

Exploring the Role of the Coach in Fostering Positive Youth Development  
Within an Elite Sport Context

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## Abstract

Youth sport is considered an ideal context to foster positive youth development (PYD) through an asset-building approach (Holt et al., 2017; Larson, 2000), yet researchers have questioned whether the pursuit of performance success within elite youth sport may hinder the pursuit of PYD (e.g., Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015). Given extensive research underlining the important role of coaches in fostering PYD through sport (Holt et al., 2017 for review), research is needed to understand the experiences of elite youth sport coaches facilitating PYD within a performance-oriented environment (Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015). Guided by Holt and colleagues' (2017) model of PYD through sport, the purpose of this dissertation was to examine the role of the coach in fostering PYD within an elite youth sport context. In manuscript one (Chapter two), I drew upon autoethnographic research methods (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) to explore my experience coaching a Canadian elite minor hockey team, using a PYD approach to foster personal development and performance success. In manuscript two (Chapter three) I used similar methodologies to examine my interactions with parents, and how these potentially fostered athlete PYD. Manuscript three (Chapter four) explored coaches' pursuit of PYD within elite youth sport more broadly through ethnographic research methods (Patton, 2005), as I acted as an assistant coach to four purposefully sampled teams for the duration of one season. Manuscript four (Chapter five) examined the content of Hockey Canada's (2016) High Performance 1 coach education manual with specific attention to interpersonal coaching approaches that facilitate PYD. Findings of manuscripts one and three show that elite youth sport coaches were able to foster a PYD climate within a performance-oriented environment; however I/they experienced challenges and underlying tensions in doing so within a performance-oriented environment. Manuscript two highlighted the tensions of the coach-parent relationship within

elite youth sport and offered plausible explanations for contentious coach-parent interactions. In addition, I share insights that may help other coaches effectively work with parents based on my lessons learned over a three-year period. The findings from manuscript four highlight that the High Performance 1 manual was primarily dedicated to professional knowledge (46%) but that 21% was dedicated to interpersonal knowledge; however, the manual did not directly reference or explain any of the primary research-based interpersonal coaching approaches. Together, all four manuscripts raise questions regarding the overall sport structure of AAA minor hockey in Canada, given the constant tension for coaches striving to attain performance success while balancing the goal of athletes' PYD. To conclude, I share overall insights regarding my experiences; these may evoke other elite youth coaches to reflect on their coaching experiences and practices regarding fostering PYD through sport. Findings are further discussed in terms of contributions to the PYD literature, and future research directions.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

Positive youth development (PYD) utilizes an ‘asset-building’ approach to development, which focuses on fostering meaningful youth experiences and developing youth’s psychosocial competencies (Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray, & Foster, 1998). These competencies are often conceptualized by the ‘5Cs’ model, which includes: competence (i.e., positive view one’s abilities in a specific domain), confidence (i.e., overall positive sense of self-worth), connection (i.e., positive bi-directional interactions with people), character (i.e., respect, moral judgement, and integrity), and caring (empathy for others) (Lerner, 2004; Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005). This approach is a growing alternative to the traditional ‘deficit reduction’ approach that focuses on minimizing or eliminating undesirable behaviours (i.e., violence, drugs/alcohol consumption) (Larson, 2000). Furthermore, the PYD approach is designed to develop life skills in youth, and create fully functioning adults, who contribute to themselves, their family, school, community, and civil society, referred to as the sixth C: contribution (Lerner, Lerner, Bowers, & Geldhof, 2015). Notably, Lerner (2004) identified that effective PYD programmes provide the ‘Big Three’ components of: (a) meaningful adult-youth relationships, (b) life skill development activities, and (c) opportunities for youth to take leadership roles.

Youth sport is considered an ideal context to teach life skills and foster the aforementioned PYD outcomes (Larson, 2000); however, research has found that merely participating in youth sport does not ensure the development of these outcomes (Coakley, 2011; Danish, Forneris, Hodge, & Heke, 2004; Gould & Carson, 2008; Martinek, Schilling, & Johnson, 2001). Instead, Holt and colleagues’ (2017) review of PYD in sport highlights the importance of the PYD environment and the role that a coach plays in facilitating PYD within youth sport.

Given the importance of fostering “fully prepared” (Pittman, 2001) citizens and equipping youth with appropriate life skills, this dissertation focuses on the study of PYD within youth sport with a particular interest in the role of the coach.

Extensive research has underlined the important role of youth sport coaches in facilitating PYD (see Holt et al., 2007 for a review). Youth sport coaches can foster PYD outcomes by building meaningful relationships with athletes, teaching life skills, and creating a positive learning environment (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005; Gould & Carson, 2008; Holt et al., 2017). For example, research has highlighted that meaningful relationships can be formed between athletes and coaches, to the extent that athletes will even perceive their coaches as parental figures (Camiré, Trudel, & Bernard, 2013). Research has also found that coaches can explicitly teach life skills by modeling desired behaviours (such as respect and emotional control), taking advantage of teachable moments, providing leadership opportunities, and setting high standards and holding athletes accountable (Camiré, Trudel, & Forneris, 2012; Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2007). With regard to optimal learning environments, research has found that coaches who focus on athletes’ attitude, level of effort, and development create learning environments that encourage athletes to make mistakes, to work hard, ask questions and learn new skills (Smith, Smoll & Cummings, 2007).

One of the major challenges faced within PYD literature is promoting PYD while meeting the demands of the performance-oriented environment of elite youth sport (Fraser-Thomas, Beesley, Dickler, Harlow, Mosher, Preston, & Wolman, 2017; Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015). These concerns are epitomized by research that has reported numerous negative outcomes associated with elite youth sport participation which are counter to PYD, such as athletes who feel isolated, fear mistakes, experience burnout, lack emotional control, and develop

eating disorders, overuse injuries and instable identities (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Gould, Tuffey, Udry, & Loehr, 1996; Scanlan, Babkes, & Scanlan, 2005; Smith, 1983; Tamminen, Holt, & Neely, 2013). Furthermore, coaches may also play a role in contributing to negative sport experiences. Research has found that some elite youth coaches belittle and humiliate athletes in front of their peers, reject and neglect athletes who underperform, and use threats and intimidation tactics to try to motivate athletes (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Gervis & Dunn, 2004).

There are numerous recommended coaching approaches to help coaches foster PYD while pursuing performance success. These include: mastery approach to coaching (Smith et al., 2007), autonomy-supportive behaviours (Magéau & Vallerand, 2003), and transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Each of these approaches will be discussed in the subsequent sections; however, no research has explored how elite youth sport coaches can navigate the tensions between PYD and performance success (Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015). As such, this dissertation examined the role of the coach in fostering PYD within the elite youth sport context. Specifically this dissertation was guided by the following research objectives:

1. Explore an elite youth sport coach's experiences attempting to facilitate players' personal development and the team's performance success with a PYD approach.
2. Examine the coach-parent relationship in relation to athletes' PYD, through the perspective of an elite youth ice hockey coach.
3. Explore how 'model' coaches facilitate PYD in an elite youth sport context and identify potential challenges.
4. Examine the content of one elite youth sport coach education manual, with specific attention to underpinnings of interpersonal coaching approaches that facilitate PYD.

## **Literature Review**

The overall purpose of this dissertation was to examine the role of the coach in fostering PYD within the elite youth sport context. In this section of the dissertation I provide an overview of key bodies of the literature that shaped the framing of this research. This overview is divided into the following sub-sections: (a) PYD through youth sport, (b) PYD in elite youth sport, (c) the role of the coach, (d) interpersonal coaching approaches, (e) the role of parents and the coach-parent relationship, and (f) PYD and coach education.

### **PYD through Youth Sport**

While interest in PYD through youth sport continues to grow, researchers have created several models and frameworks to further guide our understanding. Fraser-Thomas, Côté, and Deakin (2005) proposed one of the first integrated models of PYD through sport. Foremost, they encourage policy-makers, sport organizations, coaches, and parents to design sport programmes based on the eight setting features proposed to facilitate PYD by the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (NRCIM, 2002). Specifically, the eight setting features advise youth sport programmes to: (a) provide physical and psychological safety; (b) set age-appropriate sport structures, rules and expectations; (c) foster supportive relationships; (d) make an inclusive environment; (e) establish positive social norms; (f) support efficacy and mattering; (g) design opportunities for skill building; and (h) integrate family, school and community efforts (p. 9-10). In addition, Fraser-Thomas and colleagues (2005) emphasize that programmes should aim to foster Benson's (1997) 40 developmental assets. These assets have been suggested to play a protective role in youths' development (i.e., youth are less likely to engage in substance abuse or violence), an enhancement role in youths' development (i.e., youth are more likely to thrive in their school and community), and a resiliency role when youth are faced with adversity. Twenty

of the assets are external, focused in the categories of support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time. The other 20 assets are internal, in the categories of commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity. Fraser-Thomas and colleagues (2005) concluded that youth sport programmes should create appropriate settings and foster developmental assets based on the youths' stage of development. As a result, youth will have positive sport experiences, develop the 5 C's of PYD, and follow a path to sport expertise or recreational sport involvement.

Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte, and Jones (2005) also proposed an early model of PYD through sport – specifically a framework for planning youth sport programmes that promote psychosocial development in participants. Their framework suggests that PYD is most likely to occur when young people are: (a) in the right context, (b) surrounded by the right people (external assets), (c) developing internal assets or life skills, and (e) appropriately incorporated in a comprehensive system of research and evaluation. This framework provided a clear model that has guided numerous researchers exploring PYD in sport programmes (e.g., Camiré, Trudel, & Bernard, 2013; Camiré, Trudel, & Forneris, 2009a; 2009b; Rathwell, 2017; Weiss, Stuntz, Bhalla, Bolter, & Price, 2013).

Shortly thereafter, Gould and Carson (2008) proposed a heuristic model for understanding the process of coaching life skills through sport. The framework aims to help sport programmes develop life skills in youth. The model begins with the pre-existing make-up of youth athletes, acknowledging that youth enter activities with established life skills, abilities and personalities (i.e., internal assets) as well as external assets, such as parents, siblings and previous coaches. The next section of the model focuses on the sport participation experience, including: coach characteristics (e.g., philosophy, relationship skills, competence and

accessibility), the direct teaching strategies (e.g., rules, leadership opportunities, fairness, and team building), and indirect teaching strategies (e.g., demands of the sport, programme success, and positive social norms). Subsequently, the model shifts focus to how young athletes may develop life skills within the sport programme. The model suggests that life skills develop through an athlete's social environment and through influences such as positive identity changes, a sense of belonging, positive adult relationships, and positive social norms (see Certo, Cauley, & Chafin, 2003; Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003 for a review). The fourth section of the model emphasizes that the development of life skills should lead to positive outcomes such as physical health, academic achievement, and psychosocial outcomes (e.g., stress management, organization, leadership, respect and responsibility). However, positive outcomes are not guaranteed and it is possible that the sport experience can result in negative outcomes such as physical injury, burnout, stress, lower levels of moral functioning, and school dropout. Finally, the final section of the model focuses on how life skills acquired in sport can be transferred to other life domains (e.g., goal setting in sport can be applied to school; confidence developed in sport can carry over to other aspects of life). Specifically, the last section of the model highlights the factors that may influence whether life skills are transferred outside of the sport setting, including: the similarity of the situations, the belief that the skills are valued in other settings, the confidence to transfer the skills, the ability to adjust to initial setbacks, and the support and reinforcement of transfer. It is important to note that a feedback loop is included, so that when an individual develops a life skill, this skill is added to his or her internal assets (i.e., becomes part of their pre-existing make-up in the first section).

More recently, the Personal Assets Framework (Côté, Turnnidge, & Evans, 2014; Côté, Turnnidge & Viemerra, 2016) was introduced and derived from ecological system approaches



(e.g., Barker, 1968; Bronfenbrenner, 1995). The framework identifies three dynamic elements from which development through sport occurs: personal engagement in activities (i.e., what), quality relationships (i.e., who), and appropriate settings (i.e., where). The interaction of these three elements leads to changes in the personal assets (i.e., the 4 C's: Competence, Confidence, Connection, and Character) of the athlete over time. As a result, changes in an athlete's personal assets will influence the long-term outcomes of sport, defined as the 3 Ps (Participation, Performance, and Personal Development). Three necessary conditions are proposed to foster optimal development in sport: (a) the integration of the three dynamic elements (i.e., activities, relationships, and settings); (b) the alignment of the three dynamic elements with the personal assets (i.e., the 4 C's) to facilitate the 3 Ps; and (c) a considerable emphasis on all 3 Ps during a child's early years of sport involvement rather than an overemphasis on one of the Ps.

Most recently, Holt and colleagues (2017) proposed a comprehensive framework of PYD through sport, following an inductive meta-study reviewing and analysing 63 qualitative studies. Drawing on previous frameworks and the findings of their analysis, they present a model of PYD through sport (Figure 1) that outlines three key themes within the context of distal ecological systems (see Lerner, Bowers, Geldhof, Gestsdóttir, & DeSouza, 2012 for a review): PYD climate, life skills programme focus, and PYD outcomes. Within the distal ecological systems there are bi-directional interactions and influences between and within the sport programmes (i.e., microsystem), the broader sport system (i.e., macrosystem), and the individuals who enter sport programmes (Lerner et al., 2012). Situated in the distal ecological systems, the PYD climate within a youth sport programme (i.e., microsystem) is influenced by the relationships between athletes and adult leaders (e.g., coaches), the interactions between peers and teammates, and the level of support from parents. The model proposes that when youth experience positive

interactions with adults, peers, and parents, they are likely to develop PYD outcomes through implicit learning (i.e., development of life skills without specifically focusing on teaching life skills). On the other hand, the explicit development of PYD outcomes is the result of life skills programmes, which utilize life skill building activities (e.g., using teachable moments and team building exercises) and transfer activities (e.g., discussing the importance of transfer to other life domains). Whether achieved implicitly or explicitly, PYD outcomes are categorized into three domains: personal (e.g., perseverance, hard work, independence, responsibility, life decisions, problem-solving skills, stress management and goal setting), social (e.g., teamwork, leadership, communication skills), and physical (e.g., fundamental movement skills and skills for healthy active living).

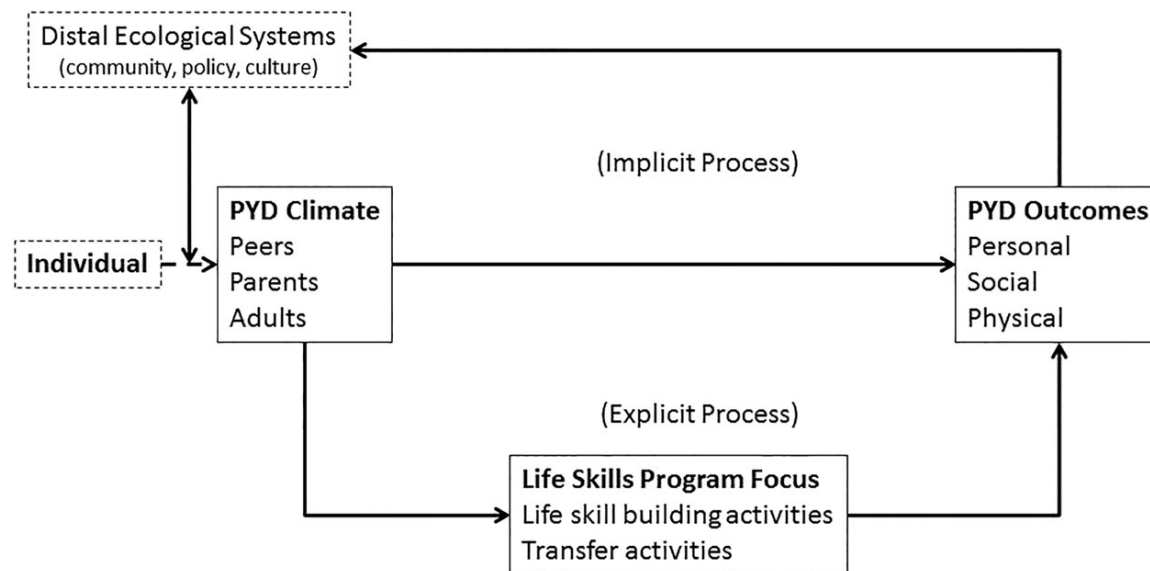


Figure 1 – PYD through Sport (Holt et al., 2017)

Research has examined PYD within sport across various contexts (e.g., elite to recreational, minority groups, high-risk neighborhoods to high SES, preschoolers to high schoolers) and from numerous perspectives (e.g., athletes, parents, coaches, peers) (see Holt et al., 2017 for a review). In review, extensive positive development experiences have been

reported in these contexts such as creating meaningful relationships with coaches and peers, developing life skills, and experiencing a sense of community (Camiré et al., 2012; 2013; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Gould et al., 2007). Conversely, research has also highlighted numerous negative experiences, such as poor relationships with coaches and peers, burden from parental pressures, and stress from performance-oriented environments (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Scanlan et al., 2005; Tamminen et al., 2013). However, one particular context has been associated with numerous positive and negative experiences, is elite youth sport.

### **PYD in Elite Youth Sport**

It has been suggested that the context of elite youth sport presents several opportunities to foster PYD that may not occur in recreational youth sport. For example, the extensive time demands of elite youth sport creates more opportunities for coaches to reinforce life skills, foster meaningful relationships, and develop commitment, discipline and perseverance (Fraser-Thomas, et al., 2005; Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015). Furthermore, the competitive nature of elite youth sport creates teachable moments for youth related to how to give and receive feedback, gracefully respond to mistakes and successes, thrive on challenges, and embrace adversity (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2017; Strachan, Côté, & Deakin, 2011). Recent research has highlighted a variety of positive developmental outcomes within elite youth sport, including meaningful and diverse relationships with adults and peers, and increased social capital, athletic ability, self-esteem, and life skills (Jones & Lavalley, 2009; Oliver, Hardy, & Markland, 2010; Strachan, Côté, & Deakin, 2009; Zarrett, Lerner, Carrano, Fay, Peltz, & Li, 2008).

On the other hand, the tensions between fostering PYD and playing sport in a performance-oriented environment have consistently raised concerns within elite youth sport

(Fraser-Thomas et al., 2017). Researchers have reported numerous negative experiences associated with elite youth sport, including feelings of isolations, entrapment, and fear of failure, and reports of burnout, injury, eating disorders, aggression and violence, dropout, emotional disruption and identity fragility (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Gould et al., 1996; Scanlan et al., 2005; Safai, Johnson, & Bryans, 2016; Smith, 1983; Tamminen et al., 2013). The demands of a performance-oriented environment are often responsible for these concerning findings and may also negatively influence elite youth sport coaches' behaviours. For instance, research has highlighted that athlete maltreatment by elite youth sport coaches has taken place in numerous forms, including: belittling, humiliating, shouting, scapegoating, rejecting, isolating, threatening, ignoring, intimidating, and favouring their athletes (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Gervis & Dunn, 2004). These concerning findings may be explained by the 'win-at-all-costs' mentality of professional sports and the belief that performance success comes at the cost of the athletes' PYD and well-being (Danish et al., 2004; McCallister, Blinde, & Weiss, 2000; Miller & Kerr, 2002). This belief was demonstrated in a study where elite swimmers felt that enduring emotional abuse was a normal and necessary step for them to advance as elite athletes (Stirling & Kerr, 2007). Canadian 'AAA' minor ice hockey (i.e., highest level for youth) is one specific context where similar concerns have been raised (Bean, Forneris, & Robidoux, 2014; Bean, Jeffery-Tosoni, Baker, & Fraser-Thomas, 2016).

Canada has the highest youth participation rates in ice hockey in the world (Martel, 2015). Unsurprisingly, Canada has had tremendous success at the world stage in hockey (i.e., Olympics, International Championships, and World Junior Championships) and Canadians make up the bulk (49.7%) of National Hockey League (NHL) players (Seravalli, 2015). As such, a passion for hockey is embedded in Canadian culture from coast to coast (Gruneau & Whitson,

1993). However, this passion may make the context of AAA minor hockey particularly susceptible to the professional sports mentality where PYD is not a top priority. For example, Campbell and Parcel (2013) explain how parents spend vast amounts of money and time towards their child's minor hockey experience with the hopes that their "investment" will pay off with an NHL contract or University scholarship. Notably, it is likely that parents may fall victim to the belief that they need to sacrifice their child's development and well-being to achieve performance success (Miller & Kerr, 2002). As such, it is quite plausible that many parents inadvertently sacrifice PYD while becoming extensively focused on their child attaining a scholarship or professional contract. Anecdotal evidence supports this notion, for example, there are numerous stories of parents moving their families, paying off coaches, or even falsely claiming family separation all in the hopes that playing for the right minor hockey team will give their child the best chances to succeed (O'Connor, 2016). Therefore, it would appear that this "sink or swim" mentality that neglects the value of PYD has become pervasive in the Canadian AAA minor hockey context.

### **The Role of the Coach in Fostering PYD**

The current dissertation focuses specifically on the role of the coach in fostering PYD in elite sport settings; as such, this section reviews the extensive research reporting the influential role coaches have on the developmental experience of young athletes (not excluded to elite youth sport). To begin, youth sport coaches exercise a position of power within the coach-athlete relationship, given their inherent authority as the coach (Tomlinson & Strachan, 1996). In addition to their position of authority, other sources of power include their age, physical size, knowledge, and control over playing time (Tomlinson & Strachan, 1996). Current PYD research highlights three key avenues by which coaches can positively utilize their power and influence to

facilitate PYD: (a) foster positive relationships with the athletes, (b) role model and teach life skills, and (c) ensure a safe and optimal learning environment (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Holt et al., 2017). For example, Camiré and colleagues (2013) emphasized that when athletes and coaches spend extensive time together, the athletes may perceive their coaches as parental figures. Additional research highlights that coaches can role model life skills (e.g., respect and emotional regulation) and teach life skills by setting high standards, providing leadership roles, and taking advantage of teachable moments (Camiré et al., 2012; Gould et al., 2007). Research by Smith and colleagues (2007) underlined the importance for coaches to focus on effort, enjoyment and development over performance success to create an optimal learning environments.

Overall, a number of studies have examined the role of the coach in facilitating PYD and developing life skills in youth sport (Camiré et al., 2013; Camiré et al., 2012; Flett, Gould, Griffes, & Lauer, 2013; Fraser-Thomas & Cote, 2009; Trottier & Robitaille, 2014; Vella, Oades & Crowe, 2011). Resoundingly, these studies highlighted that many youth coaches are successfully fostering PYD. For example, Gould and colleagues (2007) found that award winning high school football (i.e., elite youth) coaches managed to foster life skills in conjunction with achieving performance success. They articulated that emphasizing behaviours such as discipline, work ethic, and emotional control helped enhance performance success on the field, and that the life skills could also then be applied outside of the sport of football. The coaches also expressed that they could be tough on players and hold them accountable on the field, while still making sure that the players knew that they cared about them as people before leaving the football experience. As such, these coaches provide great examples of how coaches can foster PYD and also achieve performance success within elite youth sport contexts.

On the other hand, research has also highlighted that many coaches have failed to foster PYD. For example, Fraser-Thomas and Côté (2009) found that elite swimmers reported both positive and negative experiences with their coaches; specifically, they described having negative coach-athlete relationships when their coaches were poor communicators, picked favourites, were intimidating, modeled a poor work ethic and/or demonstrated inappropriate behaviours. Similarly, Stirling and Kerr's (2007) study on elite female swimmers reported emotional abuse as a normalized part of elite sport culture throughout their careers. Furthermore, Gervis and Dunn (2004) examined the experiences of twelve former elite child athletes from various sports, all of whom experienced shouting and belittling from their coaches; over half the athletes experienced other abusive behaviours (i.e., threatening, humiliating, scapegoating, ignoring and rejecting). However, a growing body of research has explored the role of 'tough love' and adversity in the development of life skills (e.g., Collins & MacNamara, 2012; Flett et al., 2013; Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015; Gould et al., 2007). This notion of tough love does not condone emotional abuse, but rather resembles the coaches in Gould and colleagues (2007) study that were tough on the athletes but still showed that they cared. As such, PYD outcomes through sport is not necessarily achieved by avoiding 'negative' experiences; but in fact, adversity may provide meaningful opportunities for life skill development (Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015).

Given the extensive research that has examined the role of the coach in fostering PYD, it is clear that coaches can foster PYD but that it does not happen in all sport contexts. To help coaches foster PYD, Camiré, Forneris, Trudel, and Bernard (2011) summarized five strategies based on their research of successful coaches. They suggest that first, coaches should thoroughly develop and write out their coaching philosophy based on their values. Secondly, coaches should

make it a priority to know their athletes as people and build meaningful relationships with them. Thirdly, coaches should spend time creating and planning development strategies to optimize learning and to teach life skills. Finally, coaches should reinforce the life skills athletes acquire in sport, and teach athletes how to transfer life skills outside of sport.

Moreover, Côté and Gilbert (2009) define effective coaching as “the consistent application of integrated professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge to improve athletes’ competence, confidence, connection, and character in specific contexts” (p. 316). Drawing on this definition and a coach’s role in fostering PYD through sport (i.e., through building positive relationships, role modelling, and creating a safe learning environment) (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Holt et al., 2017), we can conclude that interpersonal knowledge (i.e., the ability to communicate and work with athletes, assistant coaches, and parents) is central to a coach’s role in fostering PYD. In this dissertation, I draw upon three interpersonal coaching approaches that are incumbent within the literature, and align with a coach’s role in fostering PYD: (a) mastery approach to coaching (MAC) (Smith et al., 2007), (b) autonomy-supportive coaching behaviours (Magéau & Vallerand, 2003), and (c) transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

### **Interpersonal Coaching Approaches**

The MAC is one of the more established and renowned interpersonal coaching approaches that was first implemented in 1979 and originally named Coach Effectiveness Training (CET; Smith, Smoll & Curtis, 1979). The approach draws extensively on Achievement Goal Theory (AGT, Nicholls, 1984) and emphasizes the importance of creating a mastery-oriented climate (i.e., one that is focused on development and effort) over that of an ego-oriented climate (i.e., one that is focused on winning). AGT differentiates these two goal orientations, whereby



mastery-orientation refers to a person that is intrinsically motivated to learn and improve, and utilizes internal comparisons to define success (Nicholls, 1984). On the other hand, ego-orientation refers to a person that is extrinsically motivated to achieve performance relative to others, and defines success based on comparing oneself to others (Nicholls, 1984). Notably, research has found that a person can be categorized as high in mastery and ego-goal orientation, hence, the two goal-orientations are not mutually exclusive (Elliot & McGregor, 2001).

However, higher mastery-goal orientations have been associated with increased respectful behaviours, effort, persistence and intention to continue in sport among athletes (Biddle, Wang, Kavussanu, & Spray, 2003). Therefore, to create a mastery-oriented climate, the MAC offers a workshop which encourages coaches to follow five principles: (a) focus on effort and improvement over winning, (b) use positive reinforcement to foster more desired behaviours, (c) set high expectations for teamwork and supportive behaviours, (d) provide athletes opportunities to give input on team decisions and setting team rules, and (e) engage in regular self-reflection of one's coaching behaviours (see Smith & Smoll, 2011 for a review). Intervention research has found that coaches who attend a two-hour MAC workshop create higher mastery-oriented climates and lower ego-oriented climates than coaches who do not take the workshop (Smith et al., 2007). Given the evidence of the benefits of promoting a mastery-oriented climate, the MAC has been adopted by coach education programmes such as the Hockey Education Programme (Minnesota Hockey) to help optimize youth players' development and decrease attrition rates (Smith, Jorgenson, Sorenson, Margenau, Link, MacMillan, & Stuart, 2009).

Autonomy-supportive coaching is another established interpersonal coaching approach that aligns with the aims of PYD. This approach was proposed by Magéau and Vallerand (2003) as part of The Motivational Model of the Coach-Athlete Relationship, and draws upon the well-

established Self-Determination Theory (SDT, Deci & Ryan, 1985). SDT identifies three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness that are foundational to motivation (i.e., ranging on a continuum from intrinsically to extrinsically motivated, and no motivation known as a-motivation) (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The extensive research on SDT highlights that when athletes are intrinsically motivated (i.e., genuinely inspired to participate) rather than extrinsically motivated (i.e., pressured or obliged to take action), they experience increased well-being, are more persistent, and achieve greater performance success on experiential activities (Deci & Ryan, 2008). As such, Magéau and Vallerand (2003) present seven autonomy-supportive coaching behaviours that are intended to foster intrinsically motivated athletes by satisfying their three basic psychological needs. The seven coaching behaviours include: (a) providing athletes with choices, (b) explaining rationales for decisions and rules, (c) acknowledging athletes' feeling and opinions, (d) providing athletes with leadership opportunities, (e) giving feedback that is competence based and non-controlling, (f) avoiding punishing athletes to force and control athletes, and (g) discouraging ego-involvement (Magéau & Vallerand, 2003).

Research has found that athletes' perceptions of coach autonomy-support are positively associated with athletes' basic need satisfaction, well-being, and mastery-goal orientation over time (Adie, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2012; Amorose & Anderson-Butcher, 2007; Mallett, 2005; Reynolds & McDonough, 2015). In a recent intervention study, elite youth sport coaches aimed to implement autonomy-supportive coaching practices through an action research approach, and found accompanying increases in the athletes' perceptions of autonomy (Ahlberg, Mallett, & Tinning, 2008). Notably, Duda (2013) created a six-hour Empowering Coaching workshop that draws on both AGT and SDT to help coaches foster intrinsically motivated athletes. The

workshop teaches youth coaches empowering coaching behaviours to implement, and disempowering coaching behaviours to avoid. Preliminary findings have found the workshop to be effective at creating more empowering coaches, which foster more intrinsically motivated athletes (see Duda & Appleton, 2016 for a review).

The third interpersonal coaching approach that I drew upon to guide this dissertation, and aligns with PYD is transformational leadership. Recently, considerable attention has been given to the effectiveness of this approach within sport (e.g., Arthur & Tomsett, 2015; Hopton, Phelan, & Barling, 2007). With its origins in the field of business, transformational leadership is focused on motivating groups to achieve high levels of performance by fostering the strengths of the followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leadership is comprised of four components; the first is idealized influence, where a leader facilitates the growth of his or her followers by acting as a role model. Secondly, the leader motivates his or her followers through offering an inspiring vision (i.e., inspirational motivation). Next, individual consideration focuses on bringing out the best of each member, in turn bringing out the best of the group. Lastly, the leader uses intellectual stimulation to engage the followers in an active learning process. Research on transformational leadership in various contexts has consistently found this leadership style is more effective for group performance and satisfaction than other styles (such as transactional leadership) (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Similarly, transformational leadership behaviours have been associated with greater team cohesion, performance success, motivation, and developmental outcomes in sport (Callow, Smith, Hardy, Arthur, & Hardy, 2009, Rowold, 2006; Vella, Oades & Crowe, 2013a, 2013b). As such, transformational leadership workshops have recently been implemented and examined (Turnnidge & Côté, 2017; Vella et al., 2013b). Similar to the MAC and Empowering Coaching workshops, these short (two to four hour)

workshops have shown positive initial findings regarding the effectiveness of the programme on coaching behaviours and, subsequently, athlete outcomes.

### **The Role of Parents and the Coach-Parent Relationship**

The role of the parent in fostering PYD within the sport context has also been thoroughly examined in recent years. For example, research has found that parents can foster PYD through sport by (a) setting expectations regarding work ethic, respect, and responsibility, (b) modeling appropriate emotional regulation and effective communication, and (c) engaging in the sporting experience and encouraging the development of life skills, self-awareness and resiliency (Holt, Tamminen, Tink, & Black, 2009; Lauer, Gould, Roman, & Pierce, 2010). However, although parents may be well intentioned, it is evident that not all parents understand how to foster PYD through sport (Coakley, 2006; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2017; Fraser-Thomas, Strachan, & Jeffery-Tosoni, 2013; Roberts, 2012). For example, research has found that parents often make excuses for their child (which discourages the child from taking responsibility for his or her performance and development), not modeling appropriate emotional regulation and effective communication, and offering negatively perceived feedback (Holt et al., 2009; Lauer et al., 2010). Fraser-Thomas and colleagues (2013) concluded that a parent's role in their child's sport experience should be supportive (e.g., support athlete autonomy and effectively communicate) and provide age appropriate feedback. For instance, it has been suggested that as athletes specialize in a sport (i.e., increasing time commitment, typically around age 12) parents should avoid providing performance-oriented feedback unless they have played the sport at a high level, as children tend to be more receptive to sport-specific parent feedback in this case (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2013). On the other hand, it is encouraged that parents provide honest feedback regarding their child's

effort and attitude at all stages of development within their child's sporting experience (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2013).

Although research has examined the independent roles of parents and coaches on fostering PYD through sport, limited research has examined interactive roles of parents and coaches (i.e., the coach-parent relationship) (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2017). The importance of creating an effective coach-parent relationship within youth sport was first proposed by Hellstedt (1987). Hellstedt recommended that coaches provide parents with honest communication throughout the season to maintain a working alliance. He also made suggestions for how coaches could better communicate with parents, depending on the "type" of parent. These suggestions included: (a) for the moderately involved parent, educate and inform them about 2-3 times during the season about their child's development and their expected roles; (b) for the under-involved parent, encourage more engagement while also being careful not to become a substitute parent; and (c) for the over-involved parent, ensure a working alliance is formed and work towards getting the athlete to think and feel for him or herself. Similarly, Smoll, Cumming and Smith (2011) suggest that youth coaches should set expectations for parents and explain athlete competence criteria in a pre-season meeting, then provide feedback to the parents on how athletes are meeting the criteria in individual follow-up meetings throughout the season. As such, these recommendations place substantive responsibility on the coach to foster effective coach-parent relationships.

