, there is a lack of clarity on which relational factor is most influential. Therefore, it is the intention of this research to put a spotlight on the coach (and athlete) interaction; however, this does not diminish the role that parents and peers play (as is revealed in the findings section of this research report).

3.3 Personal Assets (Short-term) and Youth Sport Outcomes (Long-term)

The final two components of the PAF model, personal assets and outcomes, relate to the short-, medium- and long-term results of the dynamic elements (cogs) interactions. This therefore provides a conceptual framework for potentially guiding organisations to the longer-term objectives of sport participation. First, the changes in personal assets, competence, confidence, connection and character (4 Cs) are identified as four priority aspects that are shaped by the dynamic elements interactions. Continuous quality sporting experiences lead to positive participant outcomes and increased future participation, while negative interactions have the opposite effect (Côté et al., 2016). Finally, the '3 Ps', participation, performance and personal development, represent (long-term) outcomes that are likely to emerge from the positive interactions of the dynamic elements and consequential development of the 4 Cs through sustained quality sport experiences (Côté & Hancock, 2016; Côté et al., 2016). Together, the 4 Cs and 3 Ps answer research calls for holistic personal development to be incorporated into coaching systems and ultimately embedded in real-time coaching behaviours (Falcão et al., 2020; Griffin et al., 2018; ICCE, 2024).

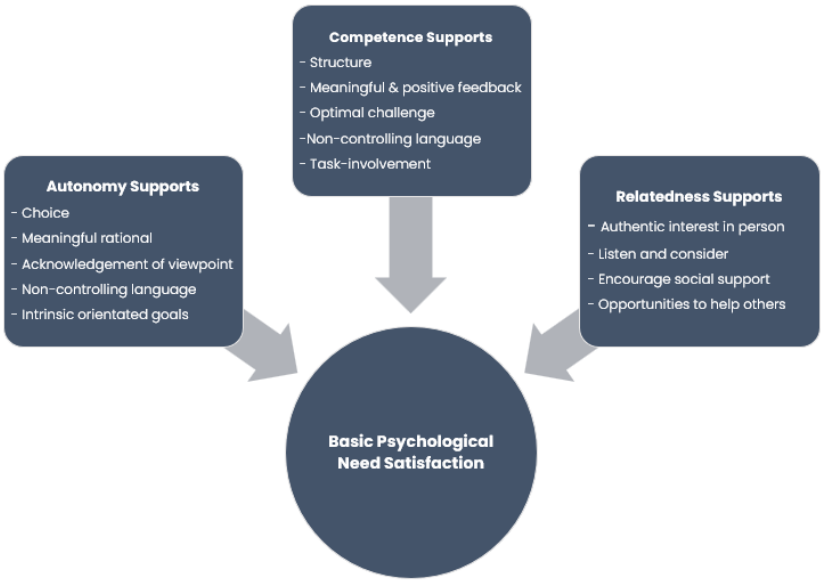
3.4 Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination theory (SDT) is a broad theory of human motivation that explains how social environments support (or undermine) high-quality motivation, well-being, and development. Necessary to environments which are supportive of such, is the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs (BPN): autonomy (a sense of ownership and initiative), competence (a sense of effectiveness), and relatedness (a sense of belonging and connection), described by Ryan & Deci (2000, 2017) as both a theory in itself and a centralizing concept across the SDT theory. Many researchers have applied and explored BPN theory since it was first formulated by Deci

and Ryan (1985). Despite consideration of extending the framework, strong rationale remains for retaining the three needs, given their essential role in growth and wellbeing, their grounding in human nature, their clear distinctiveness, and their universal relevance (Vansteenkiste et al., 2020).

In addition to BPN, SDT distinguishes autonomous motivation (intrinsic motivation and well-internalised extrinsic motivation) from controlled motivation, on the motivation continuum, within the Organismic Integration Theory, arguing that more autonomous forms are associated with more adaptive engagement and functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2017). In sport, the BPN and motivation continuum within SDT are particularly valuable because they specify how coaches and environments can shape athletes' motivation through autonomy-supportive versus controlling interpersonal styles, and through climates that provide optimal challenge, meaningful rationale, and respectful relationships (Bartholomew et al., 2011; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Empirically, autonomy-supportive coaching has been linked with athletes' more self-determined motivation through need satisfaction, supporting SDT's usefulness for interpreting coach-driven mechanisms (Amorose & Anderson-Butcher, 2007). Figure 3 displays how environments can be designed to support each BPN (Standage & Ryan, 2020):

Figure 3: *Example of Basic Psychological Needs-supportive Social Inputs and Interpersonal Interactions*



Note. Adapted from "Examples of need supportive social inputs and interpersonal interactions," by M. Standage, and R. M. Ryan, 2020, in G. Tenenbaum and R. C. Eklund (Eds.), *Handbook of Sport Psychology* (p. 48), Wiley.

3.5 Linking Self-Determination Theory with the Personal Assets Framework

Linking SDT with the Personal Assets Framework (PAF) is useful in this research because the PAF identifies where developmental outcomes are generated in youth sport (through the interaction of activities, relationships, and settings), while SDT offers a well-evidenced explanation of why these features shape athletes' motivation and experience, particularly through the coach–athlete relationship embedded in the PAF's "quality social dynamics/relationships (the who)" cog (Côté et al., 2016; Côté et al., 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Used together, SDT can add depth to claims in a PAF-framed analysis by providing established motivational processes that can be observed and discussed in coach–athlete interactions (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Standage & Ryan, 2020).

Fundamentally, the PAF argues that youth outcomes emerge through the interaction of personal engagement in activities, quality social dynamics/relationships, and appropriate settings (Côté et al., 2016; Côté et al., 2020). SDT explains why those same environmental features matter by specifying that autonomy, competence, and relatedness satisfaction supports intrinsic motivation, internalisation, and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In practical terms, the PAF "who" cog (quality relationships) maps cleanly onto SDT's emphasis on relatedness and autonomy support in the coach–athlete relationship (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003), with sport evidence showing that autonomy-supportive coaching relates to athletes' motivation via need satisfaction (Amorose & Anderson-Butcher, 2007). Similarly, the PAF "what" (activities) and "where" (settings) can be interpreted through SDT as contexts that provide optimal challenge/feedback (competence) and choice/voice (autonomy), which helps account for the PAF's focus on immediate enjoyable experiences and their accumulation over time (Côté et al., 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Through the participants' lens, the two frameworks operate at complementary levels, with SDT examining the core psychological experience of the participant, and PAFs providing a contemporary framework to analyse the contextual factors that actively influence the athletes' view of their experience. Together, these frameworks are well suited to supporting an in-depth analysis of participants' perceptions of their sporting experiences, as well as the influence of coaches on these experiences in relation to other environmental factors.

Chapter Four: Methodology

The core aim of this study is to gain a deep understanding of the influence of CfI coaches on youth participant experiences. To guide this in-depth analysis, a primary research question was established.

What are youth athletes' perceptions of the sport experiences led by coaches in the CfI programme?

This section outlines the methodology and methods applied in this research to generate the findings in response to this question. Included is a description of the philosophical position, research paradigm, researcher positionality, ethical considerations and a detailed outline of the methods and procedures employed. Furthermore, given the qualitative nature of the research and the adoption of Interpretive Description (ID) as the guiding methodological framework (Thorne, 2025) and Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) as the primary analytic tool (Braun & Clarke, 2022), I provide reflexive comments throughout (Thompson-Burdine et al., 2021).

4.1 Research Paradigm

This research is methodologically informed by my philosophical position, which is ontologically relativist and epistemologically constructivist. Ontologically, relativism is based on an understanding that reality is the product of human perception, and this does not reveal an external reality that is waiting to be discovered by research (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Terry et al., 2017). Instead, relativism recognises that knowledge is tied to human thoughts and actions and has been created through human interaction and subsequent meaning-making throughout history (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Epistemology concerns what counts as knowledge and knowing and how it is produced (Gray, 2014). Making this stance explicit helps further align ontology and the research design (Mertens, 2015). In this study, a constructivist–interpretivist epistemology is adopted to recognise that knowledge is co-constructed through social interaction and that understandings of coaching and learning are culturally and historically situated, reflecting multiple, context-dependent realities (Gray, 2014; Potrac et al., 2014). This positioning assumes that meaning is generated through participants' lived experiences and the environments in which they interact, such that knowledge and learning are both personal and shaped by local practice contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Potrac et al., 2025). Consistent with established sport coaching scholarship, this stance supports an in-depth exploration of how participants interpret and negotiate their experiences within particular sport, coaching and coach development settings (Battaglia & Kerr, 2024; Potrac et al., 2025; Saarinen et al., 2020).

Acknowledging that interpretive research does not follow a formula (Terry et al., 2017) and that there is no single truth to be discovered, the findings produced are co-constructed between the participants' articulated insights and the researcher's interpretations of those insights (Potrac et al., 2025; Reay et al., 2023). Accordingly, I acknowledge that my interpretations are shaped by the values, assumptions, and positioning I bring to the research, and that these form part of the meaning-making process rather than something to be bracketed out (see 4.2 – Researcher Positionality). As Braun and Clarke (2022) and Thorne (2025) advocate, this is to be embraced, as both ID and RTA explicitly encourage researcher reflexivity, flexibility, and active researcher engagement in the construction of findings. Unlike other thematic approaches (e.g., IPA) that prioritise reproducibility and structure, the combination of ID and RTA embraces subjectivity and co-construction of meanings, aligning closely with my constructivist–interpretivist epistemological stance (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun et al., 2022; Thorne, 2025).

Consistent with a constructivist–interpretivist stance, I will engage in ongoing reflexivity to make these influences visible and to support coherence between the study's paradigmatic assumptions and methodological choices (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Braun & Clarke, 2022). The knowledge produced is therefore presented as contextually situated and co-constructed, offering credible and useful insights without claiming universal generalisability, but inviting readers to consider transferability to their own settings.

4.2 Researcher Positionality

As this research utilises a qualitative, constructivist-interpretive approach, it is essential that I state my positionality (Grant & Giddings, 2002; Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019). As the primary researcher, and like all researchers, I cannot bring a value-free lens to this project. My view of the world and the subjects of sport participation and coaching have been informed by personal experiences, thoughts and knowledge positions over time that may have an influence on all stages of research. Therefore, it is important that I am reflexive and make my position explicit and articulate how my constant awareness of this was attained through this research (Grant & Giddings, 2002; Trainor & Bundon, 2021). Given the importance of reflexivity, both in terms of personal and methodological contributions, and the learning and unlearning that it leads to during this research, a breakdown of my background is provided (Finlay, 1998; Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019; Palaganas et al., 2017).

Growing up in rural Canterbury, NZ, sport has always been a significant part of my life. Whilst attending local primary and secondary schools, I developed a passion for playing, training for and watching sport, following the early influence of my father, and then various idols and peers. I wanted to excel in sport, but I also had a passion for experimenting with various sporting codes and immensely enjoyed the freedom that playing the back paddock provided.

Following secondary school, this passion led me on to completing a Bachelor of Sports Coaching, through the University of Canterbury. Soon after graduating, I began employment in sport development and have since gained extensive experience as a practitioner, through various employment and volunteer positions in coach and athlete development, largely in field hockey. In addition to working in sport development, I have continued to participate in field hockey as both a premier club and provincial athlete and coach. Fuelled by an interest in experience sport and travelling, in 2022 I moved to the Netherlands, where I coached and played field hockey, whilst becoming immersed in another culture.

Now, back in NZ and in my early thirties, I have spent the past few years studying part-time at the Auckland University of Technology, towards a Master of Sport, Exercise and Health. In addition, I work full-time, currently as the National Coaching Lead for Hockey NZ. I also contract for the International Hockey Federation as Coach Educator and Educator Trainer, and through this work have gained further exposure to international contexts, having travelled to Australia and India, as well as supporting many coaches from different continents via interactive online workshops.

Collectively, with 25 years of sport participation experiences, 14 years of coaching, and 10 years of work in sport development, my personal experiences have shaped my interest in sport participation and coaching and have inevitably impacted the person I am today. Whilst it is not possible for me to list how every factor of my background has contributed to this research, I have listed three highly relevant themes and commentary to demonstrate how they supported the research process.

Personal participation experiences and observations – driven by a passion for sport, I have gained an appreciation of the hard work and resilience involved in the pursuit of continuous improvement and competition-based outcomes as well as the challenges present when goals are not achieved. I have also observed a number of my teammates over the years, some of whom have experienced success on the world stage and others who have withdrawn from sport altogether. This provides me with a raft of experiences to draw practical links to theory, and an appreciation that not everyone experiences sport the same way.

Motivation to turn theory into practice – studying sport and coaching for three years immediately after secondary school led me to shape a strong belief about what quality sport and coaching looked like early in my career, and I have since advocated for this. Now heavily involved in coach development, I have seen the challenges some coaches face reconsidering an approach which has been ingrained over a lifetime, as well as the benefits that practice-friendly theories can provide those whom they spark an interest with.

Cultural awareness - I am a New Zealander of European descent and grew up in a very Western-centric culture; however, personal experiences overseas and in postgraduate study have broadened my understanding of different worldviews. The contrast between working in the Netherlands and India is extreme, and locally, I am

highly aware that there is an ongoing critique of sport systems with claims that there is a lack of cultural representation in sport leadership, and that systematic disadvantage for the likes of Māori is present (Muriwai et al., 2023).

4.3 Research Design (Preparation)

Aligned with a constructivist–interpretivist paradigm, I have employed Interpretive Description (ID) as a guiding framework for the study design (Thorne, 2025). First published in the mid-1990s and originating from the medical field of nursing, Thorne suggests that ID enables the production of practically relevant knowledge, through the combination of participants' views, academic evidence and practitioner expertise (Thorne, 2025). ID is practice-orientated, in that it acknowledges the multifaceted and complex nature of research on social practices, such as sport, yet is committed to making a meaningful contribution to the research field it involves. ID provides a flexible and experiential framework that enables the creation of recommendations based on the meaning-based themes generated from participant insights (Thompson-Burdine et al., 2021). Orientated towards an inductive approach, it is data-led with meaning explored through the analysis and interpretation of underlying elements that help to explain subjects' views (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Terry et al., 2017).

According to Thorne (2025), the intention of ID is not just to explore data and generate themes to represent what was said, but to extract meaningful insights and explore what they mean to applied practice. This was a key reason for my interest in the ID approach, as I was motivated to go further and turn the insights into something that can be useful for youth sport and coaching. In accordance with ID's approach and aligned with Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), my chosen analytic method, I have framed the 'so what' of this research as practical recommendations for practice. These recommendations provide versatile guidance that helps translate the themes into action, making them particularly valuable for sports leaders and coaches who are best positioned to use them to inform future practice.

According to Thorne (2025), ID calls for a tactical combination of a real-world question, an understanding of what evidence suggests we already know, and an awareness of the context in which the primary audience of the recommendations are situated. This positions ID well to support the design of this study, while remaining sensitive to the deeply contextual nature of the participants' experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013, 2021; Thorne, 2016). Furthermore, appreciation of existing theory positioned the use of the conceptual frameworks, PAF and SDT, by explicitly detailing how these frameworks sensitised data analysis and potential meaning within data. Therefore, I provide transparency regarding the role that existing theory played to support me in the construction of themes reported in this study. That is, it positions me well to transform participants' rich subjective views into practical

meaning-based recommendations that account for both individual and shared experiences that may inform future practice (Thompson-Burdine et al., 2021).

Moreover, the ID approach reinforced the methodological integrity through paradigmatic alignment. In turn, this led to similarly aligned methods such as participant recruitment, data generation, data analysis and finally, reporting (discussed below). In alignment with Thorne (2025) and Thompson-Burdine et al. (2021), who acknowledge that there is no fixed recipe for ID and emphasise its iterative rather than sequential nature, this approach supports an analytical framework that begins primarily with inductive methods before progressing through interpretive analysis and towards practice-focused findings. Based on this insight, Table 1 reflects the five-step research design process adopted in this study

An example of how this framework helped direct my research design can be seen in the formulation of my research question. At first, during the ID preparation stage, my original research questions included the following:

1. How does the Coaching for Impact programme influence youth athletes' sporting experiences?
    a. What are youth athletes' perceptions of the coaching approaches and actions of coaches participating in the CfI programme?
    b. What do athletes' perceived experiences reveal about the effectiveness of the coach development programme's goal of implementing the Balance is Better philosophy?

However, gaining a better understanding of the scope of the research and the literature surrounding research design (e.g., Potrac et al., 2025; Thorne, 2025), the research question was refined to better align with the sampling and recruitment of potential participants (youth participants), data collection methods (focus group), analysis methods (RTA), and the reporting and recommendations to be applied. It soon became clear that this study was investigating youth athlete perceptions of coaches who had completed the CfI programme and not an evaluation of the CfI programme itself. This process eventuated in the final research questions being established:

What are youth athletes' perceptions of the sport experiences led by coaches in the CfI programme?

Table 1: *The Five Step Research Design Process for the Study.*

1) Preparation	Applying personal knowledge and literature insights to construct the research aim and questions, and a detailed plan for gathering the required participant input.

2) Sampling	The purposive sampling of study participants, recruitment and coordination of focus groups, and meeting and forming a positive, trusting relationship with participants.
3) Data Capture	Gathering data through focus group discussions, using semi-structured questions and recording observations of group interactions. Transcription completed to form the data set.
4) Data Analysis	Data analysed using reflexive thematic analysis to generate meaning-based themes, presented as the findings.
5) Practical application of Findings	Use of the findings to inform interpretative discussion about the perceptions of participants, resulting in the creation of practical recommendations.

4.4 Sampling and Recruitment

Purposive sampling was applied as the method for participant recruitment (Bradshaw et al., 2017). Purposive sampling was chosen as it allowed for the selection of participants who could share relevant insights to address the research question (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Sparkes & Smith, 2013). As the research question was to explore how the 2023/24 CfI programme coaches influenced youth sport experiences, potential participants were required to meet two criteria. These were:

1. Rangatahi (teenagers aged 13 to 18 years) coached by CfI programme graduates.
2. Potential participants had to have completed a Sport NZ online CfI programme review survey and checked the "yes" box to be involved in this study.

