Chapter 15
Coaching Life Skills in Sports People

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Abstract The purpose of this chapter is to explore how to coach life skills through sport. A life skill is a commonly used term with sport psychology literature. However, there is a conceptual ambiguity that surrounds what life skills are and consequently which positive outcomes are labeled as life skills. Rather than listing potential life skills (e.g., communication skills), there is a need to define what life skills are based upon shared characteristics. Thus, the first part of this chapter will focus on what constitutes a life skill to enable coaches to understand what it is that they are aiming to develop. Life skills are defined as skills that are acquired through practice to help an individual to display competence in socially valuable tasks that predicts similarly useful tasks within or across life domains. The consequence(s) of the process of learning a life skill is a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and therefore, requires corresponding changes in behavior and relationships. The next focus of the chapter will be on discussing the salient features of practical life skills coaching. This section will emphasize the environmental features of useful life skills programs by analyzing literature from the broader field of positive youth development. Moreover, this section on features of practical life skills programs will highlight the role of the coach to show how coaches' personal qualities and beliefs are central to the development of life skills. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how to move life skills research and practice forward by providing areas for critical consideration and future research directions.

Keywords Learning Life Skills · Change behaviour · Positive development

The purpose of this chapter is to explore how to coach life skills through sport. Before delving into the extant research, I invite you to engage in a brief thought experiment. Consider two people. Imagine that these imaginary people are two youth sport participants: Jesse and Chris. Both Jesse and Chris play tennis. They both play on the same courts, at the same club in the same town. Both players train

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and compete under the same rules and governance provided by their national governing body. Both athletes have coaches who have received the same coaching qualifications from a relevant national governing body. Both athletes have supportive parents and siblings who endorse psychosocial growth. Imagine now that you have been asked to conduct a "personal development audit" (if such a thing is possible) to try to measure which positive skills, values, and virtues that the two athletes have developed because of their participation in tennis.

On the one hand, you observe that Jesse demonstrated a range of skills that you think are important for young people in your society. For example, Jesse is a great communicator, is organized, and can work well in teams. On the other hand, you observe that Chris does not possess the skills that Jesse has shown you. Chris is selfish, narcissistic, and will do anything to win (for example, cheat). What might "cause" these differences if their youth sports experience appears so similar?

Developmental psychologists have shown that some of the difference between the two athletes might be relatively stable and inherited individual differences (i.e., personality traits). However, inherited dispositions cannot account for all the variability in the behaviors shown by athletes. Instead, many skills, values, and virtues appear to be learned. If we were to extend our audit of personal development to the tennis club, we might observe subtle differences that could help us understand why the two athletes appear to be very different. For example, although the coaches have been trained under the same system, their coaching behaviors and foundational coaching philosophy (i.e., winning vs. personal development) are vastly different. For instance, Jesse's coach creates coaching sessions that promote teamwork, require clear and concise communication, and endorse the value of organization skills. Chris's coach, on the other hand, creates coaching sessions that promote winning at all costs, demonstrating competence by beating opponents and ignoring the needs of others. While it is not my place to say which coaching session is better—they both have value in different ways—it is apparent (I hope) that one session will probably develop a broader range of positive life skills than the other. Moreover, the positive skills that Jesse demonstrates (i.e., communication, organization, teamwork) should be more useful in most (not all) life domains outside of sport (e.g., the workplace) compared with the skills that Chris demonstrates (i.e., winning at all costs and selfishness).

This idea of developing skills for life is a central principle of life skills through sports literature. In the previous example of the two tennis players, it should also be apparent that a crucial element of developing life skills is the role of the coach. Now, that is not to say that the coach is the only way to develop life skills. Young people do not grow up on the tennis court, the football pitch, the swimming pool. They grow up in a complex developmental system that includes (but is not limited to) organized sport. While acknowledging that other social agents and structures in combination with ranges of life experiences, genetic influences, and cultural and historical nuances influence how people develop, the purpose of this chapter is to consider how sports coaches can contribute to the development of life skills in their athletes.

