

The Learning Profiles of High School Teacher-coaches

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Abstract

Jarvis' (2006) theory of human learning framed the analysis of qualitative interviews conducted with 31 high school teacher-coaches. Using composite narratives, we present three profiles as an innovative way to explain the social context within which the teacher-coaches have developed and also, to provide insight into the needs of teacher-coaches with varied biographies. Three learning profiles are presented: (1) The 'Rookie' had little or no experience coaching or playing sport prior to becoming a teacher; (2) The 'Varsity Athlete' learned to coach mainly by reflecting on his/her experiences during his/her athletic career; (3) The 'Veteran' gained coaching experience prior to becoming a teacher, often by being an assistant. Suggestions are made to maximise the learning of teacher-coaches.

Keywords: Learning; Coach; Narrative; High School

Résumé

La théorie de l'apprentissage humain de Jarvis (2006) a guidé l'analyse des 31 entrevues qualitatives faites avec des enseignant-entraîneurs de niveau secondaire. Sous forme de narratif, nous présentons trois profils afin d'expliquer le contexte social dans lequel les enseignant-entraîneurs œuvrent. De plus, l'analyse des résultats permet de constater les besoins des enseignant-entraîneurs présentant des biographies variées. Les trois profils d'apprentissage sont présentés. «La recrue» avait peu d'expérience en sport comme athlète et/ou entraîneur avant de devenir enseignant. «L'athlète universitaire» a appris à entraîner en grande partie à partir de ses expériences comme athlète. «Le vétéran» a accumulé de l'expérience en entraînement avant de devenir enseignant en étant assistant-

entraîneur. Des suggestions sont proposées afin de maximiser l'apprentissage des enseignant-entraîneurs.

Mots-clés : Apprentissage; Entraîneur; Narratif; École Secondaire

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Introduction

There is a growing body of research examining the context of high school sport in Canada (e.g., Camiré & Trudel, 2010; Holt, Tink, Mandigo, & Fox, 2008). However, only a few studies have focused specifically on the high school teacher-coach, despite that quality coaching is regarded as a key element in promoting the development of student-athletes through school sport (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005; Lacroix, Camiré, & Trudel, 2008; Scanlan, Babkes, & Scanlan, 2005). High school sport belongs to the developmental level sport context (Trudel & Gilbert, 2006); however, high school teacher-coaches experience different learning needs from developmental level coaches who work outside of the school context. The information that is available indicates that teacher-coaches are expected to enter the realm of coaching and perform, from their first day, to the same standards as their expert colleagues (Bell, 1997). Apart from high school teacher-coaches remaining largely unstudied, another reason they should be further examined is they are often asked to coach multiple sports, including sports with which they are unfamiliar, and are allotted little time for preparation (Lacroix et al.).

The developmental sporting context has been described as a setting that includes: “a formal competitive structure, increased commitment from athletes and coaches, a stable relationship between athletes and coaches, and athletes are selected based on skill tryouts” (Trudel & Gilbert, 2006, p. 521). Examples of developmental sports coaching contexts include high school sports, regional sport clubs, and adult competitive sports that are neither full-time nor professional. The first major difference between the learning of high school teacher-coaches and other developmental level coaches is related to formal learning situations (e.g., large-scale coach education programs). Most developmental level coaches in Canada are required to be certified by the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) (Lacroix et al., 2008). In contrast, teacher-coaches can coach high school sports without being certified by the NCCP. Although the NCCP has recently developed a training module for high school teacher-coaches, it is not mandatory for coaches to go through the training and the module is currently only offered in a few provinces (Coaching Association of Canada, 2010). Second, the majority of developmental sport coaches participate for several years as competitive athletes in the sport they coach, which provides them with informal knowledge about the role of a coach (Sage, 1989; Trudel & Gilbert, 2006). Furthermore, prior to becoming a head coach, developmental coaches “spend approximately four years as assistant coaches” (Trudel & Gilbert, 2006, p. 521) in which they learn how to communicate and teach sport (Wright et al., 2007). High school teacher-coaches differ because, when starting a teaching career, many are often asked to coach a sport with which they are unfamiliar and have no prior athletic or coaching experience (Lacroix et al., 2008).

