

The Cultural Challenge

Dreams and dilemmas for young talented footballers.

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Outline of the Presentation

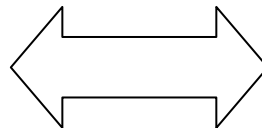


- Intro: Talent and culture
- 1. The case of Danish football (soccer)
- 2. Talent identification – a matter of taste?
- 3. Balancing dreams and dilemmas
- Concluding thoughts
- Your questions



What is talent?

Identification of talents as early as possible →
Increase the possibility for developing the talents over a longer period.



More than difficult to identify precise or even objective criteria for talent identification.



(Simonton, Psychol.Rev. 1999, vol.106; Morris, Jour.of Sport Sci. 2000, vol.18;
Williams & Reilly, Jour. Of Sport Sci. 2000; vol.18; Tranckle & Cushion, Quest 2000, vol.58)

What is talent?



“Scientists need to determine the nature of the subjective and implicit criteria that coaches and scouts use to identify talented players”

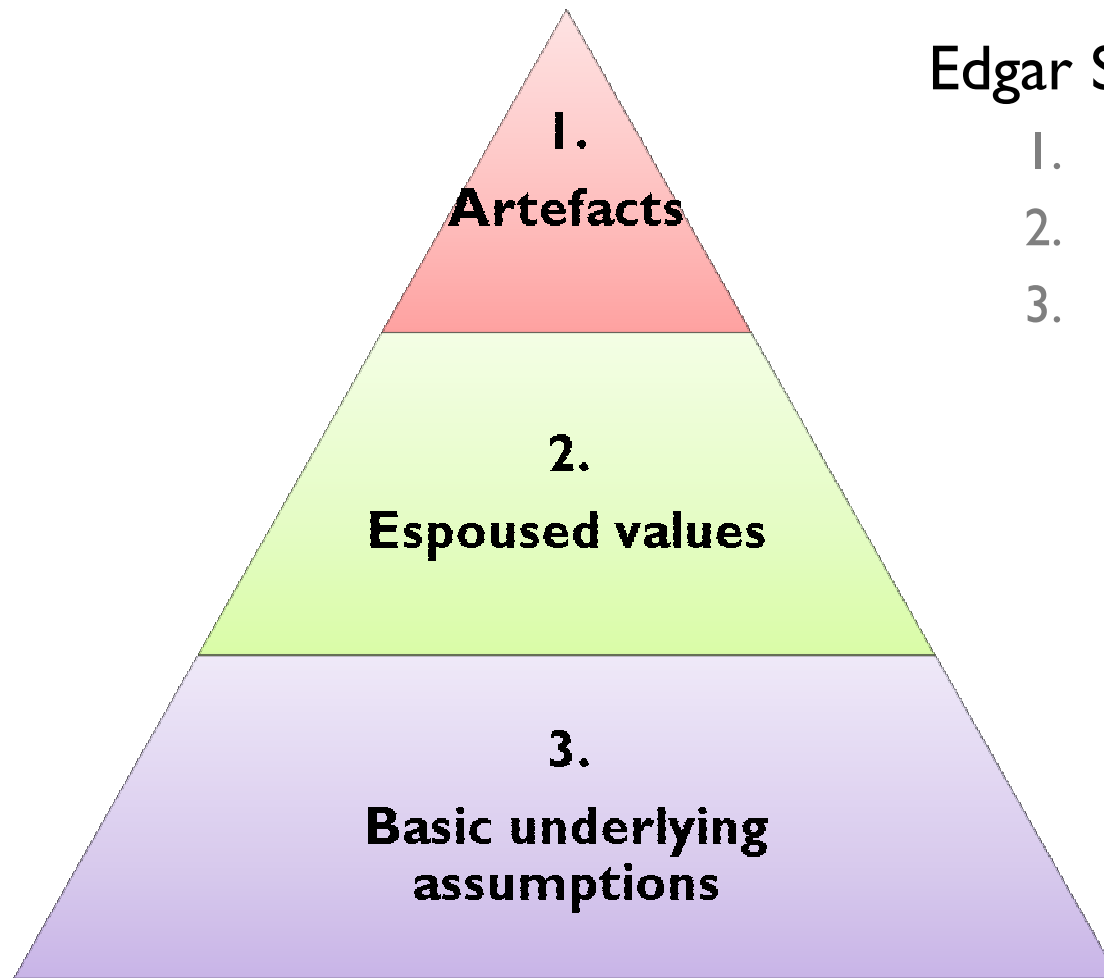
(Williams & Reilly, 2000, p. 664).



Why focus on the coach? Because...

... "talent is a **social construction**. It is a label of approval we (*the coaches*) place on traits that have a **positive value** in the particular **context** in which we live" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, p.23)

What is culture?



Edgar Schein: 3 levels of culture

1. What we show each other
2. What we talk about
3. What we take for granted

Football talents on their way

– a research project at Uni. Of Southern Den.

1

- How many talents reached the top in 1991 - 2006?