Life Skills and Sports Coaching

In the past two decades, sport and exercise psychologists have examined the procurement of life skills through sport and have generated models to delineate how life skills are developed and possibly transferred to different life domains. Gould and Carson (2008) provided an excellent review of some of this early work and set up several areas for future research. Since then, other researchers have examined life skills (e.g., Pierce, Gould, & Camiré, 2017) and more broadly the positive youth development through sports literature (e.g., Holt, 2016) and despite the excellent suggestions that these research teams made several pervasive limitations exist. One of the main barriers to progress (in my opinion) is the lack of clear guidance about how to coach life skills. While it is not within the scope of this chapter to provide definitive answers, I hope that I present relevant research and points of discussion that stimulates debate and plants the seed of innovation in any readers who wish to develop new or improved methods of coaching life skills through sport.

What Are Life Skills?

Despite a growing body of literature in this area, life skills are still not well defined. A cursory glance at the existing life skills literature reveals that there are nearly as many definitions as there are potential life skills. Life skills researchers have erected an unnecessary obstacle to coaching life skills by listing examples of life skills without identifying a common feature inherent to life skills that makes them thus. In this way, we (as consumers of the research) are exposed to Meno's paradox that a coach cannot search for life skills (or means of coaching) because s (he) does not know what to look for.

Therefore, step one in this chapter is to set out the stall and present a definition of life skills. While this may add to already lengthy list of definitions presently available, I hope that by clarifying what I mean by life skills I can ease into the discussion of how to coach them more easily.

I (Jones & Lavallee, 2009a) have previously defined life skills are ranges of transferable skills needed for daily living, by everybody that helps people thrive. On reflection, I believe that this definition has problems, and I suggest a significant amendment. The first issue regards the misinterpretation and fragility of thriving. In the context of positive youth development, thriving is a developmental concept that signifies a healthy change process linking a young person with an adult status (Lerner, Dowling, & Anderson, 2003). Benson (1993) first used thriving to refer to a set of "vital signs" in adolescence. Along these lines, Benson advocated thriving as an outcome of positive development, rather than a process of growth (Bundick, Yeager, King, & Damon, 2010). In the context of sport, coaches are more likely to use discrete indicators of thriving (e.g., successful performance, talent identification)

rather than seeing it as a process. However, that should not detract from the likely reality that young people can be on the longitudinal path of thriving in the absence of visible indicators. Adults may only identify a thriving young person when the young person demonstrates a socially valuable behavior such as volunteering or volitionally engaging in extracurricular activities that the adult sees or about which they are informed. Cognitive and emotional development is not so readily observed, yet emotional and cognitive development is probably equally important in terms of life skill development.

Thriving is also considered a fluid developmental process and is regarded as a positive positioning toward life and a focus on adaptive goals (Benson & Scales, 2009). Benson and Scales (2009, p. 85) stated that "thriving represents the dynamic and bi-directional interplay of a young person intrinsically animated and energized by discovering his or her specialness, and the developmental contexts (people, places) that know, affirm, celebrate, encourage, and guide its expression." Coaches could identify a "thriver" if he or she is on the path to an adult status marked by making culturally valued contributions to self and institutions (Lerner et al., 2003). From the positive youth development perspective, thriving incorporates the absence of problem behaviors (e.g., drug abuse) and pathology (e.g., mental illness) with indicators of healthy growth (e.g., academic achievement: Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000). If coaches are to use life skills to help people thrive, coaches must know what thriving in sport entails. Brown, Arnold, Reid, and Roberts (2018) suggested that in the context of elite sport thriving involved being optimistic, focused, and in control; having an active awareness of areas for improvement; possessing high-quality motivation; experiencing holistic development; displaying progression upward; and having a sense of belonging. They also suggested that their participants identified various personal (e.g., desire and motivation, goal setting and creating challenge) and contextual (e.g., coach support, training environment) enablers that potentially interact to facilitate thriving in sport. Whether Brown et al. (2018) conceptualization of thriving is practically useful for coaches is yet to be seen. Therefore, researchers could consider how to measure thriving so that they can have a meaningful outcome measure when establishing whether coaching interventions produce desired changes. At this time, there are no standardized measures of thriving.

Next, I would like to draw upon Pierce et al. (2017) review of life skills transfer and specify what life skills transferability might mean in real-world terms. Pierce et al. (2017, p. 194) conceptualized life skill transfer as

> The ongoing process by which an individual further develops or learns and internalizes a personal asset (i.e., psychosocial skill, knowledge, disposition, identity construction, or transformation) in sport and then experiences personal change through the application of the asset in one or more life domains beyond the context where it was originally learned.

