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The Role of the Coach in Facilitating Positive Youth Development: Moving from Theory to Practice

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Abstract

Sport is suggested as a potentially important and sufficient path for positive youth development. However, how this responsibility is translated by coaching practitioners is not understood. This research investigated whether coaching practitioners desire outcomes for their adolescent athletes that reach beyond on-field success, and incorporate constructs that are associated with positive youth development. Twenty-two participation coaches for adolescent athletes participated in semi-structured interviews. Results suggest that coaches see themselves as responsible for facilitating eight interrelated and interdependent themes that are consistent with the positive youth development literature; competence, confidence, connection, character, life skills, climate, positive affect and positive psychological capacities.

Keywords: positive youth development, coaching, youth sport, athlete outcomes

Introduction

Positive youth development focuses on the positive aspects of human development, holding that all youth have innate strengths and resources upon which they can build. The underlying assumption of positive youth development is that building upon naturally occurring resources is more effective than addressing the deficits of human functioning. The hope is that the resultant youth will be safe, healthy, happy, moral, fully engaged in life, and valuable contributors to society,

rather than simply deficit-free (Peterson, 2004). Evaluations of such programs have concluded that they are successful in promoting interpersonal skills, quality of peer and adult relationships, self-control, problem-solving, cognitive competencies, self-efficacy, commitment to schooling, and academic achievement (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak & Hawkins, 2004). Accordingly, the 'Five Cs' of competence, confidence, connection, character and caring have commonly been used in the literature to conceptualize the developmental areas of focus for programs of positive youth development (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Jelicic, Bobek, Phelps, Lerner & Lerner, 2007).

Given that youths spend up to half of their waking hours engaging in leisure activities (Larson & Verma, 1999), organized leisure activities have been promoted as a potentially important and sufficient path to positive youth development (Larson, 2000). In particular, sport has been proposed as the most popular and time-consuming leisure activity for youth (Hansen & Larson, 2007). It is also frequently suggested in the popular media and in research that youth sport programs can be used to foster positive development and to build character (Hansen, Larson & Dworkin, 2003). More specifically, youth sport participation is associated with many general indicators of development, including identity development, personal exploration, initiative, improved cognitive and physical skills, cultivating social connections, teamwork, and social skills (Hansen et al., 2003). Sport has already been the subject of asset-building programs with the coaching of life-skills in sporting contexts already well established (Gould & Carson, 2008; Gould, Collins, Lauer & Chung, 2007).

Research emphasizes that coaches have a critical role in conducting developmentally appropriate programs that focus on the enhancement of strengths and personal resources (Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Fraser-Thomas, Côté & Deakin, 2005).

Developmental research also consistently highlights the impact of supportive relationships with adults and role models as essential in bringing about positive developmental outcomes (e.g., Benson, Scales, Hamilton & Sesma, 2006). Further, Peterson (2004) concluded that while developmental programs such as sports have the potential to drive positive youth development, it is the personal characteristics of group leaders that are the essential ingredient for the success of all youth development programs.

While many conceptualizations of coaching have specified athlete psychosocial growth and development as basic components of effective practice (Horn, 2008), Côté and Gilbert (2009) have formalized the coaches' responsibility for positive youth development. They have defined coaching effectiveness as "the consistent application of integrated professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge to improve athletes' competence, confidence, connection and character" (p.316). These athlete outcomes have been drawn directly from the conceptualization of positive youth development and altered to reflect the sporting context. Studies in support of this conceptualization of the coaches' role have shown that providing training and support to youth sport coaches can result in the enhanced likelihood of positive youth development (e.g., Smoll, Smith, Barnett & Everett, 2003).

While the theory is sound, how this responsibility is translated by coaching practitioners is far from understood. Lofty goals such as positive youth development may be 'fine in theory', but are criticised by coaches as being divorced from reality (Cushion, Armour & Jones, 2003). The attainment of goals such as increasing the self esteem or life skills of youth sport participants are argued to be unmeasurable in practice, leaving the realisation of such goals to be measured only through the relative success of the athletes for whom the coaches are responsible (Jones & Wallace,

2005). The result is an inherent and unbridgeable gap that exists between the goals that motivate coaches to act and their capacity to achieve all of these goals in practice. In fact, the coaching process is characterised by an irremovable element of ambiguity over what everyone is trying to do, why they are trying to do it, and whether they can achieve it (Jones & Wallace, 2005). The resultant picture of coaching practice is one of an uncertain, improvised and messy reality where positive youth development may be a utopian and unattainable goal (Cushion, Armour & Jones, 2006; Jones & Wallace, 2005).

