

Fostering Life Skills Development in High School and Community Sport: A Comparative Analysis of the Coach's Role

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The aim of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of coaches' perceptions of their role in the development of life skills in adolescent athletes in two different sport contexts. Semistructured interviews were held with 24 coaches: 12 coaching high school basketball and 12 coaching community swimming. All coaches followed a holistic, athlete-centered approach. Coaches described the life skills they taught, their motivations, and the strategies they used to foster life skills development in practice. Although some differences between the two contexts were identified, the overall results indicate that all coaches fostered the development of life skills through various teaching and transfer strategies, and that coaches had two main motivations: athletes' needs and their own values. The main results are discussed in light of the literature on life skills in sport and positive youth development, and in terms of methodological considerations. The study concludes with some practical recommendations for coaches.

Keywords: life skills, coaches, adolescent athletes, sport context, multiple-case study

Sport takes a prominent place in the life of many adolescents. Moreover, the time when adolescents are involved in sport coincides with a crucial development period, when they are learning the values and life skills that will carry them through adulthood (McCallister, Blinde, & Weiss, 2000). Although researchers contend that sport can have a positive influence on adolescent development, some contend that it would be a mistake to believe that sport automatically generates positive benefits (Strean & Garcia Bengoechea, 2001). Sport is beneficial, but it can also have harmful consequences, such as negative interactions with peers, favoritism, performance anxiety, and stress (Dworkin & Larson, 2006). It all depends on the particular experience of the young athlete. The coach has the greatest influence on this experience. In fact, it is recognized that the coach is a key agent for socialization during adolescence (Côté & Hay, 2002). Many researchers have further argued that the coach is the most significant shaper of values and life skills for adolescent athletes (Danish, Fazio, Nellen, & Owens, 2002; McCallister et al., 2000).

According to Danish et al. (2002), life skills correspond to the mental, emotional, and social attributes as well as the characteristics and behaviors that the athlete develops or refines through practicing sport, all of which can be transferred to the world beyond sports.

The development of life skills through participation in sport is all the more critical because they constitute one of the three key objectives of sport practice in youth, as determined by Côté and Fraser-Thomas (2007): (a) enable youth to be physically active and, therefore, to improve their physical health, (b) contribute to psychosocial development by promoting the development of life skills, and (c) foster mastery of motor skills.

In the United States, many sport-based life skills programs have been developed since the mid-1990s in the aim of using sport as a context for fostering positive development in young athletes (Gould & Carson, 2008). The First Tee life skills through golf (www.thefirsttee.org), Teaching Responsibility through Physical Education and Sport (Hellison, 2003; Hellison & Walsh, 2002), Play It Smart (Petitpas, Van Raalte, Cornelius, & Presbrey, 2004), and Sport United to Promote Education and Recreation (SUPER; Danish, 2002) are some examples. However, in the interest of creating programs that are adapted to the reality of coaches and athletes, it would be useful to first examine coaches' perceptions of their role in the development of athletes' life skills, and subsequently, the ways that they develop them. To our knowledge, only three studies have specifically addressed the strategies that coaches use to develop life skills in sport. The first was by McCallister et al. (2000), who examined 22 American coaches of community baseball and softball with no formal training in structuring a learning environment to promote desired outcomes. Results revealed that, although the coaches

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generally taught life skills to the youth, they had difficulty explaining how they had taught them. In view of this difficulty reported by untrained coaches, Gould, Collins, Lauer, and Chung (2007) conducted a second study in 10 outstanding male high school football coaches, also in the United States, to examine the strategies they used to promote personal development and life skills. The results showed that they used a variety of strategies, such as treating players respectfully, using various motivational techniques, and team building. Although Gould and colleagues' study adds a new perspective, it is nevertheless specific to football players and coaches. As the authors themselves recommended, "A larger, more varied sample, including coaches who are successful in player development yet do not consistently win, needs to be examined to tease out the influence of a program with a winning record" (Gould et al., 2007, p. 31). Accordingly, it would be useful to examine different types of coaches, and in different contexts. Camiré, Trudel, and Forneris (2012) made a first step in this direction. In a recent study in high schools in the provinces of Quebec and Ontario in Canada, they interviewed outstanding coaches of basketball, volleyball, soccer, wrestling, and ice hockey. They examined the philosophies and strategies the coaches used to develop athletes' life skills and life skills transfer. Results revealed that the coaches had well-established coaching philosophies that were athlete-centered and geared toward using sport as a tool for development. Furthermore, they used specific strategies (e.g., keywords, peer evaluations, taking advantage of teachable moments, volunteer work) to coach life skills, and they taught student athletes how to transfer these life skills to other areas of life.

The above-mentioned studies have deepened understanding of the coach's role in learning life skills through sport. However, only a few such studies have been conducted, each addressing a specific sport context. For example, McCallister et al. (2000) examined community sports (softball and baseball) in the United States with untrained volunteer coaches, the sample in Gould et al. (2007) consisted of outstanding American high school football coaches, and Camiré et al. (2012) looked at model Canadian high school coaches in mainly team sports. According to Holt and Jones (2008), a significant limitation of studies on positive youth development is that all sports are treated alike, with little attempt to identify differences across sport contexts.