2

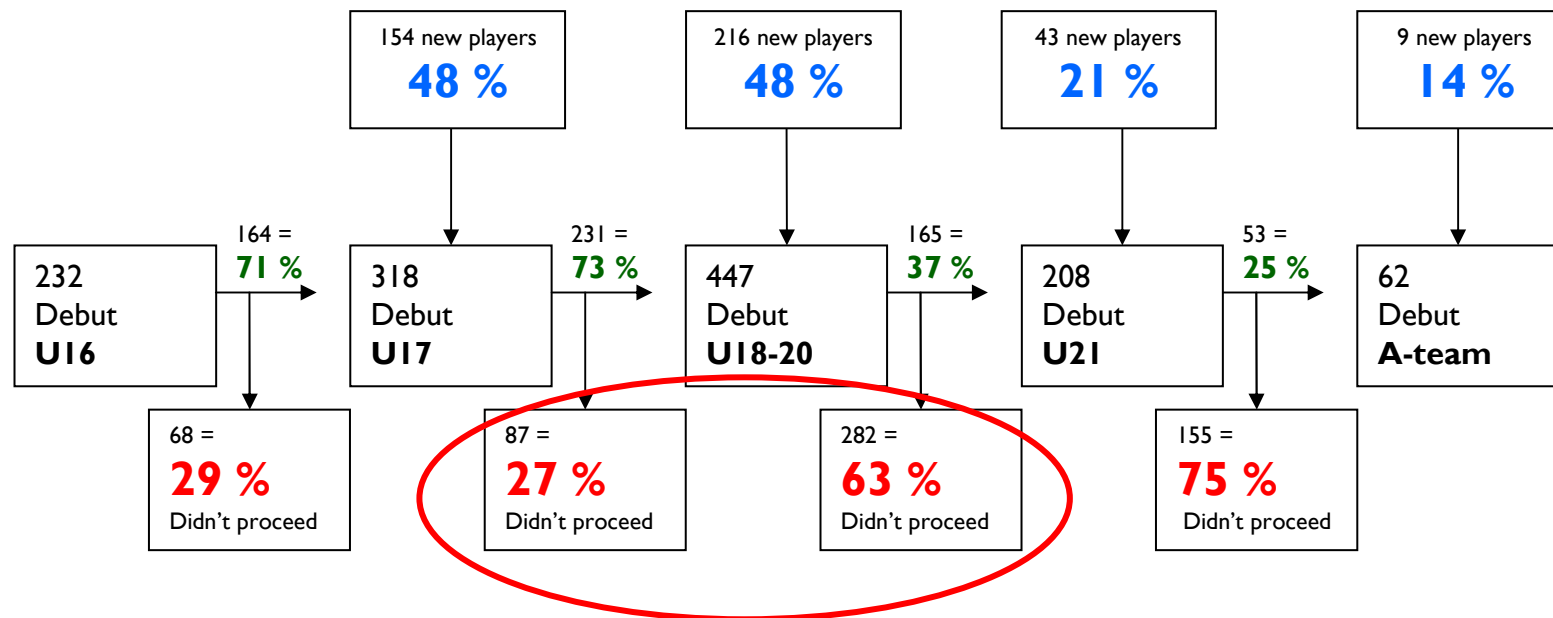
- Top-level football coaches' practical sense of talent

3

- Narratives about football career and educational choices

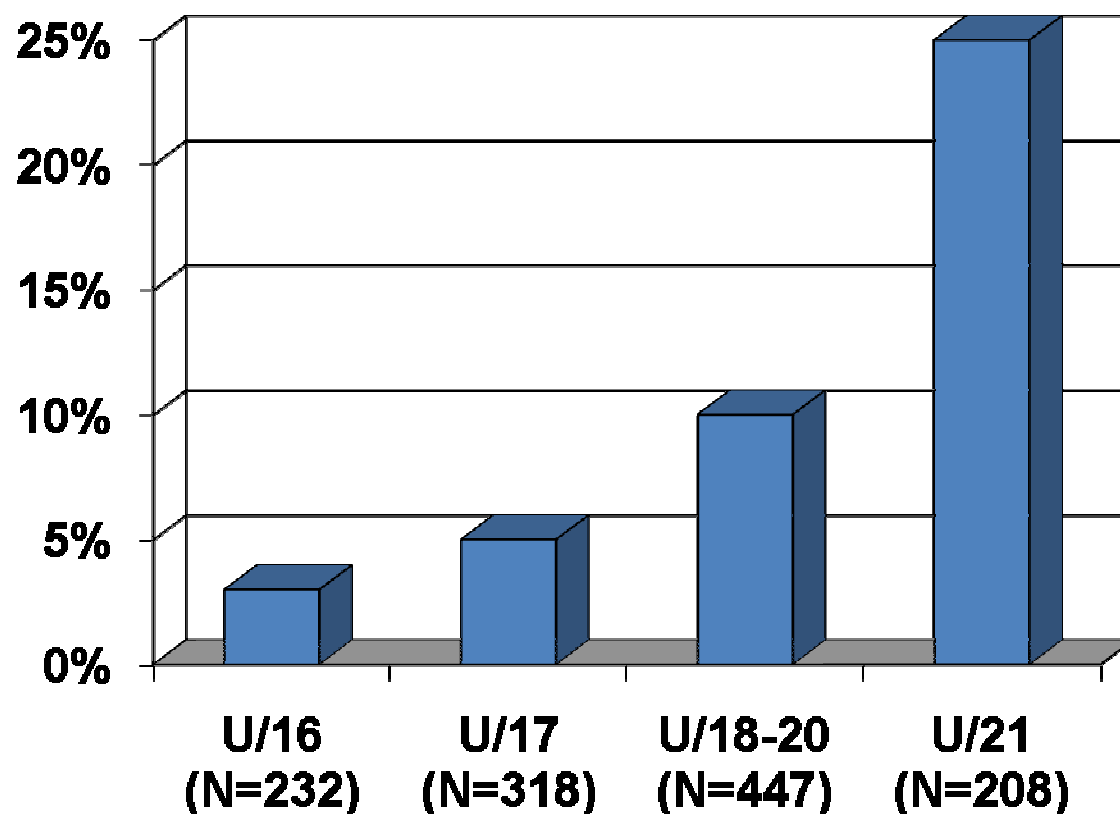
I. How many talents reached the top in 1991 - 2006?

- 635 players born in 1972-1987
- Played one or more games for Denmark
- First appearance on the A national team: 1991-2006



I. How many talents reached the top in 1991 - 2006?

Percentage of players, who debuted on the A national team.



2. Top-level football coaches' practical sense of talent

AIM

- To explore the coach's practical sense and the knowledge he uses when he identifies football talents.