However, recent studies have started to build an empirical foundation that suggests that the development of positive traits in adolescent athletes, such as character and life skills, is an attainable goal for 'successful' and adequately trained coaches (Brunelle, Danish & Forneris, 2007; Gould et al., 2007). The results of Weiss' First Tee Program has demonstrated that positive youth development may in fact be an attainable goal in practice (Weiss, Bolter, Bhalla & Price, 2007). Given the contradictory nature of the current literature, a means exists for investigating the practical role and goals of the 'average' coaching practitioner. Accordingly, the purpose of the present study was to build upon the theoretical understanding that coaches should be responsible for positive youth development. In particular, this study aimed to understand how this theoretical responsibility correlates with the goals of practitioners working in the messy reality of coaching practice. The research question investigated whether coaching practitioners, as a direct result of their coaching, desire outcomes for their adolescent athletes that reach beyond on-field success, and incorporate constructs that are typically associated with positive youth development. In order to do this, semi-structured interviews were used to explore

coaching practitioners' understanding of their leadership role, and the outcomes that they desire for their athletes as a result of their coaching.

Method

Participants

Twenty two coaches were interviewed for this study. All coaches were categorized as participation coaches for adolescents participating in team sports. Participation coaching is categorised by an emphasis that is not on competition or performance, and where participants are less intensively engaged with the sport. The objectives of participation coaches are characterized by short-term goals, enjoyment, and health-related outcomes (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). All coaches were currently practicing in one metropolitan area of Sydney. Their coaching context is defined by a medium to high socio-economic status. Each coach was responsible for a team of youth-aged athletes who were graded according to their ability, and who compete weekly in a league against teams of their own, or similar ability from the same metropolitan area. Each coach spent between two and six hours of training with the athletes each week, and typically had no more than one competitive setting per week. Of the participants, 16 were male (73%), and 6 were female (27%). Coaches had a mean age of 43.14 years ($SD = 15.74$), and had a mean of 14.09 years of coaching experience ($SD = 9.44$). Coaches represented the sports of soccer ($n = 10$), netball ($n = 4$), softball ($n = 3$), cricket ($n = 4$) and basketball ($n = 1$). There were 11 coaches of male-only teams, and 11 coaches of female-only teams. All coaches were responsible for athletes between the ages of 11 and 19 years. All but two coaches had obtained the minimal relevant accreditation from a national sporting body. Seven coaches had achieved higher than the minimal coaching accreditation, but all were short of the

highest relevant accreditations in their sport. Eight of the coaches were also employed as teachers.

Procedure

In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the practical role and goals of coaching practitioners a qualitative methodology was used. Qualitative methodologies have been promoted in coaching research in order to bring structure, understanding and a unified picture of phenomena that result from a complex reality (Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria & Russell, 1993; Poczwadowski, Barott & Jowett, 2006). Semi-structured interviews were used that consisted of seven open-ended questions designed to elicit open-ended responses. These seven questions aimed to focus the interview on athlete outcomes and were refined following feedback from 3 pilot interviews using high school sports coaches. Wording of the questions was guided by the conceptual framework provided by Côté and Gilbert (2009).

Participants were contacted through local sporting clubs, and in one case, a coach was contacted through the local high school. Soccer, cricket, netball and softball clubs were all contacted to participate as these represented a cross-section of male and female athletes, as well as male and female coaches. After first contact was made with the coach an initial phone conversation was used to give an explanation of the research process and receive verbal consent for participation in the study, and to establish a time and place for the face-to-face interview. All interviews were carried out at a location of the participant's choosing in order to increase the comfort and ease of participants. Such comfort is key in establishing a rapport with the participant, and in securing their trust and confidence during the interview.

Each participant gave written consent to participate in the recorded interview. Following this process, each participant completed a 'coach details sheet' (i.e., basic

descriptive information regarding the participants' age, sex, occupation, current sport, coaching experience and coaching qualifications). Each interview was conducted by one of the researchers with training in qualitative research design and methodology, as well as a strong knowledge of the positive youth development and coaching areas. This researcher was also familiar with each sport, and is a current coaching practitioner. More importantly, the interviewer has been immersed in the culture of the sporting association to which these coaches belong for over two decades, and was intimately familiar to all sporting bodies who agreed to take part. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) such 'prolonged engagement' and 'persistent observation' are keys to establishing the credibility of the interpretation of interview data. Such an immersion allows the interviewer to intimately understand the many contextual factors that shape the coaching practice of the participants, therefore enabling accurate understanding and interpretation of data. Interviews lasted between 45 and 75 minutes, and were transcribed verbatim for data analysis.