To date, mostly school sports and team sports have been studied in relation to life skills development. To our knowledge, no study has compared two different sport contexts within the same study to identify similarities and differences. In this perspective, the current study aimed to interview coaches that used a holistic approach, but who worked in two different sport contexts: school and community. The idea was to examine the coaches' perceptions of their role in the development of life skills in adolescent athletes. It was decided to interview coaches who used a holistic approach (i.e., they placed equal importance on the athletes' personal and athletic

development) because studies have shown that to teach life skills, coaches must adopt a coaching philosophy that emphasizes first and foremost the development of the person within a life skills development process (Camiré, Trudel, & Lemyre, 2011; Collins, Gould, Lauer, & Chung, 2009). It was also decided to examine coaches working in two different contexts: a school team sport (basketball) and an individual community sport (swimming). To date, no study has compared these two contexts (Holt & Jones, 2008). Previous research has shown that coaches deal with their athletes' behaviors differently according to sport cultures and subcultures (Trudel, Lemyre, Werthner, & Camiré, 2007). Thus, sports could differ in terms of culture (e.g., between basketball and swimming) and subculture (e.g., between community and school basketball). Accordingly, the authors felt it relevant to compare the perceptions of coaches working in a single sport in each context. The study also looked at different sports (individual swimming and team basketball) to obtain new insights into coaches' perceptions across two sport contexts. The following three questions guided the current study: (a) what life skills did the two types of coaches foster in adolescent athletes, (b) what were the motivations of the two types of coaches for teaching life skills to adolescent athletes, and (c) what strategies did the two types of coaches use to teach life skills to adolescent athletes?

Method

Research Strategy and Contexts

To respond to the study questions, a qualitative research approach was selected. A multiple-case study (Yin, 2009) was conducted in two sport contexts in the province of Quebec, Canada: (a) high school basketball coaches and (b) community swimming coaches working at various sport clubs under the Quebec swimming federation. In Canada, school sport is regulated by the Canadian School Sport Federation (CSSF), whose purpose is to "encourage, promote and be an advocate for good sportsmanship, citizenship and the total development of student athletes through interscholastic sport."¹ The CSSF has over 750,000 student athletes and 52,000 coaches in the 11-member provincial and territorial federations and associations (Canadian School Sports Federation, n.d.). What distinguishes school sport from community sport is that, in Canada, high school sport is promoted as an extension of the classroom (Holt, Tink, Mandigo, & Fox, 2008). High school coaches are expected to teach life skills through sport (Forneris, Camiré, & Trudel, 2012), in line with the school's education mission, whereas community sport takes place in sport clubs, where more of the coaches are parents and other volunteers.

Participants

The participant sample includes 24 coaches, of whom 12 (two women, 10 men) worked at high school (basketball)

and 12 (four women, eight men) worked in the community (swimming). The following selection criteria were used: (a) coaching experience, that is, background in coaching elite athletes aged 13 to 17 years; and (b) recognition in the sport environment for a holistic, athlete-centered approach, that is, placing equal importance on personal and athletic development. Demographic information on the participants in both sport contexts are presented in Table 1.

The high school basketball coaches were between 23 and 39 years old ($M = 30.08$, $SD = 4.21$) and had from 2 to 20 years of experience ($M = 11.41$, $SD = 5.51$). They coached elite AAA League basketball² with adolescent girls ($N = 5$) and boys ($N = 7$) aged 13 to 14 years ($N = 3$) and 15 to 17 years ($N = 9$), respectively. Five coaches worked full time at their high school, either as a teacher ($N = 3$), sport technician ($N = 1$), or sports director ($N = 1$). Six others held a full-time job outside the school, and one was a full-time university student (bachelor program). Five coaches had completed Level 1 of the Canadian National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP), four had completed Level 2, and three had completed Level 3. In addition, eight coaches had attended various basketball conferences: two at international conferences and six at provincial conferences. Only one coach had attended a conference that focused specifically on pedagogical coaching skills. All coaches had played on basketball teams at different levels: three at the regional ($N = 1$) or provincial ($N = 2$) high school level, five at the regional ($N = 3$) or provincial ($N = 2$) college level, three at university, and one as a professional.

The community swimming coaches were aged between 23 and 49 years ($M = 36.33$, $SD = 8.64$) and their coaching experience varied from 8 to 31 years ($M = 17.37$, $SD = 8.58$). All these coaches worked with both male and female adolescents. Seven coaches worked with athletes aged 13 to 17 years and five worked more specifically with athletes aged 15 to 17 years. Eleven coaches held a full-time coaching position and one held a part-time coaching position. One coach had completed Level 1 NCCP training, two had attained Level 2, four had attained Level 3, and four had attained Level 4. One coach did not mention the NCCP level attained. Two coaches had competed at the provincial level, six at the national level, and four at the international level.