Research examining the coach-parent-athlete triad has also been limited. One study among elite female swimmers found that parents could have a beneficial or a detrimental effect on the coach-athlete relationship (Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005). For example, positive outcomes (e.g., athlete performance and satisfaction, and quality of coaching) were associated

with open coach-parent relationships, where information was exchanged effectively. On the other hand, negative outcomes (e.g., frustrated and unsupportive parents, confused athletes) were associated with poor communication between the coach and parents. Given the significant influence of the coach-parent relationship on athlete development, future research is needed to further examine best practices.

Moreover, ineffective coach-parent relationships appear to be prevalent within youth sport. For instance, 87% of Canadian high school coach-teachers from a large survey reported that dealing with parents was challenging (Camiré, Rocchi, & Kendellen, 2016). Although another American study among junior tennis families indicated that only 30% of parents were problematic, these problem parents cause some coaches to avoid parents and, therefore, miss out on the opportunities to create effective coach-parent relationships (Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Jannes and Pennisi, 2008). Furthermore, a recent survey of 227 high school coaches found that 58% of the coaches have considered quitting because of parents (Miller, 2016). Horn (2011) explains that problem parents may be associated with the rising trend of ‘helicopter parents’ who intervene and argue for their child’s playing time (i.e., the most frequent problem with parents; Miller, 2016), in an attempt to protect their child from emotional harm (Horn, 2011). Moreover it appears that these ‘problem’ or ‘helicopter parents’ do not know how to deal with the pressures of elite sport and are unaware of how their behaviours may impact their child (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Lauer et al., 2010). Therefore, it is evident that youth sport coaches need to know how to work with parents to facilitate PYD and, as such, it should be included in youth sport coach education programmes (Newman, Ortega, Lower, & Paluta, 2016; Vargas-Tonsing, 2007).

### **PYD and Coach Education**

Despite a growing body of literature emphasizing the important role of coaches in facilitating PYD, little work has examined how PYD may be integrated and delivered through formal coach education programmes (i.e., institutionally sanctioned structures with guided delivery) (Mallett, Trudel, Lyle, & Rynne, 2009). For instance, Santos, Camiré, MacDonald, Compos, Conceição, and Silva (2017) found that youth sport coaches perceived coach education programmes lacked PYD-related material and that practical PYD-based strategies would be beneficial. Likewise, Newman and colleagues (2016) emphasized the need for coach education programmes to better address team building, parental influence, sportsmanship, and teaching life skills.

In addition to the lack of PYD-related material, researchers have found that numerous formal coach education programmes are ineffective (Abraham & Collins, 1998; Campbell, 1993; Lyle, 2007). For example, Gilbert and Trudel (1999) found that a youth hockey coach gained no new knowledge from participation in a National Coaching Certification Programme (NCCP) Level 2 Theory course in Canada. Similarly, Cushion, Armour, and Jones (2003) suggested that coach education programmes are not integrating theory and practice, nor drawing on relatable sport contexts and coaching experiences. Given these criticisms, it is not surprising that coaches tend to rely extensively on informal learning experiences to contribute to their training and knowledge at the recreational, developmental, and elite level (Mallett et al., 2007). Specifically, Wright, Trudel, and Culver (2007) found informal learning provided the largest contribution to youth ice hockey coaches' development. Similarly, Erickson, Bruner, MacDonald, and Côté (2008) found that the most important actual sources of knowledge coaches identified were learning by doing (58.4%) and interactions with others (42.7%). In addition, formal coach education (i.e., the NCCP) was identified as an ideal source of knowledge by 51% of the

coaches; however, the NCCP was only reported as actually being a top source of knowledge by 32.7% of the coaches (Erikson et al., 2008).

As such, researchers have recommended coach education programmes could be more effective if they were open and discursive rather than closed and rigid (Piggott, 2012). More specifically, research has found that coaches desire education programmes that address topics such as communication with parents and athletes, motivation and character building (Vargas-Tonsing, 2007). Moreover, research has suggested that coach education programmes move away from traditional practices (i.e., autocratic leadership styles) and place importance on the development of an athlete-centred coaching philosophy (i.e., focused on athletes' holistic development) and behaviours associated with PYD (Adams, Cropley & Mullen, 2016). Evidently, the extensive recommendations for improving coach education programmes emphasize the importance of developing interpersonal coaching knowledge (i.e., PYD-related behaviours) in coach education programmes.

Likely, in part, as a response to concerns raised in the literature, a number of coach education programmes with a greater focus on interpersonal knowledge have been implemented in recent years. These include: (a) a humanistic coaching workshop (two hours) (Falcão, Bloom, & Bennie, 2017); (b) the MAC workshop (75 minutes) (Smith et al., 2007); (c) an Empowering Coaching workshop (six hours) (Duda, 2013); (d) transformational leadership workshop (four hours) (Turnnidge & Côté, 2017); and (e) a values training workshop (two hours), followed by a practice demonstration (90 minutes), and video feedback for the coaches (a six week period) (Koh, Ong, & Camiré, 2016). Initial research assessing the effectiveness of these workshops have highlighted positive findings. For instance, the MAC workshop is associated with coaches creating greater mastery-oriented climates (Smith et al., 2007) and coaches who participated in



the humanistic coaching workshop reported increases in athlete autonomy, communication and motivation (Falcão et al., 2017).

In addition, these workshops are all generally short in duration (i.e., 75 minutes to 6 hours), which is important given the concerns of formal coach education programmes being too time consuming (Taylor & Garratt, 2010). For example, the standard Development 1 course (a NCCP course offered specifically by Hockey Canada) required to be a head coach at most levels in Canadian minor hockey is two full days (16 hours total between in-class and on-ice sessions). Furthermore, the High Performance 1 course (a NCCP course offered specifically by Hockey Canada) required to be a head coach of AAA hockey ages 13 and up is four full days of in class sessions (44 hours) and includes a written assignment and field evaluation (Ontario Minor Hockey Association, 2017).

### **Dissertation Rationale and Overview**

The purpose of this dissertation was to examine the role of the coach in fostering PYD within the elite youth sport context. Guided by Holt and colleagues' (2017) PYD through sport model this dissertation explored the coach's role in fostering a PYD climate and developing life skills through sport within the context of distal ecological systems. Holt and colleagues framework provides the most comprehensive model on PYD through sport and incorporates a detailed description on the role of the coach. As such, this model was the best fit to situate each research study within one comprehensive framework. Overall, four studies were conducted to address the gaps identified within the PYD literature.

First off, the literature has highlighted the important role of coaches in fostering PYD through youth sport and have identified three essential coaching behaviours: (a) building and sustaining meaningful coach-athlete relationships, (b) role modelling desired behaviours and

teaching life skills, and (c) creating a safe and optimal learning environment (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Holt et al., 2017). However, research has primarily examined the coach's role in fostering PYD through retrospective accounts or observations. To further understand the complex process of facilitating PYD through sport research needs to examine the coach's experiences concurrently. In particular, concerns regarding the tensions between personal development and performance success in elite youth sport contexts warrants attention from future research (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2017). Therefore, the first manuscript (Chapter two) used autoethnographic research methods (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) to explore my experience coaching Canadian elite minor hockey using a PYD approach to foster personal development and performance success. The in-depth methods provided rich anecdotes from a coach's perspective that outline the tensions I experienced as a first year head coach when pursuing PYD and performance success within elite youth sport.

Furthermore, the PYD literature has highlighted the importance of effective coach-parent relationships (Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005), the prevalence of problem parents in youth sport, and how coaches are subsequently avoiding parents (Gould et al., 2008). As such, research is needed to better understand how coaches can effectively work with parents and navigate these important and complex relationships to facilitate PYD. Therefore, the second manuscript (Chapter three) also drew upon autoethnographic methods and builds on findings from manuscript one by exploring my experiences working with parents to foster athlete PYD throughout my first three years as a AAA minor hockey head coach. Detailed accounts of contentious coach-parent interactions primarily emerged in this chapter; however, lessons learned and recommendations on how coaches can effectively work with parents are provided.

Moreover, the literature has consistently questioned if the context of elite youth sport is optimal to facilitate PYD (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2017; Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015). Therefore, we argue that research needed to take a holistic and in-depth examination of the factors that challenge and facilitate coaches from fostering PYD through elite youth sport. The third manuscript (Chapter four) explored this broader perspective through ethnographic research methods (Patton, 2005) as I acted as an assistant coach to four purposefully sampled teams for the duration of one season. The findings are presented within the COM-B framework (Michie, van Stralen, & West, 2011) and discuss if elite youth sport coaches are capable to foster PYD, motivated to foster PYD and in the right opportunity to foster PYD.

Finally, the literature highlights that coach's expect to ideally learn from formal coach education programmes (i.e., NCCP) (Erickson et al., 2008). However, youth coaches have resoundingly reported a lack of PYD and interpersonal coaching behaviours in formal coach education programmes (Adams et al., 2016; Newman et al., 2016; Santos et al., 2017). As such, the final manuscript (Chapter five) involved a content analysis of the Hockey Canada High Performance 1 coach education manual (a NCCP course offered specifically by Hockey Canada required for AAA head coaches of age 13 and older), with specific attention given to the use of theoretical and empirical underpinnings through the lens of PYD coaching approaches. The results provide a detailed description of the manual, highlight theoretical concerns and offer practical recommendations.

In summary, this dissertation examined the role of the coach in fostering PYD within elite youth sport and was guided by Holt and colleagues' (2017) model of PYD through sport. Manuscripts one and two explored the role of the coach within a sport programme (including appropriate interactions with both athletes and parents; microsystem). Manuscript three took a

greater perspective to examine the influence of the sport structure (macrosystem) on the sport programme. Finally, manuscript four examined the content of a coach education manual (macrosystem). As a result, this dissertation offers numerous contributions to the PYD and youth sport literature, stimulates new research questions, while offering rich descriptions of coaches' experiences that may invoke meaning and understanding to other elite youth coaches aiming to foster PYD through sport.

### **Methodology**

While the methodology for each study of the dissertation is outlined in detail within the four manuscripts, I have chosen to include a brief methodological section, to allow for some expansion on ethnography and autoethnography. Three of the four manuscripts included in the dissertation draw upon these methodological approaches which are often considered alternative methodological approaches in sport psychology research, and as such, are sometimes less well understood. The first section provides a brief overview of (auto)ethnography and why it was a good fit for this dissertation. The next section reviews the research paradigm which addresses the ontology, epistemology, and methodology of this dissertation. To conclude, a self-reflection of my experiences prior to and throughout my doctoral work is provided to position myself in relation to the research.

#### **(Auto) Ethnography**

Ethnography is a reflection of the lives and experiences of a particular group of people or culture (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Ethnographic approaches typically employ participant observation methods where the research is an “insider” (Merton, 1972) and builds trust and rapport with informants (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Traditionally, the approach was used by Anthropologist to “study and describe specific cultures, then compare and contrast cultures to

understand how cultures evolve and change” (Patton, 2005, p. 1633). More recently, ethnography has been applied to various fields and diverse practices (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007); however, the general purpose of ethnographic research methods is to deepen understanding of a specific group of people’s human experience (Patton, 2005).

Similar to ethnography, autoethnography represents the lives and experiences of a particular group of people or culture through the researchers’ firsthand experience (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Anderson (2006) identified five key features to an effective autoethnography. The first key feature is complete member researcher (CMR) status (Anderson, 2006). Typically CMR status is attained through fortunate opportunities (e.g., born into the group, entered a group by chance, or acquired membership through occupation or recreation) (Adler & Adler, 1987). The second key feature is analytic reflexivity which aims to better understand oneself and others through “self-conscious introspection” (Anderson, 2006, p. 382). In the third key feature the researcher should be visible and active in autoethnographic text, such as discussing the struggles he or she faced, and any changes in his or her beliefs (Anderson, 2006). Likewise, Ellis and Bochner (2000) describe that effective autoethnographic research evokes “in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible” (p. 751). The fourth key feature underlines that autoethnographers need to engage in dialogue with other group members to facilitate further reflection and deepen the understanding of a particular social phenomena beyond self-experience (Anderson, 2006). Finally, the fifth key feature of effective autoethnography is commitment to both evoking an emotional resonance with the reader and implementing an analytic agenda to enrich our understanding of the social phenomena (Anderson, 2006).

The rich process of ethnographic and autoethnographic methods met the unique needs of this dissertation, which was to explore the coaches' role in fostering a PYD climate and developing life skills within the context of elite youth sport. However, (auto)ethnographic research has been criticized as being a self-indulgent and navel-gazing process that lacks systematic analysis (Anderson, 2006; Atkinson, 2006; Charmaz, 2006; Coffey, 1999; Madison, 2006). Further resistance to autoethnographic approaches can be traced to traditional science where the self is viewed as untrustworthy and a contamination to be minimized (Krieger, 1991; Sparkes, 2002). In opposition, the advocates for autoethnography refute these criticism and emphasize the benefits of such rich and reflexive research. For example, Church (1995) advocates for the worth of one person's subjective story given "that it is possible to learn about the general from the particular" (p. 5). Church further argues that "writing about myself is a way of writing about these others and about the worlds which we create/inhabit... Because my subjective experience is part of the world, the story which emerges is not completely private and idiosyncratic" (p. 5). Furthermore, Sparkes (2002) promotes the power that autoethnographic writing can have:

This kind of writing can inform, awaken, and disturb readers by illustrating their involvement in social processes about which they might not have been consciously aware. Once aware, individuals may find the consequences of their involvement (or lack of it) unacceptable and seek to change the situation. In such circumstances, the potential for individual and collective restorying is enhanced. (p. 221)

Given the need to deepen our understanding of the coaches' role in fostering a PYD through elite you sport, (auto)ethnographic research was identified as suitable approach to address this need. Hence, I took advantage of the vocational opportunity to be an "insider" and

complete member researcher as a first time AAA minor hockey head coach implementing a PYD approach during my first year as a doctoral student. Specifically, I utilized an autoethnographic approach to self-reflect and journal my experiences throughout the entire first coaching season (Manuscript one). Afterwards, I continued to reflect on my experiences for two more seasons as a AAA head coach with specific attention to my interactions with the parents (Manuscript two). In addition, during the second year of my doctoral work I drew upon ethnographic methods (e.g., participant observation, field notes, and interviews) with four AAA head coaches with PYD philosophies throughout their entire season (Manuscript three).

### **Constructivist Paradigm**

This dissertation embraces an interpretive paradigm of inquiry to illustrate human experience, rather than a positivist paradigm of inquiry that aims to predict and control (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Williamson, 2006). Williamson (2006) identifies that an interpretive philosophy or, more specifically a constructivist paradigm, is an ideal approach to inquiry when implementing ethnographic research. As such, the ontology (i.e., what is reality?) of this dissertation is informed by constructivism where multiple realities are based on social and experiential constructs; essentially, realities may be shared amongst individuals and across cultures, or may differ pending the constructs of a person or culture (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Furthermore, the epistemology (i.e., what can we know?) of constructivism categorizes findings as subjectively created instead of objective truths. Finally, the methodology (i.e., how do we find what we know?) of constructivism reconstructs the world in the mind of the constructor to understand the various realities opposed to predicting and controlling experiments and outcomes. Schwandt (1994) captures this process succinctly; he explained that the goal of ethnography is to understand “the complete world of lived experiences from the point of view of those who live it”

(p. 118). Given the basic beliefs of a constructivist paradigm and the importance of self-awareness and reflection in ethnographic research, the final section of this chapter positions myself as the researcher through a self-reflection identifying my biases, previous experiences, and growth throughout my doctoral work.

### **Positionality of the Researcher**

*My passion for hockey started when I was two and half years old and it grew alongside my competitive spirit. After countless years of practice, training and travel, I eventually was fortunate to play high level hockey in the OHL (Ontario Hockey League), IHL (International Hockey League; minor professional), and CIS (Canadian Interuniversity Sport, since renamed U SPORT). Although I have lots of fond memories and great stories throughout my hockey career, I was often agitated by my coaches. I was repeatedly perplexed by coaching decisions, demeaning coaching behaviours, and the lack of communication, which could be characterized as 'traditional' coaches' behaviours, where it was 'their way' or 'the high way' and meaningful relationships were not a priority. Naturally, I was motivated to better understand effective coaching given the void I felt throughout my career.*

*At the age of 23 I took my first assistant coaching role with a minor hockey AA team while in the final year of my undergraduate degree. The following year I continued to be an assistant coach, now with a AAA team, and I started my Masters degree, with my thesis examining recently retired Olympians' experiences of athlete-centred coaching. I learned a lot about effective coaching practices over that two year period, from my readings and research, as well as through spending time engaged as an assistant coach. Most importantly I developed a steadfast belief in an athlete-centred approach to coaching where not only could performance success and personal development be simultaneously pursued by coaches, but the pursuit of*



*personal development could improve the performance success of an athlete or team. It was clear to me that life skills such as emotional regulation, respect, discipline, and teamwork were essential to achieving greater performance success. In addition, I became fascinated with a coaching philosophy that focused on igniting athletes' love for the game or intrinsic motivation, as opposed to motivating athletes with the 'fear of God' and using excessive punishment and yelling.*

*Furthermore, after being involved in minor hockey as an assistant coach for three years, I felt that there was a significant void in coaches (particularly in AAA) who valued personal development alongside performance success. Instead, AAA minor hockey was entrenched with coaches with 'win-at-all-costs' mentalities and I could not help but feel that countless minor hockey players were missing out on meaningful experiences and valuable life lessons. So like any normal person would do, I tried to save the world one hockey team at a time. I still recall my body tingling in excitement when I was officially given the opportunity to be the head coach and leader of a AAA minor hockey team. I was determined to create a culture that fostered positive youth development (e.g., fostering life skills and meaningful experiences and relationships) within the performance-oriented environment of AAA minor hockey.*

*Notably, during my Masters (at U of T; University of Toronto) I took Dr. Michael Atkinson's qualitative methods course where we learned about (auto)ethnographic research during a class assignment where I self-reflecting and journal my experience as an assistant coach; it was at that point that I discovered the power of critical self-reflection and rich personal stories. Therefore, when my new adventure as a head coach coincided with my acceptance as a Doctoral student, it did not take me long to put the pieces together and see the opportunity to engage in an autoethnography of my experience as a AAA minor hockey coach fostering positive*

*youth development. It seemed like a perfect opportunity to set my Doctoral research in line with my passion to coach AAA minor hockey. I'm still not sure how, but I was able to get my supervisor on board!*

*I have now spent the past four years entrenched in AAA minor hockey. I have been the head coach of a AAA minor hockey team (now in my 5<sup>th</sup> season). In addition, I spent significant time during the second year of my doctoral research acting as an assistant coach with four other AAA minor hockey teams. I have also made numerous acquaintances (i.e., friends) with fellow coaches and shared countless coaching stories, struggles, and 'tricks of the trade' over cold refreshments. I am appreciative of having had the opportunity to pursue this passion throughout my doctoral research. To this day, my excitement to foster positive youth development as a AAA minor hockey coach remains strong; however, I have certainly grown a lot through these four years, I have gathered a wealth of knowledge and have come to view the culture of AAA minor hockey with a more critical lens. Markedly, the lessons I have learned regarding the tensions of PYD and performance success, coach-parent relationships, the sport structure of AAA minor hockey, and the content of a coach education manual have further fueled new passions. I am excited to pursue these passions and take on new adventures in the next chapter of my life. Since it is clear that I had a passion (or bias) for fostering PYD through sport, it was imperative that I stayed aware of my prejudices and consistently applied a critical lens throughout my doctoral work. Within the methods section of each manuscript I discuss the intricate details and critical steps taken as I engaged in reflexivity. As a result, I did what I believe to be both meaningful and quality research.*

## CHAPTER TWO: MANUSCRIPT ONE

Preston, C. & Fraser-Thomas, J. (In Press). Problematizing the Pursuit of Personal Development and Performance Success: An Autoethnography of a Canadian Elite Youth Ice Hockey Coach. *The Sport Psychologist*.

### Summary

Performance success and positive development are goals of youth sport coaching that need not, but often do, find themselves in conflict with each other (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2017), yet there is a dearth of research that has explored into the tensions between these two goals for sport coaches. Adopting an autoethnographic research design (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), this study explored my (first author) coaching experiences with a focus on my attempts to facilitate players' personal development and the team's performance success within the context of Canadian elite minor ice hockey. Framed within a positive youth development (PYD) approach, my philosophy and behaviours were informed by key tenants of Achievement Goal Theory (AGT; Nicholls, 1984) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Three key areas were problematized: pursuing personal development and performance success, creating a task-oriented environment, and implementing autonomy-supportive behaviours. Practical implications for elite youth coaches and coach education programmes are discussed.

*KEYWORDS:* elite youth sport; coaching; positive youth development; autoethnography

Problematizing the Pursuit of Personal Development and Performance Success: An  
Autoethnography of a Canadian Elite Youth Ice Hockey Coach

Personal development and performance success (e.g., winning) have been identified as two primary objectives of elite youth sport (Côté & Gilbert, 2009), but there has been growing attention recently to the question of whether these key goals may sometimes be in conflict with one another (e.g., Fraser-Thomas, Beesley, Dickler, Harlow, Mosher, Preston, & Wolman, 2017; Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015). Specifically, it has been suggested that elite youth sport's performance-oriented climate, which often involves extensive time demands, early specialization, high expectations, and social isolation, may place too much emphasis on winning, thus failing to teach life skills or provide opportunities for positive relationship building. While coaches have consistently been suggested to play a key role in facilitating youth's optimal personal development (e.g., Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005; Holt et al., 2017), it appears there is sometimes incongruence between coaching objectives and behaviours in elite sport contexts (Strong, 1992). For example, McCallister, Blinde, and Weiss (2000) found that while coaches clearly articulated the value of both performance and personal development outcomes, they struggled to explain how they achieved personal development outcomes, despite being able to provide detailed examples of how they achieved performance outcomes. Further, there seems to be an underlying belief within elite sport culture that personal development and performance success are mutually exclusive, such that performance success comes at the expense of an athlete's personal well-being (Miller & Kerr, 2002). For example, elite female swimmers have explained that during much of their careers, they believed emotional abuse was needed in order to progress to an elite level; they did not question it, but rather, accepted it as the norm (Stirling & Kerr, 2007).

Despite these concerns, a growing body of research proposes that personal development and performance success can be mutually inclusive (e.g., Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2007; Light & Harvey, 2017; Kidman & Lombardo, 2010; Preston, Kerr & Stirling, 2015), and that there is inherent value in coaches facilitating youth's personal development without sacrificing performance goals, and vice versa (Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015). Yet there is inadequate understanding of the dynamic coaching processes to effectively deliver both of these key outcomes (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2017; Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015). The purpose of this study was to explore the first author's coaching experiences aiming to facilitate personal development and performance success, within a Canadian elite minor hockey context, using a positive youth development (PYD) approach.

### **Positive Youth Development Through Sport**

Personal development is often considered a key component of PYD through sport (Côté, Strachan, & Fraser-Thomas, 2007; Côté, Turnnidge, & Vierimaa, 2016; Strachan, Côté, & Deakin, 2011). PYD has been described as a strength-based approach to development that focuses on fostering youth's psychosocial development (Lerner, Brown, & Kier, 2005) through an asset-building approach focused on building desirable competencies (e.g., teamwork, goal setting, leadership). The PYD approach is in contrast to the traditional deficit-reduction approach, focused on eliminating undesirable behaviours such as engaging in violent behaviour or drug/alcohol consumption (Larson, 2000). As an emerging branch of developmental psychology, the scope and definition of PYD are continually evolving but are often measured through the 5Cs of PYD: competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005). In sport-based PYD research, the personal assets framework suggests key dynamic elements within the sport setting can positively influence the

5Cs among youth, resulting in the long-term outcomes of performance and personal development (Côté et al., 2016).

Over the past decade, a number of PYD through sport frameworks have emerged in the literature (Côté et al., 2007, 2016; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005; Gould & Carson, 2008; Holt et al., 2017). These models have highlighted the important roles of coaches in the facilitation of PYD, most consistently, by: (a) building and sustaining positive relationships with youth; (b) facilitating (directly or indirectly) the development of life skills; and (c) structuring activities in a manner that is conducive to optimal learning.

First, youth's relationships with their coaches play a crucial role in creating a social environment that enables them to experience events that will contribute to PYD outcomes (Holt et al., 2017). One high school student-athlete in Camiré, Trudel, and Bernard's (2013) study succinctly captured the unique nature of coach-athlete relationships stating: "We spend the whole year together at practice and on the bus during weekends. They [coaches] are sort of like our fathers on the road ..." (p. 193). Second, coaches' roles in developing youth's life skills is emerging as an important area of discussion in PYD through sport research (e.g., Turnnidge, Côté, & Hancock, 2014). In their review, Holt and colleagues (2017) summarized several explicit means by which coaches may build life skills, but also suggested life skills may be developed through implicit processes should other elements of a PYD-promoting climate be present. Means by which coaches can explicitly facilitate PYD include establishing high expectations and accountability for behaviour (Flett, Gould, Griffes, & Lauer, 2013), role modeling desired behaviour (Camiré, Trudel, & Forneris, 2012), providing opportunities for leadership roles (Lerner et al., 2005), setting, reminding and tracking athletes' goals (Gould et al., 2007) and taking advantage of teachable moments (Trottier & Robitaille, 2014). Finally,

coaches play a critical role in creating an optimal learning environment for athletes. Youth sport environments have been examined extensively through two key theories: (a) Achievement Goal Theory (AGT; Nicholls, 1984) and (b) Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Given these theories' alignment with a PYD approach, I drew from these theories to create an optimal learning environment within my own team; specifically, tenants of these theories informed my coaching philosophy and guided my coaching behaviours, as I aimed to facilitate athletes' personal development and the team's performance success.

**Achievement Goal Theory.** AGT (Nicholls, 1984) states that an individual's goal orientation may be ego-oriented, where one views success in terms of performance results, and/or task-oriented, viewing success in terms of self-improvement and mastery. The two orientations are not mutually exclusive as individuals may be classified as high task- and high ego-oriented (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Research has found that a task-orientation is associated with sportsperson-like behaviours, effort, persistence, and intention to continue, while an ego-orientation is often associated with unsportsperson-like behaviours, lower effort, and less intent to continue (Biddle, Wang, Kavussanu, & Spray, 2003). To help coaches create a task-oriented climate, Smith, Smoll and Cummings (2007) proposed the Mastery Approach to Coaching (MAC) programme, which teaches coaches five key principles: (a) focus on effort, development and enjoyment over performance success; (b) use positive reinforcement over hostile approaches; (c) promote team unity and supportive behaviours as the norm; (d) involve athletes in deciding rules to reinforce compliance over punishment; and (e) engage in self-reflection and self-awareness of their coaching behaviours (see Smith & Smoll, 2011 for a review). In their intervention study, Smith and colleagues (2007) found MAC trained coaches had significantly higher mastery-climate scores and lower ego-climate scores compared to control coaches.



Further, athletes who had played for MAC-trained coaches reported significant increases in mastery goal orientation and decreases in ego-orientation scores across the season, while control group participants did not. Thus, while AGT has been studied widely in youth sport contexts over the past several decades, the MAC programme appears to provide one of the first practical AGT-driven coaching programmes, with promising results.

**Self Determination Theory.** SDT proposes that athletes are intrinsically motivated when their three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness are satisfied (Deci & Ryan, 1985), and that intrinsic (i.e., self-endorsed) versus controlled (i.e., influenced by external pressures, rewards, punishments) motivation leads to greater psychological health, increased persistence, and more effective performance on experiential activities (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Drawing upon key elements of SDT, Magéau and Vallerand (2003) proposed a motivational model of the coach-athlete relationship that includes seven autonomy-supportive behaviours for coaches: (a) providing choice with specific rules and limits; (b) providing a rationale for tasks and limits; (c) acknowledging the athletes' feelings and perspectives; (d) providing athletes initiative taking and independent work; (e) providing non-controlling competence feedback; (f) avoiding controlling behaviours; and (g) preventing ego-involvement in athletes.

Recent research found athletes' perceptions of coach autonomy-support positively predicted within-person changes and between-person mean differences in basic need satisfaction and well-being over time (Adie, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2012). Additionally, Mallett (2005) found autonomy-supportive behaviours fostered an optimal environment for performance and personal excellence in his autoethnographic (AE) case study, drawing upon his experience as the coach of two Australian Olympic men's relay teams (4 X 100m and 4 X 400m). In contrast, studies have

also found controlling coach behaviours may thwart athletes' autonomy (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2009); these coach behaviours may include: (a) using tangible rewards; (b) controlling feedback; (c) excessive personal control; (d) intimidation; (e) promoting ego-involvement; and (f) providing conditional regard. It has been suggested, "the manifestation of ill-being in sport may be more related to the presence of psychological need thwarting than to the absence of psychological need satisfaction" (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, Ryan, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2011, p. 97).

### **Study Rationale and Purpose**

While a growing number of studies have demonstrated the value of coaches facilitating PYD by (a) building and sustaining positive relationships with youth, (b) facilitating (directly or indirectly) the development of life skills, and (c) structuring activities in a manner that is conducive to optimal learning (e.g., task-oriented environment, autonomy-supportive coaching), there remains limited research focused on the dynamic coaching processes and complex realities of optimizing youth's personal development in an elite youth sport context (Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015). In particular, it has been argued that there is a need for research to examine the antecedents to coaching behaviours for a clearer understanding of the complexity and challenges of promoting an autonomy-supportive approach to coaching (Occhino, Mallett, Rynne, & Carlisle, 2014). Additionally, a recent position piece by Denison, Mills and Konoval (2015) sheds light on how coaching approaches should problematize contexts that normalize maximum coach control.

I (first author) felt I had an ideal opportunity to further consider the dynamic coaching processes and complex realities of optimizing youth's personal development within an elite youth sport context, during my first year as a doctoral student. My research interests lay in PYD

and coaching in youth sport, and I had just accepted my first head coaching position of a boys' (10-years-old) 'AAA' (highest level) minor hockey team in Canada. I was keen to embrace my new coaching position with an intentionally informed PYD approach, while recognizing I may experience challenges in applying my theoretically-based knowledge and understanding of coaching 'on the ground'. As such, I drew upon AE research methods (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) to explore my coaching experience using a PYD approach with a focus on my attempts to facilitate players' personal development and the team's performance success within the context of Canadian elite minor ice hockey.

## **Method**

### **Background and Context**

This study focused on my first year as a head coach of a 'AAA' minor hockey team. The team consisted of 17 ten-year old boys playing at the highest level in their age group. The team of this particular year was made up primarily of new players. The team had performed poorly in the previous season, and following tryouts, I asked only six players to return; I filled the remaining positions by selecting players from other 'AA' and 'AAA' teams in the area. I officially selected the team during tryouts in April, but we did not officially start training as a team until our training camp in late August. The regular season started in mid-September and our season concluded six months later in February. Two assistant coaches were involved with the team beginning early in the season; they contributed to my coach development through shared discussions and reflections, and helped create practice drills/challenges, decide strategies for games, and manage the bench during games (i.e., one assistant coach was responsible for the defencemen, 6 of the 17 athlete roster, during games). Both of the assistant coaches shared similar coaching philosophies to my own, and were committed to utilizing and reinforcing the

coaching behaviours we felt optimized personal development and performance. As such, I trusted them in sharing responsibilities, which appeared to foster positive and effective working relationships.

A unique characteristic of this context is Canada's national obsession with hockey (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993). It has been suggested parents often invest excessive amounts of time and money with the misguided goals of their child reaching the National Hockey League (NHL) (Campbell & Parcels, 2013). Consequently, the pressures to win and be the best may be particularly substantive in this context, affecting young players, parents, and coaches. Parents often expect performance results, viewing the money spent on hockey as an investment that should pay out with a scholarship or lucrative NHL contract (Campbell & Parcels, 2013).

### **Researcher as Coach**

Given this was my first head coaching position, I entered the role with no previous head coaching experience and embraced the learning opportunity. However, I brought a wealth of knowledge to the position through my past coaching, playing, and research experiences. Specifically, I had been an assistant coach for three seasons with another age group (different athletes) and had ten years of experience coaching at summer hockey schools. In addition, I had played ten years of competitive hockey including five years of Junior A/Major Junior (i.e., top level for youth/men under 20 years of age), and five years for a varsity team within the Canadian Interuniversity Sport (now known as USport) system. I also brought significant knowledge from my research in the fields of coaching and sport psychology, with a specific research background in athlete-centred coaching (Preston, Kerr & Stirling, 2015). Through these experiences, I had developed a philosophy rooted in PYD, informed by AGT and SDT, focused on optimizing the personal development and long-term performance success among youth athletes. The season

provided me with an opportunity to engage in an AE-informed study, to better understand my experience as a first time head coach pursuing a PYD approach at the most elite level in Canadian minor hockey.

### **Autoethnography-Informed Methods**

Based upon the assumptions of an interpretive paradigm, studies using AE methods aim to understand and illuminate human experience from the point of view of those experiencing it, in contrast to studies drawing upon methodologies situated within the positivist paradigm which aims to predict and control (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). AE is defined as “an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). Specifically, this study was informed by a personal narrative form of AE, whereas I (first author), the researcher, took on the dual identities of academic and personal selves to tell autobiographical stories about my experiences coaching elite minor hockey, enabling me to explore a particular social phenomenon by drawing on my personal experiences (Culver, Gilbert, & Sparkes, 2012). The goal of this study was to portray a representation of my experience to evoke “in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 751).