For criteria two, as part of the CfI programme review process, Sport NZ initiated an anonymous online survey for the youth athletes. This survey was distributed to potential participants via their coaches, who used their team contact lists to pass the information and survey link on. Once potential participants had completed the anonymous online survey, the final question asked if they were interested in taking part in this research project. Those who selected "yes" were prompted to follow a hyperlink to a separate online expression of interest form, stored under a confidential AUTEC-certified software - Qualtrics XM. Interested individuals were asked to submit their contact details and the sports team that they represent in this form. Those who expressed interest, or their parents/guardians for those under the age of 16, were then contacted via email with an introduction from myself and the participant information sheet (see Appendix B). This form included inclusion and exclusion criteria, which enabled individuals to consider their involvement, or not. Exclusion criteria were applied to prevent any Rangatahi whose parent or guardian was a member of the 2023/24 CfI programme from taking part. This ensured that data gathering (focus group discussions) remained detailed, open and honest, removing the fear that sensitive details might be

shared back to a parent-coach. This safeguard also prevented participants from being placed in a compromised position or feeling coerced to share information within a family dynamic. The participants recruited were based across the Auckland, Christchurch, and Wellington regions, in line with the location of the three CfI hubs and the coaches who took part.

Potential participants were given a timeframe to consider and confirm their interest and availability. This step was important to ensure that potential participants, now fully informed about the process, had full autonomy over their decision to participate (Bradshaw et al., 2017). Following acceptance, participants were placed into focus groups. To ensure they felt comfortable in this setting, they were grouped with others from their team or training group where possible. Focus groups were only conducted when they had a minimum of three participants (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Liamputtong, 2011).

Despite less interest than anticipated, literature suggests that ID research can produce sufficient data with a small number of deliberately sampled participants (Thompson-Burdine et al., 2021; Thorne, 2025), therefore, it was determined that five groups were adequate. Furthermore, the make-up of these focus groups was important to support rich, meaningful data generation (Braun & Clarke, 2019), therefore, diversity of sporting background was confirmed before progressing. A total of five focus groups were coordinated at a time that suited participants. Four of these were conducted online, via private Microsoft Teams meetings and one in-person at a park close to their training location in Christchurch. Participants over 16 years were emailed a participant consent form (see Appendix B) while parents of participants between the ages of 13 and 15 years were emailed a participant assent and a parent or legal guardian consent form (see Appendix B). All participants (and parents of participants under 16 years) signed and returned the consent form prior to the focus group interview commencing.

4.5 Study Participants

19 sport participants aged between 13 and 18 years old, who were coached by 2024/25 CfI members, agreed to participate in this study. Groups of both individual and team sports were represented, with the primary sports of those interviewed including basketball, canoe polo, fencing, surf lifesaving, and touch rugby. A majority of the participants also shared reflections on recent experiences within other sports such as football, swimming, cricket, tennis, gymnastics, water polo, Australian rules football, rugby, and waka ama. Table 2 details the number of participants, age range and gender of participants in the study. To protect participants' confidentiality, the focus group locations and sport are not disclosed.

Table 2: *Number of Participants and Their Age Range, Gender and Sport Type (Individual or Team)*

Group	No. of Participants	Age		Gender		Sport Type
		13-15 years	16-18 years	Female	Male	
1	5	0	5	0	5	Team
2	3	2	1	0	3	Team
3	4	1	3	1	3	Individual
4	3	2	1	2	1	Individual
5	4	4	0	1	3	Team
Total	19	9	10	4	15	

4.6 Data Generation

Focus groups were the primary source of data generation used in the study, as they provided multiple benefits. Namely, they allowed participants to feel comfortable and collectively take ownership of the discussion in contrast to a one-on-one interview where the interviewer may unintentionally contribute more to the conversation (Bryman, 2012). In addition, the logistics of gaining access to participants were enhanced through focus group interviews, and particularly when the participants were spread throughout three regions of NZ (Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch). I originally considered in-person interviews with all focus groups due to a greater ability to read social cues and enhance flow of conversation. However, online focus groups provided practical advantages such as reduced travel time (resource constraint) and participants being able to engage from their own home (ease and comfort) (Willemsen, 2023). One Christchurch focus group was conducted in person at an agreed venue that ensured anonymity from others, due to my residence in Christchurch.

Each focus group followed a semi-structured approach, and I conducted each as the interviewer. Following common practice in social science research, the semi-structured format encouraged group members to talk to each other and explore what and why they had the views they shared (Liamputtong, 2011). This meant that my role was focused on facilitating discussion, asking probing questions, prompting alignment back to research question focus aims, and ensuring that each group member had ample opportunity to contribute, with no individuals dominating the conversation (Gill et al., 2008). Indeed, a major critique of focus group interviews is the potential conformity to dominate ideas presented by some participants (Liamputtong, 2011). Moreover, focus groups with youth participants may present further challenges, such as adult-youth power dynamics and a lack of seriousness or exaggeration by participants (Sheppard & Raby, 2023). The following outlines how I mitigated this issue.

My interview technique utilised my background in roles such as a coach developer, which puts a high emphasis on building rapport, questioning and listening to facilitate meaningful connections and discussions (McGrath et al., 2019). I was also able to capture and note live insights about the flow and discussions of each interview. Each interview was opened with a Karakia, mihi, and whakawhanaungatanga[4] to honour Māori cultural traditions, while ensuring a comfortable, non-judgmental environment, which was critical given the age of the participants. Following this, participants received clear outlines of the process, including a reminder of the confidentiality of the discussion, that they had the right to withdraw at any point, that the conversation would be recorded, and that the purpose was to share and reflect on personal experiences, not reach group consensus (Gill et al., 2008; Liamputtong, 2011). They were also encouraged to speak in ways that accurately represented their personal views and were regularly reminded that there was no judgment of their perspectives, nor any right or wrong answers.

During the focus groups, I initiated conversation using a question guide (see Appendix B). Following the guidance of Bryman (2012), the guide included questions that flowed firstly from rapport building to open-ended questions that related to the research questions. As outlined in the conceptual framework chapter, the PAF framework and SDT informed some of the more open-ended questions. This ensured questions were oriented towards youth sport developmental experiences and outcomes (Cote et al., 2016) and personal constructs of autonomy, competence and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and therefore provided a foundation for discussions about the environmental conditions influencing participant experiences. This guide remained consistent throughout each interview, although probing questions were employed in response to emerging discussion, whilst maintaining focus on the research aim (Gill et al., 2008).

Interviews lasted between 50 and 70 minutes and were concluded with a final acknowledgement of participant contributions. Participants were given the opportunity to withdraw their verbatim contributions, but no one took up this opportunity, providing reassurance that they were comfortable with their contributions. The in-person focus group held in Christchurch was recorded with a digital recorder that I then carefully transcribed to produce a verbatim account. The remaining focus groups were video recorded via the Microsoft Teams software and transcriptions were accessed via the Microsoft Teams platform. These were carefully checked for accuracy and added to the data set. I was careful to remove any details that may have compromised participants' and coaches' identities and the transcriptions were checked multiple times to ensure that they represented what the participants said.

[4] A Karakia is an opening welcome, mihi, introduction of self and background, and whakawhanaungatanga, connection-focused conversation.

At the conclusion of each interview, a reflexive review process was implemented. This included making notes in a journal, including discussion of interest, group dynamics and a personal review of how I, as the interviewer, executed this role. Following the advice of Trainor and Bundon (2021), doing so supported me to identify how I impacted the construction of data. This led to two key changes being made. First, I adjusted my language and tone from being positive and complimentary to adopting a more neutral stance. This change created more space for participants to further expand on their viewpoints and for other focus group members to express different viewpoints. Secondly, I resisted summarising conversation themes and relaying them back to the participants to check for their agreement. This helped me to focus more on actively listening to the way in which participants were describing their experiences and prevented me from implying through relayed summaries that group consensus was sought.

In addition, I utilised my supervisors as 'critical friends' (Trainor & Bundon, 2021). As critical friends, those who question a researcher's assumptions about process and data interpretation (Smith & McGannon, 2018), they encouraged deeper reflection on my early engagement with the data and on how my actions were shaping data production. They helped me to recognise that there were opportunities to go deeper by asking more why questions. For example, when a participant stated their enjoyment of a certain experience, I could follow up with "why do you think that" to gain deeper insights into their perceptions. Also, they encouraged further exploration of concepts brought up by participants, especially those which were common across multiple focus groups, creating more in-depth data and inductive contributions from participants.

Finally, I reflected on the full data collection process before further discussion with my supervisors. This enabled me to reflect and acknowledge the strengths of the critical friend(s) approach and the diverse group of participants. In addition, that there were important things to be aware of prior to fully immersing myself in the data analysis process, such as the importance of coding inductively. I now outline and justify the analytic method chosen for my study.

4.7 Data Analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) was my chosen analytic method to examine and analyse the data to find patterns of meaning and generate interpretive summaries (Braun & Clarke, 2022). RTA is a flexible yet robust process (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019) and has been used as an analytic method in sport and exercise research to explore youth participants' views. For example, Battaglia and Kerr (2024) applied RTA to explore Canadian based youth perspectives on the influence that relationships had on their experiences and development. In addition, Ault et al.

(2024) utilised it to better understand student-athletes' perceptions of the relationships and the development of life skills in their United States of America based sports programme.

RTA is methodologically aligned in this study, as it recognises the constructivist-interpretivist foundation of knowledge by valuing the researchers' interpretative skills and aligning the participant experiences to the research aims (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Terry et al., 2017). Despite thematic analysis being widely used in sport and exercise research, Braun and Clarke (2019) have critiqued its application. Reflecting on their earlier scholarship, such as the 2006 paper (Braun & Clarke, 2006), they suggest that they unintentionally contributed to a generalised understanding of thematic analysis and that many researchers apply the approach without being explicit about their positioning, how the method was applied, or what theory informed its use. As a result, they now emphasise the importance of strong theoretical understanding and alignment, are explicit about recognising the different approaches to thematic analysis, and have updated language, such as moving away from the term "emerge" and towards "generating" initial themes, to highlight that themes are not in the data waiting to be discovered (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This aligns strongly with Thornes' (2025) stance, as she echoes the view that findings do not simply emerge from data but must instead be generated through deep, deliberate, and tactically applied human analysis.

RTA, one of the approaches described by Braun and Clarke (2022), reflects the values of a qualitative research paradigm because it values researcher subjectivity. Rather than following a strict, step-by-step process aimed at reliability or accuracy, RTA emphasises thoughtful engagement with the analysis and ongoing researcher reflexivity (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This supports the development of meaningful summaries through skilled interpretation of the data, guided by the research question and relevant literature. In RTA, themes are not expected to simply emerge from the data. Instead, they are generated by the researcher through close and sustained engagement with the data, supported by coding and interpretation, and can thus be developed from rich and complex data to enable deep and nuanced insights (Terry et al., 2017). Themes represent patterns of shared meaning that are connected by a central organising idea, and they are actively developed through the researcher's in-depth exploration (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Whilst these patterns represent shared meaning, they are not necessarily derived from what the majority said, as insights that appear less frequently are not inherently less important (Thorne, 2025).

According to Braun and Clarke (2022), strong theoretical understanding, ongoing reflexivity, and transparent reporting are essential for producing high-quality RTA. These elements help ensure that the analysis reflects both the richness of the data and the researcher's interpretive role. I have aligned with Braun and Clarke's (2022) latest iteration of RTA and followed the six steps of analysis they recommend. These are: (1) familiarisation with the data, (2) generating initial codes systematically across the dataset, (3) constructing initial themes, (4)

reviewing and refining themes iteratively to ensure accurate data representation, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final analytical report supported by illustrative data extracts and reporting applied practical recommendations. The process was recursive and required deep engagement and constant reflection. Table 3 below outlines these steps and how they were applied. Given the flexible nature of RTA as described by Braun and Clarke (2022), I have adapted the final step to include Thorne's (2025) ID framework. Specifically, to include applied practice-based recommendations.

Table 3: *The Six Steps Aligned to Braun and Clarke's (2022) RTA*

Phase of RTA	Application in this research
Familiarisation with data	- Live observation and notes captured during focus groups - Individual focus group reviews following each interview, noting discussions of interest and group dynamics in journal - Two debriefs with supervisors acting as critical friends towards the process and data - Five focus groups transcribed verbatim - Read transcripts three times, noting data and accuracy against audio - Final review of the focus group process noting strengths and areas to be aware of
Generating initial codes	- Consistent focus group notes formed initial codes - Conducted line-by-line inductive coding using NVivo software - Semantic meaning was coded at the semantic level first, before moving to a latent level when reviewing codes against the transcript - Outlying statements were analysed for underlying meaning and coded accordingly - Codes were socialised with supervisors for feedback
Constructing initial themes	- Codes were grouped into clusters alongside others that represented similar underlying patterns - Conceptual frameworks were used as a lens to inform deep thought into the meaning behind what codes stated - A visual was presented with eight grouped themes and was shared with supervisors - Critical reflection led to a review of how codes aligned within drafted themes, and codes were ungrouped and re-grouped following a more latent analysis
Reviewing and refining themes	- Draft themes were reviewed against the research question to determine their relevance to the study's aim - Consideration was given to what story each theme told about the participants' experiences

Defining and naming themes	- Four themes were developed, each constructed around a central organising concept that captured the shared patterns of meaning within the participants' accounts - Themes were named in language closely aligned to participants' words, to represent how themes were co-constructed with participants
Producing the report (and recommendations for applied practise)	- Themes are presented alongside discussions of relevant literature to inform applied practice - Themes informed the creation of three practical recommendations.

RTA aligned with the study aims to explore the experienced realities of the participants' lived sporting experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Specifically, when coding the data, both inductive and deductive approaches and latent and manifest coding techniques were employed (see Byrne, 2022). While I leant into a more inductive approach, where data drove the coding and codes were created semantically (at face value), the coding process was also sensitised by the PAF and SDT conceptual frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Byrne, 2022). In this case, a latent (interpretive) level analysis was applied to explore underlying mechanisms and meaning behind the data (Braun, & Clarke, 2022; Byrne, 2022), aligned to step four and five of the ID process (Thorne, 2025). For example, SDT helped focus the interpretation of the meanings behind participants' stated experiences relating to autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In PAF terms, this could also be considered in terms of coaching outcomes related to personal assets such as competence, confidence, connection and character (Cote et al., 2016). Appendix C shows worked examples of how the transcribed data were coded and themed.

4.8 Reflexivity

As Braun and Clarke (2021) state, reflexivity is a critical part of good quality RTA. Therefore, there were numerous moments where I had to pause and reflect within the coding and theme generation process. Two of these positively impacted the quality of RTA applied. The first, early in the coding process, I realised that I was deductively coding data into what Braun and Clarke (2022) call "buckets", as opposed to coding inductively and at a semantic level (face value). With my intention of coding inductively in the first instance and then latently interpreting meaning later on (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Byrne, 2022; Thompson-Burdine et al., 2021), I reflected on why this had occurred. It became clear that I was subconsciously focusing on potential themes through my own experiences, reading of the literature and unconscious bias.

The second moment was during my initial theme construction. In this instance, I feel that I drafted a large number of themes that were at a more semantic coding level. Whilst these were interesting, they were surface-level and, in discussion with my supervisors, I realised I needed to look deeper and find centralising concepts that connected these codes together at a more latent level (Trainor & Bundon, 2021). Informed by this awareness, I started again and made multiple runs through the entire data set, recoding the transcripts and coding any relevant information related to the research questions. Once this was completed, and using my supervisors as critical friends, I then used the literature and frameworks as sensitising lenses to latently interrogate and interpret these codes further (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Byrne, 2022). It was this realisation, supported by conversations with my supervisors, that led to greater clarity around achieving a more appropriate balance between coding data at a descriptive level and interpretation through latent coding. This led to better informed generation of themes that enabled meaningful sense making of patterns in the data and ensured alignment with the research questions.

4.9 Methodological Integrity

A criticism of qualitative research, particularly by those associated with more traditional positivism-informed methodological approaches, is that they lack scientific rigour (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). In response, many qualitative researchers have sought credibility and validity and have been drawn to the concept of trustworthiness (Levitt et al, 2017). One example of a trustworthiness framework is the criteria put forward by Guba (1981), which includes credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Despite frameworks such as this providing some direction towards methodological integrity (Levitt et al., 2017), Braun and Clarke (2022) raise concern about the use of a universal quality criteria in qualitative research, as the appropriateness of such criteria is dependent on the methodological alignment.

An alternative approach to demonstrating the trustworthiness of qualitative research is through the use of the concept of methodological integrity (Levitt et al., 2017). Levitt et al. (2017) provide conceptual guidance in this regard by stating principles related to methodological integrity, which they detail is an aligned orientation of the research design, goals, approaches, in relation to the subject matter. This presents as a relevant guide for both ID and RTA, as Thorne (2025) and Braun and Clarke (2022), collectively advocate for alignment through, and transparency of, research paradigm, methodologies and methods applied. The following Table 4 details the considerations made throughout the research project, which were deemed to be appropriate in line with Levitt et al. (2017) outline of methodological integrity, underpinned by the “fidelity to subject” and “utility in achieving goals”.

Table 4: *The Methodological Integrity of the Interpretive Description (Levitt et al., 2017)*

Fidelity to Subject		Utility in Achieving Goals
Adequate data: - ID is well suited to generating meaningful in-depth findings from a relatively small number of deliberately sampled participants (Thompson-Burdine et al., 2021; Thorne, 2025).	**Data Collection**	**Contextualisation:** - Associated with dependability (Guba, 1981), transparency of the research process, the environment from which data came, and the accounts of key learnings and modifications that were made have been described throughout this chapter (Chapter Five: Methodology). - It has been acknowledged that findings are contextually situated and co-constructed, therefore not claiming universal generalisability (Braun & Clarke, 2013). - Limitations of the study are made clear in the conclusion (Chapter Seven)
Perspective Management in Data Collection: - As the researcher, I have been transparent about my positioning and learning throughout the focus group interviews - see 4.2 and 4.5.		**Catalyst for Insight:** - Purposive sampling enabled the selection of participants who had relevant insights to share in relation to the research questions (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Sparkes & Smith, 2013) – see 4.4.
Perspective Management in Analysis: - Thematic analysis is used in alignment within the interpretive description guided research process (Thorne, 2025) – see section 4.3.	**Data Analysis**	**Meaning contribution:** - In accordance with Thorne's (2025) recommendations, this was achieved by the facilitation of analytically logical methods that were well suited to producing contributions in relation to the research aim.