Procedure

Once the study was approved by the ethics committee of the researchers' university, the coaches were recruited using a reputational sampling procedure (Miles & Huberman, 1994), whereby key informants, or individuals with good knowledge of the studied context, recommend potential participants who meet the selection criteria. The key informants in the basketball ($N = 5$) and swimming ($N = 2$) community knew the coaches well but could not participate in this study for various reasons. For instance, some key informants were coaching teams in the school's AA basketball league ($N = 2$) as well as the A league A ($N = 1$), one was responsible for the school basketball leagues under the *Réseau du sport étudiant du Québec* (student sport network—RSEQ; $N = 1$), and one was responsible for sports at a high school ($N = 1$). The key informants for swimming were two individuals who were recognized for their good knowledge of coaches working in this environment. They were the Coordinator of the *Conseil du sport de haut niveau de Québec* (high level sports council of Quebec—CSHNQ) and the Technical Director of the *fédération de natation du Québec* (Quebec Swimming Federation—FNQ). The key informants proposed a list of coaches who met the selection criteria and provided their coordinates. These coaches were then contacted individually and invited to participate in the study.

Data were collected from individual semistructured interviews with the coaches varying from 60 to 120 min in duration. One researcher conducted all interviews with the basketball coaches and another researcher conducted interviews with the swimming coaches. The interview guides enabled the interviewers to conduct similar interviews, while providing coaches with the flexibility to freely express their views. In addition, to ensure methodological consistency, the two interviewers were similarly trained and held frequent discussions throughout the data collection process. At the beginning of the interviews, the study objectives were presented to the coaches. Coaches were informed that participation was voluntary, that the interview would be recorded and kept confidential. Coaches were asked to sign a consent form, which was approved by the ethics committee. The coaches also filled out a form to provide demographic information and coordinates for later validation of the data analysis.

Table 1 Demographic Information on the Participants in Both Sport Contexts

	School Sport (Basketball)	Community Sport (Swimming)
Number	12 (2 women, 10 men)	12 (4 women, 8 men)
Age (average years)	30.08	36.33
Coaching experience (average years)	11.41	17.37
Coaching job	5 full-time	11 full-time
Athletic level (average)	provincial college	national

Data saturation was reached (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003) after conducting 24 interviews (12 basketball and 12 swimming coaches). To protect the participants' identity, fictitious names were assigned to each coach.

Interview Guide

The interview guide comprised two sections and was tested in six pilot interviews (three in each sport context), the results of which are not presented in this study. These pilot interviews confirmed that the interview guide addressed the study questions adequately, and no differences in the interviews were found between the two interviewers in the two contexts. The first section addresses a unique portrait of each coach. The aim was to gain a deeper understanding of the coaches' individual and professional characteristics, their athletic and coaching experience, their coaching approach, their relational skills, and their work environment. The second section addresses the life skills that they taught. Coaches were asked to mention the particular life skills they taught, their motivations to do so, and what they did in practice to foster the development of these life skills in adolescent athletes. From the beginning of the interview, to prevent a diverse meanings and interpretations and to ensure that each coach had the same understanding of the expression "life skills," they were provided with a definition and explanation according to Danish et al. (2002).³ As stated by Gould and Carson (2008) in their literature review on life skills in sport and positive youth development:

One problem plaguing life skills through sport research stems from the fact that life skills and associated terms are often not precisely defined. For example, when reviewing the relevant literature, one will see such terms as positive youth development, social-emotional growth and life skills development. Often these terms are not explicitly defined or are simply used interchangeably with little explanation. Operationalizing key terms is important because before any phenomena can be scientifically studied it must be clearly defined. (Gould & Carson, 2008, p. 59)

Therefore, the notion of life skills was explained to the coaches and a life skills "reflection grid" was provided for them to fill out. The grid contained an example of a life skill and associated practical teaching strategies. The coaches were asked to write in one column the life skills they had fostered in the past year and the practical teaching strategies they used in another column, referring to their actual practice of sport coaching. After the coaches had spent some time reflecting on their responses, the interview was resumed, this time concerning what they had written in the grid. To our knowledge, this type of grid has never been used in a life skills study. The reflection grid enabled the coaches to clarify and express more accurately their thoughts about the life skills they taught as well as their teaching and transfer strategies. The

interviews ended with a summarizing of the main points discussed to allow the coaches to correct their statements as needed and to add further comments.