As studies using an AE research design remain limited in sport psychology, appropriate ethical protocol is not always clear or consistent. We engaged in lengthy discussion with our university ethics review board to determine an appropriate ethical protocol, while also reviewing previous works (e.g., Mallett, 2005). In conclusion, we determined that formal written consent was not required from other persons (e.g., players, parents, other coaches) given that the study was an examination of my experiences as an elite youth hockey coach. Nonetheless, we felt that it was important that assistant coaches, parents, and athletes had knowledge of my research; they

were made aware that I was a doctoral student exploring my experiences as the head coach of an elite youth hockey team. Further, in preparing the manuscript, we ensured no identifiable information was included such as biographical details of others (e.g., assistant coaches), years or location of the study, or specific meaningful dates throughout the season.

Throughout the season, I journaled and was guided by a self-reflection spread sheet, recording my experiences after every practice or game (i.e., approximately two practices and two games per week, over a six-month period) through the lens of PYD. Early in the season, I drew primarily on journaling, with entries being open ended, ranging from short paragraphs to multiple pages depending on the day. I wrote about events within particular training/game days, and/or moments of learning/realization that occurred on days off, often focusing on consistencies and inconsistencies between my experiences and the literature. By mid-October, I had created a self-reflection spreadsheet, emerging from my journaling reflections, in combination with my knowledge of the literature. The spreadsheet challenged me to consider more specific approaches and behaviours within my coaching; it consisted of eight open-ended prompting questions to assess myself, the team, and approaches moving forward (e.g., “What would I do differently?”) and 14 questions related to specific coaching behaviours, considering my quality and quantity of programme delivery (e.g., “Did I provide choices or initiatives for planning or learning?”). The introspection process provided me with the opportunity to identify emotions I might not otherwise acknowledge or admit (Ellis, 2009).

In total, my journal entries amounted to 43 single spaced pages (12-point font) and my self-reflection spreadsheet amassed to 49 pages. Data analysis occurred throughout the project. Specifically, the retrospective and selective nature of the analysis allowed me to compare and contrast the relevant literature with my experiences when recording data (i.e., journaling,

spreadsheet entries) throughout the season, after the season, and while preparing the findings for communication (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Since I was invested heavily in the data, it was important for me to look at the data as a whole, and deductively analyze my journal notes and self-reflection spreadsheet for themes and storylines (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Further, the reflexivity process encouraged me to constantly draw upon my personal perspective (i.e., moving in), but also to step away from my perspective during the analysis (i.e., moving out), to create rich descriptions and investigative interpretations (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The second author, an established researcher in the area of PYD through sport, but disconnected from this specific elite youth sport context, was also instrumental in helping me maintain perspective of the data. Together, we engaged in extensive dialogue and lengthy discussions, further facilitating the interpretation and understanding of my experience, particularly by helping me connect my experiences to wider issues. My experiences were eventually categorized into themes, and illustrated through facets of storytelling.

Since traditional criteria used to judge qualitative inquiries are not always appropriate for autoethnographic forms of research (Garrett & Hodkinson, 1999; Holt, 2003; Sparkes, 2000), we aimed to assure the credibility, rigour, and sincerity of our research process through various means, including persistent and extensive interaction within the field (i.e., over six months, with two practices and two games per week), prolonged engagement and reflection (i.e., consistent and extensive journaling and note taking during the six month period, and during an extended data analysis period), and peer debriefing (i.e., lengthy discussions between authors throughout the data collection, analysis and write-up). Further, our intention was that the overall ‘reliability, validity, and trustworthiness’ of the study be judged by alternatively proposed factors for reviewing personal narrative papers including: (a) substantive contribution (i.e., Does the paper

enhance our understanding of social life?); (b) aesthetic merit (i.e., Is the paper artistically shaped and engaging?); (c) reflexivity (i.e., How did the author gather the information and write the text?); (d) impactfulness (i.e., Does the paper move me emotionally or intellectually? Does it elicit new questions?); and (e) expression of a reality (i.e., Does it appear true?) (Richardson, 2000).

## **Results and Discussion**

My experience aiming to facilitate personal development and performance success using a PYD approach highlights the complexity of transforming theory into practice as an elite youth ice hockey coach. Specifically, my experience provides deep and personal insights of the dynamic coaching processes, problematizing three major coaching issues: (a) pursuing personal development and performance success, (b) creating a task-oriented environment, and (c) utilizing autonomy-supportive behaviours.

### **Pursuing Personal Development and Performance Success**

In line with the overall purpose of the study, my first complex challenge was indeed the pursuit of personal development and performance success – suggested to be the two primary objectives of elite youth sport (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). I felt that it was a constant struggle throughout the season to achieve both of these desired outcomes - more of a dance that never looked the same, rather than a straightforward path. Below, I outline and discuss two key areas that absorbed much of my focus, reflection, and attention as I tried to best meet these objectives: (a) dilemmas of playing time, and (b) practical coaching behaviours.

**Dilemmas of playing time.** Obviously, to give the team the best chance at short-term success, it was necessary to give stronger players more playing time. However, I believed that a significant decrease in an athlete's playing time had the potential to compromise his personal



development, improvement, and enjoyment. Specifically, I was concerned that an athlete's feelings of connection to the team may decrease if they perceived they were taking on less significant roles than their peers. Likewise, I felt their confidence may decrease if they perceived less playing time was a reflection of insufficient abilities. In addition, the athletes' actual competence may have been compromised through the missed opportunities to develop their skills and to demonstrate their abilities. However, when I distributed playing time equally, I encountered a different dilemma, as top players were often upset that they were not being acknowledged and rewarded for their efforts. Evidently, there were many tough decisions I experienced around playing time that appeared at times to put personal development and performance success in conflict. In particular, I felt as a coach striving to facilitate PYD (i.e., helping athletes build their competence and confidence through a strengths-based approach), I should be giving players all the opportunities to play, and fulfill all of their desires to play, all of the time, and that I was failing a player who was not satisfied. However, my struggles were based on the false assumption that personal development was directly related to unlimited opportunities for play and meeting the playing time expectations of the players.

As the season progressed, I realized that athletes were learning how to make compromises, deal with adversity, and consider the best interest of the team ahead of their own playing desires or ambitions – in essence, they began experiencing various forms of personal development (e.g., character development). This finding aligns with recent work highlighting that growth occurs through adversity and coaches sometimes need to show “tough love” to promote personal development. For example, Gould and colleagues (2007) found this tactic was used by award winning high school football coaches; “at times they were hard and reprimanded players on the field, but made sure players never left the football experience not knowing that

their coaches cared about them as people” (p. 30). Moreover, Collins and MacNamara (2012) make the argument that talent needs trauma, providing evidence that challenges (often prevailed through mental toughness and resilience) are more common in athletes who reach the top. Further, in their study of underserved youth, Flett and colleagues (2013) found that most effective coaches challenged players while being supportive. These recent studies likely contributed to Fraser-Thomas and Strachan’s (2015) assertion that higher levels of competition coupled with some adversity may actually offer a more optimal environment for positive youth development.

**Practical coaching behaviours.** In addition to the dilemmas around playing time, I also felt conflicted regarding other practical coaching behaviours and approaches. However, I learned to focus on what was within my control, and to be confident that my decisions considered the best interests of both individual players’ development and the team’s success as a whole. Below, I highlight my learning experiences with attention to three practical coaching approaches: clarifying my coaching objectives, managing playing time, and giving honest feedback.

**Clarifying my coaching objectives.** Throughout the season, I gradually defined my collective aims as a coach: to achieve short-term success, to achieve long-term success, and to facilitate players’ personal development. Because there were numerous interacting factors that had the potential to influence my aims, I developed clear principles to abide by around success, which I believe supported the possibility of achieving my aims:

1. Personal development is key to long-term performance success.
2. Managing playing time to achieve short-term success can be used to teach important life skills such as resiliency and a team-first mentality.

3. Managing playing time to achieve short-term success (to a degree) can serve to motivate players to earn their playing time, work harder, and continue to develop. Not rewarding players for their effort may demotivate players.

Although my coaching aims and underlying principles of success may appear to be clear, they were constantly at risk of being compromised by various factors. Most notably, these collective aims were influenced by the pressures to win, which often caused my attention to narrow in on short-term success (the first aim), such that I pushed away my aims for long-term success and players' personal development (the second and third aims). The pressures to win often came from myself given my competitive nature, but players' parents often added to this pressure. While in general, parents on our team were very supportive during the season, a bombardment of parent pressure to win triggered much reflection and some self-doubt following a pair of losing games that we had the potential to win mid-season, whereby parents were critical of my management of playing time. I reflected in my journal:

I have never been hit so hard with the pressure to win from the parents – not the players!

It is just madness - like as if I don't want to win - that is their mindset. They question how competitive I am. It blows my mind really. They are not explicitly saying that 'we have to win or we will leave' but that is the message that is being delivered.

The onslaught continued with a very detailed email from a parent, which made me consider stepping down from my position. I found the severity of the pressure to win from parents particularly disturbing given this was a minor hockey team made up of ten year old boys. This situation reinforced the importance of clarity in my coaching aims and underlying principles, in order to withstand the pressures to win from the parents.

***Managing playing time.*** Given the dilemmas discussed above regarding playing time, it follows that a second practical coaching strategy I drew upon to optimize players' personal development and the team's performance success was managing playing time. I learned to treat each situation based on its unique characteristics. The goal was to provide opportunities for players to develop and perform, while also encouraging the players to earn their playing time through effort and execution. Two key factors encouraged equal playing time: (a) that the game's fate had already been sealed (i.e., a large lead); and (b) that the game had minimal meaning (i.e., pre-season or minimal effect on standings). Conversely, several factors encouraged giving extra playing time to those that earned it through effort and execution including: players putting forth extra efforts and high levels of performance, meaningful games (i.e., finals, significant effect on standings, or playoffs), tight games (i.e., close score), special team situations (e.g., power play or penalty kill), and start/end of period. In addition to these factors, I also gave careful consideration to providing additional playing time if a player was struggling with confidence or had been given limited opportunities. The journal entry below captures my reflections as I tried to put these strategies into action, while also considering my larger aims:

I need to know my players and put the right players on at the right times. For example, a player who has played a strong game and has done the little things well should be put on at the end of the game or in a key situation. Likewise, I need to sit a star player for not doing the little things well or not playing to his ability... I think what is important is not to stress over the little decisions of who is up next, but to constantly be thinking about the bigger picture - being able to sit back and really assess what is going on here, and decide who goes on the ice when. Always thinking about what is best for the players and the team. (January 13<sup>th</sup>)

Further, my assistant coaches played an integral role in my management of playing time. Because I had a strong, knowledgeable, trustworthy support staff, I was able to delegate other leading roles (e.g., coaching the forwards) to one of the assistant coaches, so I could in turn focus more of my attention on assessing the players on the ice during the game and managing their playing time. As I noted in a journal entry, this “allowed me more time to watch, analyze the game – allowing me to then make better decisions when needed regarding sitting players and giving extra playing time. Frees up more of my viewing time and thinking time during a game” (January 13<sup>th</sup>).

Previous research by Gilbert, Trudel and Haughian (1999) highlights factors ice hockey coaches consider in making playing time decisions. They found that the youth coaches cited 2.6 to 3.2 factors for each interactive decision, challenging the adoption of dichotic (yes-no) decision-making models based solely on player performance. Specifically, they identified 21 factors ranging from game score and player performance to previous coaching actions and player history/habits. My experience supports these findings, while also offering insight into the dynamic and fluid reciprocity of these factors, and the specific complex processes of pursuing personal development and performances success, in addition to proposing approaches or strategies to navigate these complexities. Further, as my approach began to solidify, I recognized that many of my values on allocating playing time stemmed from considering the PYD outcomes of competence, confidence, character, connection, and caring (Lerner et al., 2005). For example, when a player was not playing well or lacking confidence, I made sure I provided him an opportunity to display his abilities; when a player received less playing time, they had opportunities to develop a team first mentality and resiliency, attributes of an individual of character.

***Giving honest feedback.*** In addition to managing playing time, I found it was imperative that I provide honest feedback to players regarding their abilities and playing time. When players had reduced playing time, they needed to know why, and how they could earn more playing time (i.e., what they needed to do differently). Honest feedback became particularly important during the final stretch of the season when some players' playing time decreased in key situations to give the team the best chance to win a game. One player in this situation initially became upset and expressed his concerns to me. While I knew it would be difficult, I felt a frank and constructive discussion was in order, as he was struggling with his defensive responsibilities. I was honest and described the areas in his game he needed to work on. I told him that if he started to execute these skills, he would receive more playing time, and gave him suggestions on how to improve these necessary skills. The player appeared to leave that meeting with a sense of optimism and motivation to improve the necessary skills; his father also texted me to thank me for the meeting, suggesting it had improved his son's attitude.

This honest feedback approach aligns with the change-oriented feedback approach – indicating inadequate performance and behaviours need to be modified to achieve performance goals (e.g., Carpentier & Mageau, 2013). Change-oriented feedback is the counterpart of promotion-oriented feedback – which aims to confirm and reinforce desired behaviours. Consistent with past recommendations, I found that quality change-oriented feedback must be empathetic, paired with tips, prompt, private, and given with a considerate tone of voice (Carpentier & Mageau, 2013). For example, before I expressed my thoughts to athletes, I would often listen first to their thoughts and acknowledge their feelings about a situation. This process supports the autonomy of the athlete and creates the opportunity for the coach to provide non-controlling competence feedback (Magéau & Vallerand, 2003). Also, consistent with past work,

I initially found change-oriented feedback was unpleasant to give, as I delayed or withheld feedback; this has been found to be particularly common for someone like myself in a position of authority (Larson, 1989). However, the positive outcomes I experienced after successfully providing change-oriented feedback highlight the importance of elite youth coaches being honest and embracing the ‘unpleasant’ process of change-oriented feedback. Finally, my experiences were also in line with recent work among retired Olympic athletes (Preston et al., 2015). While coaches provided feedback that was sometimes perceived as harsh or blunt, with time, athletes usually recognized the feedback as honest and growth focused, and welcomed it as constructive and helpful to their development as elite athletes.

### **Task-Oriented Environment**

The second complex challenge I faced while aiming to facilitate personal development and performance success through a PYD approach was creating a task-oriented environment. I found it to be surprisingly difficult to effectively create a task-oriented environment given the degree of the players’, parents’ and coaching staff members’ (myself included) ego-orientation. For example, during one-on-one battle drills in practice, it was not uncommon for the losing player to be upset and frustrated to the point of tears. The players often did not seem to know how to deal with defeat, apparently thinking winning was all that mattered, despite our attempt to communicate otherwise throughout the season. Below, I discuss my experiences as I tried to create a task-oriented environment, framed within three key areas: (a) the coaching staff members’ behaviours and feedback; (b) the success criteria for the team and athletes; and (c) additional strategies in creating a task-oriented environment.

**Coaching staff members’ behaviours and feedback.** Consistent with past assertions (e.g., Duda & Whitehead, 2015), I found the most important component to creating a task-

oriented environment was the coaching staff's behaviour and feedback to athletes. In particular, it was critical as coaches that we modelled a task-oriented approach, as our behaviours were almost instantaneously replicated by players. In one particular game, I was frustrated with some of the players' decisions and I made a few less than helpful comments on the bench, such as asking the rhetorical question, "Why would we dump that in there?" My comments offered indirect criticisms towards some of the players, and the players immediately started bickering with each other and expressing their frustrations by criticising each other, rather than taking responsibility for their own actions. After the game I took responsibility, apologized for my actions and explained to the team how I had lost perspective during the game, leading to uncalled for finger pointing; I would have been better off to have stayed focused on the tasks within our control, rather than the end results of the play.

While I initially misconceived my body language, hand gestures, tone of voice, and type of feedback as minute details, they clearly had a significant impact on the players' goal orientations. For example, a slight change in my demeanour would often shift a player from a task-oriented state to an ego-oriented state, where he became afraid to make a mistake, causing him to play with hesitation, in turn, drastically altering his performance. As the season progressed, we intentionally monitored and improved our behaviours as a coaching staff, given our recognition of the degree of influence we had on the motivational climate. This process of increasing our self-awareness and engaging in self-reflection was consistent with the final key principle of the MAC programme (Smith & Smoll, 2011), while our focus on effort, development, and enjoyment over performance success was informed by the first key principle of the MAC programme. Further, we focused on controlling our reactions to outcomes, avoiding judgemental comments, and providing more feedback regarding the athletes' effort, attitude, and



development – in line with the second key principle of the MAC programme – to use positive reinforcement over hostile approaches.

**Success criteria for the team and athletes.** While reviewing my journals and self-reflection spreadsheets after the season ended, I realized I had never clearly articulated our definition of success throughout the season; however, I had communicated clear messages around what success *was not* (i.e., just winning) and what it *was* (i.e., development, enjoyment, teamwork, character, effort, and attitude). For example, as the season progressed and the standings became a more prevalent topic of interest, I would reassert that we did not need to worry about the standings and that we instead focus on doing our best (November 27<sup>th</sup>). I also took advantage of our losses to point out that the process of how we played (i.e., what we controlled) was more important than the result. In December, we lost a tournament in the finals to a lower ranked team, hence the loss weighed heavily on the team. However, I found the situation provided a great teachable moment; I emphasized how the loss did not define us, and that if we kept focusing on how we played, long term success would come. I explained that results are not always indicative of play, and that, in some games, we are not going to get the bounces, but that continued effort and development would lead to long-term success. My approach in this situation, which challenged team members to separate feelings of self-worth from wins and losses, was again largely informed by the MAC key principle to focus on effort, development and enjoyment over performance success (Smith & Smoll, 2011).

Fittingly, the pinnacle of focusing on the process over results in terms of success criteria took place during our next tournament in January. We were going into the championship game and I could sense the pressure the players were feeling about winning. It was our last and best shot to win a significant event. I even had a few parents tell me this, not so subtly suggesting that

it really mattered if we won or lost the game. It was obvious that the players really wanted to win; they sat quietly and anxiously in the room, they were gripping their sticks tightly and clenching their jaws shut in anticipation of the big game. Although I also wanted to win the game and the tournament, it was apparent the pressure being experienced in the room was going to be detrimental to our performance. Therefore, I announced during my pre-game speech: “I don’t really care if we win or lose this game... compared to how much I want us to just go out and have fun, compete, and do our best!” My words were shocking at first. The players starred at me in bewilderment; they must have thought I was crazy. But I elaborated and continued to emphasize how much I cared about their effort and intensity, about them having fun and playing to their potential. Within a few moments the tension in the room dissipated, the players jumped up and roared in excitement, and took to the ice focused on working hard and having fun. The speech appeared to help get the majority of the players in an optimal mindset (i.e., task focused and excited). As a result, they went out, played to their potential, and defeated a team that was ranked much higher than us, in turn winning the tournament. This experience further enhanced my belief that MAC can be effective in fostering a task-oriented climate (e.g., Smith & Smoll, 2011; Smith et al., 2007), and the value of framing and following clear criteria for success with the team.

In addition to providing task-oriented success criteria for the team, I created opportunities for and encouraged athletes to set their own task-oriented goals throughout the season, and I explained the rationale behind this approach. For example, during our training camp, I encouraged athletes to set their focus on tasks within their control such as how well they played, and to be a great hockey team. I also provided the team with opportunities to share their thoughts regarding team task-oriented goals, and together we set the goal to be a great hockey team. The

players appeared to buy into this approach; however, upon reflection, I recognized that the task goals we set lacked specificity. As Locke and Latham (2002) explain, vague ‘do your best’ goals are not as effective as specific, difficult performance and/or learning goals. Subsequently, early in the season we created more specific and measurable process related goals for games related to scoring chances, conversation rates, and passes made.

Also early in the season, as part of a team function, I led a goal setting session with the players and parents that encouraged them to set their own (individually-based) task-oriented goals (e.g., to improve shot power by practicing their shot for two hours each week), following another discussion regarding the value of a task-orientation. Although I had good intentions, I could have improved the impact of the individual goal setting with more follow up. Locke and Latham (2002) emphasize providing summary feedback to reveal progress towards a goal as an important moderator for goal effectiveness.

**Additional strategies in creating a task-oriented environment.** The challenges I experienced implementing a task-oriented environment were surprising and concerning given the recognized positive outcomes associated with a task-oriented environment (e.g., Biddle et al., 2003; Smith et al., 2007). I was intentionally focused on creating a task-oriented environment and well equipped from an educational standpoint to do so, yet even I struggled. Foremost, my experience highlights the need for more resources (e.g., manuals, workshops, webinars) to be readily available not only for elite youth sport coaches, but also for families, to effectively support coach-facilitated task-oriented approaches. In addition, given the complexity of implementing a task-oriented environment, educational programming should include a practical component, to provide coaches opportunities to effectively create task-oriented environments through experiential learning.

Although in this study I focused on my experiences during my first season as a head coach, it is worth noting that I continued coaching this same team in subsequent seasons, and while the creation of a task-oriented environment remains a key challenge for me, I have developed several additional effective strategies. Foremost, I instituted a “no talking about results” (e.g., winning, rankings, and standings) rule which was used by the legendary basketball coach John Wooden (Nater & Gallimore, 2010); this is very helpful in avoiding an ego-oriented environment. Furthermore, I draw upon Carol Dweck’s (2006) work on the growth mindset to provide me with practical and simple examples to follow and share with the players and parents. For example, I encourage athletes to interpret challenges as learning opportunities to be excited about (i.e., growth mindset) rather than to be anxious about the threat of failure (i.e., fixed mindset). Finally, I clarified and more clearly articulated my definition of success for the team and the players. Inspired by the late John Wooden’s pyramid of success (Nater & Gallimore, 2010), I created a simplified success pyramid focused on respect, team first, development, compete, self-belief, and relaxed focused. I also created a short list of questions for the players to reflect on after practices and games, to encourage them to review their day in light of our definition of success rather than the norm of just winning (e.g., Did you listen when the coaches or your teammates were talking today? Which teammates did you encourage and support today?). I have found this approach to help orient the players and myself. Monitoring my perspective of winning and losing in relation to our definition of success has been crucial to modeling desired coaching behaviours and providing non-controlling competence related feedback.

## **Autonomy-Supportive Behaviours**

Arguably the most complex challenge I faced as an elite youth sport coach aiming to facilitate personal development and performance success, was utilizing consequences in conjunction with autonomy-supportive coaching behaviours (Magéau & Vallerand, 2003). Despite being highly motivated and committed to this approach, I found that the inherent power dynamic of the coach-athlete relationship complicated this process (Denison et al., 2015). In short, I struggled to turn Magéau and Vallerand's (2003) autonomy-supportive recommendations into practice. At the beginning of the season, I tried to create a working relationship with the players, fostering a sense of ownership within the team, and not being overtly controlling and dictating with rules. I welcomed players' ideas and gave these ideas consideration when developing rules and limits, ensuring they understood the overall rationale and their contributions behind each rule. My belief was that this would create an autonomy-supportive environment where the players would be self-motivated and, therefore, achieve greater performance success and personal development outcomes. Instead I found that providing choices to athletes was often at odds with setting rules, limits and consequences (Magéau & Vallerand, 2003). If I provided too much choice without any structure, then chaos and a sub-optimal development and performance was likely. For example, early in the season I asked the players to suggest drills for an upcoming practice; this resulted in a flurry of suggestions that were not well thought-out (i.e., drills/games we were already doing regularly, or games that were not optimal for their development). Conversely, if I provided too much structure without any choice, then a lack of motivation and sub-optimal development and performance was likely. For example, in our first tournament I reflected, "There is so much to teach these kids and if we focus on too much and forget the fun then it won't come together" (September 9<sup>th</sup>). However, over the course

of the season I developed a deeper understanding for the art of Magéau and Vallerand's (2003) autonomy-supportive behaviours. For example, in the account outlined above where I provided players too much autonomy in selecting drills, I eventually learned to instead provide the players with a set of drills/games and allow them to choose which one they wanted to participate in. Essentially, I learned to rely upon two key practical coaching strategies: (a) finding balance; and (b) creating ownership.

**Finding balance.** At the beginning of the season, all the players bought into the rules that we set together during training camp and no one seemed to be breaking them; the players were motivated and the accountability on the team was high. However, as time passed the players noticed that the rules could be broken without any real consequence, which quickly resulted in an environment that lacked accountability. For example, there was an agreed understanding amongst the players to pass the puck to open teammates, but we had not set clear consequences if and when players did not pass the puck. Subsequently, players seemed to develop the mentality of, "If he doesn't have to pass the puck, then I am not going to pass the puck!" (October 28<sup>th</sup>). Simply telling the players that they were supposed to be passing the puck was not enough. I recognized that I needed to set and implement consequences and I drew upon self-reflection and the help of my mentor, one of my former high-level coaches, to help me negotiate the right balance.

In early November, I started discussing coaching ideas with my mentor more often (approximately bi-weekly from that point on). During one of our first conversations, he advised me to define "what hills I was willing to die on." He explained that it was a war metaphor, where soldiers would choose to make a stand on a certain hill and would not retreat no matter the situation; hence, they chose a hill they were willing to die for. To me, this meant I needed to

clearly define what I was willing to stand up for and what rules I would not budge on. Following his advice, I revisited my approach to rules and consequences, to help me clarify my standards for the team. Then I reviewed the standards with the players that we had previously discussed and proposed why we would be using consequences if these standards were not met. The players bought in to this revisited approach, especially since many wanted their teammates to pass the puck more; we came to a mutual agreement on the standards and consequences. From that point forward, I felt more comfortable taking away playing time during practices and games (i.e., consequences) if players did not fulfil our mutual agreements.

After a month of continually holding the players accountable for passing by reinforcing consequences for not passing (i.e., sitting the player out one shift), the players started to consistently follow the rule – always looking for open teammates and passing the puck selflessly. During this month-long learning period, consequences were reinforced two to three times per game until mid-December when I did not have to sit any players. There were a few incidents throughout the remainder of the season when the players would slip back into old habits and they would be sat accordingly; however, there was no doubt that the level of accountability with regards to passing the puck improved. I summarized the significance of consequences following our tournament win in late January:

The sitting tactics have made our expectations clear and as a result we don't need to sit players very often. We are playing better: getting pucks deep, getting pucks out, short shifts and so on... Now we rarely need to sit someone.

In reflection, I realize that I started my season without a clear understanding of how to balance the use of choices and consequences; I was even hesitant to use consequences in fear of thwarting the autonomy of the players. I was again somewhat surprised and concerned by my

initial inability to effectively implement such a fundamental approach, considering my extensive background knowledge. I have come to realize a key point of distinction perhaps often overlooked with regard to autonomy-supportive behaviours is that they are meant to support the autonomy of the athletes, not to provide complete autonomy to athletes. My (gradually realized) interpretation aligns with the meaning of autonomy support: “an individual in a position of authority (e.g., an instructor) takes the other’s (e.g., a student’s) perspective, acknowledges the other’s feelings, and provides the other with pertinent information and opportunities for choice, while minimizing the use of pressures and demands” (Black & Deci, 2000, p. 742). My misconception of autonomy-supportive behaviours and subsequent struggles parallel findings of Headley-Cooper’s (2010) study where elite coaches had misconceptions about the meaning of ‘athlete centred’: “Many coaches thought that athlete centred meant that the athlete drives the decision making process and direction of the program,” (p. 106) rather than catering to the athletes’ needs by enabling them in the decision making process. From a more philosophical lens, this experience reinforced for me the valuable intersecting point in which practitioners and researchers collectively contribute to the understanding of a concept, and the importance of reciprocal, bidirectional, ongoing collaborations between coaches and researchers, to optimize knowledge and practice.

**Creating ownership.** In addition to balancing the use of autonomy-supportive behaviours, I found it helpful to clarify my role and the players’ roles within the team. Foremost, I intentionally made sure the players understood that the team was their team, to help foster a deep sense of ownership and autonomy within them. This was important because as the coach I was in a position of authority and often made the final call on key decisions (e.g., player selection, playing time), inherently, but not intentionally, suggesting that this was my team. I was



concerned that if the players perceived these decisions as controlling, this could thwart the basic psychology needs of the athlete, thus counteracting autonomy-supportive behaviours (Bartholomew et al., 2009). However, it was evidently the players' decisions and actions on the ice that either won or lost the games. Thus, it was their team and I was their coach. We talked at length about taking ownership of the team – how as a group of 17 young boys they were the core of the team; the coaching staff and parents were simply in support roles. It seemed important that the players heard this from the coaches (i.e., the authority figures), as this seemed to allow them to appreciate each of our roles and positions. We reinforced this message through our consistent consideration and integration of players' opinions when setting rules or plans (e.g., drills in practice, music in the changing room); it was their team so they got a say in how it was organized. During the second half of the season, we also initiated an energizing and ownership reinforcing team chant. I would ask, "Whose team is it?" They would respond, "Ours!"

Furthermore, we focused on developing decision makers, such that the athletes were taking ownership of their own development and performance. For example, in late September the team was struggling to make appropriate line changes (i.e., players had poor situation awareness, and were misjudging shift length) despite the coaching staff's continuous reinforcements of desired and undesirable line changes, accompanied by a lot of yelling during the game to notify players when it was an appropriate time to change. We soon recognized the limitations of this approach, and decided to give the responsibility for line changes to the players. First we had a discussion with the athletes on what desirable and undesirable line changes 'looked like' to ensure they understood the expectations and rationale behind these expectations (i.e., efficiency). Then we told them we would no longer call them off; that they would make the decision for themselves when it was appropriate to change lines. Somewhat to our surprise, the athletes

executed the desired line changes flawlessly. It seemed that when athletes were challenged to reflect on what effective decision making ‘looked like’ around line changes, and were immediately given the opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities to make effective decisions (i.e., the coaches went silent on line changes), the players autonomously made the right decisions themselves. Athletes appeared to appreciate the trust and responsibility afforded them; the team seemed so invigorated they actually had an impressive 9-0 win in our first game using this approach. These examples of creating ownership again align with Magéau and Vallerand’s (2003) autonomy-supportive behaviours for coaches; particularly, providing choice with specific rules and limits, acknowledging the athletes’ feelings and perspectives, and providing athletes initiative taking and independent work.

In sum, three major coaching issues were problematized through my experience aiming to facilitate personal development and performance success within elite youth sport, using a PYD approach; however, there were interconnected threads between each one of these challenges, often leading me to have overlapping approaches to these three specific issues. For example, the honest feedback and change-oriented feedback approaches I utilized in trying to optimize players’ personal development and performance success (the first problem/challenge), were also relevant as I tried to foster a task-oriented climate (the second problem/challenge) and aligned with the autonomy-supportive coaching recommendations on providing competence related non-controlling feedback (that I drew upon to address the third problem/challenge). Similarly, the MAC recommendations to involve athletes in developing rules to reinforce compliance over punishment is a fundamental approach to autonomy-supportive coaching behaviours; for example, we utilized this approach to improve passing the puck habits, set team goals, establish a team identity, and choose team chants. Therefore, while our results are presented in a fairly

siloed manner, it is important to recognize the fluid and dynamic relationship between problematized issues.

### **General Discussion**

The current study problematized the dynamic and complex process of striving to facilitate personal development and performance success - the two key objectives of elite youth sport (Côté & Gilbert, 2009) - through my PYD coaching approach. The AE-informed research design allowed me to explore this social phenomenon through my own experience and personal reflections (Culver et al., 2012), in turn offering a deeper understanding of this phenomenon in connection with current knowledge.

First, I feel that it is important to provide some additional context to my experience. Despite (or perhaps in part because of) my challenges, it is worth noting that the team achieved substantive performance success. At the end of the season the team achieved a winning percentage above .500, almost doubling the previous season's percentage. The team also placed first and second in two 'AAA' tournaments (i.e., the highest competition level). Following the season I drew upon the experiences reflected within this paper, and continued my pursuit of optimizing personal development and performance success with this team. During my second year with the team, we improved to a winning percentage above .700, placed first in our division, and advanced to the league finals, losing the finals in a sudden death overtime. This was followed by a third season with a winning percentage above .800.

My subjective assessment of the athletes' personal development outcomes also shows promise. When considered through a motivational lens, every player has wanted to return to the team after each season. Parents have claimed that the coaching staff have been positive role models in terms of academics, character, and respect. In addition, I have (anecdotally) observed

improvements in athletes' 5Cs (Lerner et al., 2005) – specifically their competence and confidence, and their connections with teammates, coaches and other parents. While it is impossible to know how the team's performance and personal development may have played out under a different coach with a different approach, in this study, my very intentional and reflective approach to attain both objectives was reasonably successful.

As such, this study questions assertions that PYD and high performance sport are in conflict, or mutually exclusive (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2017; Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015; Miller & Kerr, 2002). Instead, my experiences suggest a potential interconnection or bi-directional relationship between personal development and performance success among elite youth athletes (Côté et al., 2016). Further, my experiences highlight that the pursuit of success does not always equate to an overemphasis on winning, that accountability to high expectations can be a PYD experience, and that rich relationships can develop through autonomy-supportive and task-oriented climates within elite youth sport. Additionally, my reflections offer a contribution to recent work showing PYD can occur through adversity, and coaches sometimes need to show 'tough love' to promote personal development (Collins & MacNamara, 2012; Flett et al., 2013; Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015; Gould et al., 2007). Athletes in this study learned to compromise, put others ahead of self, and accept consequences. As such, the PYD asset-building approach that focuses on building desirable competencies (Larson, 2000) should perhaps be revisited to consider important personal development opportunities emerging through adversities, and that high levels of competition within the elite youth sport may in some situations offer a more optimal environment for PYD (Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015).

