Chapter 39
How Do Sport Educator-Coaches Contribute to RE in Catholic Schools?

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Introduction

Our aim is to help describe the purpose of the religious education (RE) by demonstrating its place outside the RE classroom within the Catholic school. Examining how sport educator-coaches in particular contribute to the Catholic religious education of the school can refocus the purpose of classroom RE and shed light on religious education's role in the overall mission of the schools.

Religious Education of the Entire School

Thinking about RE in Catholic schools should include religious education that occurs outside the RE classroom. Current thinking in educational leadership challenges educators to move past the image of the stand-alone educator—in this case, the RE teacher. Research shows that the most successful schools have collaborative teachers who overcome felt-divisions arising from separation of subject areas and grade levels in schools, along with the physical divisions between classrooms (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). Successful teachers focus on the learning and growth of all students in the school community and not simply the students in their classes. Thus, the social capital of the school—made up of faculty/staff and administration, and inclusive of students, parents and outside communities—must be considered when thinking about RE in the schools. Isolating the

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RE classroom restricts the influence of RE teachers and the overall capacity of the school to convey its religious identity.

Moreover, RE classroom teachers are limited by the fact that they are but one influence in the religious learning of students (Rossiter, 2017). The subject they teach, however, is fundamental to the mission of the schools and cannot be replaced through integration of religion into other subjects (Rymarz, 2016). These educators play an important role towards the school's purpose, but their influence on students is typically limited to time in the classroom. Students, of course, are affected by others, like parents, peers and the media. RE teachers are not wholly responsible for the lived faith of their students. These two primary limitations—that is, successful teachers must collaborate with others and individual teachers have a limited influence—establishes the basis for examining the contribution of others (particularly sport educator-coaches) to the Catholic religious education of the entire school.

Religious education cannot be restricted by the four walls of the RE classroom. Yes, this subject must be academically concerned, where students learn about religion and inform their lives through religious learning (Groome, 2011; Rossiter, 2017; Rymarz, 2016). The RE classroom primarily offers academic learning, then, and the possibility of developing students affectively and spiritually. At the same time, school leadership must also consider the contribution of other educators towards religious learning in the school. While church leaders speak often of this reality (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, par. 52; Pope John Paul, 1979, par. 69), Maria Harris' (1989) five curricula of the church engage traditional categories that differentiate various forms of ecclesial learning. She challenges the idea that religious education takes place only in classrooms with chalkboards and lesson plans and instead charts out 'the entire course' of the church's educational ministry. With a more expansive vision of curriculum than a Tylerian school of thought (p. 169), she explains the rich diversity of ecclesial educational formation offered throughout the centuries (pp. 43–44): engaging learning through community (koinonia), prayer and worship (leiturgia), service and outreach (diakonia), proclaiming the Word of God (kerygma) and teaching and learning (didache).

Drawing from Harris (1989), traditional categories enable this study to show how in practice teachers outside of the RE classroom can engage multiple forms of RE. Since the release of Harris' book, several researchers argue to expand RE in the schools to ensure a faith-infused worldview throughout the entire school. For instance, researchers have questioned and sought direction for improving Catholic schools' capacity to integrate the Catholic faith across the curriculum (Arthur, 2013; Davis, 1999; Garcia-Huidobro, 2017; Grace, 2013), or have demanded that classroom RE converses with other academic disciplines (Gellel, 2015). Our study, in a similar vein by way of Harris' long-standing categories, draws upon qualitative research completed with a specific group of educators in schools to show how RE lives outside the classroom. This is similar to other research examples: social capital created through school Masses (Casson, 2013), the value of sacramental preparation cooperation with parishes, or promotion of fellowship among religiously committed students (Rymarz, 2011). All told, these studies point to the value of thinking about RE more broadly.

Unfortunately, religious educators often neglect sport's appeal and educational value, especially considering that many in sport have an inclusivist, justice-centred, play-oriented and excellence-driven vision that is not the stereotypical understanding as drawn from muscular Christianity (Hoffman, 2010; Lixey, 2013). Despite increasing interest in the scholarly study of sport and religion (Watson and Parker, 2014) and Catholic schools' long-standing involvement in sport (Kelly, 2012), there is little research into sport as a form of religious education (Lasher, 2002; Friedrichsen, 2002; Kelly, 2015). Employing Harris' model, we examine the experiences of educator-coaches leading extra-curricular sports programs to answer the question: How do sport educator-coaches contribute to the Catholic religious education of the school? Below we state how knowledge of other forms of religious education can even sharpen the purpose of teachers in the RE classroom.

Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to show how educator-coaches contribute to the religious education of Catholic schools. A larger study employed a qualitative, phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994) to understand the spirituality of educator-coaches in Catholic schools; we wanted to understand how they lived out their faith or spirituality as educator-coaches. The point was 'to determine what an experience mean[t] for the persons who had the experience' (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13) of a spirituality of coaching in a Catholic school. In a phenomenological approach, there is a refusal to separate the subject's experience from the object studied: 'the reality of an object is only perceived within the meaning of the experience of an individual' (Creswell, 2007, p. 59). Thus, this approach enabled a rich diversity of ways spirituality was woven into the very fabric of sport-coaching. This chapter draws on secondary analysis from that research project to outline their contribution to RE in the Catholic school.

Sample

Using purposeful sampling, educator-coaches (seven male and three female) were recruited as participants from Edmonton Catholic School District. Coaches were employed at the elementary and secondary levels and had 3–27 years of coaching experience. They coached a wide assortment of sports (e.g., basketball, cheer, soccer, broomball, etc.) in recreational to highly competitive programs. All were teachers except for one educational assistant; one teacher was also a part-time administrator. All were Catholic except for two actively engaged Protestants. Many had studied theology/religion in post-secondary education; many spoke openly about participation in church or para-church organisations, like an adult sport ministry program or outreach group caring for addicted persons. Many currently or had previously taught

religion class in school. With the exception of one adult-baptised participant, they were raised in Christian homes with varying degrees of religiosity.

Procedures for determining this sample was as follows. The lead researcher was a speaker at a professional development session for school district staff, at which he introduced the study and invited potential participants. Because only a few interested educators responded to that request, the District sent out three general email invitations for interviewees over subsequent months. Respondents could email the lead researcher if they were interested and if they met inclusion criteria: (a) an educational employee of the District; (b) English-speaking; (c) at least 3 years sport-coaching experience; and, (d) were willing to talk about spirituality and religion and its relationship to coaching sport. Further information was emailed to the interviewees prior to contact. Informed consent was obtained from the educator-coaches at the beginning of each individual interview.

Data Collection and Analysis

The lead researcher completed ten interviews from September to October 2015 in Edmonton, Canada. Educator-coach participants were separately interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. Interview lengths ranged from thirty to ninety minutes. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim by a professional transcribing company and checked by the lead researcher for accuracy. Using phenomenological analysis (Moustakas, 1994) of the transcripts, we categorised each 'nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statement' and clustered the invariant statements into thematic clusters. Individual descriptions of the textures and structures of each interview was composed, followed by composite statements of each for the interviews overall (p. 122). After writing individual descriptions of each interview (p. 122), the lead research mailed each interviewee's description to them with an invitation to discuss the statements. This researcher met two of the educator-coaches to review their responses. While the topics of the interviews ranged broadly, it became apparent that they saw their role as educator-coaches as a form of RE within a Catholic setting, which is the stream of research presented here. The transcripts were also reviewed by the second researcher, who also read the descriptions and responded to the themes generated by the first author. Several changes were accordingly made to these themes, which became more focused and in line with the data. All categorizations were reviewed by both the lead researcher and a research assistant. Ongoing discussions determined the themes of the larger project and this particular article.

Results and Discussion

Educator-coaches reported several of Harris' forms of religious education in their sport-coaching. Coaches spoke about cultivating relationships with students to form

community (koinonia), gave examples of prayer (leiturgia), supported disadvantaged students through works of charity and justice (diakonia) and less frequently noted moments of instruction and proclamation (didache and kerygma). Despite this diversity of RE experiences, these educator-coaches admitted limited self-reflection on the relationship of sport and religious faith. Using Harris' categories, we below report and discuss how these educator-coaches engaged in these forms of religious learning. It should be noted that because of space limitations for this chapter we write about each form of RE simply in the lives of two or three coaches' experiences instead of detailing its significance for several or all coaches.

Koinonia

Harris (1989) described the learning form of *koinonia* as driven by the human 'impetus toward belonging' and 'toward the human need to share' (p. 76), where the ministry of community 'moves us toward the healing of division, toward overcoming brokenness, and ultimately toward achieving wholeness' (p. 77). The educator-coaches spoke of the bond forged through playing sports and the support and healing that can come through this relationship. Coach 10, who ran a sports' academy through his junior high school, stated:

> The reality with a lot of these students is that they might not come from a great home life. They might not wanna be at home at all, and they wanna come to a safe haven or a place where they can be with family. And we try to provide that [in] the academy, try to provide a sense of family for these students. And sport gives them [that, as indicated] in their journal writings. [While playing], it's like they . . . forget about the issues that they're dealing with at home and whatnot.