Given these circumstances, teacher-coaches have certain learning needs that differ from those of other developmental sport coaches. The different levels of coaching/playing experiences and overall sporting knowledge of teacher-coaches influences their attraction to certain learning situations and ultimately impacts their ability to create a suitable environment for student-athlete development. The present study was conducted to better understand Canadian high school teacher-coaches’

learning. Jarvis' (2006, 2007, 2009) theory, which states that we learn by extracting information from social situations and transforming this information into knowledge and/or skills, acted as the framework for this study. Using this framework allowed us to document the biographies of high school teacher-coaches and identify the impact that their life experiences have had on their learning how to coach.

Human learning

According to Jarvis (2006), in order to experience the world, information must be received through any one or any combination of the senses and then be transformed. The perceived content of an experience can be transformed cognitively (through thought), emotively (through feeling), and/or practically (through action) into knowledge and/or skills. All transformations ultimately end with a changed, more learned person. Jarvis contends that learning is about becoming and he has chosen to use the term 'biography' to capture the concept of who we are at a given time. Our biographies are continuously evolving by the transformation of experiences across our lifespan. As such, biographies are representative of the whole person, not just our knowledge and skills, but also our attitudes, beliefs, and values. In essence, our biographies represent an accumulation of events and characteristics that direct our approach to learning.

According to Jarvis (2006), we learn either non-reflectively or reflectively. When learning ensues non-reflectively, the individual allows the situation to alter his/her biography without evaluating the perceived sensation(s). Memorisation is one type of non-reflective learning. When learning is reflective, the perceived content of the situation is evaluated based on the person's biography, before it is accepted or rejected. Reflective learning is often future-directed and intentional; it occurs when a person recognises that his/her biography is insufficient to cope with a situation and seeks new information to bridge the knowledge gap. Reflective learning can also be incidental, whereby an individual reflects on a past experience and transforms the experience's sensations into knowledge, subsequently bridging the gap.

In summary, Jarvis (2006) identifies human learning to be the product of the cognitive, practical, and/or emotive transformation of sensations into knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and/or beliefs, which are added to our biography. Our biographies influence what we choose to learn and how we learn it. In this study, we examined the biographies of high school teacher-coaches and identified the impact that their life experiences have had on their learning to coach. Using a constructivist approach, we aimed to build narratives based on the analysis of the qualitative data generated through interviews. These data depict meaningful life events and experiential insights that shape how teacher-coaches learn to coach.

Method

Participants

Participant recruitment began when the university's Research Ethics Board granted ethical approval. The participants of this study were 31 high school teacher-coaches (15 females and 16 males) from the province of Ontario who were recruited from 17 different high schools (12 urban and 5 rural). In order to be eligible to participate in

this study, coaches needed to be teachers at the school where they coached and needed to have a minimum of one year of experience as the head coach of any sport recognised by the Ontario Federation for School Athletic Associations (OFSAA). The minimum of one year of coaching experience was used as a criterion to ensure that the teacher-coaches' biographies included the high school coaching process.

To recruit teacher-coaches, a representative from OFSAA was asked to contact, via email, potential participants who met the inclusion criteria and who worked in the same region as the researchers. Teacher-coaches interested in participating in the study were invited to contact the researchers directly in order to schedule an interview. A total of 19 coaches were recruited and interviewed using this process. The remaining 12 coaches were recruited using snowball sampling aimed at maximal variation (Creswell 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Specifically, participants were asked if they knew of any other coaches with biographical repertoires that differed from their own, who would be willing to take part in the study (e.g., more or less coaching experience). Early analysis of the first interviews conducted revealed three general groupings of participants. Given the heterogeneous nature of the participants, we felt that saturation could be achieved by interviewing about 10 participants per grouping (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Data collection

Each teacher-coach participated in an in-person, semi-structured interview that did not commence until informed consent was obtained. Each interview was carried out at a time and location convenient for the participant and was digitally recorded. The interview guide was designed to better understand the life experiences that contributed to the coaches' learning. The first portion of the interview guide focused on gathering demographic information from the participants. The rest of the interview guide included questions pertaining to coaching/athletic experience (e.g., How many years did you coach before becoming a teacher-coach? How many years of experience do you have as a teacher-coach? Were you active in sport as a child?); information on how they learned to coach (e.g., How do you prepare for your practices? Have you taken any formal coaching education?); challenges faced while coaching (e.g., What type of obstacles did you face this season?); and ways to make the coaching process easier (e.g., How do you manage the demands of coaching?). In order to gather more detailed information from the participants, probes were used throughout the interviews. The interviews ranged between 30 and 75 minutes in duration with an average length of 47 minutes. Seven of the nine shortest interviews were conducted with coaches belonging to the rookie coach profile, which is likely attributable to their limited biographical experiences related to the interview guide.

