

Studying the role of the college coach as educator.
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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Miranda, without whose patience and steadfastness I would not have been able to find the strength to finish. This thesis is also dedicated to the members and alumni of the UMM cross country teams. Your thirst for learning was the spark that started the fire. Lastly I dedicate my work to my fellow coaches who work tirelessly and at great personal expense to improve the lives of their student athletes, I made this for you!

Abstract

The purpose of the current study was to gain insight into how collegiate head coaches describe and understand their role as educators. The role of educating as a facet of coaching practice is well established in research literature concerning coaching practice. Given the social context in which coaching happens, and the self-reflective nature of the development of coaching knowledge, how coaches perceive their role as educators has significant implications for how coaches interact with athletes and how they educate both the athletes and themselves. Thematic analysis of the interviews conducted for this study revealed two themes concerning how coaches understand their role as educators: the coach-athlete relationship and storytelling. The coaches in this study felt that most of their role as educators is enacted through the relationships they construct and maintain with their athletes. Storytelling emerged as an important learning tool that coaches utilize to convey messages and lessons in ways that their learners can connect with on a personal level.

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Chapter One

Introduction

On any given day a casual passerby could stop to observe one of the thousands of training and practice scenarios unfolding at our nations' colleges and universities. The scene would make perfect sense even to the uninitiated – a coach stands off to the side as team members either drill or partake in a simulated competition. The coach watches intently and blows a whistle to communicate with their team, or calls information to them as they work. A break is called for the coach to confer with the team and before calling for a resumption of work the coach offers one brief comment to an individual heading back out. On the surface this scenario is familiar and simple to comprehend, but look below the surface, a more complicated web of interactions and interventions appears. Suddenly, there are more questions than answers. At the heart of the discussion regarding how coaches teach is understanding how coaching happens and what, exactly, coaching is. The practice of coaching is comprised of many roles: recruiter, fundraiser, motivator, community leader, and teacher. Researchers and coaching practitioners have grappled with developing a comprehensive framework that accurately describes the process and phenomenon of coaching (Côté, Saimela, Trudel, Baria, & Russell, 1995; Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2006). Lack of a sound conceptual base has undercut efforts at developing coach and sport instructor educational models that adequately unite theoretical and practical elements of coaching. As a result, sports coaches at colleges and universities in the United States are facing an identity crisis: how to frame coaching practice in a way that provides clarity and accurate representation of the many roles that coaches play yet also aligns coaching practice with the fundamental aims and strategies of college and Universities. Proper reconciliation of the role of

sports coaches within the collegiate education setting is fundamental to the issue of the evolution of college sports coaching, as well as developing a model for effective coaching strategies and behaviors.

Background and Significance of the Study: Developing A Representative Model of Sports Coaching

Practitioners of sports coaching at colleges and universities in the U.S. engage in a wide array of tasks in order to satisfy the demands of their profession. Typically, the role of the coach encompasses a breadth of duties including budget management, recruitment, alumni relations, student retention and academic performance, and athlete skill development and sport education (Lyle, 2007). All of these practices can be viewed as essential components to successful coaching practice, but all of these elements are combined in coaching practice creating a complex web of interactions, demands, and hierarchies that influence coaching practice. Models of coaching practice, therefore, are developed to illustrate both the individual elements of coaching and their interconnectedness. The complexity inherent in the sports coaching profession has led to difficulties in creating or grafting a framework capable of fully describing the phenomenology of coaching practice. The literature pertaining to modeling the coaching practice can be divided into two groups: one investigating the coaching phenomenon holistically; and the other applying a reductionist approach to investigate parts of the whole (Bowes & Jones, 2006). A primary complaint of the reductionist approach is that the conceptual framework that emerges when all of the individual parts are reassembled is too mechanistic, making the coaching process seem much more simplistic and sequential than what reality suggests (Bowes & Jones, 2006). Holistic conceptualizations draw upon social theories such as complexity theory to explain coaching not as a unidirectional, static set of interactions but as a reciprocal phenomenon where

the coach and athlete engage in education as a social arrangement and learning is context-dependent (Bowes & Jones, 2006). Viewed this way, the education component of coaching practice is seen not as an established hierarchical relationship, but more as a community of practice in which athletes' progress from a traditional teacher/student relationship towards a more egalitarian model. In this model of coaching, the coach is seen not as a static figure in the development process but as a 'more knowledgeable other' in line with Vygotskian socio-constructivist theory (Potrac & Cassidy, 2006). Holistic representations of coaching, though more complex in nature and requiring broad analysis, also offer a more accurate representation of the dynamic and sometimes spontaneous nature of coaching practice. Although early studies of coaching exemplars such as the legendary John Wooden focused on the pedagogy of coaching practice, during the 1980's and 90's the study of coaching practice centered on roles like skill developer, team motivator, recruiter and leader. The role of educator amidst the panoply of other roles was pushed further and further to the back burner of coaching study. In the past two decades however efforts to reexamine coaching practice in the context of reflective practice and learning activities has been gaining momentum.

The coach as educator

It is widely accepted among researchers and practitioners that there exists a relationship between sports coaching and teaching. According to Wikeley and Bullock (2006) "there is some agreement that learning requires both acquisition of skills or knowledge and internalization of these into individual learner identities. This would appear to resonate strongly with the aims of coaching to improve athlete performance" (p. 14). Holistic representations of coaching practice acknowledge the social and cultural aspects of coaching practice and thus frame the relationship between coaching and teaching as making connections between subjects and knowledge on both

finite and abstract levels (Jones, Armour, & Potrac, 2002). However, researchers also recognize that while a relationship exists, it is fundamentally different than a traditional teacher/student dynamic. Unlike traditional education settings, coaching takes place in a setting where information passage is reciprocal in nature and where the exact role of the coach with regard to specific stake holders is constantly renegotiated. Potrac and Cassidy (2006) draw upon the Vygotskian construct of the 'more capable other' to provide a framework for understanding the social nature of the relationship between coaching and teaching. Utilizing this framework to model coaching behavior is helpful because it accounts for the socio-cultural influences on coaching behavior, the reciprocity of learning, and the dynamic nature of the relationship between teacher and student.

The Missing Perspective: Coaches

To date, much of the literature has focused on analysis of coaching behavior and successful programs in order to develop modeling frameworks that encapsulate successful coaching practice. This has produced some relatively accurate portrayals of coaching practice but these portrayals are hollow in one important regard: the voice of the coaches themselves. As coaches frequently complain that skill development oriented coach education programs are divorced from reality, so too are conceptualizations of coaching practice that do not factor in how coaches view their own practice (Nash & Sproule, 2012). This study aims to add the coach's perspective about their role as educator into the study of coaching practice and behavior.

How coaches define their roles has important implications for how they arrange and prioritize their practice. It has been demonstrated that coaches learn their practice through a mixture of formal, experiential and reflective exercises that create a roadmap for individual definitions of success (Nelson, Cushion, & Potrac, 2006). The weighting of experience and self-

reflection in the process of coach learning pre-determines that how the coach views them self will greatly affect how they orient themselves with respect to their constituents. Within the body of literature concerned with coaching roles and practice, the viewpoint of the coach is missing. This important element has the potential to not only provide insights to modeling coaching practice, but also to further understanding of the social context of coaching.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study about college sports coaches was to describe how coaches describe and understand their role as educators in order to add the coach's perspective into the modeling of coaching practice. Studying how sports coaches contextualize their profession in terms of educative practice was worthwhile because it contributes to our understanding of the field of sports coaching and it also provides new ways to think about and improve coaching preparation programs. The research question that guided the present study is: how do sports coaches at colleges and universities in the U.S. describe and understand their role as educators?

