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Being a Teacher-Coach in Ontario High Schools: Challenges and Recommendations

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Abstract

In Ontario, coaching positions in high schools must be assumed by teachers who voluntarily take on the role of teacher-coach. There are tens of thousands of teacher-coaches in the province but little is known concerning their needs and preferred forms of support. The current study's purpose consisted of examining the perspectives of Ontario high school teacher-coaches to better understand their working conditions. Twenty-two participants (19 men, 3 women, Mage = 37.5 years, age range: 25-56 years) from across the province took part in individual semi-structured interviews. The teacher-coaches discussed how they faced several challenges, most notably concurrently managing their teaching and coaching responsibilities while meeting their family obligations. To alleviate the challenges, most teacher-coaches preferred being relieved of certain teaching duties and being offered more preparation time as opposed to being compensated financially. Suggestions are provided to help teachers maintain their involvement in coaching.

Keywords: teacher-coach, volunteer, high school, youth sport, support

Résumé

Dans les écoles secondaires de l'Ontario, la fonction d'entraîneur d'équipe sportive est assumée bénévolement par des enseignantes et des enseignants. Même si des dizaines de milliers d'enseignants-entraîneurs à travers la province occupent cette fonction, on en sait peu sur leurs besoins et sur le type de soutien qu'ils préfèreraient se voir offrir pour bien remplir cette double fonction. La présente étude visait à examiner les points de vue d'enseignants-entraîneurs d'écoles secondaires ontariennes pour mieux comprendre leurs conditions d'exercice de cette double fonction. Vingt-deux participants (19 hommes, 3 femmes, âge moyen = 37,5 ans, plage d'âge = 25 à 56 ans) de toutes les régions de la province ont participé à des entrevues personnalisées semi-structurées. Les enseignants-entraîneurs ont discuté des nombreux défis auxquels ils sont confrontés, notamment celui d'assumer à la fois leurs responsabilités à titre d'enseignants et d'entraîneurs et leurs obligations familiales. Pour les aider à relever ce défi, la plupart des enseignants-entraîneurs préfèrent être relevés de certaines tâches d'enseignement et obtenir plus de temps de préparation plutôt que d'être compensés financièrement. L'étude formule des suggestions pour aider les enseignants à rester engagés dans cette fonction d'entraîneur.

Mots clés : enseignant-entraineur, bénévole, école secondaire, sports pour les jeunes, soutien

Introduction

In countries around the world, volunteer coaches sustain amateur sport systems and represent major assets in their communities (Griffiths & Armour, 2013). In Canada, sport and recreation is the most popular volunteering area with 12% of Canadian volunteers operating in this sector, donating an average of 120 hours per year (Statistics Canada, 2010). One sporting context in Canada that is dependent on volunteers is high school sport. Every academic year, 52,000 individuals assume coaching positions and are responsible for the 750,000 students practicing sport in all of the country's provinces and territories (School Sport Canada, 2013). Most coaches in Canadian high schools are full-time teachers who volunteer to coach, thereby assuming the role of teacher-coach within their school (Lacroix, Camiré, & Trudel, 2008). Winchester, Culver, and Camiré (2011, 2013) indicated how high school teachers have diverse motives for entering the realm of coaching, which include having a passion for sport, wanting to contribute to the enhancement of school life, and increasing their standing on performance evaluations. Lacroix et al. (2008) also demonstrated how high school teachers are often motivated to coach early in their careers because coaching is deemed a useful activity that facilitates integration into a new school. However, in the current system, there are typically few incentives for teachers to maintain their coaching roles long-term, leading to problems of retention. As such, school principals and athletic directors in many provinces are obliged to seek the help of members of the community to fill vacant coaching positions in order to ensure the viability of their sport programs (Camiré, Trudel, & Lemyre, 2011; Lacroix et al., 2008). These community coaches usually receive stipends, from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars, to cover their travel-related expenses during the season (Camiré, 2014). Although community coaches in some provinces are assuming coaching roles in high schools at an increasingly higher rate, evidence suggests that teachers might be in a preferred position to positively influence students' development (Trudel, Boudreau, & Proulx, 1995). For example, Camiré and Trudel (2014) conducted an intervention to help high school coaches learn how to teach psychological skills through sport. The intervention was conducted with teacher-coaches and community coaches in Quebec and the findings indicated how the teacher-coaches more easily implemented developmental strategies because "coaches from the community interacted with students during practices and games whereas teacher-coaches had daily interactions with students and opportunities to closely monitor their academic progress" (p. 48). As such, it appears that teacher-coaches' constant presence on school premises is advantageous given that it provides further opportunities to facilitate students' personal and academic development.

