

Life Skill Development in Athletes with Intellectual Disabilities: The Strategies and Learning
Pathways of Special Olympics Coaches

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So here's to you, Mr. Petty:

Well I started out down a dirty road

Started out all alone

And the sun went down as I crossed the hill

And the town lit up, the world got still

I'm learning to fly, but I ain't got wings

Coming down is the hardest thing.

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Statement of Support

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to explore how experienced Special Olympics (SO) coaches attempt to integrate the development of life skills into their coaching practice and how the coaches learned these strategies. Merriam's (2009) basic interpretive qualitative approach was used to guide this research. Six experienced coaches from Ontario participated in this study. Data were collected through two sets of semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis. Data were analyzed both deductively and inductively using thematic analysis. Camiré, Trudel, and Forneris's (2012) study on how high school coaches help athletes to develop life skills was used as a framework for life skill development strategies. The analysis uncovered that coaches use the following strategies: (a) having a coaching philosophy aimed at helping athletes to develop, (b) understanding athletes' pre-existing makeup, (c) providing athletes with opportunities to show their skills, (d) modeling, (e) taking teachable moments, (f) using keywords, and (g) volunteerism. Two inductive strategies were also found: (a) building strong coach-athlete relationships and (b) being stern and direct with athletes. Trudel, Culver, and Werthner's 2013 chapter on coach learning was used to frame the learning pathways section of this study. Results from this portion of the study indicate that coaches learned through a variety of different means, including their experiences and through mediated and unmediated learning situations. As one of the first studies to explore the coach's role in assisting Special Olympics athletes to develop life skills, we feel that this study makes a valuable contribution to the literature on coaching science, sport for people with disabilities, and athlete development. This study also highlights new areas for research that could further expand our knowledge of this topic.

Introduction

Sport is important for people with intellectual disabilities (ID; Mactavish & Dowds, 2003) and has been considered a promising area for people with intellectual disabilities to develop and feel socially included (McConkey, Dowling, Hassan, & Menke, 2013). It has been generally accepted that intellectual disabilities entail three common characteristics: (a) considerably lower intellectual functioning, (b) impairment in adaptive skills, (c) diagnosis before the age of eighteen (Mactavish & Dowds, 2003; Special Olympics Canada [SOC], 2014b). Some areas affected, though not an exhaustive list, might include learning abilities, social and communicative skill acquisition, mental and physical health, and motor skill development (Alexander, Dummer, Smeltzer, & Denton, 2011; Belva & Matson, 2013; Grandisson, Tetreault, & Freeman, 2012; Mactavish & Dowds, 2003). People with ID are often affected in different ways and have distinctive characteristics, even if two people have the same disability (Mactavish & Dowds, 2003; Squair & Groeneveld, 2003).

Historically, people with disabilities were often isolated, mistreated, and harassed by society (Counsell & Agran, 2013). Because of society's low expectations and negative attitudes and behaviours towards people with disabilities, barriers were put up to exclude people with disabilities from partaking in many areas in which mainstream society participated (DePauw & Gavron, 2005). Sport was one such area from which people with disabilities were excluded. According to DePauw and Gavron (2005), it was assumed that people with ID could not comprehend or even appreciate competition and sport. This began to change, however, in the 1960s when the Special Olympics (SO) movement began (Mactavish & Dowds, 2003). As stated by Harada, Siperstein, Parker, and Lenox (2011), the Special Olympics initiative was the brainchild of Eunice Kennedy Shriver and was meant to

provide such individuals [with ID] the opportunities to demonstrate their abilities rather than their disabilities, and to be given the opportunity to participate in the normative life experience of sport as enjoyed by individuals without disabilities. (p. 1132)

Special Olympics has grown into an organization where people with ID (over eight years of age), regardless of their skill level, can participate in sport competitions (Harada et al., 2011). Today, SO is in 170 countries with approximately 4.4 million athletes (Special Olympics, 2014a). In Canada alone, there are 36,000 athletes participating in 17 different sports, which cycle between summer and winter seasons (SOC, 2014a). Recently, SOC has also developed and launched Active Start and FUNdamentals programmes for children with ID from ages two to twelve in an effort to provide children with opportunities to develop physically, socially, and cognitively (SOC, 2014b). The overall mission of SOC is that it is “dedicated to enriching the lives of Canadians with an intellectual disability through sport,” (SOC, 2014b, para. 2).

Research has shown that involvement in Special Olympics can have a positive impact on athletes such as increased competence, social skills, and confidence (Farrell, Crocker, McDonough, & Sedwick, 2004; Goodwin, Fitzpatrick, Thurmeier, & Hall, 2006; Harada et al., 2011; Tedrick, 2009). It has also been suggested that sport programs for people with ID, such as SO, should be encouraging the development of both sports skills and skills that can help individuals with ID in their daily lives (Riggen & Ulrich, 1993; Weiss, Diamond, Demark, & Lovald, 2003). Researchers assert that the development of skills that can help people in their daily lives (i.e., in areas such as school, work, or home) are considered life skills (Gould & Carson, 2008). Developing life skills is critical for people with ID (Bouck, 2010), as research has shown that people with ID may be lacking certain skills as basic as eating well (Gibson, Temple, Anholt, & Gaul, 2011) or communicating with others (Walton & Ingersoll, 2013).

Given that coaches have been shown to play a role in helping their athletes to develop life skills and that Special Olympics is an organization with the goals and means to bring positive change to the lives of people with ID (Dyken & Cohen, 1996; Weiss et al., 2003), research is needed to examine how Special Olympics coaches help their athletes to develop life skills.

Part of the success of SO over the past forty years, as with any sport program, can be attributed to having quality coaches and volunteers. As explained by DePauw and Gavron (2005), while disability sport – which includes SO programmes – continues to grow, the coach's role becomes increasingly important. It is not surprising then, that the role of Special Olympics coaches, according to Special Olympics Ontario (2014, para. 2) is to

serve as role models and character builders. They give athletes awareness of their worth, abilities and courage. Significantly, coaches provide the confidence for athletes to grow and improve. They help athletes acquire skills that influence the ability to obtain employment, succeed in school and achieve personal goals.

Therefore, it is believed that Special Olympics coaches can have a significant impact on their athletes. Notwithstanding, how coaches go about fulfilling their role has received little attention as a research topic (DePauw & Gavron, 2005; Inoue, 2011). The purpose of this research, therefore, was to explore how model SO coaches attempt to integrate the development of life skills into their coaching practice. Thus, we were interested in determining some of the strategies that SO coaches use to help their athletes develop life skills and how the coaches learned these strategies. Two frameworks, Camiré, Trudel, and Forneris's (2012) life skill development framework and Trudel, Culver, and Werthner's (2013) coach learning framework were used to guide this study.

Literature Review

The following literature review is meant to provide familiarity in the topics relevant to this research: positive youth development, life skill development, coach learning, Special Olympics and sport for athletes with intellectual disabilities. As such, literature from each of these areas of research will be discussed below.

Positive Youth Development

Positive youth development (PYD) is a broad concept that “focuses on the promotion of any number of desirable competencies or outcomes in young people” (Gould & Carson, 2008, p. 59). Becoming a morally responsible person or one with healthy habits are examples of competencies (Gould & Carson, 2008). Thus, there is a wide range of competencies that one may develop (Gould & Carson, 2008), which include the development of life skills and values (Camiré, Forneris, Trudel, & Bernard, 2011). PYD strategies follow the notions of building upon an individual’s assets and inherent positive qualities rather than trying to reduce unwanted behaviours (Camiré, Trudel, & Forneris, 2014; Larson, 2000; Vella, Oades, & Crowe, 2011) and that all youth have the capability to develop in a positive, healthy manner (Vierimaa, Erickson, Côté, & Gilbert, 2012). In order to foster development, however, youth must be exposed to structured activities, in which participation is voluntary (Larson, 2000), that promote opportunities for youth to show leadership, develop new skills, and build positive relationships with adults (Camiré et al., 2014; Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte, & Jones, 2005).

Researchers have suggested that sport is an attractive avenue suitable for promoting PYD because it is an activity in which many youth are involved (Camiré et al., 2012; Gould & Carson, 2008). However, the context and environment in which the sport is delivered must be conducive to developing the athlete (Camiré et al., 2014; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005; Larson,

2000). Whether sport actually does or does not foster PYD has been debated (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993).

Camiré, Trudel, and Forneris (2009), for example, found that high school sport can foster youth development if athletes have support and are afforded the opportunity to make suggestions to the coach, to communicate with coaches, and to help develop team goals. The opposite effects were also found when coaches had poor communication with athletes. Essentially, the athletes felt that they were not heard and were not given the opportunity to help make team decisions, thus causing them to have negative experiences. Gearity and Murray (2011), similarly, showed that poor coaching can lead to adverse psychological effects in athletes such as amotivation, athlete attrition, or self-doubt because it creates a hostile environment for the athletes. The aforementioned research, therefore, provides some support for the notion that the coach-athlete relationship can determine whether sport has a positive or negative impact on development.

Life Skill Development

As mentioned, PYD frameworks focus on building one's competencies, which includes the development of life skills vital to succeeding in different life domains. Precisely, Gould and Carson (as cited in Gould & Carson, 2008) define life skills as "those internal personal assets, characteristics and skills such as goal setting, emotional control, self-esteem, and hard work ethic that can be facilitated or developed through sport and are transferred for use in non-sport settings," (p. 60). Essentially, life skill development is the development of skills that allow people to function in different environments outside of sport, such as at home, school, or work (Danish et al., 1993; Gould & Carson, 2008) and can be cognitive, behavioural, intrapersonal, or interpersonal (Camiré et al., 2012; Gould & Carson, 2008). Some examples of life skills include things such as taking initiative, communicating effectively with others, making smart decisions,

and goal setting (Forneris, Danish, & Scott, 2007; Holt, Tink, Mandigo, & Fox, 2008; Papacharisis, Goudas, Danish, & Yannis, 2005).

A key feature of life skill development is the notion of transference; that is, being able to use a skill in a different area than where it was taught (Camiré et al., 2012; Gould & Carson, 2008). For example, if an athlete can only communicate when she is on the baseball field and not when she is with her family, peers, or in the community, her development of an effective communication style in sport has not transferred to other domains in her life and is not, therefore, considered one of her life skills. A program leader (e.g., camp counsellor, sports coach, teacher, etc.), therefore, often might need to emphasize that the skills taught through a program are applicable in other settings (Gould & Carson, 2008).

Life skill development through sport. Sport, as mentioned, is a popular activity in which many are involved (Trottier & Robitaille, 2014) and as such, it can also be an attractive area in which life skills are developed (Danish, Forneris, Hodge, & Heke, 2004; Holt, Tamminen, Tink, & Black, 2009; Theokas, Danish, Hodge, Heke, & Forneris, 2008). Indeed, research has shown that athletes can develop a variety of life skills through sport participation (e.g., Holt et al., 2008; Jones & Lavalley, 2009). Of importance, however, is the fact that the development of life skills is not an inevitable outcome of sport participation (Brunelle, Danish, & Forneris, 2007; Danish et al., 1993; Holt et al., 2009). According to Holt et al. (2009), “sport provides social contexts and participants’ experiences within these contexts underpin the attainment of life skills,” (p. 166). Therefore, the sport environment must afford positive sport experiences in order for life skill development to occur.

Collins, Gould, Lauer, and Chung (2009), for example, explored the philosophical beliefs of ten outstanding high school football coaches who taught life skills through their coaching.

Collins and her colleagues found that the coaches emphasized the importance of social, physical, psychological, and academic development through their coaching. The coaches helped their athletes to develop skills in these different areas through a variety of ways including: (a) creating positive relationships with athletes, (b) having open communication, (c) setting clear expectations and holding athletes accountable for their actions, (d) modelling appropriate behaviours, and (e) showing that they cared for the athletes. These actions helped to create a positive atmosphere in which athletes could thrive. Therefore, we can assume that a sporting environment needs to have appropriate leadership and the explicit goal of life skill development in order to foster positive development in young people (Danish et al., 1993; Petitpas, Van Raalte, Cornelius, & Presbrey, 2004). The work of Petitpas et al. (2005) listed key features that a sport context needs in order to help foster positive development. Their list concluded that development is more likely to occur if the sport is voluntarily chosen by the participant, if there are external assets (e.g., coaches) who participants can develop positive relationships with, if the programme is designed to help develop internal assets such as life skills, and if there is research to help ensure that sport programmes are contributing to athlete development (Petitpas et al., 2005).

Researchers have also asserted that life skills often need to be intentionally taught by a leader (e.g., coach), either through modelling, demonstrating, or practicing (Gould & Carson, 2008). The coach is the adult with whom athletes interact most with during sport (Camiré et al., 2011); therefore, it is no surprise that the coach is recognized as one of the key factors influencing athletes and helping them to develop (Camiré et al., 2011; Falção, Bloom, & Gilbert, 2012; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Petitpas et al., 2005; Vella et al., 2011). It is important to mention, however, that the coach must acknowledge that teaching life skills is an important task

and consciously work towards facilitating the development of life skills in order to bring about positive outcomes (Camiré et al., 2011). In sum, sport can be used to afford athletes the opportunity to develop positive life skills; however, it is often the environmental factors influenced by coaches that can either facilitate or prevent an athlete's positive development through sport.

Life skill development strategies. In order for coaches to foster a climate conducive to the development of life skills, current research suggests some strategies that coaches can utilize (e.g., Camiré et al., 2012; Gould & Carson, 2008; Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2007). Gould and Carson (2008) reviewed the literature of positive youth development and life skill development through sport and constructed a model for coaching life skills. First, the model suggests that coaches need to assess an athlete's internal (e.g., personality) and external assets (e.g., socioeconomic status) in order to understanding the athlete's pre-existing makeup. The next component of their model revolved around the sport experience in which coaches emphasize teaching life skills. In this component, they listed the coaches' personal characteristics (e.g., coaching philosophy), direct teaching strategies (e.g., individual attention given to athletes), and indirect teaching strategies (e.g., positive social norms). The next focus of the model provides possible explanations for how the development of life skills occurs and how this could affect the athlete's behaviour. In this component, they had two general explanations: social environment influences (e.g., the influence of positive social norms) and the utility of life skills (i.e., how they can be used in everyday life). The fourth component of the model focuses on the outcomes of life skill development through sport, namely the positive outcomes. However, the model also shows the potential negative outcomes that could occur if the sport experience is undesirable. The final component of the model explains how life skills developed through sport

should be transferable to other areas of life. Gould and Carson showed that this model is technically cyclical as the development of new life skills is then added back to the beginning component; given the athlete now has new internal assets.

Framed by Gould and Carson's (2008) work, Camiré et al. (2012) conducted a study on the philosophies and strategies that model high school coaches used to develop life skills. Their results showed that model coaches understood and took into consideration their athlete's internal and external assets, which form an athletes' pre-existing make-up according to Gould and Carson (2008). The coaches also developed philosophies oriented toward helping their athletes excel both inside and outside of sport. The coaches used both direct and indirect teaching strategies including (a) using keywords as cues for remembering life skills, (b) having peers anonymously evaluate each other to increase self-awareness, (c) providing athletes with opportunities to show their skills, (d) modelling core values, (e) taking teachable moments, and (f) getting athletes to perform volunteer work. This particular study was utilized as the framework in the present study for a multitude of reasons: it has a solid theoretical background influenced by Gould and Carson's (2008) model, it has applied Gould and Carson's model, it has included student-athlete perspectives in order to create a holistic picture of an effective use of life skill development strategies, and it is a relatively current empirical study that provides a comprehensive list of strategies that can be used to foster life skill development.

It is important to recognize, however, that coaches have to learn the different strategies in order to help athletes develop life skills. A study conducted by Camiré et al. (2014) examined how model youth sport coaches learned to facilitate positive youth development. Using Nelson, Cushion, and Potrac's (2006) formal, non-formal, and informal learning situations framework, Camiré and colleagues found that coaches learned to facilitate PYD partially through formal

situations such as their coach education and university education; through non-formal situations such as conferences and seminars; and through informal learning situations such as those from life experiences, interactions with other coaches, and books. Given that this single study produced multiple avenues by way of which coaches learned to facilitate PYD, it is important to recognize the complexity of coaches' learning processes; this being imperative for informing other coaches wishing to develop positive life skills in their athletes.