Data Analysis

The interviews with the 24 coaches (12 basketball and 12 swimming) were transcribed verbatim. The data capture was then verified by a second listening to the recordings and by several careful readings of the transcripts. The analyses were then performed in two steps: content analysis and cross-case analysis. In step 1, each transcript was content analyzed deductively and inductively (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2009). The deductive analysis was based on the study questions and the literature on life skills in sport, including studies on coaches' and athletes' perceptions of life skills development, coaching strategies, and the transfer of life skills to other life areas. The aim was to categorize the information in terms of life skills development. The inductive analysis aimed to allow new data to emerge. Two measures were taken to ensure analysis validity: first, regular meetings were held between the two study researchers and an assistant researcher throughout all coding and data analysis phases; and second, once the content analysis for each interview was completed, an individual summary was written and sent to the respective coach for validation. In step 2, cross-case analyses of the 24 interviews were performed. Analyses were first performed separately for each sport context using tables to organize the data by case (i.e., to compare each coach separately). The aim was to explore similarities and differences between coaches in terms of the study questions (i.e., life skills taught, coaches' motivations, and life skills teaching strategies). This process was then repeated for the 24 coaches in the two contexts to determine similarities and differences between the two contexts.

Results

The results are presented in three sections: (a) the main life skills taught, (b) the coaches' motivations for teaching these life skills, and (c) the life skills teaching strategies used.

Life Skills Taught

The results revealed that the coaches in both sport contexts taught a diversity of life skills to the adolescent athletes. For both sports, the majority of coaches reported teaching self-confidence and respect (see Table 2).

The two sport contexts showed particularities as well. The basketball coaches mentioned a total of 19 different life skills, led by self-confidence (9/12), followed by about half mentioning stress and emotional management (7/12), respect (7/12), and surpassing oneself (5/12). The other life skills were mentioned by only one or a few coaches. On average, each coach reported teaching 4.17 life skills over the past year.

Table 2 Life Skills That Coaches in the Two Sport Contexts Reported Teaching

School Sport (Basketball)	Community Sport (Swimming)
Self-confidence (9/12)	Respect (10/12)
Stress and emotional management (7/12)	Self-confidence (6/12)
Respect (7/12)	Goal setting (6/12)
Surpassing oneself (5/12)	Punctuality (5/12)
Leadership (3/12)	Autonomy (4/12)
Accountability (3/12)	Life balance (4/12)
Autonomy (2/12)	Stress and emotional management (4/12)
Dedication (2/12)	Surpassing oneself (4/12)
Healthy lifestyle (2/12)	Team spirit (3/12)
Assiduity (1/12)	Perseverance (3/12)
Concentration (1/12)	Positive attitude (2/12)
Communication (1/12)	Concentration (2/12)
Self-awareness (1/12)	Engagement (2/12)
Goal setting (1/12)	Motivation (2/12)
Positive thinking (1/12)	Courage (1/12)
Perseverance (1/12)	Pride (1/12)
Punctuality (1/12)	Honesty (1/12)
Teamwork (1/12)	Humility (1/12)
Visualization (1/12)	Leadership (1/12)
	Gratefulness (1/12)
	Conflict resolution (1/12)
	Accountability (1/12)
	Healthy eating habits (1/12)
	Healthy lifestyle (1/12)
	Visualization (1/12)

Note: Numbers in parentheses are the number of coaches who stated that they promoted this life skill. Common life skills between the two sport environments are written in **bold**.

The swimming coaches mentioned a total of 25 different life skills. The majority promoted respect (10/12), half promoted self-confidence (6/12) and goal setting (6/12), and about half promoted punctuality (5/12). The other life skills were mentioned by only one or a few coaches. On average, each coach reported teaching 5.66 life skills in the past year.

In all, 13 life skills were mentioned for both sport environments, accounting for slightly more than half of all the life skills mentioned.

Coaches' Motivations for Teaching Life Skills

The analysis results revealed that the motivations for the coaches to teach each life skill fell into two main categories: (a) the needs of the adolescent athletes and (b) the coach's own values. On the one hand, the majority of the coaches of both sports said they taught a particular life skill because they believed it was

important for the athletes to improve in their sport or in their personal life. This athlete-centered motivation predominated for both contexts. For basketball coaches, this motivation type was most often represented by the promotion of self-confidence, stress and emotional management, and respect. For example, Christine said, "I encourage self-confidence because athletes usually have low self-confidence. It's rare for athletes to be confident about their abilities." For swimming coaches, the most often cited life skills under this motivation type were respect, self-confidence, and goal setting. For example, Karen said, "I teach goal setting because I believe that when you have goals in a competition, it lessens the stress. In training, I would say that it increases motivation. They don't wonder what they're doing or why."

On the other hand, the coaches of both sports reported that they taught some life skills because they believed they were important, reflecting their own personal values. The basketball coaches cited surpassing

oneself the most often under this motivation type: “I’ve always believed in surpassing oneself. I love the idea of getting a group of young athletes to reach higher ground, to push them to do their individual best, or their team best” (Paul). The swimming coaches cited respect the most often under this motivation type:

I think that we have to re-explain to the athletes what respect is. ... I don’t blame the parents in any way, but if they haven’t learned it at home, they’re going to learn it with me. Respect is a super important thing for me. (Robyn)

Life Skills Teaching Strategies

The teaching strategies that the coaches used fell into two themes: (a) direct teaching strategies and (b) transfer strategies.