The point that life skill transfer is an ongoing process is particularly salient for the coaching of life skills. I do not believe that life skill transmission is dichotomous (transferred vs. not transferred) and therefore coaches should be aware the life skills transfer could be happening both when positive behavior is observed and when it is

are not. The nature of the transfer process could be happening within the thoughts and feelings of the individual. Therefore it is not readily observable. The absence of visible behavior should not lead coaches to conclude that skill has not transferred; the process could still be underway. To date, there is no evidence to show how long the process of life skills transfer takes; therefore, coaches must demonstrate patience.

It could be more useful for coaches to think in magnitudes of the transfer rather than transfer vs. no transfer. For example, a coach may want to know how much skill could transfer across life domains or how much a given outcome variable (e.g., life skill in a new life domain) will improve if the athlete learns a particular life skill in the sport. Ideally, researchers could report real-world effects derived from the possession of life skills. For example, it would be useful to know that a 50% increase in (for instance) communication skills in the sport will result in a 20% improvement of communication competency in the workplace. To date, the reliance on retrospective interviews to understand life skills development and transfer has meant that the previous research question remains unanswered. A significant research question for researchers to answer is "to what extent does a life skill from one life domain predicts life skills (or associated outcomes) within and across life domains." For the research to progress, it is crucial for scholars to establish the predictive validity of life skills by moving away from historical qualitative inquiry toward experimental psychology. To help move the field forward, practitioners need to know whether they can predict the acquisition and expression of a single life skill within and across life domains.

Finally, it would likely be useful for practitioners to know whether a given life skill predicts a different outcome (e.g., communication predicting confidence) and whether those outcomes mediate valued behaviors (e.g., job performance). The absence of evidence of predictive validity erects unnecessary obstacles for researchers who need to sell the benefits of life skill programs to athletes and coaches, or for coaches to sell the benefits to sporting directors and policymakers. When considering the time and monetary investment required to coach life skills, practitioners and coaches need to demonstrate value by providing a return on investment. Currently, the evidence base is insufficiently robust for practitioners or coaches to offer anything but an anecdote. Even if the amount of variance in the desired outcome is small, it could still be meaningful and significant to coaches, so should be examined and reported. Therefore, research is needed that reveals how much learning of life skills provided quantifiable benefits across life domains or epochs.

Analysis of Pierce et al. (2017) definition of transfer could lead some coaches to assume that life skills must cross some life skills boundary (i.e., from sport to work). However, another way of conceptualizing transfer is to think longitudinally about the skill in question (i.e., maintenance within a life domain). By within domains I mean that transfer could encompass transmitting given skills over time. The traditional conceptualization of life skills transfer alludes to transmission from one life domain (e.g., sport) to another (e.g., education). For instance, a diligent rugby player will be a diligent student. Transfer of skills might happen within the same domain,

specifically from training to competition or from participation in youth to participation in adulthood.

Haskell (2001) alluded to the transfer of learning as the application of prior learning to similar and new situations. These situations could be within the same life domain at different time points. For example, a young athlete may learn about time management as an adolescent and then continue to apply that skill to her sport in adulthood.

Similarly, a young person could determine the value of physical activity by playing youth sport. Physical activity could be a life skill or could be the outcome of one or a set of life skills (e.g., discipline or diligence). Either way, the person in question might then continue to be physically active across the lifespan by playing the same sport he or she performed in youth. In this example, no cross-domain transfer has occurred (i.e., application of the asset in one or more life domain beyond the domain where it was learned initially: Pierce et al., 2017). However, I believe that skill maintenance in the same life domain warrants equal attention.

Moreover, I contend that transfer within domains may serve as an essential moderator of transfer across areas (i.e., more significant across domain transfer in conditions of longer within domain transfer). I welcome researchers to test this hypothesis. In closing, I believe that the maintenance of a life skill is just as valuable as moving skills from one life domain to another.