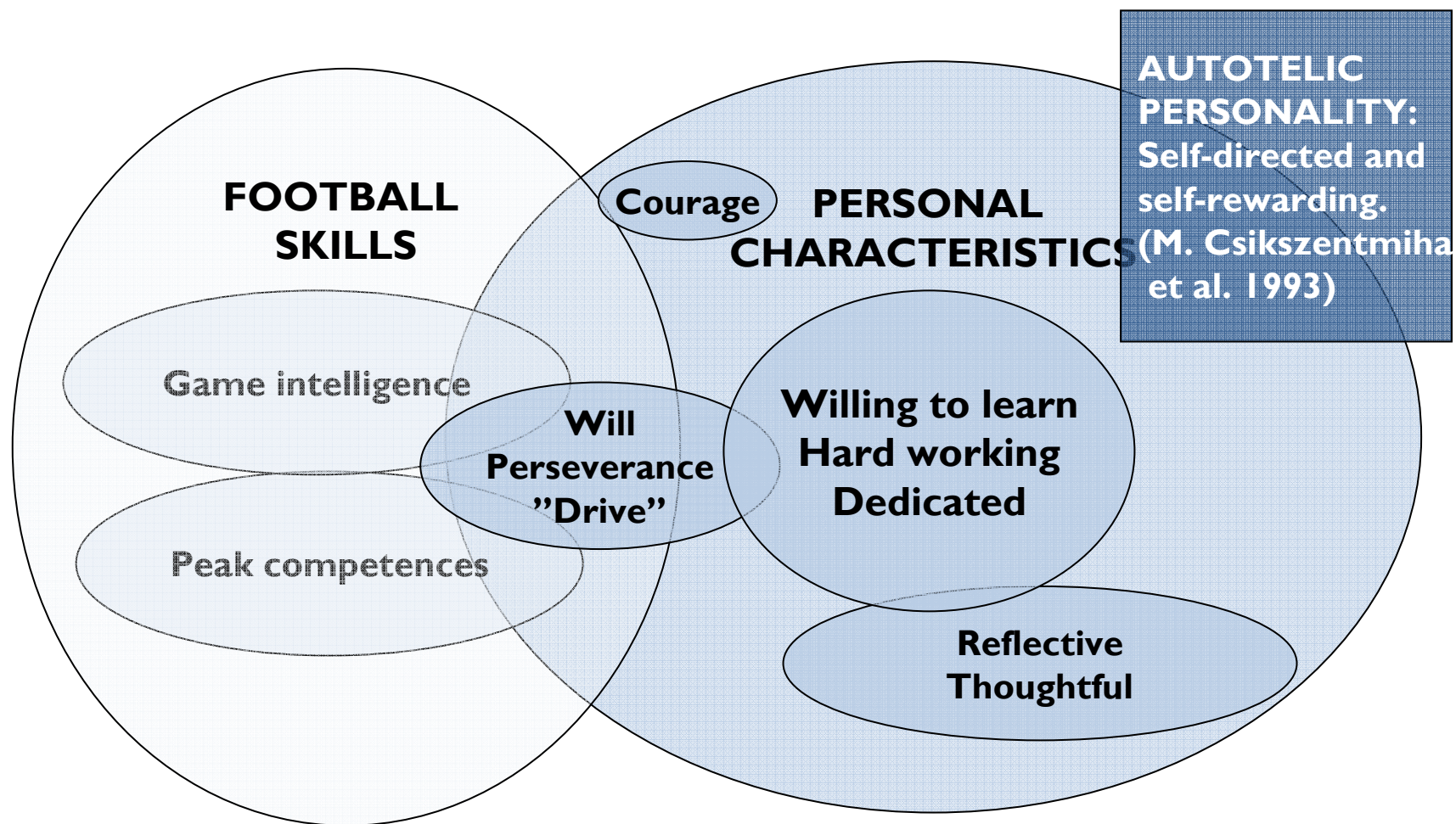
DATA

- 8 National Youth Team Coaches and National Talent Development Coaches
- Male coaches (33-64 years), 8-28 years of elite coaching experience
- 58-104 minutes/interview, transcribed verbatim

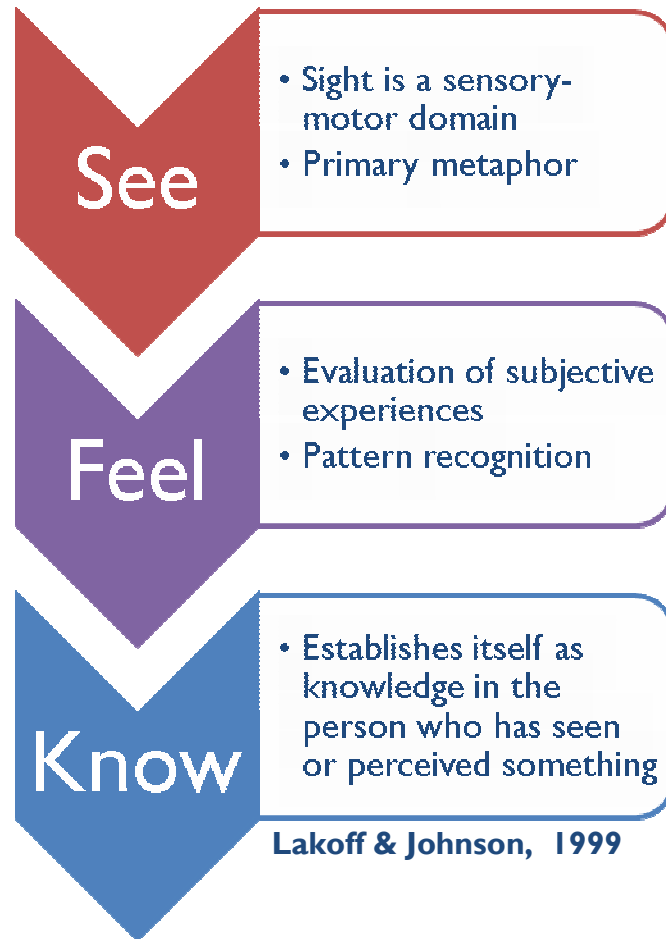
PRACTICAL SENSE

- Principles of vision and division - more or less tacit
- A certain taste that permits social agents to “make distinctions between what is good and bad.” (Pierre Bourdieu, 1998, p.8)

2. Top-level football coaches' practical sense of talent



2. Top-level football coaches' practical sense of talent



2. Top-level football coaches' practical sense of talent

We define soccer talents according to our own philosophy, and others do so according to theirs.

In Danish soccer we have very different views of soccer, whereas in Holland and Spain they have a single model.