Coach Learning

Researchers with the desire to comprehend the coaching process need to investigate how coaches learn and construct knowledge (Jones, Armour, & Potrac, 2003). Coaching is a complex activity that requires a range of abilities and knowledge (Wright, Trudel & Culver, 2007); consequently, a critical factor that determines a coach's effectiveness is his/her coaching knowledge (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). According to Côté and Gilbert (2009), there are three forms of knowledge that coaches build upon throughout their coaching careers: their professional knowledge, their interpersonal knowledge, and their intrapersonal knowledge. Professional knowledge includes the coach's sport-specific, pedagogical, and instructional knowledge; which is often the basis of coaching certification programs and seminars (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). A coach's interpersonal knowledge is his/her ability to form functional relationships with others, such as athletes or other coaches; thus, a coach's effectiveness is also dependent on his/her capacity to build reciprocal relationships and effectively communicate with others (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Finally, Côté and Gilbert (2009) defined a coach's intrapersonal knowledge as the coach's awareness of him/herself and his/her ability to critically reflect upon his/her practice. Through the development of intrapersonal knowledge, coaches can develop introspective skills that can be used to improve their craft.

Evidently, in order to become an effective coach, one needs to take a proactive approach when learning in order to be able to develop his/her different knowledge bases, a process which Jarvis (2009) explains is lifelong and constant. Moon (2001) presented learning as a series of stages through which one progresses from surface learning (i.e., memorization) to deep learning (i.e., changing one's cognitive structure). As research has shown (e.g. Lemyre, Trudel, & Durand-Bush, 2007; Wright et al., 2007), coaches can learn in a variety of different *learning contexts* or settings (Moon, 2004); however, it is important to recognize that learning is dependent upon the *learning situation*, defined as “the learner's perception of the context” (Moon, 2001, p. 48), which is unique to each individual learner.

According to Moon (2004), there are three learning situations: mediated, unmediated and internal. Trudel et al. (2013) define mediated learning situations as short-term experiences where the learner does not choose what material is to be delivered; therefore, in these situations it is often a learning facilitator or content expert who delivers a lesson based on a curriculum, usually developed by a national or provincial sport organization (Mallett, Trudel, Lyle, & Rynne, 2009; Wright et al., 2007). Examples of mediated learning contexts include coach education programmes, such as those delivered through the National Coaching Certification Program of Canada (NCCP), or seminars and conferences (Trudel et al., 2013). The content delivered in mediated learning contexts often contributes to a coach's professional knowledge (Côté & Gilbert, 2009); however, these learning situations are often not sufficient to provide a coach with all of the knowledge he/she requires. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the NCCP does not explicitly teach coaches how to teach life skills to athletes (Camiré et al., 2012); thus, coaches may seek other learning situations that support what they learned in mediated contexts.

Coaches, therefore, could pursue unmediated learning situations, which occur when coaches direct their own learning by seeking out information that they feel is important in order to improve their coaching knowledge (Trudel et al., 2013). Camiré et al. (2014), for example, studied how model youth coaches learned to facilitate PYD. In their study, they found that coaches learned to facilitate PYD through a variety of methods, including reading books on youth development and interacting with other coaches, both of which can be considered unmediated forms of learning. The fact that the coaches in Camiré et al.'s (2014) study interacted with other coaches is not surprising given that multiple research studies have revealed that coaches can learn through interactions with other coaches and with their athletes, family members, friends, etc. (Callary, Werthner, & Trudel, 2012; Carter & Bloom, 2009; Cregan, Bloom, & Reid, 2007; Culver & Trudel, 2008; Gilbert & Trudel, 2005; Lemyre et al., 2007; Nelson et al., 2006; Rynne, Mallett & Tinning, 2010; Werthner & Trudel, 2006; Wright et al., 2007). Indeed, interactions are especially helpful for coaches to develop interpersonal knowledge (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Through interacting with others on a consistent basis, coaches build their communicative skills, thus increasing their interpersonal knowledge (Côté & Gilbert, 2009).

Moon's (2004) final type of learning situation is internal learning, "where there is no new material of learning coming from either a mediated or unmediated learning situation" (Trudel et al., 2013, p. 383). To explain, a coach transforms what he/she already knows and this, in turn, helps to develop one's intrapersonal knowledge. This is often done through self-reflection on past experiences (Callary et al., 2012; Werthner & Trudel, 2006) or through the use of a learning journal (Moon, 2006). As an example, Camiré et al. (2011) wrote that through a process of self-reflection, coaches asked themselves questions about whether they were teaching their athletes what they wanted them to learn, whether their athletes were having positive experiences, and

whether they were balancing the requirements of sport with athlete development. These questions were used by the coaches to refine their coaching philosophy that they used to guide their coaching practice.

It is important to recognize, however, that although these three learning situations have been presented as separate from each other, this is not necessarily how learning occurs (Trudel et al., 2013). Indeed, Trudel et al. (2013) stated that these situations are more of a continuum and different learning situations can occur in different contexts. For example, a coach attending a mediated coach education course could be experiencing an unmediated learning situation if he/she speaks with other coaches during breaks (Trudel et al., 2013). In sum, coaches learn through a combination of three different learning situations, which are mediated, unmediated, and internal and these learning situations help coaches to enhance their professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge.

Special Olympics and Sport for Athletes with Intellectual Disabilities

Although there is a growing body of research on the coach's influence on PYD and life skill development, as well as coach learning and understanding how coaches develop their practice, much of this research has been directed toward youth/adolescent sport coaches (e.g., Lemyre et al., 2007) or high-performance sport coaches (e.g., Jones et al., 2003). Research directed towards coaches of athletes with intellectual (and physical) disabilities has been limited (DePauw & Gavron, 2005; Inoue, 2011). This is problematic given that as the sport movement for athletes with disabilities progresses, the role of the coach becomes more important (DePauw & Gavron, 2005). In Special Olympics alone, which is the biggest movement in the world for athletes with intellectual disabilities (ID; Mactavish & Dowds, 2003), the population of athletes

has increased globally to approximately 4.4 million athletes from 170 countries (SO, 2014a), yet there is a lack of personnel who can coach in this unique context (DePauw & Gavron, 2005).

Coaching athletes with disabilities has important differences compared to coaching athletes without disabilities (Gavron & DePauw, 2005). A Special Olympics coach needs to be aware of their athletes' differing disabilities, the characteristics that are attributed to those disabilities, and how this might affect an athletes' capability to play and understand the sport. On a single team, the coach could be expected to understand the characteristics of individuals living with Down syndrome, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), Prader-Willi, fetal alcohol syndrome, cerebral palsy, Williams syndrome, and/or Apert syndrome, among others (SO, 2014b). Compounding this situation is the fact that two people with the same disability can have significantly different symptoms and characteristics (Squair & Groenveld, 2003). A paper by Ohrberg (2013) on youth sports for children with ASD can be used to illustrate these points. Ohrberg stated that coaches need to be able to understand the needs of participants given that ASD is a complex disorder affecting each person differently. One child with ASD, for example, may be high functioning and able to communicate well while another child may be low functioning and unable to communicate verbally. Thus in order to (a) promote a positive sport experience for their athletes, (b) help to improve their athletes' sport and social skills, and (c) create an environment in which the athletes can feel accepted, coaches of athletes with ASD (and ID in general) need to understand each athlete individually.

Although there is a paucity of research on coaching athletes with ID, there has been research exploring the importance and impact of sport and physical activity for people with disabilities (e.g., Farrell et al., 2004; Goodwin et al., 2006; Harada et al., 2011; Tedrick, 2009). In Farrell et al.'s (2004) research on the motivation of Special Olympians, for example, results

showed that athletes were satisfying their three basic needs for motivation: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Some of the athletes in the study also said that the social skills they learned through SO helped them with their social skills outside of sport. In addition, the athletes spoke about how their coaches helped to motivate them, to support them, and to teach them a variety of skills. However, Farrell et al.'s research also showed that some athletes were negatively impacted by SO; for example, some athletes discussed having conflicts and communication issues with coaches and other athletes.

In another example, Goodwin et al. (2006) conducted a phenomenological study that examined why parents entered their children into SO. Results showed that the parents felt SO promoted the development of positive social and physical skills in their children, improved autonomy, and matched the needs of their children to appropriate levels of sport and instruction. Further, the parents felt that SO coaches understood the needs of intellectually disabled children, had strong communication abilities with athletes, and treated them with dignity and compassion (Goodwin et al., 2006). Similar to the athletes, the parents also discussed negative aspects, such as an imbalance between the number of participants and the number of volunteers. However, despite these drawbacks, the parents believed that SO provided benefits for their children (Goodwin et al., 2006).

In sum, the three aforementioned studies yielded similar results and demonstrated that coaches, at the very least, are believed to be having some impact on athletes; however, the role of SO coaches needs to be explored further. Notwithstanding the above, little focus has been given to this coaching context (Gavron & DePauw, 2005; Inoue, 2011). Special Olympics strives to develop coaches who can help their athletes to develop both as athletes and as people. According to Special Olympics Ontario (2014, para. 2), such coaches:

Serve as role models and character builders. They give athletes awareness of their worth, abilities and courage. Significantly, coaches provide the confidence for athletes to grow and improve. They help athletes acquire skills that influence the ability to obtain employment, succeed in school and achieve personal goals.

Little is known about how SO coaches work to fulfill these duties and help their athletes to develop life skills. As such, the purpose of this research was to explore (a) whether coaches attempt to integrate the teaching of life skills into their coaching practices and, if so, what strategies they use to help athletes develop life skills, and (b) how these coaches learned these different strategies.

Research Design

Epistemology

A constructivist approach was used to help guide this research. Constructivism is defined as “the individual human subject engaging with objects in the world and making sense of them” (Crotty, 1998, p. 79); to explain, constructivists believe that each individual has a unique perspective that is useful and valid (Crotty, 1998). Constructivists also consider that nothing can be completely objective and individuals can gain understanding from their subjective experiences; therefore, an individual constructs meaning through his/her engagement with the world around them (Crotty, 1998). Given that coaches would bring their own unique experiences to this research, a constructivist approach helped to elucidate the fact that individuals can have different perceptions of the same phenomenon. Therefore, despite the fact that each participant coached in a relatively similar context, a constructivist approach was beneficial because it allowed for an exploration of how each coach taught his/her athletes life skills and how each coach has learned these strategies through his/her personal experiences.

Methodology

Crotty (1998) explained that the philosophical stance from which we approach our research informs the choice of methodology. Given the constructivist epistemology, the methodology used in this study was Merriam’s (2002, 2009) basic interpretive qualitative approach. According to Merriam (2002), researchers using a basic interpretive qualitative approach are interested in understanding the meanings that participants attribute to a phenomenon; for that reason, Merriam’s methodology is complementary for research driven by a constructivist paradigm.

A basic interpretive qualitative approach allowed me to combine elements of phenomenology with elements of symbolic interactionism (Merriam, 2002). Phenomenologists study individuals' subjective interpretations of everyday experiences; therefore, these individuals are able to provide descriptions of a particular phenomenon given their knowledge and experiences of that particular phenomenon (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008; Merriam, 2002). Symbolic interactionism focuses on interpreting experiences using a societal lens (Merriam, 2002). An important feature of symbolic interactionism is that "the meaning of an experience is constructed by an individual interacting with other people" (Merriam, 2002, p. 37); thus, as Crotty (1998) explained, symbolic interactionists try to understand a phenomenon by viewing it through the lens of their participants.

As a result of combining elements of phenomenology with symbolic interactionism, Merriam (2002) explained that researchers employing a basic interpretive qualitative approach, essentially, are able to approach an understanding of a phenomenon based on participants' experiences (Merriam, 2009). This approach was appropriate for the current research because the purpose was to understand the phenomenon of how each participant attempts to integrate life skill development strategies into his or her individual coaching practice and what learning path each of these coaches travelled.

As a research design, Merriam (2009) stated that in a basic interpretive study, data could be collected through a variety of methods including interviews, observations, and/or document analysis. The collected data are then analyzed to find common themes and these findings are presented using rich and descriptive accounts (Merriam, 2002). Furthermore, the interpretation of the findings is based on the researcher's understanding of the participants' experiences and views (Merriam, 2009).

Methods

Population selection and sampling strategies. Before any participants were contacted, ethical approval was granted by the Research Ethics Board (Appendix A). To select participants, purposive sampling was used. In purposive sampling, “particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately to provide information that is particularly relevant to your questions and goals” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 97). The goal of using purposive sampling was to answer the research questions as thoroughly as possible by choosing participants whose experiences could provide rich, in-depth data (Polkinghorne, 2005).

Special Olympics coaches should be striving to fulfill the aforementioned role that SO deems important for its coaches. Given that this is a relatively unexplored area of research with the goal to help improve the SO coaching practice, coaches with a considerable amount of experience were selected for the study (Camiré et al., 2012; Gilbert & Trudel, 2004). Experienced coaches were also selected because they may “have better thought-out strategies for influencing athletes’...personal development,” (Gould et al., 2007, p. 19). In order for a coach to be considered experienced, they had to meet the following selection criteria: coaches had to have at least three years of experience coaching SO athletes, coaches had to be certified in an SO specific stream from an accredited coaching certification program (e.g., National Coaching Certification Program of Canada), and coaches had to have been selected by SO to coach at a national or international level. As a separate criterion, coaches had to speak English fluently.

To select the sample, ten community coordinators (i.e., the heads of the different districts) and one fundraising coordinator from within a four-hour radius of Ottawa were provided with an information letter (see Appendix B) and the selection criteria. The coordinators then sent the letter to all eligible candidates. Of the 11 districts contacted, 13 coaches met the criteria and of

those 13 coaches, six were interested in participating. Candidates who were interested were then asked to contact the lead researcher. The sports coached by the participants included floor hockey, swimming, golf, athletics, curling, softball, ten-pin bowling, and Nordic skiing. For more information about the participants, please refer to Table C1 in Appendix C.

As Maxwell (2013) stated, the relationship that a researcher establishes with a participant is crucial for collecting data because the relationship effects how open the participant will be to share experiences. To establish trust and rapport, I had an initial, informal meeting with four of the six coaches at locations of their choice, for example, a softball tournament. Multiple emails with the other two coaches I had not met (due to scheduling conflicts). Therefore, despite the lack of a face-to-face meeting with these coaches, they appeared to be open and willing to share their experiences and I feel that rapport was not affected by the lack of an initial meeting.

Data collection. Before data collection began, all the coaches signed consent forms (See Appendix D). Multiple data collection methods were used, as this practice is considered beneficial for establishing trustworthiness (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011). To collect data, therefore, I used semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, document analysis, and follow-up semi-structured interviews.

Semi-structured interviews. The first method of data collection was a semi-structured, one-on-one interview with each coach at a location of his/her choice. The interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder and ranged from 29:58 minutes to 81:10 minutes, with an average of 57 minutes. This yielded 100 single-spaced pages of transcripts altogether. The purpose of this initial interview was to gain an understanding of the coaches' previous experiences, whether they believed that they had an impact on their athletes' lives outside of

sport (including life skill development), and how they might have learned to develop life skills in their athletes.

Maxwell (2013) stated that a less structured approach to data collection helps the researcher to uncover contextual meanings and provides more depth for understanding than a structured approach. Semi-structured interviews, therefore, were useful because although an interview guide was used to help direct the interviews (See Appendix E), the questions were open-ended to elicit rich descriptions of the phenomenon (Smith & Caddick, 2012). For example, coaches were asked questions such as “What is your coaching philosophy?” and “What are some challenges that you have encountered in coaching and helping your athletes to develop?” Thus, these interviews were flexible enough to allow for probing questions to be asked (e.g., could you please provide an example), but structured enough to maintain the focus of the interview (Barriball & While, 1994; Smith & Caddick, 2012).

Non-participant observation. As a means to provide thick description (Geertz, 1973) and to help triangulate the data collection methods (Cotton, Stokes, & Cotton, 2010), a set of non-participant observations were conducted. Non-participant observation means that in the field, the researcher does not participate, he/she merely observes what and how things are happening (Smith & Caddick, 2012). During observations, field notes were recorded about the coaches and different events that transpired in practices and/or games.