Direct Teaching Strategies. Coaches use direct teaching strategies voluntarily and consciously (Gould & Carson, 2008). More precisely, “Direct strategies focus on such practices as having clear and consistent rules, providing leadership opportunities and engaging in team building efforts” (Gould & Carson, 2008, p. 67). Coaches in the two contexts use several direct teaching strategies: 16 for basketball and 15 for swimming coaches. Regarding similarities, the results indicated that 13 teaching strategies were shared between the two sport contexts. Eight of these were cited by more than half the coaches of each sport: general discussions, rules to follow, individual interventions, specific interventions, goal setting, feedback, maintaining high expectations, and

modeling (see Table 3). For example, Paul, a basketball coach, promotes respect through modeling: “Respect inspires respect. So I set an example by showing the players respect.” Robyn, a swimming coach, also promotes respect through modeling: “When we travel by bus to a competition, I get off the bus first and thank the driver. The athletes who follow me then realize that they should thank the driver as well.” In addition, Paul, the basketball coach, promotes goal setting to surpass oneself: “At the start of the season, I set a seasonal goal for the team that is challenging but realistic. The athletes know that it is a demanding goal, but they also know that by surpassing themselves, they will succeed.” Matthew, a swimming coach, fosters the development of pride by setting goals, as follows:

Using the same principle as asking the swimmers to set goals, I ask them to target what they want to do well, and to write down three achievements they would like to attain so they could be proud of their performance. When I ask them to do this exercise, the athletes base themselves less on performance standards [results] and more on what they succeed in doing, and on their personal aspirations. They can also take pride in themselves and in their performance.

Of the main direct teaching strategies used in each sport context, it should be noted that all the basketball coaches reported using general discussions (12/12) and rules (12/12). For example, Steve fostered the life skill surpassing oneself during general discussions or individual interventions:

Table 3 Life Skills Teaching Strategies Used by the Coaches in the Two Sport Contexts

School Sport (Basketball)	Community Sport (Swimming)
Holding a general discussion (12/12)	Holding a general discussion (12/12)
Establishing rules to follow (12/12)	Making individual interventions (12/12)
Making individual interventions (11/12)	Providing feedback (11/12)
Making specific interventions (10/12)	Using goal setting (10/12)
Providing feedback (9/12)	Making specific interventions (9/12)
Maintaining high expectations (8/12)	Maintaining high expectations (8/12)
Using goal setting (8/12)	Acting as a model (8/12)
Developing self-awareness (8/12)	Creating practice opportunities (7/12)
Acting as a model (7/12)	Establishing rules to follow (7/12)
Creating practice opportunities (6/12)	Making athletes accountable (4/12)
Changing attitudes or interventions (5/12)	Changing attitudes or interventions (3/12)
Fostering team spirit (5/12)	Developing self-awareness (3/12)
Posting messages or images in plain view (3/12)	Doing systematic teaching (2/12)
Making athletes accountable (3/12)	Using teamwork (1/12)
Getting parents involved (1/12)	Arranging sport performances (1/12)
Doing systematic teaching (1/12)	

Note. Numbers in parentheses are the number of coaches who stated they used this strategy. Common strategies between the two sport contexts are written in **bold**.

Sometimes I would make a little speech: “It’s going to be hard; it’s going to hurt; but your team’s going to be better. You have to make sacrifices,” and so on. . . . Other times, I’m going to make an individual intervention by asking for a meeting with the youth so I can tell him I’m not satisfied with his work, or I might tell him briefly during a training session.

For his part, William promotes the development of respect by establishing rules to follow:

I give each athlete a very simple sheet that contains the team rules: to behave fairly and respectfully towards the other members. The rules cover lateness, school marks, and the notification procedure for when they can’t make it to practice, as well as the consequences when they break the rules. When somebody breaks a rule, we’re all on the same page. There’s no surprise, no hard feelings, when they suffer the consequences.

On the other hand, all the swimming coaches used general discussions (12/12) and individual interventions (12/12). For example, Matthew fosters the development of perseverance by holding a general discussion:

I talk it over with the swimmers, and I try to get them to understand that just because they are not succeeding at this moment, it doesn’t mean that they will never succeed. I tell them that they have to persevere and persevere, and that sometimes it takes a long time before they’ll see the results!

Ryan, for his part, promoted developing a balanced life in individual interventions:

When an athlete is going through a difficult time, this is the time to take a step back. We sit down and discuss things a little more deeply. I get them to think about their level of satisfaction in all areas of life: family, social, performance, training, school. We discuss all this, and then we can identify where the problem is. Then I offer some advice.

Most of the swimming coaches (11/12) also cited feedback as a teaching strategy for certain life skills. For example, David said: “Self-confidence, I usually teach it using positive messages such as, ‘Bravo, you did it; you worked hard.’” James also mentioned using feedback to encourage the athletes to be more self-confident and to surpass themselves: “When I ask them to change something in their style or technique, it’s demanding, and they don’t always succeed. But when I see that they have succeeded, I let them know: ‘You got it! You can do it, no? You did it once, now do it 10 times!’”