We just can't do that in Denmark, because we are far too . . . umm . . . we do our own thing.

That's why we will always select our own type [of player].

Sometimes I also think, "How can that player even be considered? It's completely hopeless." But it's because it [talent identification] reflects our philosophy (Frank)

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3. Narratives about football career and educational choices



Focus groups

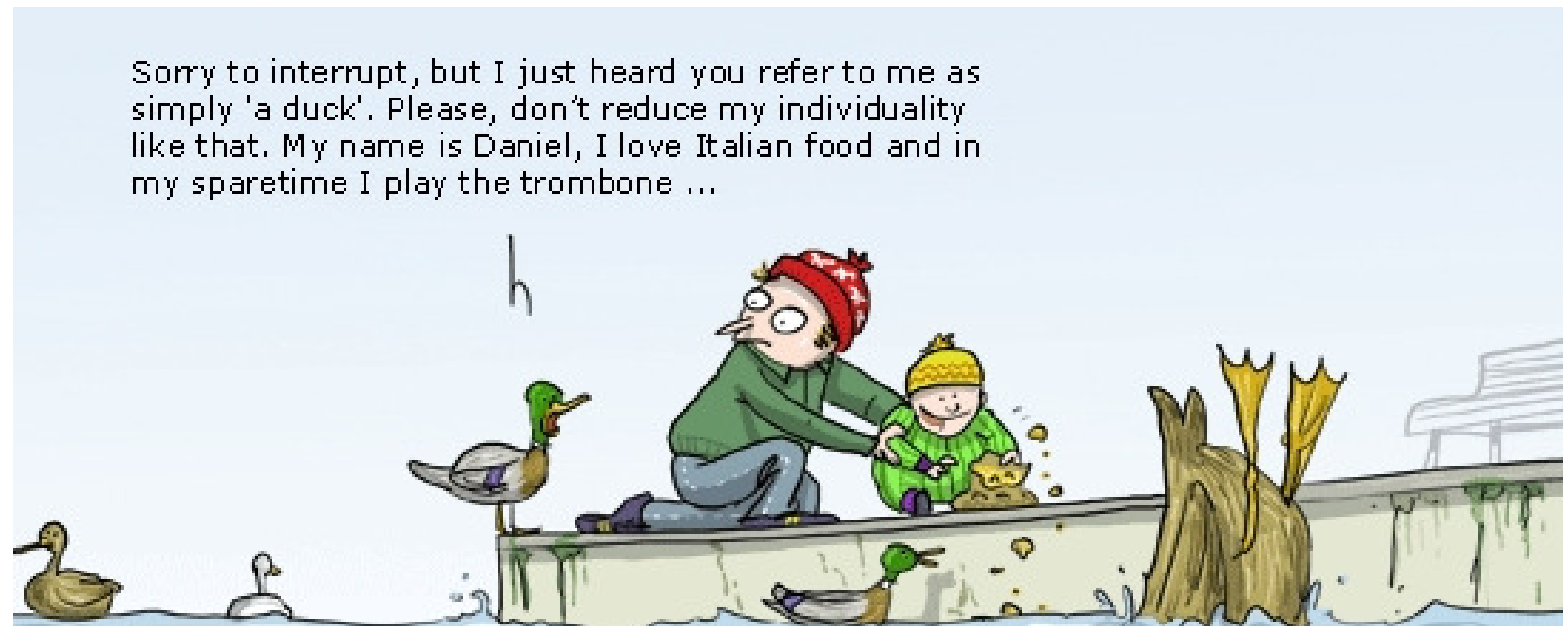
- Commonly shared stories among 25 footballers
- 4 groups of 6-7 talented footballers aged 15-18 years)



In-depth interviews

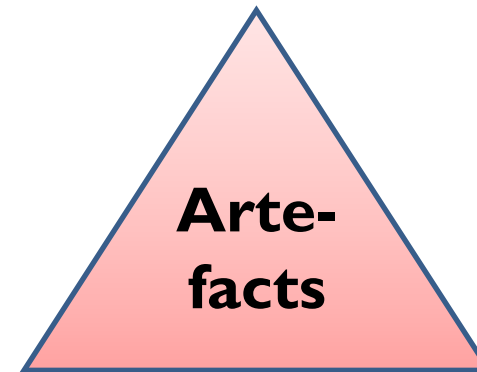
- Individual narratives about school and sport
- 8 talented footballers aged 15-18 years

If you don't ask you'll never know...



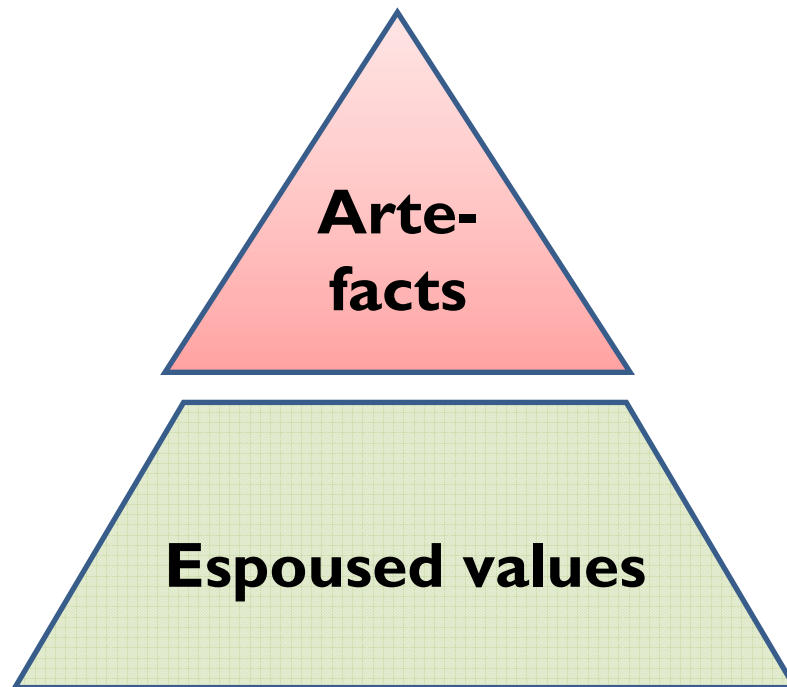
3. Narratives about football career and educational choices