- Details of reflexive processes are presented throughout this chapter (Chapter Four: Methodology) - Supervisors' guidance and role as a critical friend (Smith & McGannon, 2018), and our shared expertise in youth sport and coaching supported a reconsideration of codes and themes – see 4.7.		
Groundedness: - Participant quotes are woven throughout Findings (Chapter Five) and Discussion (Chapter Six) to display the co-creation of themes. - Truthful representation of participant input was delivered (Bradshaw et al., 2017) through an example of how data were coded, initially themed, and represented in final themes - see Appendix C. - Conclusions reflect co-construction of findings, with claims logically associated with the research aim, sample, and intended audience (Thorne, 2025).		**Coherence:** - Through the application of the conceptual frameworks (see Chapter Three), the relationship between the findings and literature is discussed (see Chapter Six).

Whilst the above processes were applied in line with Methodological Integrity, it is worth noting that member checks of data summaries were planned during the study design. However, following a review of literature, this process was deemed ineffective in terms of validating data as the interpretivism paradigm recognises there to be no objective truth to be discovered (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Whilst a member check may have allowed for participants to contribute further insights, rather than confirming what was said is accurate, this was not deemed necessary given the sufficient data captured and participants limited availability.

4.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted on 5 June 2024 by Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) (Appendix A). Ethical considerations are a fundamental component of all stages of research and informed by Tajir (2018), should address the principles of respect, beneficence and justice. An outline of how these were achieved in this project is provided in Table 5.

Table 5: *Respect, Beneficence and Justice Research Considerations (Tajir, 2018)*

Respect	• The vulnerability of the participants due to their age was acknowledged and their safety and well-being were prioritised. • Participants had full autonomy over their participation. • Participants received clear and easy-to-understand information that outlined the purpose and process of the research. • Participants' personal details have been kept confidential. • All identifiable details have been removed from the data. • Participants agreed to not share information about the group and the discussion with people outside the focus group. • Participant contributions have been acknowledged during data collection and reporting.
Beneficence	• The research aim was achieved by executing high-quality research. • The use of ID and RTA enabled findings to portray an in-depth representation of participants' perceptions on their experiences. • Participants were given the chance to speak up on behalf of their communities. • Findings could contribute to the advancement in understanding of youth sport and coaching, specifically in NZ.
Justice	• The research aims acknowledge the importance of participant voice to help shape the future of youth sport. • The research does not benefit one group of people at the detriment of another. • A potential power balance due to the age of interviewer and participants was addressed through a participant-centred data collection approach that acknowledged that they are experts in their own experiences. • The researcher consulted with a cultural advisor and was vigilant for cultural nuances in the data.

As this research was conducted in NZ, obligations related to Te Tiriti o Waitangi[5] were taken into consideration. In particular, it is critical that Māori are not negatively impacted by any research, in the present or future (Kidd, 2022) and that relevance to Māori of any research is considered (Came, 2013). The Te Ara Tika Ethical Framework (Hudson et al., 2010) was used to assess where this study was positioned in relation to Māori and enabled a critical reflection on the dominant NZ European cultural paradigm in NZ (Came, 2013), in addition to my cultural positionality. Following consideration with supervisors and a cultural advisor, the minimum standards, or first layer, of the Te Ara Tika framework were applied. These included:

1. **Whakapapa (relationships):** Involved consultation with a cultural advisor to determine the best course of action. This helped to determine that it was appropriate to utilise Māori practices such as Karakia, Mihi and Whakawhanaungatanga during data capture, in addition to kai[6] during in-person interviews, to create space for relationships.
2. **Tika (research design): S**upported by insights from the cultural advisor and approved by AUTEC, it was deemed appropriate for the research participants to be representative of the general population, as there was a clear purpose with relevant sampling frames and recruitment.
3. **Manaakitanga (cultural & social responsibility)**: Cultural sensitivity was achieved with confidentiality of participant identities and information shared during interviews. In addition, I followed a cultural safety informed approach (Rich & Breunig, 2022), which promotes critical reflection on knowledge, practices, and assumptions, in order to understand and interrogate the power relationships between cultures, throughout each research phase. Furthermore, it was acknowledged that should any culture-specific findings be discovered, consultation with an appropriate cultural advisor will be required to determine what is done with this information.
4. **Mana (Justice & Equity)** – all participants were autonomous, having the choice to participate and with awareness of the risks, all of which were minimised.

In addition, conscious of the objectives of Sport NZ to contribute to the wellbeing of New Zealanders (Sport NZ, 2020), the bi-culturally grounded NZ principle-based youth development framework, Mana Taiohi (Ara Taiohi, 2019), was utilised to inform research design. Specifically, this was achieved through the use of the

[5] Te Tiriti o Waitangi - The Treaty of Waitangi is a founding document of New Zealand, signed in 1840 by Māori chiefs and the British Crown.
[6] Kai – Te Reo Māori word for food.

centralising concept of honouring mana[7], by acknowledging participants' views and giving them voice, both in the focus group interviews and within the thesis report (Ara Taiohi, 2019). In addition, following Ara Taiohi's (2019) guiding principles of Whanaungatanga,[8] by building trusting relationships, and Whai Wāhitanga[9], through empowering rangatahi to contribute to society. By applying this strength-based approach, it supported the quality of focus groups, whilst giving back, even if only in a small way, to those who contributed.

4.11 Disclosure of External Interests

It is important to acknowledge that a scholarship stipend was provided by Sport NZ to cover the course fees and minor research implementation costs. Sport NZ has a vested interest in better understanding how the coaches who participated in CfI are influencing youth experiences, given the objectives of the programme. Given their investment in this research, Sport NZ assisted in identifying potential participants (youth athletes who were coached by 2024/25 CfI members) and requested that their insights be included. However, they did not influence any other aspects of the project's design, analysis, or management. A final report will be shared with Sport NZ following the submission of this thesis.

[7] Mana – The authority we inherit at birth, which can be affected by our choices and actions.
[8] Whanaungatanga - Taking time to build and sustain meaningful and trusting relationships.
[9] Whai Wāhitanga - Recognises young people as valued contributions to society, creating space for participation, agency and responsibility.

Chapter Five: Findings

This chapter presents findings in the form of themes generated through reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2022), as outlined in Chapter Four: Methodology. Given that the aim of this process was to interpret deep and underlying meaning (Terry et al., 2017), the themes presented in this chapter do not merely represent what the majority said. Instead, they reflect the diverse views shared by participants, including some outlying statements that convey a shared underlying meaning and that are relevant to answering the research question.

In accordance with the research aim to explore coaches' influence on participants' experiences and taking into consideration the impact of environmental factors, the themes are orientated towards both coaches' actions and other influential elements. A total of four themes and four sub-themes are presented and are displayed in Table 6. To demonstrate transparency, these themes are presented separately from the discussion, allowing me to further explore, in depth, and interpret the meaning behind the themes, which is presented in Chapter Six: Discussion.

It was determined that, in presenting the themes, it was appropriate to give voice to the participants in an attempt to action mana-supportive practice (Ara Taiohi, 2019); therefore, the titles reflect the language used by participants. In addition, anonymised quotes from focus group discussions are presented alongside paraphrased summaries, which, following Thorne's (2025) recommendations, can be used when interpretations of underlying meaning are not verbally communicated. These are supported by introductions to some of my interpretations of the underlying meaning within each theme, demonstrating the co-construction of these findings (Thorne, 2025).

The themes are presented in a deliberate order, beginning with the coach-athlete relationship, moving to coaches' influence on groups, and concluding with the broader context in which the athletes, their peer groups, and coaches operate. Whilst there are central concepts which differentiate the core themes, there are concepts that overlap, representing the complex and multi-layered nature of the sport participant and coaching contexts (Abraham et al., 2014; Kelly et al., 2022; Ryou et al., 2025). These overlapping concepts are referred to within this chapter, before being discussed further in the following chapter (see Chapter Six: Discussion).

Table 6: *Themes Generated from Reflexive Thematic Analysis*

Theme 1	**I have a positive connection with the coach**
Sub-theme 1A	*Coach gives me a say*
Sub-theme 1B	*Coach provides feedback and guidance*
Theme 2	**Coach puts it all together**
Sub-theme 2A	*Coach gives us freedom within structure*
Sub-theme 2C	*Coach connects the team*
Theme 3	**The people around me matter**
Theme 4	**It's important that I achieve what I want to in sport**

5.1 Theme 1 - I Have a Positive Connection with the Coach

A consistent view shared by participants during focus groups was that they had formed a positive connection with their coach. Whilst descriptions of coach-athlete relationships differed, at the core was the positive and supportive approach coaches were applying. For example, when discussing the influence of coaching on their experience, participant one (P1), identified as male, in focus group five (FG5) stated "Coach, he's just positive. No matter what happened, he had a positive mindset and that helped me connect with him." Furthermore, when discussing social connection, the personable nature of coaches was explicitly mentioned, such as in FG3 when P3, identified as male, shared how: "Coach is just generally a nice person to be around."

The significance of this connection for participants was also emphasised. In multiple focus groups, participants referred to the benefits of having a quality relationship with their coach, particularly due to the time spent together and the individual support the coach then offered. This was summarised well by P1, identified as male, in FG3, when referring to what contributes to quality sport experiences: "a good relationship with the coach is like fundamental".

In addition to complimentary commentary about their current coaches, there were interesting comparisons provided via the sharing of previous sport experiences, where a lack of positive connection with coaches contributed to negative experiences and in some cases the participants' withdrawal from the sport. One example of this was past coaches investing more time in connection with other teammates, reflected in the experiences of P3, identified as female, from FG4: "Like when you don't have a great relationship with your coach and like they just, like favourite other people over you and so like they just leave you out." In addition, during other discussions participants suggested that some coaches focused their attention heavily on team-based development and competition success, with little interest displayed in individualised connections or support.

Collectively, these insights demonstrated how participants valued the connections they had formed with their coaches, with the positive and individually supportive approach being a key driver of a quality coach-athlete relationship. The following sub-themes, 'Coach gives me a say' and 'Coach provides feedback and guidance', further reinforce the important aspects of this positive relationship.

5.1.1 Sub-theme 1A - Coach Gives Me a Say

Linked to the positive coach-athlete relationship were participants' beliefs that coaches were providing athletes with the autonomy to have a say in their sporting experiences. Important in this regard was their coaches providing

them with opportunities to voice their thoughts and feelings, and the coach showing a genuine interest in what they had to say.

Participants frequently shared reflections of opportunities they were given to contribute to decisions related to training programme design. One example of this was:

> Coach would tell us what to do, like for the first part, but then when we got close to the competition, they would ask us what we don't like or are less confident in, and then they would plan like what we would do from that. So, we got to practise what we were least confident and before we did it (P2, FG4, identified as female).

On several other occasions, individuals again described how their experiences contrasted with other previous sports experiences where coaches made decisions without any athlete consultation, resulting in feelings of disempowerment.

While most participants indicated that coaches offered them opportunities to share their perspectives regarding training decisions, several also reported being able to provide input on the broader design of their sport programme. The comments of P4, identified as female, in FG3, highlighted this on multiple occasions. First, when referring to discussion with their coach about individual support: “if you're competing a lot, coach will talk to you one-on-one about like goals, goal setting, and like why you're in the sport. What they can do to support you, and like, what you want out of your competition.” Secondly, when reflecting on a time when she requested some time away from the sport following a tournament in which they did not achieve their goals: “I talked with Coach about how I wanted to have a break and they were supportive of that.”

Together, these insights demonstrate how participants both appreciate and desire opportunities to contribute their thoughts or ideas and ultimately be heard by their coaches. Collectively, they believed a quality coach is someone who is always approachable, making it easy for athletes to speak up or ask for help whenever they need it, and is willing to listen and act on athlete input.

5.1.2 Sub-theme 1B - Coach Provides Feedback and Guidance

Also associated with the positive coach-athlete connection, and in many ways complementing athlete input, was the value that participants placed on their coaches providing them with guidance. Across various discussions, participants referred to occasions where their coach had provided them with this direction via individual and ongoing feedback. These reflections highlighted coaches’ sport-specific expertise, which they used to guide individual development, primarily through the transmission of technical and tactical knowledge. They suggested

that this process largely involved verbal instruction and explanation, supplemented by occasional practical demonstrations.

Whilst it's not surprising that participants appreciated developmentally focused advice from their coach, given this is traditionally recognised as a core component of the coaching role, what is interesting is the way in which the coaches provided this direction. P1's statement in FG3, highlighted this when sharing how their coach provides direction but empowers them to determine what they will do with this: "Coach is like good at like getting you to do stuff without like forcing you to do it." This indicates that the coach offered guidance aligned with the athlete's objectives, while ultimately enabling the athlete to independently determine their course of action.

Further discussions uncovered how participants valued coaches taking on an observer type role during both game-based training activities and match play, and then providing feedback during breaks, drawing attention to things that players often did not see themselves. These insights display that whilst participants valued coaches possessing and sharing sport-specific knowledge, it is the way in which the feedback and guidance are delivered that made it most effective.

5.2 Theme 2 - Coach Puts It All Together

Related to the coaching approach but differentiated from the previous theme, 'Coach puts it all together' depicts how the participants viewed their coach as the primary leader of their sport experience. It is centred on the athletes' recognition of their coaches' responsibility for coordinating the group (or team), training sessions, competition fixtures and the broader programme.

There were numerous occasions where participants referred to their expectations of the coach's leadership role and coaches' actions in relation to leading their sport experiences. One example of this was in FG5, when P1, identified as male, stated: "Coach is there for a reason, 'cause they know what the game is, they understand it, they know what works, what doesn't." Another was in FG2, when P3, identified as male, praised their coach's ability to design and coordinate training throughout the programme: "Coach has got really good knowledge, more things to do like different drills, which I think is really helpful."

Whilst this was a dominant view shared across focus groups, an interesting statement was made by P4, identified as male, in FG5, in relation to who is responsible for programme design-based decisions: "I don't know if it should be, but usually it seems like it's the coach's decision." This indicated some curiosity towards a reality where athletes have more decision-making and ultimately leadership responsibility. However, when questioned on what their sport experiences might look like if athletes had more ownership, the majority liked things as they

were, sharing the view that their coach is best positioned to determine the overarching programme and training design, in accordance with upcoming events and group-based needs.

In addition to programme and training design, participants shared how their coach set the standard by role modelling a variety of valued characteristics and actions. These included previously mentioned aspects such as a deep understanding of sport-specific knowledge and maintaining a positive approach, as well as establishing a positive group culture and commitment-based behaviours, as referred to by P5, identified as male, in FG1: “I like the environment of how like everyone tries their hardest, and like puts lots of effort in, like even the coach, they're like giving up their time coming down here and like helping us develop.”

Supporting the concepts of programme leadership and providing a positive role-model figure, the two sub-themes, ‘Coach provides freedom within structure’ and ‘Coach is a social connector’, provide further insights into the key actions that coaches applied to lead quality participants’ experiences.

5.2.1 Sub-theme 2A - Coach Gives Us Freedom Within Structure

Associated with coaches’ efforts to coordinate sport programmes, were signs that athletes valued both the structure and freedom they were provided within their environment. Referred to by P1, male, in FG4, as “a middle ground”, participants expressed that they valued feeling a sense of freedom but also sought meaningful planned and structured training that contributed to their development, even if it was at times less enjoyable than their favourite training activities, or things they would do if training alone in their free time.

One way in which participants suggested this middle ground was achieved was through their coaches’ use of game-based training activities. These provided some structure through activity coordination, in addition to some technical or tactical guidance, but athletes were ultimately left to make their own decisions. The value of these game-based training activities was reflected in the following comments:

> The game-based training is really important because it's when we can put into practise all the stuff that we're learning through drills. You've got a little bit of time to sort of play around, have fun and try out things that you wouldn't necessarily try out in a competition setting, and you definitely wouldn't in like drills or exercises. So, I think you can almost be kind of creative (P4, FG3).

Evident within this quote and insights from other participants, is that not only do these activities provide freedom in the form of decision-making and opportunity for creativity, but also the removal of fear of judgement and pressure that more isolated skill-based training and competitive match contexts create.

In addition, participants suggested that coaches also used this balance of structure and freedom effectively when preparing for matches and managing games. For example, P3, identified as male, in FG5, spoke to how their

coach prepared the team by providing the group some aligned points of focus and leading the warmup but "when it came to the actual game, coach gave us freedom of what we wanted to choose to do, basically." These comments were followed by further discussion about the coaches' efforts to empower players, and was concluded by P4, who stated: "So I think it is a good thing that coaching style of leading the players to have independence and just play their own game."

Taken together, this highlights that while participants valued some form of structure when they believed it was contributing to a meaningful outcome, such as development or feelings of competence, they also sought freedom to make their own decisions and express themselves. Furthermore, when freedom is provided thoughtfully, it can further contribute to the improvement of sport-related skills.

5.2.2 Sub-theme 2B - Coach Connects the Team

Related to coaches' leadership of the sporting environment, were participant stories that pointed towards their coaches being leaders of both social connections between athletes and the broader group culture. Comments in FG3 by P2, identified as male, provide an example of how they believed their coach was key to leading social connections in an individual sport, and how this was more effective in comparison to team sport experiences: "the social aspect mainly revolves around training, and that goes back to 'Coach' because in previous sports there wasn't as much time to be social, but they create lots of time for this in training." P3 then went on to share about how detrimental some social experiences had been in their previous sport experiences, reinforcing the importance of their current coach's role in facilitating meaningful social connections: "the coaches were all just kind of like far too bossy for me. Like they don't allow any time to like interact with other people."

While social interactions were viewed positively, many also spoke to the role their coach had in leadership of their team culture. A discussion in FG1 exemplifies this, initiated by P4, identified as male, sharing: "I think coach made it like a real good team environment like we have team theme". This was followed by P3, identified as male, stating: "I've never had a coach focus on the team culture so much", and concluded by P2, identified as male, speaking to the importance this had on their continued participation: "I considered pulling out because team culture was really bad, but now it's got better and I was looking forward to going away with the team".