Non-participant observation was a useful method in order to see the events that take place in the natural settings (Cotton et al., 2010) of the SO coaches. Coaches were observed at least twice, either at games or practices or a combination of the two. Based on the way that SO seasons are structured, some coaches were observed at two practices or two games because they did not have any upcoming practices or competitions within the time frame of the study. For

example, the bowling coach was observed at two practices because the team did not have any competitions until late in the research process.

The coaches were contacted after the initial interview to schedule times that were appropriate for observation. In order to prepare for the sets of observations with each of the six coaches, all of the initial interviews were listened to (and transcribed, if there was time to do so before the observation occurred) and notes were taken about various things that might be observed according to what the coaches had said during their interviews. For example, if a coach said that he/she uses humour to help develop relationships with athletes, then a note would be made to pay attention to the coach's use of humour during practice. Both theoretical frameworks (i.e., Camiré et al., 2012 and Trudel et al., 2013) were reread and notes were taken in order to understand aspects that would be key to observe, such as whether coaches use keywords when they are coaching. For a detailed example of an observation guide, please refer to Appendix F. In total, 22.5 hours were spent observing the coaches. Four of the coaches were observed three times and two of the coaches were observed twice because of SO scheduling (see Table G3 in Appendix G for a thorough breakdown of the number and length of observations).

Upon my arrival at the practices or games, I would situate myself in an area that provided a clear view of the coaches and athletes, as well as optimal audio without interfering with the practices or games. If my vision and hearing were limited, I would move to another area.

Document analysis. Document analysis is the review of documents and images that have been created without a researcher's influence (Bowen, 2009). Although documentary data may not be used as frequently as other methods such as interviews and observations (Culver, Gilbert, & Sparkes, 2012), it can provide rich and detailed data (Polkinghorne, 2005); thus, document

analysis was used to help enrich the data collected through the other data collection methods (Bowen, 2009; Yin, 1999).

For this research, I sought to access personal coaching documents from the coaches such as practice plans, coaching journals, coaching workbooks from coach education programs, or anything else that they perceived as important to share. Three of the six coaches (coaches 1, 3 and, 5) provided their coach education documents, the other three coaches felt that they did not have any documents suitable for the research purposes. Altogether, approximately 20 coach education workbooks and reference materials were analyzed. In order to analyze the documents, anything that related to life skill development (e.g., nutritional information, goal setting) was scanned, saved as a digital photograph, and read. These scans were then subjected to thematic analysis (see Data Analysis section below). A total of 74 scans were added to NVivo10 (Qualitative Solution and Research, 2013) for coding.

There were some limitations in using document analysis. Coaching documents were not provided by all of the coaches, which limited the amount of data that could be collected. The three coaches who provided documents all gave their coach education workbooks. Given that these three coaches all took the same course, their reference materials did not differ in content. Furthermore, the coaches did not fill out their coach workbooks in their entirety (or what was written lacked detail). Therefore, anything that could have been original between the coaches – for example, answers to hypothetical scenarios – was essentially absent.

Follow-up semi-structured interviews. After the first round of interviews, the observations, and the document analyses were completed, a second interview was conducted with each coach. The purposes of this interview were threefold: (a) to clarify anything found during the earlier data collection methods, (b) to ask more specific questions related to the

coaches' life skill development strategies, and (c) to ask more specific questions about each coach's learning experiences.

This set of interviews was also semi-structured and consisted of 25 questions (please refer to Appendix H). Coaches were asked questions such as "How do you model the values that you try to instil in your athletes?" and "Do you use your life experiences to help you with your coaching? If yes, please provide an example." Many of the questions were also based on initial ideas from the other data collection methods. For example, after reading the coaches' documents, one of the questions developed was "Did your coach education courses make you more aware of the potential life skills that SO athletes may need to learn?" Also, during observations it was noted that coaches often teased their athletes, so one probe was "Does using humour impact your coach-athlete relationships? If it does, how so?" Questions in the interview guide were also influenced by the theoretical frameworks used in this study. The second interviews were on average 52 minutes in length. The shortest interview was 30:16 minutes and the longest interview was 61:50 minutes. Altogether, these interviews yielded approximately 100 pages of single spaced text.

Data analysis. All data (interviews, observation field notes, documents) were analyzed using thematic analysis, as it respects the rules and principles of both a constructivist epistemology (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and a basic interpretive qualitative methodology (Merriam, 2002). Thematic analysis is a flexible method of analysis that was used to help identify and describe patterns found in the data (Aronson, 1994; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Given that thematic analysis can be used both as an inductive analysis strategy and a deductive analysis strategy (Braun & Clarke, 2006), both strategies were mixed to analyze the data. Joffe (2012) explained that a combination of approaches has "...one [go] to the

data with certain preconceived categories derived from theories, yet one also remains open to new concepts that emerge” (p. 210). Two frameworks were used to help guide the analysis, but we remained open to any new themes that were not present in either framework.

For the strategies that SO coaches use to help promote the development of life skills, Camiré et al.’s (2012) “Coaching and Transferring Life Skills: Philosophies and Strategies Used by Model High School Coaches” was used for guidance. For the different learning situations reported by the participants, Moon’s (2001) mediated, unmediated, and internal learning framework as adapted by Trudel et al. (2013) in their chapter “Looking at Coach Development from the Coach-Learner’s Perspective” was used. The blend of inductive and deductive strategies was beneficial because even though the frameworks were helpful for guiding the analysis, these frameworks have not been examined in the context of coaching intellectually disabled athletes. Thus, it was important to remain open to new themes because, even though the frameworks provided a strong theoretical basis, coaching and teaching life skills to SO athletes had unique attributes that were not entirely covered by the frameworks.

To conduct the thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six phases were followed. The first phase was to familiarize myself with the data through carefully transcribing the interviews, typing field notes, reading all of the data, and noting initial thoughts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke’s (2006) second phase includes the creation of initial codes, which identify interesting features about the data. In this phase, researchers are to work through all of the data and should be looking for patterns that appear to be emerging across the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this phase, NVivo 10 software was utilized to help analyze all of the data line-by-line using both in vivo codes (e.g., “being direct with athletes” and codes that were applicable to the framework categories (e.g., “coaching philosophy”). The third phase

began once all of the data had been coded and listed. In this phase, the focus was on developing potential themes through the analysis of codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All codes were checked to determine how they related to each other (e.g., “using humour” related to “building strong coach-athlete relationships”) or how they would fit into the pre-existing categories from the frameworks. As these relationships were beginning to develop, the codes were grouped together. Once the potential themes and subthemes (where applicable) were created, the fourth phase was to review the themes to determine two things: (a) whether the data extracts in each theme form a clear and logical pattern and (b) whether the themes are a valid representation of the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After the themes were reviewed and minor changes were made (e.g., the theme “being strict” was quite similar to “being direct” so they were combined to make one theme), the fifth step was to define and name themes, which involved describing each theme in small paragraphs after determining what was interesting about each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, one of the themes based on inductive analysis was named “Building Strong Coach-Athlete Relationships” and it was described as “building relationships with athletes, which in turn helped the athletes to develop trust and create a bond with the coach.” Another key part of the description of this theme was that coaches attempted to develop these bonds through treating their athletes with respect and dignity. The final step was to carefully select extracts in order to make a strong argument for the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In order to organize the themes, each theme was written in a separate Microsoft Word document and then defined with a list of the most appropriate extracts. Each theme was also colour coded for easier reading.

Quality and trustworthiness. As Merriam (2009) stated, all researchers should strive to write high quality and trustworthy work in an ethical fashion. It is through the production of high quality and trustworthy qualitative work that readers are afforded the opportunity to gain an

understanding about a particular phenomenon that could otherwise have been left unknown or unclear (Golafshani, 2003). Quality in qualitative research refers to the goodness of the research and whether the study helps to foster an understanding of the phenomenon; furthermore, if a study is good quality, it can be trusted to inform other research or practice (Flick, 2007; Golafshani, 2003; Merriam, 2002). Thus establishing trustworthiness is a means for helping to establish quality (Golafshani, 2003). Trustworthiness is a measure of how reasonable findings are and whether they represent reality (or the participant's reality) (Golafshani, 2003; Koro-Ljungberg, 2008; Maxwell, 1992; Mertens, 2005). It is important to recognize, however, that the aforementioned definitions of quality and trustworthiness are basic and that there are differing opinions regarding what quality and trustworthiness (also known as validity in positivist research) should mean (Creswell, 2013).

To establish quality and trustworthiness, I completed a bracketing interview prior to data collection in order to determine my biases, assumptions, and personal interests (Ahern, 1999; Rolls & Relf, 2006). The bracketing interview helped me to understand how my previous experiences could influence my research, both positively and negatively (Rolls & Relf, 2006). I used this awareness to ensure that I was not distracted during observations because of my emotional connection to my study. Since my past experiences have made me passionate about advocating for people with disabilities, I tend to have an overtly positive view of organizations like the Special Olympics. Furthermore, given that I shared similar experiences with some of the coaches, the bracketing interview helped me realise that these experiences could lead me to become sidetracked during interviews as well. This awareness, therefore, helped me to better identify when I was allowing my experiences and emotions to takeover and cloud my judgment

and then to be more judicious in my thoughts and behaviours. The bracketing interview also helped me to be cognizant of the need to remain critical throughout the entire study.

Other methods were also used to increase the trustworthiness of this study. For instance, methodological triangulation was used in the form of multiple data collection methods (Guion et al., 2011). The triangulation of data collection methods was helpful in order to ensure that this topic was explored using multiple tools (Baxter & Jack, 2008), with each method enriching the others (Maxwell, 2013). All interview transcripts were also sent back to the participants for member-checking (Merriam, 2002) in order for the coaches to provide suggestions or make changes (Creswell, 2013). Only two coaches provided minor revisions (e.g., incorrect name spelling). An audit trail, which is a thorough explanation of the methods, procedures, and decisions used throughout the study (Merriam, 2002), was also created for readers and evaluators so that they can be made aware of the entire research process. Furthermore, Merriam (2002) and Creswell (2013) both explained that the use of rich, thick descriptions helps readers to determine the transferability of findings, and as such, rich, thick descriptions have been provided in this report.

Results

The results from this research are presented in two formats. The first set of results, which answered the first research question about how coaches attempt to integrate life skill development strategies into their coaching practices are presented in an article format. The second set of results, which are based on the learning pathways of each of the participants will be presented as a general results section.

Article

Life skill development in athletes with intellectual disabilities: Strategies used by Special
Olympics coaches

Abstract

Merriam's (2002) basic interpretive qualitative approach was used to explore the strategies employed by Special Olympics coaches to promote life skill development. Non-participant observations and two semi-structured interviews were conducted with six coaches. Results revealed seven deductive themes framed by Camiré, Trudel, and Forneris's (2012) study with high school coaches: (a) having a philosophy aimed at helping athletes develop, (b) understanding athletes' pre-existing makeup, (c) providing athletes with opportunities to show their skills, (d) modelling, (e) taking teachable moments, (f) using keywords, and (g) volunteerism. Two inductive themes were found: building strong coach-athlete relationships and being stern and direct.

Keywords: developmental disabilities, coaching athletes with intellectual disabilities, athlete development, development through sport

Life skill development in athletes with intellectual disabilities: Strategies used by Special Olympics coaches

Research has shown that sports are important for people with intellectual disabilities (ID; Mactavish & Dowds, 2003), assisting this population to develop and feel socially included (McConkey, Dowling, Hassan, & Menke, 2013). Herewith, intellectual disabilities entail three common characteristics: (a) considerably lower intellectual functioning, (b) impairment in adaptive skills, and (c) these first two traits revealed before the age of eighteen (Mactavish & Dowds, 2003; Special Olympics Canada [SOC], 2014b). People living with ID are often affected in varying ways, even when two people have the same disability (Mactavish & Dowds, 2003; Squair & Groeneveld, 2003). The areas affected might include learning abilities, social and communicative skill acquisition, mental and physical health, and motor skill development (Alexander, Dummer, Smeltzer, & Denton, 2011; Belva & Matson, 2013; Grandisson, Tetreault, & Freeman, 2012; Mactavish & Dowds, 2003).

Historically, people with disabilities were often isolated, mistreated, and harassed by society (Counsell & Agran, 2013). Because of society's low expectations and negative attitudes and behaviours towards people with disabilities, barriers were created to exclude people with disabilities from partaking in many activities in which mainstream society participated (DePauw & Gavron, 2005); sport was one such area. According to DePauw and Gavron (2005), it was assumed that people with ID could not comprehend or even appreciate competition and sport. This began to change in the 1960s when the Special Olympics (SO) movement began (Mactavish & Dowds, 2003). As stated by Harada, Siperstein, Parker, and Lenox (2011), the Special Olympics initiative was the brainchild of Eunice Kennedy Shriver and was meant to "...provide such individuals [with ID] the opportunities to demonstrate their abilities rather than their

disabilities, and to be given the opportunity to participate in the normative life experience of sport as enjoyed by individuals without disabilities” (p. 1132).

Special Olympics has grown into an organization where people with ID (over eight years of age), regardless of their skill level, can participate in sport competitions (Harada et al., 2011). Today, SO is in 170 countries with approximately 4.4 million athletes (SO, 2014). In Canada there are 36,000 athletes participating in 17 different sports which cycle between summer and winter seasons (SOC, 2014a). Recently, SOC has also developed and launched Active Start and FUNdamentals programs for children from ages two to twelve with ID in an effort to provide children with further opportunities to develop physically, socially, and cognitively (SOC, 2014b). The overall mission of SOC states that it is “dedicated to enriching the lives of Canadians with an intellectual disability through sport,” (SOC, 2014b, para. 2).

Research has shown that involvement in SO can have a positive impact on athletes by, for example, increasing competence, social skills, and confidence (Farrell, Crocker, McDonough, & Sedwick, 2004; Goodwin, Fitzpatrick, Thurmeier, & Hall, 2006; Harada et al., 2011). It has also been suggested that sport programs for people with ID should be encouraging the development of both sports skills and skills that can help individuals with ID in their daily lives (Weiss, Diamond, Demark, & Lovald, 2003). Skills that are essential for daily functioning outside of sport (e.g., school, work) are called life skills (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993; Gould & Carson, 2008); life skills are critical for people with ID (Bouck, 2010). As mentioned, people with ID are especially susceptible to mental and physical health issues (Grandisson et al., 2012) and may also be lacking in social skills (Alexander et al., 2011), communication skills (Walton & Ingersoll, 2013), and/or healthy habits (e.g., eating; Gibson, Temple, Anholt, & Gaul, 2011).

Life Skill Development

Life skill development is the development of skills that allow people to function in different environments; they can be cognitive, physical, behavioural, intrapersonal, or interpersonal (Camiré, Trudel, & Forneris, 2012; Danish et al., 1993; Gould & Carson, 2008; Papacharisis, Goudas, Danish, & Theodorakis, 2005). Some examples include making smart decisions, taking initiative, communicating effectively with others, and goal setting (Forneris, Danish, & Scott, 2007; Holt, Tink, Mandigo, & Fox, 2008; Papacharisis et al., 2005). A key principle of life skill development is the transference of skills (in this case, from sport) to other areas of life such as school, home, or in the community (Danish et al., 1993; Gould & Carson, 2008; Theokas, Danish, Hodge, Heke, & Forneris, 2008).

Sport has been seen as an attractive avenue for helping athletes to develop life skills (Camiré et al., 2012; Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2007), especially given its popularity in society (Papacharisis et al., 2005; Theokas et al., 2008; Trottier & Robitaille, 2014) and its potential for the transfer of skills to other domains (Alexander et al., 2011). However, it is important to recognize that mere participation in sport does not necessarily ensure life skill development (Brunelle, Danish, & Forneris, 2007; Danish, Forneris, Hodge, & Heke, 2004). Indeed, it is an athlete's experiences through sport that could result in positive development (Holt, Tamminen, Tink, & Black, 2009; Papacharisis et al., 2005). Holt et al. (2009) further argued that these experiences, either positive or negative, are shaped by the social context provided by the sporting environment. Given that the coach has the utmost influence on an athlete's experiences in sport (Falcão, Bloom, & Gilbert, 2012; Trottier & Robitaille, 2014), it should be no surprise that the environment set by the coach impacts the developmental gains of athletes (Camiré & Trudel, 2011; Gould, Flett, & Lauer, 2012).