This study also provides novel insights into the unique context of Canadian AAA minor hockey, highlighting the tremendous focus on performance success, despite being a youth sport

system, which includes ten-year old children. This context pushed me to further question and challenge my own beliefs about what success entails – particularly within this team. Multiple themes emerged around my interpretation of success, including clarifying my coaching objectives for success, developing our team’s definition of success, and helping the team and I pursue success within these parameters. Further, the performance-based context supports previous assertions regarding Canada’s national obsession with hockey (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993), and parents’ exaggerated expectations for their child’s performance (Campbell & Parcels, 2013). This is perhaps not surprising, given the trend within sport systems in western nations to stream children in an early specialization trajectory, focus on expertise development from a young age, and offer accompanying high amounts of deliberate practice training (e.g., Baker, Cobley & Fraser-Thomas, 2009).

While there are a multitude of interacting factors continually feeding into this culture, parents appear to play a key role. Specifically, I found parents were constantly verifying that my priorities were focused on the team’s victory, while pressuring me to assure their child received sufficient playing time. Although one must assume such behaviours were well intentioned, past research shows they are often seen by child-athletes as pressuring and negative (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008; Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Jannes, & Pennisi, 2008; Keegan, Spray, Harwood, & Lavallee, 2010). Questions regarding *how* parents parent, specifically to facilitate PYD within high performance youth sport contexts, are only beginning to be explored. Preliminary work suggests parents have the potential to serve as critical role models (e.g., of work ethic, responsibility, humility) given the close and special bonds formed with their children through sport (e.g., extensive time invested, coupled with the emotional highs and lows of high performance sport) (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Holt, Tamminen, Black, Mandigo, & Fox, 2009; Lauer, Gould,

Roman, & Pierce, 2010). Future research should broaden exploration of parents' roles in facilitating PYD in high performance sport, particularly in relation to coaches and athletes (i.e., parent-coach dyad; parent-coach-athlete triad). Currently, there is a paucity of research examining the process of coaches and parents working together to promote PYD (Holt et al., 2017), and subsequently, few practical implications are available to help guide these relationships. Studies should continue to draw upon innovative methodologies (e.g., journaling, self-reflection) to capture the richness and complexity of relevant relationships, while also using more traditional approaches (i.e., interviews, observation) to gain perspective on how parents and coaches can best work together, and what the intricacies of that process may look like. There are extensive opportunities for additional research to further understanding of the pursuit of PYD and performance, including the exploration of female players and/or coaches, less competitive levels, different age groups, and other sports.

This study aimed to advance understanding of the dynamic coaching process involved in fostering PYD within elite youth sport by exploring one coach's AE-informed experiences aiming to facilitate personal development and performance success within a Canadian elite minor hockey context. While my experiences are not generalizable, my reflections nonetheless offer numerous considerations for applied sport practitioners. Specifically, findings highlight the value of coaches clarifying their objectives to serve as a framework for all key decisions. Being clear on one's coaching objectives may also better inform management of playing time, likelihood of delivering honest feedback to athletes, and one's ability to monitor the coaching staff's behaviours. In attempting to create a task-oriented climate, having a clear definition of success seems critical, which can in turn serve as the foundation for the development of all team and individually based goals. Self-reflection also offers an invaluable tool in helping find balance

between offering athletes choices and providing them with sufficient structure, while additionally creating opportunities for them to experience ownership of their team. Through this study, I was able to communicate micro-level details of the daily complexities of my coaching experiences, which I believe will evoke reflexivity, impactfulness, and a reflection of reality (Richardson, 2000) among readers. I am optimistic this process may facilitate opportunities for other coaches to experience personal change as they aim to optimize PYD within elite youth sport contexts, indirectly contributing to potential changes within sport organizations, coach education resources and programmes, and wider sport policies.

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**CHAPTER THREE: MANUSCRIPT TWO**

Preston, C., Wolman, L., & Fraser-Thomas, J. (in preparation). *The coach-parent relationship and athlete's development within elite youth sport: An autoethnographic self-reflection.*



## Summary

Extensive research has highlighted the important roles of coaches and parents in fostering positive youth development (PYD); however, little research has examined the complex coach-parent relationship within the bi-directional interactions of the coach-parent-athlete triad. This research is particularly pertinent within elite youth sport contexts, where the performance-oriented environment may impede the pursuit of PYD (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2017). Guided by Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; 1999), the current study used an autoethnographic approach (Anderson, 2006) to expand understanding of the coach-parent relationship in relation to athletes' PYD, through the perspective of an elite youth ice hockey coach. Three inter-connected themes emerged: (a) parents' behavior and understanding of their role; (b) the influence of the coach-parent relationship on athletes; and (c) effective methods of coach-parent communication. My experiences are discussed within a continuum of contentious to cooperative coach-parent interactions. My lessons learned regarding effective parent communication may evoke other elite youth sport coaches to reflect on their own interactions with parents, and to develop their own strategies for working with parents.

*KEYWORDS:* coach-parent relationship; coaching; autoethnography; positive youth development; elite youth sport

The coach-parent relationship and athlete's development within elite youth sport: An autoethnographic self-reflection

The role of parents and coaches are essential to facilitating positive experiences within youth sport (Fraser-Thomas, Beesley, Dickler, Harlow, Mosher, Preston, & Wolman, 2017); however, limited research has explicitly examined the coach-parent relationship. Moreover, research has highlighted numerous concerns regarding negative coach-parent relationships in youth sport (e.g., Camiré, Rocchi, & Kendellen, 2016; Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Jannes and Pennisi, 2008; Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005). The importance of an effective coach-parent relationship may be particularly crucial within elite youth sport where the performance-oriented environment can exacerbate negative developmental experiences (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2017; Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015). Therefore, the current study utilized an autoethnographic approach (Anderson, 2006) to expand understanding of the coach-parent relationship in relation to athletes' positive youth development (PYD), through the perspective of an elite youth ice hockey coach.

In recent years, PYD has emerged as a sub-discipline within the field of developmental psychology to examine and understand youths' development, particularly within youth-based programming. PYD is a strength-based approach that focuses on fostering youths' psychosocial development and places an emphasis on building desirable competencies (e.g., teamwork, goal setting, leadership; Larson, 2000); this is an alternative to the traditional deficit-reduction approach, which focuses on eliminating undesirable behaviours (e.g., violence, drug/alcohol consumption; Larson, 2000). The PYD approach implies that youth activities should foster positive adult-youth relationships, promote skill-building activities, and provide opportunities for leadership roles (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005). Notably, youth sport is considered

an ideal activity to foster PYD outcomes (Larson, 2000), yet extensive research suggests that merely participating in youth sport does not ensure PYD outcomes will be achieved (Coakley, 2011; Danish, Forneris, Hodge, & Heke, 2004; Gould & Carson, 2008). Rather, distal ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1995, 1999) play an important role in influencing athletes' PYD outcomes through sport (Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015; Holt et al., 2017). As such, we draw upon Bronfenbrenner's (1995; 1999) Ecological Systems Theory (EST) to guide our research.

### **Ecological Systems Theory**

EST proposes that human development and human behaviour are the manifestation of person-context interactions. EST is centred on two propositions (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; 1999) where proposition one states that human development occurs through proximal processes, described as progressively more complex reciprocal interactions between an individual and the persons, objects, and symbols in their immediate environment. To be effective, proximal processes must occur on a regular basis and over an extended period of time. Proposition two specifies that the form, power, content, and direction of the proximal processes affecting development differ according to: a) the characteristics of the person; b) the environment; c) the developmental outcomes being measured; and d) the time period of the proximal processes. Furthermore, there are five nested systems within the EST, including: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1995, 1999). The microsystem is the most proximal level to the person and consists of the engagement of the developing person in activities, roles and interactions with surrounding structures (e.g., family, school, coach, peers). The mesosystem entails the reciprocal relationships within the developing person's microsystem (e.g., coach-parent relationship). The exosystem consists of interrelationships outside the developing person but may have an indirect influence on the developing person (e.g., parent's

job). The outer most level is the macrosystem, which consists of cultural and social factors that influence human development. The final system is the chronosystem, which entails the changes or consistencies to personal characteristics and/or the environment over time. A key tenant of EST is the reciprocal nature of interactions, thus, at the microsystem level, it is important to recognize that a child and his or her immediate surroundings (e.g., parents, coaches) influence each other bi-directionally. Similarly, at the mesosystem level, while the coach-parent relationship influences a child's development, the child also influences the coach-parent relationship.

### **Parents, Coaches, and Athlete Development**

A growing body of research has focused on key interactions within the microsystem of the EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; 1999) in high performance youth sport environments. For example, the Development Model of Sport Participation (DMSP; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2016) describes the roles of parents and coaches as key within the processes and pathways of children and youths' sport development and potential sport excellence. In their review of parents' roles in children's sport development, Fraser-Thomas, Strachan and Jeffery-Tosoni (2013) emphasize the importance of parents engaging with their child in an autonomy-supportive style, using effective communication, positively teaching and modeling of life skills, and providing age-appropriate feedback. For example, as athletes transition from the sampling years of the DMSP to the specializing years (i.e., when they transition from engaging in multiple sports to narrowing in on two to three sports, usually at age 12 years), athletes typically become less receptive to performance-related feedback from their parents, unless their parents have extensive background in high-level sport. Further, Fraser-Thomas and colleagues suggest that throughout all stages of development, parents should provide honest feedback regarding effort and attitude. Supportive

environments fostered by parents and coaches can facilitate positive outcomes such as successful athlete and team performances (Hellstedt, 1987; Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Smoll, Cumming, & Smith, 2011).

In contrast, a modest body of research has focused on interactions at the mesosystem level of the EST within high performance youth sport environments (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2017). Hellstedt (1987) first addressed the importance of the coach-parent-athlete triad in an Integrated Sport Psychology and Family Systems model. He described three types of parents: overinvolved, under involved, and moderately involved. He also provided goals and strategies for coaches to positively engage with each type of parent (e.g., provide honest communication two to three times per season and maintain a working alliance with the moderately involved parents). More recently, Smoll and colleagues (2011) provided suggestions for coaches to work effectively with parents, highlighting the importance of coaches holding pre-season coach-parent meetings and providing competence criteria and feedback to parents throughout the season. Together, these studies suggest that coaches can play an important role in initiating effective coach-parent relationships that allows parents and coaches to work together to foster athletes' development.

In one of only a few in-depth studies examining the coach-parent-athlete relationship, Jowett and Timson-Katchis (2005) interviewed five elite 16-year old swimmers, their parents, and their swimming coaches. The results indicated parents' influence on the coach-athlete relationship could be either beneficial or detrimental. For example, when the parents and the coach worked together to exchange and process general and practical information, they enhanced the athletes' performance, satisfaction, and the quality of coaching. Conversely, coach-parent relationships were strained when coaches did not take the time to communicate with the parents.

In turn, when parents felt frustrated by the lack of communication, they were less supportive of the coach and the coach-athlete relationship.

Alarming, unhealthy coach-parent relationships may be pervasive within sport settings. In a study that surveyed 3,062 Canadian high school coach-teachers, 87% reported that dealing with parents was a challenge within their role as coaches (Camiré et al., 2016). However, in another a study by Gould and colleagues (2008), American junior tennis coaches suggested “that at least 70% of parents were ‘golden’ (i.e., had an appropriate perspective, were supportive, and focused on their child’s total development), and the rest ranged from ‘temperamental’ to ‘raging maniacs’” (p. 24). Nevertheless, it is concerning that 30% of parents within the study were perceived by coaches to be negatively influencing their child’s development. Examples of ‘problem’ behaviours reported in the literature include parents making excuses and discouraging their child from taking responsibility for his or her performance, parents modelling poor emotional regulation and ineffective communication, and parents offering feedback to their son or daughter that is perceived negatively (Holt, Tamminen, Tink, & Black, 2009; Lauer, Gould, Roman, & Pierce, 2010). Gould and colleagues (2008) suggested negative parent behaviours may result in elite youth sport coaches avoiding parents instead of working with them. One possible explanation for ‘problem’ parents is that they are ill equipped to handle the pressures of high-performance sport and do not understand how their behaviours may influence their child (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Lauer et al., 2010).

### **Rationale and Purpose**

Literature in the field of sport psychology has extensively focused on the independent roles of coaches and parents in fostering athlete PYD (microsystem); however, limited research has examined the bi-directional interactions within the coach-parent-athlete triad, and

particularly the influence of the coach-parent relationship on athlete development (mesosystem) (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2017; Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015). It has been suggested that athletes commonly get trapped in the interactions of the coach-parent-athlete triad (Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005). As such, further research is necessary to understand the underlying processes of the coach-parent-athlete relationships in order to optimize athletes' development.

Ethnographic methodologies have been proposed as a means to enrich our understanding of sport culture and behaviours and to improve motivational climates within sport psychology (Krane & Baird, 2005). While ethnography has been used to explore coach-athlete relationships (e.g., Poczwadowski, Barott, & Henschen, 2002), coaching behaviors (e.g., Gilbert & Trudel, 2004) and the complexities of the athlete experiences (e.g., Howe, 2001), no ethnographic or autoethnographic research to date has explored the experiences of coaches engaging with parents and the influence of this relationship on athletes' development. Such work is particularly important within an elite youth sport context, where the performance-oriented environment may eclipse the pursuit of PYD (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2017; Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015). As such, guided by EST with a focus on the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; 1999), this project drew upon an autoethnographic approach to expand understanding of the coach-parent relationship in relation to athletes' PYD, through the perspective of an elite youth ice hockey coach.

## **Methods**

### **Research Design**

This study was part of a larger project where I (first author) explored the relationship between personal development and performance success within a Canadian elite minor hockey context using a PYD approach (Preston & Fraser-Thomas, in press). In the first phase, I engaged

in an autoethnographic approach to explore my coaching experiences during my first year of coaching (Preston & Fraser-Thomas, in press). The current study built upon my initial work as I continued to draw upon autoethnographic methods (Anderson, 2006) for two additional years (i.e., three years in total), to gain in-depth understanding of the coach-parent relationship through my perspective as an elite youth ice hockey coach.

Autoethnography is a form of qualitative research where the researcher is a fully immersed member of the group of study, visible within the researcher's written text, and is committed to presenting a theoretical understanding of social phenomena (Anderson, 2006). Furthermore, the researcher's written text includes his/her own feelings and experiences in the social world being observed (Anderson, 2006). For example, Ellis and Boucher (2000) describe that the validity of autoethnographic research is achieved by evoking "in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible" (p. 751). Autoethnography also utilizes reflective practices to develop self-awareness and explore words, thoughts and feelings to understand the complex nature of the story being told (Ellis, 2009).

### **Background and Context**

This study focused on my experiences as the head coach of a boys 'AAA' (i.e., highest level in minor ice hockey in Canada) team over a three-year period. Ice hockey provides a unique context to study the coach-parent relationship within elite sport, given the popularity and success of Canadian hockey players on an international stage. Canada has the highest percentage of professionals playing within the National Hockey League (Seravalli, 2015) and ice hockey is the most popular sport played by Canadian-born men (Heritage Canada, 2013). However, the sport has seen a decline in overall participation, with participation rates particularly low amongst boys from lower-income households (Clark, 2008). Moreover, Campbell and Parcels (2013)



suggested that parents often view the excessive amount of time and money spent on hockey as an investment that should pay out with a scholarship or lucrative National Hockey League (NHL) contract. Consequently, the expectations and pressures to win and be the best may be particularly substantive in this context, placing stress on young players, parents, and coaches.

During the three-year period of study, I coached the same group of athletes, moving up to the next age grouping with the athletes each season. Athletes were ten years of age in the first year and twelve years of age by the final year of the study. There were 16-17 athletes participating on the team each season. Most of the players were reselected at tryouts for the team, except for three to four changes in the roster after each year. The team progressively improved over the three-year period and achieved significant performance success (e.g., placing first in our division in the second and third seasons). While demographic data was not collected from parents, as the head coach, I was aware through casual discussions over the course of the three years) that families were generally of mid to high socio-economic status; parents were generally between 40 and 50 years of age, well-educated with University degrees, with professional careers (e.g., engineers, business owners, teachers, real-estate agents, financial consultants); the majority of parents were also currently married with two to three children; and only a few families were visible minorities.

### **Researcher as Coach**

As part of an autoethnographic approach, it is important I reflect on my own positionality and role within the study (Anderson, 2006). I came from a solid base of sport technical knowledge with several years of experience as an assistant coach (three seasons with a different team/athletes) and ten years of experience coaching at summer hockey schools. I also played ten years of competitive hockey between Junior A/Major Junior (i.e., top level for males under 20

years of age in Canada) and Canadian Interuniversity Sport (now known as USport). As the three-year period of study coincided with the first three years of my head coaching career, I saw myself grow and develop my skill set as a coach.

Moreover, my coaching philosophy was influenced by my prior academic research on athlete-centred coaching (Preston, Kerr, & Stirling, 2015). Specifically, my approach was rooted in a PYD (i.e., asset building) approach and focused on optimizing the personal development and performance success among youth athletes. Although the core of my philosophy remained the same over the three-year period, I was aware of changes in my coaching approach as I learned to better ‘read’ my team, and implement more effective coaching strategies (see Preston & Fraser-Thomas, in press). In addition to changes in my coaching due to my own learning, I was also aware of significant developmental changes in the athletes, and with their growing maturity, I found myself having to further adapt my coaching approaches. As such, my coaching experiences over the three-year period were complex, filled with learning, successes and failures, thrills and frustrations.

Given this study’s focus on the coach-parent dynamic within elite youth sport, it is also important to identify my position in relation to parents. Given my extensive background in the minor hockey system in Canada, I came into the coaching position aware of tensions that sometimes exist between parents and coaches in this context. I was however somewhat surprised when I was advised by my colleagues (i.e., fellow minor hockey coaches) to exercise restraint in my interactions with parents; they suggested that being too open could lead to problematic coach-parent-athlete relationships and challenging team dynamics. Despite my colleagues’ cautionary tales, I still thought it was best to have an ‘open door’ policy around parent communication. I was determined to work with the parents, not against them. As such, after the

team was selected in my first year as coach I held a parent meeting where I encouraged parents to reach out to me to discuss concerns and ask questions, with a preference for phone or in-person communication. I specifically requested that parents avoid communicating through long emails or text messages; however, beyond this, I did not set any further communication boundaries. I really believed an ‘open door’ policy was important given the athletes were only ten years of age, and it was possible some might not have the cognitive or social maturity to communicate effectively with me, making parents an important link in our coach-athlete communication. Evidently, as athletes matured over the three-year period, I adapted my approach, but I generally maintained the ‘open door’ policy for parents. As will become evident throughout the manuscript, I would best describe the realities of interacting with parents on a day-to-day basis as “messy”. As such, the experiences, learning, and lessons presented throughout this manuscript are not blanket solutions that guarantee effective coach-parent interactions, but rather, present the ongoing conflicted tensions of my role as a coach.

### **Autoethnography-Informed Protocol**

As part of the initial study during my first year as head coach (Preston & Fraser-Thomas, in press), I collected extensive data through journaling, and explored events within particular training/game days, and/or moments of learning/realization. In addition, I completed a self-reflection template form after each practice and game, which included eight open-ended questions to encourage self-assessment; these in-turn assisted in the development of my coaching plans moving forward (e.g., What went well? What would I do differently?). Building upon my experiences in the first year, I was particularly interested in improving my interactions with parents. As such, for the following two years, I continued to document my interactions with parents via email, text, and in person; these included parents’ feedback and inquiries related to

their son and the team's performance. Throughout this process, I was guided by Anderson's (2006) explanation that autoethnographic reflexivity "entails self-conscious introspection guided by a desire to better understand both self and others, through examining one's actions and perceptions in reference to and dialogue with those of others" (p. 382). I recalled detailed memories of my experiences as a whole (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) and reflected back when notes were limited in order to provide a more exhaustive picture of the experience; my memories included familiar feelings and experiences while coaching (e.g., interactions with parents in phone conversations or in person meetings).

Following discussions with my university ethics review board and my review of previous autoethnographic-informed work (e.g., Mallett, 2005), I determined that formal written consent was not required from other persons (e.g., players, parents, other coaches) given that the study focused on my experiences as an elite youth hockey coach, and my reflections upon these experiences. Nevertheless, assistant coaches, parents, and athletes were made aware that I was a doctoral student exploring my experiences as the head coach of an elite youth hockey team. To further ensure associated others (i.e., parents and athletes) remained anonymous, we removed all identifiable information during the preparation of this manuscript, such as biographical details of others (e.g., parents), years or location of the study, or specific meaningful dates throughout the seasons.

Data were analyzed for critical incidences (Hanton, Cropley, Neil, Mellalieu, & Miles, 2007) relating to my engagement with parents over the three-year period. Critical incidents can be defined "as those that participants felt they had learned from and subsequently altered their behaviour as a result" (Hanton et al. 2007, p. 34). Since I was researching my experiences as the head coach in interactions with parents, it was important that I was aware of my biases during the

data analysis process (Anderson, 2006). The purpose was not to remove myself from the data but to be aware of my preconceptions and previous experiences. Maintaining perspective was further aided by the two co-authors on this paper; one co-author was an established researcher in the area of PYD through sport, and the other was a colleague (upper year doctoral candidate) similarly researching the role of parents within youth sport contexts, thus both were disconnected from this specific elite youth sport context. As such, I engaged in extensive discussions with my co-authors to further facilitate the interpretation and understanding of my experience and to connect my experiences to wider issues (Johns, 2002).

As qualitative research should not be judged by criteria traditionally employed to evaluate quantitative research (Garrett & Hodkinson, 1999; Holt, 2003; Sparkes, 2000), the credibility, rigour, and trustworthiness of the current study comes from my participation as a full group member (i.e., minor league hockey coach) with persistent and extensive interactions with parents and athletes over a three-year time period, substantial reflection through journaling and note taking, the extended data analysis period, and peer debriefing (i.e., discussions between authors throughout the data collection, analysis and write-up). Using criteria proposed by Richardson (2000), I remained critical of the research process, ensuring the results of the study were engaging, impactful, an expression of a lived reality, and a substantive contribution to PYD in elite youth sport.

### **Results and Discussion**

Over the course of a three year period as a AAA minor hockey head coach, I focused on optimizing athletes' personal development and performance success through a PYD approach. As part of my coaching role, I engaged extensively with parents. I have reflected upon these interactions, and I feel that they ranged from cooperative (i.e., I experienced mutually respectful

and cordial interactions) to contentious (i.e., I experienced strained and confrontational interactions). My reflections of these experiences (i.e., my ‘findings’) build upon previous knowledge of the coach-parent-athlete triad within elite youth sport, specifically as I consider this relationship framed within the EST’s mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; 1999). Reflections upon my experiences are presented in three inter-connected themes. First I describe the various coach-parent interactions I experienced and how I perceived parents’ sometimes conflicting roles within these interactions. Second, I reflect upon how I perceived the various coach-parent interactions to influence the athletes. Third, I reflect upon some of the lessons I learned from my experiences, with regard to how to best work with parents while pursuing PYD within elite youth sport.

### **Parents’ Behaviours and Understanding of Their Role**

The first theme focuses on the various interactions with the parents that I experienced over the three-year period, and unpacking their role within the coach-parent-athlete triad from my perspective. I experienced many parent interactions that I felt were contentious in nature (i.e., I experienced strained and confrontational interactions); however, I also experienced some cooperative interactions (i.e., I experienced mutually respectful and cordial interactions). To further describe and unpack my perceptions, I discuss the following sub-themes: (a) parents’ offering of unsolicited advice; (b) parents’ bias towards their own son; (c) parents’ error-blindness; and (d) parents’ ‘helicoptering’. These subthemes remained focused on the various interactions I experienced with parents and my perceptions of their role. My perceptions of how these interactions influenced the athlete are discussed in the second theme and the lessons I learned are discussed in the third theme.

**Parents' offering of unsolicited advice.** I found that my interactions with parents were contentious when parents offered me unsolicited advice. Parents most commonly made suggestions that their son should be receiving more playing time or that I needed to coach to win. Parents voiced their opinions face-to face, or by telephone, text or email. Very often, I felt that their unsolicited advice displayed a lack of trust in me as the coach. One of my most challenging parent interactions, in my first year, involved a meeting with one of the top player's parents after two disappointing losses mid-season. The parents repeatedly suggested that I needed to be tougher on the players and "play to win". I expressed my frustrations in my journal:

I have never been hit so bad with the pressure to win from the parents – not the players!?

It is just madness – like as if I don't want to win! That is their mindset – they question how competitive I am... It blows my mind really and it is intense – They are not, "we have to win or we will leave" – but that is the message that is being delivered.

In another case, a parent sent me his concerns via a text message, questioning the playing time of his son; particularly bewildering was that he accused a fellow athlete of playing a role in determining his son's playing time. The suggestion that a teammate could control another athlete's playing time was so ludicrous, I was left feeling shocked and frustrated by the accusation.

Regular parental feedback questioning my decisions and competence were stressful and frustrating, particularly when I repeatedly made every effort to respond in a cooperative and positive manner to parents' unsolicited advice. This would regularly play out with a father complaining about his son's playing time, stating that he should receive more, followed by my attempt to resolve the issue by explaining why his son received the amount of playing time that he did, and how he could earn more; however, rebuttals would continually contradict my

statements and the father would further explain why he thought his son deserved more playing time. We would go back and forth and eventually the father would start to see my perspective but this would always take a great deal of time, patience and emotional energy. Although the issues were often resolved, I was exhausted by what I felt were confrontational interactions, and I began to resent this part of my coaching duties.

Moreover, some conflicts were heightened when parents discussed among themselves their dissatisfactions. For example, one parent mentioned, “other parents agreed with me and said my son is playing well.” This occasionally hindered my ability to resolve coach-parent conflicts, as the parent’s views were often validated by other parents. Furthermore, the parents of the top performing athletes offered the majority of the unsolicited advice. It was evident that these parents used the status of their son as a way to offer their advice in a self-serving manner. For example, there were numerous occasions when the parents of prominent athletes would elude that if they did not see X (e.g., team playing to win, more passing, specific power play units) than they would consider changing teams the following season. I perceived this parent behaviour to further reinforce their doubt in my ability to make decisions in the best interest of the athletes and the team, making me feel unsupported. These interactions furthered my stress regarding my team’s performance as I worried about losing the more prominent athletes for the next season if I did not satisfy these parents’ concerns. Overall, these negative parent behaviours align with previous findings regarding Canadian hockey parents interfering with the coach’s role (Bean, Jeffery-Tosoni, Baker, & Fraser-Thomas, 2016). The potential negative impact of parents was recently highlighted in a survey of 227 Syracuse high school coaches that found that 58% of coaches have considered quitting because of parents (Miller, 2016). They found that the most frequent problems were parents’ complaints about playing time for their child (87%), followed



by parents questioning coaching strategy (72%), and unsportspersonlike conduct among parents (67%).

In contrast, I felt that interactions with parents were more cooperative when I believed parents exhibited trust in me. For example, in one meeting, a parent stated that he was not going to pretend to be qualified to assess his son's performance and asked for feedback on how his son was doing. The parent listened to the feedback I provided and asked several follow up questions for clarity. Interactions where parents enabled me to provide constructive feedback on their son's performance without challenging or criticizing my insights not only allowed me to communicate effectively, but in so doing, also strengthened my desires to work with parents. Nonetheless, over the course of the three seasons, I experienced several interactions that led me to believe that parents and I often saw very different roles for each other, other than the ones we were fulfilling. As such, I learned many important lessons about my own approach to effective coach-parent communication to better align with each of our perceptions of roles (which are shared in the third theme).

**Parents' bias towards their son.** I observed that numerous parents had a bias towards their son (i.e., confirmation bias). As I tried to make sense of contentious interactions, confirmation bias emerged as a plausible explanation for parents' reluctance to trust my coaching decisions and accept what I perceived to be more appropriate roles. Klayman (1995) describes that confirmation bias emerges when a person starts out overconfident in an initial belief, then he/she remains overconfident in this belief, even after additional evidence that conflicts this belief is presented. Similarly, confirmation biases are present when people interpret perceived supportive data as trustworthy and perceived conflicting data as dubious (Klayman, 1995).

Confirmation biases are also often present when an individual is looking for data to support their hypothesis, instead of letting the data speak for itself (Klayman, 1995).

There were numerous instances throughout the three seasons where I believed parents exhibited confirmation bias, mainly centered on opinions related to their son's performance and playing time. For example, one parent expressed that his son was one of the best players on the team based on recent improvements in performance, and asserted that he should be played more. While I acknowledged the recent improved performance of his son, and agreed that his son had become a more valuable player, I pointed out that his son was not one of the best players, and subsequently his playing time would remain a reflection of his effort and performance. Another common situation that further fed into confirmation bias occurred when parents compared their son's best game to other players' (teammates') worst game. Parents also often drew upon their sons' performance statistics, in isolation, serving to present their son as a top performer, which did not account for the many intricate details that I used to evaluate a player (i.e., they used distorted or incomplete information). Lastly, confirmation bias was often evident in parents' determination for their son to continue playing at the AAA level (i.e., the highest level), despite my observations of their son's struggles to perform at this level, and recommendations that their son play down a competitive level for the next season (i.e., to AA). I interpreted these situations to indicate that certain parents were biased towards their son's performance; parents seemed to focus on only some elements of their son's skills and experience, in turn reinforcing their bias, and failing to consider their son's overall development or the team's performance.

Given my reflections regarding parents' bias towards their son, I often became frustrated. While generally, I believed myself to be a 'clear thinker', it is possible that at times my charged emotions led me to overlook a player's performance and perhaps make less than ideal decisions

regarding athletes' playing time. Over the three years, there were numerous occasions where I acknowledged and took responsibility for the mistakes I made. Nonetheless, I felt that my extensive background and knowledge in the sport should not be contended, and that my perceptions of the athletes' abilities were accurate most of the time. Further, I was aware of research showing that youth sport parents believe they have sport specific knowledge and expertise, despite indications that their knowledge is actually quite low (Holt, Tamminen, Black, Shen & Wall, 2008). In my mind, this further supported my belief that parents were demonstrating bias towards their sons. Thus, it seemed that my sport specific knowledge, coupled with my academic knowledge, while helpful in some regards, sometimes set me up to become further frustrated with parents, which evidently was not helpful in fostering our cooperative interactions.

In light of this discussion, I wondered if perhaps parents' exhibition of bias towards their sons was related to their lack of knowledge and expertise of the content and context of AAA hockey (Klayman, 1995). Parents who had previous experience playing hockey at an elite level had perspectives that were more aligned with my own in regards to their son's performance; they were better able to identify the positive and negative nuances in their son's performance. Furthermore, parents who recognized that they lacked knowledge and expertise in the field were open and receptive to my feedback and perspective on their son's hockey development. Both of these situations facilitated more cooperative interactions. However, parents who had not played (or coached) hockey at a high level, yet had strong opinions about their son's performance, often displayed the most confirmation bias, which resulted in what I perceived to be contentious interactions. As such, my reflections are in line with past work showing parents' perceived expertise is often misaligned with their actual expertise (Holt et al., 2008). In addition, past

research has shown parents' perceived expertise is linked to more controlling behaviours (e.g., yelling at instructors and offering advice; Holt et al., 2008). Generally, findings support the need for, but often the absence of, parental trust in coaches' decisions within elite youth sport (Knight, Boden, & Holt, 2010) and particularly within the Canadian AAA minor hockey (Bean et al., 2016).

My interpretation of parents' biases towards their sons can be further understood through the reversed-dependency phenomenon, where parents seek validation through their sons (Smith & Smoll, 2002). Smith and Smoll (2002) explain that all parents identify with their child to some extent; however, when the degree of identification becomes excessive, parents may begin to define their own self-worth in terms of their child's successes or failures. Hence, parents may develop a bias towards their son to maintain a self-image as the parent of a great athlete compared to his peers (Klayman, 1995). This phenomenon has been supported in recent studies that found parents wanted their child to be highly competent so that their child, and they as parents, would compare well to others and gain social status (Bean et al., 2016; Dorsch, Smith, Wilson, & McDonough, 2015). Given the historical and social position of hockey in Canada (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993), it is perhaps not surprising that fathers (as same gendered parents as their sons) appeared to more often engage in behaviours related to confirmation bias in this study. Previous research has found that boys perceive their fathers to place more pressure on them in sport, and that fathers are more influential than mothers on their children's sport decisions (Leff & Hoyle, 1995).

**Parents' error-blindness.** Contentious coach-parent interactions, and in particular parents' offering of unsolicited advice and apparent demonstration of bias towards their son may be further understood by Schulz's (2011) research on error-blindness. Schulz describes error-

blindness as, “whatever falsehoods each of us currently believes are necessarily invisible to us” (p. 18). Schulz identifies three assumptions that make people feel right when they are wrong: that others are (a) ignorant, (b) uneducated (i.e., cannot put the pieces together), or (c) evil (i.e., intentionally trying to do ‘bad’). Regardless of who was right or wrong, I found myself frustrated with parents whom I felt often displayed these assumptions. For example, I often felt parents displayed the first two of these assumptions when they assumed that they knew something that I did not know or could not figure out (e.g., a parent explained to me that the team was not passing enough, assuming I was not aware of this). I felt parents were in line with the third assumption (i.e., evil) when they accused me of “playing favourites” (e.g., a suggestion that was common from parents when their son did not get as much playing time as a top performing athlete). On the other hand, when parents did not display these assumptions, I found our interactions to be much more cooperative.