Similar comments were echoed across focus groups, with participants both emphasising the contributions a positive social environment makes towards quality experiences and how their coaches have prioritised team culture more than previous coaches. Furthermore, in FG5, P2, identified as female, referred to how this is an area that they have seen their coach display growth in over time, noting a shift from focusing solely on sport-specific

concepts to now in their words: “I don't know how to explain it, be like the coach.”, referring to them leading a culture within the team.

5.3 Theme 3 - The People Around Me Matter

This theme presents strong ties to the ‘I have a positive connection with the coach’ theme and the sub-theme ‘Coach connects the team’, in that it recognises the impact of social factors. However, it is significant in itself, as it highlights consensus across the participants that the people within and around their sporting experiences collectively have a considerable impact. It is centred on broader social influences, namely fellow participants, particularly teammates, but also competitors, and family members. While the coach’s social influence is acknowledged, it is understood as a distinct form of influence due to the nature of their role, therefore, their influence has been addressed separately in previous themes.

The significance of these social influences was consistently referred to. For example, when discussing the biggest impact on individual sporting experiences in FG5, P3 responded with “the people you're surrounded by, like coaches and players.” Whilst this comment recognised coaches as a key social figure, others indicated their teammates have an equal, if not bigger role in determining the quality of the sporting experience. Again, in FG5, P2 shared this about their previous experiences in another sport: “like our team was just all douche bags and there was only like me and one other girl who got along.” They then went on to share about how they stopped participating in this team and sport, with this negative social environment being the main deterrent. On a more positive note, many spoke to how within their current environment their peers contribute to their motivation. During several discussions, participants indicated that they are more inclined to train with greater intensity when working alongside peers and are more likely to engage in additional player-led training, such as physical sessions, when accompanied by teammates rather than training individually.

In addition to peers more generally, there were numerous references to the influence of those whom participants see themselves being friends with. The comments by P4, in FG3, allude to this by drawing attention to friends’ contributions to enjoyment: “Yeah, the social side is really important for me as well, when you don't have friends at training, it's like, it’s just not as fun.” They went on to suggest that due to friends leaving the club it has impacted their level of enjoyment. Other conversations brought up how important friends were in their early engagement with the sport and then developing an interest in ongoing participation. Furthermore, there were signs that the group-based environments present within participants’ experiences were well suited to them developing new friendships. One example of this is P3 in FG2, who suggested: “I have probably made most of my friends playing sports, probably the most playing this sport.”

Further to peers and friends' social importance for motivation and enjoyment, it was recognised by participants that they experienced meaningful learning from their peers, largely through observing and receiving feedback from them. In some cases, there was recognition that whilst their coaches helped them to develop foundational technical skills, it was their peers that had shown them new skills or plays, which they have since tried to learn and replicate. Furthermore, participants spoke to how their teammates provide encouragement and feedback, such as P5 in FG1, who stated, "the people who had more experience, the captains and stuff, they'll guide you and tell you." Less common, but worth noting is that some participants believed more of their learning could be attributed to their peers, rather than coaches, such as P2 in FG5 who shared: "I learned more from my teammates over the years. By watching them and how they play, and like trying to copy them."

The final group of people who a smaller number of participants mentioned as having an influence on their experience was family. In several cases, family members, siblings, cousins and parents, were identified as a key reason for getting involved in sport, but some suggested that they have an ongoing impact on their participation experiences and sport-related choices. In FG2, P1, identified as male, suggested their brother fills an idol-like figure: "what makes me want to do it is my brother. He's overseas playing now, so that's what I want to try and do." Whilst in FG4, P3 spoke about their brother, stating that when they previously had negative experiences, a key reason for not quitting was "my brother because like I don't want him to feel like, if I quit then he would have to quit too".

5.4 Theme 4 - It's Important That I Achieve What I Want to in Sport

This fourth and final theme reflects a core influence underpinning all previous themes: the individual (often diverse) goals of participants, which in turn shape their motivation for taking part in sport. It highlights how these internally directed motivations shape continued participation and examines how the sporting environment and social factors support or challenge participants' personal aspirations.

Captured within this theme was the preference among a number of individuals to pursue self-improvement-based goals. This was illustrated in FG2 when P3 stated: "I'm playing to improve and just enjoying all those moments where things go well", while others described valuing the pride they felt in being physically active, reaching new fitness levels, and believing that these achievements contributed to their overall wellbeing. Further comments demonstrated how competing against self was a core priority. For example:

> Like winning's just a substitute for me. Like, I'd prefer to race myself than like anyone else. Like raise my time, see how I've done. Like because, if I've been training for a few months, I want to know how well I've been training and I guess the time shows that (P3, FG4)

This perspective contrasted with that of P1 who disagreed and stated: “You always want to do well compared to others, as it's not really fun if, like, you're continuously getting personal bests, but you're still losing.” This demonstrated one of many comments that revealed the underlying influence of competition and social comparison within their sporting contexts, and despite some participants enjoying, and even promoting, the satisfaction they gain from competitive events that facilitate comparison, others expressed negative perceptions of such environments. For example:

> It's super easy to feel like you're not making any progress at all. I've had burnout because of that. Trying to avoid that point again is kind of a losing battle to be honest, because it's so competitive, unless you're winning everything. It's like easy to think, I'm not good enough (P4, FG3).

In FG1, a back-and-forth debate between participants occurred when speaking about the competitiveness of their sports environment. This was initiated by P4 stating: “I don't really like the competitiveness of it. Sometimes it can get a bit serious, you know? Lot of pressure.” Others struggled to relate, with them sharing how they value the opportunities to play under pressure, believing it provides an adrenaline rush and contributes to personal growth. This was followed by P5 sharing: “I probably only like competitiveness, in like this sport, because like I’m decent at it, but other sports I’m pretty trash, so it’s like not fun when you're losing and stuff, you know”, which the majority agreed with.

Also mentioned was the influence of comparison with others through selection or event qualification processes. In some cases, participants described how they had to trial or meet competition standards to be selected for a team or qualify for an event, and how achieving this made them feel a sense of belonging. On the other hand, P2 from FG3 commented: “I’m not as competitive nowadays. A big part of my self-esteem used to be performance, but after a certain tournament, I kind of just put that on the back burner and I just do it mainly for enjoyment.” This tournament was one for which they were not selected, an experience that caused significant distress and ultimately led to a loss of trust in those overseeing the process. Although this was a negative experience that highlighted the challenges of navigating competitive sport environments, the resulting shift in mindset reflects a final trend identified across participants: personal goals within sport continue to evolve over time.

5.5 Summary of Findings

Overall, these themes and sub-themes provide a detailed summary of the co-constructed findings formed through participants’ contributions and researcher interpretation through the RTA process. They describe the actions taken by coaches, which participants suggested had largely contributed positively to their sporting experiences. In addition, they have highlighted how other environmental factors, namely social influences and individually orientated goals within sport settings, both support and challenge coaches’ efforts in providing participants with

quality sport experiences. The following chapter will discuss these themes in further detail, drawing on insights from the literature and providing deeper interpretations of the meaning behind these findings, as well as how they can inform future applied practice.

Chapter Six: Discussion

The primary aim of this study is to explore athletes' perceptions of the experiences led by coaches who took part in the Coaching for Impact (CfI) programme. The intention is not to just present findings, but to interpret what they might mean, both individually and in relation to one another (Thorne, 2025). Accordingly, this chapter presents interpretive analysis of the findings, using the conceptual frameworks, the Personal Assets Framework (PAF) (Côté et al., 2016) and the Basic Psychological Needs (BPN) from Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), as well as relevant literature. Participant quotes and references to the themes developed via Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2022) are utilised to display how interpretations are anchored in the data, illustrating specific examples of where deeper meaning was interpreted (Thorne, 2025).

Informed by the themes generated, the influence of positive coach-athlete connections and coaches' leadership of participant sporting experiences is first addressed, through an interpretative description on why their coaches' actions were valued by participants. This is followed by interpretation of how the two other prominent influences on the youths' sporting experiences, social factors and the influence of participants' individual sporting goals, contribute to or detract from the sporting environments led by the CfI coaches. To conclude, a synthesis of interpretations is provided, outlining how the coaching, social and individual goal elements, related to the PAF 'cogs', interact and how coaches may create greater alignment across these dynamic elements to shape higher quality sporting environments that support personal asset development and long-term outcomes. Embedded within this discussion is the role of BNP, as outlined in Deci & Ryan's SDT (1985), which helps to determine why factors within the dynamic elements support or thwart individuals' psychological needs, wellbeing, and development (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

6.1 The Positive Influence of CfI Coaches

As identified in the findings, coaches, associated with the "who" of PAF (Côté et al., 2016), were perceived by the participants as prominent social figures in their sporting experiences. These findings largely reflect youth participant and sport coaching literature, which positions coaches as leaders of youth sporting environments and as key social figures whom youth athletes value forming meaningful relationships with (Bailey et al., 2013; Bowes & Jones, 2006; Brown et al., 2023; Côté et al., 2024; Erikstad et al., 2021; Jowett, 2025; Lefebvre et al., 2021). Of particular relevance to this study were indicators within the themes of coaches' ability to develop quality coach-athlete relationships, alongside the application of transformational leadership principles and the use of autonomy-supportive and athlete-centred coaching (ACC) approaches. Collectively, these practices appeared to positively influence and support participants' BPNs.

6.1.1 Quality Coach-Athlete Relationships

Central to the theme 'I have a positive connection with the coach' (refer to section 5.1), participants expressed strong appreciation for the quality of the coach-athlete relationship. They highlighted the importance of coaches who encourage player input, demonstrate genuine interest, and provide effective guidance. A highly relevant theoretical framework in this context is the 3 + 1 Cs model (Jowett, 2024; Jowett, 2025), which offers a useful lens for understanding the core characteristics of effective coach-athlete relationships. With quality relationships recognised as a central component of effective coaching practice (Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016), this model conceptualises the coach-athlete relationship as an interpersonal construct characterised by closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation (Jowett, 2024).

Through interpretive analysis, indicators of closeness, commitment, and complementarity within coach-athlete relationships were identified. One example of this is demonstrated through one participant's comment (FG5, P4): "Coach, he was trying to help everyone improve. He was never negative, and since he was showing a nice amount of respect, I was able to respect him as well. That helps us form a good bond." In this case, aspects of closeness were evident in participants' references to respect, underlying trust in their coach, and appreciation of positive support.

In other discussions, evidence of commitment emerged through participants' accounts of coaches' consistent efforts to provide meaningful guidance and their availability when support was sought. Signs of complementarity were also apparent, with findings indicating that coaches and athletes had established clear roles within the relationship, where coaches were viewed as experienced providers of direction, and athletes as autonomous agents who contributed input and made decisions.

The positive intent demonstrated by coaches to build quality coach-athlete relationships aligns with recent research recommendations. For example, Li et al. (2024), in their systematic review of coach development, highlighted the critical role of positive coach-athlete relationships and emphasised the need for coaches to prioritise these to enhance the impact of coaching on young athletes' experiences. Similarly, Visek et al. (2022) identified the influence of the coach and positive coaching behaviours as one of three primary contributors to youth enjoyment in sport.

Further reinforcing this, two Canadian-based studies that explored athlete voice highlighted young people's desire for, and the importance of, quality coach-athlete relationships. The first, a qualitative study by Falcão et al. (2019), found that when athletes perceived strong relationships with their coaches, this contributed to quality sport experiences and resulted in positive youth development (PYD) related outcomes that extended beyond sport. The second, a quantitative study examining athletes' self-reported outcomes in relation to programme quality (Bean et

al., 2018), found that quality coach-athlete relationships, alongside positive peer connections, were integral to athletes' perceptions of high-quality sporting experiences.

6.1.2 Coaches Leading Sporting Experiences

Embedded within the theme 'Coach puts it all together' (refer to section 5.2), the findings indicate that participants regarded their coaches as central figures in their sporting experiences and suggested that coaches demonstrated transformational leadership qualities while managing participants' sporting programmes. While leadership is a complex phenomenon shaped by a range of contextual factors (Lefebvre et al., 2021; Turnnidge & Côté, 2019), transformational leadership has been promoted within the literature as a form of leadership well suited to effective coaching practice (Côté et al., 2014; Lefebvre et al., 2021; Subijana et al., 2021; Turnnidge & Côté, 2017). Hummel et al. (2023) describe transformational leadership as being underpinned by idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration.

Whilst transformational leadership was not explicitly referred to by participants, there were a number of indications that coaches were applying aspects of this leadership approach. For example:

> I think every team I've been in with coach, they like improve relationship with each other and make sure we're all on the same page when we go and play. I think it improves how the team plays together as everyone knows each other and there's more team chemistry (P3, FG2).

This example can be interpreted as actions that support both idealised influence and individualised consideration, as the coach is role modelling desired behaviours such as the prioritisation of positive group dynamics, often referred to as "team culture", and is prioritising the social needs of the group.

Other findings displayed aspects of intellectual stimulation, reflected in coaches sharing detailed sport-related knowledge and facilitating game-like training scenarios that challenged athletes' decision-making. Furthermore, elements of individualised consideration were again indicated through participants' perceptions of coaches actively taking on board their input.

Further to signs of quality coach-athlete relationships and elements of transformational leadership in action, the findings also suggest that coaches were utilising their interpersonal skills to support the adoption of an autonomy-supportive and athlete-centred coaching approach (ACC). Mageau and Vallerand (2003) suggest that in accordance with motivational theory, an autonomy-supportive coaching approach is more effective than a controlling one. They outline the key behaviours of autonomy-supportive coaching as follows:

> (a) provide choice to their athletes within specific limits and rules, (b) provide athletes with a meaningful rationale for the activities, limits, and rules, (c) ask about and acknowledge the athletes' feelings, (d) provide the opportunity for athletes to take initiative and act independently, (e) provide non-controlling performance feedback, (f) avoid overt control, guilt-induced criticism, controlling statements, and limit the use of tangible rewards, and (g) minimise behaviours which promote ego-involvement (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003, pp. 886).

Along similar lines, the ACC approach, which prioritises athletes' needs whilst pursuing holistic development (Falcão et al., 2019; Griffin et al., 2018) has been framed as the combination of (a) athlete empowerment, (b) integrating life skills, (c) pedagogical principles, and (d) democracy in action, by Griffin et al. (2018). Together, these coaching frameworks and concepts provide practical guidance for how coaches can create more participant-centred experiences, referencing many of the BPN supportive social inputs listed by Standage and Ryan (2020) (refer to section 3.4 in Chapter Three: The Conceptual Frameworks).

When reviewed against the findings, there are numerous examples of coaches' actions aligning with this guidance. For example, coaches applied a positive and autonomy-supportive approach that, at times, empowered athletes and aligned with non-restraining practices, while avoiding controlling feedback or criticism. In addition, coaches provided individualised direction through feedback, which, according to the athletes interviewed by Silva et al. (2019), is critical for the development of both sport specific and personal skills, alongside facilitating athlete empowerment and attending to athletes' feelings. Furthermore, within the environments shaped by coaches, pedagogical principles were evident through the provision of freedom within structure and the use of strategies such as game-based training, which Light and Harvey (2017) suggest are learner-centred and particularly well-suited to holistic development. Finally, the integration of life skills was evident through the facilitation of meaningful social connections and positive team dynamics.

Collectively, whilst these actions depict how the coaches' actions largely aligned with an autonomy-supportive and ACC-informed approach, they also raise one interesting gap in coaches' actions. This is the lack of any explicit or underlying reference to coaches supporting athletes to move away from an ego-orientated measure of individual success to one that is more task-focused (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Given the connection with the others cogs within the PAF (personal engagement in activities, and appropriate settings), this will be explored further later in the chapter.

6.1.3 How Coaches Supported Basic Psychological Needs

Captured within the themes are numerous examples of coaches' actions aligning with practices promoted in the literature (Griffin et al., 2018; Hummel et al., 2023; Jowett, 2025; Mageau and Vallerand, 2003). Whilst this

alignment suggests that these actions are contributing to positive outcomes for participants, applying a BPN lens (Deci and Ryan, 1985) enables deeper insight into the potential psychological benefits of these behaviours, and provides a clearer explanation for why coaches actions are contributing to participants' continued engagement in sport. As illustrated in Figure 3 (refer to section 3.4 in Chapter Three: Conceptual Frameworks), interpersonal interactions can support BPN in multiple ways (Standage and Ryan, 2020). The findings presented demonstrate strong alignment with each of these needs, with coaches' actions often influencing more than one BPN simultaneously.

A prominent example of this alignment was the strong sense of relatedness participants reported in their relationships with their coaches. This was reflected in the value athletes placed on coaches' positive nature and the feelings of support they experienced, which in turn fostered respect and trust and enhanced the quality of the coach-athlete relationship. While the coach-athlete connection is fundamentally relational, as noted by Bean et al. (2018), a high-quality relationship is not confined to relatedness alone and can be strongly connected to all three BPNs.

When exploring the meaning beneath participants' perceptions, there are indications that autonomy promotion and competence support were also embedded within these coach-athlete connections. Participants highlighted their appreciation for opportunities to provide autonomy-supportive input into decisions related to their sporting experience. In addition, athletes' desires for autonomy were further supported through coaches' approaches to training and competition, where participants were given freedom within training activities and space during match play to make their own decisions. These practices appear to have helped create environments that supported the development of competence and relatedness, while also allowing space for autonomy.

This autonomy-supportive environment can again be linked to competence development, as Flaherty and Sagas (2021) found that athletes often interpret such freedom as an opportunity to demonstrate and apply their skillsets. However, participants also emphasised the importance of coach guidance and feedback, indicating a desire for direction that supports the attainment of competence. This balance between freedom and guidance highlights the nuanced role coaches play in meeting athletes' psychological needs.

Consistent across the findings was evidence of competence-supporting approaches embedded within training and programme design. Coaches implemented development-focused interventions that supported the growth of physical, technical and tactical capabilities. Closely associated with this competence development was a sense of relatedness with others, particularly teammates or training partners. Participants placed strong value on team culture, led by coaches, with indications that this culture contributed not only to individual and collective competence development, but also to the creation of a welcoming environment in which athletes felt a sense of belonging.