Instruments

In-depth interviews

A semi-structured interview guide was developed according to the procedure outlined above. This resulted in the articulation of seven open-ended questions:

1. Can you define the term leadership for me?
2. (In your role as a coach) In what ways do you see yourself as a leader?
3. What outcomes do you desire for your athletes as a result of your coaching?
4. What outcomes do you desire for your team as a result of your coaching?
5. Which outcome do you see as the most important?
6. Do you have a coaching philosophy?

7. What knowledge do you need in order to bring about these outcomes successfully?

The emphasis of the interview, including a large percentage of the total time, was given to questions three, four and five. This was reflective of the aims and purposes of this research. In order to gain rich and detailed answers, the interviewer used probing questioning and clarification throughout the interview. Coaches were often asked to expand upon, clarify, or define the outcomes that they were articulating. Accordingly, positive youth development, life-skills, or similar phrases were not used prior to, or during, the interview.

Data Analysis

Given that the positive youth development literature typically articulates developmental themes (e.g., Benson, 1997; Jelicic et al., 2007), and that Cote and Gilbert (2009) also engaged a thematic approach when applying the positive youth development literature to sports coaching, thematic analysis was used to analyze the verbatim transcripts.

Analysis followed the five steps articulated by Braun and Clarke (2006). (1) Familiarisation of data by reading transcripts and also looking for potential errors in transcription. (2) Initial codes were generated. Codes represent both semantic and latent content of the data and are the most basic element of the raw data that can be assessed in a meaningful way. For example, the statement “*Camraderie* is the most important thing within the team. I have to try to make them enjoy each others company... and *hang out with each other afterwards*’ (Coach 3) generated two codes; camaraderie and social cohesion. Codes are different from themes as themes are broader units of analysis that unify multiple aspects of the raw data. A theme captures something important about the data and represents some level of patterned response or

meaning within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this case, both camaraderie and social cohesion belong to a broader theme of 'social connection'. (3) Codes were organized into themes of positive youth development with organization aided by the current conceptual framework provided by Cote and Gilbert (2009). These themes were competence, confidence, connection and character. Codes that did not fit any of these themes were searched, and organised into new themes. Each code was placed into a theme, while some codes were placed into two separate themes. As no data set is without irregularities, it is common for codes to be placed into multiple themes. A list of codes and themes can be found in Table 1. (4) Extracts for each code were taken from the data and collated into themes to ensure that the data within themes was coherent and related, as well as identifiably distinct from other themes. This process was performed individually by two researchers to ensure that each code was placed into an appropriate theme. Differences were reconciled by mutual agreement. (5) Following discussion between the researchers in stage 4 regarding the content of the themes, the essence of each theme was articulated, and a description given. The description and supporting quotes for each theme are given in the results section.

Results

When considering the coaches' desired outcomes for athletes as a result of their coaching, a total of 69 codes were gathered from the raw data. These can be seen in Table 1. Data saturation, where no new information was being collected from additional interviews, had occurred after 17 participants. In total, these codes were organized into eight distinct themes. Each code was placed into a theme, and 8 codes were placed into two separate themes because these codes were consistent with the description and patterned response of more than one theme. In other words, these codes contributed to the picture of a coherent and internally consistent account of

more than one theme, and to leave them out of one of these themes would reduce the overall consistency of theme generation, despite increasing the external heterogeneity of themes. For example, the code 'interpersonal skills' was placed into both the 'social connection' theme and the 'life skills' theme. 41 codes (53%) were placed into themes consistent with the current conceptual framework; competence ($n = 14$), confidence ($n = 5$), connection ($n = 5$) and character ($n = 17$). 35 codes (47%) were placed into an additional four themes; life skills ($n = 13$), climate ($n = 8$), positive affect ($n = 10$), and positive psychological capacities ($n = 4$). Each of the four additional themes is highly connected with the positive youth development and positive psychology literature. Table 1 shows the 69 separate codes placed into the eight distinct themes. Inter-rater agreement between independent researchers on the organization of codes into themes was high, with agreement on 62 of the total 69 codes (90%).