Shultz (2011) further explains why individuals struggle to let go of misinformed or false beliefs. First, it is hard to let go of a belief if there is not a new one to replace it. This was evident to me when a parent was clearly moving towards recognizing that his son may not be a top player on the team, but could not fully embrace this belief, as he evidently did not want to replace his belief with the idea that his son was a bottom player on the team. Second, the more invested an individual is in a belief (e.g., money or time), the harder it is for them to let go of their belief. Financial and time investment likely played a factor as the costs per season were in line with general standards for AAA hockey in Canada: upwards of \$10,000.00 per season after registration fees, equipment, travel, and additional training (Campbell & Parcels, 2013). Hence, as previously noted, AAA hockey parents in Canada may expect a return on their extensive investment in the form of NHL contracts or University scholarships (Campbell & Parcels, 2013).

Similarly, Bean and colleagues (2016) found that many AAA minor hockey parents felt it was unfair when their son received less playing time than another player, when parents had invested the same amount of money.

**Parents' 'helicoptering'.** I felt that many of the contentious interactions I experienced with parents were in line with the concepts of 'helicopter parenting'. Helicopter parents view their children as vulnerable and precious commodities; as such, parents "hover" around their children and intervene whenever they perceive they need to protect their children from physical or emotional harm (Horn, 2011). I observed this type of parent behaviour when parents argued for their son to receive more playing time (i.e., protecting their son from the emotional harm of being treated 'unfairly').

This parenting style is at odds with the growing support regarding the role of adversity in fostering PYD within youth sport (Collins & MacNamara, 2012; Flett, Gould, Griffes, & Lauer, 2013; Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015; Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2007; Preston & Fraser-Thomas, in press). Specifically, research has highlighted the need to show 'tough love' (e.g., coaches setting high standards and enforcing consequences for not meeting standards) to promote personal development whereby children learn to compromise and accept consequences (Flett et al., 2013). However, the findings of the present study elude that when parents act as helicopter parents they may be preventing or limiting their child from experiencing and growing from the adversity naturally presented by youth sport and their coaches. Findings further draw attention to the negative impact helicopter parenting can have on the coach-parent relationship, as parents overstep their roles within this dynamic, as highlighted above.

### **The Influence of the Coach-Parent Relationship on the Athlete**

The second theme focuses on how I perceived the various coach-parent interactions to influence the athletes (i.e., the mesosystem of the EST; Bronfenbrenner, 1995, 1999). Consistent with past work (Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005), I generally found that an athlete's performance decreased (i.e., based on my systematic assessments, which were tracked each game via player performance ratings), when the parent and I had conflicting opinions of the athlete's abilities and/or performance (i.e., contentious interactions). One explanation for the decreases in performance may have been a result of athletes receiving different, often conflicting messages from myself (or my coaching staff) and their parents, leaving the athlete with not only too much information to process, but possibly also stressed regarding how to optimally process contradictory information (e.g., Knight et al., 2010). Past research has suggested athletes may encounter roadblocks to effective concentration when performing, such as excessive thinking, lack of trust, and questioning of themselves (Burton & Raedeke, 2008). Additionally, as noted in the previous theme, parents who perceived themselves as experts, often offered extensive unsolicited advice to me, and engaged in more controlling behaviours with their sons (e.g., offering feedback and yelling instructions to their son on while on the ice); these behaviours have been found to be disliked by athletes if they did not see their parents as experts (Holt et al., 2008; Holt, Tamminen, Black, Mandigo, & Fox, 2009; Knight et al., 2010; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005), and have also been associated with athlete frustration, confusion, stress, and even drop out (Fraser-Thomas, Côte, & Deakin, 2008; Gould et al., 2008; Lauer et al., 2010; Power & Woolger, 1994; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005).

On the other hand, research has found that when parents do have sport expertise, athletes appreciate receiving sport-related advice and guidance (Gould, Dieffenbach, & Moffatt, 2002; Holt & Dunn, 2004; Knight et al., 2010), underlining that the athlete's perception of his or her

parents' level of expertise often influences how the athlete will respond to parents' feedback (Fraser-Thomas & Beesley, 2015). Given positive parental support can contribute to athletes' success and enjoyment in sport (Fredericks & Eccles, 2004), I contend that parents who possess sport expertise can offer sport-related feedback to their sons, but passionate parents who lack sport specific expertise should be aware that their potentially contentious relationship with the coach, and their 'well intended' feedback directed towards their child, may ultimately negatively influence their child.

In addition to potential decreases in athlete performance that I observed, I found some athletes lacked a sense of responsibility for their performance (i.e., a PYD outcome; Holt et al., 2017). For example, on one occasion, I asked the athletes to self-reflect (individually) in writing on their performance after a game and share this with the coaching staff the following day. One player's self-reflection accused the coaching staff of being unfair stating that the coaches did not uphold the team rule of ice time 'being earned', and that the same players always played, regardless of others' performance. Although I cannot be certain of the various factors that led the athlete to this mindset, it is noteworthy to highlight that the comments aligned with those of his parents, in my previous discussions with them. Regardless of who was 'right' or 'wrong' in this situation (as it is possible my perceptions were wrong), what is clear is that this form of communication by the parents and, subsequently, the son seemed to have impeded the athlete's sense of responsibility or personal accountability for his performance – important PYD outcomes (Holt et al., 2017). In trying to set aside my own perceptions of the situation, I felt that even if the parents' perception of the situation was 'correct', approaching the issue with the accusations that I was being unfair restricted the opportunity to have a constructive interaction. Alternatively the parent and subsequently the athlete could have approached this situation in a more inquiry-



based manner, which could have facilitated more positive learning opportunities for the athlete and more cooperative interactions between all of us.

Collectively, these parent and son behaviours suggest some elements of helicopter parenting, which has been related to children's sense of entitlement (Schiffrin & Liss, 2017); further, entitlement has been linked to athletes' avoidance of adversity and challenges, and fear failure (Dweck, 2008). Dweck's (2008) work on mindsets suggests that it is most beneficial for an athlete's motivation and development to approach adversity with a growth mindset. A growth mindset "is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts" (Dweck, 2008, p. 7). As such, parents should encourage and model responsibility and embrace challenges (i.e., encourage their son to earn their playing time through hard work and resultant performance), and to not tolerate their son making excuses or complaining. On various occasions, I did observe athletes taking responsibility for their performance and development. One athlete asked to talk with me after a game, instead of complaining about his playing time, he simply asked what he could do to earn more playing time and took responsibility to improve at the areas I had suggested. Not surprisingly, the parents of this athlete had never complained about playing time or the coaching staff's decisions and assessment; I had always found our interactions to be very cooperative in nature. These findings further align with previous research by Jowett and Timson-Katchis (2005) in which a coach stated: "Kids copy parents, if the kid sees the parents aren't very respectful or cooperative with the coach then they start to think it's okay for them to behave in a similar, rather unacceptable way with their coach" (p. 280).

In summary, my reflections support previous research that parents can positively or negatively influence athletes' PYD outcomes (Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005). Over the course of the three years, I found that athletes generally modelled parents' behaviours with regard to

their communication with me, the coach (i.e., ranging from respectful and courteous to confrontational), their response to feedback (i.e., openness versus closed), and their response to adversity (i.e., ranging from embracing challenges and taking responsibility for situations, to making excuses, complaining and blaming). Further, it is also noteworthy that I found athletes whom were respectful, open to feedback, embraced challenges and took responsibility exhibited greater engagement, enjoyment, and performance success. Conversely, when athletes were confrontational, unreceptive to feedback, and exuded negative emotions, I found these athletes also tended to be less engaged, more easily frustrated, and also struggled to consistently perform their best.

### **Effective Methods of Communication**

The final theme focuses on the lessons I learned regarding the coach's roles in optimizing coach-parent interactions, given the importance of effective coach-athlete relationships for positive athlete experiences within elite youth sports (Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005). Based on my experiences and reflections throughout this study, I highlight and discuss two interconnected and sometimes opposing communication suggestions: (a) coach initiated communication; and (b) communication boundaries.

**Coach initiated communication.** In reflection, I realized that over the three years, some of the contentious coach-parent interactions were the result of my failure to initiate frequent communication with parents. For example, one parent noticed his son was working hard and performing relatively well but was being short-changed in playing time in some games. Initially, the parent did not speak to me about this, and as such, this carried on for over a month without being addressed. Meanwhile, I had not initiated any parent meetings during this time. Eventually the parent scheduled a meeting with me to express his concerns. In the end, I realized this was a

case where I was somewhat at fault for not having noticed or being aware of the issue, but when drawn to my attention, became quite clear to me, and seemed a reasonable point to bring forward. As such, the issue was resolved fairly quickly; however, the parent was stressed from allowing his frustrations to build up over time, as evidenced during our discussion. Had I put in place more frequent or systematically scheduled meetings with parents, I could have addressed the concerns much sooner, avoiding the parent's frustrations from building up.

I believe that more frequent formal (scheduled) or informal (casual) communication between parents and I, relating to their son's performance and development could have minimized conflicts and enhanced the development of trust in our relationship. Although I believe I should have implemented such an approach more often, I generally found that my relationships with parents were enhanced when I initiated coach-parent discussions and provided honest (i.e., not lying, withholding, or altering feedback; McMorris & Hale, 2006) and detailed feedback to parents throughout the season. For example, in one interaction, a father acknowledged and agreed that his son had the potential for vast improvement; he subsequently asked me for recommendations on achieving this goal. I found such interactions to be cooperative and very rewarding, both in terms of the players' subsequent development, as well as my relationship building with parents. Proactive coach communication is supported by Smoll and colleagues' (2011) recommendations for coaches to have a pre-season parent meeting and to provide competence criteria and feedback regarding athletes to parents throughout the season. Similarly, Hellstedt (1987) explained the importance of coaches giving feedback to parents regarding their child's ability, skill development, and training needs. However, these approaches have not been found to always be effective (i.e., parents and coaches remain in disagreement); in these cases, Smoll and colleagues (2011) recommend that coaches always circle back to the

common ground - wanting what is best for the athletes. As such, parents and coaches can work together from this common ground (i.e., through small incremental steps).

It is also worth noting that there were some instances where I was reluctant to provide honest and detailed feedback or change-oriented feedback in parent meetings, when I should have done so. Change-oriented feedback identifies inadequate performance and behaviours that need to be modified to achieve performance goals (Carpentier & Magéau, 2013). Consistent with past work, I found change-oriented feedback unpleasant to give and, therefore, delayed or even withheld feedback; this has been found to be especially prevalent for someone in a position of authority, like a coach (Fisher, 1979; Larson, 1989). In retrospect, I believe that many of the occasions when parents became distressed because they thought their son deserved more playing time could have been prevented or minimized, if the parents did not think so highly of their son's ability. Thus, earlier more honest and direct performance related feedback from myself to parents could have avoided these situations; hence, I learned to embrace the responsibility of providing honest feedback throughout the season to prevent parents from having an inflated view of their son's ability, and expect high amounts of playing time throughout the season.

**Communication boundaries.** While above I outline the importance of regular coach-initiated parent communication, I also learned over the course of the three years, that it was important to set boundaries around my 'open door' policy with parents. Specifically, I came to realize that the method and timing of my communications with parents was often problematic. Communications via texts and emails were particularly challenging because they were sent and received during "off hours" (i.e., no games, practices, or administration scheduled), during inopportune moments for myself (e.g., while I was engaging in academic work, teaching, attending a family gathering). Most often these texts contained what the parent perceived as a

pressing issue (e.g., concerns about their son's playing time), but I would perceive the issue as complex and delicate, requiring an in-person discussion, rather than an immediate response via text or email. In such cases, I wanted to resolve the issue promptly as I became distracted and stressed in my current engagement (unrelated to hockey), therefore, I often took time out of my current engagement to address the issue via a phone conversation. Alternatively, if it was not possible to have a phone conversation, I scheduled a meeting to discuss the issue at a later time and I would do my best to put aside my anxiety to resolve the parent concern.

One of the most frustrating interactions I had with a parent came in the form of an email in my first year; a parent parlayed numerous recommendations for me, totaling over 1400 words. I journaled the experience: "I was totally distraught and wanted to quit yesterday. I received a very informative email – which had lots of good recommendations but I assumed the worst tone – and it was just over the top. Parents are crazy..." Not long after I reflected further: "I would say I have had some issues with my own confidence as a coach. Am I a good coach? It has been tough when everyone is challenging you..." Although the parent's intent may have been to be helpful, it was not his place to offer unsolicited advice and criticism to me as the coach (e.g., how I needed to hold players accountable, and needed to coach to win), particularly through email. As Miller and Barbour (2014) suggest, written channels are effective for task-related and top down information, while face-to-face interactions are best used for maintenance-related and free flowing conversations. Perhaps I was frustrated in part because the email read as 'top-down' towards me, the coach, who was in a leadership (i.e., 'top') position. Conversely, instances where I addressed 'maintenance' issues with parents in person resulted in more cooperative interactions, as issues were discussed and resolved on the spot. Therefore, a big lesson I learned in my first year of coaching was that I wanted only phone or face-to-face conversations and no

texts or emails when addressing specific parental concerns. I set these expectations upfront in the following two years; consequently, there was a significant decrease in complaints via email or text in those years.

Another important lesson I learned was to set clearer boundaries regarding the content of coach-parent communication (i.e., not tolerate unsolicited advice, criticism or opinions from parents); however, it took me some time to learn this lesson. Specifically, at the start of the third season, I explained to parents that it was not acceptable for them to question the coaching staffs' decisions and that it was important for them to trust us. I explained the significance of effective coach-parent relationships (i.e., influence on athletes' PYD and performance) and, to ensure this, they were encouraged to ask questions for clarity and understanding within the set communication boundaries. I believe this approach created the necessary boundaries for more cooperative coach-parent interactions and, subsequently, I found the amount of contentious interactions decreased; however, one parent still crossed these boundaries on occasion. Another important component of creating boundaries was my own gradual decline in concerning myself about the parent's opinions (i.e., wanting to be a people pleaser and being dependent on the good opinion of others); instead I stayed focused on what I believed as the head coach, to be best for the team and the athletes and determined that I would not change my course of action to appease particular parents (often with conflicting views with my own, and even each other).

In line with the above, the final lesson I learned was the need to set consequences for parents not adhering to the coach-parent communication boundaries and rules. Although most parents stayed within the boundaries and met the expectations I set for them, I had not set clear consequences for parents if they did not adhere to the rules, and thus some parents did not adhere. As such, after three years I determined the best consequence for parents breaking rules

was taking away their son's playing time. I was conflicted in this decision, as it penalizes the athletes; however, the son's playing time was highly valued by the parents (based on my conversations with parents arguing for their son to receive more playing time). Thus, I was willing to try this method, with the hopes that merely being aware of the consequence would be all that would be required to change parents' behaviours, which in turn would eventually lead to more positive athlete experiences. Although, I have only implement this approach recently (after the three-year period of study), I have yet to have any parents cross the boundaries or break the rules; nonetheless, given this is the first study to suggest such coaching tactics future research is needed to further explore methods of keeping sport parents accountable, enforcing consequences, the outcomes on such consequences on the athlete, and overall effective means of behavior change among sport parents.

Collectively, these findings support previous recommendations highlighting the importance of effective methods of communication between parents and coaches (Camiré et al., 2016; Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Smoll et al., 2011). In particular, I learned to utilize effective methods of communication (e.g., frequent face-to-face meetings) and delivery (e.g., providing feedback that is constructive, clear and honest). Similarly, I learned to set clear boundaries regarding coach-parent communication methods (i.e., timing and mode) and content (i.e., unsolicited opinions versus asking questions for clarity), and developed means of holding parents accountable to set rules. Although communication boundaries are important, I did not want to discourage parents from asking questions, therefore, I established a consistent platform of communication (i.e., monthly meetings), where parents had a forum to discuss their child's development. I also meet with parents in the pre-season to discuss these expectations. As a result, I found when parents and I worked together to exchange and process general and practical

information, a greater PYD climate was created, which has been associated with enhanced athlete performances and satisfaction (Camiré et al., 2016; Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Smoll et al., 2011).

### **General Discussion and Conclusion**

Given the potential of sport participation to facilitate PYD outcomes (e.g., competence, confidence, character, connection, & caring; Lerner et al., 2005), it is essential that sport programmes (i.e., recreational to elite) provide environments that are conducive to positive athlete experiences (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Holt et al., 2017). Guided by the EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1999), which suggests that human development and behaviour are manifestations of person-context interactions, this research explored my experiences working with parents as the head coach of a AAA minor hockey team over a three-year period with the intention to foster athlete PYD. By exploring the coach-parent relationships and their influence on athletes' development, this research provides new insights into the intricacies of the mesosystem-level interactions within EST, which can positively and negatively impact athlete participation, performance, and personal development (Côté, Strachan, & Fraser-Thomas, 2007). It has been suggested that athletes can be positively or negatively influenced by coach-parent interactions (Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005). In particular, my experiences highlights numerous situations that challenged the relationships within the coach-parent-athlete triad, particularly in a team setting where playing time was the ultimate commodity. The first theme illustrated that I perceived coach-parent interactions were contentious when parents offered unsolicited advice and when I felt that the parents did not trust my coaching abilities. While parents' bias of their son, error-blindness and helicopter behaviours were all connected to the perceived contentious interactions, parents that were supportive, trusting and open to my



feedback fostered coach-parent interactions that I found more cooperative. Furthermore, I found that the athletes modelled parent behaviours (e.g., modes of communication and responses to adversity). Finally, through this study I shared specific lessons learned in relation to effective coach communication, which I believe may evoke other coaches in elite youth sport settings to reflect on their experiences and approaches to working with parents. Specifically, my experiences initiating honest and detailed communication frequently throughout the season, and setting clear parent communication boundaries (regarding timing, modes, and content), with clear consequences will hopefully have a meaningful impact on other youth sport coaches.

The findings align with past work outlining potential detrimental outcomes for athletes, when parents are over-involved in their child's sport (e.g., Hellstedt, 1987); however, the current study advances this understanding specifically in relation to coach-parent interactions within an elite youth sport context. When viewed through the lens of the DMSP (Côte & Fraser-Thomas, 2016), little work has focused specifically on this mesosystem level interaction (Bronfenbrenner, 1995, 1999). Namely, the DMSP suggests athletes mature and move from sampling to specializing years at the age of approximately 12 to 13 years, with parents typically transitioning into more supportive roles (e.g., providing resources and encouragement), and coaches focusing more on technical, tactical, and training protocol. As such, parents should engage with athletes in the specializing years in a more autonomy-supportive manner, as athletes will tend to rely more on coach feedback, becoming less receptive to performance-related feedback from their parents (unless their parents have extensive background in high-level sport) (Côte & Fraser-Thomas, 2016; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2013). In this study, athletes' chronological age aligned with the sampling stage of the DMSP, yet their sport development seemed much closer to that of specializers (i.e., high investment in hockey, limited involvement in other

sports). It is possible that parents' inappropriate interactions with me (e.g., overstepping boundaries, providing unsolicited advice and technical feedback) may have been in part due to parents' uncertainty on how to behave in relation to their high performing (specializing) 10-12 year old children, due to athletes' misaligned chronological and sport development ages. These insights may also be useful for other elite youth sport coaches to consider when defining and communicating their expectations to parents. Given an increasing trend towards specialization at earlier ages (Feeley, Agel, & LaPrade, 2016), particularly in minor hockey in Canada where AAA hockey begins as early as age seven (Campbell & Parcels, 2013), future research should further explore the complexity of the coach-parent interactions and their subsequent influence on athletes' development in elite youth sports, where young children may be moving through sport development stages at an advanced rate.

The coach-parent interactions that I found contentious throughout the three-year period could be explained in part through parents' biases towards their sons, error-blindness, and helicopter parenting. For example, many parents acted as if they had a high level of sport expertise and offered unsolicited advice. However, the majority of these parents had not played or coached hockey at a high level. In addition, on numerous occasions fathers complained about their son's playing time and passionately attempted to prove they were right and that I (and my coaching staff) were in the wrong. In line with previous assertions (Bean et al., 2016; Campbell & Parcels, 2013), the financial, practical, and emotional costs of hockey, likely caused parents to expect return on their investment, feel entitled to share their opinions, and advocate for their son (helicopter behaviours). These feelings are likely only further enhanced given the passion for hockey in Canada, and the professionalization of youth hockey, where performance and winning

often consume parents and coaches (Bean et al., 2016; Bean, Forneris, & Robidoux, 2014; Gruneau & Whitson, 1993).

Additionally, this study highlights the effectiveness of utilizing autoethnographic methodology to explore lived experiences and relationships (e.g., coach-parent-athlete triad) within applied sport psychology. Autoethnography provides deep and personal insights into a phenomena that might only be uncovered through the consistent reflection of ones thoughts and feelings (Anderson, 2006). For example, the current research illustrates the personal stories, feelings, and lessons that I experienced working with parents over a three-year period. Moving forward, the coach-parent-athlete relationship should be explored from additional and differing perspectives of other coaches, parents and athletes. For example, parents could provide insight into the challenges of navigating their interactions with their child and their child's coach as their child progresses through the sport system. In addition, it would be beneficial for youth athletes to further reflect on their experiences in light of how parent and coaches work together. These insights could advance our understanding of how coaches and parents can best work together to foster athletes' PYD through sport.

Although this research may be insightful to sport researchers and administrators, findings likely provide instances that resonate only with specific groups. As such, further research examining the coach-parent-athlete triad in other diverse sport contexts would be beneficial, given the unique exosystem (e.g. organizational/structural) and macrosystem (e.g., cultural, social) elements of elite male hockey in Canada (Bronfenbrenner, 1995, 1999; Campbell & Parcels, 2013; Gruneau & Whitson, 1993). Specifically, examination of the coach-parent relationships among female players and/or coaches, fathers and/or mothers, varying competitive levels, diverse socio-economic status, among different age groups, and involving other sports

would offer important advances in understanding and knowledge. The role of other elements with the EST such as peers (microsystem), coach and peer interactions (mesosystem) and the sport structure and culture of the sport (exosystem/macrosystem) would also be beneficial. Future research should further explore the reciprocal nature of the nested levels within the EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; 1999). The current study focused primarily on how the coach-parent interactions influenced the athlete; however, future research should examine how athletes may also influence the coaches and parents.

In conclusion, this study tells the story of my experience working with parents to foster PYD through elite sport over a three-year period. Evidently, I faced many challenges from which lessons were learned; however, my growth as a coach coincided with a changing environment including the maturing of the athletes and improved performance of the team. Findings of this study cannot be separated from the specific context and environment of my three-year journey. Nonetheless, findings may be relatable, and impact other youth sport coaches working with parents to reflect on their experiences and approaches. Future research may want to examine the development, implementation and evaluation of programmes aimed at improving the coach-parent-athlete triad.

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**CHAPTER FOUR: MANUSCRIPT THREE**

Preston, C. & Fraser-Thomas, J. F. (in preparation). *Is the Professionalization of Youth Sport Impeding Athletes' Personal Development? Exploring How Elite Youth Sport Coaches Facilitate Positive Youth Development*

### Summary

Youth sport has been identified as a viable means to facilitate positive youth development (PYD) and create fully prepared and contributing adults (Holt et al., 2017). However, questions have arisen regarding elite youth sport as a context to effectively foster PYD, and specifically the role of the coach in this process (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2017). The current study drew upon an ethnographic-informed approach (Patton, 2005) to explore how ‘model’ coaches facilitate PYD in an elite youth sport context. Framed within the COM-B model (Michie et al., 2011), the study focused on how coaches’ Capabilities, Opportunities, and Motivation influenced their Behaviour in relation to facilitating PYD. Findings highlight that these elite youth coaches used many effective strategies (e.g., setting high standards, providing leadership opportunities, communicating with the athletes) but the sport structure (i.e., professional sports model that focuses on competition and performance from early childhood) often restricted their ability to optimally foster PYD. Further, coaches’ own motivations to achieve performance success presented a challenge to fostering PYD on some occasions. The results are situated within PYD literature, and may evoke practical considerations for elite youth sport coaches aiming to foster PYD more effectively.

*KEYWORDS:* Ethnography, elite youth sport, positive youth development, coaching

## Is the Professionalization of Youth Sport Impeding Athletes' Personal Development? Exploring How Elite Youth Sport Coaches Facilitate Positive Youth Development

Positive Youth Development (PYD) is an asset-building approach that facilitates youths' psychosocial development and builds life skills such as teamwork, goal setting and leadership (Larson, 2000). Much research has focused on the role of youth sport in facilitating PYD outcomes (see Holt et al., 2017 for a review). However, there is growing recognition of a potential conflict between athletes' PYD and the key goals of elite youth sport (Fraser-Thomas, Beesley, Dickler, Harlow, Mosher, Preston, & Wolman, 2017; Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015; Harwood & Johnston, 2016; Strachan, Fraser-Thomas, & Nelson-Ferguson, 2016). Numerous frameworks of PYD through sport (Côté, Turnnidge, & Vierima; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005; Gould & Carson, 2008; Holt et al., 2017) consistently identify the role of coaches as essential to the facilitation of PYD, suggesting that through their ability to create meaningful relationships, develop life skills, and facilitate an ideal learning environment, coaches can enable their athletes to experience PYD. However, to date, minimal research has explored the coach's roles in facilitating PYD within elite youth sport contexts, and there is a need for more in-depth understanding of coaches' experiences (Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015). As such, the current study drew upon an ethnographic-informed approach (Patton, 2005) to explore how 'model' coaches facilitate PYD in an elite youth sport context. Specifically, the study drew upon the COM-B model (Michie, van Stralen, & West, 2011) to explore how coaches' capabilities, opportunities, and motivation influenced their behaviour in relation to facilitating PYD.

### **PYD through Sport**

Sport has long been promoted as a context for optimal psychological and social development for youth (Larson, 2000), with a growing body of more recent literature focusing on



the role of the coach in facilitating life skill development (e.g., Trottier & Robitaille, 2014; Turnnidge, Côté, & Hancock, 2014; Vella, Oades, & Crowe, 2013). Following a recent meta-review of 63 studies focused on PYD through sport, Holt and colleagues (2017) proposed a model suggesting life skills could be developed through explicit or implicit means. They suggest that when elements of a PYD promoting climate are present (i.e., strong relationships between coaches, athletes, peers, and parents), life skills can be implicitly cultivated among athletes. On the other hand, they summarized extensive research identifying numerous means by which coaches can explicitly facilitate PYD and life skills: establishing high expectations and accountability for behaviour (Brown & Fry, 2011; Flett, Gould, Griffes, & Lauer, 2013), role modeling desired behaviour (Camiré et al., 2012), providing opportunities for leadership roles (Lerner et al., 2005), setting, reminding and tracking athletes' goals (Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2007) and taking advantage of teachable moments (Trottier & Robitaille, 2014).

While there is much evidence to support life skill development through youth sport, and specifically the coach's role in facilitating athletes' life skills, researchers have questioned whether elite youth sport offers an optimal climate for coaches to foster PYD (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2017; Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015) given various factors including extensive time demands, high expectations, focus on early specialization, and the social isolation of athletes. It has been suggested that these factors may contribute to a climate exclusively focused on performance success (i.e., winning), at the cost of athletes' personal development (i.e., deterring positive relationships from being built and failing to teach life skills). Furthermore, these impediments of the performance-oriented climate have been juxtaposed with the objectives and behaviours of the athletes' coaches (McCallister, Blinde, & Weiss, 2000; Wilcox & Trudel, 1998). In a study by McCallister and colleagues (2000), youth sport coaches outlined that they

believed performance and personal development were both important, yet they were unable to successfully communicate how both of these aims could be achieved in practice. Further evidence of this potential conflict is provided through elite youth athletes' accounts of maltreatment by their coaches, in the forms of belittling, humiliating, shouting, scapegoating, rejecting, isolating, threatening, ignoring, intimidating, and favouring their athletes, and in particular, athletes' normalization of these behaviours, suggesting these to be necessary coach behaviours in order for athletes to reach top performance levels (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Stirling & Kerr, 2007)

Despite these concerns, there is a growing body of coaching research that indicates PYD and performance success can be mutually inclusive (e.g., Gould et al., 2007; Kidman & Lombardo, 2010; Mallett, 2005; Preston, Kerr & Stirling, 2015; Vella et al., 2013). For example, setting high expectations and accountability for behaviour can foster PYD and promote performance success (Gould et al., 2007); providing athletes with important choices and opportunities to offer input can increase athletes' sense of autonomy and intrinsic motivation to train and achieve performance success (Mallett, 2005); and running engaging practices and fostering a team culture of respect, industriousness, and teamwork can create more positive athlete experiences, greater team cohesion, and, therefore, increase performance success (Kidman & Lombardo, 2010; Preston et al., 2015).

Thus, collectively, the current literature suggests there is tension between the aims of fostering PYD and performance success (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2017; Fraser-Thomas & Strachan 2015; Harwood & Johnston, 2016; Strachan et al., 2016), yet there also appears to be some evidence to suggest certain coaching approaches and strategies may be effective in balancing these athlete outcomes (Gould et al., 2007; Kidman & Lombardo, 2010; Mallett, 2005; Preston et

al., 2015). Alternative methodologies have been proposed as a means to gain more in-depth understanding of this conflict, and capture the nuances of how effective strategies and approaches are experienced ‘on the ground’, and in particular, implemented by coaches (Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015). As such, the current study drew upon an ethnographic-informed approach (Patton, 2005) to explore how ‘model’ coaches facilitate PYD in an elite youth sport context.

### **COM-B Model**

This study drew upon the COM-B model (Michie et al., 2011) to explore how coaches’ capabilities, available opportunities, and motivation influenced their behaviour in relation to facilitating PYD in elite youth sport contexts. The COM-B model suggests that three broad factors (i.e., capabilities, opportunities, and motivation) interact to influence an individual’s behaviour. Capabilities are defined as the individual’s psychological (i.e., knowledge, comprehension, reasoning) and physical (i.e., skill) capacity to engage in the activity concerned (i.e., facilitating PYD in athletes). Opportunities are described as the physical (i.e., environment) and social (i.e., cultural) milieu; they include the concepts, thoughts, and words that influence how we think about things, and all the factors that lie outside the individual that make a behaviour possible or prompt a behaviour. Lastly, motivation is defined as the brain process that energizes and directs behaviour including reflective processes (i.e., evaluations, goals and plans) and automatic processes (i.e., habitual processes, emotional responding, and impulses from associated learning or innate dispositions). Markedly, the three factors are interactive; for example, a coach’s opportunities and/or capabilities could influence their motivation, while carrying out a behaviour could alter an individual’s capabilities, opportunities, or motivation. Michie and colleagues (2011) created the model to help design interventions aimed at behaviour

change; the model has also been utilized to identify barriers to specific target behaviours. Hence, for the purpose of this study, the model was helpful not only to offer understanding of how coaches were facilitating PYD, but also to explore potential challenges that they may have been successfully (or unsuccessfully) navigating, in their aim of facilitating athletes' PYD.

## **Methods**

### **Research Design**

To gain a deeper understanding of how youth sport coaches' were fostering PYD within an elite (high performance) context, an ethnographic-informed research design was utilized (Patton, 2005). Rooted in an interpretive paradigm, the ethnographic research design provides a methodology to understand and illuminate the experience of the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Williamson, 2006). Ethnography reflects on how a particular group of people approach the world (Patton, 2005) - in this case, elite youth sport coaches aiming to foster PYD. As a result, ethnographic methods (e.g., participant observation and interview techniques) present data that communicate and represent "the irreducibility of human experience" (Willis & Trondman, 2000, p. 5).

### **Context**

The context being studied was elite youth sport coaching, with a specific focus on coaching boys' AAA minor ice hockey in a large urban centre in Ontario, Canada. This context offered a unique coaching environment, given Canada's national passion for hockey (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993). Concerns have been raised in both academic contexts and through mainstream sources regarding performance pressures that arise as parents 'invest' excessive financial resources in order for their child to play AAA hockey, with the hopes their child will attain a scholarship or lucrative NHL contract (Bean, Jeffery-Tosoni, Baker, & Fraser-Thomas, 2016;

Campbell & Parcels, 2013). As such, the expectations of coaches to achieve performance success may eclipse expectations related to PYD. Further, it has been suggested that a performance-oriented environment has been related to the professionalization of coaching, where coaches attempt to advance their careers through short-term performance success (Lyle, 2002); hence, similar to other youth sport settings, coaches may “see their team as their ticket to higher status in the league and community” (Brower, 1979, p. 43).

### **Participants**

Within the context of elite youth sport coaching, this study focused on the experiences of four AAA minor hockey head coaches of four different teams in a large urban centre in Ontario, throughout the 2014-2015 season. Given our focus on understanding how coaches facilitated PYD in high performance settings, coaches were purposefully sampled via reputational sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994); specifically, they were identified by key informants (organization presidents) as ‘model’ coaches who were focused on fostering PYD. Purposeful sampling was also used to recruit coaches from diverse age groups (i.e., 9-15) in order to maximize variations between participants (Patton, 2005). Initially, five coaches were approached and agreed to participate in the study; they were sent a recruitment letter (Appendix A) and signed a consent form (Appendix B). However, one coach stepped down from his position early in the season and, therefore, was not included in the study.