- Education is important!
- The 'complete' sports person



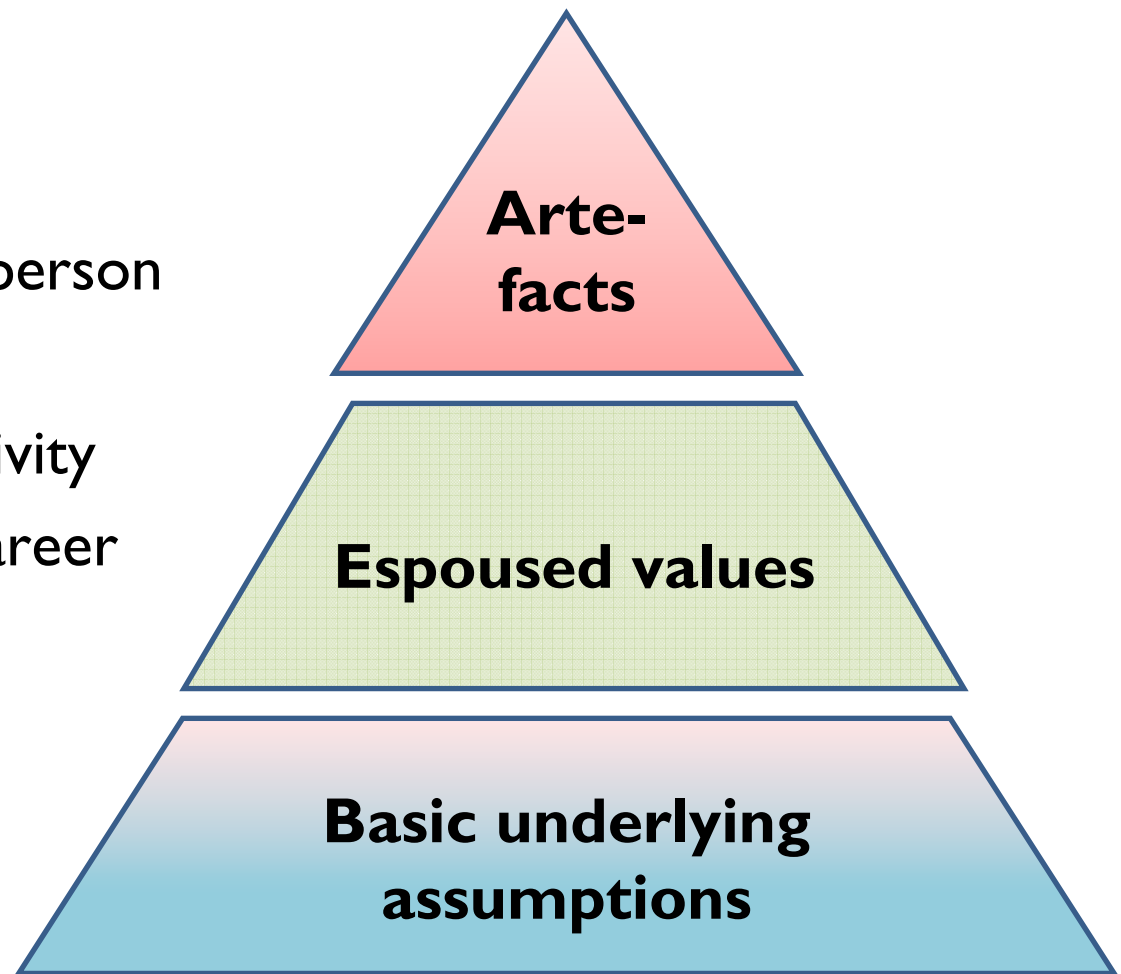
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- Education is important!
- The 'complete' sports person
- Football is a leisure activity
- Football is (maybe) a career



3. Narratives about football career and educational choices

- Education is important!
- The 'complete' sports person
- Football is a leisure activity
- Football is (maybe) a career
- Education = a good life
- 100% football



Education is important, but....

There isn't really anything that makes me want to go to school – except that I don't want to be a footballer who hasn't got any academic qualifications at all.

I want my upper secondary school leaving certificate, which in one way or another makes me free – which makes it possible for me to dedicate myself entirely to football and to let go in order to say “yes” to everything in football without having to think: by the way, I have to get my academic qualifications (Tom, 19 years).

Basic underlying assumptions

If you have too many absences (from school) you aren't allowed to do morning training...

If you ring and say you are behind with your homework, they tell you that you have to stay home and do your homework...but I don't think it happens very often!

(focus group 1)

Here the coach begins to present you with a choice. You are forced to choose, he says.

If you want to do this, you have to go for it 100%.

(focus group 3)

Levels of culture	School	Sport
Artefacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible education system • Team Danmark schools • Team Danmark classes • Coordinator • Principles about postponement of written assignments. • Principles about compensation lessons. • ‘The complete sports person’ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team Danmark target results • Team Danmark coach • Principles about exemption from training attendance if you are behind requirements in school. • College or other forms of accommodation near by the training facilities. • ‘The complete sports person’
Espoused values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Football is (still) a leisure activity. • Education is good for you to fall back upon. • The school offers a responsible combination of sport and school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Football is (still) a leisure activity and a future career. • Education is necessary for you to fall back upon. • The club offers a responsible combination of sport and school.
Basic underlying assumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education is the way to a good life. • Exam results and qualifications needed for entry to further education are symbolic capital. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional elite football demands 100% of the young talented player. • A full-time contract is symbolic capital.