The coach provides leadership and is also the person with whom athletes interact most frequently (Camiré, Forneris, Trudel & Bernard, 2011). Thus, if a coach provides good leadership and creates a positive environment, the sport setting will be more conducive to the development of life skills (Gould et al., 2007). For example, Camiré, Trudel, and Forneris (2009) examined high school coaches and found that high school sport can be used for youth development if athletes have support and are afforded opportunities to suggest coaching material, to communicate with coaches, and to help develop team goals. Not all coaches, however, promote a positive sporting environment. Indeed, in the same study, Camiré and his colleagues found the opposite effects are possible in instances of poor coaching: some athletes had a negative experience in sport because of a lack of athlete/coach communication. The athletes wanted to be heard by their coaches and wanted the opportunity to help make team decisions. Gearity and Murray (2011) also showed that adverse effects such as amotivation, athlete attrition, or self-doubt can arise as the result of poor coaching and a negative sporting environment.

Life Skill Development Strategies

Researchers have stated that a leader (e.g., coach) who intentionally teaches life skills – either through modelling, demonstrating, or practicing – can help to increase the probability that athletes will develop life skills (Camiré et al., 2011; Gould & Carson, 2008; Theokas et al., 2008). There are a multitude of strategies that coaches can implement to help athletes develop life skills (Holt et al., 2008). However, there has been a lack of attention given to research devoted to explaining how life skills can be taught by coaches (Gould & Carson, 2008). In 2008, Gould and Carson reviewed the literature of positive youth development and life skill development through sport and constructed a model for coaching life skills. First, they stated

that coaches need to assess an athlete's internal (e.g., personality) and external assets (e.g., socioeconomic status) in order to understand the athlete's pre-existing makeup. The second component of their model focuses on the sport experience and how coaches can emphasize teaching life skills. In this component, they listed the coaches' personal characteristics (e.g., the coach's relationship skills), direct teaching strategies (e.g., team building activities), and indirect teaching strategies (e.g., modeling life skills) as important factors. The third component of the model outlines two possible mechanisms for how an athlete develops life skills and how these skills could affect the athlete's behaviour. The first such mechanism is how the social environment in sport influences athletes (e.g., the influence of positive social norms) and the second is the utility of life skills in everyday life (i.e., some life skills, like stress management, are easily applied to other areas of life). The fourth component of the model focusses on the outcomes of life skill development through sport, namely the positive outcomes. The final component of the model explains how life skills developed through sport should be transferable to other areas of life. The model also recognizes the potential negative outcomes if the sport experience is undesirable.

Camiré et al. (2012) used Gould and Carson's (2008) model as a framework to gain an understanding of the philosophies and strategies that model high school coaches used to coach life skills and life skill transference to their athletes. Their results included the perspectives of both the coaches and athletes. Camiré and his colleagues conducted 25 interviews (9 coaches, 16 athletes) and found that coaches sought to understand their athletes' pre-existing makeup and had coaching philosophies dedicated to helping their athletes develop life skills. Coaches also used a variety of life skill development strategies such as keywords, peer evaluations, providing athletes with opportunities to display skills, modelling, taking advantage of teachable moments, and

volunteerism. Despite some mixed results, coaches and athletes generally believed that athletes can transfer the skills gained through sport to other areas of life. Camiré et al.'s research was used as the framework for the current study because (a) it has a strong theoretical background framed by Gould and Carson's (2008) work, (b) it applies Gould and Carson's model, (c) it includes the perspectives of student-athletes to create a more holistic picture of how life skill development strategies can be used effectively, and (d) it is a current list of life skill development strategies.

Given that coaches can play a role in helping their athletes to develop life skills and that SO is an organization with the goals and means to bring positive change to the lives of people with ID (Dykens & Cohen, 1996; Weiss et al., 2003), research is needed to examine how SO coaches help their athletes develop life skills. As explained by DePauw and Gavron (2005), while disability sport, which includes SO programming, continues to grow, the coach's role becomes increasingly important. It is not surprising then, that the role of SO coaches, according to Special Olympics Ontario (2014, para. 2) is to:

...serve as role models and character builders. They give athletes awareness of their worth, abilities and courage. Significantly, coaches provide the confidence for athletes to grow and improve. They help athletes acquire skills that influence the ability to obtain employment, succeed in school and achieve personal goals.

However, to date, there is a lack of research exploring how Special Olympics coaches fulfill their role and help their athletes develop (DePauw & Gavron, 2005; Inoue, 2011). The purpose of this research, therefore, was to explore how experienced SO coaches attempt to integrate the development of life skills into their coaching practice. Thus, we were interested in determining some of the strategies that SO coaches use to help their athletes develop life skills.

Method

Participant Selection

Upon ethical approval from the researchers' university Research Ethics Board, participants were selected using purposeful sampling. Purposeful selection was used because it allows for the deliberate selection of participants who can provide rich, in-depth answers to the research question (Maxwell, 2013; Polkinghorne, 2005). Given that SO coaching is a relatively unexplored area of research and the goal was to help improve the coaching practice (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004), experienced coaches were chosen for the study. Experienced coaches may also "have better thought-out strategies for influencing athletes' ...personal development," (Gould et al., 2007, p. 19). The coach participants had to meet the following selection criteria: have at least three years of experience coaching SO athletes, be certified in a SO specific coaching stream from an accredited coaching certification program (e.g., National Coaching Certification Program of Canada), and have been selected by Special Olympics Canada to coach at a national or international level. Coaches also needed to be fluent in the English language.

Eleven regional coordinators working within a four-hour radius from the researchers' university were contacted and provided with an information letter and the selection criteria. The coordinators then forwarded the information to all eligible coaches within their district and interested candidates were to contact the lead researcher. Six coaches participated in this study from the following sports: floor hockey, swimming, golf, athletics, curling, softball, ten-pin bowling, and Nordic skiing.

Data Collection

Data were collected using multiple methods, as this helped to view the coaches' experiences using multiples lenses (Baxter & Jack, 2008) and helped to establish trustworthiness

(Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011). The data collection methods used were semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and follow-up semi-structured interviews. Before data collection began, all coaches signed consent forms.

The first semi-structured interview, that is, an interview guided by a list of open-ended questions to elicit rich descriptions of the phenomenon (Smith & Caddick, 2012), was used to gain an initial understanding of the coaches' previous experiences, whether they believed that they had an impact on their athletes' lives outside of sport (including life skill development), and what skills they thought were necessary for their athletes to develop. Questions such as: "What is your coaching philosophy?" and "What are some challenges that you have encountered in coaching and helping your athletes to develop?" were asked. The interviews were voice recorded and ranged from 30 minutes to 80 minutes, with an average of 57 minutes.

Following the initial interviews, a set of non-participant observations with each coach was completed. When observing as a non-participant, the researcher does not participate, he/she merely observes what and how things are happening (Smith & Caddick, 2012). During the observations, the lead researcher recorded field notes. Coaches were observed at least twice (four coaches were observed three times). Based on the way that SO seasons are structured, some coaches were observed only at practices or only at games because they did not have any upcoming practices or competitions within the time frame of the study. In preparation for the observations, all initial interviews were listened to with notes taken about key behaviours to watch for (e.g., coaches encouraging athletes) and the theoretical framework was re-read, again, with additional notes taken. Sixteen observation sessions were conducted amounting to 22.5 hours spent observing the coaches.

Once all of the observations were completed, a follow-up semi-structured interview was conducted with each coach. The goals of this interview were to clarify issues found during the initial interviews and observations and to ask more specific questions related to the coaches' life skill development strategies. Coaches were asked questions such as: "How do you model the values that you try to instill in your athletes?" The data already collected were helpful when constructing questions and potential probes. For example, one probe based on observations was: "Do you think teasing your athletes helps you to bond with them?" after the lead research noticed how often coaches tease their athletes. The second interviews were on averaged 52 minutes long. The shortest interview was 30 minutes and the longest was just over 60 minutes.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stages of thematic analysis, applying both deductive and inductive strategies. Camiré et al.'s (2012) study guided the deductive portion. To begin, all interviews were transcribed verbatim, resulting in approximately 200 pages of single spaced text (approximately 100 pages for each set of the interviews) and all field notes were typed, resulting in 20 single-spaced pages. Initial analytical ideas were noted at this time. Transcripts were then sent to the coaches for member checking; only two coaches made minor adjustments (e.g., name spelling). The transcripts were then subjected to analysis using NVivo10 software (QSR, 2014). The data were coded line-by-line using both codes that were deduced from the framework categories (e.g., "coaching philosophy") and inductive codes (e.g., "being direct with athletes"). Once all of the data had been coded, potential themes were built, with codes being checked to determine whether they related to each other and the pre-existing categories from Camiré et al.'s framework. Themes were then reviewed to determine whether they made a clear pattern and were related to the entire data set. Some of the original

themes were changed as they were either similar to other themes and could collapse under those themes. For example, “being strict” was a potential theme, but after reviewing its codes and extracts, it was determined that combining “being strict” with the theme “being direct” was more appropriate and holistic, the two being complementary. Finally the themes were given their definitive names and extracts from each were chosen to help create a vivid picture of the themes.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a measure of how logical the findings are and whether they represent the participants’ experiences (Koro-Ljungberg, 2008; Mertens, 2005). Prior to data collection, the lead researcher completed a bracketing interview to raise her awareness of her biases, assumptions, and personal interests in this study (Ahern, 1999). Methodological triangulation occurred as multiple data collection methods were utilized to supplement one another (Guion et al., 2011). An audit trail explaining the methods, procedures, and decisions used throughout the study (Merriam, 2002) has been left; and rich, thick descriptions have been provided to help the readers to determine the transferability of the findings (Creswell, 2013).

Results

Nine life skill development strategies emerged from the thematic analysis. Seven of them are based on Camiré et al.’s (2012) framework and two were found inductively. The seven strategies based on Camiré et al.’s work are (a) having coaching philosophy directed at being a role model, (b) understanding athletes’ pre-existing make-up, (c) providing athlete with opportunities to showcase skills, (d) modelling, (e) taking teachable moments, (f) using keywords, and (g) volunteerism. The two strategies resulting from the inductive analysis were (a) building strong relationships with athletes and (b) being stern and direct.

Coaching Philosophy

All of the coaches, when asked about their coaching philosophy, stated that SO is not meant to be about winning at all costs. Each expressed that they were there to provide their athletes with a fun, encouraging, and inclusive experience, while teaching them things such as fair play, sportsmanship, and healthy living. Coach 5's coaching philosophy provides a portrait of how the coaches felt: "My philosophy about sports is basically to have fun, not to win at all costs, but if you can get to the top fine. If you can't, just play fair, be a good sport."

Three of the coaches also expressed in their philosophies that they needed to be advocates and champions for people with intellectual disabilities. Coach 1 provided this reflection:

I believe that everybody [should have] the opportunity. Myself growing up, I had challenges. I have a physical disability that I was born with and I was never [unable] to participate because of my disability, so I think that for anybody else. No matter what the challenges somebody may have, we need to make [participation] possible. And if that means changing some of...the ways we do things, then we change some of the ways we do things.

Altogether, coaches had the philosophy that SO was not just a sport program, but also a place for their athletes to come together and feel included and that it was their duty as a coach to be a good role model. Coach 3 said that people with ID tend to be both isolated and often depressed, so part of his role in SO was to offer his athletes an inclusive space for development by "providing them [with] a venue to come together, meet their peers, in a safe environment."

Understanding Athletes' Pre-existing Make-up

The coaches all explained that they had to have an understanding of their athletes' make-up, especially when it came to understanding their (dis)abilities, challenges, and individual characteristics. By understanding their athletes, coaches were able to both individually tailor

their coaching strategies to meet each athlete's needs and build better coach-athlete relationships. As Coach 5 said, "You get to know their ways, understand their character. Little bit of empathy for their problems, their frustrations."

Coaches shared that having an understanding of their athletes helped when the athletes had outbursts or were frustrated; this way, coaches were better able create coping mechanisms and plans of action for when athletes did have issues. Coach 4 explained that things like a "change of the weather, change of the moon, last day before Christmas" could impact her athletes, so she always had a plan for those days and was better able to help her athletes calm down and manage stressful situations. Similarly, Coach 3 explained that he would allow an athlete who would become aggressive when he was feeling stressed to go for a walk and then, "at the next practice, try to have a quiet conversation with him...don't get heavy with him because he'll just get embarrassed and stop talking. Try to keep the communication, show him you trust him, show him you understand him." This strategy was not the same for all of Coach 3's athletes, however, as he explained that each athlete was different in the way that he/she dealt with problems. Moreover, four of the coaches (Coaches 2, 3, 4, and 6) explained that on their teams, they had different levels of functioning, so how they went about coaching and problem solving with their athletes was dependent on that as well.

Building Strong Coach-Athlete Relationships

Most of the coaches felt that they built relationships with their athletes, which helped them to develop trust and create a bond or friendship between coach and athlete. The majority of the coaches mentioned that it was important to treat athletes with respect and dignity. Coach 1 shared that, "Coming to the games, being respectful myself, learning about the people's lives and asking questions, like we would do with anybody. You know...you start friendships, you ask

questions, you share about yourself, you're consistent, you're fair, you have fun," was helpful in building relationships with her athletes, which in turn helped her athletes to trust her and come to her for advice.

One strategy that the coaches said helped them to build relationships was the use of humour. On numerous occasions, it was observed that coaches would make jokes with their athletes to get them laughing, which coaches explained helped them to create a positive environment and to make light of mistakes. This also allowed them to show athletes that they could have fun with their coaches. As Coach 3 explained, "The kibitzing with them in a positive way, they all respond – well, the [vast] majority of them – respond. If you're kibitzing with them, they think, 'You're cool and I'm cool' sort of thing."

Some of the coaches explained that once trust was gained, athletes were more open to share things about their personal lives. Coach 1 explained that as she developed a stronger relationship with her athletes, she became a "...role model, [somebody] who they can come and talk to. I think [I'm] somebody that they trust – that they can come and talk to – if they need help or assistance." She further explained that her female athletes, in particular, opened up to her and looked for advice about relationships, especially if they needed validation about the way they were being treated by their significant others.

Providing Athletes with Opportunities to Showcase Skills

The coaches in the current study tried to provide their athletes with opportunities to show some of their skills. For example, coaches thought that providing athletes with the opportunity to use their leadership skills, even by leading the warm-up, which was observed during some of the coaches' practice, benefitted the athletes and helped them to feel confident. Coach 3 explained

that he would choose different athletes to lead a relay-type race and that even small gestures like that helped to build an athlete's self-esteem and leadership skills. Coach 5 said:

I think we do [provide them chances to be leaders] when we give somebody the captaincy of the team. You see it more, as I said, when you go away to provincials, it's a whole different environment. That is when leadership skills show: in the accommodation areas, meal times, and at after-hours activities.

He further explained that such leadership roles provided athletes with a sense of pride and could boost confidence.

Coach 6, however, warned that although athletes enjoy taking on a leadership role or the ambassador role, coaches should be careful about how much responsibility is given to the athletes. Sometimes the athletes would take their position too far, wielding their position of power over their teammates' heads:

As long as I've been in [city name], [city name]'s had athlete [representatives], more for other athletes to go to if they have issues, to then take them to the council to discuss.... I have found that any athlete who has stepped into that role has taken it way above what they should be, and it's, "I'm the athlete rep; you can't tell me this", or, "You can't do that! I'm telling you, you can't do that!" And they're telling this to other athletes, "You can't do that because I'm the athlete rep!"

Coach 6 did offer the suggestion that if an athlete is chosen for a leadership position, such as the athlete representative, the athlete should be taught what their role is, which he further stated is not something that is often done well.

Modelling

The coaches stated that they tried to instill their values and help their athletes learn different life skills through modelling the correct behaviour. As Coach 6 explained, “It’s sort of like, if I’m telling you that you can’t do something, I can’t do it. If I say that this is what you have to do, then I have to be willing to do the same thing.” Coach 2 expressed, “I try to be a role model, I try to set a good example...A leader of sorts too, I’m sure they look up to me.”