Context

The participants in this study were athletics coaches employed at NCAA Division III athletic departments at upper mid-west colleges and universities in the United States. The average number of years coaching for the participants in this study was 26 years, with a range of 20-40 years. Many sports coaches at D-III institutions have teaching credit loads in addition to their coaching appointments. Four coaches in this study had additional teaching credit requirements, while two coaches had additional duties such as assistant director of athletics, or no duties outside of their specific sports coaching duties.

Role of the Researcher

Within the context of the current study, I conducted individual, face-to-face interviews with the study participants who are also coaching colleagues. I am a head cross country coach at the NCAA Division III level of collegiate athletics. My interest in studying the role of collegiate athletic coaches as educators is both personal and professional. On a personal level, this study will help me reflect on my own practice and I hope to learn from the perspectives and insights of more senior coaches. On a professional level, I am interested in uncovering information that could be potentially useful in developing and informing coaching education platforms, on both small and large scales. I *do* believe that coaching involves a very distinct educative process and that one of the many important hats sports coaches wear is *educator*. How coaches perceive and define their practice affects how they practice coaching. Lack of recognition of the role of coaches as educators has led to development of coaching education programs in the U.S. that neglect a fundamental aspect of coach preparation. It has also led to increased autonomy of athletic departments within post-secondary institutions to the extent that athletic departments are run more as side-businesses entirely separate from the educational aims of the colleges and universities they serve.

Scope of the Study

A limitation of this study was that only head coaches at the Division III level of college athletics were included as participants. It is acknowledged that perspectives regarding the role of coaches as educators may be very different within higher divisions of collegiate sports where the focus on producing top-level competitors is greater. Additionally, this study does not address the realm of post-collegiate and professional level coaching. Again the experience of these coaches as educators may be entirely different from the coaches interviewed at the D-III level.

Summary

This chapter introduced the phenomenology of coaching and described the multi-faceted nature of the profession. Although many studies have focused on modeling the coaching process and uniting theoretical and practical elements, very few studies have shed light on how coaches themselves view and prioritize their various roles. One element of coaching practice is the use of teaching tools for a range of purposes including skill development, sport knowledge and understandings and psychological exercises. Potrac and Cassidy (2006) have suggested that Vygotsky's concept of the 'more capable other' is a useful construct for interpreting how a coach navigates the teaching process amidst the socio-cultural concerns that affect their practice. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to add to the existing body of knowledge concerning the role of collegiate sports coaches as educators. Results from this study will shed light on how coaches perceive their role as educators and how they frame their practice in the overall educative experience of the student athletes they work with. This study is important because it incorporates direct thoughts, experiences and perceptions from coaches to inform coaching models, whereas most other studies concerning the modeling of coaching behavior neglect the direct voice and experience of coaches themselves. In the chapter that follows I will delve into the literature surrounding the phenomenology, and modeling of coaching practice and will provide a theoretical framework which will be used to analyze the role of coaches as educators.

Chapter Two

Introduction

Sports coaching at the collegiate level as it is known in the U.S is a relatively young field. Although organized sport has been a major part of American college culture since the early 20th century, until relatively recent times, coaching sport at the collegiate level was something added to an already established position, such as teaching. As the profession of coaching has emerged in its own right alongside other professions within the education community, so too have efforts to model and situate coaching practice within a theoretical framework. Jones (2007) points out that despite the fact that it is widely accepted that part of the coaching role is to develop skill and influence athlete learning, aspects of teaching and the pedagogy of coaching have received little attention. The collegiate sports coach as a highly specified, semi-autonomous appointment is a position that has gained momentum over the past thirty to forty years. Tharpe and Gallimore's seminal study of legendary UCLA basketball coach John Wooden in 1976 formed the basis of subsequent studies of coaching behavior, instructional styles, coaching philosophies and theoretical underpinnings. Since then the study of the phenomenology of coaching has diverged on two important paths. The first research path to emerge in the mid-1990's was focused the praxis of coaching - examining coaching behavior in order to construct a model of coaching expertise (Saury & Durand, 1998). The second path, applies a qualitative research paradigm to the ontological and methodological study of coaching practice (Cushion, 2007). This qualitative branch of the research on coaching looks specifically at how coaching is situated in society, how the relationships between coaches and athletes, and between coaches and teams form and how these relationships are negotiated by members of the coaching environment. These two branches of coaching research are fundamentally related, and together have formed the picture of what

successful coaching looks like, how successful coaching happens, and the roles that coaches and athletes play in a successful coach-athlete relationship.

In what follows, I provide an overview of sports coaching research, briefly examining its development, as well as discussing overall findings that have informed the coaching research. Additionally, the theories researchers have drawn upon across the two branches of the research are identified and discussed. I also provide an examination of the role of the coach as an educator. The final sections of this chapter outline the definition of educator used for this study and discuss the key attributes of this definition that apply to coach's descriptions and understandings of their role as educators.

Developing a model of coaching expertise

Since the 1970's, sports programs in the United States have experienced a rapid and thorough professionalization. College sport programs have been swept up in this professionalization movement to the extent that proposals to pay college players are a consistent feature at college sport association conventions (Sheehan, 2000). A corresponding development in sport has been the professionalization of the role of sports coaches within collegiate athletic programs. In the days of Wooden and Bowerman, successful coaches typically arose from the ranks of university or college faculty. Although exceptions existed, post-secondary institutions rarely hired for coaching appointments devoid of teaching responsibilities. The more recent trend at the collegiate level has been to retract teaching loads from coaches, isolating the athletic experience from the academic objectives of the schools. As the position of collegiate sports coach has been professionalized, and thus a corresponding greater need for expert coaches, there has been notably greater emphasis on clarifying what coaching expertise is and how coaches go about becoming "experts." Research into the practice of coaching began in earnest in the late

1970's as noted above (Tharpe & Gallimore, 1976) and initially focused on pedagogical practices and aspects of sports psychology (Côté et al., 1995). Although studies of coaching expertise throughout the 70's and 80's yielded valuable information regarding the practices of highly successful coaches, these studies, like the 1976 Tharpe and Gallimore study of John Wooden, tended to focus on specific coaching exemplars and therefore, were not sufficient for developing general models of expertise in coaching. It is interesting to note that John Wooden himself clearly saw himself as a *teacher* of basketball and viewed his ability to educate, not his skill as a coach, that led to his success (Gallimore & Tharp, 2004). Yet the legacy of coaching research that started with him was to be a focus on skill development rather than pedagogy. Throughout the 1990's a number of researchers studied the concept of expert coaching on a sport-by-sport basis, which moved the field of study toward more generalizable concepts of coaching expertise.

Moving toward a definition of expertise in coaching.