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DREAM

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DREAM

DILEMMA

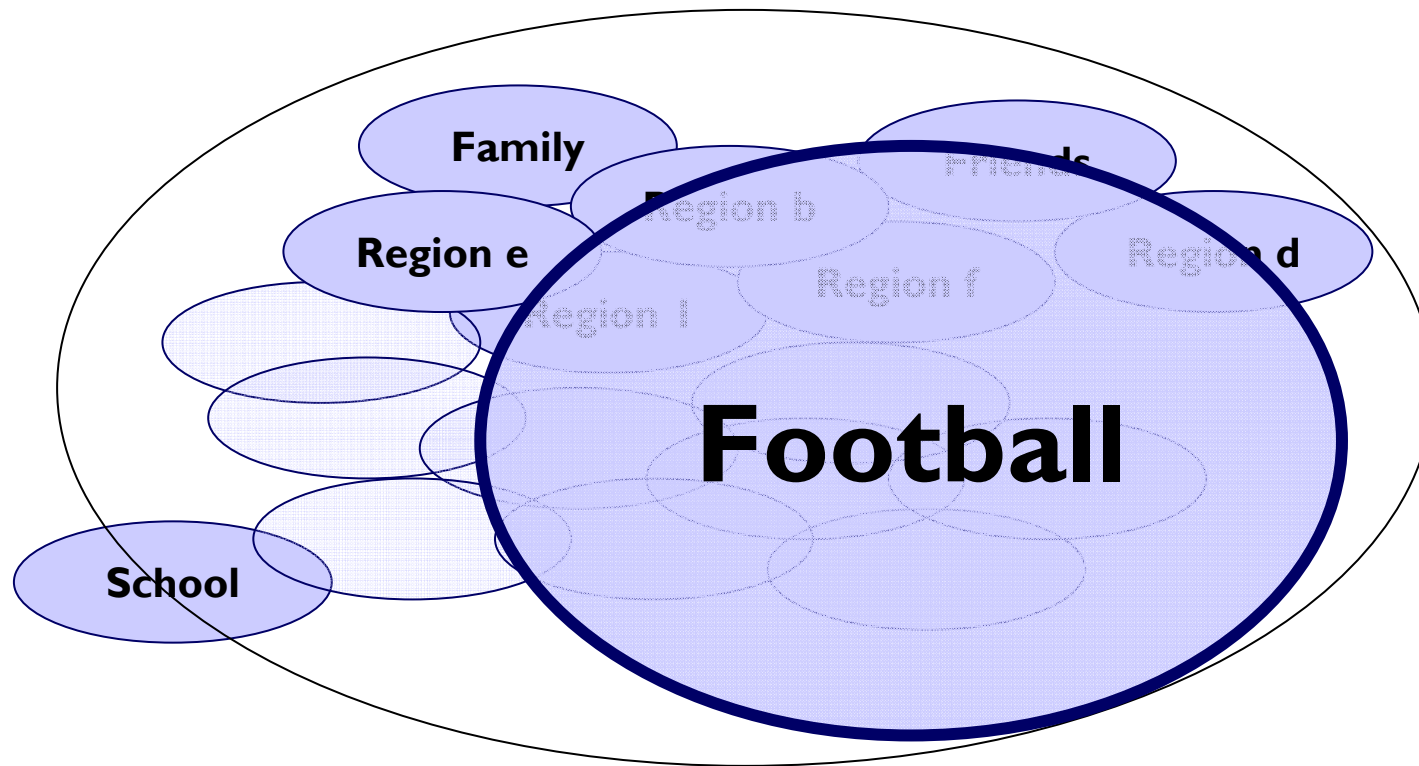
Football is the dominant region

Yes, especially all that with school. Sometimes you feel you'd damned well rather stay at home.
And other times you also think, what the hell am I doing here when I am going to be a footballer.
I ought to spend much more time on football
(Claus, 17 years)

In the beginning my parents were very curious and said, 'Remember to keep up at school'.
But it hasn't been difficult for them to see and feel recently that our contract is more important now, when they (the contracts) are going to be extended.
So that is definitely the top priority now
(Jesper, 17 years)

Life space

Kurt Lewin (1951)



The 'complete' sports person?

The privileged player (the 'complete' sports person):

- good academic abilities
- live close to the club
- go to school in the vicinity of home and the club
- maintain regular contact with family and friends
- has minimal transport
- shows 100 % commitment to football

However:

Many players do not belong to this category and they run great risks.