Detailed information regarding each of the four coaches and their teams is provided in Table 1 (Pseudonyms are used throughout.) All four were employed (i.e., paid) minor hockey coaches with extensive hockey coaching backgrounds (i.e., 10-30 years) and additional hockey related employment experience (e.g., skill instructor). Although they all aimed to foster PYD and had been identified as models in this regard, they each brought unique strengths, philosophies,

and personalities to their roles and approaches. For example, throughout the season it became evident to me that Bob tended to be well prepared and patient, Doug enjoyed having “fun” with the athletes, Kevin liked to think outside the box (e.g., tried new things), and Paul was extremely detail oriented. In addition, each team had 2-3 assistant coaches that included a mix of parent and non-parent coaches.

Table 1: Participant Descriptions

Coach Name	Team's Age Group	Age	Years Coaching	Year with Current Team
Bob	Minor Atom (9 years old)	62	30	First
Doug	Atom (10 years old)	32	10	Third
Kevin	Minor Bantam (13 years old)	47	21	First
Paul	Minor Midget (15 years old)	42	17	Second

Each of the coaches' teams consisted of 16 to 18 male players, with all team members selected following April 2014 tryouts. The teams' seasons began with training camps in late August 2014; regular seasons began mid-September 2014 and seasons concluded in February 2015. Three out of the four teams emerged as higher performing teams within their league (i.e., made the playoffs), while the fourth team made substantial improvements throughout the season (i.e., achieved more wins than the previous year). Although each team differed in age, personnel, and experience, the tone of each team flowed back and forth from laughter to serious competition and discipline.

### **Researcher's Position**

Given this was an ethnographic informed study, the lead researcher played an important role in the research process (Patton, 2005). Specifically, the first author served as an assistant coach with each of the four teams, and conducted all field work (Details of his role as assistant coach are outlined below in the data collection section). He was considered an “insider” within the elite youth sport coaching community (Merton, 1972) primarily because he was congruently

coaching his own AAA minor hockey team; however, athletes were of a different age (11 years) and therefore his team did not play against any of these coaches' teams. In addition to being a fellow coach (i.e., two years as a head coach and three years as an assistant coach at the AAA level), the primary researcher also had extensive experience leading hockey camps, and had extensive knowledge of the sport as a player (ten years at various competitive levels including Ontario Provincial Junior A, Ontario Hockey League, International Hockey League, and U Sport formerly known as Canadian Interuniversity Sport), which further enhanced his "insider" status within this hockey community. As such, the researcher was welcomed onto the teams by each of the participating coaches, and the time spent by the primary researcher with each coach over the course of the season further enhanced a trusting relationship, which in turn enhanced coaches' comfort and openness in sharing experiences (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

While the primary researcher's insider status was essential to the study's approach, it is important to acknowledge that he brought preconceptions and biases regarding how elite youth sport coaches can foster PYD. For example, he had a steadfast belief that elite youth sport coaches could pursue PYD and performance success. In addition, based on his previous experiences he had preconceptions of what coaching behaviour may foster PYD and performance success. As such, it was important that he was aware of his biases during data collection and analysis. In addition, the second author, an established researcher in PYD, helped to maintain a critical lens in the data analysis process (Johns, 2002). Finally, it is important to note the researcher did not have a pre-established relationship with any of the informants, but rather, was introduced to them through the hockey organization, based on their 'model' approach aiming to facilitate PYD.

### **Data Collection**

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) describe the variations in the data collection process (p. 2) used in ethnography:

Ethnography usually involves the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts – in fact, gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry.

As such, informed by an ethnographic research design, the first author collected data through participant observation, field notes and semi-structured interviews. Specifically, in his role as assistant coach, the first author participated in 44 events (i.e., 10-12 practices and games per team) across the season. He was fully immersed with the team, engaging on the ice in practices, standing with the team behind the bench during games, and joining team meeting in change rooms. Within this role, he was able to observe first-hand the coaching methods and strategies used in game and practice scenarios, as well as to assess the player-coach dynamics as understood through the lens of PYD through sport (Holt et al., 2017). Essentially, participant observations provided “detailed descriptions of people’s activities, behaviours, actions, and the full range of interpersonal interactions and organizational processes that are part of observable human experience” (Patton, 2005, p. 1633). Field notes were completed after each event and were focused on recording the head coach’s interactions with assistant coaches, players, parents and referees. Field notes also included observed coaching behaviours, body language, decisions, and teaching style; general notes were taken about the overall environment or culture of the team.



Drawing from his shared experiences as a team coach, the first author also engaged participants in two semi-structured interviews during the mid-season and after the season ended (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The interview guide (Appendix C) was focused on the coaches' experiences, specifically how they successfully (or at times perhaps unsuccessfully) facilitated PYD (e.g., What do you consider to be your successes as a coach? What are your biggest challenges coaching?). Questions also probed specific coaching behaviours – practice structure, managing playing time, development of life skills, mastery-approach to coaching, autonomy-supportive coaching behaviours, and coach development (e.g., Can you describe how you weigh the importance of winning? How do you manage playing time?). Questions and probes were adjusted based on field observations; for example, if a coach had been observed in situations where he appeared to be experiencing success (or challenges) in relation to fostering PYD, the researcher would probe these situations for further insights. Additionally, questions and probes were adjusted in the second interview based on responses in the first interview; for example, if a coach discussed a particular approach or strategy he used to fostering PYD in his first interview, the primary researcher would follow up and inquire again about how this approach or strategy may have been utilized in the latter part of the season. Utilizing interviews in addition to field work (i.e., observations and field notes) allowed coaches to reflect and share directly their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge around the factors that facilitated and challenged their fostering of PYD (Patton, 2005).

### **Data Analysis**

The process of ethnographic analysis “involves sifting and sorting through pieces of data to detect and interpret thematic categorisations, search for inconsistencies and contradictions, and generate conclusions about what is happening and why” (Thorne, 2000, p. 69). A two-step

process was utilized; first, the large amount of raw data (i.e., field notes from observations and interview transcripts) were inductively coded into themes, patterns, understandings, and insights about the culture under study (Patton, 2005). This process was important to allow the informants' experiences and lived realities to inform the data (Patton, 2005). After the inductive analysis, the data were further analysed deductively through a fitting framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researchers identified the COM-B model as a suitable framework as it allowed the data to be understood through the lens of the coaches' capabilities, available opportunities, and personal motivation, to understand their behaviour in relation to facilitating PYD (Michie et al., 2011). Thus, each of the themes that emerged from the inductive analysis was discussed through the lens of the COM-B model. Notably, many of the themes were considered at the intersection of multiple constructs of model. For example, a coach's capabilities in facilitating PYD were often influenced by the opportunities he experienced within the high-performance hockey context; these intersections are discussed throughout the results and discussion sections.

## **Results**

### **Coaches' Capabilities**

This section explores the capabilities of the coaches (i.e., their knowledge and skills; Michie et al., 2011) in relation to facilitating PYD. Overall, the coaches appeared to have the capabilities to foster PYD, as demonstrated through four key behaviours: setting high standards, providing leadership opportunities, being a role model, and communicating effectively with the athletes. It should be noted however, that some key capabilities were not demonstrated through coaches' behaviours; coaches sometimes served as poor role models, and generally, had poor self-awareness and ineffective communication with the parents.

**Setting high standards.** The coaches articulated and displayed their capabilities to foster PYD by setting high standards for their athletes, and consistently holding the athletes accountable to these standards. For example, the coaches would often stop drills to teach the team something they were not implementing, or have an athlete restart a drill if they were not executing it correctly. These examples emphasize the high standards coaches had for execution. Furthermore, the coaches discussed and displayed how they used playing time in conjunction with their high standards to promote development. As Paul verbalized, “Work ethic is number one. You don’t want to work, you don’t play.” He elaborated on how this transpired at practice: “If they are supposed to be behind the red line, then they should be behind the red line, or past the blue line. Simple rules really.”

**Providing leadership opportunities.** Coaches’ capabilities to foster PYD were also demonstrated through their provision of leadership opportunities for athletes, and expectations of responsibilities among their athletes. For example, before games Kevin would outline focus points for the team, for the game; however, after doing so, he would leave the change room, leaving the captain with the responsibility of getting the team ready to play. Similarly, Doug set up a “players-only” meeting (i.e., no coaches) before one of his playoff games to encourage the players to take initiative in preparing themselves to play. In his interviews, Paul explained how he liked to give the players a voice; this was in line with observations whereby he would let the players decide on one of the team captains. Keeping the athletes involved in decision-making and assuring they assumed key roles commonly performed by coaches encouraged them to be more engaged in their environment.

**Role modelling.** Coaches’ capabilities to foster PYD were also evident in their continual position of serving as a role model. Specifically, the coaches were observed modelling numerous

desired behaviours throughout the season (e.g., preparing for practices and games, showing respect and passion). Kevin clearly articulated the importance of serving as a positive model to the athletes when he stated:

What I have noticed over the years is that the players pay so much attention to you as a person. Like the way you dress up to the rink, the way you dress to practice, the way your stick is taped, the way your skates are... they look up to everything... I didn't realize it... Like kids in novice came up to me and say, "Coach you have a different stick." I never actually talk about it, but they notice... From that I just learned that you influence them throughout the whole process. From the time you come to the dressing room, to the rink, the way you come into the dressing room, how you talk in the room, to leaving the room, to how you talk on the bench, to leaving the ice - it is all leadership. You are the ultimate role model in that whole process.

Although the coaches generally modelled desirable behaviours, they were observed modelling undesired behaviours on occasion. These may be best explained through their lack of self-awareness, which is discussed shortly. Examples of the coaches not modelling desired behaviours included Paul and Bob yelling at the athletes, making sarcastic comments, or asking rhetorical questions, when they were frustrated with the athletes' poor performance and or lack of effort. For example, Bob was observed roaring the rhetorical question "why would you do that?" to an athlete from which no response was expected and the tone clearly insinuate that the athlete had made an unacceptable mistake. In addition, Paul was repeatedly observed demonstrating disrespect towards officials, and verbally abusing officials when frustrated; he was suspended numerous times for his behaviours.

**Effective athlete communication.** Furthermore, the coaches were observed engaging in effective communication with their athletes, and discussed their approaches throughout their interviews. Specifically, coaches appeared to understand the importance of honest communication in fostering PYD, while also recognizing how to foster learning through more adverse situations, such as those involving their playing time (in games). Kevin articulated his communication approach, providing a number of examples of honest conversations he often had with athletes:

I am honest with the players. If they are doing a great job, I tell them. I don't swear at the players. I don't use bad words. I tell the players, "If you take a bad penalty", I tell them, "that was a selfish penalty". Or if they are going at the net in last few seconds in a tied game, [I tell them]. Or if [they] showed too much fear and didn't sacrifice enough for the team, [I tell them].

Doug explained his approach to communicating with the athletes in challenging situations, such as when players received less playing time during playoffs:

Individuals have been held a little more accountable in playoffs. We had two overtime games, and another really tight game, so some guys have seen a little less ice time because they are not picking it up. Then we talk to them about that after... we made a comment to everybody after one game, "This is a total team win, one line didn't play in the four minutes of overtime, but they still helped us get there."

Doug went on to explain how he had then referenced (to the team) the contributions of each of these specific players earlier in the game, with the aim of enhancing their confidence. Doug also explained how he then pulled these athletes aside one on one and discussed areas of focus for them within the coming practices. In the next game, each of the players on this specific

line did get a shift in overtime, as they had demonstrated their enhanced defensive skills. This example highlights several elements of effective communication; Doug provided a rationale to the team for his coaching decisions, he explicitly outlined players' contributions when their confidence may have been low, he displayed awareness of the importance of being discrete and respectful in providing feedback, and followed through on commitment to reward players' practice efforts. Similarly, Bob explained how he communicated to the athletes when they received less playing time:

I'd say to the whole team, "A couple boys missed a couple shifts and never said a word. I want you to know how hard they worked to support the team." Then after the [other] kids had left, I'd sit down and say, "I appreciate how you missed a couple shifts. It is not about how hard you worked. It is this particular situation you struggled in (...)"

Like Doug, Bob would then explicitly outline to the player(s) the rationale for his coaching decision, and how the situation might look different for that player in the future (i.e., areas of focus to work on).

**Poor self-awareness.** While the coaches generally displayed and articulated their capabilities to foster PYD, there were a few behaviours that they struggled to demonstrate consistently, or at all. Foremost, coaches often appeared to lack self-awareness of their behaviours, particularly in emotionally charged situations; they would describe themselves in one way in their interviews, but were observed behaving in a completely contradictory manner. For example, Bob described himself in his second interview: "My demeanour is very soft spoken. I never raise my voice to the kids. They don't know when I'm mad. I keep it inside." However, Bob was observed on several occasions displaying his frustrations through aggressive tones and the use of sarcastic comments and rhetorical questions. When skills or drills were not

executed in practice, he could be heard yelling, “That was terrible! Let’s pick it up!” Bob was not alone in this apparent lack of self-awareness, as Kevin suggested he did not engage in his own development as much as he used to, and Doug summarized the extent of his self-reflection as, “I always think of things I could have done. But actually reflecting and putting it to paper I could probably do a better job of that.” The coaches’ lack of awareness of their inappropriate behaviours was problematic to fostering PYD in that it indirectly fostered a normalization and acceptance of such behaviours, which was troubling when considering coaches powerful influence as role models to players (as noted by Kevin above). These inappropriate behaviours are further discussed below in relation to coaches’ motivations to facilitated PYD.

**Ineffective parent communication.** Furthermore, the coaches were generally ineffective in interacting with the parents, which presented an obstacle to fostering athletes’ PYD. The coaches regularly complained about having to deal with parents that “don’t get it.” When probed further, coaches suggested parents did not understand the intricacies of the game or the importance of their son taking responsibility for his performance; instead parents often made excuses for their sons. As such, all four coaches expressed frustrations regarding the pressures and criticisms from parents; however, coaches often seemed responsible for further escalating such situations through their ineffective responses. For example, Paul narrated how, after a loss, a parent told him that he had been “out coached.” Paul responded by asking the parent if he would like to coach the next game. Bob recounted another emotionally charged situation where the team had a strong lead in a game but ended up losing; one parent started arguing with the opposing team’s parents and yelling negative instructions (assumedly to the coach) about one of their own players on the ice (e.g., “Get that goalie out of there!”), which insinuated that it was

that players fault for the goals against. Bob reflected on he could have handled the situation differently:

I should have let him [the parent] go right then... in November... I did talk with him. I took him inside, and he told me that I “should be embarrassed” and that “it was my job to make sure we win games like that.” And I said, “You know what? This has nothing to do with hockey. You can’t be screaming at our goalie and swearing and cursing at other parents.”

Bob suggested in his interview that in hindsight, he should have removed the problem parent (and by association, the player) from the team. Clearly, situations such as these that involved highly invested parents were complex; they appeared to leave coaches feeling challenged and sometimes even at a loss to effectively navigate, in turn leading to poor coach-parent relationships, while detracting from the athletes’ overall development on the ice.

It should be noted however that coaches did develop some strategies to promote an open and positive tone with parents. For example, all the coaches had pre-season parent meetings to outline and discuss their coaching philosophies and expectations with parents. Additionally, all of the coaches implemented a “24 hour rule”, where parents were required to wait 24 hours after a game before reaching out to a coach with any concerns; this was aimed at providing both parties time to calm down and reflect. Unfortunately, as noted in the examples above, coaches were challenged to fully enforce this approach. In addition to these strategies, Bob also provided players with report cards on their development, and parents with team email updates regarding the team’s development, current focus, and general progress. Despite these efforts, the coaches were not observed nor did they report providing education sessions (e.g., workshops, newsletters) for parents throughout the season, despite complaining that the parents “didn’t get



it.” Thus, after the initial parent meeting at the beginning of the season, there was limited coach initiated interactions throughout the season, and coaches’ pursuit of PYD was challenged by their inability to effectively work with parents.

### **Opportunity to Foster PYD**

This section explores the available opportunities (i.e., environment and culture; Michie et al., 2011) for coaches to facilitate PYD. Although coaches took advantage of some opportunities to foster PYD (i.e., teachable moments), the competition-focused structure of the sport, and the sport’s culture appeared to lead to a performance-oriented environment (Nicholls, 1984), often ignoring appropriate sport development pathways; this indirectly also influenced coaches motivations (as discussed in the final section of the results).

**Teachable moments.** The coaches were provided with numerous opportunities to foster PYD through teachable moments (i.e., spontaneous or improvised situations to teach life skills; Camiré, Trudel, & Forneris, 2012; Trottier & Robitaille, 2014). These moments occurred when coaches saw a moment in practice or in a game where they had an opportunity to teach players important life lessons through sport. Most often these moments would materialize when athletes acted inappropriately; in turn, coaches would help guide athletes’ moral compass to follow through on the “right” path through a discussion and/or an appropriate consequence, or sometimes simply by modelling strong character themselves, and expecting the same of their athletes. For example, teachable moments often presented when the athletes were disrespectful or not meeting the coach’s moral standards. Bob described one such incident:

We have caught kids in the act of doing things, like a comment made after a goalie had a bad game and a boy called him a “siv” [Slang for a bad goalie]. So we sat the boy for a period, and had him apologize in front of the team.

In another case, Bob explained why he did not play an athlete for a period (one third of a game): “He hit a kid from behind and got away with it. He didn’t get a penalty when he should have. And it was a retaliation penalty.” Doug also described using a similar approach to reinforce appropriate teamwork (by decreasing playing time) when one line (a group of three players that consistently play together in the forward position) were not implementing the set team systems while the other two lines were.

**Sport structure.** While teachable moments provided opportunities for coaches to facilitate PYD, the competition-focused structure of the sport seemed to diminish such opportunities. More specifically, having equal number of games as practices (approximately two of each per week) led to a significant focus on performance (i.e., winning games), often at the cost of athletes’ overall development. Within this structure, coaches often designed practices with a focus on increasing the team’s chances to win the next game, rather than giving broader consideration to athletes’ long-term development, despite their articulated intentions to facilitate PYD. For example, on the team of nine year olds, players often spent the majority of their practice time learning advanced team system drills (e.g., breakouts, power plays) rather than developing fundamental technical skills (e.g., skating, passing, shooting) or essential tactical skills (e.g., puck support, checking, and small area passing plays). However, one of the four coaches, Kevin, did make a conscious effort to focus on long-term development as he stated: “I spend 80% of my time on development of the individual skill. From stickhandling to shooting, passing, faking, deking, then 20% is more towards the game concept.” His approach was observed throughout practices, as his commitment to individual skill development was evident. However, he seemed constantly aware of the tension between different approaches, as his two assistant coaches (parents) were often observed pushing him to spend more time on team

systems. As playoffs approached, Kevin seemed to relent to these pressures, and started to afford more time to team systems.

For each team, the first goal within the 34 game regular season was to make the playoffs with good standing (i.e., higher standing results meant a more favourable first round match up). Consequently, as the regular season progressed the perceived importance of winning each game increased. Likewise, once playoffs arrived the emphasis placed on winning was further heightened by the second goal of each of the teams - to win the playoff championship. Doug stated:

We have been focusing more on results in the playoffs than the regular season. I don't know if it is just common nature to do that. You want them (the athletes) to understand the importance of if we lose we are done.

While each coach had the opportunity to create the climate within their own team, it was evident that the structure of the sport imposed a performance-oriented climate. The performance oriented climate defines success in terms of performance results and comparisons with others (Nicholls, 1984), hence influencing the coaches' motivations and definitions of success (discussed further in the third section). As a result, the performance-oriented climate diverted coaches from focusing on fostering PYD outcomes (e.g., building meaningful relationships, teaching life skills, and creating an optimal learning environment) (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Holt et al., 2017) to focusing primarily on achieving performance success.

**Coach-parent boundaries.** A final factor that appeared to limit coaches' opportunities to facilitate PYD were the apparent boundaries between coaches and parents that seemed a part of the minor ice hockey culture. Although past research has highlighted the importance of effective coach-parent communication in facilitating PYD (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2017; Hellstedt, 1987;

Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Smoll, Cumming, & Smith, 2011), there seemed little opportunity for this to occur. While each coach engaged in a parent meeting at the beginning of the season, and coaches engaged in some interactions throughout the season, these interactions were limited. Throughout the study, the physical boundaries inherent within the structure of ice hockey were observed; the parents were generally confined to the lobby and stands, while the coaches were primarily in the dressing rooms, on the ice, or the bench. This physical set-up provided limited opportunities for casual coach-parent interactions. When coach-parent interactions did occur, they were usually parent initiated, with parents ‘chasing down’ coaches. If a coach wanted to initiate a private parent interaction at the rink they would have to either pull the parent into a dressing room or try to find adequate space within an often noisy and overcrowded lobby. As such, natural or set opportunities for coaches to effectively communicate with parents were limited. However, the coaches could have set meetings with parents or pulled aside parents for more frequent communication. In addition, alternative channels of communication such as phone, text and email were possible for coaches to communicate with parents; nonetheless, coaches expressed that they “did not want to deal with parents” during their time away from the rink – suggesting that they too were contributing to creating this boundary between coaches and parents, which appeared to be a norm within the minor ice hockey culture. This presents an appropriate segue into the final factor influencing coaches’ facilitation of PYD – their motivation.

### **Motivation to Foster PYD**

The findings regarding coaches’ motivations (i.e., goals and impulses; Michie et al., 2011) to foster PYD paint a contradictory picture. On the one hand, the coaches articulated their motivation to facilitate PYD, but this was certainly not always evident in the observation of

practices and games, despite all four coaches having been identified as coaches that focused on fostering PYD. Three themes are presented in this section, which present evidence of coaches' conflicting motivations towards fostering PYD: coaches' care for the athletes, coaches' conflicting foci on PYD and winning, and coaches' aversion for parents. In this section, it becomes evident that coaches' motivation is directly influenced by both their capabilities and available opportunities, thus some of the previously discussed themes will inevitably resurface.

**Care for the athletes.** One indication of coaches' motivation to foster PYD was reflected in their sincere care for their players. For example, Doug expressed that "seeing the kids grow up... developing their own personalities" was one of the more rewarding parts of being a coach. Bob also highlighted the joys of "watching them develop as people - and their personalities." Doug's care for his athletes was also observed during a practice when the boys shared stories about their activities away from the rink; he listened intently and the boys were clearly enjoying engaging with their coach, in this less formalized context. Although the coaches generally showed care for the athletes, there were instances observed when the genuineness of this care could be questioned. For example, on one occasion Paul was frustrated with a player's lack of effort and engagement, and he impulsively and deliberately withdrew his attention from the player. In debriefing the event with Paul after the game, he justified his actions stating, "Why should I care, if he does not care?" In so doing, he demonstrated poor communication skills, and served as a poor role model.

**PYD versus winning.** As expected and as previously noted, the coaches appeared motivated to foster PYD through building meaningful relationships (e.g., caring for the athletes), fostering life skills (e.g., setting high standards for respect and holding the athletes accountable), and developing more competent hockey players through a task-oriented environment (Nicholls,

1984). Specifically, the coaches unambiguously expressed in their language the importance of player development, which they tended to view as a long-term process, over winning, which often required coaches to modify their coaching approach moment by moment. Kevin explained how he maintained his player development focus, even when tempted to alter course to optimize his chances of winning and improving playoff rankings:

I didn't make any drastic changes or adjustments near the end of the season. It was my first full season with the team. I don't think it is fair by me to make those kinds of changes (...) We were 3 points out of making the playoffs. I didn't make any changes, I didn't want to sacrifice development for the sake of winning one or two extra games just so we can go to the playoffs.

Likewise, Bob articulated his philosophy on assuring the development of each player, rather than giving unequal opportunities to a select few on the team:

My philosophy is to develop the kids and again winning is not what it is all about. We went into that tournament and I gave the goalie with less time - he started against the two best teams - never took him out. We got thumped. We supported him and kept going with him... But with him we are trying to encourage him that he is a big part of the team, we all have our roles. In general, I say I play all my kids.

Lastly, Paul described his team's development focus: "We tried as much to develop what we have. We evaluated where our skills sets were... everything has been teaching and doing edge work."

However, despite these coaches' stated approaches, when observed, these coaches were typically motivated to win hockey games, more so than to foster PYD (i.e., develop meaningful relationships). This drive to win hockey games was inescapably influenced by the environment,

as previously discussed (i.e., the importance of winning increased throughout the season). For example, the coaches were observed significantly decreasing weaker athletes' playing time and frequently discussing the standings and importance of games with their coaching staff and the team. In addition, the coaches' discussions with the athletes often lacked any emphasis on personal development, character, well-being or leadership, and instead primarily focused on performance. During Doug's second interview he self-reflects on how his motivation to win seemed to be effecting the athletes' performance by creating a performance-oriented environment (Nicholls, 1984):

We (the coaches) are just adding more pressure. Their parents are already in the car getting them going, then we are saying it ("we need to win"), and it is like "shit" - now they start bobbling pucks. So it could be hindering their performance.

**Aversion to parents.** Finally, coaches clearly did not have the motivation to foster PYD by working with parents; rather, coaches generally saw parents as a problem to avoid given that parents appeared to hold attitudes, and engage in a number of behaviours that coaches perceived as problematic. For example, parents had a very heavy focus on performance, whereby coaches often felt they were being judged in the quality of their coaching, based solely on their winning record; the coaches expressed that parents primarily "wanted to see wins." Throughout the season it was evident that coaches were frustrated with parents, but they did not make any attempts to improve their communication with parents, or their overall relationship with parents, to minimize the possibility of problems arising. As such, coaches regularly suggested parents to be one of the more stressful components of the coach's job and discussed parents as "the worst part of coaching". For example, Paul provided one example of parents being "problems", whereby they were contradicting the coaching staff and putting too much pressure on their sons.

Paul explained the two players' situations: "They gave the best that they were capable of based on their emotional space. The pressure from their home and emotional space far out weights what it should be so then there is always blame out there." However, in this case, as in many similar cases throughout the season, Paul did not make any attempt to follow-up, debrief, counsel, or discuss the situation with the parents.

### **Discussion**

The current study drew upon an ethnographic-informed approach (Patton, 2005) to explore how 'model' coaches facilitate PYD in an elite youth sport context. Framed within the COM-B model (Michie et al., 2011), findings highlight that the coaches were capable of fostering PYD (e.g., set high standards, provided leadership opportunities for players, served as role models, and communicated effectively with athletes), and generally had the motivation (e.g., cared about athletes and their development) to foster PYD. However, the opportunity (e.g., sport structure) challenged the coaches in fostering PYD and, notably, negatively influenced the coaches' motivation (i.e., increased their focus on winning at the cost of fostering PYD). These findings advance understanding of the process PYD facilitation, specifically in high performance sport contexts, while highlighting some considerations and preliminary implications for practice.

#### **PYD within Elite Youth Sport**

This study provides some evidence to strengthen the claim that PYD and high performance sport can be mutually inclusive (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2017; Fraser-Thomas & Strachan 2015; Harwood & Johnston, 2016; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Strachan, et al., 2016), and offers insight into how coaches may facilitate PYD in high performance sport. Specifically, the findings highlight that the elite youth sport coaches in this study engaged in numerous behaviours previously associated with PYD (e.g., Camiré et al., 2012), such as setting and



holding athletes to high standards, creating opportunities for athletes to take on leadership roles, role modelling appropriate behaviours, engaging in effective athlete communication, using teachable moments, and demonstrating care in relationships with athletes. Further, the in-depth study design allowed additional evidence to emerge regarding how the high performance sport context may be optimizing opportunities for PYD. For example, findings support previous research (e.g., Camiré, Trudel, & Bernard, 2013) which highlight how athletes build meaningful relationships with their coaches when extensive time is spent together and the coaches show that they care. Regarding life skills, coaches' effective communication in situations where athletes experienced adversity (e.g., received less playing time) and positive role modeling in times of conflict or frustration within games served as important teaching tools/contexts. Further, coaches utilized teachable moments extensively; youth were often taught lessons around sacrifice for the team (i.e., selflessness), which may have been unique to the performance-oriented environment, meaning elite youth sport may be advantageous for building desirable competencies and fostering PYD (Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015).

### **Sport Structure**

Despite evidence of coaches fostering PYD within these high performance minor hockey teams, this study also uncovered extensive competing tensions between coaches' fostering of PYD, and their aims of high performance success (i.e., winning). Much of this tension appeared rooted within the larger sport structure of high performance minor hockey. Specifically, the teams played as many games as practices, standings were monitored, and playoffs were at the forefront of the system's design. This structure essentially appeared to replicate the professional sports model; there was a win-at-all-costs mentality, despite the inappropriateness of this model for this particular age group (Martel, 2015; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Smith & Smoll, 2011). As such,

this structure challenged coaches from maintaining focus on development over performance success as well as from creating a task-oriented climate (Nicholls, 1984); this challenge intensified as the season progressed towards the playoffs, and the focus on winning for optimal standings were perceived to be increasingly important. These findings support previous research (e.g., Preston & Fraser-Thomas, in press) regarding the difficulty of creating a task-oriented environment within a performance-oriented setting. Although the coaches articulated their motivation and intention to focus on development, their motivation was at odds with the sport structure.

Interestingly however, coaches appeared at times to be oblivious to the apparent performance-PYD conflict, as they tended to believe they were consistently creating a learning climate for optimal youth development. While previous research by McCallister and colleagues (2000) found that youth sport coaches struggled to articulate how they achieved personal development outcomes, despite suggesting that they did so, the present study's ethnographically informed design allowed for the corroboration of coach observations and interviews to better understand if coaches were staying aligned with their intended behaviours (i.e., did they walk the talk?). Essentially, this research found coaches clearly articulated their perceived PYD fostering behaviours during interviews, but their observed behaviours were often in stark contrast to their perceptions. As such, coaches appeared to have poor self-awareness of their behaviours (i.e., saying one thing but doing another), in line with previous research of recreational youth coaches (Smith, Smoll & Curtis, 1978).

The sport structure appeared to be a foundation for coaches' challenges in fostering PYD. Previous research has highlighted that the culture of AAA minor hockey in Canada has adopted the professional sports model, which is in part intensified by the high costs of participation

(Bean, Forneris, & Robidoux, 2014; Bean et al., 2016; Campbell & Parcels, 2013; Gruneau & Whitson, 1993). Collectively, this work raises the question as to whether this sport structure is age-appropriate, optimal for the athletes' development, and in line with key objectives of youth sport (e.g., skill competence, health, psychosocial development, and potentially – performance; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2016). Notably, the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (NRCIM, 2002) suggests that programs aiming to facilitate youth development should be guided by appropriate structures, rules and expectations. One emerging adaptation within youth hockey programming is for younger athletes to play in smaller areas with less players and smaller nets (e.g., USA Hockey, Sweden; Martel, 2015). As Martel (2015) explains, “the competition structure always dictates the development structure” (p. 43), and the small area games have been found to provide young athletes with numerous direct benefits including increased opportunities to handle the puck, increased scoring chances, and increased decision making opportunities. Particularly relevant is that the small area game-playing environment positively influences the practice environment, whereby coaches are motivated to develop basic skills; there are “no incentives for coaches to focus on set positions, offside rules, and face-off plays, items that are minimally beneficial to skill development and can be learned at a more appropriate time later in a player's hockey development experience” (p. 43).

Other proposed adaptations to minor hockey structure involve increasing the practice to game ratio for younger ages, in order to shift the focus from teams' results to players' development, and in turn, decrease the relevance of playoff standings (Martel, 2015). These approaches have been utilized in other countries such as Northern Sweden, where young age groups receive similar ice time as young players in North America, but “the club focuses on skill development at the young ages and trains all players equally. They don't cut players at the young

ages, as the club is open to all” (Martel, 2015, p. 42). Inspired by this European model, youth Minnesota Hockey teams have restructured their practice-to-game ratio at 3-4:1 (Smith, Jorgenson, Sorenson, Margenau, Link, MacMillan, & Stuart, 2009), and in the spring of 2017, Hockey Canada engaged in substantive restructuring; players aged six and younger shall play cross-ice (i.e., small area) games, with the aim that this be extended to players aged eight and younger by 2019 (Colpitts, 2017). Although these are promising steps forward, the current findings contend that the sport structure of AAA minor hockey for ages 13 and younger is the most challenging factor for coaches in fostering PYD.

### **Coach-Parent Interactions**

Findings regarding ineffective coach-parent interactions were evident throughout the season-long study. Essentially coaches demonstrated a lack of competence in effectively communicating with parents, while opportunities for optimal interactions between coaches and parents were not always afforded. Most telling however, was coaches’ lack of motivation to positively engage with parents, as they were unambiguously motivated to avoid parents, and generally viewed them as problems to avoid rather than assets to work with. These findings build on previous concerns about the coach-parent-athlete triad (Camiré, Rocchi, & Kendellen, 2016; Chapter three; Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Jannes and Pennisi, 2008; Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005) and parents within AAA minor hockey in Canada (Bean et al., 2014; Bean et al., 2016; Chapter three). For example, the findings support previous research that indicates that a few problematic parents may cause coaches to avoid working with parents (Gould et al., 2008). Notably, Fraser-Thomas, Strachan, and Jeffery-Tosoni (2013) emphasize that parents should be supportive in their child’s sporting experience and avoid performance-oriented feedback. Furthermore, previous research highlights that the professionalization and high costs of AAA minor hockey

makes parents feel entitled to share their opinions instead of accepting a more supportive role (Bean et al., 2014; Bean et al., 2016; Chapter three); a lack of role acceptance by parents could further explain why coaches viewed parents as a problem to avoid. While these concerns appear quite systemic, potentially requiring a culture shift within Canadian minor hockey, some smaller-scale innovative approaches may serve to initiate the rebuilding of coach-parent relationships. For example, head coaches could consider having their assistant coaches facilitate practices on occasion (e.g., once a month), to allow him/her to spend time in the lobby and stands checking in with parents. Such an approach could inherently build more effective coach-parent communication into the existing sport structure through proactive rather than reactive means. The lack of coach involvement with parents presents a large gap of knowledge that when actively pursued has potential to reveal new opportunities to enhance PYD. However, the findings of the current study are limited to the specific context and culture of AAA minor hockey in Canada. Future research is needed to explore other sports and contexts to deepen understanding of the coach-parent-athlete triad.