Table 1
Codes Generated by Coaches and Organised by Theme

Theme	Codes			
Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strength • Fitness • Technical skills • Tactical skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance skills • Game awareness • Decision-making • Communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agility • Knowledge of game • Concentration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visualisation • Success/winning • Love of the game
Confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sport self-efficacy • Self-confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-esteem/worth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-belief 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-respect
Connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Camaraderie • Friendships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect team mates • Social Cohesion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust team mates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpersonal skills
Character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect team mates • Self-control • Coping with success • Coping with failure • Commitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loyalty • Temperament • Moral values • Maturity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sportsmanship • Pro-social behaviour • Spirit of the game • Respect opposition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect officials • Discipline • Honesty • Responsibility
Life Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication skills • Self-control • Coping with success • Coping with failure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-discipline • Time management • Goal setting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership skills • Interpersonal awareness • Interpersonal skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teamwork, • Visualisation • Self-understanding
Climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team harmony • Encourage teammates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team morale/spirit • Social cohesion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task cohesion • Team unity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Club spirit • Happy environment
Positive Affect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoyment • Fun • Satisfaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intrinsic motivation • Enriching experience • Happiness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievement • Security 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose • Joy
Psychological Capacities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resilience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perseverance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forgiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimism

Themes are discussed in order of response frequency;

Character

Outcomes of character were the most easily recognised and most often articulated outcomes. These outcomes centred around the development of moral, respectful and pro-social behaviors, as well as desirable character traits such as honesty, loyalty, responsibility and self-control. There was a strong emphasis placed on sporting behaviours, as well as an authentic respect for team mates, opposition and

officials. Coaches saw this as within their range of influence and as a construct that lends itself to purposeful development.

It is often less confrontational to do that in a soccer context than it is in a rest-of-life context, but the benefits of doing it in a soccer context can flow off the field, and can be used to help shape the players in their general lives. You can be intentional about that on different levels. In some cases with teams, you might have a time incorporated into the training sessions to deal with frustration on the field, or how to lose well. And also dealing with interpersonal issues on the team, you can be intentional about that. And/or you can deal with the issues as they arise, recognizing that they are as important, if not more important in some cases, than dealing with the technical aspects of what is happening in the team. Also as a coach you have the opportunity to make a lasting difference in the players, one that is carried out off the field, and often one that lasts for the rest of their lives. Taking those opportunities is an important part of being a coach (Coach 1).

The strong emphasis placed on the development of sporting behaviours was articulated by all coaches.

When you are dealing with kids you just want them to know to play in the right spirit. And always play fairly and not to play dirty so to speak (Coach 9).

'Respect' provided the basis for a majority of the content of the character theme. The outcome of respect was articulated as pertaining to team-mates, to officials, and to the opposition. In most cases, this also transcended sport and the desired outcome was that youth should learn the value in treating all people with respect.

It's obviously about making them better people, teaching them how to treat other people. We try to teach them the concept that if they give respect they will

more than likely get it back. If they want someone to like them, they have to like them and treat them the same as they want to be treated (Coach 15).

The outcome of character also incorporates the character traits of honesty, responsibility, maturity, self-control, commitment, loyalty, morality, and temperament.

Life skills

Life skills were, along with outcomes of character, the most easily articulated and desired outcomes. This theme included many and varied outcomes that were seen by the coaches to be useful tools that can be applied to benefit sports performance in addition to contributing to positive human functioning. Life skills were given a high priority by every coach.

I believe, in the modern day, that life skills can be left behind. Young kids, today, in a lot of ways, kids sit in a computer room. I am talking about having that outside of the family, male influence somewhere in their lives. That is all I think I provide. Someone outside of the family group that mentors them and is able to teach them the skills that they need to be successful in life (Coach 15).

The four core life skills that were mentioned by the coaches were goal setting, communication skills, leadership skills and interpersonal skills.

You don't just stop there. You teach them to be leaders. You teach them to think, you teach them to think and to communicate. You teach them to analyze the situation effectively. And to understand others' abilities, and understand others mental capacities, and strengths and weaknesses, and emotions (Coach 2).

Despite the coaches' view that life skills were of great importance as outcomes, the constraints of time were readily articulated. Coaches saw that their coaching context

was detrimental to the development of life skills due to an inadequate amount of time spent in direct contact with the athletes.

It's difficult in two and a half hours a week to do the life skills, or the broader relational or character type coaching because we don't see them any more than that, and we get a very small snapshot of who they are (Coach 1).