Further reflection on the Jones and Lavallee (2009a) definition raises additional points of critique. Using simple language such as "everybody" and "every day" to conceptualize a life skill presents a break from the reality of what a life skill is for most people. It is unlikely that people use their life skills every day. Similarly, people are different, and life experiences are unique, so it is doubtful that everyone will require the same skills (based on the novel interactions of individual assets and ecologies in which people live: Lerner et al., 2006). Lerner and colleagues suggested that thriving is a consequence of the potentially infinite number of adaptive developmental regulations that exist in a young person's life. Because of the billions of developmental trajectories that could emerge across the lifespan, it would be brave to suggest that life skills are the primary driving force behind thriving.

Discussing life skills in absolute terms will undoubtedly present unnecessary obstacles to coaches and researchers who wish to conduct life skills research and help young people in the real world. Coaches may better serve the needs of youth by defining life skills in more practical terms. Showing that people do not need life skills but rather acquiring transferable skills improves the probability of securing a desirable outcome could be a better solution to the problem of life skills definition. Simple definitions of life skills may paint a picture that young people cannot thrive in the absence of a rich repertoire of life skills. Thriving is such an elusive construct; it is highly unlikely that life skills alone account for the variance in a person's prosperity to thrive. Instead, life skills will interact with a plethora of other assets, resources, genes, dispositions, and ecological conditions to improve people's chances of thriving.

It is plausible that life skills are culturally valued and subjective (Jones & Parker, 2014). There will be cultural and individual differences in life skills classification.

Therefore, the coaching of specific life skills may engender growth in some people, but not all. Clarifying boundary conditions is crucial. It is not for me to impose these boundary conditions but rather to open debate so that researchers and coaches consider cultural nuances when attempting to intervene in young people's lives. For example, coaching life skills to young people in neo-liberal western societies will be vastly different to coaching life skills to young people from nationalist or socialist societies because of the value assigned to the ranges of life skills within each society (i.e., individualism vs. collectivism).

To refine existing definitions of life skills, I recommend adopting Simonton's (1999) work on talent development. In a similar vein to Simonton's definition of talent, I suggest that life skills could enable an individual to display competence within or across life domains, and life skills require specialized training. I recommend this adaptation to existing definitions because it is useful to clarify that life skills must be learnable (i.e., need training) and are not fixed (or are relatively stable personality traits). It may be that people believe that sport taught a life skill in a young person because of a disposition or an ability and was already present before the young person started playing sport. For example, it may be reasonable to conclude that golf helps to develop conscientiousness. However, an alternative explanation is that people high in conscientiousness are attracted to golf, and the sport experience has done nothing to improve this trait. It is possible that traits like conscientiousness are then considered typical in golf because golfers may value traits like conscientiousness, and coaches identify them as precursors of performance (i.e., talent identification). The result could be that people high in conscientiousness progress through the talent development system while their low conscientiousness counterparts drop out. Ultimately, people may observe that golfers (as a population) are conscientious and draw the conclusion that golf teaches conscientiousness when this is not the case. The same or similar narratives could play out across ranges of sports.

Even though I recommend that life skills be defined based on their learnability, I do not suggest that scholars ignore relatively stable traits completely. It is possible that some of the moderators of life skill development could be innate. For example, an open personality trait may moderate the development of communication skills in the sport. However, openness alone probably cannot help people display competence in communication. Instead, communication skills are refined with specialized training, but openness increases the magnitude of the effect. In here lies the complexity of life skill development. It is improbable that all the available or desired life skills are all learned in the same way as each other. Each life skill will require a different path of development to others. Equally, (and probably more importantly) each person will learn a given skill differently based on a range of individual differences (e.g., personality). Thus, any model of life skill coaching should acknowledge and at least try to reconcile the variability in how life skills are developed based on what the individual brings to the table (see Gould & Carson, 2008).

In closing this section of the definition of life skills, I would like to offer my thoughts on how life skills can be defined. I believe that life skills are acquired

through practice to help the owner to display competence in socially valuable tasks that predicts similarly useful functions within or across life domains. The consequence of the process of learning a life skill is a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and therefore requires corresponding changes in behavior (affect and cognition) and relationships (i.e., a transition: Schlossberg, 1981).

Potential Features of Positive Life Skills Coaching

Before delving into this discussion, it is essential to note that any debate about the features of life skills coaching programs is provisional. It is based on the current body of research, which is delimited to a particular range of social and cultural groups. Therefore, some features of practical life skills programs that are culturally nuanced will possibly be omitted.