Given the complex nature of coaching practice, and the variety of settings in which coaching takes place, developing a definition of expertise capable of uniting the theoretical framework, social context, and practical application of coaching is itself a complex undertaking. Researchers have approached developing a definition of coaching expertise from three separate but related avenues: studies of how coaches develop knowledge; studies that describe behaviors of top level coaches; and qualitative examinations that seek to raise a definition inductively from studying the entire process of coaching via its constituent elements (Vallée & Bloom, 2005). These research approaches are primarily built on the theoretical framework of the Coaching Model (CM) developed by Cotè, Salmela, Trudel, Baria and Russell in 1995. The basic premise of CM is that the coaching process, which consists of competition, training and organization

components, is affected by variables such as the coach's personal characteristics, the coach's level of development and the coach's mental model of athlete's potential (Côté et al., 1995). Fundamentally CM developed by Cotè et al. places the coach at the center of the process of coaching and therefore, expertise can be simplistically viewed as a direct result of the coach's superior process. In the early 2000's researchers such as John Lyle, Robyn Jones and Chris Cushion critiqued the coach-centered model, favoring instead a model that could account for the social complexity of coaching practice. Jones, Armour and Potrac, (2004) suggest that by utilizing Community of Practice Theory to describe the social environment of coaching, coaches can be seen as mentors or guides who create learning along with the learners within the sport-related community of practice. Cotè and Gilbert (2009) defined coaching expertise as "the consistent application of integrated professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge to improve athletes' competence, confidence, connection and character in specific coaching contexts" (Côté & Gilbert, 2009, p. 11). This definition of coaching expertise forged a union of the CM with Community of Practice theory, suggesting that there are three common variables that unite the conceptual frameworks and are imperative to coaching success: coaching knowledge; athletes outcomes; and coaching context (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). The present study utilized Cotè and Gilbert's (2009) definition of coaching expertise. Overall, research on coaching has shown that coaching knowledge and reflective practice are determinants of the level of expertise that coaches attain, both aspects of coaching are discussed below.

Coaching knowledge.

Jones, et al (2003) suggested that studying the knowledge bases of coaching will lend understanding to the general practice of coaching. Researchers have shown that coaching expertise is, in part, reliant on a coaches' ability to make the *right* decision for a given set of

circumstances (Nash & Collins, 2006). Thus, *what* coaches know and *how* they know it becomes vital to understanding coaching expertise (Nelson et al., 2006). Researchers have applied both inductive and deductive approaches to studying the development and application of coaching knowledge. Early examinations of coaching knowledge sought to build a framework of coaching knowledge through examination of the various types of education, interactions and experiences that coaches utilize to develop their working knowledge. Nelson, Cushion and Potrac (2006) argued that utilization of an inductive approach led to a confusion of terminology, as well as an incomplete conceptual base from which to guide further research. Nelson and colleagues suggested that utilizing widely accepted, existing conceptual frameworks such as Coombs and Ahmed's (1974) *conceptual framework of formal, non-formal and informal learning* can better guide research. Utilizing Coombs and Ahmed's framework, the sources of coaching knowledge can then be usefully classified. Formal learning takes place within large-scale certification programs or courses that have a standardized curriculum and guided outcomes. Non-formal learning is typified by seminars, clinics, and other professional development opportunities that lack a standardized core curriculum. Informal learning, through which coaches develop tacit knowledge, happens throughout a coach's career as the coach learns through experience, observation, discussion and reflection. Cotè and Gilbert (2009) adapted Collinson's (1996) model of knowledge content for expert teachers to describe the nature of knowledge involved in coaching. Using Collinson's model, Cotè and Gilbert (2009) suggested that coaching knowledge consists of professional knowledge (knowledge relating to sport specific content), interpersonal knowledge (knowledge relating to relationships with athletes and larger sport community), and intrapersonal knowledge (knowledge related to reflections, opinions and dispositions). Many researchers have pointed out that most formal coach education programs selectively develop

coaches professional knowledge; that is the coach education programs develop knowledge that is very sport-specific and pertaining to development of performance ability of athletes (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Many non-formal learning environments address the development of coaches' interpersonal knowledge, which enables coaches to communicate and empathize effectively. Largely absent from formal and non-formal coach learning settings is the prioritization and development of coaches' intrapersonal knowledge. Intrapersonal knowledge is developed through self-reflective practices and research has shown that coach reflection is a critical element in translating knowledge and experiences into skill (Gilbert & Trudel, 2001). Nash and Collin's (2006) research into how coaches develop the tacit knowledge of coaching practice has been informative to understanding how coaches translate experiences and observations gained through coaching into knowledge. Their study reinforced the idea that a great deal of coaching knowledge is developed in informal settings and is reliant on the social context of coaching. Because informal and tacit knowledge of coaching is filtered and interpreted through the consciousness of the coach, how coaches view their role has an important impact on how they arrange their priorities and therefore how they conduct their practice as coaches. Cotè and Gilbert (2009) suggested that while it is commonly assumed that coaching expertise is built on extensive professional knowledge, an integration of all forms of coaching knowledge is necessary and, in fact, expert coaches prioritize knowledge related to connecting with others and an openness to self-reflection.

Reflective practice in coaching.

In settings where experiential learning plays a large role in the development of expertise, such as coaching practice, reflection is essential for skill improvement (Cassidy, Jones, & Potrac, 2004; Gilbert & Trudel, 2006). Reflective practice as an element of coaches' development of

coaching expertise was initially observed in the seminal study of John Wooden by researchers Tharp and Gallimore in the 1970's. However, it was not until the last two decades that researchers dealt directly with how reflective practice scaffolds the learning process of coaches and the role that reflective practice plays in the translation of knowledge to skill. Gilbert and Trudel (2006) drew upon the work of D.A. Schön (1983) to provide a framework for the role of reflection in coach development. Schön suggested that reflective practitioners engage in two types of reflective practice: reflection-on-action, which is thinking back on what we have done in order to discover and draw connections between past events; reflection-in-action, which is reflection that occurs within the timeframe where it is still possible to influence an outcome (Schön, 1983). According to Schön, the repeated cycle of action, reflection and application of modified re-action is referred to as a reflective conversation. The reflective conversation is influenced by the way practitioners view their professional roles and limited by the constraints of the dilemma such as time or task goals (Gilbert & Trudel, 2001). It is important to note that within coaching practice, coaches themselves not only use reflective practice as an important method of integrating formal and informal knowledge of coaching, but it has been shown that coaches incorporate others into their reflective practice in ways that add social context to their own reflection (Gilbert & Trudel, 2006). For example, at the conclusion of a season a coach may review their training plan, personal notes and remembered observations in order to identify areas that need further development or attention. As part of their review the coach may also solicit feedback from team members, colleagues and mentors as a way to gain a more complete perspective. A coach's personal orientation towards their practice, and what they see as the purpose of their coaching affects what type of knowledge reflective practice reinforces. For the coach who identifies as an educator, reflective practice builds and reinforces interpersonal

knowledge between the coach, athlete and team and influences which type of professional knowledge the coach seeks out.