Competence

The theme of competence was seen as the most basic requirement. All coaches saw it as their role to transfer the skills and knowledge of the game to the athletes. While the basic skill sets mentioned differed by sport, each coach mentioned a range of technical, tactical and performance related skills. There were also large within sport variations by age, sex and level of athletes.

Depending on their skill level, you work on various technical skills. It also depends on whether you are dealing with girls or boys, and what sport you are also dealing with. For example, I coach the girls 16s, under 16s. They are all 15 and 16 year olds, but they are at a skill level equivalent to a lot of boys that are under 10. So basically, if I have the under 10s this is how I would be coaching the girls under 16s (Coach 9).

A progressive and systematic approach to skill development was the focus of most coaches. Broadly, this progression moved from physiological outcomes such as strength, fitness and agility, to sport specific technical skills such as throwing, kicking and catching technique, to tactical skills such as basic team play, team formations and set piece moves, through to performance skills such as decision-making, game awareness, and communication.

In terms of the building blocks, you have to start with physiology. Strength, fitness, before technical ability. Then, for soccer, it has to be game awareness.

You want to teach them to be able to execute with a good technique, but you also need to teach them to think properly and to make good decisions while they are playing (Coach 1).

Very few of the coaches saw that winning and success were appropriate outcomes for this coaching context. None of the coaches prioritized success, and no coach mentioned success as part of their coaching philosophy. When success was mentioned by coaches, it was in the context of an improvement in technical, tactical and performance skills. Success was also mentioned in the context of positive affect, and related to a feeling of achievement, fun and happiness.

You want to see them successful, or as successful as they can be. Performing well is probably more a measure of whether you are getting all of those other things right like the technical aspect of the game. And let's face it, when they win they are all having more fun, and that is what I want (Coach 13).

A knowledge and love of the game were also seen as primary responsibilities of the coach. Knowledge of the game most often included the knowledge of rules and the history of the game. The development of pre-game and game-related psychological techniques of visualization and concentration were also desired. The coaches' also saw it as their role to promote physical activity to their athletes.

Positive affect

Outcomes of positive affect were seen as the single most important outcomes for athletes. Enjoyment provided the core of this theme, with all coaches emphasising that the enjoyment of sports participation was their priority outcome. Other derivatives of this were fun and happiness.

Doing non-elite coaching, really, in a lot of ways the enjoyment of the game and the experience is the ultimate outcome (Coach 1).

Happiness is extremely important. If you play sport it is basically something you want to do, something you like doing, not something you have to do. It's not like school work. You've got to enjoy it otherwise you won't do it (Coach 17).

Enjoyment was often seen as a result of the other outcomes within the theme. Positive affect and psychological impetus outcomes were seen as the drivers of enjoyment. These drivers were a deep sense of satisfaction, motivation, achievement, security and purpose.

It was probably one of my goals as well, to get them to step outside of their comfort zone and not sail along in life. And to inspire them to achieve something. I believe that they are all happy because they are achieving something. Enjoyment comes through a bit of hard work (Coach 15).

That they enjoy it. That is really important. And it is important, I think, that they have personally felt like they have succeeded. So they have some kind of sense of self accomplishment. They feel like they have done their best and that they have achieved something (Coach 11).

A majority of coaches also highlighted that retention rate was a measure that they used to gauge the enjoyment of their athletes over the course of a sporting season. Specifically, if all athletes signed up again next year, the coach felt entitled to consider that each athlete had enjoyed themselves.

Well it is to enjoy the season. Enjoying the season means enjoying the elements I have talked about – skills, team morale, all those things. It meant that it came together. So that's kind of the end product. If all these bits fall into place and they are saying 'I am coming back next year', that meant I did a good job (Coach 19).

Confidence

Confidence was articulated in many and varied ways, including confidence, self-esteem, self-worth, self-belief and self-respect. Despite the differing definitions of these terms, the outcome of confidence was manifested in two main contexts. Firstly, coaches articulated a sport-specific self-efficacy. This type of confidence had as its emphasis a belief that they were competent athletes and that they had the ability to perform the skills needed to be competitive.

You have really got to give them self-confidence. When they go out onto the field they don't have mum or dad, or coach, there to tell them that they can do it. They have to have the confidence to be able to do it out on the field by themselves, that is so important (Coach 7).