The majority of the coaches in both contexts appear to use spontaneous or improvised situations to foster the development of life skills or to strengthen their development. More specifically, none of the coaches appeared to allocate a specific time in the training program for teaching life skills. These coaches taught life skills in

combination with physical skills. For example, Ryan, a swimming coach, said: “I don’t begin a training session by telling myself that ‘Today, we’re going to work on surpassing ourselves,’ or any other life skill. But whenever an appropriate situation comes up, I use that as an opportunity.”

Life Skills Transfer Strategies. Transfer strategies are used to help athletes apply the life skills they acquire in sport to other, nonsport settings (Gould & Carson, 2008). The coaches mentioned two main transfer strategies that they used. The first, reported most often by both basketball (11/12) and swimming (12/12) coaches, was using specific discussions, which consisted of explaining to the athletes the nonsport settings where the life skills would be useful or important. For example, Charles, a basketball coach, said:

Everything about the ability to manage stress and emotions, I think that athletes can easily transfer to their life. I regularly draw parallels between stress management when athletes have to write exams, because this is what they worry about the most.

Emi, a swimming coach, fostered surpassing oneself by telling her athletes:

Later on, when you’re working, this is going to be useful. If you continue to try and surpass yourself and do your best, you’re going to get the job. You’re going to be the one who gets selected for promotion, who pushes the envelope. You’re going to be the one who succeeds, over someone who doesn’t go the extra mile.

The second-most often cited transfer strategy was asking, that is, asking the athletes to put a life skill into practice in another area of life. Half the basketball coaches (6/12) and two of the swimming coaches (2/12) used this strategy. William, a basketball coach, explained how he tried to foster the transfer of respect: “Being respectful is a quality. I teach respect on the basketball court, for the officials, and when we travel to a tournament, whether we’re at a restaurant, a hotel, or a grocery store. I ask athletes to be respectful in life domains other than the basketball court.” Karen, a swimming coach, promoted goal setting by asking her athletes to apply this life skill to other areas:

The ones who have problems in school, I ask them to set goals so they can improve. For example, I might say, “Okay, it didn’t go very well this time, but now you’re going to set yourself a goal, just like in training.” That’s how I try to transfer this learning to school.

Finally, although the basketball and swimming coaches did not mention any transfer strategies for certain life skills, some coaches (nine basketball, seven swimming) said that they believed that life skills transferred automatically to nonsport settings. John, a

basketball coach, felt that stress management would transfer automatically:

I don't tell my athletes that basketball, with its stressful situations, will help them in their future life. But I think that by developing the ability to cope with these stressful situations in basketball, they'll be able to apply that later.

Matthew, a swimming coach, also felt that the ability to persevere would automatically transfer to other situations: "If they can use swimming to learn how to persevere, for the rest of their lives, when they go through difficult times, they'll be able to persevere by hoping for the best, and this way get through it."

Discussion

This study aimed to better understand the role of coaches who use a holistic approach to develop life skills in adolescent athletes in two sport contexts: high school basketball and community swimming. Although some differences between the two contexts were observed, the overall results indicate that all the coaches emphasized the development of life skills in adolescent athletes, and were motivated to foster the acquisition of several life skills through various teaching and transfer strategies. The differences in the number of life skills taught between the two sport contexts could be attributed to the different interviewers, individual differences between the coaches, and the different contexts. The most often reported life skills taught (i.e., self-confidence and respect) are in line with the literature. For instance, the athletes studied by Holt et al. (2008) and by Camiré, Trudel, and Forneris (2009a) reported acquiring self-confidence and respect through participation in sport. The parents of the athletes interviewed by Camiré, Trudel, and Forneris (2009b) also believed that their children had acquired self-confidence and respect through participating in sport. Self-confidence and respect therefore appear to be important life skills to acquire, according to various actors in the sport community. The fact that self-confidence has been positively related to sport performance in many studies (e.g., Bandura & Locke, 2003; Martens, Vealey, & Burton, 1990; Vealey, 1986, 2001; Woodman & Hardy, 2003) may explain why the majority of coaches emphasize this life skill. Furthermore, both the basketball and swimming coaches in the current study promoted surpassing oneself in their coaching practice. Gould et al. (2007), Fraser-Thomas and Côté (2009), and Holt, Tamminen, Tink, and Black (2009) found that the coaches in their respective studies asked the athletes to surpass themselves. Coaches might consider surpassing oneself an important life skill because the demands of elite competitive sport require athletes to continuously push themselves to new heights (Pensgaard & Duda, 2002).