Data analysis

All of the interviews were transcribed verbatim (448 single-spaced pages). During the transcribing process, notes were taken to identify the different learning situations of the teacher-coaches and categorised as formal, nonformal, or informal (Nelson, Cushion, & Potrac, 2006). Member checking (Schwandt, 2001) was performed, allowing participants to review and potentially change some of the ideas and notions shared during the interviews. A few coaches asked for minor changes to be made. Once the participants

validated the content of their transcripts, a database detailing the biographical characteristics of the high school teacher-coaches was built. This first phase of analysis allowed for three distinct coaching profiles to emerge. The coaching profiles were developed based on common experiences shared by participants that shaped the nature of how they learned to coach. Eleven coaches had limited experience in sport as athletes and coaches prior to becoming a teacher and were categorised as 'Rookie' coaches. Nine had experience as varsity athletes prior to becoming a teacher and were categorised as 'Varsity Athlete' coaches. Eleven had coaching experience prior to becoming a teacher and were categorised as 'Veteran' coaches.

A second analysis was performed to examine the learning of coaches from the three different profiles identified. A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was conducted and was mostly deductive in nature, in that the categories developed were based on concepts from Jarvis' (2006) theory of human learning (e.g., cognitive, emotive and practical transformations, and life experiences). The coded data were read and sorted into categories based on the initial themes identified during transcribing (e.g., time restrictions). The categories were refined until they provided an accurate interpretation of the data, which were arranged into three fictitious narratives, or stories, to represent the profiles.

Hinchman and Hinchman (1997) provided a rationale for using narratives by stating: "Narratives in human science should be defined provisionally as discourses with a clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful way for a definite audience and thus offer insights about the world and/or people's experiences in it" (p. xvi). In this study, the narratives were constructed by taking the data specific to each profile and turning it into a collective story. When discussing the purpose of a narrative, Richardson (1990) referred to how it is a collective account that tells one individual's story using "the experiences of the social category to which the individual belongs, rather than by telling a particular individual's story" (p. 25). This narrative approach has been previously used in sport (Denison, 1996; Lemyre & Trudel, 2004). In Sparkes' (2002) book *Telling Tales in Sport and Physical Activity: A Qualitative Journey*, fictional tales are suggested to render lived experiences effectively to readers, given their potential to connect directly on an emotional level. Indeed, because they capture the story of particular groups, narratives were deemed to be an appropriate way to capture the cognitive, emotive, and practical transformations involved in high school teacher-coaches' learning process.

It is essential to consider that not one type of profile is better than the other, nor does every teacher-coach fit perfectly into one of the three profiles. As Riessman (1993) stated: "A narrative is not meant to be an exact record of what happened nor is it a mirror of the world 'out there'" (p. 64). Using Jarvis' (2006, 2007, 2009) theory of human learning, we have identified three teacher-coach learning profiles and used narratives to explain the social context within which the teacher-coaches have developed and also, to provide insight into the needs of teacher-coaches with varied biographies. Three coaching profiles are presented: (1) John: The rookie, (2) Sharon: The varsity athlete, and (3) Keith: The veteran. To protect the identity of participants, pseudonyms are used and the names of the schools are fictitious.

Results

John: The rookie

It was near the end of the final semester of Teachers College when one of John's professors told the students: "During a teaching job interview, the principal is likely going to ask you what you are willing to do for their school on an extracurricular basis. They want to see how you plan on going beyond just being a teacher and add to the life of the school. There are many things you can do: yearbook, band, coach, plays. Things like that." With 15 minutes of class remaining, the professor asked the students to discuss the extracurricular activities in which they could see themselves getting involved. John, who had never before thought about getting involved in extracurricular activities, knew that out of all of the options his professor had listed, coaching would be his top choice.

John's first teaching job was at St. Mary's Secondary School and with it came a coaching position. Luckily, John did not have to coach alone as he was named the assistant coach on a team with a veteran coach named Ted. Nine years prior, when Ted entered the realm of coaching, he did so with no previous coaching experience, little tactical and technical knowledge, and without the luxury of being paired with a veteran coach. However, he did have an enthusiasm to get involved in school sport, something John also shared. Feeling somewhat insecure about his coaching abilities, John asked Ted: "What was it like coaching during your first year of teaching?"