6.2 The Impact of Others

Also associated with the social dynamic element, "who" of the PAF (Côté et al., 2016), the influence of other social figures is a factor outside of coaching that significantly impacts participants' experiences, as demonstrated through 'The people around me matter' *(*refer to section 5.3). Although this study primarily aimed to examine the impact of coaching on participants' experiences, the data suggest that the influence of others, including peers, friends, and family, is also important, as for some individuals, their contributions were a primary motivation for participating. This sentiment is reflected in a comment from P3 in FG3, who stated, "I really like it for the social aspect 'cause it's like the only place that I found that I really connect with people."

Given the value many participants placed on quality social connections with others, it is apparent that these social figures can either support or hinder the coach's ability to deliver high-quality experiences to participants. It is not unexpected that these social figures have an impact, considering this topic is receiving scholarly attention in the literature (e.g., Freeman, 2020; Smith & Ullrich-French, 2020). For example, Smith and Ullrich-French (2020) suggest that peer support is critical to the quality of the experience, as these interactions shape factors such as effort, commitment, motivation, and even well-being. Freeman (2020) and Gardner et al. (2016) also consider the wider social climate, including peers, parents, and others connected to the participant, as individuals who can support the attainment of positive outcomes in sport. Furthermore, Rouquette et al. (2020) and Wall et al. (2019) highlight the key role parents play in facilitating positive youth sport experiences.

Interestingly, the findings of this study demonstrate that while parents played a role in getting participants involved in sport, there was very little recognition of their ongoing influence. However, on multiple occasions, siblings were cited as key reasons for either staying engaged in sport or seeking to progress within competitive sport systems. What was consistent though is that peers, in many cases referred to as teammates or friends, largely contributed positively to experiences by supporting the creation of fun-based experiences, which aligns with the findings of Visek et al. (2022), who identified positive social dynamics as a primary driver of fun for youth. In addition, there were also signs that peers felt supported, were motivated by others, and learned from one another, with only a few instances where peers had negatively impacted experiences.

Whilst these findings suggest the social influences of others were largely positive, there were signs, particularly in relation to other sport experiences referenced, where peers were negatively influencing experiences. As the likes of Bailey et al. (2013), Gardner et al. (2016) and Wall et al. (2019) suggest, the social figures surrounding athletes have the potential to either support or undermine the coaching processes, highlighting that regular consideration should be made in relation to how the social network is influencing sporting environments.

6.2.1 How Others Supported Basic Psychological Needs

The influence of others considered through a BPN lens (Deci & Ryan, 1985) reveals some important reasons why peers and other social influences had a material impact on the participants' experiences. First, the desire for relatedness is most clearly reflected, where participants emphasised the importance of having supportive and positive relationships with those around them and ultimately feeling a sense of connection and belonging. According to participants, these social connections played a significant role in sustaining motivation, and in some instances, they even encouraged greater commitment to sport-specific training, likely in pursuit of competence, even when such commitments reduced participants' sense of autonomy.

In addition, there appeared to be a strong connection between participants' feelings of competence and their sense of relatedness. Participants described developing skills and enhancing their competence through observing others and receiving feedback from peers, which are processes that align with key elements of social cognitive theory (Connolly, 2017). Furthermore, as Smith and Ullrich-French (2020) suggest, the likes of social comparison influence individuals' sporting experiences, particularly during adolescence. When socially influenced measures of competence were not attained, such as through deselection or performing below expectations, participants appeared to shift their focus toward relatedness needs. This prioritisation of relatedness also emerged in discussions about sport experiences perceived as more social than competitive.

6.3 The Underlying Effect of Individuals' Sporting Goals

As detailed within the theme 'It's important that I achieve what I want to in sport' (refer to section 5.4), participants' individual goals, when realised or left unfulfilled, were an underlying factor that affected their interest in and ongoing engagement with sport. This is an important finding, as while coaches are recognised as being well positioned to assist individuals in shaping and achieving their goals (Abraham et al., 2014; Scales, 2023; Smoll et al., 2007), such goals, similar to the influence of others, ultimately lie beyond their direct control. Furthermore, coaches' influence is even more limited when it comes to the broader climate, including sport settings and external social factors, in which participants' attempts to achieve their goals.

Analysis of participants' insights identified three goal-related components: (1) the goals individuals held, (2) the influence of the surrounding climate on those goals, and (3) how these goals changed over time. Regarding individuals' goals, there appeared to be a strong association with the achievement goal theory, presented by Nicholls (1984). Achievement goal theory describes two forms of goal orientation: task-oriented, where individuals focus on personal effort, learning, and improvement, and ego-oriented, where individuals seek to

outperform others (Fry & Moore, 2019; Nicholls, 1984). Some participants indicated that their goals were more ego-oriented, largely based on competition achievement, whilst others were more task-oriented, centred around individual improvement. In addition, a small number of participants suggested that while their initial goals were task focused, their surrounding climate contributed to the development of more ego-oriented goals.

Those who aligned more closely with task-focused goals generally reflected on satisfactory experiences. In contrast, participants with stronger ego-focused goals reported mixed levels of success and, at times, negative accounts of their sporting experiences. One example of this was:

> I get really annoyed if I don't think I'm performing as well as I should be. Like there was a competition last weekend, which I won, but it was a small field, so it was like, I felt like I should win rather than being happy because I did win (P4, FG3).

This highlights a key limitation of ego-oriented goals, as success is based on social comparison and is therefore not always achievable, or, as seen in P4's situation, satisfying, even when individuals put in their best effort. (Fry & Moore, 2019; Nicholls, 1984). Although the drivers of participants' more task-oriented goals were not explored in extensive detail, several indicators suggested that coaches were fostering task-oriented climates through their use of an ACC coaching approach. Conversely, those who held more ego-oriented goals indicated that selection processes and competitive outcomes were factors shaping these goals.

These findings align with wider youth sport research, with literature raising concerns about sport climates promoting more ego-orientated goals (Gómez-López et al., 2024; MacDonald et al., 2011; Scales, 2023). For example, quantitative evidence highlights the contrasting effects of motivational climates, with Gómez-López et al. (2024) finding that ego involving climates were associated with heightened fear of failure and anxiety among team sport participants, while MacDonald et al. (2011) reported that task-oriented climates strongly predicted positive youth sport experiences, yet negative experiences were strongly linked to ego-driven climates. The challenges associated with an ego-orientated climate have even led scholars to develop approaches such as Compete Learn Honor, proposed by Scales (2023), with the aim of enabling coaches to help shift athletes' focus towards task-orientated goals.

Interestingly, in this study, several participants reflected on negative experiences in which their ego-oriented goals were not achieved, whether during significant one-off events or through the accumulation of smaller moments, and subsequently re-oriented their focus. This shift highlighted a growing emphasis on positive social connections and enjoyment, rather than performance-related goals, again demonstrating the importance of quality social dynamics.

6.3.1 How Individuals' Sporting Goals Supported and Hindered Basic Psychological Needs

With both task and ego-orientated goals held by participants, a BPN lens (Deci & Ryan, 1985) helps to explain why the achievement, or lack thereof, influenced the quality of participants' sporting experiences and, in some cases, led to a reorientation of their focus. A pursuit of competence appeared to be the central desire, as participants described measuring their success in sport using several sources of information, including improvements in personal abilities, feelings of physical fitness, and comparisons with others. Whether task-focused or ego-orientated, the achievement of goals positively supported participants' sense of competence.

However, multiple participants' accounts of experiencing pressure, reduced self-esteem, and burnout shared a common link to more ego-oriented goals. These goals appeared to reduce feelings of competence and autonomy, as although individuals chose them, their achievement was largely outside of their control and was often only recognised when the goals were not met. This is a significant issue, as highlighted by both Deci and Ryan (2000) and Bartholomew et al. (2011), due to its potential to contribute to psychological distress and ill-being. Furthermore, need-thwarting behaviours have been identified as one of the leading causes of participants dropping out of sport (Crane & Temples, 2015).

Despite these participants continuing to engage in sport following these negative need-thwarting experiences, there were several instances where such experiences appeared to initiate a shift in thinking regarding their competence-based aspirations. This aligns with the findings of Jorgensen et al. (2024), where not only short-term feelings of competence, but also longer-term expectations of future competence, influenced participants' interest in pursuing competence-related goals over time.

6.4 The Dynamic Interaction of Coaching, Others, and Individual Goals on Quality Sporting Experiences

Considered separately, the study's findings provide insights into the coach–athlete relationship, coaching leadership and approaches, social influences, and participants' experiences in pursuit of their individual goals in sport. However, when they are viewed as interacting components of the dynamic elements within the PAF (Côté et al., 2016), findings draw attention to the intricate nature of individuals' sporting experiences, and therefore the complexity of how coaches operate to best support the creation of quality sport environments (Bowes & Jones, 2006; Li et al. 2024). In recognition of the dynamic and interconnected nature of the interpretative findings discussed, the following section examines how coaches, socially positioned within the "who" of the PAF (Côté et al., 2016), currently shape, and could further enhance, their influence on youths' sporting environments.

6.4.1 Coaching Effectiveness in Isolation

As outlined in 'The Positive Influence of CfI Coaches' (refer to section 6.1), there are strong indications that coaches are positively contributing to participants' experiences through the transmission of both professional and interpersonal knowledge (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Findings indicate that professional knowledge, including an understanding of sport-specific techniques and tactics, sport science, and pedagogical concepts (Côté et al., 2013), was an expectation participants placed on coaches. This expectation was largely met through coaching practice, including programme and training design, as well as the delivery of individual guidance and feedback, and helped participants develop a sense of competence.

Complementing the use of professional knowledge were coaches' interpersonal behaviours, which, according to Côté et al. (2013), involve the skilful integration of emotional intelligence, social connection, and the capacity to inspire growth. Whilst this study did not reveal evidence of emotional intelligence demonstrated by coaches, the positive interpersonal connections with athletes, along with the facilitation of connections among team or training group members, demonstrated coaches' ability to foster social connection and support both individual and collective growth, ultimately contributing to both competence and relatedness.

Additionally, findings of participant centred practices, which entail a combination of professional and interpersonal knowledge, suggest that these coaches' approaches could be further categorised as athlete centred, representing a shift away from traditional coaching practices (Fyall et al., 2024; ICCE, 2024). This also suggests an autonomy-supportive approach that can contribute to the development of competence and relatedness. Such an approach is notable given the efforts across sporting organisations in NZ to promote ACC (Kidman & Keelty, 2015; Walters & Kidman, 2015), as well as Sport NZ's BisB initiative, which reinforces the importance of developmentally appropriate youth sport settings (BisB, n.d.).

When considered in isolation, these indicators reflect a contemporary, research-informed, and nationally aligned coaching approach, underpinned by the combined use of professional and interpersonal skills. As identified by Côté and Gilbert (2009) and endorsed by the ICCE (2024), these are core components of coaching effectiveness. Alone, this suggests that coaches are largely applying what the CfI programme intended, which is to support them in providing positive sporting experiences for their participants.

6.4.2 The Interplay Between Coaching Effectiveness and Dynamic Elements of the PAF

Despite indications of coaching effectiveness, the PAF (Côté et al., 2016), helps to explain that although coaches are well positioned to lead and influence the youth sport experience (Turnnidge and Côté, 2017; Subijana et al., 2021), their influence can either be supported or reduced by other social and sport setting factors (Côté et al., 2024; Holmes et al., 2025). Using the 'cog' analogy related to the PAF, when the cogs of personal engagement in activities, appropriate settings, and quality social dynamics are in sync, quality coaching can help these cogs turn faster (Côté et al., 2020), resulting in a higher quality experience. However, when misalignment occurs, the three dynamic cogs slow down, coaches' impact is reduced, and the outcome is lower quality sporting experiences.

The findings, particularly those showing how sport settings and social comparison can shape goals in unhelpful ways and expose athletes to negative experiences, highlight the need for coaches to consider how they can shape wider social factors and support athletes' goals to improve alignment between the cogs. This underscores the challenging landscape in which coaches operate, where true coaching effectiveness requires navigating complex environments (Booth, 2025; Cassidy, 2022).

In some respects, this study suggests that coaches are already positively contributing to the wider social dynamics by facilitating social connections and positive team cultures among the groups they coach. Given the influence of not only peers, or teammates, but also the external social network, a potential next step, aligned with the suggestions of Freeman (2020), is for coaches to consider how they can support athletes to utilise the full range of supportive resources available to them. Building on this and acknowledging the influence of the broader social network on individuals' experiences (Stuntz & Weiss, 2010), further impact may be achieved by empowering others close to participants to contribute positively and in an aligned manner, thereby better supporting participants as they navigate wider sporting settings.

Whilst the capacity and capability of volunteer coaches to educate and influence others are factors that need to be considered, literature suggests there are numerous benefits to maximising others close to participants as supportive resources (Freeman, 2020). These benefits include increasing parents' understanding of how they can aid their child's development (Horne et al., 2023), assisting in reinforcing a motivation-supporting climate (O'Rourke et al., 2014), and drawing further on peers as role models and supportive figures who can inform the learning of both sporting and character-based skills (Connolly, 2017).

In regard to addressing individual goals, there appears to be an opportunity for coaches to develop a deeper understanding of individuals' goals within sport and to support the alignment of both these goals and the sport setting. This is where coaches' efforts to continually seek to understand athletes' "why", their primary reason for participating (which findings suggest change), and to ensure their coaching approach aligns with this, could better

enable the delivery of high-quality, individualised sport experiences (Li et al., 2024). Whilst it is not feasible to tailor coaching to every individual when working with groups (Abraham et al., 2014), attending to a balance of collective and individual needs helps ensure participants' perspectives are understood and used to shape appropriate development (Harris et al., 2023). This may also support the fulfilment of co orientation based on individuals' characteristics, in line with the 3+1 Cs of an effective coach-athlete relationship (Jowett, 2025), and further enhance the individualised consideration emphasised within transformational leadership (Hummel et al., 2023).

An additional benefit of understanding participants' why is that this understanding can help coaches recognise when participants are overemphasising the importance of performance-based results. When this occurs, coaches can draw on guidance from literature to help shift athletes from ego-involved aims to more task-focused goals (Scales, 2023; Smoll et al., 2007). This approach is shown to better support athletes' basic psychological needs and, in turn, promotes more intrinsic and integrated motivation supporting environments (Standage & Ryan, 2020).

Together, I suggest that if these factors are considered and acted on by coaches, the cogs (dynamic elements) are more likely to move in sync, contributing to higher quality experiences. Furthermore, this could lead to sporting environments that better support athletes' BPNs (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In particular, relatedness may be fostered through more high-quality social connections, competence through coaching approaches and sport settings that align with individuals' sport-specific or holistic development goals, and autonomy by empowering athletes to contribute further to the design of the sport setting and encouraging more task-focused goal orientations.

6.5 Chapter Summary

In summary, while these interpretations are based on the experiences of a relatively small number of youth participants, the depth of the data enabled detailed interpretative analysis of the environments in which participants and their coaches operate, leading to three important conclusions. The first is the importance of the CfI coaches' efforts to apply a research-informed, participant-centred coaching approach that supports youth athletes' basic psychological needs, with youth indicating that such an approach is a key factor supporting the quality of their experiences and motivation for continued participation. The second concerns how social influences and individual goals affect participants' views on the quality of their experiences. This is significant as it further reinforces that whilst quality coaching is important, other elements that fall outside of coaches control are either contributing to or negatively influencing participants' sporting experiences. The third, is that whilst the interaction of individual motives, coaching, social, and sport setting factors collectively shapes sporting experiences, coaches are positioned

to have further influence across the dynamic elements. Therefore, it can be proposed that, in order for genuine coaching effectiveness to be realised in this context, not only is the integrated application of professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge required, as defined by Côté and Gilbert (2009) and Côté et al. (2013), and endorsed by the ICCE (2024), but these components must be applied in ways that are responsive to dynamic elements of the environment in which participants and coaches engage.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

The aim of this interpretive qualitative research project was to understand how coaches who participated in Coaching for Impact (CfI) influenced the sporting experiences of the youth participants they coach. To address this, the study explored youth perceptions of CfI coaches' approaches and actions, and how coach-led environments influenced the quality of their sport experiences and their motivation to continue participating. An interpretive description (ID) methodology was applied, following the direction of Thorne (2025), which enabled an in-depth enquiry that gave 19 purposively sampled youth participants a voice whilst drawing on literature and my practical experience to develop findings and interpret the deep meaning behind them. Through this enquiry, the use of semi-structured focus group interviews and reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2022), contributed to the generation of four themes and four sub-themes, which have been explored and discussed through the Personal Assets Framework (PAF) (Côté et al., 2016; Côté et al., 2020) and Self-Determination Theory's (SDT) basic psychological needs (BPN) (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2017) conceptual frameworks.

It is important to acknowledge that this research was not an evaluation of the CfI programme and makes no direct claims related to how the coach development programme is influencing participant sport experiences. However, through an interpretive enquiry that combined theoretical knowledge, participants' insights, and my interpretations, the findings suggest that the five coaches involved in the CfI programme are contributing to positive sport experiences. This is evident through coaching actions associated with building quality coach–athlete relationships, leading enjoyable sport experiences, and applying approaches aligned with autonomy-supportive and athlete-centred coaching principles. These actions show strong alignment with established definitions of coaching effectiveness (e.g., Côté & Gilbert, 2009) and indicate that coaches were supporting athletes' basic psychological needs (competence, relatedness, and autonomy) which SDT identifies as essential for intrinsic motivation, growth, and ongoing wellbeing (Ryan & Deci 2000; 2017). In turn, this support helps create the conditions for quality sport experiences, consistent with the intentions of the CfI programme.

Whilst it was positive to see that many participants experienced positive sport participation aligned with coach development programme intentions, this enquiry also revealed other key factors that were influencing their experiences. These factors included the influence of the social network surrounding them (such as peers and family), the importance of achieving their individual goals in sport, and the negative impact ego-orientated goals can cause. Together, these factors highlight that whilst the coaches are largely contributing to quality youth athlete experiences, the dynamic elements described within the PAF (Côté et al., 2016; Côté et al., 2020) can either work with or against the coaches' actions to determine the quality of the environment in which participation occurs. What is promising though is that whilst coaches cannot control athletes' environments, this study reinforces that

they can influence all three of the dynamic elements of the PAF (Côté et al., 2016; Côté et al., 2020) and thus are influential figures within youth sport experiences.