### **Coach Education**

Finally, findings of this study allude to numerous opportunities for coach education programmes. In particular, the challenges acknowledged by coaches within the COM-B framework can ultimately be translated into learning exercises that bridge gaps to in turn build coaches more equipped to foster PYD. For example, coach education programmes should address the coach capabilities that were identified as lacking (i.e., self-awareness, parent communication, and role modelling). One coach learning practice that has gained attention is Werger's (1998) concept of communities of practice, which is framed by social learning theory (Bandura, 1969) and built upon mutual engagement (i.e., negotiating the meanings of actions),

joint enterprise (i.e., collectively negotiated within the community), and shared repertoire (e.g., tools, routines, stories, and ways of doing things) (see Culver & Trudel, 2008 for a review). Establishing and maintaining communities of practice could be an effective option for sport organizations and/or coach education programmes to increase on going coach self-reflection and learning after coach education programmes are completed.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, this study drew upon the COM-B model (Michie et al., 2011) to explore how coaches' capabilities, available opportunities, and motivation influenced their behaviour in relation to facilitating PYD in elite youth sport contexts. The study identified means by which coaches fostered and were challenged to foster PYD within a AAA minor hockey context. Findings provide numerous unique contributions to the literature. The generalizability of the findings are singularly framed within the methodology used and the unique nature of AAA minor ice hockey in Canada. Future research should continue to identify and assess the factors that challenge and facilitate elite youth sport coaches in fostering PYD within other contexts (i.e., different sports, cultures, coaches, and athletes). Lastly, this research may evoke elite youth sport coaches, sport organizations and coach education programmes to reflect on current practices and consider practical implications to more optimally foster PYD outcomes.

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**CHAPTER FIVE: MANUSCRIPT FOUR**

Preston, C. & Fraser-Thomas, J. (in preparation). *Examining an elite youth sport coach education manual: An analysis of theoretical and empirical content.*

## Summary

Formal coach education programmes have been scrutinized for their lack of effectiveness (Abraham & Collins, 1998; Campbell, 1993; Lyle, 2007). Notably, research has identified interpersonal coaching knowledge (i.e., the ability to effectively interact with others) as critical to coaching effectiveness (Côté & Gilbert, 2009) and a needed component to improve coach education programmes (e.g., Adams et al., 2016; Newman et al., 2016; Santos et al., 2017). Interpersonal coaching knowledge is particularly important for elite youth sport coaches given the reported tensions between the performance-oriented environment and the facilitation of PYD (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2017). The purpose of this study was to examine the content of one elite youth sport coach education manual, with specific attention to underpinnings of interpersonal coaching approaches that facilitate PYD. An in-depth content analysis (Neuendorf, 2016) was conducted on Hockey Canada's 2016 High Performance 1 Coaching Manual. Findings highlight that the majority of the content was dedicated to professional knowledge (46%) followed by interpersonal knowledge (21%) and intrapersonal knowledge (15%). However, no research-informed interpersonal coaching approaches were cited in the manual (i.e., Bass & Riggio, 2006; Holt et al., 2017; Magéau & Vallerand, 2003; Smith et al., 2007). The findings are discussed in the context of the coach education and PYD literature, and practical recommendations for coach education programmes are provided.

*KEYWORDS:* Coach education, positive youth development, interpersonal knowledge, elite youth sport

## Examining an elite youth sport coach education manual: An analysis of theoretical and empirical content

As the professionalization of coaching continues to grow, so does the importance of formal coach education programmes (Lyle, 2002). However, researchers have highlighted numerous concerns regarding the effectiveness of formal coach education programmes (Campbell, 1993; Lyle, 2007), criticizing them for being too simple and not relevant to the complex reality of everyday practice (Gilbert & Trudel, 1999; Vargas-Tonsing, 2007), for not drawing upon coaches' experiences (Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2003), and providing prescriptive and rigid rationalities (Piggott, 2012). In response to ineffective formal youth coach education programmes, recent research has emphasized the need to include more positive youth development (PYD)-related material that is focused on team building, parental roles, sportsmanship, and the teaching of life skills (Adams, Cropley & Mullen, 2016; Newman, Ortega, Lower, & Paluta, 2016; Santos, Camiré, MacDonald, Compos, Conceição, & Silva, 2017).

PYD is a relatively new sub-discipline within developmental psychology (Damon, 2004). PYD draws upon an asset building approach (versus a deficit reduction approach) to foster youths' life skills, with the aim that youth grow into contributing adults (i.e., contributing to their family, school, community and civil society) (Lerner, Lerner, Bowers, & Geldhof, 2015). In sport, PYD researchers emphasize the importance of creating a climate that fosters meaningful relationships between youth and coaches, peers, and parents, to in turn, implicitly facilitate the development of positive psychosocial outcomes (i.e., competence, character, connection, caring, and confidence; Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005). Researchers also argue PYD outcomes can be explicitly fostered through sport programmes that intentionally focus on life



skills development among youth (see Holt et al., 2017 for a review). However, research has highlighted the struggles elite youth sport coaches have faced in trying to fostering PYD (Chapter four, Preston & Fraser-Thomas, in press; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Gervis & Dunn, 2004; McCallister, Blinde, & Weiss, 2000; Stirling & Kerr, 2007). As such, coach education programmes for elite youth sport coaches may be of particular concern, given that the key objectives of performance success may be in conflict with PYD (Fraser-Thomas, Beesley, Dickler, Harlow, Mosher, Preston, & Wolman, 2017). Prior to initiating changes in coach education programmes, it is necessary to gain a detailed understanding of current content. As such, the purpose of this study was to examine the content of one elite youth sport coach education manual, with a specific attention to underpinnings of interpersonal coaching approaches that facilitate PYD.

### **Coaching Effectiveness**

One of the primary goals of coach education programmes is to develop effective coaches (Evans, McGuckin, Gainforth, Bruner, & Côté, 2015). Coaching effectiveness as defined by Côté and Gilbert (2009) is “the consistent application of integrated professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge to improve athletes’ competence, confidence, connection, and character in specific contexts” (p. 316). In line with this definition, coach education programmes should facilitate all three types of coaching knowledge in an integrated manner (i.e., professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge), and teach coaches how to utilize their integrated knowledge in specific contexts. Côté and Gilbert described professional knowledge as sport-specific and pedagogical knowledge; interpersonal knowledge as the ability to interact with athletes, assistant coaches, parents and other professionals; and intrapersonal knowledge as the ability to self-reflect and be self-aware.

Although the integration of all three types of knowledge is important, coach education programmes have focused primarily on delivering professional knowledge (Lefebvre, Evans, Turnidge, Gainforth, & Côté, 2016). In a recent review of 285 coach development programmes, 92% were focused on developing professional knowledge, while only 6% were focused on the development of interpersonal knowledge and 2% on intrapersonal knowledge (Lefebvre et al., 2016). This is particularly concerning for elite youth sport coaches, as interpersonal knowledge is crucial for coaches aiming to foster PYD (Camiré, Trudel, & Bernard, 2013) and recent research has stressed the tensions for coaches aiming to facilitate the goals of performance success and PYD within elite youth sport (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2017; Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015; Preston & Fraser-Thomas, in press).

### **Interpersonal Coaching Approaches**

There are a variety of coaching approaches that align with (i.e., could enhance) coaches' interpersonal knowledge. Notably, four approaches are discussed in this section, given their simultaneous alignment with fostering PYD outcomes: (a) PYD coaching approach (Holt et al., 2017), (b) Mastery Approach Coaching (MAC, Smith, Smoll & Cummings, 2007) (c) autonomy-supportive coaching (e.g., Magéau & Vallerand, 2003), and (d) transformational Leadership (e.g., Vella, Oades & Crowe, 2013a, 2013b). Notably, these interpersonal approaches are rooted in theory and have been developed and examined through rigorous research.

**PYD coaching approach.** Foremost, a growing body of research has consistently highlighted specific coaching approaches and behaviours associated with facilitating PYD. Generally, coaches that build meaningful relationships with athletes, develop athletes' life skills, and create an optimal learning environment have been found to optimize PYD outcomes (See Holt et al., 2017 for a review). Specific coaching behaviours associated with PYD outcomes

include setting high expectations and holding athletes accountable (Brown & Fry, 2011), being a role model (Camiré, Trudel, & Forneris, 2012), setting and tracking goals (Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2007), providing leadership opportunities (Gould, Voelker, & Griffes, 2013), taking advantage of teachable moments (Camiré et al., 2012), and effectively working with parents (Turnnidge, Vierimaa, & Côté, 2012). Notably, research has found that youth sport coach education programmes lack PYD-based approaches and that youth sport coaches desire to learn more about PYD-based coaching practices (Santos et al., 2017).

With increased research supporting a PYD coaching approach, a growing number of educational workshops have emerged drawing upon this approach. For example, one recent intervention study involved the development and delivery of a two-hour humanistic coaching workshop (i.e., teaching PYD-based practices) to youth sport coaches (Falcão, Bloom, & Bennie, 2017). The participants emphasized the effectiveness of videos, empirical studies, group discussions, and practical coaching examples. Falcão and colleagues (2017) highlight that the coaches' participation in the workshop had a positive impact on the youth sport athletes. For example, "the coaches noticed increased autonomy, communication skills, and motivation amongst their athletes" (p. 20-21). Similarly, a values training programme was recently implemented for physical education teachers and coaches in a Singaporean primary school (Koh, Ong, & Camiré, 2016). The programme included a two-hour introductory workshop, a 90-minute live demonstration of a practice plan designed to teach movement skills and values concurrently, a six-week teaching period where coaches were video recorded and could review clips for feedback, and a 90-minute review meeting to discuss strengths and weaknesses of the programme. The findings highlighted that the programme provided the coaches with new

pedagogical strategies and motivation to teach values, and that the athletes learned about values and life skills (e.g., resilience, respect, and integrity).

**Mastery Approach to Coaching (MAC).** A second interpersonal coaching approach that simultaneously focuses on fostering PYD outcomes, is the Mastery Approach to Coaching (MAC) (Smith et al., 2007), which is an updated version of the Coach Effectiveness Training (CET) programme (Smith, Smoll & Curtis, 1979). The MAC is based on Achievement Goal Theory (AGT, Nicholls, 1984) and focuses on teaching coaches how to develop a mastery-oriented climate (i.e., emphasizes effort, attitude and improvement) over an ego-oriented climate (i.e., emphasizes results and comparisons with others). The five key principles of MAC teaches coaches to: (a) emphasize effort and development over winning, (b) reinforce desired behaviours over using punishment for undesirable behaviours, (c) encourage teamwork and set high standards for supportive behaviours, (d) include athletes in decision making and setting rules, and (e) self-reflect on their own coaching behaviours (see Smith & Smoll, 2011 for a review). Smith and colleagues (2007) implemented an intervention study to assess the effectiveness of the MAC workshops. They found that coaches who were MAC trained created higher mastery-oriented climates and lower ego-oriented climates than the control coaches. In addition, the athletes of the MAC trained coaches had higher mastery-goal orientations and lower ego-goal orientations than the athletes of the control coaches. Consequently, Minnesota Hockey utilized the MAC to inform their coaching curriculum in their attempts to help develop better athletes and decrease attrition rates (Smith, Jorgenson, Sorenson, Margenau, Link, MacMillan, & Stuart, 2009).

**Autonomy-supportive coaching (ASC).** Similarly, autonomy-supportive coaching behaviours have also emerged as effective interpersonal approach to foster PYD. Informed by

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985), autonomy-supportive coaching behaviours were proposed in Magéau and Vallerand's (2003) Motivational Model of the Coach-Athlete Relationship. The extensive research on SDT emphasizes that when a person's basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness are satisfied, then that individual will be intrinsically motivated and have a greater sense of well-being, more persistent effort, and increased performance on experiential activities (Deci & Ryan, 2008). As such, Magéau and Vallerand proposed seven autonomy-supportive coaching behaviours intended to satisfy athletes' basic psychological needs; the behaviours include: (a) providing athletes choices, (b) providing rationales and explanations for coaching decisions, (c) acknowledging athletes' perspectives and feelings, (d) providing athletes with leadership opportunities, (e) providing competence-based feedback, (f) minimizing the use of controlling behaviours, and (g) emphasizing mastery-focused over ego-focused.

Numerous studies have highlighted that perceived autonomy-supportive coaching behaviours positively predict the athlete's basic needs satisfaction, well-being, and intrinsic motivation (Adie, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2012; Amorose & Anderson-Butcher, 2006; Mallett, 2005; Reynolds & McDonough, 2015). Furthermore, recent research has utilized an action research approach to foster changes in an elite youth sport coach's autonomy-supportive coaching practices; the findings highlighted that increased autonomy-supportive behaviours facilitated players' perceptions of autonomy (Ahlberg, Mallett, & Tinning, 2008). The Empowering Coaching Workshop (Duda, 2013) offers one coach education programme that draws upon the autonomy-supportive coaching framework to teach coaches empowering coaching behaviours and foster intrinsically motivated athletes. The workshop is being implemented over five European countries as part of the large Promoting Adolescent Physical

Activity (PAPA) project (Duda et al., 2013). Preliminary findings have supported the effectiveness of the six-hour workshop (see Duda & Appleton, 2016 for a review).

**Transformational leadership (TL).** Finally, transformational leadership offers another interpersonal coaching approach that aligns with PYD (Arthur & Tomsett, 2015; Hopton, Phelan, & Barling, 2007). The concept of transformational leadership is based on the principle that leaders ‘transform’ groups by motivating followers to high levels of performance and developing the followers’ strengths (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The four components of transformation leadership include: (a) idealized influence (i.e., the leader acts as a role model); (b) inspirational motivation (i.e., the leader inspires and motivates); (c) individual consideration (i.e., the leader brings out the best efforts of each individual); and (d) intellectual stimulation (i.e., the leader challenges followers to be innovative and creative). Furthermore, Bass and Riggio suggest transformational leadership leads to higher levels of performance and satisfaction compared with other leadership styles. Within sport, research has found transformational leadership behaviours positively associated with team cohesion, performance success, motivation, and developmental outcomes (Callow, Smith, Hardy, Arthur, & Hardy, 2009; Rowold, 2006; Vella, Oades & Crowe, 2013a, 2013b). Vella and colleagues (2013b) implemented a transformational leadership training programme with youth sport coaches and found that the coaches who were in the programme had higher rates of perceived transformational leadership behaviour at follow-up compared to baseline measures than the control group. In addition, the trained group was also associated with higher rates of positive athlete outcomes at follow-up compared to baseline measures than the control group.

### **Rationale and Purpose**

Formal coach education programmes have been scrutinized for their lack of effectiveness (Abraham & Collins, 1998; Campbell, 1993; Lyle, 2007), with coaching effectiveness described as the consistent application of professional, intrapersonal, and interpersonal knowledge in order to optimize athletes' positive developmental outcomes (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Although extensive research highlights the value and importance of interpersonal knowledge (i.e., the ability to effectively interact with others) within coach education programmes (e.g., Adams et al., 2016; Newman et al., 2016; Santos et al., 2017), recent research suggests few coaching education programmes place focus on this type of knowledge (Lefebvre et al., 2016). Given numerous suggestions to improve coach education programmes, there is a need to better understand the specific content being delivered through current coach education programmes. Several coaching approaches that build upon existing theoretical and empirical research have been proposed; the four approaches outlined above (i.e., PYD approach, MAC, autonomy-supportive coaching, transformational leadership) (Ahlberg et al., 2008; Holt et al., 2017; Smith & Smoll, 2011; Vella et al., 2013a) align with coaches' interpersonal coaching knowledge, and facilitation of PYD outcomes. These four approaches may be particularly important in elite youth sport coach education programmes given past work suggesting the aims of performance success (e.g., winning) and personal development may be in conflict (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2017; Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015). As such, the purpose of this study was to examine the content of one elite youth sport coach education manual, with specific attention to underpinnings of interpersonal coaching approaches that facilitate PYD.

## **Methods**

### **Elite Youth Sport Manual**

Given our intention to examine an elite youth sport context where tensions may exist between performance success and PYD, ‘AAA’ minor hockey (the highest level in Canada) provided an appropriate context (e.g., Bean, Forneris, & Robidoux, 2014; Bean, Jeffery-Tosoni, Baker, & Fraser-Thomas, 2016; Gruneau & Whitson, 1993). Hockey Canada’s coach education has three primary streams of coaching certification: Community Sport, Competition (Development and High Performance), and Instructional. The Community Coach certification is required for head coaches of athletes 10 years of age and younger, and is typically offered as a full day course (Ontario Minor Hockey Association, 2017). The Competition - Development stream offers courses (Level 1 and 2) required for head coaches of athletes 11 years of age and older for most levels of play (i.e., from least competitive - house league to most competitive - AAA); it is a time intensive course at 16 hours (Ontario Minor Hockey Association, 2017). Finally, the Instructional Stream offers a series of clinics aimed to develop specific hockey skills.

The Competition – High Performance (HP) stream was particularly relevant for the current study – with a focus on Level 1, given the course was made mandatory for all Canadian head coaches of ‘AAA’ teams aged 13 and higher in 2015. The Competition - HP 1 Manual was selected over the Competition Development 1 Manual because it was specifically designed for coaches of ‘AAA’ minor hockey. While we focus exclusively on the content of the HP 1 manual, it is important to note that the manual is delivered in conjunction with a four-day (44 hour) course, which also includes a written assignment, and a field evaluation. The course was first offered in 2010 and the manual examined was specifically developed for the programmes of 2016 and onward; it was 403 pages long.

### **Content Analysis**



A content analysis (Neuendorf, 2016) was determined as the best suited design to examine the HP 1 manual. The content analysis design enabled us to code the text within the HP 1 manual into categories then total the frequencies of occurrence within each category (Neuendorf, 2016). Three distinct steps of content analysis were conducted.

**Step 1: Basic content overview.** First, the manual was categorized through a basic content overview. Specifically, a coding guide (Table 1) was used to code the content of each page of the manual according to the three types of coaching knowledge (Côté & Gilbert, 2009): professional knowledge (e.g., hockey specific, pedagogy), interpersonal knowledge (e.g., team bonding, leadership, relationships), intrapersonal knowledge (e.g., self-reflection, coaching philosophy), or other (e.g., title pages, blank pages). In addition, the coding manual offered categorizations for each type of coaching knowledge by subthemes based on the literature and the specific hockey context. For example, interpersonal knowledge included the four subthemes of resolving conflict, leadership, role modelling, and parent communication. Each page in the manual was then deductively coded into the types of coaching knowledge and the appropriate subtheme. Specifically, the content on each page was compared to the coding guide and the most appropriate type of knowledge and subtheme was chosen to code that page.

**Step 2: Interpersonal coaching approaches.** Given the study's aim to examine the manual with specific attention to underpinnings of interpersonal coaching approaches, the second step involved further analysis of the interpersonal content. For the purpose of this step, interpersonal content included all content coded as interpersonal knowledge in Step 1. Additionally some of the content coded as professional knowledge in Step 1 was also included, given its pedagogy focus and alignment with interpersonal behaviours (e.g., teaching and providing feedback). The second coding guide (Table 2) was developed, informed by the four

interpersonal coaching approaches (reviewed above): (a) PYD coaching approach (Holt et al., 2017); (b) Mastery Approach to Coaching (MAC; Smith et al., 2007); (c) autonomy-supportive coaching behaviours (ASC; Magéau & Vallerand, 2003); and (d) transformational leadership (TL; Bass & Riggio, 2006). The second coding guide included a total of 22 key behaviours (codes) in line with the four coaching approaches. All interpersonal content was deductively coded, such that meaning units (i.e., segments of text that contain a chunk of information; Tesch, 1990) within the manual were coded for sentences or sections that aligned with the coding guide. For example, under the MAC, one of the basic behaviours (codes) is to promote effort, development, and enjoyment over winning; if a section or sentence in the manual reflected this code, it was categorized accordingly (Neuendorf, 2016). Coding criteria was that content reflected similar meaning; wording was not required to be identical in order for coding to occur. Notably, some content was coded with two or three different codes, given some of the similarities amongst the coaching approaches.

**Step 3: Sources of interpersonal content.** The final level of inquiry was an inductive analysis (Thomas, 2006) of the different sources cited and used within the interpersonal content of the manual. The sources were then categorized according to type: text books, journal articles, individuals (i.e., through books or specific quotes), and other. The “individuals” category was then further broken down into coaches, academics, and authors/others.

### **Reliability and Validity**

It is essential to ensure reliability and validity throughout content analysis (Neuendorf, 2016). As such, an *a priori* design (Neuendorf, 2016) was utilized in steps 1 and 2 whereby coding guides were created in advance of the coding process. In addition, validity (i.e., “Are we measuring what we want to measure”) (Neuendorf, 2016, p. 122) was addressed by ensuring the

coding guides adhered to literature on coaching knowledge (Côté & Gilbert, 2009) and interpersonal coaching behaviours (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Holt et al., 2017; Magéau & Vallerand, 2003; Smith & Smoll, 2011). Further, the co-authors worked in collaboration to develop the coding manuals to assure appropriate categorizations, wording and final codes; the first author brought research and applied expertise in coaching approaches and behaviours, while the second author was an established researcher in PYD. This process provided the assurance that we were measuring what we wanted to measure.

The reliability of analysis was also addressed through the involvement of a second coder who independently followed the same coding guides (Neuendorf, 2016). In step 1 a 94% (383/403) inter coder reliability was calculated and the 6% discrepancies were discussed and resolved; these discrepancies were mostly an oversight between player evaluation (professional knowledge) and self-evaluation (intrapersonal knowledge). In step 2 an 83% (67/81) inter coder reliability was calculated and the 17% discrepancies were discussed and resolved. Overall these inter coder reliability percentages suggest that both coding guides were reliable.

## **Results**

### **Description of Manual Content by Coaching Knowledge Types**

An overview of the types of coaching knowledge and subthemes in the content of the manual is provided in Table 3. The majority of the manual was dedicated to professional knowledge (46%) followed by interpersonal knowledge (21%), and intrapersonal knowledge (15%); other content made up 18% of the manual. Within the interpersonal category of knowledge, 14% of the manual's content fell into the sub-category of conflict management and ethical decision-making, within the interpersonal knowledge category. The remaining subcategories of interpersonal knowledge (i.e., leadership, role modelling, and parent

communication) made up 7% of the content. In other words, within the interpersonal category, 66% (56/85 pages) of the content focused on eliminating undesirable behaviours and fixing problems, while 34% (29/85 pages) focused on teaching or enhancing desirable behaviours and building meaningful relationships.

### **Interpersonal Coaching Content: Frequency of Approaches and Behaviours**

A summary of the total coded meaning units for the interpersonal coaching content is provided in Table 4. The most coded meaning units were: setting goals and providing feedback (PYD approach) (11), role modelling (PYD approach) and idealized influence (TL) (n = 9 each), and setting clear expectations and roles with consistent accountability (PYD approach) (n = 8). Several meaning units were not evident at all within the content: non-controlling feedback (ASC), avoid(ing) controlling behaviours (ASC), and prevent(ing) ego involvement (ASC). Moreover, numerous behaviours were only coded once: provide(ing) rationale (ASC), individual consideration (TL), and parent communication (PYD approach). Notably, none of the four interpersonal coaching approaches guiding the study/analysis were explicitly named within the manual.

### **Sources Cited within Interpersonal Content of the Manual**

Table 5 provides a breakdown of the categories of the sources cited within the interpersonal content of the manual, as well as the specific details of each source. In total 35 sources were cited; the largest category of sources was “individuals” (77%), while the remaining sources were journal articles (6%), textbooks (6%), and other (9%). The individuals were cited in the form of direct quotes or books they had authored, and were categorized into coaches (29%), academics (31%), and authors/other (17%). Interestingly, the approaches of successful coaches (e.g., John Wooden) often align with interpersonal coaching approaches (e.g., mastery approach

to coaching; Smith et al., 2007); however, the content presented in the manual from these individuals was generally brief (i.e., a short quote or a simplified explanation of a concept/approach) and did not fully capture the theory or rationale underpinning the approach. Furthermore, key underlying theories of interpersonal coaching approaches (e.g., SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985; AGT, Nicholls, 1984) were not cited within the manual.

### **Discussion**

This study examined the content of the HP 1 coaching manual (Hockey Canada, 2016), with specific attention to underpinnings of interpersonal coaching approaches that facilitate PYD. The main findings highlight that 46% of the manual's 403 pages were dedicated to professional knowledge and 21% to interpersonal knowledge. When focusing specifically on interpersonal content, several interpersonal coaching behaviours were coded in varying frequencies; however, several behaviours were not included and the four empirically based interpersonal coaching approaches were not explicitly named. Finally, 35 various sources were cited, with the majority being individuals (77%), but none of the underlying interpersonal theories (i.e., SDT and AGT) were cited and the cited individuals often included only short quotes or simplified concepts. In the remainder of this section we situate these findings within the literature, highlighting how these results enhance our understanding of coach education within elite youth sport in relation to PYD. Furthermore, we discuss the strengths, limitations and directions for future research. To conclude, numerous recommendations are provided for elite youth sport coach education manuals.

#### **PYD within Elite Youth Sport Coach Education**

The manual was primarily dedicated to professional knowledge (46%) which aligns with recent research that found that the majority (92%) of coach education programmes focus

primarily on professional knowledge (Lefebvre et al., 2016). Despite the manual's primary focus on professional knowledge, 21% of the manual was focused on interpersonal knowledge, and included content specifically related to interpersonal coaching behaviours such as team building, leadership, and parent communication. Further, within the 21% of content focused on interpersonal knowledge, only 7% focused specifically on teaching desirable interpersonal coaching behaviours, while the remaining 14% focused on eliminating undesirable interpersonal behaviours. This is particularly relevant, given that a PYD approach utilizes an asset-building approach versus a deficit reduction approach (Lerner et al., 2005). Finally, although 7% of the content focused on desirable interpersonal behaviors, the content was generally over-simplified, offering incomplete explanations of a concept/approach or a mere quote/sentence to support an approach. Thus, while this coach education programme focused primarily on professional knowledge, it also aimed to teach desirable interpersonal coaching behaviours that foster PYD outcomes; however, findings also reinforce previous concerns that youth coach education programmes should more effectively address interpersonal and PYD-based coaching behaviours (Adams et al., 2016; Newman et al., 2016; Santos et al., 2017).

When further examining interpersonal content, it appears that several of the empirically based interpersonal coaching approaches (i.e., MAC, ASC, TL, PYD) (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Holt et al., 2017; Magéau & Vallerand, 2003; Smith et al., 2007) were indirectly represented through various behaviours, but that none were explicitly named. This appears to highlight an area for further development within coaching manuals, given extensive research backing these approaches, and particularly, their association with facilitating PYD outcomes (Ahlberg et al., 2008; Holt et al., 2017; Smith & Smoll, 2011; Vella et al., 2013a). Further, these approaches could be particularly relevant given reported tensions within elite youth sport contexts between

coaches' goals of performance success and facilitation of PYD (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2017). For example, in elite youth sport settings coaches may face tough decisions regarding pursuing team performance success by reducing a weaker athletes' playing time; hence, being able to draw upon interpersonal knowledge and expertise to effectively communicate with players and or players' parents about these decisions would likely create a more PYD-fostering climate (Chapter three; Preston & Fraser-Thomas, in press). Recent research has also highlighted the tensions caused in pursuing performance success while attempting to foster a mastery-oriented climate via coaching behaviours and interactions with the athletes (Preston & Fraser-Thomas, in press).

The manual cited quotes and books from successful coaches such as John Wooden; interestingly, approaches such as John Wooden's align with elements of some interpersonal coaching approaches (e.g., mastery approach to coaching; Smith et al., 2007). However, the manual simplified these concepts and did not discuss the underlying theories (e.g., achievement goal theory; Nicholls, 1984). The lack of research-based approaches and underlying theories could explain previous criticisms regarding the lack of intricate and complex applications of the coaching process within coach education programmes (Gilbert & Trudel, 1999; Vargas-Tonsing, 2007). For instance, without underlying theories and detailed research-based practices, coach education programmes are likely not engaging coaches in the critical thought required to prepare for the complex realities of day-to-day coaching.

Furthermore, these findings highlight the disconnection between research and practice given that the HP 1 manual was not informed by key interpersonal coaching literature. This reinforces the growing demands for knowledge mobilization: "getting the right information to the right people in the right format at the right time, so as to influence decision-making.

Knowledge mobilization includes dissemination, knowledge transfer and knowledge translation” (Levin, 2008, p. 12), and is recognized as an important process to basing practices on reliable empirical evidence from which the human society benefits (Levin, 2008). Therefore, the results of the current study suggests that better knowledge mobilization systems are needed between coaching researchers and coaching governing bodies (e.g., Coaches Association of Canada) that oversee coach education programmes (e.g., National Coaching Certification Programme).

### **Strengths, Limitations and Future Directions**

A key strength of this study lay in the depth and detail of the content analysis of this elite youth coach education manual. Specifically, we were able to present a detailed overview of the types of coaching knowledge within the manual (Table 3), the frequency of interpersonal coaching behaviour meaning units (Table 4) and outline the sources cited and not cited within the interpersonal and pedagogy sections (Table 5). Advancing understanding of the content of one elite youth sport coaching education programme offers an important contribution at a time when programmes are criticized for failing to effectively teach interpersonal coaching knowledge (Adams et al., 2016; Newman et al., 2016; Santos et al., 2017), coach education workshops with an interpersonal focus are growing (e.g., Duda, 2013; Falcão et al., 2017; Koh et al., 2016; Turnnidge & Côté, 2017), and potential tensions in coaching PYD in elite youth sport contexts have been raised (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2017).

One consideration for research in moving this area of research forward is that the complexities of the parameters of professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge be further acknowledged and discussed. While this study was guided by existing definitions and conceptualization of each type of knowledge (Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Lefebvre et al., 2016), coaching effectiveness is broadly defined as “the consistent application of *integrated*



professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge to improve athletes' competence, confidence, connection, and character in specific contexts" (Côté & Gilbert, 2009, p. 316, emphasis added). Research to date (e.g., Lefebvre et al., 2016) has focused on silo-ed rather than integrated understanding of different forms of knowledge. Moving forward, there is much value in understanding how professional, interpersonal, and interpersonal knowledge may be integrated to optimize PYD outcomes, and subsequently, how coach education programmes should be designed to best foster coach effectiveness.

While the study offers an important first step in providing more in depth understanding of one elite youth sport coaching manual, it could be argued that the findings of the study are limited in breadth, and recommendations may not apply to other coach education programmes. Additionally, this content analysis may be limited in scope as it focused only on the coaching manual, rather than the course as a whole. As such future research should examine other coach education manuals to broaden understanding of coach education programmes being delivered for elite youth sport contexts, while also utilizing alternative methodological approaches (observation, interviews, coach journaling, longitudinal pre- and post-course designs, etc.) to examine interactive components of courses, and understand the coach education process more comprehensively.

### **Recommendations for Coach Education Programmes**

Given the widespread concerns and criticisms of formal coach education programmes (Abraham & Collins, 1998; Campbell, 1993; Lyle, 2007), it is imperative to understand how programmes can be improved. As the first in-depth analysis of the content of an elite youth sport coaching manual, findings offer a unique opportunity to build on previous recommendations by cautiously (given limited breadth of the study) offering new insights into ongoing discussions.

Foremost, findings suggest research-based interpersonal coaching approaches should inform more content within elite youth sport coach education manuals (see Langan, Blake, & Lonsdale, 2013; Vella & Perlman, 2014). Although 7% of the content in this manual was focused on desirable interpersonal coaching behaviours, more could be included given the importance of interpersonal coaching skills and the need for more PYD related material (Adams et al., 2016; Newman et al., 2016; Santos et al., 2017). Additional training focused on interpersonal approaches facilitating PYD would likely better prepare coaches to effectively address existing tensions between fostering PYD performance success within elite youth sport contexts (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2017; Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015).

In addition to increasing the content dedicated to interpersonal coaching behaviours, coach education programmes (manuals) may also consider providing more context (i.e., underlying theories and supportive research) to outlined interpersonal coaching approaches. Such an addition could stimulate more critical thought among coaches, as previous research has found programmes that promote open and discursive reflections to be effective among high performance coaches (Callary, Culver, Werthner, & Bales, 2014; Piggott, 2012). Further, coaches should be given ample opportunity to address the complex realities of day-to-day coaching within courses. Previous research has highlighted the importance of drawing upon coaches' experiences to explore intricate processes and tensions of implementing interpersonal coaching approaches (Cushion et al., 2003; Mallett, 2005; Preston & Fraser-Thomas, in press). Providing coaches with opportunities to reflect on qualitative research studies (e.g., Mallett's 2005 study using autonomy-supportive coaching behaviours with two Australian Olympic relay teams) may provoke ideas to help coaches translate interpersonal coaching approaches to practice.