Ted clutched his chin with his hand and after a short pause he responded: "It was tough, really tough." John felt a pit in his stomach as his insecurities heightened. After another short pause, Ted continued: "Despite being challenging, coaching made my first year teaching a lot more enjoyable. I do wish I had had some sort of a mentor or that I had started off as an assistant coach. Something like that would have made coaching a lot easier. But most often, there are just not enough coaches for there to be assistants." The two men continued to discuss Ted's first years as a coach: "I was just thrown in as a head coach. It was like, 'Hey Ted, can you coach volleyball?' I said, 'Yes sure,' without an understanding of what I was getting into. I did not know much about the game and I wanted to be prepared so I started looking for drills and strategies before the season began." John wanted to be prepared just as Ted had tried to be, so he created a list of goals he planned to fulfill during his first season of coaching. "I really want to take a volleyball coaching clinic," he thought to himself and wrote this idea down. Also, he said to himself: "I will make a list of all of the practice plans and drills we use and put them in a file so that I have them for next year." However, early in his first semester at school, John was overwhelmed with prepping for classes and teaching. The coaching 'to do' list fell victim to the restraints of time.

Despite not following through with all of the intended learning opportunities he had written down, John was taking full advantage of Ted's experience as he observed his behaviors during practice, as well as the knowledge passed on by other coaches in the school. Progressively, John was developing his own approach to coaching and learning how to structure a volleyball practice. However, on a particular Wednesday night, about a month into the semester, Ted contacted John and said, "I will not be able to make it to practice tonight because I have a family thing I need to attend." John answered, "No problem Ted." After the words left John's mouth, he realised he now had a lot more responsibilities: "Oh man, I only have two drills prepared for tonight's practice. That is

like maximum 15 minutes. But what if I use my classroom prep time to look up some drills?” Although it seemed to be a good idea at first, John realised that his number one priority had to be teaching and preparing good classes, so he decided he would have to organise and structure the practice on the fly. And so, when it came time for practice, John started each drill without knowing which drill would come next.

One day before practice, in the middle of the season, Ted found John in the physical education office with his elbows planted on the desk, palms pressed into his eye sockets, and fingers gripping his hair. “I remember that position,” Ted said. After a little laugh, Ted recognised that the stresses of teaching and coaching were getting to John so he took on a more serious tone and said, “It gets easier with time. You will get used to teaching your courses and then you will have to do less preparation which will allow you to have more energy for other things.” John loosened the grip on his hair, moved his hands off his eyes, and slid his fingers along his cheeks until they rested beneath his chin. Ted took his body language as a request for just a little more encouragement: “And as for coaching, you just have to keep trying things and asking questions and eventually it gets easier and more enjoyable too. It took me a couple of years before I was comfortable coaching my own team.” John lamented: “I know, this week has just been horrendous with interviews, marking, and it is all brand new. Not to mention coaching can be like having a second job, except without the pay.” Ted responded: “Yes, teaching requires a lot more work than it superficially reveals, especially when you add coaching into the mix. But I have been through it, others have been through it, and more will go through it after you. You just find ways to make it work.”

Sharon: The varsity athlete

“I am so excited for this year’s high school basketball season to start,” Sharon said to herself. She was excited that a relatively large number of students tried out for her team but dreaded having to make cuts. In that moment, she reflected on a particular event related to team selection during her high school days. “I wonder if we made the team. Imagine if we got to play on the same team this year?,” a younger Sharon said to her friend Ashley as they huddled near the gym doors eagerly awaiting the news of who made the squad. Moments later, the coach posted on the gym door a list of who would be playing for him this season and said: “Thank you all for trying out for the team this year. Everyone worked very hard and this decision was one of the hardest I can remember in all my years of coaching.” “There I am. I made it! I have to go tell my mom!,” Ashley cried before scurrying off to spread the news. As for Sharon, her name did not appear on the list. Her eyes welled up but she managed to hold back her tears until she made it to the car. While trying to catch her breath between tears, Sharon said to her mother: “I do not know why I did not make it Mom... he just, he just put a list up... and... and walked away.”

Being cut from the bantam team was only a mild setback in Sharon’s competitive basketball career, which began at age 11 and culminated at age 22, when she finished a four-year career with her university team. She remembered how at that time, being cut seemed like the worst experience imaginable. However, in the long run, it helped her develop an understanding of how little things can make a big difference in the way an athlete feels about him/herself.