Elsewhere this educator-coach shared the story of a girl, who had skipped school and showed up afterwards for practice. It turned out that it was the anniversary of her mother's suicide and she had cut herself several times. Coach 10 realised that the soccer team and the soccer field were her solace, providing a place for respite and healing.

As a teacher and administrator, Coach 7 had coached for over 20 years because it 'gives you a better rapport with the kids'. He found that coaching builds a high level of trust among the players and allows him to know them at a deeper level. Further, he described how on each team at the elementary and junior high levels, he takes on 'projects': 'there's always kids who struggle with school, there's always kids who do something, that they're out of line in school . . . so I want to build a positive rapport with those kids too'. Some kids, then, make the team 'to give them an opportunity to be responsible, to learn what it's like to be team work, to know what it is to be depended upon for things'. Some parents question the approach, especially when their child is cut from the team, but Coach 7 believes that it gives a unique opportunity for building social skills and experiencing a tight-knit community. Coaches with more elite teams at the high school level didn't mention including 'projects', but

nonetheless also affirmed the strong sense of community that appeared through the dedication of the coaches and players.

Leiturgia

Harris argued that Christianity has built-in rhythms and patterns that shape communal life, and that much of this draws on prayer and worship. Leiturgia, experienced in both communal and personal forms, has multiple elements (for instance, thanksgiving, petition, etc.) that give life to Christians, and create and recreate their identity in Christ. She affirmed the importance of not separating the sacred from the secular and supports 'attempts of people to live religiously and morally in the midst of life' (p. 101). In the sporting world, educator-coaches who had learned to incorporate team prayer into their teams' pre- and post-game rituals drew together the sacred and the secular in an important community-building moment. Of the many coaches' stories, two stood out.

Coach 5, who primarily coached basketball in an elite high school program for several years, explained that he always led a team prayer before a game:

> you use it for a moment of grounding to make sure these guys know it's not cutthroat. And we pray for health for both teams, and good competition, we ask these kids to demand of themselves, and then you do see some of the kids, they will use some of that prayer [privately].

He added that he tells players his own religious background and identity as a Catholic so they can make sense of why they do a team prayer; he didn't see himself as a very spiritual person, but believed the Mass grounds him and gives him perspective. He added

> For me prayer before games has been a moment where you take that and . . . channel those handful of things that should matter to these kids at that time, like health and hard work, and finding some spirit within them to dig deeper than they've been digging and to see and . . . find some guidance for that.

The seriousness of sport and the intensity of playing in a competitive program made prayer a seamless working within this coach's program. The act of thanksgiving and petition felt natural in this environment, as he witnessed youth praying privately. In fact, Coach 1, who generally had not led a team prayer with his players in any sport, reported beginning the practice after his original interview.

While most but not all the coaches believed in saying a team prayer before a game, Coach 2, who primarily coached volleyball and did so at various school levels, prayed for similar things before his team's games yet also incorporated parents while coaching a junior high school team:

> We went out into the hallway and I encouraged all the parents. I said, "We're all gonna hold hands. Parents stand behind your players, put your hand on their shoulders and let's ask God to bless these young ladies as they continue their careers in volleyball. Let them have some success." And it was stunning because one of the organizers of the [tournament] looked at

> me and he [said], "We've been tryin' to get our coaches to do that for years and you're one of the first coaches that I've seen that has prayed every game."

Including parents in a corporate act of prayer expanded the use of team prayer and embodied the mentoring role of parents and the familial bond.

Diakonia

In her description of leiturgia, Harris asserted the connection between prayer and worship to service and justice. This element, diakonia, can be understood broadly as all acts of service and ministry, yet Harris reminded readers of specific activities of outreach where emphasis is 'toward remembering and reintegrating compassionate service as part of the essential curricular work of every Christian community' (pp. 144–45). The broad theme of service was prevalent through all of the experiences of the educator-coaches.

Coach 9, who primarily led a junior high volleyball team and was a Protestant teacher, underlined his coaching as a service:

> I think Jesus obviously asked us to serve others, to be generous with your time and your effort and certainly with your money. And I think [coaching is] just a way of giving . . . I like doing it and I like serving in that way. I think some people maybe would feed the homeless, I think I can maybe coach some players. Both are good. One's probably better than the other, but I think if you're giving of yourself then you're doing a Christ-like thing.