It is noteworthy that many of the basketball coaches used goal setting as a strategy to foster the development of life skills more than as a life skill to be developed as

such (only one coach reported promoting goal setting for itself). Therefore, it appears that basketball coaches already have this life skill, and that they use it in practice as a way to develop other life skills in adolescent athletes. This result departs from the literature: Goal setting is a central life skill in life skills programs such as GOAL (Danish, Meyer, Mash, et al., 1998) and SUPER (Danish, 2002). Based on the results of the current study, basketball coaches do not appear to place much importance on the fact that adolescent athletes have to learn to set goals. It is also possible that the coaches felt that their athletes had already acquired this life skill. If we want coaches to teach a variety of life skills, they need access to additional pedagogical information and training programs specifically for basketball coaching (e.g., the Canadian NCCP) to raise their awareness of this life skill and how to teach it to adolescent athletes. For their part, the swimming coaches reported promoting the development of life skills through goal setting as well, but they also reported promoting this life skill for its own merit.

An original contribution of this study lies in the exploration of the coaches' motivations. Although some studies have addressed life skills that coaches teach and the strategies they use to teach them, no study to date has specifically investigated their motivations for teaching specific life skills. The findings of the current study advance the knowledge by incorporating these motivations. The results indicate that coaches in both sport contexts appear to promote life skills based primarily on the needs of the athletes, in both their sport and their personal lives. These findings can be linked to the conceptual framework for life skills recently developed by Hodge, Danish, and Martin (2012). The model completes the Life Development Intervention model developed by Danish and D'Augelli (1983) by integrating aspects of Basic Psychological Need Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), notably the three basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) and the notion of a need-supportive motivational climate. According to Hodge et al., when basic psychological needs are satisfied, people experience positive psychological development and optimal psychological well-being, which are the objectives of many life skills programs. Hodge et al. model addresses fundamental, predetermined psychological needs, whereas the current study considers meeting athletes' needs from a sport or personal standpoint. More research is needed to better understand the impact of considering different needs when teaching athletes life skills. On the other hand, the coaches in both sport contexts reported teaching some life skills because they believed that they were important, reflecting the coaches' personal values. It is possible that the coaches' motivations for teaching life skills may be related to the culture and subculture of their respective sport (basketball or swimming). In other words, the coaches might have valued teaching certain life skills in line with the values of that particular sport culture. Indeed, as proposed by Trudel et al. (2007) in a study on character development in young athletes, and in line with a previous proposal by Bredemeier and Shields

(2006), it is important to take the culture and subculture of a sport into consideration to gain a deeper understanding of how young athletes develop character through sport participation. Trudel et al. found that the baseball and hockey coaches they interviewed had differing perceptions about accepting unsportsmanlike behavior, and consequently character development in young athletes. Their results revealed, among other things, that the manner in which the coaches acted or reacted to some of their athletes' behaviors varied considerably according to the sport subculture. The results of the current study, therefore, open up a promising research avenue for a better understanding of coaches' motivations for teaching life skills. Thus, it would be useful to conduct studies on coaches' motivations for teaching life skills while accounting for specific cultural aspects of different sports.

In the life skills teaching strategies reported by the basketball and swimming coaches in this study, a diversity of strategies were used, some of which can be found in Gould and Carson's (2008) model. The results of the current study enrich this model by revealing new direct teaching strategies used in the two different sport contexts: providing feedback, developing self-awareness in athletes, making specific interventions, creating practice opportunities, changing attitudes or interventions, providing advice, using teamwork, and arranging sport performances. In addition, it is noteworthy that all the coaches were able to verbalize the strategies that they used and provide concrete examples, supporting the results of Gould et al. (2007). This result could be attributable to the fact that the coaches who were interviewed were experienced, like those in the study by Gould et al. In a previous study, the coaches studied by McCallister et al. (2000) had difficulty explaining how they taught life skills to athletes. In the current study, although the basketball and swimming coaches used a number of different strategies, they did not teach life skills systematically or explicitly, unlike the SUPER life skills program (Forneris, Danish, & Scott, 2007; Goudas, Dermitzaki, Leondari, & Danish, 2006; Papacharisis, Goudas, Danish, & Theodorakis, 2005). Instead, they integrated life skills into daily training. More precisely, the coaches took advantage of spontaneous or improvised situations to teach life skills, which did not add to the training time. Gould et al. came to the same conclusion: the coaches in their study did not view teaching life skills as a separate activity from their general coaching duties. They reported infusing life skills into their coaching practice. These results concur with the results of various studies on learning life skills in adolescent athletes. Thus, Holt et al. (2008), Camiré et al. (2009a), and Jones and Lavalley (2009) all underscored in their respective studies that athletes learn life skills without explicit or systematic teaching by their coaches. These results may also be explained by the fact that in training programs for coaches (e.g., the Canadian NCCP), there is no explicit training on the development of life skills in sport (although mental skills are covered), in contrast to life skill coaching programs (e.g., GOAL, SUPER). Further studies are needed to determine whether

the strategies used by the coaches in the current study are really effective in teaching the life skills that their athletes needed.