Coach 1 provided a unique example of how she tries to model the values that she wants to pass to her athletes. She stated that because she has a physical disability, she is able to use that to understand what the athletes face in their lives and to show her athletes that having a disability does not mean that someone is incapable of accomplishing their goals:

I think I have that better understanding and I can bring that to say, “Hey, we’re all athletes here, we all have challenges in different ways, we all need to be treated the same way. We all have limitations and what are we going to do to overcome those? But it doesn’t mean I can’t. It doesn’t mean you can’t.” So I think that’s been helpful.

Coach 2 shared that he tries to be a good role model to his athletes and that he tries to teach his athletes the value of sportsmanship and fair play through his own behaviour. He provided an example:

The first thing I’ll do, I’ll play as hard as I can to beat you but if you beat me I’m the first one to come off the bench to shake your hand and say great game, thanks for honouring me with your best game. And I hope I have instilled it in our athletes, I’d like to think that our team is known as we play hard but we are good sports.

This behaviour was also observed during a softball game by this coach’s team. Coach 2 and his entire team began clapping and cheering for an opposing player who hit a homerun against them. It was evident that winning was not the most important thing for this team, it was more about

being good sports and supporting their fellow athletes, even if they were their competition.

Taking Teachable Moments

There were some instances when coaches took teachable moments to teach their entire team something life skill related. During the observations at a softball tournament, for example, Coach 2 was missing two of his strongest players. He found out that they had been out partying the night before and as a result, missed the bus to the tournament. The coach then turned to his athletes and explained how disappointing it was that those athletes chose to act irresponsibly. He further explained that their behaviour showed a lack of dedication and was an example of poor teamwork.

Also as observed, Coach 6 took time out of a practice to explain that because the weather had been getting colder, he expected his athletes to dress appropriately for practice. This was the result of seeing one athlete waiting outside in the cold for approximately 15 minutes wearing only a short-sleeved shirt and shorts.

Coach 1 also explained that sometimes she would have to address inappropriate behaviours and take a teachable moment to explain to the whole group how their actions might influence others. She sometimes needed to say, “This is totally inappropriate and we don’t talk to people this way. People may react and...they may not take it the way we are right now or they may get angry.”

Being Stern and Direct with Athletes

Coaches were both straightforward in the way that they taught and coached their athletes and they were also firm with their athletes in order to maintain discipline and structure. The coaches said that they needed to explain things to their athletes in a forthright fashion in order for the athletes to comprehend the message. As Coach 2 explained, “Sometimes you don’t always

tell people what they want to hear, but you have to tell them what they need to hear.” Through being stern and direct, coaches were able to deal with issues immediately and were also better able to maintain order during practices. This helped to teach their athletes how to be better listeners and to be more responsible for their actions. Coach 6 said, “Some people may see me at practice and say, ‘You’re quite forward with them,’ ...but I believe...if you just sort of let them run, the programs aren’t run properly and they need the instruction.” This behaviour was also observed at Coach 6’s practices. On one occasion, an athlete did not bring money to pay for bowling for the second week in a row. Coach 6 told her that she could not play the following week if she did not pay her fees. As the athlete walked away angrily, Coach 6 told her she cannot walk away every time someone says something that displeases her because she has to take responsibility for her actions. This example provides evidence that Coach 6 believes that the best way to help athletes is to maintain discipline, be clear about expectations, and hold athletes accountable for their behaviour.

This strategy was often used when athletes were not acting in a socially acceptable manner. For example, Coach 3 told the story of one athlete who was acting inappropriately at a tournament:

I had to point out to one fellow this weekend that, “You know, if you’re going to go on to provincials or nationals in any sport, part of the process is that the coach community has to...say that this person is a mature enough individual to go travelling with the team.” I pointed out to him that when we went to the [city name] tournament last spring he did a wonderful job – really impressed with him, but with his attitude that he was demonstrating there..., “If you carry on like this, nobody’s going to sign your sponsorship and you just won’t get to go because nobody can take you.”

Coach 2 also explained that he has to be direct with his athletes, especially when he sees members of the opposite sex acting inappropriately to the other.

I'm a pretty easy-going guy, pretty liberal minded, but sometimes I have to tell the guys about respect towards members of the opposite sex. I mean, some of the guys, they don't have the same things in place that you or I do, so sometimes they can be bordering on inappropriate and I have to be on top of that all the time....

For the coaches in this study, being direct was important in order to make sure athletes understood the messages that the coaches were trying to send. Coaches often had to be direct when teaching their athletes socially acceptable behaviour, such as maintaining respect for personal space, being hygienic, being responsible, and using appropriate language.

Using Keywords

Using keywords with athletes is a life skill development strategy that is sometimes used to help coaches keep messages clear and concise. A few of the coaches mentioned that they use keywords, often to help an athlete know he/she needs to be quiet or pay attention. For example, Coach 2 explained that he has some athletes who lose their concentration and talk too much on the field, but a quick reminder helps them regain their attention, "When they're talking too much, 'focus' is a good word for them."

Coach 4 used keywords occasionally to reinforce coping and behavioural management strategies that group homes had in place for the athletes. She provided a specific example of an athlete who counts in order to control his emotional outbursts:

Some of the group homes will come and tell us if they have a strategy in place, like that guy counting. I just needed to say, "Number 1" and then he went with it and he knew what to do.

Volunteerism

Most of the coaches had their athletes participate in some form of volunteering, from helping to keep score when they were not playing to joining the coaches in their other volunteer opportunities. For example, Coach 5 had his athletes help at swim meets if they were not competing, believing it helped them to “set a good example” for others. Coach 2 explained that he would bring his athletes out to help him with his other volunteer work because it builds character and positive feelings:

It takes the dreariness of the world away; to bring a smile to an old lady’s face over a game of cribbage in an old age home or to read somebody a book who can’t read. So I encourage my athletes to do that and we do a bingo [night] at one of the seniors’ residence...once a month...and I encourage my guys to come with me and do those things.

Five of the coaches also explained that they encouraged their athletes to help with their district’s SO fundraisers such as golf tournaments, torch runs, barbeques, or canvassing at local businesses. Coach 3 explained that at his district’s charity golf tournament, the SO athletes would help the golfers by being their caddy for the day. He also said he and the other coaches from his district would help the athletes introduce themselves to the golfers and tell them a bit about themselves in order to establish rapport. When asked what he believed his athletes took from those experiences, he said the athletes “get a lot of pride” out of helping, thus helping to build their confidence.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the strategies that experienced Special Olympics (SO) coaches use to help promote and integrate life skill development into their coaching

practice. The six participants believed that their role as a coach was to be a role model and positive influence on their athletes. Seven of the strategies were directly from Camiré et al.'s framework while two were found inductively. The life-skill development strategies used by coaches in this study included (a) having coaching philosophy directed at being a role model, (b) understanding athletes' pre-existing make-up, (c) building strong coach-athlete relationships, (4) providing athletes with opportunities to showcase skills, (e) modelling, (f) taking teachable moments, (g) being direct and blunt with athletes, (h) using keywords, and (i) volunteerism. Building strong-coach athlete relationships and being stern and direct were found inductively.

Although not a strategy explicitly stated in Camiré et al.'s framework, past research (e.g., Collins, Gould, Lauer, & Chung, 2009; Gould & Carson, 2008; Gould et al., 2007) has indicated that the coach-athlete relationship underlies a coach's ability to help athletes develop life skills. In their study of 455 adolescent athletes, Vella, Oades, and Crowe (2013) found that "the perceived quality of the coach-athlete relationship was positively correlated with positive development experiences," (p. 557). Vella and his colleagues also suggested that a coach needs to devote time to building positive coach-athlete relationships because of how important these relationships can be for promoting positive developmental gains.

Indeed, there have been a variety of studies that have shown that developing a positive coach-athlete relationship impacts development. Flett, Gould, Griffes, and Lauer (2013) recently compared more and less effective coaches in terms of how those coaches fostered youth development in an underserved sport setting (i.e., youth living in less than favourable conditions). The researchers found that more effective coaches help teach life skills by developing positive coach-athlete relationships and fostering a supportive team environment. These coaches explained that they (a) needed to show athletes that they cared for them, (b)

needed to be a credible authority figure, (c) needed to show mutual trust and respect, and (d) needed to lead by example in order to help their athletes to develop positively. The coaches in the current study voiced similar opinions, especially concerning the need to develop trust with athletes. Coach 1, for example, explained that by first proving she was a committed, consistent, and trustworthy coach, she could then gain the trust of her athletes who subsequently sought more life-related advice from her.

Camiré et al.'s (2011) work also highlighted ways in which coaches could develop meaningful relationships with athletes and how this can be used as a strategy for coaches to nurture positive youth development and as such, life skill development. Camiré et al. found that coaches could build stronger relationships through team-building excursions outside of the sport context, through holding meetings with the athletes, and through having athletes keep a weekly journal. The SO coaches explained that they are limited in the amount of outside activities they can host that are not directly related to participating in SO. None of the coaches mentioned holding player meetings or having their athletes participate in journaling. Instead, the SO coaches found that remaining consistent, fair, and asking athletes about their lives helped build relationships.

An interesting finding in this particular study is the "Stern and Direct with Athletes" strategy. In order for athletes to understand the messages and/or follow directions, the coaches explained that they needed to be direct with their athletes, explaining exactly what they meant. The coaches frequently used this strategy to maintain structure in their practices, something that has been shown to be important for keeping athletes more secure, calm, and less distracted (Cone & Cone, 2011). To our knowledge, this has not been a strategy stated in the literature on life skill development for typically developing athletes; thus, this could be a strategy unique to coaching

athletes with intellectual disabilities (ID). The literature on teaching physical education and sport to people with disabilities contains evidence that instruction needs to be clear and concise in order for understanding to be achieved (Squair & Groeneveld, 2003). Furthermore, Mactavish and Dowds (2003) explained that when structuring the sport environment for athletes with ID, the coach or teacher's expectations and the consequences for disobeying expectations need to be made clear to the athletes. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to expect that in order to effectively coach athletes with ID, coaches need to be direct and stern with athletes so that the sporting environment is favourable for learning.

Another important aspect of coaching athletes with ID, as explained by the coaches in this study, is that they need to understand their athletes' disabilities in order to help the athletes learn and cope with issues. The coaches noted, moreover, that they could have a wide range of player ability and that athletes with the same disability often did not share the same characteristics, requiring the coaches to know each individual athlete in order to tailor coaching strategies. In a study about coaching athletes with physical disabilities, McMaster, Culver, and Werthner (2012) found that coaches needed to have an understanding of their athletes' disabilities in order to coach effectively. It appears, therefore, that coaching sport for athletes with a disability requires another area of knowledge that is important for teaching life skills and/or sports skills: the knowledge of disability.

Despite the few unique findings discussed previously, the SO coaches' strategies shared many similarities with coaching typically developing athletes. The strategies found in this study mirrored the strategies in Camiré et al.'s (2012) framework for the most part, with one obvious exception; that is, the SO coaches did not feel that peer evaluations would be a fruitful way to

teach life skills. Thus, coaches of SO athletes wishing to help develop their athletes' sport and life skills could transfer many strategies and resources used in other sport contexts.

Limitations

Given the relatively small sample size in this study, we cannot generalize our findings to all SO coaches; thus, we do not assume that all SO coaches are using the strategies found in this study, nor do we assume that all coaches integrate life skill development into their coaching. The coaches in this study had to match certain criteria in order to be considered for participation and, therefore, may not be representative of the majority of SO coaches. Another limitation of this study is the underdeveloped knowledge that the coaches had about what life skills are according to the literature. Investigators wishing to explore this topic further may need to provide more information and examples of life skills to future participants. Finally, the framework used for this study was developed using high school coaches and athletes; clearly, this is a different context from SO. Notwithstanding these limitations, this study contributes to this relatively unexplored topic and the findings are at least transferable across similar circumstances (Golafshani, 2003).

Conclusion

We suggest that more literature is needed in order to explore the best practices for helping athletes with ID learn life skills. Future research might examine how coaches can develop the coach-athlete relationship. The SO coaches in this study explained that they could coach more effectively if their athletes trusted them, so studying how coaches can build these relationships is of importance. Another viable area of research could be to implement a life skill training program for SO coaches and then examine the impact of the program on the coaches' practices and whether athletes were learning new life skills. Alexander et al. (2011) found that after SO coaches were trained in teaching social skills to their athletes, the coaches were more

apt to model the appropriate social skills in their coaching, which resulted in the athletes then developing the skills. It is feasible to think that training coaches in teaching life skills (which include behavioural, social, cognitive, and psychological skills) would yield similar results. Finally, the list of strategies from this particular study is not exhaustive and the small sample size and relatively homogenous group of coaches could mean that there are multiple other strategies used by SO coaches to develop life skills. It is therefore suggested that researchers continue to investigate strategies that SO coaches can use, perhaps through studying a more diverse group of coaches or through using a more inductive methodology, such as grounded theory.

To conclude, this study was one of the first studies to explore the strategies that SO coaches use to help their athletes develop life skills. Given that athletes with disabilities, as mentioned, may have difficulties in a variety of areas (e.g., communicating effectively), we view the development of life skills in this particular population as an important endeavour. This study provides an array of strategies that coaches of athletes with intellectual disabilities could use in their coaching practice. These strategies could also be integrated into the coach education programs of SO organisations, such as Special Olympics Canada.

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General Results

First and foremost, the coaches explained that they were guided by the belief that people with intellectual disabilities should be treated with respect and dignity and that they should be role models for their athletes. Also guiding each coach was their myriad of past experiences. The coaches explained that much of what they knew about coaching, teaching life skills, and working with athletes with intellectual disabilities came from past experiences, including their sport experiences, their work experiences, and their parenting experiences. Each of the coaches also provided examples of mediated and unmediated learning situations that they experienced, which helped to supplement and build their cognitive structure as coaches. Mediated learning occurred mostly through coach education courses, while unmediated situations occurred mostly through interacting with others. The coaches, however, struggled to concretely explain any internal learning situations that they experienced.

Guiding Beliefs and Previous Experiences

The six coaches frequently stated that their coaching was guided by their beliefs and life experiences. The coaches in this study, in fact, relied heavily on their past experiences from the different domains of their lives, including their previous coaching and sport experience, their work experience, their parenting experience, and their other significant life experiences.

Coach beliefs. Coaches mentioned that they had the belief that people with intellectual disabilities should be treated fairly by society and that it was their duty to try and promote an inclusive sport experience for their athletes. As Coach 1 said, “No matter what the challenges somebody may have, we need to make it possible.” Some of the coaches also believed that they needed to be advocates for Special Olympics athletes. Coach 2 explained how he had lived with a stigma growing up as an Aboriginal person and said that,

It's not right to treat people differently because of their skin colour or because of their mental capability or because of their religious difference. I mean, hey we are all the same, we all put our pants on one leg at a time.

Coach 2 also described how, from a young age, he began developing his advocacy for people with disabilities after watching his classmates mistreat a girl with hydrocephalus. Coach 2 said that championing for the “under-dog” was engrained in him:

Part of my personality I guess, it's just the way I am. I have always been. When I was growing up in [city name], there was a girl in our class [who] was hydrocephalic...and she was picked on unmercifully and it used to drive me crazy. Even as a kid I knew that wasn't right. Even some of my friends picked on her [and] I said, “That's not right!”

...I've just always had that sense of fair play, what's right and what is wrong.

Therefore, even as a child, Coach 2 had the attitude that all people need to be treated with dignity and respect and, as a result, used this mentality to help guide him through life and in his coaching practice.

Other coaches explained that they believed it was their duty to be a role model for their athletes. Coach 5, for example, explained that one of his athletes was often tardy and disorganized but he worked with him to improve this behaviour. When asked how he did this, Coach 5 replied, “Just talking and trying to be a positive influence. Trying to be a role model, showing him and leading by example.” Altogether, these examples show that the beliefs that helped to make up the coaches' cognitive structures influenced their coaching and guided them to be advocates and role models for their athletes.

Coaching and sport experience. All of the coaches explained that they learned how to coach Special Olympics because of what they learned from their own sport and coaching

experiences (some coached in both Special Olympics and sport for typically developing athletes). Coaches spoke about influential coaches that they had had as young athletes and how those coaches were a major source of learning how to coach not only sport skills, but how to help athletes grow as people as well. Coach 2, in particular, said that his high school football coach was instrumental in his sport career and later on in his coaching career:

I was pretty lucky, I always had good coaches in most of the sports I played and learned a lot from them about [the] way you treat people with respect. I was treated with respect. One of my favourite coaches was a guy, he had played in the [Canadian Football League] actually...and he picked me to be quarterback....It wasn't that I was the best athlete then, but he saw something in me....So I learned from that, I look for things in [athletes] that maybe they don't see in themselves.