Once her competitive career was over, Sharon began teaching and coaching. After she selected her first team, Sharon decided to start practices the next day. Her keen eye for judging talent, which came from being immersed in the sport for many years, allowed her to analyse her team's strengths and weaknesses relatively quickly. After only two practices and one game, she identified the technical and tactical aspects of the game where her team needed to improve. As a result, she designed her practices based on the needs of her athletes and began to teach them the fundamentals of the game of basketball. Sharon's practice plans were put together using drills she had executed as a player and also drills she invented herself based on the team's needs.

Sharon had played for a number of coaches throughout her years as an athlete and she had learned from their individual beliefs of what it takes to be a successful basketball coach. She reflected on how the coach of her senior high school team was all about offense. If an opposing team was able to shut them down offensively, he would get flustered and was unable to adapt. As a result, the whole team would lose focus and begin to turn on each other. Sharon hated it when her team played the blame game. Her university coach, however, was all about adaptation. In times of turmoil, she would remain composed and discussed with the team what needed to be done to adapt. This coach and her approach really helped Sharon learn the game.

The first few games of the season had passed and Sharon noticed how one of her forwards was often being outperformed by her counterparts in all aspects of the game. "I know if she improved her play that our team would do much better. I do not know the forward position well enough to help improve her game the way we need her to," Sharon thought to herself while reflecting on her team's third straight loss. She started making some phone calls and was able to get in contact with an old university teammate, Gina, who played the forward position. After 20 minutes of reminiscing about the glory days, Sharon said to Gina: "I need your help with one of my athletes. We are on a losing streak and it is partly because one of my forward players keeps getting outplayed. Do you know anything I can do to help her?" Gina answered: "Yes of course I do, but they are hard to explain over the phone. Maybe I could come to a couple of practices and help her out one on one." Sharon eagerly accepted the proposition.

As the season went on, Sharon's team was practicing well and playing much better. The team placed third in the region and received home court advantage for first round of playoffs. Sharon deemed the first playoff game a shaky performance, but the girls were still able secure the win. Their playoff success continued as they advanced to the semi-finals and then to the regional finals despite not yet playing their best basketball. Sharon felt she was partly to blame for their inconsistent play because she did not quite know how to help them deal with the pressure, something she knew she needed to learn for the following season.

Through the first half of the championship game, Sharon's girls fought hard but their opponents still led by nine. "Stay composed Sharon, stay composed," she repeated to herself. Sharon had never before coached in a big game like this and although she had played in playoff basketball games, she was realising how different the experience is from the bench. "Where do I channel my emotions?" she worried. "When I played, I would channel them into effort. Now, I have to keep them bottled up." While reflecting on what to do with her emotions, Sharon realised the best thing would be to channel them into positive behaviours.

The fourth quarter, like the previous three, was a tight battle and the outcome rested on the final seconds. Sharon called a timeout to go over the game's final play with her team. She addressed her team and said: "I know it is the championship game and we are down by one but it is just like any other game. Let's just focus on what we have to do. One basket in the next six seconds and the game is ours." An air of anxiousness suffocated the huddle; however, the girls remained focused as their coach directed their next move.

The girls shook their heads in agreement with the play called and ended the timeout with a loud cheer "One, Two, Three, Cougars!" Before the players went back on to the court, Sharon called them in for some final words: "Girls, no matter what happens here, I just want you to know that I am so proud of what you have accomplished together this season. Now go enjoy the moment." Seconds prior to that statement, she had a flashback to a similar situation during her sophomore year in university. Her coach told them the exact same thing and the coach's words had calmed her down, alleviated any fear of failure, and reminded everyone on her team why they played the game in the first place: to have fun.

Keith: The veteran

"The junior boys' soccer season starts in a couple weeks and no one has yet volunteered to coach. Is there anyone who wants to do it or can do it?" Jack, the principal of Elmira High School, asked his staff during an after school meeting. When the meeting ended, Keith, one of the Elmira's biology teachers, approached the principal and accepted the coaching opportunity. Keith did so because he felt his experience coaching soccer while he was in high school and university provided him with adequate knowledge and skills to run the team and he wanted to make sure the students had a team.

With only two weeks to the season's start, Keith began preparing for his new coaching position. He turned his basement upside down trying to find some old soccer coaching manuals that were given to him when he was an assistant coach. He found the manuals, a couple of books on coaching philosophies, the textbook from his university coaching course, a medal from a tournament his team won, and a team photo. The team photo was of a group of 13- and 14-year-old kids that Keith had helped coach the summer after graduating from high school.