Modeling the coach/educator role

In recent decades, as coaching has diverged from explicit education aims of higher education, it has also relinquished a certain amount of clarity regarding the educative aspects of coaching practice. Wins and losses have always been a major criterion upon which coaching success has been evaluated but other aspects such as budgeting, recruiting and student athlete satisfaction have also been quantifiable measures of coaching success. More recently the role that coaches play as educators has re-emerged as an essential and fundamental aspect of the coach's role on campus. Defining the coach/athlete relationship as an educative one is certainly not a new idea to the field of coach research. Indeed, this idea emerged from the seminal studies of Coach John Wooden in the 1970's, who readily identified himself as a teacher of the sport. Defining and modeling the pedagogy of coaching, as well, as the learning environment of sports teams has been a focus of recent study and scholarship. Wikely and Bullock (2007) draw upon Garforth's (1985) definition of teaching to provide a foundation of understanding. Using this definition the coach is someone who is deliberately engaged in manipulating the environment of the athletes in order to influence, modify and improve them (Garforth, 1985). The development of coaching knowledge and the definition of coaching expertise can be pulled together, along with Garforth's definition of teaching to outline the methodology and nature of educating in which coaches engage. Coaches utilize formal and informal knowledge, along with reflective conversations to make decisions about how to manipulate the social and physical environment of their athletes and teams in order to influence, modify and improve both their athletes and themselves.

Describing the social context of coaching practice

As part of the effort by coaching researchers to define coaching expertise and to describe what expert coaching looks like in practice, several attempts have been made since the 1990's to model coaching practice. Two prevailing schools of thought developed around modeling coaching practice: reductionism (rationalism) and complexity. Within a reductionist theory, the coaching process is dissected to gain understanding of how coaches achieve success through investigation of the constituent parts. Reductionists see coaching as a logical decision making process consisting of different variables that affect the coach-athlete interface (Côté et al., 1995; Cote & Sedgwick, 2003). The hallmark of the complexity theory is a multi-dimensional and holistic view of coaching. Utilizing complexity theory to underpin a model of coaching practice produces a view of coaching as a dynamic social activity rather than a strict hierarchy of teacher and learners (Cushion, 2007). Critics of these two predominant theoretical approaches have suggested that while the reductionist/rationalist approach produces a mechanistic guide to understanding coaching, the complexity approach mires understanding in ambiguity (Cushion, 2007; Jones, Edwards, & Viotto Filho, 2016; Lyle, 2007). Recently, a third theoretical approach has emerged that embraces the common elements and organizational structures of coaching practice while acknowledging the impact of contextual and environmental factors (Jones et al., 2016; Lyle, 2007). In their 2003 study of the coaching behavior of elite Canadian rowing coaches, Cote and Sedgwick provided a visual representation of their integrative model of the coaching practice. They presented the model as a set of three concentric circles, with each level corresponding to the different natures of the interaction between coaches and athletes (Cote & Sedgwick, 2003, p. 74) . The outermost level consists of organizational tools that coaches use to set up optimal learning environments. The middle circle consists of coaching behaviors that are

associated with the pedagogy of coaching. The center circle represents the socio-cultural interactions that take place within coach athlete relationships. Cotè and Sedgwick's model is helpful because it provides a sound conceptual structure for the practice of coaching and it also provides a scaffold on which to understand the utilization and contextualization of coaching knowledge. In Cotè and Sedgwick's model, social context is integral to coaching development and coaching practice. Much of the knowledge base of expert coaches is reliant on the interactions that take place in the context of the coaching environment. The relationships that are part of coaching practice are determinants both in the expertise of the coach and the extent of coaching knowledge.

Theoretical Framework of the Present Study

Examinations of the coach's role as educator gained significant momentum in the late 1990's and early 2000's. Interest in describing and defining the role of the coach as educator grew out of a perceived necessity of relating the ever-more professionalized role of collegiate coach back to the academic settings in which coaches practice (Cassidy et al., 2004).

Additionally, efforts to describe coaching knowledge and expertise led researchers to conclude that coaches who position themselves as educators are more likely to take a holistic approach to athlete development, which encourages the growth of a positive team culture, which is essential for athlete development (Potrac & Cassidy, 2006). This study utilized a definition of educator that is built on the premise that the learner (in this case, the athlete) is the fundamental organizational unit of education (Bentley, 1998). This reorientation of the traditional recognition of schools as the fundamental organizational unit of education opens up the potential for the coach to be studied as an educator and coaching practice as an educative encounter. In the

sections that follow, I discuss the definition of educator applied in this study, as well as the key attributes of what it means to educate that are relevant for this study.

Defining the term Educator in the coaching context

In order to gain the appropriate perspective from which to view the coach as an educator, it is necessary to step back far enough so that the specificities of sport, and sport skill development fade away and the dominant activities and actions regarding coaching practice can be seen, all of which are primarily about educating. A key construct of this study is the term educator. This study drew upon the work of Garforth (1985), Bentley (1998), and Bergmann (2000) to define an educator as someone who manipulates the pedagogic setting to nurture understanding in learners, and who engages learners as independent, creative individuals capable of thinking for themselves. The term pedagogic setting was defined by Leach and Moon (1999) and within the context of coaching a pedagogic setting encompasses all interactions and individual actions that take place within the sphere of influence of the educator, and in this study specifically, the coach. Considering the sphere of influence of the coach in a pedagogic setting, the positions, interactions and actions that occur within the environment are crucial to learning (Leach & Moon, 1999). In a pedagogic setting all participants are viewed as essential elements in the learning process, therefore, both coach and athlete are essential elements in the educative role of the coach. The definition of educator given above positions the learner as having a significant stake in their education, as is seen in collegiate athletics, with athletes entering in to the coach athlete relationship with their own intrinsic rationales. The application of pedagogic setting created the framework within which coaches educate. The vast majority of coach-athlete interactions take place in live practice or competition settings and may involve social interaction with either specific or vaguely determined goals. The personal orientation and philosophy of a

coach largely determines the structure, style and number of these educative interactions; however a coach's personal philosophy provides an overall organizational structure and general set of desired outcomes for each coach-athlete interaction (Schroeder, 2010). Nurturing understanding, both of self and of subject or discipline, and engaging learners are two key attributes of an educator within the definition applied in the present study. Specifically, this study sought to gain insight into coaches' descriptions and understandings of their role as educators using the theoretical framework of Garforth (1985), Bentley (1998), and Bergmann (2000).