Similarly, Coach 3 remarked that many of his coaches were “role models” for him when he was younger and he would draw upon his experiences as an athlete and apply those experiences to his coaching.

Coach 4 described her own previous coaching experience in Special Olympics and how she learned a lot about adapting movements and drills to suit her athletes through trial and error. She explained that her coach education courses briefly touched upon skill-breakdown, but it was learning-by-doing that helped her the most when she had begun coaching almost 20 years prior to being interviewed. Coach 4 provided a hypothetical example to explain what she meant:

[With] the associated disabilities, you have to break down the skill differently and you have to teach it in a different way, at a different speed than you would a generic [athlete]. Like, you would assume if you're cross-country skiing, one hand goes forward and the opposite foot goes forward naturally. But [with] our guys, that's not a natural thing, so we

have to model it and we have to break down the skill all the way down to the minute balance and stuff like that. So the different courses, they sort of highlighted it but I only learned it by actually doing [it] with the athletes and realizing that, “Oh yeah, they can’t....” One foot does not go naturally forward; so I learned more by doing it.

Coach 1 also talked about her own sport experiences and how those experiences led her to become a coach. She explained that she has a physical disability, but she participated in many sports and it was one place in life where she felt accepted and successful:

Many other areas of my life I didn’t feel I belonged, but in sports I always did. So I don’t know if that’s why I kind of moved towards coaching, because it’s an area I always felt accepted and that we can all really feel accepted with sports because it’s a group, it’s a team.

For Coach 1, she learned that sport could be a positive area for development for athletes with disabilities and had since transferred that into her own coaching.

Work experience. Four of the coaches (1, 2, 3, and 4) mentioned that their occupations and work experiences helped to provide them with relevant experiences that they could draw upon when coaching. Coaches 1 and 2 were both mental health case workers, Coach 3 was a manager responsible for 60 employees for the Canadian federal government, and Coach 4 was a Special Education teacher. All of these three said their work afforded them opportunities to learn about and understand the needs of people with disabilities. Coach 1 explained that her work experiences were always people-centred and, as a result, coaching in Special Olympics came naturally to her:

I worked in a lot of people-centred fields where people are oppressed and left out of things. [I] have worked my whole life pretty much making sure everything’s inclusive

and everybody can belong in some way. So I think from all my years of doing what I've been doing, it's just part of what I do, it's natural.

Before she became a mental health case worker, moreover, Coach 1 was also an early childhood educator. This experience helped to teach her about stages of development and growth, which she always applied to her coaching.

Coach 4, as mentioned, was a Special Education teacher who had also worked in group homes when she was younger. She explained that those experiences and her coaching experience have helped her learn the nuances of coaching in Special Olympics and how to diffuse issues. When asked how she learned to solve coaching issues, she explained,

I guess it came with working [in] the group homes.... It just sort of built and I just have like a sixth sense. I almost can walk into a practice and look and say, "Yep, it's coming." I know it is. I don't know how, it's just a sense that I have and it might be 20 years' worth of doing it.

Coach 3, although he did not work in an area related to mental health or disability, was able to apply some of his managerial and people skills to his coaching, as he was a manager before he retired. As Coach 3 said, "At one point I had 60 people working for me, so you had a whole variety of people and experiences and that. I draw on that a lot."

Parenting experience. All of the coaches had children and felt that their parenting experiences were transferable to their coaching practice. Two of the coaches (Coaches 3 and 6) had children with intellectual disabilities who participated in Special Olympics; therefore, they felt that they learned a lot about intellectual disabilities from raising their child. According to Coach 6, "Having [learned] how to deal with and teach my son things has helped me to

understand other athletes in a better sense.” Coach 3 shared the same opinion, but provided more detail:

I think [parenting] gives you a much broader, in-depth understanding of what it is that these athletes are going [through]...they’re athletes, they’re students, they can have health issues, they can have behavioural issues....So growing up, with a son all the way, you go through all the steps. So you understand it from the athlete’s perspective, but I think it also gives you a bit more empathy and understanding, often, of what the parent maybe is going through. You’ve walked in their shoes.

Therefore, Coach 3 explained that his parenting experiences not only taught him how to empathize with his athletes and understand their make-up, but also how to empathize with parents as well.

The other four coaches did not have children with intellectual disabilities, but felt that their experiences were applicable to Special Olympics because being a parent taught them about child development and what athletes endure. The coaches also explained that being a parent made them more empathetic towards others. Coach 5’s statements illustrate what the other coaches explained,

You know with kids, you’ve always got situations that arise where [kids] need a little bit of discipline, need a little pat on the back, need a few words of encouragement. So [coaching is] part-in-parcel kind of the same thing, really. Raising kids, it certainly does wash over into your coaching: patience, trying to be confident all of the time.

Coach 4 explained that she learned some parenting skills from coaching since she began coaching approximately 15 years before becoming a parent. She further explained, however, that

she was able to learn and transfer skills from her parenting to her coaching as well. She used balance and coordination as an example to show how these two areas of her life cross over:

[Coaching has] probably impacted my parenting...after coaching for 15 years. Maybe because my kids are very young and I see how they learn to walk and learn to run and learn those little steps. My athletes are a lot older, but I know that they're missing a physical step; I can see it in them and then I know I have to break it back down to the younger level. And maybe, just because I saw it first-hand, I can see, "Oh, yeah, this one's balance is off, or this one's coordination is off because my three-year-old is walking like that right now!"

In sum, the coaches were able to draw upon their experiences as parents and then transfer that knowledge into their own coaching practices. Because of parenting, the coaches felt that they understood how athletes grow and develop, how to be more empathetic, and how to read and understand situations and issues better.

Other life experiences. Three of the coaches mentioned other key life experiences that influenced their coaching. Coach 3 described his experiences as a member of the Canadian Ski Patrol and how a lot of his first aid and safety training was transferable to his coaching. He also described how he was a scout leader and that he was able to transfer much of what he learned there to his coaching practice: "It's a little different, I guess, than 'coaching' per se, but I was also a scout leader for about 14 years; but I mean, to me there's a lot the same – it's communicating with your athlete, basically."

Coach 1 explained that she used her experience as someone with a physical disability to inspire her athletes and teach them that they are capable of many things. As she explained:

I wasn't treated by my family as somebody with a disability – but I was treated by others

differently, I was left out of things or I was bullied, or I was this and that, so I really know how I do not want to be treated and how much it hurts to be treated differently or to be looked at even differently, like, “What’s wrong with you?” [People staring at you] or not giving opportunities.

The coaches in this study, as it appears, transferred many of their life experiences as a means of learning how to coach Special Olympics athletes and how to help them develop life skills. As Coach 5 said, “...the stuff you’ve learned during your life, I guess, you try to pass it on.”

Mediated Learning Situations

Mediated learning situations, as mentioned, occur when the learner does not choose what will be taught. The material to be learned is selected by an expert or group of experts, who, in this case, were the coach educators for the National Coaching Certification Program of Canada (NCCP) and Special Olympics Canada. This particular cohort of coaches all spoke about their formal coach education training and some of the coaches mentioned other formal training and how those experiences influenced what they knew about integrating life skill development strategies into their coaching.

Coach education. Coaches, for the most part, believed that the courses were fairly helpful when it came to teaching them about different sport-specific aspects of Special Olympics coaching. The document analysis revealed that there is material relevant to life skill development in the current NCCP courses as there is information about helping athletes with goal setting, nutrition and healthy eating, problem solving, and travelling. Coach 1 explained that she was “very thankful that [she] took” courses that included a Make Ethical Decisions module and a Nutrition module. She further explained that, “It added to my knowledge base and it taught me

things I wouldn't even have thought of, 'Oh yeah, do it this way, not that way.' Yeah, so it was really helpful."

Generally, however, coaches explained that the courses did not emphasize teaching life skills. Most of the coaches felt that their NCCP training did not focus on how to integrate life skills into their coaching practice, as the courses were dedicated mostly to sport. Coach 2 felt that the material in the courses may extend into life skill development, but for the most part, "none of it focussed on that so much, as the sport-specific coaching stuff that I've taken was more to improve my skills in imparting the knowledge of those games." Coach 4 shared the same sentiment, "...they are really more focussed on the sport. Sport development, breaking down the skills, show them the skill, know the rules."

Some of the coaches also explained that because of their life experiences, they felt as though the courses did not teach them anything novel. Coach 3, when asked how helpful his courses were, explained that the courses were helpful, but, "...my son was 15...or 16 when he actively got involved with Special Olympics. So I already had 15 years of dealing with a special needs person."

Coach 4 also explained how her life experiences were more helpful than her coach education courses:

I kind of had [knowledge] before...I started coaching right out of high school, so, yes, [the courses] did teach me a little bit of coaching stuff and breaking down the skill, but then I became a [Special Education] specialist during university, so it kind of wasn't necessarily from Special Olympics.

The material, some coaches felt, was often not appropriate for their particular contexts. Coach 5 explained that even though the courses are informative, what is taught is not always applicable in real-life situations:

Well, it's like every other course. It's great when you're on the course, you're taking the training, everything is in theory, and let's face it, in practice, in the real world, sometimes things don't always fall into play the way they should as per the course. And, you know, in real life situations, things happen a bit differently sometimes.

Coach 6 provided a concrete example of how what is taught in the courses may not apply to his athletes:

They were coming out and saying, "Well, when you're going to a competition, or you're staying away, [they] shouldn't be eating X number of [times in] a certain time-frame before they go out to compete," [but] these athletes are on [medication], they have to eat with them.

Two coaches, however, did offer suggestions for how to improve the coach education courses. For example, Coach 3 shared that all learning facilitators teaching courses should understand the Special Olympics context:

I find generally it's better, if you're going to talk about coaching Special Olympic athletes, that you have a room full of Special Olympics coaches and that you get a coach in there or your instructor who's then able, and hopefully had some experience coaching Special Olympics as well, who can then sort of take his material and focus it for you. Rather than...because if you get a Midget AAA boys' hockey...it's really different, you know, what you're dealing with there.

Coach 3 went on to explain that he had a learning facilitator who coached a high level of hockey, but did not understand what coaching Special Olympics entailed and, as a result, did not provide the Special Olympics coaches in his class with the information that they needed. Coach 6 also said that Special Olympics and the NCCP could improve the coach education courses to make them more suitable to some of the less competitive athletes:

There's stuff that you can pick up from the generic, okay? But it would be nice if Special Olympics could turn around and say, "Okay, here's the generic training. Let's take that and modify it so that our coaches can train our athletes to be better." In the generic world, I would say that that is good coaching for the higher-echelon of Special Olympic athletes. For the lower level, I don't think it helps.

Formal education. Four of the coaches (Coaches 1, 2, 3, and 4) mentioned other courses or formal education experiences that they felt were more beneficial than their basic SO courses for integrating life skills teaching. Two of the coaches (Coach 1 and 4) explained that their educational backgrounds relating to their occupations (mental health case worker and Special Education teacher, respectively) helped them to understand the needs of people with disabilities. Coach 1 has her early childhood education diploma and a bachelor's degree in social work and Coach 4 has an honour's bachelor in developmental psychology.

Coaches 2 and 3 described different courses that helped to supplement their Special Olympics knowledge. Coach 2 explained that he took a life skill coaching course for his work as mental health case worker and that "really impacted on [his] work." As a result of his training, he taught a life skills program for his profession and was able to transfer those skills to his coaching. Coach 3 took a course that helps to train people in defusing problems and communicating with individuals with intellectual disabilities. The course was offered through an

association in Ontario devoted to helping people with intellectual disabilities. Coach 3 explained that this particular course, in comparison to his coach education courses “is even more formal and it gives you even better information...so that was useful.”

Unmediated Learning Situations

Unmediated learning occurs when the learner chooses the material to be learned, such as through interacting with others. There are two categories of unmediated learning situations: (a) a more un-conscious situation where, for example, the coach learns the subculture of a sport and (b) the actively conscious effort that coaches put forth in order to solve coaching questions and issues. This section will focus on the second category where coaches were actively seeking out information from others in the form of interactions and through being mentored.

Interacting with others (coaches, family, sport professionals). The coaches in this particular study shared that they interacted with a variety of people in order to learn new things or to help problem solve. As Coach 6 explained, “There have been a lot of people that, even in my own world...when I was playing sports, I was shown how to do something that I’ve been able to carry that into the Special Olympics.” The coaches in this study mainly cited other coaches, spouses, and athletes as the people who had the biggest impact on their coach learning.

Coaches. Other coaches were helpful when coaches wanted a different perspective or needed help solving issues. All of the coaches except for one (Coach 4) described how they worked with both their assistant coaches and other coaches whom they knew from Special Olympics and other sport organizations. Coach 3 explained that sometimes it is beneficial to have another coach come into your practice because, “you think you’re getting the message across and somebody else can say [it] just marginally different, and all of a sudden the light bulbs go on.”

Coach 2 explained that because his assistant coach in softball was a female, she helped to provide a woman's perspective on issues:

Having both males and females; sometimes there are some female things, I'll ask [assistant's name]....She's really good, she picks up on things like that. She picks it up often herself and sometimes comes to me because she's fairly new and she'll say, "Well is it alright if I talk to...?" "Of course it is. I was going to ask you."

Coach 5 not only felt that assistants were helpful, but he mentioned that when he travelled to the Special Olympics National Games, he met many different coaches and exchanged coaching information with them: "You know, I think there's quite a bit to be learned by the time you get to nationals, you meet so many people.... Yeah, I think you talk about your coaching experiences. You trade your knowledge." Therefore, the coaches in this study went to other coaches as sources of information and to get new perspectives.

Athletes. Three of the coaches (1, 3, and 5) discussed learning things from their athletes, such as how to be more empathetic and fair. For example, when probed about whether or not his athletes teach him anything, Coach 5 said:

Yeah, I guess so—kind of humbles you actually, too. It's humbling to be around some of these guys. See the way they're fighting through their problems, so it teaches you a little bit of humility, I guess. You know, on that side, not on the technical skiing side. On the life skills side, maybe.

Coach 3 explained that he has learned to model some of his athletes' sportsmanlike behaviours when he plays sports with friends:

So I do play the little pickup hockey and there's a couple lads that are about 75, and I've been known to give them a free pass and "Go ahead, have a shot on goal." That, I would attribute to watching these guys and [modelling] from them.

Thus, it appears that not only do coaches help their athletes to develop, but athletes also tend to help coaches develop as well, which they then cycle back into their coaching.

Friends and family. Four of the coaches (2, 3, 5, and 6) mentioned family and/or friends who helped them learn. Coaches would seek out their friends and families for validation about coaching decisions, for advice and problem solving tips, and for an outsider's perspective. Coach 2 said that he would go to some of his close friends and that he would speak with them about "...anything if the solution is not forthcoming to me. I'd seek input and say 'what would you do?' and make it a hypothetical situation."

Each of the four coaches also mentioned that they would speak with their spouses about their coaching. Coach 3 explained that his wife has always been quite helpful because they "had the journey of [raising] a special needs child together and how you deal with it." He further explained that what he learned raising his child was applicable to his coaching and since his wife was also a Special Olympics coach, she knew the athletes and could help provide him with a different perspective about various coaching issues. Coach 6 had a similar experience and said, "I've gone to my wife and discussed some issues and what she has said in some cases has made sense and led me to go in a different direction than maybe I would have gone." Coaches, therefore, sought people who were not necessarily involved in Special Olympics, but whom they trusted and could seek advice from.

Mentors. Four of the coaches (1, 3, 5, and 6) spoke of mentors who helped them when they began coaching in Special Olympics. These mentors were also Special Olympics coaches,

but they had an abundant amount of experience. Coach 1's mentor was the head coach with whom she coached and, as she explained, is a "phenomenal role model who's been coaching Special Olympics sports for probably 30 odd years, which has been a big, big impact...." When asked if he helped her to learn not only the sport, but also about each of the athletes and their personalities and needs, she said:

Definitely, that's the biggest thing because I might have come in a bit serious and worried I might mess up by saying something wrong or being inappropriate...and he really taught me, "Hey, chill, calm down, this is good. We're coaching athletes, who, yes, have some challenges, but they're everyday people just like us." So it was really helpful....Great good role model that way.