Secondly, confidence was more often talked about as an overall sense of positive self-worth. Such an understanding was articulated by all coaches in some form. Some coaches talked about self-respect and self-belief, while others talked about self-esteem and self-worth. However, they all shared the core assumption that the coach is responsible for an athlete's overall sense of positive self worth.

They have to think that they are important and that someone cares. In a lot of cases sometimes you have kids that are only sent to you because you are a cheap way to baby sit. But then they get someone that actually cares about them, and really does care about what they do, how they are playing and what they are doing (Coach 17).

The majority of coaches saw that this responsibility extends to confidence in other areas of life, such as their interpersonal and social skills.

In that time I can see the level of belief in themselves; you can see the ones that aren't really confident. That they don't feel they are the strongest in the team. So then I start to target those players and really give them extra confidence and be

probably more complementary to them about the great things they are doing. It's usually specific to netball but you can see it in the different things you ask them to do. Often girls like that can be not as confident out in their social life or be a little bit shy. That can actually change when they see that we are all in this together (Coach 19).

Climate

Climate is defined here as the accumulated atmosphere that results from interpersonal interactions and relationships between team members. As opposed to the connection theme that conceptualizes positive individual outcomes, the theme of climate refers specifically to outcomes at a group level. The focus of this theme was on team morale, team harmony and team cohesion, both social and task, that is created through positive interpersonal behaviors and a sense of togetherness.

I see it as my role to influence their development, but also to influence the environment, the general team environment. That is the surrounds of the team, it's members, and how they interrelate (Coach 17).

Coaches primarily referred to three areas of climate-related outcomes. The first is team morale. When articulating this construct the coaches were speaking of a positive expectancy for the future, high levels of motivation in all athletes, and a desire to be part of the team unit. The second is team harmony. Team harmony is the interpersonal interactions and feelings between team members. This outcome is constituted by respect for team members, trust between team members and encouragement between team members.

Ultimately in the most successful team there is going to be trust between all the participants, they are going to trust one another. Encouragement is really vital there too. Making sure that they all encourage each other. So I think it really

comes down to if you create that trust between all the people that are part of it then you can work within it because people don't feel criticised. They feel empowered actually because the confidence comes out of that (Coach 16).

Third is team cohesion. Coaches referred to both task cohesion; that all team members are united in striving for a common goal, and social cohesion; that all team members are attracted to other group members and to the group as a whole outside of a sporting context.

Team cohesion, definitely. Just within the team, over the years I have been coaching, I am starting to understand it more. That has helped, but you do notice that everyone in the team enjoys each others company and there is never an issue with one player, and everyone comes up, works, and puts in a good effort. They are all enjoying themselves and everyone wants everyone else to do well. So everyone contributes and you can notice the vibe straight away and I think that is really important (Coach 5).

Lastly, coaches were united in emphasising a climate that reached beyond the confines of the team. This most often took the form of 'club spirit' or a 'pride in their association'.

I really bang on about the club. I really try to instil in the team how much playing for your club means to the players. Every one likes to feel like they are part of a group, I think that you will perform better for each other if you are doing it for the group, even though the team will be more of a priority then the club. You can use the club to build that camaraderie (Coach 13).

Connection

The core of this theme is the development and maintenance of quality positive friendships. The focus of most coaches was on the friendships between athletes within the same team.

I think down the track you stop playing a sport but the people you meet along the way are important. They last a life time in a lot of cases. It is my role to help that along (Coach 17).

Further, there was also an emphasis placed on the skills needed to develop those friendships, and the ability to maintain friendships over time. Coaches saw it as their role to equip the players with the skills needed to engage with peers, and to encourage that engagement.

It is about knowing themselves and knowing what they want to achieve and giving them the tools to achieve it. Often it only requires some interpersonal skills that they might need just to be more part of the team and develop those friendships (Coach 16).

Psychological Capacities

The outcomes of psychological capacities were the least formally articulated by the coaches. The outcomes of optimism, resilience, perseverance and forgiveness were mostly implicit. Further, optimism and resilience were almost always grouped together.

You have got to get them to go out there with a positive attitude, and feel like they are going to achieve something. You want the players to believe that they are going to achieve something. And no matter what happens, you want them to keep on believing that (Coach 7).

Forgiveness and perseverance were more readily articulated in the data than optimism and resilience. However, both of these outcomes were expressed, implicitly or explicitly, by a minority of the coaches.