Lerner (2004) described that "Big Three" features of optimal youth development programs. In the context of sport, coaching is most likely to promote life skills when the coaching environment and the coaching process involve possibilities for sustained adult-youth relationships, youth skill-building activities, and opportunities for youth participation in the leadership of community-based activities. Outside of sport, Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, and Hawkins (1998) found that the majority (about 75%) of effective affirmative youth development programs focus on the "Big Three" features effective affirmative youth development programs. Catalano et al. (1998) classified positive youth development programs as any youth-based program that promoted bonding, resilience, competence, self-determination, spirituality, self-efficacy, clear and positive identity, belief in the future, provided recognition for positive behavior and opportunities for prosocial involvement, and prosocial norms. Catalano and colleagues identified 25 affirmative youth development programs that had robust evaluation designs (experimental or quasi-experimental with viable comparison groups), had an acceptable standard of statistical proof, provided sufficient methodological detail to allow an independent assessment of the study's soundness, and produced evidence of significant effects or behavioral outcomes.

The most effective programs addressed a wide range of positive youth development objectives rather than concentrating on just one area. Similarly, the best programs were rigorously evaluated, made assessments of positive and problem outcomes, had a structured curriculum, lasted for a minimum of 9 months, and had high implementation fidelity. Precious few life skills programs that are delivered by coaches through sport participation are rigorously evaluated, made assessments of positive and problem outcomes, had a structured curriculum, lasted for a minimum of 9 months, and had high implementation fidelity.

The characteristics of effective positive youth development programs identified by Catalano et al. (1998) are similar to those identified by Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003). They noted that effective programs transcend an exclusive focus on the prevention of risky behaviors to include attempts to instil behaviors that emphasize

youth competencies and abilities (e.g., life skills) through increasing exposure to supportive and empowering environments where activities create opportunities for skill-building and horizon-broadening experiences. Also, Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003) indicated that effective positive youth development programs offer opportunities for youth to nurture their interests and talents, practice new skills, and gain a sense of personal and group recognition.

Finally, the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (NRCIM, 2002) outlined four primary areas of youth development: physical, intellectual, psychological/emotional, and social. For each developmental domain, several developmental assets are suggested. For example, right eating and physical activity habits are assets that facilitate positive physical development. Knowledge of interpersonal skills, vocational skills, and decision-making skills contribute to positive intellectual development. Mental health, positive self-regard, coping skills, mastery motivation, and conflict resolution skills characterize positive psychological and emotional development. Assets contributing to positive social development include connectedness with parents, peers, and other adults, a sense of social place, and an attachment to society. In addition to the developmental assets, the NRCIM (2002) also outlined eight features of settings that are most likely to foster these developmental assets. These features are physical and psychological safety, appropriate structure, supportive relationships, opportunities to belong, positive social norms, support for efficacy and mattering, opportunities for skill building, and integration of family, school, and community efforts. The NRCIM (2002) also discussed contrast poles for their feature of positive programs. These contrast poles that characterize potential negative youth development program features are relevant in this discussion because they could provide coaches with things to avoid.

Moreover, coaches might recognize strategies and behaviors that they regularly demonstrate, which the coach may have thought were adaptive (e.g., focussing on winning). For example, rather than physical and psychological safety poor (and potentially damaging) programs may comprise dangers, fear, and feeling of insecurity, sexual and physical harassment, and verbal abuse. The opposite of appropriate structure could be a range of conditions including chaos, disorganized, laissez-faire, rigid, over controlled or autocratic.

Unsupportive relationships could be identified as cold, distant, over-controlling, ambiguous support, untrustworthy, focused on winning, inattentive, unresponsive, and rejecting. Exclusion, marginalization and intergroup conflict could be seen as opposite of opportunities for belonging, mainly if the exclusion was based on the excluded individual's gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disabilities, which can sometimes be the case. For example, female youth soccer players may be able to play with male players up to a certain age but are then restricted to female only teams. Recent changes to rules in international athletics also highlight the potential for exclusion and derision of some female athletes because of elevated (compared to norms) levels of the androgenetic hormone testosterone. To date, gender screening of youth sports athletes is rare (if seen at all); however, it is not outside the realms of possibility see some young people being tested and excluded in the future as the professionalization of youth sport takes hold.