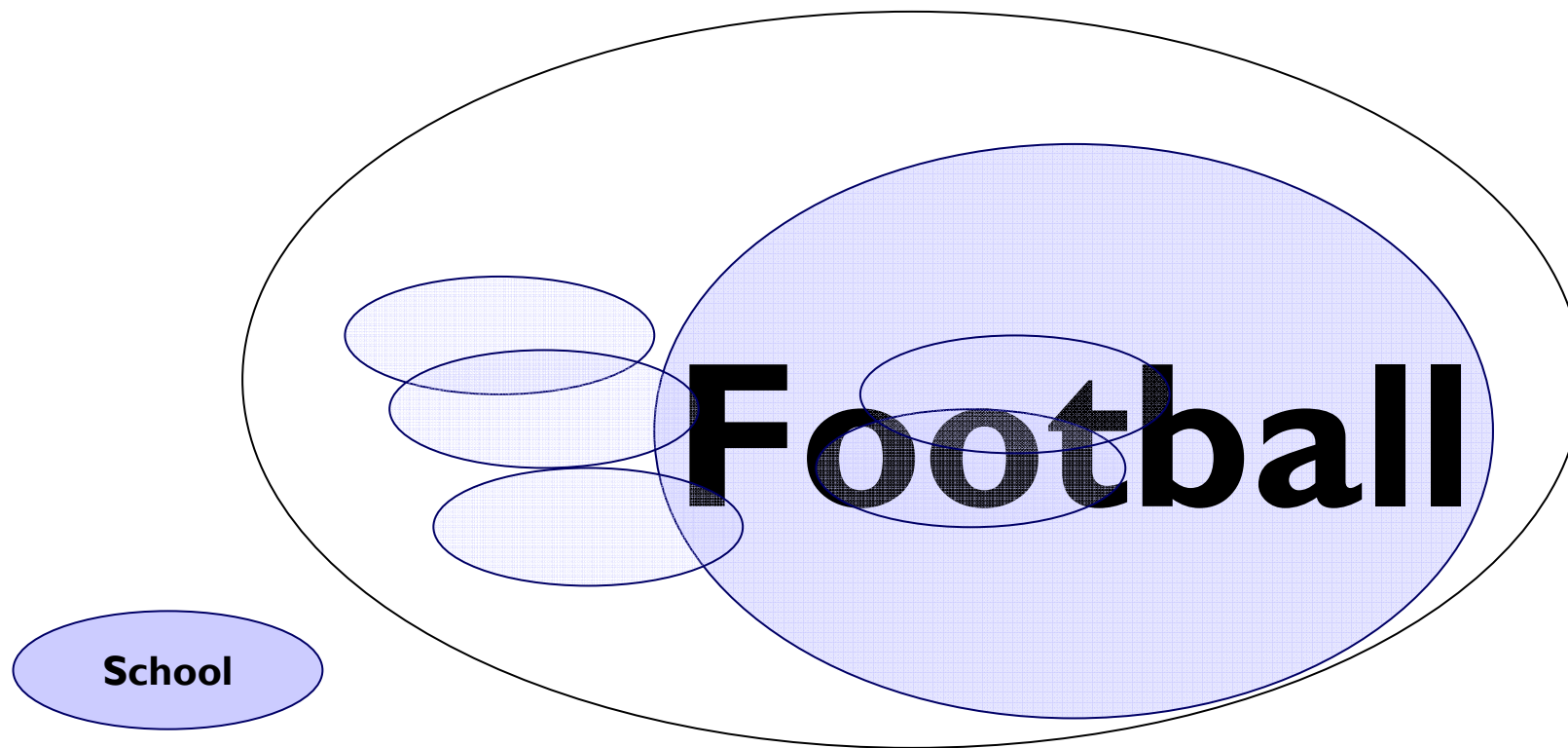
Risks

1. A significantly lower set of exam results.
2. Change to another school system with the school period stretched over more years.
3. A significant level of stress and a sense of time pressure.
4. Dropping out of school.
5. Mental breakdown.

Risks

1. A significantly lower set of exam results.
2. Change to another school system with the school period stretched over more years.
3. A significant level of stress and a sense of time pressure.
4. **Dropping out of school.**
5. **Mental breakdown.**

Life space → 'frozen identity' ?



“I simply couldn’t find a way through it”

Last year I was diagnosed with stress. I was unhappy with myself and with the place. That lasted six months. Over the first months it went well, but then it started going downhill. Then everything went down and I was good for nothing. It’s only now after the summer holidays that I’ve got back on top again.

Because I simply couldn’t find a way through it, and then they kept on saying, like what the hell was wrong and that sort of thing. They wanted me to be able to tell them....

I don’t know...there was just something or other...I just found it difficult to be open and tell them openly about all that, because I had felt so bad for such a long time... (Jesper, 16 years)

The marginal man

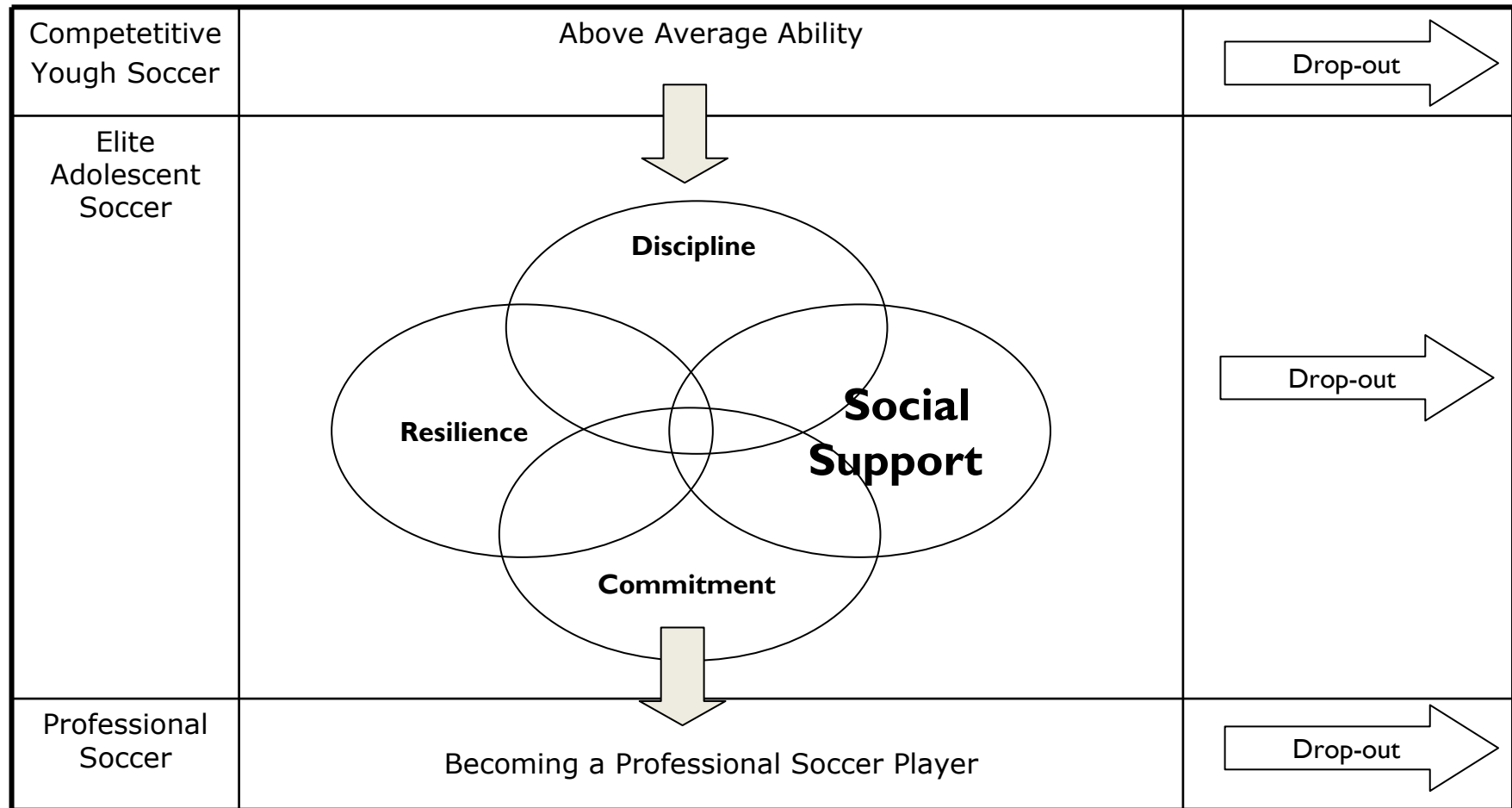
“The marginal man is a person who stands on the boundary between two groups. He does not belong to either of them, or at least he is not certain about his belongingness [...]