Coach 6 spoke of his beginnings as a Special Olympics coach and how the group of coaches he worked with were "a really good core of coaches", under whom he was able to develop as a coach. He said that they were able to give him advice and show him different ways of looking at situations: "if you looked at how they handled situations, that has helped me to handle situations."

Coach 4, in contrast, explained that she did not have a mentor when she began coaching, basically learning a lot through trial and error. She said that she has now become a mentor herself though, especially since the turnover rate of coaches in her sport and district is high:

I know that I've, because of the way I've worked with my coaches, I've kept them longer and I've kept them in. I explain the different [coaching] models and I explain the different levels and I explain that competition is not for everybody. If I really spend time with somebody I will keep them. Our coaching turnover is really high, but you know, if [they] have a mentor...you tend to keep them.

Essentially, coaches who had mentors felt that they were beneficial to their development of Special Olympics coaches.

Altogether, the coaches in this study were actively seeking out others to learn from, especially when they needed advice in difficult situations or when they simply wanted a new perspective. Mentors were also a vital source of learning for some of the coaches, especially when they were beginning their Special Olympics coaching careers.

Internal Learning Situations

Internal learning situations, as mentioned, occur when there is no new material to be learned and the learner transforms what he/she already knows and understands, which is a process called “cognitive housekeeping”. Some of the coaches explained that they took time to reflect on their coaching; however, there were few indications that coaches learned through internal learning situations.

Learning journals. Only Coach 2 said that he wrote in a journal but he did not have a specific journal only for coaching, his journal was for all of his thoughts:

Yeah my dad taught me to do that many years ago. My dad was always writing things down....So yeah I write things down all the time.

Yeah I put the scores and if something stood out in my mind about the game. It's point form...but it tweaks my memory when I look back. I don't keep a specific journal about my coaching or anything like that, but just my daily thing. I do it every night before bed, I talk about what happened and specific incidents that I want to remember.

Coach 4 explained that she kept things in her coaching binder, but she did not spend time specifically on journaling about her coaching practice. She explained:

I keep my binder, like we have all of their health forms. I haven't written any lesson plans....I'll keep everything from year to year and I'll just kind of stack it in and my observations. It's all kind of in the binder.

In sum, the coaches all learned through a variety of learning situations. Each coach discussed how their life experiences heavily influenced how they coached, but that they also learned through mediated and unmediated situations. There was little evidence to suggest that coaches were learning through internal learning situations. However, it was apparent from the coaches' answers that there are multiples avenues one can take to learn how to coach Special Olympics and how to help integrate the development of life skills into their coaching.

Discussion of General Results

To reiterate, the purpose of this research was to determine how model SO coaches attempt to integrate the development of life skills into their coaching practice by exploring the strategies that they use to help their athletes develop and how the coaches learned these different strategies. Camiré et al.'s (2012) work was used to frame the analysis for the life skill development strategies and Trudel et al.'s (2013) work based on Moon's generic view of learning was used to guide the coach learning analysis. The results, as mentioned, have been split into two sections: an article and a general results section. The findings from the article, which was directed at life skill development, indicate that the strategies used by coaches to teach life skills are similar between coaching typically developing athletes and athletes with intellectual disabilities. A further discussion of these results can be found in the article.

This section will focus mainly on the general results and the learning situations of the Special Olympics coaches. These particular results revealed that the coaches' cognitive structures guided them and provided them with important knowledge about coaching athletes with disabilities and teaching them life skills. The coaches also reported learning through a variety of mediated and unmediated situations. There was, however, little evidence to support that coaches were learning through internal learning situations. To reiterate, mediated learning situations are guided by others and the material to be learned is not chosen by the individual learner (Moon, 2004; Trudel et al., 2013). Unmediated learning situations occur when the learner decides to guide his/her own learning and chooses what material he/she wants to learn (Moon, 2004; Trudel et al., 2013). Finally, in internal learning situations, no new material is added, instead the learner reorganizes what he/she already knows (Moon, 2004; Trudel et al., 2013).

To begin, like other studies have shown (e.g., Callary et al., 2012; McMaster et al., 2012), coaches learn from a variety of different situations. In this particular study, coaches often used past life experiences to guide their coaching and help teach their athletes both sports skills and life skills. The coaches mainly cited their own personal sport experience (either playing or coaching), their work experiences, and their parenting experiences as key contributors to their coaching knowledge. A recent study by Camiré et al. (2014) that looked at how youth sport coaches learned to facilitate positive youth development (which encompasses life skill development) also found that coaches used their previous life experiences as a source of learning. In their study, similar to the present study, coaches learned the importance of sport for impacting development through their own sport experiences and through their parenting; thus, using life experience to guide one through his/her coaching is not unique to this study. Of interest is that two of the coaches had children who participated in Special Olympics. These two coaches were able to transfer what they knew through their experiences raising their own child to their coaching. They both explained that this helped them to not only understand how to interact with someone with intellectual disabilities, but to empathize with athletes' parents and caregivers.

In terms of mediated learning, each of the coaches shared experiences that they had from their formal coach education courses and some mentioned other formal education ventures that influenced their coaching. The coaches, for the most part, explained that their coach education courses were beneficial to their learning; however, the coaches also explained that their courses were insufficient in that they do not mirror "real-life" situations and do not discuss teaching life skills. This is not surprising, as learning theorists and coaching researchers alike have asserted that courses and formal education does not encompass all that there is to learn about a particular

subject area and/or profession (e.g., Jarvis, 2009; Lemyre et al., 2007). Jarvis (2009) views learning from this type of situation as essentially incomplete. Jarvis theorized that there are two forms of experience, primary and secondary, and learning through mediated situations may be considered a secondary experience. In a secondary experience, coaches learn the theoretical side of coaching, but they have not yet had the experience of coaching. It is not until the coach participates in coaching activities and attempts to integrate teaching life skills to athletes that he/she then has primary experiences in coaching and teaching life skills. These primary experiences, therefore, helps a coach to develop his/her personal knowledge of coaching. Thus, the Special Olympics coaches in this study were able to gain some theoretical knowledge through their formal coach education courses, but their learning was incomplete; their primary experiences gained by actually coaching was needed to complement what was learned in these mediated situations.

Of interest is a suggestion that some of the coaches gave for improving their coach education courses: (a) the use of learning facilitators with appropriate experience enabling them to understand the Special Olympics context and the level of competition of the coaches' athletes, and (b) more context-specific material. Indeed, it not unreasonable for coaches engaging in coach education courses to desire that their courses be context-specific context. A recent study by Nelson, Cushion, and Potrac (2013) explored the recommendations that coaches made for enhancing coach education. Among the coaches suggestions was that course content needs to be relevant and useful to their coaching practice. The coaches also suggested that coaches should be involved in making decisions about what content should be delivered during courses so that they are more coach-focused instead of standardized. Vella, Crowe, and Oades (2013), studying how to increase the usefulness of coach education courses, had similar findings in that coaches

wanted courses to be practical and to involve greater collaboration with the learning facilitators. They concluded that in order for coach education to have an impact on coaches, coaches need to be taught practical skills relevant to their coaching context and need to be shown how they can apply these skills.

Part of the issue, as the coaches in this present study explained, is that they have a basic Special Olympics course but almost all sport-specific courses that they take are aimed at coaches of typically developing athletes (SOC, 2014c). Creating coach education courses that effectively impact coach learning is a challenge for sport organizations at any level (Nelson et al., 2013); thus, if it is unfeasible for SOC to create its own sport-specific courses, it may be beneficial for sport organizations that have courses in which SO coaches participate to adopt novel approaches to create more individualized courses for its participants. A recently implemented strategy by Triathlon Canada has coaches who are attending courses submit a brief portfolio with prior coaching experiences and beliefs (Hussain, Trudel, Patrick, & Rossi, 2012; Paquette, Hussain, Trudel, & Camiré, 2014). This practice allows Triathlon Canada to somewhat tailor its courses to the individual coaches' needs. Triathlon Canada was able to implement such an innovation, according to Hussain et al. (2012), because not only were its course developers open to the change, but it is a rather small program and managing portfolios is easier with smaller numbers. Thus, implementing such a change in a larger sport program may be a difficult endeavour (Trudel et al., 2013). Nonetheless, a more individualistic and/or inclusive design to sport-specific courses would undoubtedly benefit SO coaches. Altogether, the lack of context specific courses with learning facilitators who understand how to coach athletes with intellectual disabilities makes providing coaches with applicable tools for their own coaching practice challenging.

Fortunately, however, the coaches were able to supplement what they learned through mediated learning situations by engaging in a variety of unmediated learning situations.

The coaches appeared to value learning through unmediated situations given that they were able to control what they learned and from whom they might learn. The coaches mentioned that they would actively seek advice about how to approach different situations (e.g., finding appropriate behaviour management strategies). Mentoring was an interesting topic as the coaches who had mentors when they began coaching said that their mentors were instrumental in helping them to understand the needs of athletes with ID. Mentorship, although not studied frequently in the area of sport (Bloom, 2013), has been shown to be an important aspect for coach development (e.g., Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke, & Salmela, 1998; Lemyre et al., 2007; Winchester, Culver, & Camiré, 2013). Similar to the present study, both Bloom et al. (1998) and Lemyre et al. (2007) found that in the early stages of learning how to coach, mentors were a vital source of information.

Bloom et al., (1998) however, found that coaches who had mentors were “in the right place at the right time” (p. 279) when they found their mentors. This serendipity related to finding mentors appeared to also be the case in the present study. One coach, on the contrary, did not have such an experience and said she would have liked to have had the opportunity to be mentored; she said she initially learned how to coach through trial and error. She further explained that mentors in Special Olympics are important for coach retention. We can, therefore, assume that in the context of Special Olympics, mentors are not only beneficial for teaching coaches about coaching in this context, but they could also be helping to retain coaches by acting as a sounding board. Studies in special education and teaching, which shares similarities with coaching athletes with intellectual disabilities, have pointed to the benefits of mentorship for

special education teachers (e.g., Boyer & Lee, 2001; Leko & Smith, 2010; Wasburn, Wasburn-Moses, & Davis, 2012). Crucially, if mentors have strong interpersonal skills and knowledge (McDowall-Long, 2004), they can be beneficial by helping teachers feel more supported so that they can ask questions and receive advice (Boyer & Lee, 2001; Leko & Smith, 2010). This feeling of support and access to a knowledgeable and experienced mentor also helps to retain special education teachers (Boyer & Lee, 2001; Leko & Smith, 2010), which is an important task given that special education teachers have a high attrition rate for a variety of reasons including a lack of support, high demands, and challenging work environments (Gehrke & Murri, 2006). This situation mirrors what one of the coaches in this study voiced; thus, perhaps implementing mentoring programs would benefit SO coaches and lead to higher coach retention.

In terms of learning through internal learning situations, for the most part, coaches said they would think about practices and games in order to make strategic changes or to determine why a particular event occurred, yet nothing was systematic. They did not discuss reflecting on particular life skills that athletes required or how to teach life skills to athletes. When asked if they used a journal to record thoughts about their coaching, almost none of the coaches used them or felt that it was an important task. Werthner and Trudel (2009) had similar findings in that the coaches of their study did not use a learning journal to enhance their reflection. Perhaps the lack of journaling by the coaches from this study (and those from other studies) is due to time constraints, a factor asserted by Trudel et al. (2013). One coach in the present study said he could not take time to merely reflect on coaching because he was busy, so perhaps this was the issue for the other coaches.

Finally, the coaches in this study appeared to have difficulties articulating how they learned their various strategies for teaching life skills to athletes and, as a whole, coaching in

Special Olympics. They were able to describe their courses and interactions, but were unable to definitively state what they reflected on and how they developed some of their life skill development strategies. For example, they had difficulties explaining where they developed their philosophies and beliefs, relationships skills, teaching skills, behavioural management strategies, and understanding of athlete needs. This suggests that these coaches possessed a great deal of tacit knowledge, which is gained through life experiences (Nash & Collins, 2006) and occurs in the preconscious at any moment in time (Jarvis, 2006). It should not be a surprise that recalling where learning transpired can be a challenging task given that learning often occurs in our pre-consciousness or on the outside of consciousness (Jarvis, 2009). Learning that occurs in this periphery of consciousness, that is, tacit knowledge, is “not openly expressed or stated therefore individuals must acquire such knowledge through their own experiences” (Nash & Collins, 2006, p. 470). When an experienced individual possesses tacit knowledge, he or she is unaware of how much he or she actually knows and would experience difficulty when pinpointing where and how something was learned (Peet, 2011; Polyani, 1966).

Researchers have said that tacit knowledge presents itself, for example, when coaches make decisions that appear to be instinctive and this could be the result of a current situation sharing similarities with a previous experience (Nash & Collins, 2006). Essentially, coaches with a vast amount of experience are able to function on an automatic level because they have previously dealt with most things that arise in their coaching practice (Nash & Collins, 2006). Thus, it can be inferred that given the level of experience of each coach in this study, both within and outside of SO, they mostly functioned on an automatic level using their tacit knowledge. This could explain why they had difficulty when trying to fully articulate how they learned to

coach Special Olympics athletes, and more specifically, how they integrate life skill development strategies into their coaching.

Limitations

Like all studies, this study had limitations. First, it is important to remember that a coach can learn from a combination of the different situations at the same time (Christensen, 2014; Mallett et al., 2009; Moon, 2004; Trudel et al., 2013; Werthner & Trudel, 2006). Given that learning is complex and does not occur in a linear fashion, we cannot precisely state every way in which the coaches learned, we can merely shed light on some of the contexts in which Special Olympics coaches could and have learned. As Werthner and Trudel (2006) explained, “A detailed description of a coach’s cognitive structure is therefore almost impossible because it is the result of a process always in movement and certainly not always conscious and intentional,” (p. 204). We, nevertheless, have attempted to draw as holistic of a picture as possible in terms of discussing the coaches’ learning experiences.

Second, we cannot generalize our findings and assume that all Special Olympics coaches have had the same learning pathways as the six coaches in this study. We can, however, assert that the findings are in-depth and transferable to similar circumstances (Golafshani, 2003). The findings, moreover, can be used as a guide for other research or can be used to show Special Olympics coaches possible ways to learn more about coaching and integrating life skills into their own practice.

Finally, the coaches included in this study were also a relatively homogenous group. All six of the coaches had coached for a considerable length of time (all with four or more years), had NCCP training, and had been a coach in Special Olympics competitions outside of their region (e.g., nationally). The coaches were also parents and only one coach (Coach 5) had no

previous experiences before coaching Special Olympics related to working with people with intellectual disabilities. Thus, the coaches of this study were heavily influenced by their life experiences and experiences with people with disabilities. The coaches chosen for this study were considered “model” coaches given their experiences and, as such, did not differ tremendously in terms of their knowledge and skills.

Conclusion

This study is, to our knowledge, one of the first to explore the strategies that Special Olympics coaches use to integrate the development of life skills into their coaching and is also one of the first to explore how the coaches learned these various strategies when coaching Special Olympics athletes. Given the relative novelty of studying coaches of intellectual disabled athletes, it is evident that there are many avenues through which researchers may begin their exploration of this context.

To begin, given that coaches explained the utility of having mentors, future research could be used to implement a formal mentorship program for new Special Olympics coaches and evaluate the outcomes. As one of the coaches explained, retention of new coaches appears to be a challenge for Special Olympics, so perhaps implementing a mentorship initiative could improve the length of time that a coach remains in Special Olympics.

Future research could take a similar approach to this study in investigating either the learning pathways of coaches or the life skill development strategies that they use, but they could use more variable samples. As mentioned, the six coaches included in this study needed to match certain criteria and as a result, were a fairly similar group in terms of experiences. Other research could look at how beginner Special Olympics coaches are learning to coach in this unique context. Coaches of athletes in a higher competition level like A or B (who may, in some cases, also have a higher level of cognitive functioning) could be another fruitful area for exploring how SO coaches assist athletes in developing life skills. The results could then be used to compare between other SO competition levels to determine if there are any differences across the wide range of athletes that SO accommodates.