Here Coach 9 explicitly names his coaching as a work of service to youth and which is an imitation of Christ. Another Protestant, Coach 6, worked with high school students and echoed this theme:

> I want to be a consistent person in their lives, somebody that they can come and talk to if they have some issues, somebody that is a leader for them that they can come and ask . . . Not just about sport, about the skill . . . . To give them some stability and somebody that they can come and talk to, and trust.

Coach 6 passionately spoke of wanting to offer her time and energy to selflessly give of herself for the benefit of others.

Another junior high coach, Coach 8, illustrated how girls who find success in sport grow in confidence, which transfers over into other areas of life. One girl in particular, who had spent time in a refugee camp, had uncovered a real talent in throwing a ball and had an 'a-ha' moment about what she was capable of: sport 'transfers very easily to the rest of their life, because then they're like I can do something, somebody recognised me for doing something, and I can do that'. Many other coaches gave similar examples. Coach 3 had a 14-year-old student with a 'rough family life' who got seriously involved in track and field, won the city championship in one event, and was able to be swayed away from 'the wrong crowd'. Coaching as an act of service, as a compassionate work that flows from the educator-coaches' Christian vocation, was exemplified again and again. What was not as pronounced was what

was found in Coach 4's elite high school basketball program. As this educator-coach had built the program, he included elements of charity and leadership. His players 'volunteered at an elementary school' providing 'a Phys. Ed. class after-school care', and also ran 'charity events' like 'an alumni basketball game' versus a rival school for charity. Because this coach recognised the advantages his players received from playing on the school team, he promoted and supported his players' acts of service for the wider community.

Didache and Kerygma

Harris named two remaining educational forms of ecclesial learning: the didache—from the Greek for 'teaching' and focused on 'verbal instruction, literacy and study' (pp. 110-111)—and the kerygma—the original apostolic proclamation of Christ's death and resurrection that remains an active and powerful force in the Church. Educator-coaches typically did not see their educational task in these two forms and often underlined that they were not preaching at their players and that coaching sports was advantageous precisely because it was not like regular classroom teaching. Nonetheless, there were some instances of educator-coaches practicing didache and kerygmas.

Several coaches offered verbal instruction about living a better life. Coaching was not restricted to Xs and Os, and could apply Christian teaching and belief to sporting arenas. Coach 8, who coached several sports with female junior high athletes explained what she tells her athletes:

> You can't expect God to control your life. He should be in your life and you should be looking to him for guidance. But he expects you to do some of the work. That's kind of how my philosophy of teaching and coaching is. Yeah, I'm gonna help you and I'm gonna try and create this area of love, where it's safe to fail, it's safe to grow, it's safe to learn, it's safe to ask questions. But you still have to do [things to be successful].

Similarly, Coach 5, who coached at the high school level highlighted part of his approach with students: 'I think it's essential that you learn how to work well with people, and that you're willing to shed ego, and you're willing to compromise—-maybe your game—for the sake of the team's game. 'Cause I think that is . . . how you exist within the team framework'. This verbal instruction isn't explicitly Christian, but it was how coaches felt comfortable speaking about topics related to faith and morality to a diverse student-body.

Another example came from an educator-coach who had fought off cancer in his adolescence, but had to quit the sport he loved. He thus had an important message for his players:

> Be thankful for what you have right now. I wanna make sure that every student has the chance to play, I want them to play because when it was taken away from me, it . . . was a big thing. I turned to God at that moment, and I battled and I overcame that setback . . . I hope to pass on some of these stories and the difficult moments of my life to some of these students I teach [and coach].

Coach 9, who was a Protestant, spoke about embodying Christian teaching in his actions as coach:

> I am trying to do this faith thing without saying to them, 'Hi, I'm trying to be like Jesus right now.' You don't wanna shine your light on yourself all the time in that sense, like I'm doing the good Christ-like thing.

This coach reveals how he tried to be less conspicuous with his faith and simply modeled the teaching. Coaches generally felt that it was in the act of living their faith that their actions spoke to the gospel.

As is evident, there wasn't a kerygmatic preaching in sport; that didn't feel appropriate for the sporting atmosphere, especially with many non-Catholics playing (as noted by many educator-coaches). Nonetheless, there was a deeper connection fostered through time spent together in sport, as relayed by Coach 3 and her time coaching junior high basketball: 'I had a big talk with [a player about her family], and actually we did talk about God, and that she's always loved no matter what . . . It actually surprised me that she was so open about it'.

Implications

The various traditional forms of RE used by sport educator-coaches can offer important contributions to Catholic schools and can help clarify the purpose of RE inside the classroom.