I suppose, perseverance is also really important for kids, so that they don't get angry and walk off. That is for training as well. A lot of kids don't possess that quality of perseverance. You get the kids who want to quit as soon as something goes wrong (Coach 11).

I know that there are different personalities in our squad and try to make everybody aware that when you get a group of 15 people together you are not always going to be best mates. I teach them that they have to be forgiving with the differences in opinion, or personalities. That forgiveness goes a long way to team harmony (Coach 13).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore whether or not participation youth sport coaches view themselves as responsible for positive youth development.

Interpretation of the results suggests that coaches do view themselves as responsible for positive youth development. Coaches see themselves as responsible for the development of many positive outcomes that have been organized into the themes of competence, confidence, connection and character as they have been applied to sports coaching by Cote and Gilbert (2009). An important addition to this existing conceptualization was the theme of life skill development. Further, coaches extended this responsibility to include outcomes consistent with the themes of positive affect, positive psychological capacities and positive team climate. Consequently, the conclusion is that coaches see themselves as responsible for the development of a

holistic and diverse range of sport-specific and non-sport specific competencies that are included in the broad notion of positive youth development.

The outcomes of competence, confidence, connection and character are consistent with the theoretical literature (Cote & Gilbert, 2009; Cote, Bruner, Erickson, Strachan & Fraser-Thomas, in press), and need little further explanation here. One minor difference was found in the addition of a sport-specific self-efficacy component to the confidence theme. Given that adolescents have the ability to evaluate themselves differently over different contexts, particularly in sports (Cote et al., in press), it is unsurprising that coaches see themselves as responsible for sport-specific self-efficacy, and in some cases, for self-efficacy in alternate domains.

The addition of a life skills component represents a shift in focus from purely sporting outcomes towards a holistic approach to coaching athletes. Similar research concerning coach leadership also emphasizes the development of life skills within a holistic coaching philosophy (Vallee & Bloom, 2005). The coaching of life skills through sport has been identified as a major avenue of positive youth development (Gould et al., 2007; Gould & Carson, 2008). The emphasis of the coaches in this study was on the development of behavioral and interpersonal skills such as communication, leadership and social skills. Consistent with the assertion of Danish et al. (2004), coaches also articulated that life skills pertain to cognitive, behavioural and intrapersonal skills such as goal-setting, self-control, and self-understanding.

The climate theme is also an addition to the existing literature. In this case, climate is defined by the psychological atmosphere that is created by the relationships between group members and their interactions, and refers specifically to outcomes on a group level. This is emphasised in the positive psychology literature through the assertion that leaders are 'climate engineers' who are responsible for establishing a

‘condition where positive emotions predominate over negative emotions’ (Cameron, 2008, p. 17; Linley, Woolston & Biswas-Diener, 2009). Goleman (2000) proposes that coaching is a style of leadership that is focused on the development of people to improve performance and develop strengths, and thus culminates in a positive impact on group climate. Upon this assumption it is the holistic development of athletes that provides the foundation of the positive climate. Coaches saw that the positive interpersonal connections, driven by interpersonal skills, and a united sense of purpose and achievement, are the core building blocks of group climate.

The emphasis that was placed on the outcomes of positive affect as the most important outcomes was expected. Outcomes of positive affect, namely enjoyment, fun, happiness and achievement, characterize the setting in which these coaches practice. The participation context for adolescents is defined by the promotion of positive affect including fun, challenge and enjoyment (Cote, Baker & Abernethy, 2007), which was recognized by all coaches. Positive affect leads people to engage with their environment, participate in social activities, and makes them more likely to continue in these activities (Cacioppo, Gardner & Berntson, 1999; Carver & Sheier, 1990). Engineering a sense of purpose, achievement and security for athletes is common to expert coaches (Vallee & Bloom, 2005), and this research shows that it is also a goal of participation coaches. Further, intrinsic motivation is highly correlated with positive developmental outcomes within sport (Weiss, Ebbeck & Horn, 1997).

There is a strong link between positive affect and the personal, social and psychological resources mentioned by the coaches. Fredrickson’s (2001) ‘Broaden and Build’ theory of positive emotions states that experience of positive emotions such as joy, happiness, and satisfaction broaden people’s momentary thought-action repertoires and broaden their enduring resources, including their psychological

capacities. It is the experience of these positive emotions that is the key in building the psychological capacities of resilience, optimism and perseverance that are the desired outcomes of coaches. Such capacities have already been shown to be desirable outcomes in elite sport (Schinke & Jerome, 2002; Seligman, 1992), but not in participation sports.