Nurturing understanding at the individual and team level

The concept of team culture is an essential component in identifying how coaches nurture understanding at the individual and team levels in collegiate sports teams. Coaches manipulate and influence team culture through the use of artifacts, espoused values, and basic assumptions (Schroeder, 2010). Artifacts are the tangible elements of team culture (i.e. clothing, mascots) and also include slogans, stories and traditions. Espoused values such as "no racing at practice" or "showing up on time" provide the day to day operating principles that help guide and direct team behavior. Espoused values may be deliberately highlighted by the coach either in verbal or written format, or may be discussed openly within the hierarchy of team leadership. Basic assumptions are the unwritten "rules of the road" within team structures that scaffold artifacts and espoused values. Basic assumptions of team culture educate team members as to which values and beliefs are truly important to the coach and the team. Team-held basic assumptions define what is worth paying attention to and shape how coaches and athletes associate meaning with actions. The team-held basic assumptions define how coaches, athletes, trainers and others react to situations within the team setting. Coaches utilize artifacts, espoused values and basic assumptions to manipulate the environment in which they coach. The coach identifies

dysfunctional team culture, or elements of team culture, and creates and espouses a vision for the cultural elements they desire. Coaches manipulate the team environment with teams and individuals through modeling behaviors and well as more subtle cues such as what they pay attention or draw attention to, and their decisions regarding what things to measure and control. Team culture is important as an organizational framework that provides both coaches and athletes with information on how they are expected to act, how relationships will be arranged, what level of involvement is to be expected from participants, and what content will be considered relevant instructional content. To coaches, team culture is an extremely useful tool that can be manipulated to expedite and enhance the learning process. Team culture not only provides the scaffold that guides the education, but in many cases team culture can be part of the education itself. Operating within the boundaries of team culture, coaches utilize tools such as stories, modeling behavior, numeric data, and reflective conversation to craft and nurture understandings among individual athletes and teams. Due to the fluidity and ‘live’ nature of these interactions, coaches are constantly drawing upon their own tacit knowledge of coaching to make accurate, in-the-moment, appraisals regarding which type of tool is necessary for a given situation, thus coaches have been called ‘masters of the instantaneous response’ (Lauder, 1993, p. 2; Nash & Collins, 2006). Nurturing understandings is also dependent on the methods that coaches use to engage learners. The practical methods that coaches utilize as part of their educative process are an important part of the overall theoretical framework concerning the educative role of coaches.

How coaches teach

Coaches engage in a wide array of educational methods in order to foster growth and progress within the teams and individual athletes whom they interact with. In some instances a

coach may engage in very deliberate instructive activities aimed at increasing sport specific understanding within a narrow focus. At other times a coach's instructional method may involve modeling of certain behaviors or espousing certain values aimed at cultivating a desired aspect of team culture. Studies show that the specific educational methods that coaches employ are driven both by the team and the coach (Cote & Sedgwick, 2003; Gilbert & Trudel, 2001; Lee, Chow, Komar, Tan, & Button, 2014). At a fundamental level the educative role of a coach is about producing athletes and teams that are physically and mentally capable of success in their sport. In pursuit of this aim coaches must address the development of both sports skills and life skills in order to educate athletes and teams holistically. Using perspectives and descriptions of athletes who had worked with expert coaches Becker (2009) showed that developing a personal relationship with each athlete is a crucial step for coaches because it provides opportunities for the coach to individualize their educational approach to the athlete, but it also enables the coach to prioritize what content and delivery method are most needed by the athlete (Becker, 2009). Personal relationships undergird the entire coach athlete experience and their impact on the success of the athlete, the coach and the team cannot be overstated. As educators, coaches work in a unique setting with their athletes. At the college level, it is common for coaches to work with athletes for multiple hours every day of the week. The daily interactions between coach and athlete, coupled with additional meeting times, extra hours spent together during competitions and travel means that collegiate coaches are likely to spend more time with the athletes on their teams than any other single person on the college campus. Although not true of every coach athlete relationship, in many cases the establishment and growth of the coach athlete relationship forms the basis for a shared leadership approach to involving athletes in various facets of their development (Jones & Standage, 2006).

The educative methods that coaches utilize to foster growth and progress in student-athletes include role modeling of ideal behaviors, demonstration of task performance, reflection using the full range of sensory cues, and empowering athletes through trust, belief, shared values, and inclusion in decision making. Because there is no standardized approach to coaching a college sports team, collegiate coaches generate their educational approach based on personal preference, alignment with personality type, beliefs, and co-construction of ideas with peers and mentors (Cassidy et al., 2004). It is also important to note that while the athlete and the team remain the main focus of a coach's educative practice, the coach themselves should also be considered a member of the learning community (Penney, 2006). Coaches are incessantly seeking to improve their own practice through conscious and subconscious development of tacit knowledge. The coach is actively seeking new knowledge from their athletes as well as their own reflective conversations (Gilbert & Trudel, 2006; Nash & Collins, 2006). Positioning coaches as both teacher and learner is germane to the study of how coaches educate because it acknowledges the reciprocal nature of teaching and learning within the sport environment.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of how coaching knowledge is developed and also provided a definition of coaching expertise. Understanding what expert coaching looks like, as well as how that expertise is developed in coaches is essential to modeling coaching behavior. This chapter also discussed the role that coaches play as educators alongside their many other roles. The role of the coach as educator is not a novel one in coaching research, however most examinations and discussions of this role have not involved the voice of the coach. The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the role that coaches play as educators from the descriptions and understandings of coaches themselves. Coaches own descriptions and understandings of

their role as educators will provide insight and understanding about how coaches operate as educators, and what it means to them to educate within the context of coaching. This study utilizes a definition of educator that accounts for the social and interpersonal context in which coaching happens. The definition of educator used in this study also positions the coach as a guide to the educative process ultimately enabling their athletes to operate as independent stakeholders in their own development. The following chapter will describe the phenomenological research design used for this study and will outline the context and methods of analysis used.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The purpose of the present study was to gain insight into how coaches describe and understand their roles as educators. In what follows, I first discuss the phenomenological research design adopted for this study, and then describe the participants of the study. Next, I discuss the creation of the interview questions and the data collection and analysis methods I applied in the study.

Research Design

Qualitative research focuses on “exploring and understanding the meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2014, p. 31). I adopted a phenomenological design for my study. Phenomenological approaches concentrate on studying objects of direct experience, in this case the direct experience of coaches as educators. The reason I chose a phenomenological research design was that I wanted to examine the experience of coaches within the context of their role as educators, utilizing their own descriptions,

understandings, experiences and perceptions. I am a coach myself and therefore, have a personal connection to this study and to the experience of coaches. My own experiences working and being educated as a coach at the college level have helped me see the importance of recognizing that coaches *are* educators and therefore, a better understanding of this role is needed.

Context of the Study and Participants

The interviews for this study were conducted at three four-year, NCAA D-III liberal arts colleges. The campuses are all located in the upper midwest United States in rural or semi-urban areas. The campuses are all comparable in size with student populations ranging in size from 1,500 to 2,100 students. Two of the schools are private universities, while the third is a public university. Each of the participants were initially identified through personal connection I have as a colleague. The sample included current head collegiate coaches who had a minimum of 10 years coaching experience at the college level. The coaches who participated in this study represented coaching experience from three sports backgrounds: women's basketball; men's and women's cross country; and men's and women's track and field. All participants were individually emailed, asking them to voluntarily participate in the study on understanding and describing the role of coaches as educators. Interviews were conducted in-person at the location where each participant works.

Data Gathering and Analysis

For this study, data were collected through five individual, in-person, semi-structured interviews with the researcher. The interviews took place on the campus of the research participants in their offices in order to make participation as convenient as possible for the participants. The interviews lasted approximately ninety minutes including a review of the consent form, and a brief description of the background and purpose of the study. A semi-

structured interview format was chosen for this study in order to provide some flexibility and fluidity to the conversations with the participants. The main purpose of the interviews was to encourage the participating coaches to describe how they view their role as educators and what that role means to them. In this study, the interview protocol served as a guide to encourage participants to offer rich descriptions and make thoughtful connections among the question topics and their practice. The interviews were audio recorded for transcription and analysis, and stored via a cloud-based account as to protect the privacy of the participants.