Another recommendation for coach education programmes moving forward relates to inclusion of interpersonal content on coach-parent interactions, given such content was nearly absent within the HP 1 manual (i.e., 1%). Specifically, the only content related to the coach-parent-athlete triad was a two-page blog from a minor hockey coach and parent that offered some generic advice for hockey parents. Past research has reported that coaches consistently find some parents challenging to deal with (Camiré, Rocchi, & Kendellen, 2016; Chapter three; Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Jannes & Pennisi, 2008), and as such, coaches often perceive parents as a problem to avoid rather than an asset to work with (Chapter four; Gould et al., 2008). Given effective coach-parent interactions are associated with more positive athlete outcomes, while contentious coach-parent interactions are associated with more negative athlete outcomes (Chapter three; Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005), interpersonal coach knowledge focused on working effectively with parents is a critical inclusion within coach education programmes. Past research has highlighted some effective coaching strategies include having a pre-season meeting, providing competence criteria and feedback periodically throughout the season, and setting clear communication boundaries with consequences (Chapter three; Hellstedt, 1987; Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Smoll, Cumming, & Smith, 2011).

Furthermore, we recommend formal coach education programmes be informed by research, and this may include drawing upon established interpersonal coach education programmes, many of which emerged in response to the shortcomings of formal programmes (Brennan, 1997). Existing programmes include Smith and Smoll's (2011) 75-minute MAC educational workshop. Falcão and colleagues' (2017) two-hour humanistic coaching workshop, Duda's (2013) six-hour Empowering Coaching workshop, and Vella and colleagues' (2013b) transformational leadership workshop. Most recently, Turnnidge and Côté's (2017), created the

four hour Transformational Leadership Workshop, following work with community stakeholders to design, implement, evaluate and disseminate the workshop. Unique to this workshop is that it incorporates behaviour change theories into the design and implementation (see Allan, Vierimaa, Gainforth, & Côté, 2017 for a review). In addition, systematic evaluation frameworks (RE-AIM; Glasgow, Vogt, & Boles, 1999) are in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the workshop. Together these workshops offer practical approaches for coach education programmes to teach effective interpersonal coaching behaviours. In addition, given that formal coach education programmes are often considered to be too time consuming (Taylor & Garratt, 2010), the length of these programmes is pertinent (i.e., ranging from 75 minutes to six hours, which is a fraction of the 44 hours of the HP 1 course). Similarly, the Hockey Canada Development 1 course that is required for head coaches of athletes 11 years of age and older for most levels of play (excluding AAA 13 and older – that requires the HP 1 course) is also a time intensive course at 16 hours (Ontario Minor Hockey Association, 2017).

Finally, as previously noted, coaching effectiveness involves coaches consistently applying integrated knowledge (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). As such, coach education programmes should also give consideration to intrapersonal knowledge within coach education programmes, and its relation to developing interpersonal knowledge. Cushion and colleagues (2003) emphasized the need for more coach reflection and the important role of mentors within coach development. Similarly, Erickson, Bruner, MacDonald, and Côté (2008) found that coaches viewed learning by doing, and interactions with others, as important sources of learning. As such, communities of practice have emerged as effective contexts for coach development (Culver & Trudel, 2008), with recent research finding shared online blogs promoted higher order reflection and created functioning online communities of practice (Stoszkowski & Collins,

2017). Therefore, communities of practice and the use of mentors may be a more suitable avenues to teach the intricacies of interpersonal coaching behaviours than through traditionally delivered courses. Similarly, coach education programmes should reflect on the overall structure of their programmes. For example, New Zealand has left behind the outcome focused structure (i.e., this coach is certified and educated) to a process of continual coach development where coaches engage in ongoing develop through reflection and mentoring throughout their coaching tenure (Kidman & Keelty, 2015).

In sum, as formal coach education programmes have been scrutinized for their lack of effectiveness (Abraham & Collins, 1998; Campbell, 1993; Lyle, 2007) particularly in relation to interpersonal knowledge (Adams et al., 2016; Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Newman et al., 2016; Santos et al., 2017), this study examined the content of one elite youth sport manual, with specific attention to underpinnings of interpersonal coaching approaches that facilitate PYD. Findings suggest the content of the HP 1 Canadian hockey coach manual (Hockey Canada, 2016) contained primarily professional knowledge, with only minimal interpersonal knowledge focused on PYD. As the first in depth content analysis of an elite youth sport coaching manual, findings are discussed in the context of the coach education and PYD literature, and shed light on practical recommendations for coach education programmes.

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**Table 1: Content Analysis Coding Guide for Types of Coaching Knowledge**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Inter-personal	1	Conflict Management and Make Ethical Decisions	Resolving conflicts. Ethical decision making regarding physical abuse, emotional abuse, injuries, or drugs.
	2	Leadership and Team Building	Building team cohesion. Promoting teamwork. Leadership behaviours and the importance of leadership. Fostering leaders.
	3	Role Modelling	Role modelling behaviours. The importance of role modelling.
	4	Parents	How to work with parents.
Intra-personal	5	Values, Philosophy, Plan	Examples, explanations or worksheets related to developing coaching values, philosophies or plans.
	6	Staff/Self Evaluation	Examples, explanations or worksheets related to coach reflection or evaluation.
Professional	7	Blank Worksheets	Empty worksheets for drills, stats, or systems.
	8	Skill Development and System Drills	Examples of drills, systems or skill develop techniques.
	9	Teaching and Feedback – Pedagogy	Explanations on how to teach, provide feedback, or the learning process.
	10	Analytics and Video	Technology related material. Recording statistics and analysis. How to use video and statistics with athletes.
	11	Mental Preparation	Explanations and examples of developing mental skills and mindsets for optimal performance.
	12	Goalies	Drills for goalies. Explanations about unique aspects of goalies.
	13	Physical Conditioning and Nutrition	Physical preparation including training, sleep, and nutrition.
Other	14	Title page, table of contents, empty	



**Table 2: Content Analysis Coding Guide for Interpersonal Coaching Content**

Category (Approach)	Code	Subcategory	Example statement
<b>PYD</b>	1	Clear expectations, roles, responsibilities, and accountability for behaviour	Set rules, hold athletes accountable – consequences Give athletes responsibility. Clarify athlete roles.
	2	Role modeling desired behaviour	Act respectful, prepared, passion... etc.
	3	Providing opportunities for leadership roles	Give athletes leadership roles, tasks, make them in charge of a task
	4	Setting, reminding and tracking athletes' goals	Goal setting, track feedback and give back
	5	Taking advantage of teachable moments	Talk to athlete or group about learning opportunity within the current situation. After mistakes, failures, during adversity
	6	Parent communication	Preseason parent meetings. Checking in with parents.
<b>MAC</b>	7	Focus on Effort, Development and Enjoyment	Reinforce effort and development leads to outcomes
	8	Positive reinforcement	Acknowledge desired behaviours
	9	Promote Team unity and supportive behaviours	Encourage and acknowledge team first behaviours
	10	Involve athletes in deciding team rules for compliance over punishment	Ask athletes opinions for rules or team decisions
	11	Engage in self-reflection and self-awareness of coaching behaviours	Self-reflective questions – how you can be better? Self-assessment.
<b>AS</b>	12	Provide choice with specific rules and limits	Provide options for athletes to choose from – team related or performance
	13	Provide rationale for tasks and limits	Provide reasons for team tactics
	14	Acknowledge other's feelings and perspective	Acknowledge athlete's frustrations and feelings
	15	Provide initiative and independent work	Provide leadership opportunity
	16	Non-controlling competence feedback	Provide feedback without judging the person as bad
	17	Avoid controlling behaviours	Avoid if then statements
	18	Prevent ego-involvement	Set goals on self-improvement vs peer comparison

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<b>TL</b>	19	Idealized influence	Practice what you preach, role model desired behaviours and attitude
	20	Inspirational motivation	Communicate that you believe in your athletes
	21	Intellectual stimulation	Involve athletes in coaching process, ask them questions
	22	Individualized consideration	Talk to athletes individually and as a person

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**Table 3: Types of Coaching Knowledge and Subcategories in the HP 1 Manual**

<b>Type of Coaching Knowledge</b>		<b>Pages (403)</b>	<b>%</b>
Interpersonal 85 (21%)	Conflict Management and Make Ethical Decisions	56	14%
	Leadership and Team Building	21	5%
	Role Modelling	6	1%
	Parent Communication	2	1%
Intrapersonal 60 (15%)	Values, Philosophy, Plans	38	9%
	Staff/Self-evaluation	22	6%
Professional 185 (46%)	Blank Work Sheets	46	11%
	Skill Development and System Drills	36	9%
	Pedagogy - Teaching and Feedback	33	8%
	Player Evaluation and Team Identity	25	6%
	Analytics and Video	17	4%
	Mental Preparation	12	3%
	Goalies	9	2%
	Physical Conditioning and Nutrition	7	2%
Other	Title Pages and Table of Contents	73	18%

**Table 4: Interpersonal Coaching Content within the HP1 Manual: Frequency of****Approaches and Behaviours**

Approach	Behaviour (Code)	Frequency
Explicit means to facilitate PYD	Clear expectations, roles, responsibilities, and accountability	8
	Role model	9
	Provide opportunities to lead	2
	Set, remind, feedback, track goals	11
	Teachable moments	3
	Parent communication	1
Mastery Approach to Coaching (MAC)	Effort, development and enjoyment	2
	Positive reinforcement	2
	Promote team unity	5
	Compliance over punishment	3
	Self-reflection	5
Autonomy-Supportive (AS)	Provide choices	2
	Provide rationale	1
	Acknowledge others	2
	Provide initiative	2
	Non-controlling feedback	0
	Avoid controlling behaviours	0
Transformational Leadership (TL)	Prevent ego involvement	0
	Idealized influence	9
	Inspiration motivation	5
	Intellectual stimulation	4
	Individual consideration	1

**Table 5: Cited Sources within Interpersonal Content of HP 1 Manual**

Sources (35)	Person or Author	Description	
Text Books (n=2, 6%)	Johnson & Johnson, 1991	Joining Together: Group Theory and Group Skills	
	Malloy, Ross, & Zackus, 2000	Sport Ethics	
Journal Articles (n=2, 6%)	Tomlinson & Strachan, 1996	Power Dynamics	
	Turkman, 1965	Model for Group Dynamics. Four stages.	
Other (n=3, 9%)	Dublin Commission Report		
	Teamworks Canada, Inc		
Coaches (n=10, 29%)	Manning, 1989	Characteristics diagram of a coach	
	Anson Dorrance	NCAA Division 3 soccer coach	
	John Wooden	NCAA basketball coach (UCLA)	
	Mike Babcock	NHL coach	
	Dan Bauer	Minor hockey coach and parent	
	Vince Lombardi	NFL coach	
	Basil McCrae	Part owner OHL – London Knights	
	Andy Higgins	Track and field coach - Olympic level	
	Dan Church	Olympic hockey coach (Women; Canada)	
	Red Deer Optimist Chiefs	WHL team	
Individuals: Books or Quotes (n=27, 77%)	Pat Summit	NCAA Division 1 basketball coach	
	Academic (n=11, 31%)	Albert Einstein	Theoretical physicist
		Ashley Montago	Lectured at Harvard, anthropologist, author
		Edgar Shein	Professor at MIT School of Management
		Dr. Saul Miller	Sport psychologist
		Dr. David Scott	Professor at University of New Brunswick
		Dr. Greg Dale	Director of Sport Psychology program at Duke
		Dr. Randy Pausch	PhD in computer science
		Dave Cooper	Professor at University of Toronto
		Dave Chambers	Professor at York University; coached NHL
Ronald G. Marteniuk		Professor at Simon Fraser University	
Authors/ Other (n=6, 17%)	Jeff Janssen	MSc and author	
	Chris Novak	Author, leadership coach	
	Geroge Bernard Shaw	Irish playwright and critic	
	Thomas Crum	Martial artist	
	Roberta Cava	Author	
	Eric Harvey	Author	
	Daniel Coyle	Author, magazine contributor	

## CHAPTER SIX: GENERAL DISCUSSION

### Personal Overview

Over my 10 years as a minor hockey player, and additional 10 years playing at elite and semi-professional levels during my late adolescent and early adult years, I developed a keen interest in the art and science of coaching. In my Masters degree, I examined elite athletes' experiences of athlete-centred coaching. During this time, I served as an assistant coach to a minor hockey team in the Greater Toronto Area, and I developed the desire to be a head coach of my own AAA minor hockey team. I earned my first head coaching position of a AAA minor hockey team the same year I began my doctoral degree. I felt privileged to have an opportunity to shape the development of young elite athletes, and I was determined to apply what I had learned through my academic research, to foster PYD in an elite youth sport context. I had recently taken a qualitative methods course that focused extensively on autoethnography, and I was excited by the possibility of exploring this methodological approach in my own research. Following extensive discussions with my supervisor, it was determined that I would explore my experiences as a first year AAA minor hockey coach, as I aimed to foster athletes' personal development while also optimizing their performance success (Manuscript one). My experiences throughout that first year were intertwined with struggles. One significant struggle that caught me somewhat off guard was my relationship with parents. Because I wanted to further understand this struggle, manuscript two explored my interactions with parents as I tried to foster athletes' PYD, over a three-year period. Findings shed light on the coach-parent-athlete triad; my interactions with parents ranged from contentious to cooperative, prompting diverse athlete outcomes, and numerous lessons learned for me as a coach. To build on these findings, manuscript three drew upon an ethnographic approach to explore how four 'model' coaches

facilitated PYD in a high performance setting. Findings of manuscript three further reinforced my understanding of the substantive influence of the sport structure on a coach's ability to facilitate PYD in high performance sport. In manuscript four, I wanted to explore how athlete PYD was being considered within the high performance coach education programmes. I engaged in a content analysis of Hockey Canada's (2016) high performance 1 coach education manual, with specific attention to theoretical and empirical underpinnings. Upon reflection, I feel I have grown tremendously as a coach and academic over the past four and a half years, and feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to engage in this interconnected professional journey. The remainder of this general discussion, aims to summarize my dissertation experience and findings through the appropriate guiding frameworks.

### **Guiding Frameworks**

The overall purpose of this dissertation was to examine the role of the coach in fostering PYD within elite youth sport, guided by Holt and colleagues' (2017) model of PYD through sport. The model suggests sport programs are a microsystem (García Bengoechea, 2002), with coaches, parents, and peers implicitly (i.e., through meaningful relationships) or explicitly (i.e., through life skill focused programs) facilitating PYD outcomes. The model also emphasizes the importance of distal ecological systems (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1995, 1999; Lerner, Bowers, Geldhof, Gestsdottir, & DeSouza, 2012) in influencing the process of PYD through sport. As such, manuscripts one and three focused at the microsystem level, in understanding the interactions between coaches and athletes, and how this influenced youths' PYD. Manuscript two focused on interactions between the parent and coach, at a mesosystem level (Bronfenbrenner, 1995, 1999), and how these interactions influenced athletes' PYD. Finally, manuscript four focused more broadly on examining how the high performance coach education

manual informed the process of PYD (i.e., at the exosystem level; Bronfenbrenner, 1995, 1999). Within this discussion, I contextualize the findings of the dissertation's four studies through the lens of the Holt and colleagues' (2017) model of PYD through sport, with an expanded focus on the distal ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1995, 1999). This dissertation contributes numerous insights to the PYD literature within elite youth sport, sparks new questions for future researchers to explore, and offers personal struggles and experiences that may evoke other elite youth sport coaches, parents, and organizations to reflect on their experiences and practices regarding their role in facilitating PYD.

### **The Role of the Coach in Facilitating PYD (Microsystem)**

The first and third manuscripts in this dissertation utilized autoethnographic and ethnographic methodological approaches to explore in-depth the coach's role in fostering PYD through elite youth sport. Foremost, the findings support previous literature (Fraser-Thomas, Beesley, Dickler, Harlow, Mosher, Preston, & Wolman, 2017; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015; Strachan, Côté, & Deakin, 2011), whereby elite youth sport coaches (myself in manuscript one, and four identified coaches in manuscript three) were able to foster a PYD climate within elite youth sport, with indications that the performance-orientated environment may have offered teachable moments to facilitate life skill development. However, findings also echoed previous concerns that the performance oriented objectives of elite youth sport can conflict with a coach's pursuit of PYD (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2017; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015; Gervis & Dunn, 2004).

As such, this dissertation sheds light on the tension between fostering PYD and achieving performance success within an elite youth sport setting. Notably, the use of autoethnographic and ethnographic informed approaches in these two studies garnered novel contributions to the field,



through the emotional depth of the extensive time (I) spent in the field, observing, interviewing/conversing, and engaging in disciplined and critical (self-) reflection. For example, the findings of these two studies offer unique insights into the intricate processes of elite youth coaches' effective management of playing time in critical games, holding athletes accountable while implementing autonomy-supportive behaviours (Magéau & Vallerand, 2003), and fostering a mastery-oriented climate (i.e., Mastery Approach to Coaching (MAC) (Smith, Smoll & Cummings, 2007) within a performance-oriented environment. Further, the findings highlight the importance of consistent self-reflection of one's coaching behaviours and frequent communication with a mentor, in order to sustain a high level of self-awareness in one's coaching. Detailed reflections of these tensions offer vulnerable accounts of the struggles of fostering PYD at an elite youth sport level.

### **The Coach-Parent Relationship in Fostering PYD (Mesosystem)**

Manuscript two also drew upon autoethnographic approaches, uncovering the tensions of the coach-parent relationship within elite youth sport (i.e., my relationship with parents), and how this relationship influenced athletes' PYD. Generally, I found that the athletes modelled how their parents communicated and responded to adversity. I felt my interactions with parents were more contentious when parents offered unsolicited advice regarding their son's playing time or team tactics. Notably, fathers of "top" players offered the most unsolicited advice. Plausible explanations for contentious coach-parent interactions were explored, including parents' bias towards their child, error-blindness, and helicopter parent tendencies. Further, the context of AAA minor hockey in Canada was highlighted; the professionalization of the youth sport system, coupled with the exorbitant financial, practical, and emotional costs of involvement, appeared to place parents in a position of clients and investors, rather than

supportive facilitators of development (Bean, Forneris, & Robidoux, 2014; Bean, Jeffery-Tosoni, Baker, & Fraser-Thomas, 2016; Campbell & Parcels, 2013; Gruneau & Whitson, 1993).

Within these constraints, I discussed how I learned to enhance my interactions with parents within the elite youth sport context. First, in line with previous recommendations, I found it important to initiate frequent communication and offer performance-related feedback to parents as the coach (Camiré, Rocchi, & Kendellen, 2016; Hellstedt, 1987; Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Smoll, Cumming, & Smith, 2011). Moreover, I also emphasized the importance of feedback being honest and detailed to adequately inform parents, while also preventing parents from developing inflated perceptions of their child's abilities. Further, I recognized the value in setting appropriate coach-parent boundaries with regard to communication mediums (i.e., primarily in person versus texts and emails), timing (e.g., generally before or after practice versus during the coach's off-hours), and content (e.g., asking for clarity versus offering unsolicited advice). Overall, parents should not be viewed as a problem to be avoided; instead, parents should be viewed as an asset to work with, and my experiences may impact other coaches to reflect on their experiences and coaching practices regarding working effectively with parents. These findings advance the limited existing research on the coach-parent-athlete triad, while also reinforcing the challenge of developing cooperative relationships within the existing AAA minor hockey context in Canada.

### **Coach Education in Fostering PYD (Exosystem)**

The final manuscript of the dissertation focused on coach education, which falls within the exosystem; this more distal system can have an indirect influence in fostering youths' PYD (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; 1999; Holt et al., 2017). Although formal coach education programmes are recognized as viable means to develop effective coaches, and in turn optimally develop

youth, programmes are often criticized for inadequately doing so (Abraham & Collins, 1998; Campbell, 1993; Lyle, 2007). Interpersonal coaching knowledge (i.e., the ability to interact effectively with others) is especially relevant for coaches aiming to implicitly foster PYD through meaningful and effective relationships with athletes (Boardley, Kavussanu, & Ring, 2008; Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Evans, McGuckin, Gainforth, Bruner, & Côté, 2015; Holt et al., 2017). As such, manuscript four offered a detailed content analysis of the coaching knowledge outlined within a high performance ice hockey coach education manual (i.e., for coaches of AAA level teams, aged 13 and older, in Canada). Findings indicate that only 21% of the manual content was dedicated to interpersonal knowledge, in comparison to 46% of content that was dedicated to professional knowledge (i.e., technical and tactical sport specific information). Further, the manual did not directly reference or explain any of the primary research-based coaching approaches (i.e., MAC, autonomy-supportive coaching, transformational leadership, PYD approach) (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Holt et al., 2017; Magéau & Vallerand, 2003; Smith et al., 2007); however, quotes and books by successful coaches (e.g., John Wooden) indirectly supported some interpersonal coaching behaviours (e.g., MAC; Smith et al., 2007).

Correspondingly, elite youth coach education programmes should put a greater emphasis on teaching coaches interpersonal knowledge. Specifically, coach education programmes should draw on established interpersonal coaching approaches (i.e., MAC, autonomy-supportive coaching, transformational leadership, PYD approach) (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Duda, 2013; Holt et al., 2017; Magéau & Vallerand, 2003; Smith et al., 2007) to teach the subtle nuances of these approaches and the underlying theories. For example, coach education programmes should discuss how elite youth sport coaches can: (a) manage playing time to facilitate both performance success and personal development; (b) create an autonomy-supportive environment

and still hold athletes accountable to high standards; and (c) foster a mastery-oriented climate in a performance-oriented environment. Similarly, elite youth coach education programmes should also teach coaches about the important but complex dynamic of the coach-parent relationship, and best practices to effectively work with parents (e.g., frequent, detailed and honest coach-initiated feedback; and communication boundaries regarding mode, timing, and content with consequences for not adhering to the boundaries). Lastly, inclusion of coaching research, particularly qualitative research, within programmes (e.g., Chapter three; Mallett, 2005; Peel, Cropley, Hanton & Fleming, 2013; Preston & Fraser-Thomas, in press) could offer effective and accessible materials for elite youth coaches to inform interpersonal coaching behaviours, by evoking or encouraging coaches to self-reflect and evaluate their own coaching practices.

#### **Constraint to Fostering PYD in Elite Youth Sport: Sport Structure (Macrosystem)**

Collectively, all four manuscripts indicate to some degree the potential to facilitate PYD in this elite youth sport context, but suggest an overarching (macrosystem) constraint to fully and effectively doing so – the structure of the sport. Specifically, AAA minor hockey in Canada draws upon a professional model focused primarily on winning (Bean et al., 2014; Bean et al., 2016). As Martel (2015) asserted, “the competitive structure always dictates the development structure” (Martel, 2015, p. 43), further explaining that the sport structure can incentivize coaches to focus on short-term success, while sacrificing long-term athlete development. For example, in manuscript three, coaches were observed prioritizing performance success during games (i.e., increasing top athletes playing time and decreasing weaker athletes playing time), while building meaningful relationships and developing players appeared visibly less important. Likewise, a team of nine year-old hockey players were consistently observed spending the majority of their practice learning about advanced team tactics (e.g., power plays and penalty

kills), which were exclusively designed to help the team achieve performance success in upcoming games. Alternatively, practice time dedicated to fundamental skill development (e.g., skating, passing, shooting), and game play tactical skills (e.g., puck support, checking, and give-and-go plays) would have been more effective for nine-year old players' long-term development (Martel, 2015). Furthermore, the games to practices ratio was approximately one to one.

Coaches, parents, and athletes appeared to demonstrate increasing concerns to make the playoffs with good standings as the playoffs approached, which seemed to lead coaches to focus less on fostering PYD. Overall, this dissertation explored the coach's role in fostering PYD in an elite youth sport context, highlighting the various ecological systems that influence a coach's ability to do so. Findings suggest a constant tension for coaches striving to attain performance success while balancing the goal of athletes' PYD, raising questions regarding the overall sport structure of AAA minor hockey in Canada. Specifically, the structure of the sport appeared built upon a performance-oriented model, which often made it very challenging for coaches to focus on the more holistic development of the athletes.

### **Challenging Status Quo (Macrosystem)**

While findings of this dissertation offer some examples of coaches facilitating PYD within an elite sport context, coaches' ability to do so was most often in spite of the context, rather than because of it. Essentially, findings support past suggestions of the struggle in optimizing both performance and PYD in elite sport contexts (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2017; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015). Arguably, the most important recommendation for elite youth sport programmes, specifically AAA minor hockey in Canada, is to consider restructuring the sport to focus more on athlete development rather than high performance. Other countries (e.g., United States, Sweden) have recognized similar conflicts in

prioritization within their programmes and have implemented numerous development-focused changes, such as introducing a smaller playing area, with fewer players, smaller nets, lighter pucks, and decreased performance incentives (Martel, 2015). These adaptations have been found to directly benefit the athletes by increasing their opportunities to handle the puck, score goals, and make decisions (Martel, 2015). In addition, USA Hockey eliminated the under 12 national championship that was incentivising coaches to focus on winning and even leading coaches to recruit players from all over the country. Martel (2015) explained how these structural changes shifted coaches' focus to be less performance-oriented: "there is no incentive for coaches to focus on set positions, offside rules, and face-off plays, items that are minimally beneficial to skill development and can be learned at a more appropriate time later in a player's hockey development experience" (p. 43).

Notably, Hockey Canada recently introduced a mandate requiring that children age six and under to play cross-ice games (i.e., smaller area) instead of full ice games beginning in 2018, which is also intended to be introduced for two additional (older) age groups in subsequent years (Colpitts, 2017). However, the change has already been met with considerable resistance and complaints from minor hockey parents, organizations, and leagues (Colpitts, 2017; Strashin, 2017). This resistance is perhaps not surprising given findings of this dissertation coupled with past research in minor hockey (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993) that indicate a deeply rooted performance-focused culture, intertwined through sport structure, coach education programmes, coaching practices, parents' approaches, and subsequently, athlete behaviours. While it could be argued that this new mandate offers a progressive step forward for Hockey Canada in providing greater consideration to athletes' overall development, preliminary resistance indicates that change will be slow.

### **Strengths, Limitations and Future Directions**

This dissertation utilized in-depth qualitative methods that created rich first-hand data regarding the role of the coach in fostering PYD in an elite youth sport context. This work should be considered and contextualized within existing knowledge, as the dissertation offers novel insight to PYD literature. Given the methodological approaches used within this dissertation, broad generalizations and overarching conclusions should be avoided.

Instead, my autoethnographic accounts can evoke readers to reflect on their experiences and coaching practices (Anderson, 2006). Given the keys to effective autoethnography, I should be visible in the text of manuscripts one and two, as I discussed the struggles I faced. My approach was guided by existing autoethnographic research and guidelines within sport psychology research, which has been quite limited (Holt, 2003). As such, I was focused on meeting the keys of effective autoethnography but also cognizant of the numerous criticisms of this approach and the traditional criteria for assessing qualitative research (Garrett & Hodkinson, 1999). Generally, I aimed to share my experiences while providing meaningful insights through relevant themes, in line with the purposes of the studies. While I expressed relevant details of my experience through my manuscripts, I was limited by the manuscript format, to express all the internal dialog related to my ‘ego’, insecurities, and power dynamics. Furthermore, autoethnographic research has been criticized as untrustworthy (Krieger, 1991; Sparkes, 2002); however, the worth of my experiences is based on the extensive time I spent within the field engaged in critical self-reflection, and my autoethnographic manuscripts should be assessed by the reader’s perceptions of contribution and impactfulness (Richardson, 2000).

Moreover, as outlined above, the findings are limited to the specific and homogenous context under study (male AAA minor hockey in Canada). As such, future research should

explore the role of the coach in fostering PYD in other contexts (e.g., female athletes, different levels, different sports, and in different countries/cultures). In addition, given the limited research on the coach-parent relationship, additional work is required to further understanding of effective coach-parent interactions in various contexts (e.g., sampler to specializer, young to old, mothers and fathers, females and males, parents with previous sport experience and without) and from different perspectives (i.e., coach, parent and athlete). Finally, the findings regarding the content of a coach education manual are limited to the one manual that was examined. As such, future research should examine the content of additional coach education manuals as well as other components of coach training (e.g. interactive portions of coach courses) to broaden understanding of current coach education programmes in their entirety.

To our knowledge, this is the first body of research to examine the intricate process of implementing various interpersonal coaching behaviours to foster PYD through elite youth sport. In addition, the sport structure emerged as an influential factor in a coach's pursuit of PYD. Given this, future research is needed to further examine the complex realities of day-to-day coaching practices within elite youth sport, and attention should be paid to the influence of the sport structure in various contexts. For example, research could assess the effectiveness of various sport structures (such as development focused clubs that develop all athletes equally) and their influence on coaching behaviours. Intervention studies with control groups could assess how making a change in the sport structure may influence changes in coaching behaviours.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, exploring the role of the coach in fostering PYD within elite youth sport was a challenging but worthwhile endeavour. In particular, drawing upon autoethnography and ethnography allowed me to gain in-depth insights into the tensions and challenges of this



process, as well as offer some valuable insights for how elite youth sport coaches can navigate the tensions between PYD and performance success. This dissertation focused on Canadian boys AAA minor hockey and, within this context, study findings highlight a significant macrosystem level constraint to the facilitation of PYD – the current sport structure. While findings may be limited to this unique context and future research is needed to explore similar research questions in other contexts, ice hockey is the most popular sport played by Canadian-born men (Heritage Canada, 2013), thus findings have the potential to have an immediate and significant impact on the Canadian hockey experience. Finally, a significant impact of this research is reflected in my own growth over the past four and half years, as a more self-aware, reflective coach focused on explicitly teaching life skills, but in particular, fostering meaningful interactions with athletes, parents, and other coaches, in order to implicitly foster an optimal PYD climate.

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### **Appendix A: Letter of Information**

Dear Coach,

I hope your team's preparation for the up-coming season is going well. I am a fellow minor hockey coach.

I wanted to message you to see if you would be interested in participating in my current research study as part of my Ph.D. dissertation. All it really involves is me coming out to some practices and games to watch, maybe even help out, and then we can have some chats along the way about what it is like to coach competitive youth sports. So a small time commitment on your end (probably 5-10 minutes after a practice to discuss how things are going, the odd week, plus two interviews 30-60 minutes each at the mid-season and end of season). And you'll get to have an extra coach to help out when I'm there.

The point of the study is to examine other AAA minor hockey coaches' experiences. The focus is on coaches who are fostering positive youth development. From what I've been told, you fit that mold and thus qualify for this study. So through the observations and chats I should be able to grasp a strong idea of your unique coaching experiences.

There is more information within the consent form that I have attached.

Your participation would be greatly appreciated. Please let me know if you are interested or if you have any questions.

Thank you,  
Cassidy Preston

**Appendix B: Consent Form**  
Coaches' Experiences Fostering PYD in Elite Youth Sport

**Researchers:** Dr. Jessica Fraser-Thomas, Associate Professor, York University  
Cassidy Preston, PhD Candidate, York University

**Purpose of the Research:** To examine elite-youth sport coaches' experiences fostering PYD.

**What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:** Over the course of the season, the primary researcher (Cassidy Preston) will observe you coaching practices and games and you will engage in discussions with Cassidy about your experiences through both informal conversations and two semi-structured interviews. The total time commitment anticipated from you is approximately 10 minutes per week throughout the season for discussions before or after team events, as well as two formal interviews at the middle of the season and end of the season that will last 30-60 minutes each.

**Risks and Discomforts:** We do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research.

**Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You:** It is anticipated that by participating in this research project, you will have stimulating and reflective discussions with the primary researcher, and you will have a helping hand at various practices and games throughout the season.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

**Withdrawal from the Study:** You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

**Confidentiality:** The recording of the participant will not be associated with identifying information. All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Your data (observation notes, recordings, and transcripts) will be safely stored in a locked facility and only research staff will have access to this information. The data will only be stored for as long as required to accomplish research purposes and satisfy legal and policy retention requirements (up to 5 years). All data will be securely destroyed at the end of the retention period (up to 5 years). Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

**Questions About the Research?** If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Dr. Jessica Fraser-Thomas either by

telephone... This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, York Research Tower, York University.

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I \_\_\_\_\_, consent to participate in *Coaches' Experiences of Implementing an Athlete-Centred Approach in Elite-Youth Sport* conducted by Dr. Jessica Fraser-Thomas and Cassidy Preston. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature  
Participant

Date

Signature  
Principal Investigator

Date

### **Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Guide**

1. Describe your understanding of PYD? Has your understanding changed since we last spoke? Explain/elaborate.
2. Describe some of the methods you're utilizing to foster PYD in your practices / games?
3. Have you tried to facilitate autonomy-supportive coaching behaviours? If so, please describe the experience and give detailed examples. (If not, probe on why this may be the case).
4. Have you tried to create a mastery-orientated environment? If so, please describe the experience and give detailed examples. (If not, probe on why this may be the case).
5. Have you tried to develop life skills and character? If so, please describe the experience and give detailed examples. (If not, probe on why this may be the case).
6. Have you tried to use a guided style of teaching and development? If so, please describe the experience and give detailed examples. (If not, probe on why this may be the case).
7. Do you feel that you balance the needs of the team with the needs of the individual players on the team? If so, please describe your experiences and provide detailed examples. (If not, probe on why this may be the case).
8. Can you comment on your self-awareness and development as a coach? Please describe your experiences and give detailed examples.
9. Have you encountered challenges fostering PYD? If so, please describe your experiences and give detailed examples.
10. Have you encountered successes fostering PYD? If so, please describe your experiences and give detailed examples.
11. Is there anything in particular that you're working on implementing right now with regards to fostering PYD? If yes, please explain or elaborate.
12. Please describe anything else from your experience coaching elite-youth sport.