These contributions are significant not only for Sport NZ's evaluation of CfI, but also for NZ's broader youth sport and coach development landscape. This study fills a critical literature gap by extending beyond practical reviews and local coach development commentary to provide insights into how coaches supported through a contemporary, research-informed coach development programme are contributing to athletes' experiences. By synthesising participant experiences with established literature, it highlights the positive influence supported coaches have and indicates that quality coach development is likely contributing to positive coaching practices. Ultimately, this work indicates that the value of investing in coaching is being realised by the participants, and that ongoing support should be provided to coaches to help them navigate the dynamic and complex environments in which they operate. To conclude, in the words of P2 from FG3, quality coaching is critical to their sport experiences as: "It would definitely be different if we didn't have Coach. They're one of the reasons I've been playing for so long."

7.1 Limitations and Future Research

This research has addressed a gap in the literature, especially in the NZ context, and provides practice-informing insights that may be relevant to other contexts in sport coaching and youth sport. While this study contributes to the understanding of youth experiences and coaching in NZ, like all research, there are limitations that must be acknowledged.

Firstly, although focus group participants came from diverse sporting backgrounds and represented a range of youth in terms of age, there was a greater representation of males (15) than females (4). As outlined in Chapter Four: Methodology, this imbalance resulted from recruitment challenges and the limited availability of potential participants. The second limitation was the lack of cultural background information captured from participants. Not collecting this information was considered the most appropriate course of action during the research and ethics proposal process, as it was believed that purposive sampling of groups from diverse sporting backgrounds would adequately represent the broader participant demographics across youth sport in NZ. Whilst it may be beneficial to capture more insights from females and participants from different cultural backgrounds to explore potential nuances in their views, this study highlights the practical and logistical challenges associated with conducting qualitative research with youth without some form of ethically acceptable incentive.

A further limitation is the potential for unintended selection bias in the recruitment of participants. Whilst the recruitment process was justified (see Section 4.4, Sampling and Recruitment), it is possible that participants who experienced positive engagement with sport and their coaches were more likely to volunteer for involvement in the study. As a result, the views of youth participants coached by Coaching for Impact members who had less positive experiences may not have been captured. This highlights the potential for future research to address broader population groups to better understand how different groups of youth sport participants perceive their experiences and the influence of their coaches.

Despite limitations being apparent, this study can inform future research into the coaching of youth, particularly in NZ. For example, to add further depth to the understanding of youth experiences, there may be value in exploring coaches' insights in parallel with youth participants. This could involve the utilisation of the coach-athlete relationships questionnaire (CART-Q) (Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016), to better understand the thought process and actions of coaches in relation to their context and their relationship with their athletes. Another direction would be to examine which coaching actions were, or were not, attributable to coaches' learning and development within the CfI programme. While this study explored youth athletes' perspectives on their sport experiences, a more comprehensive design incorporating perspectives collected both pre- and post-coaching intervention such as CfI would provide deeper insight into programme effectiveness. Such an approach could strengthen understanding of how coach development influences coaching practice and athlete experience and allow greater certainty in the claims made about the programme's impact for both coaches and athletes.

7.2 Is This Just Coaches' Responsibility?

As identified through discussion of the study's findings and the literature, coaches are positioned as the primary figures responsible for supporting athletes as they navigate sport (Côté, 2013; Silva, 2019). However, the findings also indicate that factors outside of the coach's control influence sporting environments and participants' experiences. In light of this, there appears to be a risk of placing too much responsibility on coaches to ensure quality experiences, even when other social and sport-setting factors are not aligned. This raises a critical question: should this responsibility sit so heavily with coaches?

In 2015, the International Olympic Committee called for an urgent shift in the culture of youth sport, which had become increasingly centred on the interests of adults and the media (Bergeron et al., 2015). Recently, there have been recommendations for the education of athletes' broader support networks (Li et al., 2024), and in NZ, calls to create sport settings that are better aligned with the needs of young people (Walters et al., 2022). National sport organisations have an important role in educating the wider community about developmentally appropriate

sport experiences and in creating sport systems that cater to the needs of participants (Lundberg et al., 2025). In its guiding framework, these calls have been addressed by Sport NZ through the implementation of the BisB approach, with a focus on influencing the "people", "programmes", and "environments" within the sport system (BiB, n.d.). However, findings from this research suggest that while coaches, key "people" within the sport system, were acting in ways that largely aligned with the BisB approach, some of the programmes in which participants were involved appeared to lack alignment with a key BisB recommendation of "balancing winning and pressure to perform with opportunities to develop, improve, and enjoy participation" (BisB, n.d.).

As Standage and Ryan (2020) point out, although competition is a fundamental aspect of sport, it presents a challenging dilemma when viewed through the psychological lens of competence. Furthermore, if these competitive environments create climates that are ego-oriented, this can shape individuals' goals towards performance outcome-based goals that risk the diminishment of autonomy (Fry & Moore, 2019; Nicholls, 1984). This challenging dilemma appears to be one that requires more attention by sport leaders to re-orientate sport competition systems to better suit the diverse needs of youth participants.

7.3 Practical Recommendations

To conclude this thesis, and in line with the ID approach advocated by Thorne (2025), which emphasises the importance of practical implications, three practical recommendations are presented. They "close the loop" on this study by giving back to the applied field from which the research data have come, with a hope that sport leaders and coaches can draw upon these recommendations to inform future enhancements in sport offerings. Although these recommendations should be applied cautiously in other settings due to the contextual factors shaping the findings, the study's transparency and detailed discussion of participant contributions give readers sufficient information to judge their relevance to their own contexts.

1. Invest in developing coaching effectiveness.

The findings support international calls for an ongoing commitment to the development of coaching effectiveness, from both coaches themselves and sport-system leaders, through the enhancement of professional knowledge, as well as both intrapersonal and interpersonal capabilities. Together, these research-informed capabilities can contribute to humanistic coaching approaches that help shape positive athlete experiences, support individual athlete needs, and contribute to the creation of more intrinsically motivation-enhancing environments.

2. Continuously pursue alignment between the athletes' goals and their environment.

A key contributor to negative experiences was a misalignment between what participants wanted from sport and what they encountered. Coaches play an important role in aligning athletes' goals with sport settings, while also helping them navigate wider influences such as competition formats, competence-based comparisons, and other social factors. By regularly checking for alignment between athlete motivations, key social figures and sport settings, coaches can identify when these layers are out of sync and respond in ways that support a reorientation back towards athletes' needs.

3. Further consider the social collective and sport system's role in supporting the delivery of quality experiences.

This research suggests that whilst coaching can positively influence youth sport experiences, other social dynamics and sport settings have the potential to either contribute or detract from these experiences. In order to maximise the impact of effective coaching and provide 'sport for all, sport for life' (BisB, n.d.), a continued effort is required to educate the social network surrounding youth participants and to design sport structures to serve the needs of the people they are in place to serve: the participants.

These three recommendations call for coaches and sport leaders to invest time in developing coaching effectiveness and to critically assess whether the sporting environments they lead align with research-informed practice that meets participants' needs. Together, these strategies can enhance coaching impact, improve alignment across the dynamic elements outlined in PAF, and enhance support for athletes' BPNs (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Such alignment increases the likelihood that coaches' actions will contribute to quality sporting experiences that, over time, support the development of the 4Cs, competence, confidence, connection, and character, while also promoting long-term outcomes related to participation, personal development, and performance (Côté et al., 2016; Côté et al., 2020).

References

Abraham, A., Lorenzo, S., Saiz, J., McKeown, S., Morgan, G., & Muir, B. (2014). Planning your coaching: A focus on youth participant development. In C. Nash (Ed.), *Practical sports coaching* (pp. 16–53). Routledge.

Alder, J. P. (2017). Team culture and athlete-centred coaching. In S. Pill (Ed.), *Perspectives on athlete-centred coaching* (pp. 57–69). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315102450-6

Amorose, A. J., & Anderson-Butcher, D. (2007). Autonomy-supportive coaching and self-determined motivation in high school and college athletes: A test of self-determination theory. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 8*(5), 654–670. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2006.11.003

Ara Taiohi. (2019). *Mana Taiohi: Youth development principles*. https://www.arataiohi.org.nz/mana-taiohi-youth-development-principles

Arnold, A., Thigpen, C. A., Beattie, P. F., Bell, D. R., & Padua, D. A. (2017). Overuse physeal injuries in youth athletes. *Sports Health, 9*(2), 139–147. https://doi.org/10.1177/1941738117690847

Astle, A., Leberman, S., & Watson, G. (2018). *Sport development in action: Plan, programme and practice*. Taylor & Francis.

Ault, K. J., Blanton, J. E., & Pierce, S. (2024). Student-athletes' perceptions of relationship quality and life skills development. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 36*(1), 139-160. https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2023.2197970

Bailey, R., Cope, E. J., & Pearce, G. (2013). Why do children take part in, and remain involved in sport? A literature review and discussion of implications for sports coaches. *International Journal of Coaching Science, 7*(1), 56–75.

Balance is Better. (n.d.). *About Balance is Better*. Retrieved March 7, 2026, from https://balanceisbetter.org.nz/about/

Balish, S. M., McLaren, C., Rainham, D., & Blanchard, C. (2014). Correlates of youth sport attrition: A review and future directions. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 15*(4), 429-439. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2014.04.003

Bateman, J. E., Lovell, G. P., Burke, K. J., & Lastella, M. (2020). Coach education and positive youth development as a means of improving Australian sport. *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living, 2*, 591633, https://doi.org/10.3389/fspor.2020.591633

Battaglia, A., & Kerr, G. (2024). Youth athletes' perspectives on developmental influences of relationships in individual and team sports. *Cogent Social Sciences, 10*(1), Article 2392023. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2024.2392023

Bartholomew, K. J., Ntoumanis, N., Bosch, J. A., Thøgersen-Ntoumani, C., & Ryan, R. M. (2011). Self-determination theory and diminished functioning: The role of interpersonal control and psychological need thwarting. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 37(11), 1459–1473. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167211413125

Bean, C., Harlow, M., Mosher, A., Fraser-Thomas, J., & Forneris, T. (2018). Assessing differences in athlete-reported outcomes between high and low-quality youth sport programs. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 30*(4), 456-472. https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2017.1413019

Bell, D. R., Post, E. G., Biese, K., McGuine, T., Brooks, M. A., & Hetzel, S. (2018). Sport specialization and risk of overuse injuries: A systematic review with meta-analysis. *Pediatrics, 142*(3), e20180657. https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2018-0657

Bennett, B., & Fyall, G. (2018). Power and control in school rugby: An hermeneutic interpretation of the pedagogical intentions of five secondary school rugby coaches in New Zealand. *Journal of Global Sport Management, 3*(3), 284–301. https://doi.org/10.1080/24704067.2018.1432986

Bergeron, M., Mountjoy, M., Armstrong, N., Chia, M., Côté, J., Emery, C., Faigenbaum, A., Hall, G., Kriemler, S., Leglise, M., Malina, R., Pensgaard, A., Sanchez, A., Soligard, T., Sundgot-Borgen, J., van Mechelen, W., Weissensteiner, J., & Engebretsen, L. (2015). International Olympic Committee consensus statement on youth athletic development. *British Journal of Sports Medicine, 49*(13), 43. https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2015-094962

Booth, S. J., Appleton, P. R., & Duda, J. L. (2025). Conceptions of the coach-team relationship in the views of youth team sport coaches and athletes. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2025.2512552

Bowes, I., & Jones, R. L. (2006). Working at the edge of chaos: Understanding coaching as a complex, interpersonal system. *The Sport Psychologist*, *20*(2), 235–245. https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.20.2.235

Bradshaw, C., Atkinson, S., & Doody, O. (2017). Employing a qualitative description approach in health care research. *Global Qualitative Nursing Research*, *4*. https://doi.org/10.1177/2333393617742282

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners*. SAGE Publications.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, 11*(4), 589-597. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide.* SAGE Publications.

Brown, D., Vandenborn, E., Kwan, M., Cairney, J., Azimi, S., Tamminen, K., & Bruner, M. (2023). Towards the development of a quality youth sport experience measure: Understanding participant and stakeholder perspectives. *PLOS ONE, 18*(7), e0287387. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0287387

Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods*. Oxford University Press.

Byrne, D. (2022). A worked example of Braun and Clarke's approach to reflexive thematic analysis. *Quality & Quantity*, *56*(3), 1391-1412. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-021-01182-y

Came, H. (2013). Doing research in Aotearoa: A Pākehā exemplar of applying *Te Ara Tika* ethical framework. *Kotuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online, 8* (1-2), 64-73.

Cassidy, T. (2022). Sport coaching, education and development: A continually contested terrain. In D. Sturm & R. Kerr (Eds.), *Sport in Aotearoa/New Zealand: Contested terrain.* (pp. 95–106). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003034445-9

Cassidy, T., & Hapeta, J. (2024). Coach development in a rugby union context (New Zealand). In *The Routledge handbook of coach development in sport* (p. 252). https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003160939-20

Cassidy, T., & Kidman, L. (2010). Initiating a national coaching curriculum: a paradigmatic shift? *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, *15*(3), 307–322. https://doi.org/10.1080/17408980903409907

Cassidy, T., Jones, R., & Potrac, P. (2016). *Understanding sports coaching: The social, cultural and pedagogical foundations of coaching practice* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Connolly, G. J. (2017). *Applying social cognitive theory in coaching athletes: The power of positive role models*. *Strategies: A Journal for Physical and Sport Educators*, *30*(3), 23–29. https://doi.org/10.1080/08924562.2017.1297750

Côté, J., Erickson, K., & Duffy, P. (2013). Developing the expert performance coach. In D. Farrow, J. Baker, & C. MacMahon (Eds.), *Developing sport expertise* (2nd ed., pp. 96–109). Routledge.

Côté, J., & Gilbert, W. (2009). An integrative definition of coaching effectiveness and expertise. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, *4*(3), 307-323. https://doi.org/10.1260/174795409789623892

Côté, J., & Hancock, D. J. (2016). Evidence-based policies for youth sport programmes. *International Journal of Sport Policy & Politics, 8*(1), 51-65. https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2014.919338

Côté, J., Kurtz-Favero, M., Smith, H., & Murata, A. (2024). Exploring short-term youth athlete development through the personal assets framework. In N. L. Holt & M. H. McDonough (Ed.), *Positive youth development through sport* (3rd ed., pp. 49-64). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003395867-5

Côté, J., Strachan, L., & Fraser-Thomas, J. (2008). Participation, personal development, and performance through youth sport. In N. L. Holt (Ed.), *Positive youth development through sport* (pp. 34–45). Routledge.

Côté, J., Turnnidge, J., & Evans, M. B. (2014). The dynamic process of development through sport. *Kinesiologia Slovenica, 20*(3), 14–26.

Côté, J., Turnnidge, J., Murata, A., McGuire, C. S., & Martin, L. J. (2020). Youth sport research: Describing the integrated dynamic elements of the personal assets framework. *International Journal of Sport Psychology, 51*(4), 562–578. https://doi.org/10.7352/IJSP.2020.51.562

Côté, J., Turnnidge, J., & Vierimaa, M. (2016). A personal assets approach to youth sport. In K. Green & A. Smith (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of youth sport* (pp. 381–398). Taylor & Francis Group. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203795002-28

Crane, J., & Temple, V. (2015). A systematic review of dropout from organized sport among children and Youth. *European Physical Education Review, 21*(1), 114-131. https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336X14555294

Crowther, J. (2025). Kicking crime into touch? A critical ethnography of rugby union, masculinity, and the limits of positive youth development in youth justice. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, 17*(6), 504–524. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2025.2549902

Day, D., Loudcher, J.-F., & Vaucelle, S. (2025). Sports coaching histories and biographies: A raison d'être. *Sports Coaching Review, 14*(1), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2024.2321804

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior.* Plenum Press.

DiFiori, J. P., Benjamin, H. J., Brenner, J. S., Gregory, A., Jayanthi, N., Landry, G. L., & Luke, A. (2014). Overuse injuries and burnout in youth sports: A position statement from the American Medical Society for Sports Medicine. *British Journal of Sports Medicine, 48*, 287–288. https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2013-093299

DiSanti, J. S., & Erickson, K. (2019). Youth sport specialization: a multidisciplinary scoping systematic review. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, *37*(18), 2094–2105. https://doi.org/10.1080/02640414.2019.1621476

Dohme, L., Rankin-Wright, A. J., & Lara-Bercial, S. (2019). Beyond knowledge transfer: the role of coach developers as motivators for lifelong learning. *International Sport Coaching Journal*, *6*(3), 317-328. https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2019-0034

Eade, A., & Reid, B. (2015). The role of the coach developer in supporting and guiding coach learning: A commentary. *International Sport Coaching Journal, 2*(3), 350-351. https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2015-0074

Eather, N., Miller, A., Jones, B., & Morgan, P. J. (2021). Evaluating the impact of a coach development intervention for improving coaching practices and player outcomes in netball: The MASTER coaching randomized control trial. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching, 16*(3), 439–455. https://doi.org/10.1177/1747954120952069

Erikstad, M. K., Johansen, B. T., Johnsen, M., Haugen, T., & Côté, J. (2021). "As many as possible for as long as possible"—A case study of a soccer team that fosters multiple outcomes. *The Sport Psychologist, 35*(2), 131–141. https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.2020-0107

Falcão, W. R., Bloom, G. A., Caron, J. G., & Gilbert, W, D. (2019). Youth athletes' perceptions of humanistic coaching. *International Journal of Sport Psychology, 50*(6), 523-547. https://doi.org/10.7352/IJSP.2019.50.523

Falcão, W. R., Bloom, G. A., & Sabiston, C. M. (2020). The impact of humanistic coach training on youth athletes' development through sport. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching, 15*(5/6), 610-620. https://doi.org/10.1177/1747954120933975

Finlay, L. (1998). Reflexivity: An essential component for all research? *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 61(10), 453-456. https://doi.org/10.1177/030802269806101005

Flaherty, M., & Sagas, M. (2021). Shifting the paradigm: A constructivist analysis of agency and structure in sustained youth sport participation. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*, 660080. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.660080

Freeman, P. (2020). Social support in sport. In G. Tenenbaum & R. C. Eklund (Eds.), *Handbook of sport psychology* (4th ed., Vol. 1, pp. 447–464). John Wiley & Sons.