The interview questions were centered on describing and understanding the coach's role as an educator. Participants were asked to describe their role as educator in terms of what subject were important to them to teach, specific practices they employ to educate at the group and individual level, and what the role of educator means to them in the context of coaching practice. The topics and sequencing of the interview questions were chosen to encourage participants to connect their broad experiences within coaching practice to their specific roles as educators.

Thematic analysis methods were adopted for data analysis. Thematic analysis involved identifying patterns within the interviews that are important to describing the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2014). Thematic analysis is an analytical process that involves the researcher in examining the contextualization of language used, comparing and contrasting views presented in the interviews and with the literature reviewed, identifying missing or voided terminology or descriptors, and examining the ways in which participants draw connections topically (cite source). Once data were collected, the first tier of analysis was to listen thoroughly to each of the five interviews. The initial review of the audio data was focused on cataloguing general topics within each respective interview, noted by speech markers such as repetition and redundancy, emphasis and enthusiasm, and the duration of time spent. The 2nd tier of analysis involved coding

the topics into categories within each interview. Once coding each interview was complete the next tier of analysis was to identify patterns among the topics across the five interviews. The final tier of analysis focused on identifying emergent themes across the interviews.

Summary

This study adopted a phenomenological research approach to investigate collegiate head coach's experiences and roles as educators. The researcher conducted in-person, semi-structured interviews with current head coaches who have at least ten years of experience as head coaches at the college level. Once the interviews were concluded, thematic analysis was undertaken to identify themes that emerged in the analysis of data. In the following chapter, I present the results of the thematic analysis and discuss the themes that emerged describing the ways in which the participating head coaches experience their roles as educators.

Chapter Four

Results and Discussion

In this chapter I discuss the results of the thematic analysis conducted of the five semi-structured interviews. Analysis of the interviews revealed the emergence of two main themes in coach's descriptions and understandings of their roles as educators: the primacy of the coach athlete relationship; and the use of storytelling as an educative practice. The first section of this chapter will discuss these themes. The chapter will conclude with a section that discusses the themes in relation to the research question.

Results

The coaches who participated in this study are all collegiate head coaches with at least ten years of head coaching experience. Each of the participants has spent at least ten years coaching at a single institution and have multiple contractual roles that they fulfill on their respective campuses; four have additional teaching credit loads and three have additional administrative responsibilities. In spite of the complex arrangement of their official appointments, all of the coaches who participated in this study held the coaching of student-athletes to be their primary responsibility and all expressed a willingness to put the needs of the student athletes above all other professional, and at times personal, responsibilities. To use the words of one participant, these coaches feel that their position as a coach is a vocation, which all expressed a feeling of being called to do. The ability to connect with young men and women and “*make an impact*” was universally expressed by all participants as the underlying purpose behind their desire to coach. All of the coaches interviewed for this study related past experiences with who they believed to be expert coaches. These individuals inspired or encouraged the coaches to enter the coaching profession and also scaffolded their developmental process by providing a

framework for what expert coaching looked like. Some of the chief attributes that these coaches resonated with were approachability, genuineness, relatability, honesty and a willingness to make the athlete a stake-holder in their own development. The interviews conducted with each participant provided a very candid, in-depth look at the motives of these college coaches and also highlighted some of the practical ways they educate and guide the student-athletes they work with.

In the beginning of the present study I shaped the theoretical framework around a definition of educator as someone who manipulates an environment to encourage growth and progress within learners (Bentley, 1998; Drewe, 2012; Garforth, 1985). Although the interviews supported this definition, they also emphasized how coaches manipulate environments on an individual level through their interpersonal interactions with student athletes. These interviews showed that much of the social structure that coaches operate within is created and maintained at the individual level. This echoes the findings of Becker (2009) whose findings showed that the overall team environment was a product of a coach's accessibility and approachability to the athletes at an individual level (Becker, 2009).

The coaches who participated in this study were eager to share their experiences, beliefs and understandings. Their answers to the interview questions provide a nuanced view of what it means to educate as a coach and what they believe to be the real impact of good coaching on a student-athlete's life. Throughout the interviews the coach-athlete relationship emerged as a consistent theme. The nature and quality of the coach-athlete relationship was important to all of the coaches interviewed for this study and provided the foundation and setting for the coaches to engage in educative practices.

The coach athlete relationship

The relationship between a sports coach and an athlete forms the cornerstone of the athletic experience, not only for athletes, but for coaches as well. The nature of coach-athlete relationships, like teacher-student relationships is very important to effective learning outcomes for both athletes and coaches (Frymier & Houser, 2000). All of the coaches who participated in this study emphasized the importance of building strong relationships with the student-athletes on the sports teams they coach. For the coaches who participated in this study, the effectiveness and content of their coaching and teaching relies upon their ability to relate and connect on a personal level with student-athletes. The sheer amount of time that collegiate sports coaches spend with and among the athletes on the teams they coach, along with interactions that are an inherent part of sports skill development almost ensures that over time athletes and coaches will develop extensive shared knowledge of one another. When the participants in this study were asked to describe their work as a collegiate head coach, all of them struggled to give a clear and concise description, but they all painted the same picture of busy days spent in conversation with athletes; the revolving office door through which athletes walked at all times of the day to seek counsel, ask advice, troubleshoot, share ideas, collaborate on projects, and grasp an image of a bigger picture. One coach ventured to say that *“coaching is not so much about being a great coach of your event, so much of coaching is relationships.”* To the coaches interviewed for this study, establishing great relationships with the athletes on their teams was more important than developing the athletes into great players. Interestingly, given the obvious importance these coaches placed on individual relationships, only one coach deliberately arranged one-on-one meetings with the athletes on their teams. The remaining four coaches allowed the relationship to build (or not) on its own without any overt prompting. In spite of the difference of opinion on

how to go about establishing a relationship with the student-athletes, the coaches were all in agreement on what could be gained from the establishment of a personal relationship. The coaches' expected outcome and primary reason for establishing a relationship was so that each and every athlete on their team felt valued and cared-for. One coach conveyed this by saying: *"players need to feel that their thoughts and ideas are valued. It's important to tell them things like 'I love you and I want you to be successful.'" These findings echo Becker's (2009) work which studied athlete's perceptions and descriptions of expert coaching. The athletes in this study described expert coaches as ensuring that they felt valued and cared for and that expert coaches sought a collaborative relationship with them (Becker, 2009).*