"That was such a fun year!," Keith thought to himself. "What did we do that year to bring so much enjoyment to the kids?" While reflecting, he remembered Debbie, the head coach of the team that year, saying: "Whenever the kids play for one another rather than for themselves, they enjoy the game so much more, regardless of the outcome." Keith quickly realised that Debbie's philosophy was all about team cohesion and team commitment. One of her tactics for team cohesion was team-building games. Keith remembered a game known as Mine Field, where the team verbally guided one blindfolded player around objects, or 'mines,' that were scattered on the field and he knew he would use it.

Keith also noted, "Not one kid missed a practice without a legitimate reason." Puzzled by how this was possible, Keith remembered how Debbie made the team sign commitment contracts. Keith tried to remember the clauses written in the contracts: "If I miss practice, I do not play the next game. If I do not have a C+ average or higher in school, I do not play until I increase my grades. I will not put down any of my teammates

or I will not play.” He mumbled each clause as he wrote them down and then added a few of his own.

Over the next few evenings, Keith sat down at his kitchen table and sifted through the literature from his coaching box. He remembered a lot of the things he was reading because when he was coaching as a young adult, he relied heavily on books and manuals to help him develop practice plans. By revising his soccer and coaching material each evening before tryouts, Keith’s confidence in his ability to coach the soccer team at Elmira was increasing.

One day after school, Keith and his colleague Paul, another young biology teacher at Elmira, were discussing their lesson plans for the upcoming unit. Somehow, the conversation shifted from biology to coaching, and Paul asked Keith: “Do you ever have to deal with parents when you coach? Like complaining about their kids’ playing time or anything like that.” “Yes, sometimes it is an issue. Like last year with basketball, a parent was complaining about her son’s playing time,” Keith replied. “What did you do? I do not know what to say when a parent calls me and starts chewing my ear off,” Paul pressed. To help Paul resolve this issue, Keith told Paul: “It is bound to happen no matter what sport or what level of sport you are coaching. I see the same situations in high school sport as I did when I was coaching before I started teaching. Parents are just looking out for their kids. Some do so a little more confrontationally than others. At the start of the year I just ask the kids, ‘Do you want to play for fun or to win?’ I explain that playing to win means sometimes equal playing time will be sacrificed. Whatever the team chooses is the philosophy I take into my coaching. That way, the decision is in their hands and I can tell the parent that his/her child was part of that decision.” “That is a good idea Keith. It is a little late for that this year but I will do that next year for sure” expressed Paul.

At the end of the season, Keith sat down with his team and asked for feedback on what they felt went well and what they felt needed improvement. He strived to become a better coach every year and he valued his athletes’ feedback. Keith addressed the team and stated: “I give constructive criticism to you guys all year and I need to be able to take it as well. So lay it on me. What do you think could have made the season better?” Keith loved to coach and knew he would be coaching for many years to come. By documenting his players’ comments and suggestions, he knew he could refer back to them before coaching a new team. That way, he could learn to retain the positive elements in his approach to coaching and avoid making the same mistakes twice.

Discussion

Conducting this study using Jarvis’ (2006) theory of human learning has led to a better understanding of the biographies of high school teacher-coaches and how they learn to coach. Based on the identification of biographical characteristics, we developed three narratives to describe the different teacher-coach learning processes.

High school teacher-coaches operate within what is considered developmental level sport (Trudel & Gilbert, 2006). However, unlike most coaches in this context, the rookie coaches in this study did not have enough experience in sport to possess the necessary knowledge and skills to fulfill head coaching positions (Erickson, et al., 2008;

Trudel & Gilbert). As a result, the narratives demonstrated how their chosen learning situations were mainly future-directed and intentional. Furthermore, the narratives highlighted how some prospective teachers mainly used coaching as a means of increasing their chances of securing a teaching job. These results parallel those of Lacroix et al. (2008) who found that coaching is an excellent way for teachers to integrate into a new school but that there are few incentives to maintain this practice long-term.

Some of the rookie coaches in our study were lucky enough to acquire coaching experience as assistants during the first years of their careers before actually becoming a head coach. These coaches maintained that assistant coaching experience allowed them to develop coaching knowledge, coaching skills, and ultimately helped them build the confidence necessary to run a high school sport team (Erickson, et al., 2008; Trudel and Gilbert, 2006). Unfortunately, not all of the rookie coaches were provided with this opportunity as the dearth of coaches in the context of high school sport forces many inexperienced teachers to take on head coaching positions from the start of their careers (Lacroix et al., 2008).