Characteristic symptoms of behavior of the marginal man are emotional instability and sensitivity”

(Lewin, 1951, p.143)

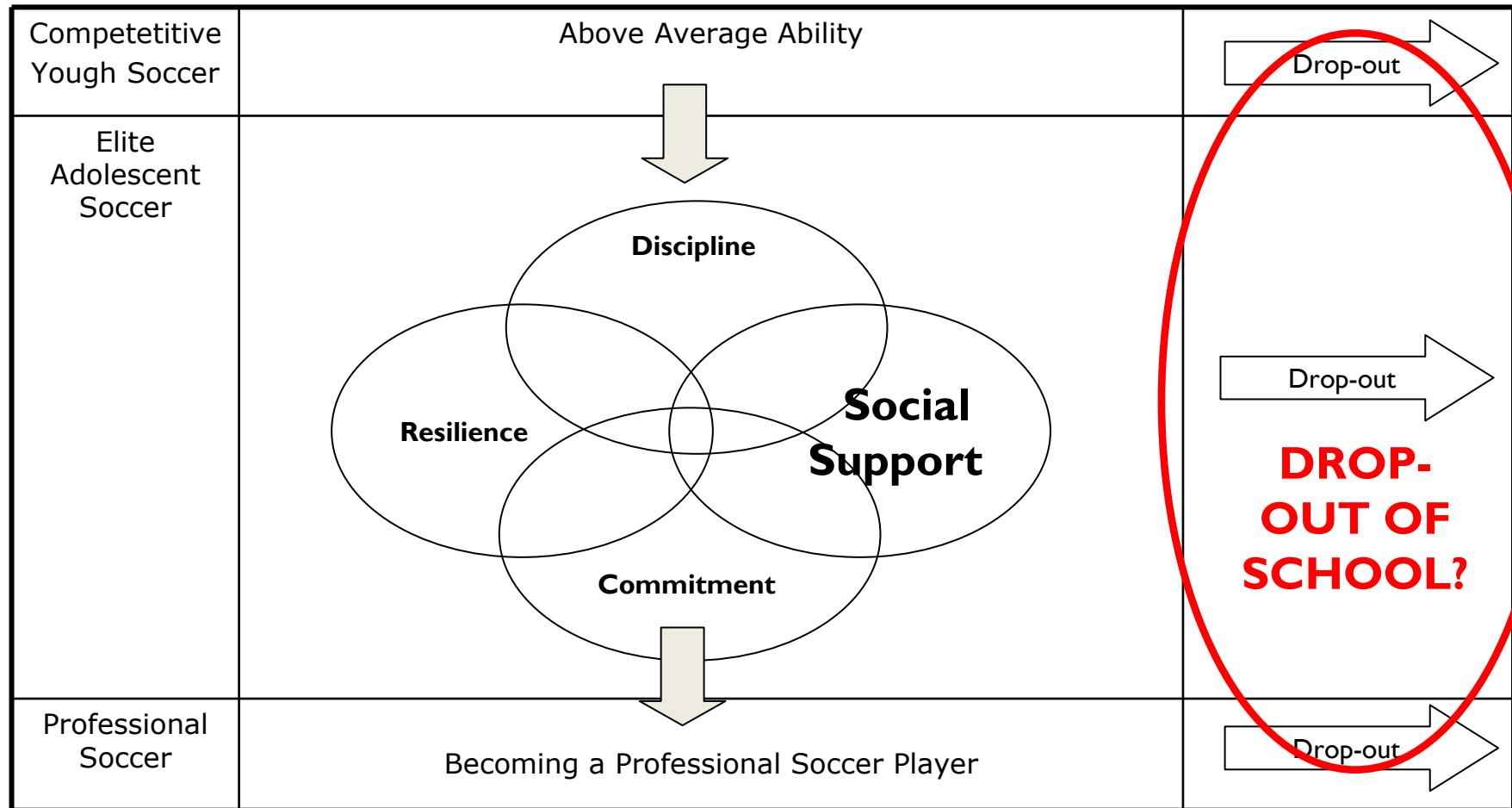
Holt and Dunn

Jour.of App.Sport Psych., 16, 199-219, 2004



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Concluding thoughts

The discrepancy between artefacts and basic underlying assumptions is a cultural challenge, but the footballers are often left alone with this concern.

The (so-called) flexible education system is perhaps not developed and utilized sufficiently.

The ideal (and political correct?) picture of the 'complete' sports person is a far cry from most of the player's own experience and expectations.

Thoughts...?

Teaching and learning life skills as part of elite sport?

- Coping can be taught and learned
- Even younger athletes (aged 12) can learn life skills

Supervision in groups?

- Trained supervisor
- Share experiences (Yalom 2005)
 - Development of socializing techniques
 - Existential factors
 - Cohesiveness
 - Interpersonal learning

References:

Christensen, MK (2009) “An Eye for Talent”: Talent Identification and the “Practical Sense” of Top-level Soccer Coaches. *Sociology of Sport Journal*.

Christensen, MK & Sørensen, JK (2009) Sport or school? Dreams and dilemmas for talented young Danish football players *European Physical Education Review*.

Christensen, MK (2008): Elitefodboldtræneres praktiske sans for talent. I: Henriksen, K (red.): *Inspiration til talentudvikling – et psykologisk perspektiv*. Syddansk Universitetsforlag.

Christensen, MK et al. (2008): Unge fodboldtalenters veje mod toppen – evolutionær eller strategisk talentudvikling? *Idrætshistorisk Årbog*.

Thanks for your attention



...and thanks to The Ministry of Culture Committee on Sports Research and Team Danmark.