The development of a coach-athlete relationship may be, in part, a natural outcome of spending a significant amount of time in each other's company, but coaches are very deliberate in how they cultivate and utilize this relationship. The elements of team culture are largely created at this individual level between the coach and athlete. All of the coaches who participated in this study are consummate story tellers and insisted that story telling is a highly valuable method of espousing the values and beliefs they hold to be essential to personal development. Story telling often comes in the form of relatable 'parables' that assist the coach in making a point to a study athlete. These might be lessons the coach has learned personally or, more often, they are stories drawn from the collective memory of the team. This method of instruction is powerful because it not only reinforces the espoused beliefs and values of the coach and the team, but it often involves an emotional response thus enabling the lesson to strike a deep chord in the athlete. Additionally, the coach-athlete relationship is an important signal to the athletes as to what level of involvement is expected by the coach. The coaches in this study all expressed a desire to share leadership with their athletes and to be collaborators with them rather than

dictating every facet of development. Jones and Standage (2006) have described the ideal coach athlete relationship as being one of shared leadership, where the coach is still the primary decision maker but the athlete is empowered to join in decision-making whenever feasible (Jones & Standage, 2006). By sharing leadership with their athletes, the coach places, themselves in a position of vulnerability, inviting the athletes to observe the coach closely on both a personal and professional level. Coaches in this study felt that it was important for the athletes to observe them living their own lives because role modeling goes beyond the sport environment. By closely observing the coach's habits, lifestyle, reactions and patterns the athletes learn important things about how to operate as individuals, and as team mates. One coach related how he accidentally missed a day of practice because he misread a class schedule. Throughout the day he was being called by athletes and his assistant coaches, "*apparently if I'm not at practice, I'm dead!*"

Another deliberate use of the coach-athlete relationship is the reciprocal learning that it enables. As one coach said "*coaching knowledge is experiential, you learn from their experiences too*". The coach-athlete relationship forms an essential piece of the coach's own professional development, and the coaches utilize the relationship to learn from their athletes even as they use it as a platform from which to teach them. Wikely and Bullock (2006) developed an adapted version of Kolb's Learning Cycle in which the coach's learning cycle is broken into four categories: planning, experimenting or practice, experience, and reflection (Wikeley & Bullock, 2006). All of the coaches in this study noted that reflection played an ever-increasing role in their own development as a coach, and this affected how they taught. The coaches noted that as they grew and developed as coaches they had an increasing tendency to engage in reflective practice with the athletes on their team, often for the purpose of helping the

athlete change their perspective or develop solutions, but also to process their own thoughts and recollections. The interviews for this study revealed that coaches utilize the relationships with their athletes to enhance their own learning cycle by incorporating the experiences and reflections of the athletes they work with. The coaches who participated in this study felt that reflection with their athletes helped them and the athletes translate coaching knowledge into something that the athletes could internalize and use on a practical level. Part of the reflection and educating that happens within the context of the coach-athlete relationship is delivered in the form of stories. Mello (2001) described storytelling as an important learning tool that creates links between knowledge and experience and also works to deepen the sense of connectedness between the learner and subject (Mello, 2001).

Storytelling

In this study, the use of storytelling as an educative practice emerged as a major theme. Storytelling has not been extensively studied as a feature of coaching practice, however, as a learning tool within formal education settings it has received substantial attention (Reissner, 2008). Although not all of the coaches directly identified storytelling as a teaching method, all of the coaches wove stories into their descriptions and expressed their understanding through the recounting of experiences and events. The coaches who directly addressed how they use storytelling in their practice described storytelling as a vehicle for getting lessons across or as a tool for building relationships with athletes.

The story is a powerful tool in the coach's educative repertoire. Many coaches are natural story tellers, and after decades coaching, most coaches have a story for every situation. Throughout the interviews conducted for this study, the coaches were constantly telling stories, sometimes to illustrate a point, other times to provide context to an answer, and yet other times

to relate a personal connection with the topic or add emotion to a discussion. Storytelling has been used as a learning tool since the distant past and, as Mello (2001) suggests, it has been legitimized in education research as an important information medium (Andrews, Hull, & Donahue, 2009; Mello, 2001). Storytelling enabled the coaches to establish rapport with their athletes; it provided a medium through which values and beliefs can be shown rather than merely mentioned, and it contextualized information. One coach related a story both he and the athletes on his team have passed down through generations of team members about a moment in which he showed uncharacteristic emotion in chastising members of the team for taking juice boxes out of other team mate's lunches. The story is one he and the athletes re-tell because it conveyed a strong personal belief of his, that team members should care for each other, and the story is so memorable and effective that even though it happened over a decade ago this coach says "*the new guys tell it like they were on the bus!*" The re-telling of this story was an example of how and why coaches use storytelling to teach lessons about beliefs and values. As shown through studies of the use of storytelling in formal education settings, stories provide illustrations and emotions that enable information to penetrate at a deeper level in the learners (Reissner, 2008). Stories also play an important role in initializing and deepening the coach-athlete relationship. Stories help make the coach relatable to the athletes, they convey a coach's passion for a subject and they draw the coach and athlete together on a plane of shared experience. Stories also serve an evidentiary role in how coaches teach. The coaches who participated in this study often make claims and follow them up immediately with an anecdote intended to validate and emphasize the claim. In describing the differences between the styles of two coaches with which he had experience, one participant shared a story about his personal interactions that seemed to 'prove' his description. Reissner (2008) suggested that the way in which coaches use stories to illustrate

and emphasize points is a form of “narrative knowing” that helps the coach make sense of and draw connections between experiences and observations (Reissner, 2008). In these cases the story creates a space in which the coach may offer an interpretation and the listener can respond to it either positively or negatively without engaging the coach on a personal level. Even though stories may contain very personal elements to the teller, the story itself is like a buffer zone where agreements and disagreements may be aired safely.

The coaches who participated in this study were all experienced storytellers. Their stories were often humorous, occasionally tearful, and always engaging. The coaches’ ability to tell stories was well-honed and they had clearly become very accustomed to using this as a method of connecting with their audience to convey specific messages.

Discussion

This study focused on discerning coaches’ descriptions and understandings of their role as educators. It is worth noting that all of the coaches involved in this study stressed the individualized, personal nature of their instruction. In fact, none of the participating coaches spoke about their deliberate acts of teaching such as instructing athletes on how to set up a screen, or how to run the curve in a sprint race. The coaches chose to focus on how they create and maintain a personal connection with team members, and how they convey their personal beliefs and values through their coaching practice. To these coaches the relationships they shared with their athletes were the real sphere in which educating takes place. Wikely and Bullock (2006) claimed that the success of the educational aims of the coach, even skill development exercises, depend on the relationship between the coach and the athlete. Based off their answers, the coaches in this study were in agreement with that claim. Development and cultivation of the coach athlete relationship is important to coaches not only because it enables them to coach their

athletes more holistically, but because it also affords them a potential learning source for their own development. The coach-athlete relationship also provides context and meaning to the stories that coaches tell. A coach telling a story about the time he blew up at his athlete for stealing juice from their team mates is impactful precisely because the athletes know that coach well enough to judge how uncharacteristic that expression was. The athletes are therefore able to derive meaning because of their shared relationship with the coach.

This study defined an educator as someone who manipulates a pedagogic setting to nurture understanding in learners, and who engages learners as independent, creative individuals capable of thinking for themselves. The results of this study show that coaches, at the Division III level of collegiate athletics, are engaging the athletes on their teams as creative individuals. They develop relationships with these athletes and tell stories to inspire creativity and independent thought. These results challenge rationalistic models of coaching practice because much of the educating that these coaches do is not part of a deliberate, planned exercise. Instead the content and structure of their teaching is determined and guided by their relationship with their athletes. These findings support the work of Jones et al (2006) which assert the social nature of coaching pedagogy (Jones, 2006).