Additionally, given the complexity of internal learning situations, researchers could teach Special Olympics coaches about how to engage in systematic reflection and how to keep a learning journal. Indeed, this would surely prompt coaches to reflect more and be able to better explain their internal learning situations (Gilbert & Trudel, 2013). This study provides some support for the fact that coaches can be prompted to reflect more simply by being asked questions; one coach explained that the interviews made him reflect on his entire coaching career for the first time. Therefore, purposefully teaching coaches how to reflect would generate more thorough reflective practices.

This study, however, leads not only to possible areas for future research, but also provides some practical recommendations for Special Olympics and its coaches. To start, the coaches in this study felt that although some parts of their coach education were beneficial, they did not feel as though their courses necessarily depicted the Special Olympics context in the most representative manner. Part of the issue was due to the lack of sport-specific courses devoted solely to Special Olympics; thus, perhaps the NCCP and Special Olympics could design some courses based on Special Olympics sports; this way, learning facilitators would be better able to teach about coaching the sport in this particular context. Further, some Special Olympics sports deviate from the traditional sport. For example, Special Olympics floor hockey is similar to ringette, but played on a gymnasium floor. Therefore, Special Olympics coaches must either take generic hockey or generic ringette courses to supplement their floor hockey knowledge, despite the fact that the courses are not specific to the athletes that they coach nor are the sports the same as the one they are coaching.

Finally, this study can be used to provide Special Olympics coaches with ways to help their athletes to develop life skills (if they wish to integrate this into their coaching and fulfill

SO's mission) and to show coaches the various ways in which they can learn new coaching and life skill development strategies. For example, this study has shown the value of interacting with a variety of different people in order to learn and problem solve. Coaches were willing to speak with family members, other coaches, mentors, and athletes about different coaching aspects. Perhaps new coaches, therefore, may begin to consciously build their networks in order to seek more knowledgeable others to help themselves learn how to coach and teach life skills.

In sum, this study has provided a glimpse into the complexity and challenges of helping Special Olympics athletes develop life skills. There are many strategies that coaches may use and many ways in which to learn the strategies. Coaches, however, need to be proactive in their learning in order to optimally facilitate the development of their athletes' life skills (Camiré et al., 2014). We have not attempted to prescribe a "how-to" list with this study, but indeed, have shown a multiplicity of possibilities that coaches can utilize in enhancing their coaching practices.

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Appendix A

Ethics Approval

File Number: H06-13-12

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 06/27/2013



Université d'Ottawa
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Ethics Approval Notice

Health Sciences and Science REB

Principal Investigator / Supervisor / Co-investigator(s) / Student(s)

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Diane	Culver	Health Sciences / Human Kinetics	Supervisor
Sarah	Cybulski	Health Sciences / Human Kinetics	Student Researcher

File Number: H06-13-12**Type of Project:** Master's Thesis**Title:** Life Skill Development in Special Olympic Athletes: The Coach's role

Approval Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Expiry Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Approval Type
06/27/2013	06/26/2014	Ia

(Ia: Approval, Ib: Approval for initial stage only)**Special Conditions / Comments:**

N/A

File Number: H06-13-12

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 06/27/2013



Université d'Ottawa
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

This is to confirm that the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board identified above, which operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and other applicable laws and regulations in Ontario, has examined and approved the application for ethical approval for the above named research project as of the Ethics Approval Date indicated for the period above and subject to the conditions listed the section above entitled "Special Conditions / Comments".

During the course of the study the protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB except when necessary to remove subjects from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) pertain to only administrative or logistical components of the study (e.g. change of telephone number). Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes which increase the risk to participant(s), any changes which considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project and safety of the participant(s). Modifications to the project, information/consent documentation, and/or recruitment documentation, should be submitted to this office for approval using the "Modification to research project" form available at: <http://www.research.uottawa.ca/ethics/forms.html>.

Please submit an annual status report to the Protocol Officer four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to either close the file or request a renewal of ethics approval. This document can be found at: <http://www.research.uottawa.ca/ethics/forms.html>.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Office at extension 5387 or by e-mail at: ethics@uOttawa.ca.

Signature:

Kim Thompson

Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research
For Daniel Lagarec, Chair of the Health Sciences and Sciences REB

Appendix B

Information Letter

Title of the study: Life skill development in Special Olympic athletes: The coach's role.

Principal Investigator:

Sarah Cybulski

Master of Arts Candidate

School of Human Kinetics

University of Ottawa

Ottawa, ON

Thesis Supervisor:

Dr. Diane Culver

Associate Professor

School of Human Kinetics

University of Ottawa

Ottawa, ON

Dear Special Olympics Coach,

As part of a Master's thesis focusing on coaching intellectually disabled athletes, our research team (Sarah Cybulski and Dr. Diane Culver) at the University of Ottawa's School of Human Kinetics is conducting a study entitled "Life Skill Development in Special Olympic Athletes: The Coach's Role". The study's objectives consists of a) exploring how Special Olympic coaches attempt to integrate the development of life skills in their athletes, and b) if the coaches are trying to help their athletes to develop life skills, how they learned their various techniques for integrating life skill development into their coaching. The goals of this research are to learn more about Special Olympic coaches, to determine how they can attempt to help their athletes gain important life skills, to examine the different learning situations that the coaches might encounter, and to add to the literature focusing on this particular coaching context.

The researcher is recruiting approximately six to eight Special Olympic coaches from Ottawa, ON and its surrounding areas. Your participation would consist of taking part in an initial interview lasting between 30 and 60 minutes, observations at both a practice and game, an analysis of your personal coaching documents, an a follow-up interview lasting between 20 and 40 minutes. All data collection methods will focus on the strategies that coaches use to help their athletes develop life skills and on various learning situations that coaches might have encountered while learning these various strategies.

The researcher emphasizes that all of your data will only be used for this research and confidentiality is assured. Anonymity is guaranteed by identifying participants using a pseudonym rather than the participant's actual name on all collected data items. Furthermore, the digital audio recordings will be stored at the University of Ottawa in Dr. Culver's research laboratory to which

only the principal investigator and supervisor will have access. All participants can discontinue their participation from the study at any time.

The researcher insists that you are free to participate and is being conducted independently from Special Olympics Canada. If you have any questions or require more information about the study itself, you may contact the researcher or her supervisor at the aforementioned numbers.

Please keep this form for your records.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sarah Cybulski, MA(c)

Appendix C

Participant Information

Table C1

Special Olympics coach participant demographics.

Coach	Age	Sex	Years in SO	Highest Level Coached	Sports	Athlete Level*	Athlete Ages	SO Coach Education
1	49	F	4	Provincial	Softball	D	~18-60	Level 1 and 2, Golf
2	62	M	33	National	Softball, Golf, Floor hockey	D	11-65	Level 1 and 2, Golf
3	61	M	10	National	Floor hockey, Softball	Adapt/ D	12-60	Level 2
4	39	F	19	International	Swimming, Athletics	Mixed	Teens to 60s	Level 1 and 2
5	69	F	15	National	Nordic skiing, Floor Hockey, Softball	C/D	14-55	Level 1 and 2
6	62	F	17	National	10-pin bowling Softball, Floor hockey, Curling	C	12-57	Level 1 and 2

Note. Athletes are classified as A, B, C, D, or Adapt. A is the highest level of SO competition and Adapt is the lowest level of SO competition.

Appendix D

Consent Form

Titles of Study: Life Skill Development in Special Olympic Athletes: The Coach's Role

Principal Investigator: Sarah Cybulski, MA Candidate
School of Human Kinetics
University of Ottawa
Supervisor: Diane Culver, PhD
School of Human Kinetics
University of Ottawa

I, _____, have been asked to participate in the research conducted by Sarah Cybulski (supervised by Dr. Diane Culver) from the University of Ottawa's School of Human Kinetics. This project has been funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The purpose of the study is to discover a) how Special Olympic coaches attempt to integrate the development of life skills in their athletes, and b) if the coaches are trying to help their athletes to develop life skills, how they learned their various techniques for integrating life skill development into their coaching. Data from the project will be used to inform other coaches of athletes with intellectual disabilities, to add to the literature conducted on disability sport coaches, and to show other potential areas for research as this is an underdeveloped area of research. This research may also help me to deeper learning through my explanation of my various life skill development techniques and learning situations.

My participation will consist of participating in an initial interview lasting between 30 and 60 minutes, observations at both a practice and game, an analysis of my personal coaching documents, and a follow-up interview lasting between 20 and 40 minutes. I am aware that both interviews will be audio recorded. The interviews will be conducted at a convenient location for me and I will be given a chance to review the written transcripts. During the interviews, I will be asked questions about my coaching background, my strategies that I use to help my athletes develop life skills, and how I learned these strategies. The purpose of the observations is for the researchers to become familiar with my coaching context and to gather more information about how I attempt to integrate life skill development into my coaching. Finally, I agree to allow the principal investigator to analyze different coaching documents that I wish to share.

I am free to withdraw from the study at any time or refuse to answer questions. If I choose to withdraw from the study, all of the data collected about me will not be used and will be destroyed. I have been assured by the researcher that the information that I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for the purposes of the study. My confidentiality will be protected in the following manner: a pseudonym will be used in place of my name in all of the data collected about me and I understand that the content related to my participation will only be used by Sarah Cybulski and Dr. Diane Culver's research team. The recorded data and written data will be kept at the University of Ottawa for five years in the

researcher's office in a locked filing cabinet and on password protected computers. At the end of five years, all of the data will be deleted or destroyed.

The transcription of my interviews will be returned to me by email in order to verify the accuracy of my responses. The transcription will not be protected by a password and I recognize the associated risks.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher. If I have any questions with regards to the ethical conduct of this research, I may contact the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity. There are two copies of the consent form, one of which I may keep.

I, _____, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Sarah Cybulski from the School of Human Kinetics at the University of Ottawa, whose research is under the supervision of Dr. Diane Culver.

Participant: _____ Date: _____

Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Appendix E

Interview Guide #1

Introduce the study, ask about consent forms

1. Could you please describe your current coaching context?
 - a. How old are your athletes?
 - b. Do you coach both males and females?
 - c. What is the range of disabilities that you coach?
2. What does a typical season look like with regards to practices and competitions?
3. How many years have you been a coach?
 - a. How long have you been involved with Special Olympics as a coach?
4. Have you ever coached athletes without disabilities?
 - a. If yes, is there a difference between coaching athletes without disabilities and coaching Special Olympic athletes?
5. Where did your interest in coaching Special Olympic athletes come from?
6. When you began coaching, had you taken any coach education courses?
7. Have you taken any Special Olympic specific coach education courses?
8. What is your coaching philosophy?
9. Given that you know your athletes, what are some of the skills you feel are important for them to develop?
 - a. Do you try to integrate these into your coaching? If so, how?
 - b. How do you know when they are starting to develop these life skills?
 - c. Are there any other life skills that you have not discussed that you emphasize in your coaching?

- i. How do you integrate the teaching of these like skills?
- 10. Are you familiar with the mission of Special Olympics Canada?
 - a. If not, I will state what the mission is: “Special Olympics Canada is dedicated to enriching the lives of Canadians with an intellectual disability through sport.”
(Special Olympics Canada, 2014, para. 2)
 - b. Could you please comment on this mission statement in relation to your coaching philosophy?
 - i. Can you provide some examples?
 - ii. How did you learn to do these things?
- 11. What are some challenges that you have encountered in coaching and helping your athletes to develop?
 - a. How did you solve them?
 - b. Where did these solutions come from?
- 12. Are there any significant others who have helped you in your coaching?
 - a. Who are they?
 - b. How have they helped you?
- 13. Do you ever take time to reflect on your coaching?
 - a. Examples?
 - i. Do you keep a journal?
- 14. Do you intend to continue coaching Special Olympic athletes?
 - a. Why?
- 15. Do you have any suggestions that could help you to further develop yourself as a Special Olympics coach?

16. Is there anything else you wish to share with me about your coaching?

Appendix F

Observation Guide Example – Coach 4

Table F2

Summary of findings from theoretical frameworks to guide observations.

Themes	Meaning and Examples
Camiré et al., 2012	
<i>Pre-existing make-up</i>	Understanding the athletes
<i>Coaching Philosophy</i>	Demonstrating philosophy from interview
<i>Keywords</i>	Using a word to remind the athletes of a life skill
<i>Peer Evaluations</i>	Having athletes evaluate each other
<i>Providing Opportunities to Display Skills</i>	Letting the athletes show some of the things they are good at
<i>Modeling</i>	Modeling appropriate behaviours and life skills to athletes
<i>Teachable Moments</i>	Taking a moment to teach athletes about a life skill – often as the result of something seen
<i>Volunteerism</i>	Having athletes volunteer
Trudel et al., 2013	
<i>Mediated Learning</i>	Coach education reference books
<i>Unmediated Learning</i>	Speaking with other coaches Observing other coaches
<i>Internal Learning</i>	Reflection

Specific Aspects to Look For Based on Interview:

- ☐ Breaking individual sports skills into smaller components
- ☐ Promoting fair play and having fun
- ☐ Promoting fun for the ADAPT level athletes
- ☐ Confidence boosters
- ☐ Paying attention to socially acceptable behaviour
- ☐ Talking about nutrition, lifestyle balance
- ☐ Asking athletes what they learned at practice
- ☐ Having athletes help each other
- ☐ Talking about social skills
- ☐ Promoting athletes to congratulate each other
- ☐ Limiting social time during practice so athletes remain disciplined when learning how to swim
- ☐ Proper swimming etiquette
- ☐ Announcements at the end of practice and cheering

- ☐ Any talk about hygiene
- ☐ Talking to athletes about goals and goal setting

Appendix G
Observation Details

Table G3

Details about length of time observed and types of observations.

Coach	Time Observed (hrs)	Type of Observation (i.e., practice/game)
1	2	2 games
2	3.5	2 games, 1 practice
3	4	2 practices, 1 game
4	2	2 practices
5	4	2 practices, 1 game
6	7	2 practices, 1 game

Appendix H

Interview Guide #2

Life Skill Development

1. What do you feel is the role that you play in your athletes' lives?
2. Can you give me an example of an athlete who you identified was lacking a particular life skill? How did you approach this?
3. Do your athletes ever ask you to help them with other things in their lives? If yes, how do you approach this?
4. Are there ever times when you have to point out that something is not socially acceptable to your athletes? How would you approach that situation?
5. What strategies do you use to develop positive relationships with your athletes?
6. When an athlete has an outburst or acts inappropriately, what ways are best to deal with it?
7. Do you ever use key words to keep your messages clear? Examples?
8. Do you ever have athletes evaluate their peers' strengths and weaknesses?
9. Do more high-functioning athletes ever feel self-conscious about being an SO athlete? If so, how do you deal with that?
10. Do you ever provide your athletes with opportunities to display their skills, like leadership? Examples.
11. How do you model the values that you try to instill in your athletes?
12. Does the team ever help out in volunteer opportunities (ex. Tournaments, helping young athletes, running fundraiser etc.?)
 - a. If yes, examples.

- b. If no, why not?
13. Do you think your athletes actually apply some of the life skills taught in SO to other domains such as school, work, or in their communities? Could you provide an example?
 14. Could you provide an example of how you help your athletes to transfer some life skills to areas outside of sport?
 15. Do you think your athletes see the link between how the skills gained through sport can be applied to other areas of life? If yes, example?

Coach Learning

16. Did your coach education courses make you more aware of the potential life skills that SO athletes may need to learn?
 - a. How so?
17. How do you use what you have learned from your coach education courses?
18. Do you think that your coach education courses helped teach you ways to promote the development of life skills? How so? Specific examples?
19. Do you ever refer back to what you learned in your coach education course (i.e., in your reference materials)?
20. Outside of your course books, what has helped you the most to teach life skills to SO athletes?
21. Do you ever speak with the other coaches that you work with about different life skills that you notice an athlete needs to build? For example?
22. Do you use your life experiences to help you with your coaching? If yes, example.
23. Do you think that being a parent has impacted how you coach your athletes? How so?
24. Please share with me some of your memorable and/or impactful learning situations.

- a. How were these situations memorable and/or impactful? Examples?
- b. Why do you think these were impactful?
- c. So what exactly did you learn in those situations?

25. Why is being an SO coach important to you?

*As a reminder, ask for their ages.