Regardless of whether a rookie coach was able to coach alongside a more experienced colleague, interacting with and receiving support from fellow coaches was deemed to be the most common means of learning about coaching. This is likely because high schools act as Informal Knowledge Networks, which are composed of “individuals who are familiar with each other and are used for collecting and passing information” (Culver & Trudel, 2008, p. 4). Interacting with others is a common learning situation for developmental level coaches (Lemyre et al. 2007; Wright, et al., 2007). The findings of this study support the notion that high schools act as an informal knowledge network through which new teachers have the opportunity to learn how to coach.

Future-directed and intentional learning for the rookie coaches also ensued through the use of the Internet as these coaches sought information about drills and strategies. This conclusion was also found with the inexperienced developmental level coaches of the Lemyre et al. (2007) and Wright et al. (2007) studies. The results of this study help confirm that inexperienced coaches use the Internet as an efficient way to quickly gain some form of coaching competency.

For their part, the varsity athlete coaches had biographies filled with practical experiences from which they could choose to learn, a characteristic typical of most developmental level coaches (Trudel and Gilbert, 2006). As a result, these coaches often reflected on their past athletic experiences in order to develop the knowledge and/or skills necessary to handle coaching situations with which they were unfamiliar. The act of reflecting on past athlete experiences is a characteristic that is found in a number of studies on developmental level coaches (Gilbert & Trudel, 2001; Lemyre et al., 2007). Our results indicate how coaches sharing this profile engaged in two types of reflection in order to learn how to coach: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983). The narratives depicted how reflection occurs both during games/practices as well as before and after games/practices. Consequently, it appears that the varsity athlete coaches do a substantial amount of coach learning incidentally.

Throughout their athletic careers, the varsity athlete coaches were exposed to a number of coaches with varying biographies. The results suggest how the behaviours and attitudes, both positive and negative, of their former coaches created an emotional response that shaped their own coaching styles, philosophies, and the belief they shared

concerning how sport can contribute to youth development. Although learning to coach through past athletic experiences is well-documented in the literature, learning to coach through emotive transformation, as some of our participants did, is a relatively unexamined area of coach learning that should be further explored. Jarvis (2009) explains, "Those experiences that are emotionally charged are more likely to be recalled at a later date than others" (p. 141). Concerning learning through emotion, Dirkx (2001) added that emotional dimensions of our experiences provide the foundation on which practical and conceptual modes of learning rest. Jarvis and Dirkx help us understand how emotionally charged experiences contributed to the learning of varsity coaches and helped shape their biography and coaching practices.

When past athletic experiences were unable to provide the varsity athlete coaches with the necessary knowledge and/or skills to deal with a coaching issue, they frequently sought information from people whom they believed were competent in specific areas. In these situations, the varsity athlete coaches engaged in conscious future-directed learning (Jarvis, 2006). All of the teacher-coaches in this study, regardless of their biographical profile, engaged in colleague interactions; however, what was particular with the varsity athlete coaches was how they commonly sought aid outside of the school by contacting former teammates and former coaches. Because of their years of experience in sport, varsity athlete coaches have built a network of resources that they can consult in times of unfamiliarity. This network influences their learning process because it makes them realise that it is no longer about how much knowledge they have, but rather about the people they know and where they can find the desired information.

Wilson, Bloom, and Harvey (2010) conducted a study on Canadian high school teacher-coaches and how they learn to coach. Their participants were more homogeneous than the participants of the current study as the selection criteria required that each of their six participants have between five and 15 years of experience as a high school head coach, completed a minimum Level 1 and maximum Level 3 coaching certification, and be a physical education teacher. All of their participants also accumulated numerous hours of elite athletic experience at the university level or higher. Given their biographical traits, the high school coaches of the Wilson et al. study shared many similarities with our varsity athlete coaches. The situations from which they reported learning and the value given to these situations paralleled those described by the varsity athlete coaches of the current study. Our study adds to the literature on coach learning by confirming how reflecting on competitive athletic experiences and engaging in colleague interactions are valuable learning situations for coaches sharing this type of biography.