Summary

Thematic analysis of the interviews revealed two main themes concerning how coaches describe and understand their role as educators: coaches see their teaching as being relationally based, and coaches use storytelling as a major method of instruction. Rather than focusing on deliberate instruction, coaches more often allow their teaching to occur naturally within the coach-athlete relationship and they use stories as a teaching method because of the powerful personal and emotional connections they enable. The final chapter will discuss the findings and

insights of this study within the general landscape of coaching research and will discuss the education implications of this study as well as recommendations for future research into coaching practice.

Chapter Five Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine collegiate coaches' descriptions and understandings of their role as educators. It is widely accepted in coaching literature that coaches do educate, however, most studies examining the educative roles of coaches have studied this role using methodologies that focus on observing behaviors of coaching exemplars. Missing from the body of research concerning the educative role of coaches is the understandings and descriptions of the coaches themselves. The viewpoint of the coaches themselves was necessary because it provided an internal viewpoint to understanding how coaching happens and how the coaches themselves perceive their roles. As the coaches in this study all agreed, much of the collegiate coaching profession is hidden from view or misunderstood by those outside the profession. Utilizing the viewpoint of coaches provides clarity and insight from a source that has intimate knowledge of the coaching profession.

Educational Implications

The coaches who participated in this study all spoke of the importance of one-on-one interaction with the athletes on their teams. To these coaches the skills they most valued within themselves were skills related to helping them make a stronger connection with their athletes, such as listening, reflecting, processing ideas and experiences, and translating their own knowledge and experiences into something the athletes could use and internalize. One coach related how his wife had taught him how to conduct a motivational interview and he felt that this, more than any previous knowledge or skill development, had made him a better coach. Given the interpersonal nature of the educative role of coaches, and the finding that over time coaches place more and more emphasis on developing their own interpersonal skills, an implication of

this study is that there appears to be a growing need for coaches to be educated and prepared in ways that assist them in developing reflective practice skills, relationship skills, and informal teaching methods. The coaches in this study all indicated a dissatisfaction with the professional development opportunities in their profession, which focus primarily on the coach as a sports specific skill developer. This echoes the findings of Nash and Sproule (2012) who found that coaches desire opportunities to develop interpersonal and pedagogical skills (Nash & Sproule, 2012). Current coach education programs that focus primarily on sport-specific skill development are missing the bigger picture of what sports coaches do in reality.

The coaches who participated in this study described their days as being full of personal interactions, relationship development, and helping athletes solve a very wide range of problems, only a minor fraction of which relate to their athletic ability and performance. The coaches in this study described a significant aspect of their relationships with athletes as specifically educative. That relationship is often couched as a mentoring relationship and learning “life lessons” but these coaches talked about it as the context through which they teach and learn. Although the popular conception of college coaches may involve a coach delivering a pep talk to the entire team, to these coaches the real impact of coaching happens at the individual level outside of formal practice settings. This study showed that alongside their sport specific knowledge, coaches should also be developing a skill set that enables them to relate to people, listen well and help guide student-athletes to find their own answers.

This study highlighted how some coaches utilize storytelling as an important instructional method. The coaches in this study utilized stories often in order to emphasize a point, add validity to a claim or to generate an emotional response. Storytelling has been shown to be an effective means of conveying information and enriching formal education. Given the attention

that storytelling has received in research in formal education settings another implication of this study was that the use of storytelling may be a cornerstone of the educative process of coaches and should therefore play a more prominent role in research focused on describing coaching behaviors and modeling the coaching process.

Recommendations for Future Research

As mentioned throughout this study, the nature of coaching at the collegiate level is changing at a rapid pace. Understandings of what it takes to be successful as a college coach and how coaches go about developing skills that will enable success are critical to the development of coaches. This study provided a small glimpse into how five head coaches at the D-III level of collegiate athletics perceive and understand their role as educators. To build on the findings of this study future research could involve coaches from a variety of collegiate coaching contexts. Including perceptions and understandings from coaches of all sports background and across all divisions will provide insight into the differences and similarities that may exist within the landscape of the collegiate coaching profession. Additionally given the rapid pace of change within the collegiate coaching profession future research focused on the changing climate of coaching may offer insight into how the changes to the coaching profession are shaping coaches understandings of their role as educators.

One key insight of this study was the role that storytelling plays in the educative process of coaches. Storytelling as an instructional method has been well-researched in formal education settings but has not received similar attention in coaching settings. Future research should examine focus on the stories that coaches tell. The content of these stories may enrich our understanding of the lessons, values and beliefs that coaches feel are important to pass on to

athlete learners. Also further research may reveal how coaches decide which stories to tell and when to tell them as well as the outcomes they anticipate from the storytelling episodes.

Given the insights of this study and others like it, that have shown how coaches enact their role as educators within and through coach athlete relationships, storytelling and other informal educative methods, coaching preparation programs might consider including discussion of these tactics. This would encourage beginning coaches to look beyond the development of their sport specific knowledge.

Limitations

There were three major limitations to this study: only NCAA D-III head coaches were interviewed, all of the participating coaches were male, and only three sports were represented. Gathering descriptions and understandings from male and female head college coaches across divisions, with more sports represented would enable a more complete analysis to be made of college coaches' understandings of their role as educators. It is very likely that NCAA D-I head coaches view their roles differently than D-III coaches. Also likely is that a head football coach, who only works with their athletes for one season per year would see their role differently than a cross country coach who may work with their athletes nearly all year round.

Summary

All of the coaches involved in this study emphasized the importance of making a positive impact in the lives of the athletes they coach. One coach described the coaching profession as a *vocation* and all of the coaches related feelings of being called, or led into sports coaching. Having the sense that they were meant to coach is a powerful intrinsic motivating force for these coaches. As this study and others have shown coaches are consummate reflective practitioners who can showcase deep understandings of how and why they do what they do. Coaches utilize

reflective practice from their own experiences and observations to build and develop their knowledge bases but they also seek out and benefit from the reflective practice of other coaching peers. This is why studies that involve perceptions and understandings of the coaches themselves are so important. Coaching is complex and at times, abstract and confusing. Coaches understand their work like no other party. As all of the coaches in this study said at many points *you get it, because you're a coach too*. Incorporating the perceptions and understandings of coaches themselves helps translate the apparent complexity into something that appears rational.

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Appendices

Appendix I

IRB Approval Letter or Email

Appendix II

Interview Script

Warm-Up Questions:

Tell me about how you came to be a college coach

(Prompt) what influences (people, events, circumstances) shaped your path?

(prompt) share about an experience that encouraged you to pursue coaching.

For you, what are the essential elements of successful coaching?

#1 How would you describe your role as a collegiate coach to someone outside of coaching?

#2 Does the role of educator have an important role for you as a collegiate coach?

#3: How do you approach assessing and cultivating skill level, motivation and understanding of your sport among your student athletes?

(follow-up) Presumably not everyone on your team has the same athletic abilities, level of motivation or understanding of the sport, tell me about how you approach these differences as an educator.

#4 In your thinking, what distinguishes a coach from a coach/educator?

Probe – Is there a difference in how the coach educator approaches working with athletes?

#5: How does working with student athletes overtime influence your role as their coach?

#6 Do you find coaching in a collegiate institution influences your coaching practice? In what ways?

#7: As a coach, how do you hone and improve your coaching and educating of student-athletes?