Fry, M. D., & Moore, E. W. G. (2019). Motivation in sport: Theory to application. In M. H. Anshel, T. A. Petrie, E. E. Labbe, S. J. Petruzello, & J. A. Steinfeldt (Eds.), *APA handbook of sport and exercise psychology: Vol. 1. Sport psychology* (pp. 273–299). American Psychological Association.

Fyall, G., Cowan, J., Bennett, B., Hapeta, J., & Walters, S. (2024). "Lightbulb moments": The (re)conceptualization of coach development in Aotearoa, New Zealand. *International Sport Coaching Journal*, *11*(2), 238-248. https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2022-0067

Gardner, L., Magee, C., & Vella, S. (2016). Social climate profiles in adolescent sports: Associations with enjoyment and intention to continue. *Journal of Adolescence, 52*, 112. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2016.08.003

Gill, P., Stewart, K., Treasure, E., & Chadwick, B. (2008). Methods of data collection in qualitative research: interviews and focus groups. *British Dental Journal*, *204*(6), 291–295. https://doi.org/10.1038/bdj.2008.192

Gómez-López, M., Valero-Valenzuela, A., Manzano-Sánchez, D., & González-Hernández, J. (2024). Fear of failure and perception of the motivational climate under the coach pressure. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching, 19*(3), 933–943. https://doi.org/10.1177/17479541231223652

Gould, D. (2013). Effective education and development of youth sport coaches. *President's Council on Physical Fitness & Sports Research Digest, 14*(4), 1.

Gould, D. (2016). Quality coaching: What it is and how it's measured. *Athletic Insight, 8*(2), 101–107.

Gould, D. (2019). The current youth sport landscape: Identifying critical Research issues. *Kinesiology Review, 8*(3), 150-161. https://doi.org/10.1123/kr.2019-0034

Grainger, A., Kelly, A. L., Garland, S. W., Baker, J., Johnston, K., & McAuley, A. B. T. (2025). 'Athletes', 'talents', and 'players': Conceptual distinctions and considerations for researchers and practitioners. *Sports Medicine, 55*(1), 9–15. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40279-024-02101-5

Grant, B. M., & Giddings, L. S. (2002). Making sense of methodologies: A paradigm framework for the novice researcher, *Contemporary Nurse, 13*(1), 10-28. https://doi.org/10.5172/conu.13.1.10

Gray, D. E. (2014). *Doing educational research in the real world*. SAGE Publications.

Griffin, L. L., Butler, J. I., & Sheppard, J. (2018). Athlete-centred coaching: Extending the possibilities of a holistic and process-oriented model to athlete development. In S. Pill (Ed.), *Perspectives on athlete-centred coaching* (pp. 9–23). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315102450-2

Guba, E.G. (1981). Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. *Education Communication and Technology*, 29 (2), 75-91.

Harris, J. J., Collins, D., & Nash, C. (2023). Let's hear it from the kids! Examining the experiences, views, and needs of highly committed children involved in youth sport. *Sport Psychologist, 37*(2), 81-91. https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.2022-0114

Hassanin, R, & Light, R. (2014). The influence of cultural context on rugby coaches' beliefs about coaching, *Sports Coaching Review*, *3(2),* 132-144. https://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2015.1013751

Holmes, P., Light, R. L., & Sparkes, A. C. (2025). Everything plays a part doesn't it?: A contemporary model of lifelong coach development in elite sport. *Education Sciences, 15*(7), Article 932. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15070932

Holt, N. L., Neely, K. C., Slater, L. G., Camiré, M., Côté, J., Fraser-Thomas, J., MacDonald, D. J., Strachan, L., & Tamminen, K. A. (2017). *A grounded theory of positive youth development through sport based on results from a qualitative meta-study.* International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology, 10(1), 1–49. https://doi.org/10.1080/1750984X.2016.1180704

Hudson, M., Milne, M., Reynolds, P., Russell, K., & Smith, B. (2010). *Te Ara Tika: Guidelines for Māori research ethics: A framework for researchers and ethics committee members*. Health Research Council of New Zealand.

Hummell, C., Herbison, J. D., Turnnidge, J., & Côté, J. (2023). Assessing the effectiveness of the transformational coaching workshop using behavior change theory. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching, 18*(1), 3-12. https://doi.org/10.1177/17479541221122435

International Council for Coaching Excellence. (2024). *Sport coaches' handbook*. Human Kinetics.

Jacobson, D., & Mustafa, N. (2019). Social identity map: A reflexivity tool for practicing explicit positionality in critical qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *18*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919870075

Jayanthi, N. A., Post, E. G., Laury, T. C., & Fabricant, P. D. (2019). Health consequences of youth sport specialization. *Journal of Athletic Training, 54*(10), 1040–1049. https://doi.org/10.4085/1062-6050-380-18

Jones, T., Allen, J., & Macdonald, S. (2023). The face of coach development: A systematic review of the role of the coach developer. *International Sport Coaching Journal*, *10*, 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2022-0017

Jorgensen, T. M., Gjesdal, S., & Abrahamsen, F. E. (2024). Understanding enjoyment within the context of the children-to-youth sport transition in Norwegian soccer: A mixed methods study. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 75,* 102723. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2024.102723

Jowett, S. (2024). The coach-athlete relationship within a cross-boundary team of experts: A conceptual analysis. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.1080/1750984X.2024.2416968

Jowett, S. (2025). 25 years of relationship research in sport: The quality of the coach-athlete relationship as defined by closeness, commitment, complementarity and co-orientation (3+1Cs). *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 80*, 102909. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2025.102909

Jowett, S., & Shanmugam, V. (2016). *Relational coaching in sport: Its psychological underpinnings and practical effectiveness*. Taylor & Francis.

Keegan, R., Spray, C., Harwood, C., & Lavallee, D. (2014). A qualitative synthesis of research into social motivational influences across the athletic career span. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, 6*(4), 537. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2013.857710

Kelly, A. L., Calvo, A. L., dos Santos, S. D. L., & Jiménez Sáiz, S. L. (2022). Special issue: talent identification and development in youth sports. *Sports, 10*(12), 189. https://doi.org/10.3390/sports10120189

Kidd, J. (2022). Researching health in Aotearoa New Zealand: Mana rangahau hauora table [Course resource]. Canvas. https://canvas.aut.ac.nz/courses/16020/files/4531526

Kidman, L., & Keelty, D. (2015). Coaching and coach development in New Zealand. *International Sport Coaching Journal, 2*(3), 330–338. https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2015-0031

Kidman, L., & Lombardo, B. J. (2010). *Athlete-centred coaching: Developing decision makers*. IPC Resources.

Lefebvre, J. S., Evans, M. B., Turnnidge, J., Gainforth, H. L., & Côté, J. (2016). Describing and classifying coach development programmes: A synthesis of empirical research and applied practice. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching, 11,* 887–899. https://doi.org/10.1177/1747954116676116

Lefebvre, J. S., Turnnidge, J., & Côté, J. (2021). A systematic observation of coach leadership behaviours in youth sport. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 33*(3), 377–386. https://doi-org/10.1080/10413200.2019.1609620

Levitt, H. M., Motulsky, S. L., Wertz, F. J., Morrow, S. L., & Ponterotto, J. G. (2017). Recommendations for designing and reviewing qualitative research in psychology: Promoting methodological integrity. *Qualitative Psychology, 4*(1), 2–22. https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000082

Li, L., Olson, H. O., Tereschenko, I., Wang, A., & McCleery, J. (2024). Impact of coach education on coaching effectiveness in youth sport: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, *20*(1), 340-356. https://doi.org/10.1177/17479541241283442

Liamputtong, P. (2011). *Focus group methodology: Principles and practice*. SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473957657

Light, R. L., & Harvey, S. (2017). Positive pedagogy for sport coaching. *Sport, Education and Society, 22*(2), 271-287. https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2015.1015977

Lundberg, T. R., Lind, J., Baker, J., Lundkvist, E., Lascu, A., Johnston, K., Côté, J., Fransen, J., & Ivarsson, A. (2025). Evidence based framework for the development of young athletes in a national sports context [Preprint]. *SportRxiv*. https://doi.org/10.51224/SRXIV.544

MacDonald, D. J., Côté, J., Eys, M., & Deakin, J. (2011). The role of enjoyment and motivational climate in relation to the personal development of team sport athletes. *Sport Psychologist, 25*(1), 32-46. https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.25.1.32

Mageau, G. A., & Vallerand, R. J. (2003). The coach–athlete relationship: A motivational model. *Journal of Sports Sciences, 21*(11), 883–904. https://doi.org/10.1080/0264041031000140374

McGowan, J., Walters, S., & Whatman, C. (2021). 10,000 hours and early specialization: Short term gains or long term pain? In A. Whitehead & J. Coe (Eds.), *Myths of sport coaching* (pp. 122–137). Sequoia Books.

McGrath, C., Palmgren, P. J., & Liljedahl, M. (2019). Twelve tips for conducting qualitative research interviews. *Medical Teacher*, *41*(9), 1002–1006. https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2018.1497149

McQuade, S., & Nash, C. (2015). The role of the coach developer in supporting and guiding coach learning. *International Sport Coaching Journal, 2*, 339–346. https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2015-0059

Mertens, D. M. (2015). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Moore, M., Blom, L., Califano, K., Hussey, K., Farello, A., Vasiloff, O., Gabler, T., & Sullivan, M. (2021). Redesigning a youth soccer program: Holistic development of athletes. *Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal*, *38*(4), 409–421. https://doi-org/10.1007/s10560-021-00770-z

Muriwai, E., Manuela, S., Cartwright, C., & Rowe, L. (2023). Māori exercise professionals: Using Indigenous knowledge to connect the space between performance and wellbeing. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, *35*(1), 83–109. https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2022.2075982

Nicholls, J. G. (1984). Achievement motivation: Conceptions of ability, subjective experience, task choice, and performance. *Psychological Review, 91*(3), 328–346. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.91.3.328

O′Connor, D., Bennett, B., Perry, K., Fyall, G., Rogers, A., & Morley, D. (2024). Coach development in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand: Evolutions and current directions. In D. O′Connor, B. Bennett, K. Perry, G. Fyall, A. Rogers, & D. Morley (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of coach development in sport* (1st ed., pp. 23–38). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003160939-3

O'Rourke, D. J., Smith, R. E., Smoll, F. L., & Cumming, S. P. (2014). Relations of parent- and coach-initiated motivational climates to young athletes' self-esteem, performance anxiety, and autonomous motivation: Who is more influential? *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 26*(4), 395–408. https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2014.907838

Palaganas, E. C., Sanchez, M. C., Molintas, M. P., & Caricativo, R. D. (2017). Reflexivity in qualitative research: *A journey of learning*. *The Qualitative Report, 22*(2), 426–438. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2017.2552

Partington, M., & Cushion, C. J. (2025). Re-visiting a critical analysis of coaching philosophy: Deconstruction to reconstruction. *Sport, Education and Society*. https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2025.2505941

Potrac, P., Jones, R., Hall, E., Ives, B., Morgan, C., & Nelson, L. (2025). Interpretivism: Exploring meaning making, intentional action, and group life in coaching research. In L. Nelson, R. Groom, & P. Potrac (Eds.), *Research Methods in Sports Coaching* (2nd ed., pp. 65–75). Routledge.

Potrac, P., Jones, R., L, & Nelson, L. (2014). Interpretivism. In L. Nelson, R. Groom, & P. Potrac (Eds.), *Research methods in sports coaching* (pp. 31-41). Routledge.

Reay, S., Khoo, C., Terry, G., Collier, G., Dallas, T., & Smith, V. (2023). *Are you making a meal out of research?: A recipe for research success.* Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003348924

Rich, K., & Breunig, M. (2022). Cultural safety: a lens to consider leisure provision in cross-cultural contexts. *Managing Sport & Leisure*, *27*(4), 366–380. https://doi.org/10.1080/23750472.2020.1800506

Robertson, M., Hague, C., Evans, M. B., & Martin, L. J. (2019). Do participant reporting practices in youth sport research adequately represent the diversity of sport contexts? *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, *45*, 1-9. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2019.101559

Rogers, A., Keelty, D., & Youman, N. (2024). Sport coach assessment in New Zealand: A people-focused approach. In *Sport coach education, development, and assessment: International perspectives* (p. 216). https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003472438-14

Rouquette, O. Y., Knight, C. J., Lovett, V. E., & Heuzé, J.-P. (2020). Parent-athlete relationships: A central but underexamined consideration within sport psychology. *Sport & Exercise Psychology Review*, *16*(2), 5–23. https://doi-org/10.53841/bpssepr.2020.16.2.5

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *The American Psychologist*, *55*(1), 68–78. https://doi.org/10.1037//0003-066x.55.1.68

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2017). *Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Ryou, J., Yoo, W., Cho, O., & Cope, E. (2025). Am I becoming better? A life-long and life-wide analysis of sport coaches' ecological realities and (mal)adaptation in the workplace. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, 17*(4), 296–312. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2025.2467378

Saarinen, M., Ryba, T. V., Ronkainen, N. J., Aunola, K., & Rintala, H. (2020). 'I was excited to train, so I didn't have problems with the coach': Dual career athletes' experiences of (dis)empowering motivational climates. *Sport in Society, 23*(4), 629–644. https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2019.1669322

Santos, F., Camiré, M., MacDonald, D. J., Campos, H., Conceição, M., & Silva, A. (2019). Process and outcome evaluation of a positive youth development-focused online coach education course. *International Sport Coaching Journal, 6*(1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2017-0101

Scales, P. C. (2023). The compete learn honor approach to coaching and player development: Promoting performance growth while enhancing well-being. *Journal of Sport Psychology in Action, 14*(1), 51–60. https://doi.org/10.1080/21520704.2022.2104979

Sheppard, L. C., & Raby, R. (2024). Off track or on point? Side comments in focus groups with teens. *Qualitative Research, 24*(3), 628–646. https://doi.org/10.1177/14687941231176931Silva, A. S., Fonseca, A. M., & Barreiros, A. (2019). Exploring the importance of coaches in the development of the sports career in handball: The perception of athletes from higher and lower levels of success. *Cuadernos de Psicología del Deporte, 19*(1), 106–120. https://doi.org/10.6018/cpd.347541

Silva, E. J. D., Evans, M. B., Lefebvre, J. S., Allan, V., Côté, J., & Palmeira, A. (2020). A systematic review of intrapersonal coach development programs: Examining the development and evaluation of programs to elicit coach reflection. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, *15*(5-6), 818-837. https://doi.org/10.1177/1747954120943508

Smith, A. L., & Ullrich-French, S. (2020). Peers and the sport experience. In G. Tenenbaum & R. C. Eklund (Eds.), *Handbook of sport psychology* (4th ed., Vol. 1, pp. 410–428). John Wiley & Sons.

Smith, B., & McGannon, K. R. (2018) Developing rigor in qualitative research: problems and opportunities within sport and exercise psychology. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, *11*(1), 101-121. https://doi.org/10.1080/1750984X.2017.1317357

Smith, K., Burns, C., O'Neill, C., Quinn, N., Winkelman, N., Wilkie, M., & Coughlan, E. K. (2024). An evaluation of the impact of the Irish Rugby Football Union Coach Education Framework on the coach–athlete dyad across the age and stage spectrum in rugby union. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching, 19*(5), 1927-1939. https://doi.org/10.1177/17479541241258702

Smoll, F. L., Smith, R. E., & Cumming, S. P. (2007). Effects of a motivational climate intervention for coaches on changes in young athletes' achievement goal orientations. *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology*, *1*(1), 23-46. https://doi.org/10.1123/jcsp.1.1.23

Sparkes, A. C., & Smith, B. (2013). *Qualitative research methods in sport, exercise and health: From process to product.* Taylor & Francis Group

Sport New Zealand | Ihi Aotearoa. (2016). *Sport NZ talent plan 2016–2020*. https://sportnz.org.nz/resources/talent-plan/

Sport New Zealand | Ihi Aotearoa. (2017). *The value of sport*. https://sportnz.org.nz/resources/the-value-of-sport/

Sport New Zealand | Ihi Aotearoa. (2020). *Every body active: Strategic direction 2020–2032*. https://sportnz.org.nz/resources/every-body-active-strategic-direction-2020-2032/

Sport New Zealand | Ihi Aotearoa. (2023). *Coaching for Impact*. Retrieved March 7, 2026, from https://sportnz.org.nz/resources/coaching-for-impact/

Sport New Zealand | Ihi Aotearoa. (2024). *Active NZ: Snapshot of the participation landscape 2023*. https://sportnz.org.nz/media/ladhjrz1/active-nz-snapshot-of-the-participation-landscape_july2024.pdf

Sport New Zealand | Ihi Aotearoa. (2025). *Active NZ report 2024–25*. https://sportnz.org.nz/media/wfzflqoq/sport-nz-active-nz-report-24_25-final-v2.pdf

Sport New Zealand | Ihi Aotearoa. (n.d.). *About Balance is Better*. https://sportnz.org.nz/media/5253/about-balance-is-better-2_4.pdf

Standage, M., & Ryan, R. M. (2020). Self-determination theory in sport and exercise. In G. Tenenbaum & R. C. Eklund (Eds.), *Handbook of sport psychology* (4th ed., Vol. 1, pp. 37-56). Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119568124.ch3

Stuntz, C., & Weiss, M. (2010). Motivating children and adolescents to sustain a physically active lifestyle. *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine, 4*(5), 433–444. https://doi.org/10.1177/1559827610368779

Subijana, C. L. de, Martin, L. J., Tejón, O., & Côté, J. (2021). Adolescent athletes' perceptions of both their coaches' leadership and their personal motivation. *Perceptual & Motor Skills, 128*(2), 813–830. https://doi.org/10.1177/0031512520985760

Tajir, G. (2018). Ethical treatment of participants in public health research. *Journal of Public Health and Emergency, 2*(1). https://doi.org/10.21037/jphe.2017.12.04

Taylor, L.-A., Lander, P., & Rayner, R. (2024). Youth basketball in New Zealand: Establishing performance norms in the context of Balance is Better. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Science*, *8*(1), 65-73. https://jses.net/youth-basketball-in-new-zealand-establishing-performance-norms-in-the-context-of-balance-is-better/

Terry, G., Hayfield, N., Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2017). Thematic analysis. In C. Willig & W. Rogers (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research in psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 17–37). SAGE Publications.