The veteran coaches, out of all three teacher-coach profiles, share the most biographical characteristics with typical coaches from the developmental context. Prior to becoming head coaches, the veteran coaches and developmental coaches alike develop coaching knowledge and skills through assistantships and/or co-coaching (Trudel & Gilbert, 2006). Gilbert and Trudel (2001) demonstrated that practical experience and observation of other coaches are often cited as the primary sources from which youth sport coaches learn. The results of this study support this finding, indicating that being involved in the coaching process from a relatively early age allowed the veteran coaches to learn the intricacies of coaching (e.g., understanding of sport, organisation, and human behaviour) from the experienced coaches under whom they learned. Veteran coaches often reflected on the behaviours of their former mentors and evaluated whether their

actions could help resolve a current coaching situation. This type of learning appears to be common to developmental coaches (Gilbert & Trudel, 2001; Lemyre et al., 2007; Wright et al., 2007).

As the veteran coaches gained head coaching experience, they began to reflect more on their own behaviours and actions as a means of learning. Thus, comparable to the varsity athlete coaches, veteran coaches also learned from reflection-in-action and on-action (Schön, 1983). Coaching issues such as parental concerns and player commitment are common in most developmental level sport settings (Gilbert, Gilbert, & Trudel, 2001ab) and high school sport is no different. The veteran coaches, in some instances, attempted to solve coaching issues using solutions they had seen as athletes, while other times they would develop their own strategies and evaluate their outcomes.

When veteran coaches started coaching in the high school setting, their biographies were already equipped with a variety of coaching experiences upon which they could reflect. Nonetheless, they also experienced novel situations that required them to develop new knowledge. In such cases, the veteran coaches sought out information from a variety of informal resources (e.g., Internet, approaching coach colleagues) and transformed this information, through reflection, into knowledge, thus learning by cognitive transformation.

Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to document the biographies of high school teacher-coaches and identify the impact that their life experiences have had on their learning how to coach. As Jarvis (2006) stated, it is the accumulation of experiences across our lifespan that shapes who we are, how we learn, and what we choose to learn. Before becoming a teacher-coach, having little or no coaching experience, having a long competitive athletic career, or having plenty of coaching experience are three main biographical characteristics that influence the learning situations chosen by teachers who become high school coaches.

Having identified three types of teacher-coach biographies, this study has some limitations. Firstly, we focused mainly on the predominant learning situations reported by the coaches from each profile when writing the narratives. As a result, some learning situations, which were described as less significant by our participants, may not have been represented in the narratives. Also, some of our participants had biographical characteristics that were representative of more than one profile (e.g., having coaching experience before teaching as well as being a varsity athlete, and or previous training and or certification). In such instances, we placed the participants in the profile that best represented their overall learning experiences. Furthermore, our participants frequently mentioned learning through colleague interactions and although we did probe to get a better understanding of what these interactions were about and how they were carried out, we cannot assume that the information exchanged in these interactions are always the best way of finding solutions to challenges.

Despite these limitations, the results of this study suggest that in order to optimise the learning of teacher-coaches, learning situations must be tailored to their realities. For example, coach educators should work to more easily provide formal coach learning opportunities to all prospective secondary school teachers while they are completing

Teachers College. This would be very beneficial for rookie coaches as they would be better prepared to enter the coaching world. Also, school administrators should encourage and provide their coaches the time and resources necessary to take part in the NCCP's new training module for high school teacher-coaches (Coaching Association of Canada, 2010).

Findings also demonstrated how learning from more experienced coaches is a valued learning situation. Wilson et al. (2010) mentioned that the development of a coach mentorship program could positively influence high school teacher-coach learning. Such a program has already been developed to help new Ontario teachers learn how to teach and could also help teacher-coaches learn how to coach (Glassford & Salinitri, 2007). Considering that coaches from all three profiles benefited from interactions with their colleagues, specific coaching workshops should be designed and be part of teachers' professional development opportunities. In addition to providing teacher-coaches with opportunities to develop their coaching skills and knowledge, such non-formal learning (Nelson et al., 2006) situations could provide great opportunities for coaches to develop by extending their informal knowledge networks (Culver & Trudel, 2008).

The original contribution of this study resides in how it was able to demonstrate that high school teacher-coaches enter the realm of coaching with varying biographies. The life experiences of each coach play a large role in dictating the learning situations in which they choose to engage. Although some high school teacher-coaches share similar characteristics with developmental level coaches, others, especially rookie coaches, have different biographies and therefore different learning needs that must be considered. Further research is needed to better understand how high school teacher-coaches can be provided with the knowledge and skills necessary to promote the healthy development of student-athletes through sport.

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