Although some provinces have opened their doors to community coaches, others still require that teachers be responsible for the oversight of high school sport teams. For instance, the Ontario Federation of School Athletic Associations (OFSAA) states in its constitution that teachers (defined as members of the Ontario College of Teachers) from the school must be responsible for sport teams (OFSAA, 2013). However, it is essential to note that there are no clauses in the collective agreement between the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation and the Ontario Ministry of Education requiring teachers to coach school teams. As such, high school teachers in Ontario do not have a professional obligation to coach but inherently have a 'moral obligation' to volunteer as coaches in order to sustain their schools' sport programs given that community coaches cannot oversee sport teams. As Brown (2012) noted, high schools in Ontario have relied for generations on this system promoting a 'gift' culture where teachers are expected to volunteer their time to coach sport teams.

A number of scholars (e.g., Gregory, 1982; Parry & Bloch, 1989), from anthropology to economics, have discussed the concept of 'gift economy', which represents a mode of exchange, governed by social norms, without a clear agreement for a reciprocal reward. In contrast with the market economy, the gift economy is deemed to facilitate social bonds and helps create vibrant

communities (Kenway, Bullen, & Robb, 2004). In the field of education, Jane Kenway, an educational policy scholar, has indicated how certain activities within the teaching profession can be labelled as occurring as part of the gift economy (Kenway, Bullen, Fahey, & Robb, 2006). In the case of high school sport, the 'gift' represents teachers' volunteer offering of their services to their schools' sport programs. Numerous teachers demonstrate a desire to volunteer because they are cognisant that many students are intrinsically motivated to take part in sport (Gould & Carson, 2008) and understand that meaningful involvement beyond the classroom helps create vibrant educational experiences for students. However, with growing demands and evolving expectations being placed on teachers, the sole reliance on a gift economy for school sports, as is the case in Ontario, must be further scrutinised to ascertain if the system in place remains viable. In provinces where community coaches can oversee high school sport teams, teacher-coaches are often outnumbered. For instance, in recent studies on high school coaching in Quebec, less than 45% of the samples consisted of teacher-coaches (Camiré, Forneris, & Trudel, 2012; Forneris, Camiré, & Trudel, 2012). Such findings suggest that in settings where the services of community coaches are welcomed, there are far fewer reasons for teachers to be involved in their school's sport program because they have much less of a 'moral obligation' to coach.

The departure of high school teachers from volunteer coaching, such as in the province of Quebec, can be mainly explained by the demands of managing both roles, which recent reviews of the literature have indicated can lead to role conflict (Konukman, Agbuga, Erdogan, Zorba, Demirhan, & Yilmaz, 2010; Richards & Templin, 2012). Role conflict is defined as an outcome manifesting itself when teacher-coaches are exposed to misaligned/conflicting sets of expectations (interrole conflict) or when requirements of a role go beyond that which can be performed (intrarole conflict). Much of the empirical research examining high school teacher-coaches' working conditions emanates principally from an American context and was published mostly from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. For example, in a survey of 201 teacher-coaches, Locke and Massengale (1978) found that role overload was the most commonly and most intensely experienced conflict among participants. In a study with 50 high school teacher-coaches, Sage (1987) found that the overload resulting from both teaching and coaching led to stress, strained family relations, and in many cases, withdrawal from coaching. High school teacher-coaches have also been found to have difficulties managing the responsibilities of teaching and coaching, which can lead to maladaptive coping strategies and even burnout (Kosa, 1990). It has been suggested by Figone (1994) that the demands of teaching and coaching in high school are often incompatible, leading to high levels of role strain (e.g., frustration, tension, anxiety) that not only impact teacher-coaches but influence the quality of student-athletes' educational experience.