There is a high degree of interdependence between each of the eight themes. Each theme is not developed in isolation, but is dependent upon the facilitation of each of the other themes. This interdependence is heavily reflected in the psychological literature. For example, the development of sporting competence is associated with increased levels of intrinsic motivation, self esteem, and positive affect (Weiss et al., 1997), as well as adolescent growth and wellbeing (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In turn, self esteem, intrinsic motivation and positive affect lead to higher levels of positive psychological capacities such as resilience and optimism (Fredrickson, 2001). These psychological capacities, along with competencies such as interpersonal skills, are the foundation and core assets for psychologically healthy, happy, and engaged youth (Peterson, 2004).

The conclusion to be reached is that coaching practitioners, along with coaching scholars, see themselves as responsible for positive youth development. However, coaching practitioners go further than the proposed 4 C's of effective coaching (Cote & Gilbert, 2009), 5 C's of positive youth development (Jelicic et al., 2007) and life skill development (Gould & Carson, 2008) and include the facilitation of a positive climate, positive affect and positive psychological capacities. Thus, the existing literature is not comprehensive enough to capture the entirety of outcomes desired by youth sport coaches, with coaching practitioners seeing themselves as

responsible for more areas of positive youth development than have been systematically argued through the literature.

Despite coaches seeing themselves as primarily responsible for positive youth development, the content of relevant coaching accreditation courses is lacking in substance (Vargas-Tonsing, 2007). Coaching education typically focuses on performance enhancement, with an over-emphasis on technical and tactical knowledge, and little attention given to other important aspects such as youth development (Cushion et al., 2003). This is most likely to be the reason that coaching practitioners see coach education courses as irrelevant and unnecessary (Vargas-Tonsing, 2007). Further, the poor quality, relevancy and applicability of coach education is likely a deterrent for many coaches as the material remains unchanged from year to year despite the societal shaping of coaching roles (Wiersma & Sherman, 2005). Not surprisingly then, research suggests that coaches' needs are not being met by the current system. Prominent coaching scholars Lyle (2002) and Cushion and colleagues (2003) both contend that the current form of coaching education is neither informative nor influential. Youth sport coaches need to be educated about the important responsibility of positive youth development, and need training in how to facilitate such outcomes. Research has shown that the skills that are acquired through sport, including like skills, do not automatically transfer to other life domains (Brunelle et al., 2007), as the coaches in this study believed. Therefore, training coaches to transfer these skills from the sport setting is a necessary next step in coach training research.

These results also confirm the suggestion that the coaching process is an endeavour that is moulded by social pressures and constraints, and is not independent

of the social world (Potrac, Brewer, Jones, Armour & Hoff, 2000; Schempp, 1998). Social and cultural contexts have a large influence on the role, interactions, and power of sport coaches (Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2002). The fact that it is frequently suggested in the popular media and in research that youth sport programs can be used to foster positive development and to build character (Hansen et al., 2003) may have influenced youth sport coaches to view themselves as holding this responsibility. Consequently, social desirability may be a significant limitation of this research project. Despite measures taken to increase the credibility of responses, namely, establishing a rapport with the participants, assuring them of confidentiality, and prolonged engagement and persistent observation by the interviewer within the coaches context, social desirability remains a significant limitation.

In order to further establish the credibility of these responses, data on actual coaching behaviours may be necessary. However, consistent with evidence provided in this study, research has shown that positive development must be pursued within the sporting context (Danish et al., 2007). Specifically, sport is the vehicle for development, and behaviours designed to facilitate positive developmental outcomes cannot be isolated from the sporting context. Therefore, it may prove difficult to separate coaching behaviours designed to increase competence from those designed to facilitate positive developmental outcomes. Notwithstanding this difficulty, assessing coaching behaviours designed to facilitate positive youth development is a necessary next step for research and will help to provide credibility to qualitative research methods used thus far.

Further, this research reflects a particular context that limits the transferability of findings. These coaches were all practitioners in the one medium to high socio-economic status area of Sydney. Their athletes were all part of team sports, and were

graded according to their ability, and compete once per week against teams of similar ability. It remains to be seen whether the same responsibilities are articulated by performance coaches, or coaches of children and adults. The transferability of these results is therefore limited, and research exploring these topics in alternate contexts is a necessary endeavour. Another potential limitation of this study is an order effect that may have been produced when commencing the interview by discussing leadership, which is commonly assigned as a life skill.

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