Thompson-Burdine, J., Thorne, S., & Sandhu, G. (2021). Interpretive description: A flexible qualitative methodology for medical education research. *Medical Education*, 55(3) 336–343. https://doi.org/10.1111/medu.14380

Thorne, S. (2016). *Interpretive description: Qualitative research for applied practice*. Routledge.

Thorne, S. (2025). *Interpretive description: Qualitative research for applied practice* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Trainor, L. R., & Bundon, A. (2021) Developing the craft: reflexive accounts of doing reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, *13*(5), 705-726. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2020.1840423

Turnnidge, J., & Côté, J. (2019). Observing coaches' leadership behaviours: The development of the Coach Leadership Assessment System (CLAS). *Measurement in Physical Education and Exercise Science, 23*(3), 214–226. https://doi.org/10.1080/1091367X.2019.1602835

Turnnidge, J., Côté, J., & Hancock, D. J. (2014). Positive youth development from sport to life: Explicit or implicit transfer? *Quest, 66*(2), 203-217. https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2013.867275

Turnnidge, J., & Côté, J. (2017). Transformational coaching workshop: Applying a person-centred approach to coach development programs. *International Sport Coaching Journal, 4*(3), 314-325. https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2017-0046

United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee. (2020). *Quality coaching framework* (Full 2020 ed.). https://assets.contentstack.io/v3/assets/blt9e58afd92a18a0fc/blt626eb32d20a35fe6/644959917f34014b36beef89/USOPC_QCF_Full_2020.pdf

Vaismoradi, M., Turunen, H. and Bondas, T. (2013). Content analysis and thematic analysis: Implications for conducting a qualitative descriptive study. *Nursing & Health Science, 15*, 398-405. https://doi.org/10.1111/nhs.12048

Vansteenkiste, M., Ryan, R. M., & Soenens, B. (2020). Basic psychological need theory: Advancements, critical themes, and future directions. *Motivation and Emotion, 44*(1), 1–31. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-019-09818-1

Vierimaa, M., Erickson, K., Côté, J., & Gilbert, W. (2012). Positive youth development: A measurement framework for sport. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 7(3), 601–614. https://doi.org/10.1260/1747-9541.7.3.601

Vierimaa, M., Turnnidge, J., Bruner, M. W., & Côté, J. (2017). Just for the fun of it: Coaches' perceptions of an exemplary community youth sport program. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy, 22*(6), 603–617. https://doi.org/10.1080/17408989.2017.1341473

Visek, A. J., Ivarsson, A., Putt, G., & Learner, J. L. (2022). To have fun: What it means and its significance in sport. In M. Toms & R. Jeanes (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of coaching children in sport* (pp. 51–61). Taylor & Francis Group. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003199359-7

Wall, J., Baugh, L., Pradhan, K., Beauchamp, M., Marshall, S., & Young, R. (2019). The coach-parent relationship in Canadian competitive figure skating: An interpretive description. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 45,* 101577. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2019.101577

Walters, S., & Kidman, L. (2015). Humanistic coaching. In J. Wallis & J. Lambert (Eds.), *Becoming a sports coach* (pp. 83–96). Taylor & Francis.

Walters, S. R., Minjares, V., Bradbury, T., Lucas, P., Lenton, A., Spencer, K., & Spencer, S. (2022). Promoting a culture change in junior and youth sport in New Zealand. *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*, *4*, 356. https://doi.org/10.3389/fspor.2022.811603

Walters, S., Rogers, A., & Oldham, A. R. H. (2019). A competency-based approach to coach learning: The Sport New Zealand Coach Developer program. In C. Nash & C. Martindale (Eds.), *Coach education and development in sport* (pp. 154–165). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429351037-13

Willemsen, R. F., Aardoom, J. J., Chavannes, N. H., & Versluis, A. (2023). Online synchronous focus group interviews: Practical considerations. *Qualitative Research*, *23*(6), 1810–1820. https://doi.org/10.1177/14687941221110161

Wilson, O. W. A., Whatman, C., Walters, S., Keung, S., Enari, D., Rogers, A., Millar, S.-K., Ferkins, L., Hinckson, E., Hapeta, J., Sam, M., & Richards, J. (2022). The value of sport: Wellbeing benefits of sport participation during adolescence. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 19*(14), 8579. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19148579

Witt, P. A., & Dangi, T. B. (2018). Why children/youth drop out of sports. *Journal of Park & Recreation Administration*, *36*(3), 191–199. https://doi-org/10.18666/JPRA-2018-V36-I3-8618

Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Approval

Appendix B: Focus Group Information and Forms

- Participant information sheet
- Consent form
- Assent form
- Parent guardian assent form
- Focus group question guide

Appendix C: Sample of Thematic Analysis

Appendix A: Ethics Approval

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

5 June 2024

Simon Walters
Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences

Dear Simon

Re Ethics Application: **24/86 A qualitative analysis on the influence of Sport New Zealand's Coaching for Impact programme on youth athlete sporting experiences.**

Thank you for your responses to AUTEC's conditions.

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 30 May 2027.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research and as approved by AUTEC.
2. All public facing documents must have the AUTEC approval number and be of a high standard of spelling and grammar. Dates on the Information Sheet(s) and Consent Form(s) must be consistent.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented.
4. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date.
5. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project.
6. Any serious or adverse events must be reported to AUTEC, this includes unforeseen issues that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
7. AUTEC grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management permission for access from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

The application number and title need to be referenced on all correspondence related to this project.

All forms are available online http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics

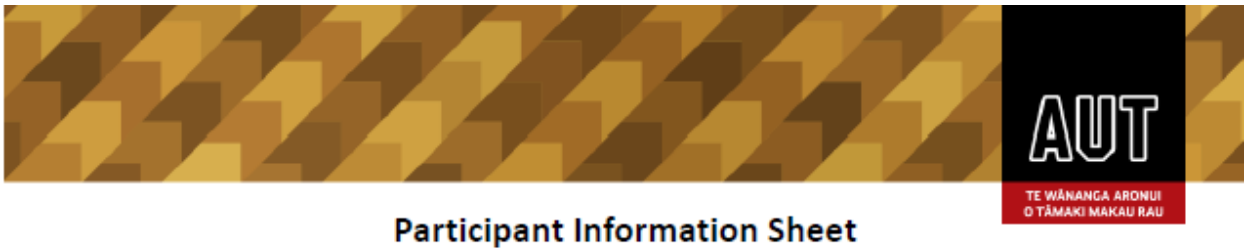
For any enquiries, please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz
(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEC Secretariat
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: mzc2291@autuni.ac.nz

Auckland University of Technology, D-88, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, New Zealand.
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316: E: ethics@aut.ac.nz: www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics

Appendix B: Focus Group Information and Forms



Participant Information Sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced: 23/05/2024

Kia ora, I, Ben Owers, a post graduate student at the Auckland University of Technology (AUT), would like to invite you to participate in a research project. This study is being carried out as part of a Master of Sports, Exercise and Health, and a review of a Sport New Zealand Ihi Aotearoa (SNZ) coach development project.

Project Title

Qualitative analysis on the influence of Coaching for Impact on youth athletes sporting experiences.

What is the purpose of this research?

This research project aims to explore youth athletes perceptions of the influence of SNZ's Coaching for Impact (CFI) program on the quality of their sporting experiences. CFI is a national coach development initiative which seeks to increase the number of high quality youth sport coaches in New Zealand, and is currently in a pilot phase and undergoing review. To support this review, this study will explore the sporting experiences of youth athletes from a variety of sporting backgrounds, who are coached by CFI participants. The findings of this research may also be used for academic publications and presentations.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You are being recruited for this research through the CFI athlete survey link that your coach has forwarded to you because you are a 13 to 18 year old youth sport participant, who is or has been coached by a member of the 2024 CFI program. It is intended that all participants coached by CFI receive this information and that approximately 30 to 36 participants will be included in this research. If interest in registration surpasses the targeted 36 participants, criteria such as demographics, location, and sports affiliation will be used to choose a diverse range of participants.

You may be coached by a member of the CFI program but **not eligible** to take part in this research if you are a youth athlete whose parent or legal guardian is both your coach and a member of the CFI program. This is required to minimise the risk of a participant sharing any sensitive discussion details back to a parent/guardian, who is also their coach, and to help to ensure a youth individual is not put in a compromised position where they are coerced to share confidential information.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

After registering your interest, you will receive email confirmation about whether or not you are required to participate in this study. This email will also contain the participant information form (this document) as well as consent, assent and parent/guardian consent forms. Please review these forms and follow the instructions below if you would like to participate:

1. If you are 16 years or older, please sign a participant consent form.
2. If you are 13-15 years old, please sign a participant assent form and get your parent/legal guardian to sign a parent/guardian consent form.
3. Please scan or take a photo of the relevant forms and email them to mzc2291@autuni.ac.nz

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

Information Sheet Produced: 23/05/2024

What will happen in this research?

If you choose to take part in this research, you will be asked to participate in an online focus group. This focus group will involve you and four to five other members of your team or training group meeting to discuss your recent sporting experiences. In particular, what influences how you feel about sport, what contributes to your enjoyment of sport and any recent changes in your sporting experiences.

The focus group will take place online via a Microsoft Teams video meeting. I will contact you and the other participants to arrange a suitable time. It will involve me, the researcher, introducing myself and other members of the group. I will explain how the group will work, and answer any questions you may have. Then, I will facilitate a group discussion about your sporting experiences. It is estimated that the focus group will take around 45 to 60 minutes.

The focus group will be video-recorded with the Microsoft Teams meeting software recording feature. Written notes will also be taken. The recording will be used to create a written transcript of the group discussion which I will analyse as part of the research. I will transfer the recording to a password-protected file and ensure this is not accessible by anyone apart from the research supervisors and myself.

What are the discomforts and risks?

The only identified risk of participation in this research is a member of a focus group sharing the identity of others to people outside of the focus group.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

The risk will be mitigated by participants, and their parents/legal guardians if they're under the age of 16, signing a written agreement that they will not share the identity of other participants and what is discussed during focus group meetings with people outside of the group itself. If participants or their parents/legal guardians are unable to agree to this commitment they will be asked not to participate.

What are the benefits?

Participants in this research will benefit by being empowered to share their perceptions on youth sport and coaching. This has the potential to enhance participants mana and enable them to add valued contributions to improving the future sport experiences for young people in New Zealand. By listening to other individuals input, participants may also increase their understanding of positive youth sport experiences and quality coaching practices.

SNZ, the research funder, and the wider sport community will benefit from the findings of this study, as it will explore and provide rich descriptions of youth participant viewpoints. These viewpoints will help to inform sport leaders to better understand the experiences of youth participants, and may contribute to the planning and delivery of future youth sport and coach education initiatives. Finally, the research will contribute to a dissertation which I am completing for a Master of Sport, Exercise and Health.

How will my privacy be protected?

I will keep all participants' identities, and the information they provide during the focus group, confidential. To ensure your identity is not known to anyone outside the research team, all information collected, including your registration of interest, will be kept confidential by myself, the researcher, and the research supervisors. I will store signed consent forms separately from the focus group transcript and notes, and your name will be changed to a participant ID number whenever it appears in the transcript.

Information Sheet Produced: 23/05/2024

All study data will be stored on a secure database at AUT and will be destroyed six years after completion of the publication of study findings. I will be responsible for making sure that your data is only for the purposes mentioned in this information sheet.

Who pays for this research?

SNZ are funding this research project. The are no financial costs for participants. It is expected that the time commitment for participants will be approximately one and a quarter hours. This includes a one hour online focus group meeting as well as reading research information and signing relevant agreements.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

Following an offer to participate in this research, it is requested that you accept or decline this invitation within four weeks. A follow up reminder will be sent out to all participants via email after two weeks.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

I will send a summary of the research to you at the end of the study via the contact email that you provide, at your request.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Simon Walters, simon.walters@aut.ac.nz.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, ethics@aut.ac.nz, (+649) 921 9999 ext. 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher - Ben Owers - mzc2291@autuni.ac.nz

Project Supervisor – Simon Walters - simon.walters@aut.ac.nz

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 05-06-2024, AUTEC Reference number 24/86.

Information Sheet Produced: 23/05/2024

Consent Form

For completion by research participants aged 16 years and older.

Project title: Qualitative analysis on the influence of Coaching for Impact on youth athletes sporting experiences.

Project Supervisor: Simon Walters

Researcher: Ben Owers

- ○ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 23 May 2024.
- ○ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ○ I understand that the identity of my fellow participants and our discussions in the focus group is confidential to the group and I agree to keep this information confidential.
- ○ I understand that notes will be taken during the focus group and that a video recording of the meeting will be captured and the audio will be transcribed.
- ○ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ○ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then, while it may not be possible to destroy all records of the focus group discussion of which I was part, I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- ○ I agree to take part in this research.
- ○ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes○ No○

Participants Signature: .....

Participants Name: .....

Participants Contact Email: .....

Date: .....

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 05-06-2024.

AUTEC Reference number 24/86.

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Assent Form

For completion by people aged 13 to 15 years. This must be accompanied by a parent/guardian Consent Form.

Project title: Qualitative analysis on the influence of Coaching for Impact on youth athletes experiences

Project Supervisor: Simon Walters

Researcher: Ben Owers

- ○ I have read and understood the sheet telling me what will happen in this study and why it is important.
- ○ I have been able to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ○ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that a video recording of the meeting will be captured and the audio will be transcribed.
- ○ I understand that the identity of my fellow participants and our discussions in the focus group is confidential to the group and I agree to keep this information confidential.
- ○ I understand that I can stop being part of this study whenever I want and that it is perfectly ok for me to do this.
- ○ If I stop being part of the study, I understand that then I will be offered the choice between having any information that that other people can know is about me removed or letting the researcher keep using it. I also understand that sometimes, if the results of the research have been written, some information about me may not be able to be removed.
- ○ I agree to take part in this research.

Participants signature: .....

Participants Name: .....

Participant and/or Parent/Guardians Contact Email:

.....

.....

Date: .....

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 05-06-2024.

AUTEC Reference number 24/86.

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Parent/Guardian Consent Form

For use in conjunction with the Assent Form when people 13-15 years of age are participants in the research.

Project title: Qualitative analysis on the influence of Coaching for Impact on youth athletes experiences

Project Supervisor: Simon Walters

Researcher: Ben Owers

- ○ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 23 May 2024.
- ○ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ○ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that a video recording of the meeting will be captured and transcribed.
- ○ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and that I may withdraw my child/children from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ○ I understand that if I withdraw my child/children from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to my child/children removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of our data may not be possible.
- ○ I agree to my child/children taking part in this research.
- ○ I understand that my child is able to refuse to give assent to take part in this research.
- ○ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes○ No○

Child Name :.....

Parent/Guardian Signature: .....

Parent/Guardian Name: .....

Parent/Guardian Contact Email: .....

Date: .....

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 05-06-2024.

AUTEC Reference number 24/86.

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Focus Group Question Guide

Within the focus group sessions, a semi structured interview process will be followed. Below is a list of predetermined questions to help provide a base structure to the start of group conversations.

Note, all interviews will start with introductions, a summary of the research project and rules for the interview. These include keeping the information discussed confidential and not using the name or any identifying features of their coach(s).

1. How long have you been involved in your sport?

2. What is it about sport that you enjoy the most?

3. Do you enjoy your current sporting environment?
    a. People mentioned scrimmage/practise matches – WHY?
    b. If so, why?

4. Is there anything you don't enjoy? What supports or impacts this?

5. Do you feel competent in your sporting environment?
    a. Do you feel like you are good at your sport?
    b. If so, why?

6. Do you feel a sense of connection to your sporting environment?
    a. People have mentioned team culture, but WHY?
    b. If so, why?

7. Do you feel like you can be yourself and make decisions within the team environment?
    a. If so, why?

8. Have you noticed any significant changes in your sporting environment over the past season?
    a. If yes, why?
    b. What about the coaching approach?

9. Based off our discussions, who has the biggest influence on the quality of your sports experiences, and why?
    a. Do athletes have a big influence

Appendix C: Sample of Thematic Analysis

Data Extract (Participant Voice)	Code	Initial Theme	Final Theme
FG3, P3 “I definitely think I learned a lot about basics through actual coaching, but most my improvement have come from the practise matches. Actually seeing what works for me and stuff.”	1) Free play 2) Training Design	Coach creates a quality environment	Coach Puts It All Together
FG2, P2 “I think building connections on the team is really important, and coach's helped us do that. He took us into a room and like gave us different questions and find out about different people”	Team Culture	Coach creates a quality environment	Coach Puts It All Together
FG4, P2 “Well the coach always tells me good job after I do my races, which is always nice, even if it's not been the best race and something bad happens. They're still quite supportive, which is good.”	Supportive Coach	Importance of positive coach-athlete relationship	I have a good connection with the coach
FG5, P4 “Since like he was showing like a nice amount of respect, I was able to respect him as well. So that was able to make it like a good bond.”	Respect for coach	Importance of positive coach-athlete relationship	I have a good connection with the coach
FG1, P1 “I reckon it's a lot with your teammates too. I reckon, your teammates encourage you a lot. They say that you do good in some areas. You just try keep doing that, and they say you're bad in some areas, you just try and improve on it.	Teammates Influence	It’s about the people	The people around me matter
FG3, P1 “There was this one tournament that I went to and I was like very young and I did bad at it. And then like it made me not want to do fencing for a while, but then I got like, I got over it	1) Negative Experience 2) Competition	Feeling competent is important to me	It’s important that I achieve what I want to in sport

End of thesis.