First, the diversity of experiences confirms that educator-coaches do act like religious educators in many ways. They reported engaging thoroughly in koinonia and diakonia, along with many acknowledging the public and private use of leiturgia. The didache offered was not typically kerygmatic in form; it did qualify as a verbal instruction about a better way to live (which could be based on Christian principles). In effect, educator-coaches offered a form of leadership that showed and taught lived-wisdom through deeds and relationship-building. Drawing upon Harris and others overall, we confirm that there are multiple forms of RE learning and the RE should not be restricted to the RE classroom. Naming this larger vision of RE can help situate the particular focus of RE in the classroom.

The second implication stems from the first: these multiple forms of RE clarify the primary purpose of classroom RE (that is, knowledge-based learning). All educators are asked to support the faith-based mission of Catholic schools, and educator-coaches can offer a mentorship that should be recognised, developed, and promoted as such. RE teachers must trust that students learn other forms of RE elsewhere in the school, especially when school leadership support the development of RE in these other forms. Will focusing on an educationally-based RE classroom program forego important faith formation elements in the classroom? Hyde (2013, p. 43) originally raises this concern, but then stipulates that there is room for an academic approach to RE if the school as a community focuses on the integration of the religious learning in the lives of students elsewhere in the school. Educator-coaches themselves noted that

classroom RE is substantially different from what happens in the gymnasium; these educator-coaches found it refreshing to work with students outside the classroom. In their experience, the classroom is of a different nature than the soccer pitch. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that classroom RE should be treated as an academic discipline like other school subjects (General Director for Catechesis, 1997, par. 73). Because of its distinct setting, classroom RE should not be primarily focused on faith formation and school leadership must promote other educators' engagement of these other forms of RE.

Furthermore, an important element of a strongly educationally based RE program is that it can support encounter between people of difference, where knowledge of other faith traditions can enable dialogue outside of the classroom in environments like sport. Research with Catholic schools highlights that students in sports are respectful of others' religious beliefs but feel uncomfortable to dialogue about this difference (Hoven and Kuchera, 2016). Here, the content-based RE program can be supportive of sport programing and differences among players.

Third, we must recall that current educational leadership research emphasises systems-thinking, highlighting learning communities among professional educators and acknowledging limitations to dealing with a school subject on its own. A communal model for educators has often served Catholic schools well in the past (Convey, 2012) and this study's findings affirm the need for practicing a larger vision of RE to ensure that it does not become restricted to the classroom. Instead of underappreciating different forms of RE, school leadership must support these forms outside the classroom so that the religious dimension of the school not become relegated to simply school prayers and the RE classroom (Davis, 1999). For this to happen, however, it must be recognised that these educator-coaches admitted limited self-reflection on the relationship of sport and religious faith. Although they were doing RE, the educator-coaches had not considered the religious aspect of their work comprehensively: that is, they hadn't explicitly identified and promoted their work as a form of RE. These educator-coaches, who work in a predominantly secular country like Canada (Bibby and Reid, 2016; Thiessen, 2015), require both professional preparation and continuing education to complete a more thorough integration of RE throughout the entire curriculum of the school (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, par. 52; Pope John Paul, 1979, n. 69). This more inclusive vision of RE is necessary for the flourishing of students' own integration of religious learning.

To be clear, we affirm that religious education has a dual-role: to provide learning about religion and learning in a particular religion (Moran, 1997, p. 153). These two aspects must be incorporated into the Catholic school, yet all of it cannot fall on the RE classroom teacher. Other places of formation exist in the school and must be incorporated as such. Harris' work, along with others like Moran, highlight how didache (or verbal instruction) should not be seen as the only source of RE. In reality, elements of diakonia, leiturgia and koinonia provide the basis for a more authentic and inclusive religious learning (Hoven and Kuchera, 2016).

Conclusion

It is necessary to note that these ten educator-coaches had volunteered to discuss a range of topics about sport-coaching and spirituality. They felt comfortable talking about this subject—many also noted regular attendance at Sunday services—which cannot be assumed for many educator-coaches in Catholic schools. However, this larger phenomenological study highlights the range of experiences for coaches engaging sport, religion and spirituality and arguably makes room for different forms of RE that correspond with different coaches' interests and abilities. Further, because modern sport has Protestant Christian roots (Hoffman, 2010), there is a particularly advantageous opportunity in sport that may not be as implicit elsewhere outside the RE classroom. Sport educator-coaches can offer an important contribution to the Catholic religious education of the school and support the work of educators in the RE classroom.

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