Finally, the findings on the transfer strategies used by the basketball and swimming coaches (i.e., specific discussions, asking) are similar to the findings of Gould et al. (2007). In their study, school football coaches also reported discussing problems in other life spheres and the connections between practicing sport and other life situations, as well as emphasizing certain life skills both on and off the field. Similar transfer strategies were found by Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte, and Jones (2005) and Gould and Carson (2008), and in conditions that facilitated life skills transfer, according to Danish (2000). The present findings also suggest that the coaches we interviewed promoted life skills transfer without using any particular strategies. As some authors have pointed out (e.g., Danish, 2000; Gould & Carson, 2008; Mayocchi & Hanrahan, 2000; Petitpas et al., 2005), athletes who are aware of their life skills and are self-confident would find it easier to apply these life skills to other situations. By promoting self-confidence as a life skill and by developing self-awareness in athletes as a direct teaching strategy, coaches could create the conditions that are liable to help adolescent athletes transfer their acquired life skills to other life areas. However, to be considered a life skill, transfer to another context must actually take place (Gould & Carson, 2008). Because the current study addresses coaches' perspectives, it was not possible to examine whether and how the athletes transferred these life skills to other settings. Future studies could examine the life skills transfer process while taking into account the athlete's role in the process as well as the roles of other individuals in the athlete's environment (e.g., coaches, peers, siblings, parents).

In sum, as mentioned above, the results of the current study on the two sport contexts (school basketball and community swimming) were similar overall. This can be explained in part by the profile of the coaches studied. Because not all the basketball coaches worked full-time at the school (only 5/12), they may have been less influenced by the school's education philosophy and mission, which can be similar to those of the community swimming coaches, who worked at sport clubs. In addition, although two groups of coaches were selected from two different contexts (i.e., school and community sport), it is possible that the two groups of coaches are more similar than expected, for two reasons. First, the selection criteria, whereby all participating coaches had to follow a holistic, athlete-centered approach, lead to the following question: Does this approach outweigh the influence of context on how coaches foster life skills in adolescent athletes? This question leads to further reflection on the influence of coaching philosophy on the teaching of life skills in sport. Because this question was not specifically addressed in the current study, it is impossible to draw a conclusion here. Future studies could explore this issue in greater depth. Second, the interview guide, and more specifically the definition of

life skills that was included, could have influenced the coaches more than expected. In fact, because the coaches in the two contexts were given a definition of life skills at the beginning of the interview, including an example, and because a specific reflection grid was used for the different life skills taught and the strategies used, it is possible that this method would have influenced the coaches in a similar manner. Thus, if a definition of life skills had not been provided, the results could have differed. Nevertheless, because the term “life skills” might have caused some confusion if it had not been defined (given that coaches in Canada are not well-informed on this subject), this was felt to be the most appropriate method for conducting the interviews.

Based on the results of the current study, some practical recommendations for coaches are proposed. First, because different life skills were mentioned by the coaches, it would be useful to include a broad range of life skills in training programs for coaches. Coaches could then be better informed and prepared to teach a variety of life skills. They could also better adapt life skills teaching to the needs of their athletes. Second, when teaching life skills, it would be important for coaches to account for the specific culture and subculture of the sport, the coaching environment, the demands of the sport, the characteristics of the athletes, and their own values. Third, coaches could also focus on regular teaching of life skills, with a heightened awareness of their actions and their influence on adolescent athletes. Finally, coaches could facilitate life skills transfer by holding specific discussions with athletes on the importance of applying the life skills they learn through sport to other areas of life, and by asking them to use these life skills in practice.

In conclusion, some study limitations must be considered. First of all, it is an exploratory study that addresses the perceptions of coaches working in two specific sports and two different contexts and their role in teaching life skills in sport. Moreover, because data were collected from individual interviews, it was not possible to confirm that the reports of the coaches corresponded to what actually took place during coaching. Furthermore, the results of this study cannot be generalized to other situations or samples, given the selection criteria for the participants, the limited number of coaches who participated, and the two specific sport contexts in which they coached.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes to advancing the knowledge by providing a new perspective on the different life skills that coaches taught in two different sport contexts and the different teaching and transfer strategies they used, enriching previous research and the model developed by Gould and Carson (2008). Moreover, an original contribution of this study is the preliminary evidence on coaches' motivations to teach specific life skills. Further studies are needed to deepen understanding of the coach's role in the development of life skills in athletes. For example, it would be useful to conduct a study in both coaches and athletes, using

interviews and observations of real coaching or competitive situations. Such studies could enable determining whether coaches act according to their reports and whether athletes actually learn the life skills that their coaches wish to instill. In sum, this new knowledge would allow a better understanding of how life skills coaching takes place in sport practice, and would ultimately enable improvements in training programs for coaches so that they could teach life skills more effectively.

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Notes

1. CanadianSchool Sport Federation (CSSF), Constitution. <http://www.schoolsport.ca/constitution/>. Consulted September 22, 2012.
2. In Quebec, the provincial AAA basketball league is the highest level of competition for school sport.
3. Danish and his colleagues (2002) have defined life skills as mental, emotional, and social attributes, characteristics, and behaviors that athletes develop or refine through sport participation that have the potential to transfer beyond the sport venue.

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