Positive social norms are always going to reflect the society in which they are applied, thus in western societies, positive norms are probably things like adhering to rules of behavior, values, and morals, and obligations for service.

In contrast, harmful norms could be laissez-faire practices, antisocial and amoral norms, norms that encourage violence, reckless behavior, consumerism, poor health, practices, and conformity. Lack of support for efficacy and mattering could be manifested in coaching behavior and structure that is non-challenging, over-controlling, disempowering, and disabling and promotes an excessive focus on current relative performance level rather than improvement. Finally, practices that promote bad physical habits and habits of mind; and practices that undermine school and learning are considered features of harmful youth programs. Although some features are extreme and are unlikely to be intentionally set into a life skills program (e.g., harassment and neglect), some aspects of the aforementioned contrast poles may "sneak in" without the coach realizing the effects (e.g., winning over development). Therefore, coaches need to reflect on their coaching practices and structures to consider whether they are inadvertently scuppering attempts to develop life skills by creating conditions that are not conducive to personal growth.

The Role of the Coach

Bailey (2008) stated that whether an athlete reaps the developmental benefits of sports participation depends a great deal on the coach and how the coach transmits his or her behaviors, beliefs, and values and how coach behaviors, beliefs, and value determines the valence of the sports experience for young people. It is, therefore, important to discuss and critically examine how coaches can coach life skills.

Gould and Carson (2008) constructed a broad exploratory model for coaching life skills through sport. In their model, Gould and Carson (2008) emphasized how, under what conditions, and why life skills develop. Gould and Carson (2008) considered the range of assets that young people bring to the sport setting, and they suggested that these prior factors can debilitate or facilitate development (see my earlier discussion of personality). The next section of Gould and Carson's model examined what coaches do (and what they believe) that could encourage life skills development. Gould and Carson (2008) clarify that coaching philosophy and relationship skills (i.e., empathy, rapport building, and communication) are central to the development of life skills. For example, in the hypothetical scenario in the opening paragraphs, it should be clear that the two coaches had different coaching philosophies that underpinned their coaching strategies. It would be fair to assume that Jesse's coach had a philosophy build around tenets of cooperation and personal development, whereas Chris's coach has a philosophy centered on winning and competition. It may be more complicated than a simple dichotomy of one philosophy versus another. In reality, a coach probably holds several beliefs about the value of youth sport and some (if not most) will probably want positive youth development and winning. In this case, the important thing is that the coaches hold philosophies

that place a high priority on athletes' personal development over nondevelopmental goals (i.e., personal career development, trophies). Primarily, coaches strive to help athletes become better people if they improve as an athlete as well; that is a bonus. To understand coaching philosophy Gould, Medbery, and Collins (2003) recommended that coaches consider answering these questions: why do I coach, what are my aim and objectives for coaching, what do I get out of coaching, and why did I get into coaching? Coaches can use the answers from these questions to understand their coaching philosophy.

Gould and Carson (2008) proposed that the way (and when) coaches use of direct teaching strategies also influences life skill development. For instance, the absence of clear rules or inconsistent application of rules and boundaries could hinder life skill development. Likewise, limited reinforcement of skills could encumber skill development that, the presence of appropriate feedback and instruction could flourish. Sports participants could derive feedback directly from the coach. In this way, what the coach says and does is paramount. This is not the only that coaches can influence feedback and reinforcement. Coaches can engender social reinforcement of life skills by educating parents and asking them to deliver support young people that are coherent with the lessons that coaches deliver on the pitch, at the pool, in the gym, and the changing rooms. Coaches can also influence the policy of national governing bodies in a bottom-up fashion (as opposed to top-down when governing bodies inform coach behavior). Rather than passively following guidelines, coaches are sometimes in a position to provide feedback to sporting directors, head coaches, and policymakers in national governing bodies that could be disseminated across the relevant communities of knowledge (through coaches continued professional development programs and through coach education).

Turnnidge, Côté, and Hancock (2014) suggested that coaches could develop life skills through sport in two different ways: the implicit approach and the explicit approach. Pierce et al. (2017) noted that there had been growing debate and discussion amongst sport psychology researchers about which approach to life skills transfer is optimal. I add that these approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and I suggest that coaches consider a combination approach rather than exclusively relying on one method over the other. In reality, it is likely that some skills will be developed in the absence of intentional instruction and skills can be developed and reinforced in the presence of deliberate teaching.

Coaches could adopt an explicit method while recognizing that implicit learning could occur in the background. The implicit approach is characterized by the absence of deliberate coaching strategies to develop life skills. Instead, athletes can develop life skills based on the nature of the sport and the athletes' experiences of playing, training, and competing in the sporting environment. Certain sports require skills and values without which athletes will either be unsuccessful or lack enjoyment. To demonstrate this idea, I encourage you to participate in another brief thought experiment and reflect on your answer. Contemplate the reality of sport participation in a developing nation where athletes do not have access to well-trained coaches, league competition, or pervasive national governing bodies. In this case, sports participation is better described as unstructured play rather than training or

competition. Consider that the sport young people are playing is cricket. To play cricket, the young people must develop or demonstrate a range of skills including (but not limited to) working together in a team, developing communication skills, managing disappointment (for example getting out), and negotiation (picking teams, applying rules). There is no youth development policy at play and no coach to teach the skills in question. Instead, it is more likely that young people learn skills through trial and error, practice, and peer observation. In this way, continued participation is contingent on developing a set of skills. Failure to acquire necessary life (and sport) skills may result in lowered enjoyment, reduced functioning, and probably dropout from the sport in question (perhaps to other activities that are coherent with an individual's assets, values, and skills).

The explicit approach refers to coaches who intentionally teach life skills and forms the basis of the majority of life skills programs. Intentional life skill teaching does not necessarily mean traditional didactic style teaching. The deliberate instruction can also involve dialectics and the creation of the conditions so that implicit skill development occurs. For example, coaches can condition practice to develop game knowledge and life skill proficiency within representative game activities, akin to a "teaching games for understanding" style model of practice.

The third part of Gould and Carson's explanatory model of life skill development attempts to explain why the sport experience and individual factors may promote life skills development. Gould and Carson (2008) highlighted possible mechanisms that explain the relationship between sport and life skills development. Gould and Carson (2008) proposed two broad sets of explanations: social environment influences and the utility of the life skill strategies themselves. The social environment group mechanisms focus on how sports facilities positive identity formation, development, and consolidation, membership in a positive peer group, developing social capital, and the formation and maintenance of attachments with non-familial adults. By entering different social settings, young people can learn about different social norms, and they can positively enhance their perceived competence, locus of control, self-worth, and autonomy. Without doubt, the positive development of self-worth, locus or control, and perceived autonomy is not automatic and is often confounded and suppressed by many factors (e.g., unsupportive adults and peers, social exclusion, peer conflict). Thus, coaches should appreciate that while young people can learn life skills in the absence of direct teaching and just being in the sports environment can teach skills (i.e., an implicit approach to life skill development) there are sometimes obstacles that can blunt the positive effect of the sports environment.

Thus, one job (among many) for a coach could be to coach life skills by removing these so-called blunting factors. The other general explanation for understanding how life skills development is the utility of life skills (and in my opinion, how aware young people are of the skills they have). According to Gould and Carson (2008), several life skills such as stress management, goal setting, and communication are directly transferable to other settings and used throughout life because this is the most utile.

The final components of Gould and Carson's explanatory life skills model list possible outcomes that coaches, athletes, and parents might label as life skills and role transfer plays in life skills development. According to Gould and Carson (2008), the absence of transfer to another setting occludes observation of whether life skills have developed. In their model, Gould and Carson (2008) stated that transfer is influenced by the perceived value of the transferable skill (by both coach and athlete), awareness of one's skill and similarity of learning and transfer contexts, confidence in the ability to transfer, external support for transfer, and perseverance in the face of failure. Coaching based life skills interventions could, therefore, focus on any one of these areas.

Regarding transferability, the athlete must be aware of the skills that they are learning. Without awareness, the transfer of life skills will be implausible. Danish, Petitpas, and Hale (1993) suggested that one of the main obstructions to life skill acquisition is that young people are aware of the skills they possess. To create the conditions for the transfer of life skills, Gould and Carson's (2008) suggested that young people believe that skills can be of value in other situations. They also require awareness of possessing physical and psychological skills and an understanding and knowledge of how skills are learned. Life skill transfer is also facilitated if young people have the confidence to use skills in different situations and motivation to explore non-sporting roles. Finally, it is plausible that young people will benefit if they seek and finding sources of social support and have the ability to adjust and cope with initial setbacks and failures. Pierce, Kendellen, Camiré, and Gould (2018) also recommended that within the implicit method of life skills development transfer of life skills occurs if the individual deems the skill to be useful in other areas of life. A coach could be well placed to engage with athletes to help them see how skills could be used and by doing so, influence an athlete's perception of the utility of skill across life domains and epochs.

In addition to the Gould and Carson (2008) several other researchers have considered how to teach life skills (e.g., Camiré, Trudel, & Forneris, 2012; Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2007). The majority of these researchers have done so by interviewing coaches and asking them to recall what they believe, they did, and how they facilitated growth in their athletes. Aligned with this research, other scholars have asked athletes to reflect on what they thought their coaches did to help them develop life skills (e.g., Jones & Lavallee, 2009b). The result of both approaches to understanding how life skills have been developed is a rich description of the experience. However, what is missing is experimental research that tests the ideas of coaches and athletes. The Gould and Carson (2008) model indicate several areas that could contribute to life skill development. Likewise, similar qualitative research is based on recall of life skills experiences that might not accurately reflect the reality of the sport experience. In the absence of high-quality experimental research, it is impossible to know which areas in Gould and Carson's (2008) model drive the process of life skill development and which areas might be cognitive (i.e., confirmatory) biases on the part of coaches and athletes. To reiterate, I am not saying that the existing qualitative research is redundant, but I do not see the need to adopt the same research design (i.e., retrospective interviews) repeatedly. It is my opinion that

this type of research has run its course, and scholars and practitioners are approaching saturation in terms of what this type of research can contribute to knowledge. Other researchers may disagree with me!

The next step is to take the findings from qualitative research and to examine whether independent coaches (i.e., not the coaches' who were interviewed) can adopt specific life skills development strategies. Scholars and practitioners could then consider experimental research designs that compare different coaching conditions to control conditions to see whether athletes believe that they have learned life skills and whether any evidence of life skill transfer can be identified.

The obvious challenge is the longitudinal nature of personal development that cannot be captured through single shot cross-sectional research. The best research designs will be longitudinal that assess life skill development and demonstration over a period (possibly years). The more critical limitation will be the funding available to fund such longitudinal endeavors. Despite these limitations, researchers should strongly consider this type of research (longitudinal and experimental) because publishing the same qualitative papers that ostensibly ask the same question (i.e., what life skills have you learned from sport) have genuinely run their course.

Key Points

- Life skills are latent constructs and as such there is a lack of agreement on how life skills should be operationalised.
- There are also some noteworthy conceptual challenges associated with defining and measuring transferability of skills across life domains.
- Scholars and practitioners need to be considerate of the ranges of outcomes associated with the coaching life skills and also be aware that some outcomes will be moderated by extraneous variables.
- Life skills coaching involves an interaction of personal and environment variables.
- Coaches could play an active role in life skill development however there is a paucity of experimental research to support this claim

Conclusion

In closing, I would like to highlight a range of issues that I believe need reconciling before meaningful progress can be made, and coaches can use research to develop life skills in the sport. Before coaches can coach life skills through the sport, they need to know what life skills are and what they are not. Coaches need objective outcome measures so that they can demonstrate quantifiable benefits to the athlete, the other coaches, and the sports administrators and policymakers. These outcome measures can then be employed to reveal the magnitude of transfer of a life skill from

one domain to another or from one time to another. Models of life skill coaching exist, but they are mainly anecdotal and lack sufficient high-quality evidence to support their implementation. These models should be used as a guide but should not be prescriptive. Clearly, future research is required to demonstrate that life skills can be coached and that life skills that are coach can be transferred across life domains or periods. The current literature is not of a high enough quality to conclude that coaching is employed to develop life skills; however, in the absence of high-quality experimental data, there is enough anecdote to suggest that coaching probably does contribute to young sports peoples' life skill development. There is no smoke without fire!

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