Beyond the American context, the working conditions of high school teacher-coaches have not been extensively studied. In Canada, some research has been conducted with high school teacher-coaches (e.g., Trudel et al., 1995) but recent studies have mainly been conducted through a pedagogical lens by focusing on how teacher-coaches acquire knowledge. In a study involving 31 teacher-coaches from Ontario, Winchester et al. (2011, 2013) indicated how coaching clinics and interactions with colleagues were viewed as preferred learning situations. However, time, or a lack thereof, was discussed as a major factor influencing teacher-coaches' access to these situations to become more effective coaches. Wilson, Bloom, and Harvey (2010) found similar findings in a study with high school teacher-coaches from Quebec who discussed how interacting with experienced colleagues, going to coaching clinics, and consulting books and the internet represented their major sources of knowledge acquisition as it relates to coaching. Only one Canadian study was found touching specifically on the challenges faced by teacher-coaches. Lacroix et al. (2008) interviewed 16 teacher-coaches from Quebec and Ontario who discussed experiencing a lack of recognition for their work. Due to the few incentives in place for them to maintain their coaching positions, many participants discussed the withdrawal of teachers from coaching and stated how athletic directors were often

required to recruit inexperienced individuals (e.g., parents, senior student-athletes) to fill vacant coaching positions.

Based on the available evidence, it appears that the role of teacher-coach leads to complex and demanding working conditions. However, given the limited amount of Canadian data, it is essential to explore in greater detail the working conditions of the thousands of teacher-coaches who sustain high school sport, particularly in a province such as Ontario, which operates within the confines of a 'gift' system reliant on the services of volunteer teachers. As a result, the study's purpose consisted of examining the perspectives of Ontario high school teacher-coaches to better understand their working conditions. Three research questions guided the study as well as the organisation of the findings: (a) What challenges do the participants believe they face in their role as teacher-coaches? (b) What initiatives do the participants recommend be implemented to alleviate the challenges faced? (c) What are the participants' views on the volunteer nature of coaching in Ontario? A qualitative methodology (Merriam, 2009) was employed to take an in-depth look at how teacher-coaches from Ontario experienced their dual role and made sense of it. The current study represented phase one of a two-phased mixed-methods research project examining the status of teacher-coaches in Canada.

Teacher-Coach Role Conflict Model

The teacher-coach role conflict model was developed by Richards and Templin (2012) and is grounded in role theory and occupational socialisation theory. The model is used to explain the occurrence of role conflict, which can manifest itself through interrole or intrarole conflicts. Interrole conflicts can occur when a teacher-coach occupies too many roles (i.e., teacher, coach, parent, etc.) that are complex and time consuming. Intrarole conflicts can arise from teaching (e.g., having to teach an extra class) or coaching (e.g., losing an assistant coach) and impact teacher-coaches' overall ability to manage their responsibilities. According to the model, incidences of role conflict are experienced differently based on two sets of interrelated factors. First, individual level factors (i.e., identity, family, expectations, emotional response, gender, career aspirations, experience, teaching area) are deemed to influence an individual's ability to navigate the dual role of teacher-coach. Second, socialisation factors can influence how the dual role of teacher-coach is perceived. Such factors appear during acculturation and can be reinforced during professional socialisation and organisational socialisation. For example, teacher-coaches' experiences of role-conflict can be triggered by multiple factors such as the nature of their interactions with students and colleagues and the type of support received from the school and the community.

Method

Procedure

Ethical approval to conduct the study was received from the University's Office of Research Ethics and Integrity. The participants were recruited by sending an information letter by email, containing the researcher's contact information, to regional school sport directors and school principals and asking them to forward the information letter to the teacher-coaches in their area. The teacher-coaches wishing to take part in the study were invited to contact the researcher directly. Participants needed to be full-time teachers and have at least one year of teaching and coaching experience at the high school level to take part in the study. The individuals meeting the selection criteria who responded to the email were interviewed in person by the researcher. Prior to interviewing, the participants were reminded of their right to confidentiality, signed a consent form, and completed a one-page demographic questionnaire. All interviews (M = 69.8 minutes) were audio-recorded.

Participants

High school teacher-coaches (19 men, 3 women, M_{age} = 37.5 years, age range: 25-56 years) were recruited from high schools in urban and rural communities across Ontario (Greater Toronto Area n = 8; National Capital Region n = 9; Northern Ontario n = 5). All participants (teaching experience, M = 11.7 years, range: 1-30 years; coaching experience, M = 11.4 years, range: 2-25 years) held at least a bachelor's degree and one held a doctorate. Participants taught in 13 subject areas, with the two most popular being physical education and science. Thirteen participants reported coaching two or more sports during the academic year when the interviews occurred (2012-2013). Ten participants stated having coached both boys' and girls' teams during their career.

Interview Guide

The interview guide was informed by guides used in previous studies with teacher-coaches (i.e., Camiré & Trudel, 2014; Camiré et al., 2011). These guides were adapted by modifying/adding questions to answer the study's three research questions. Section one pertained to the participants' motivations for teaching and coaching (e.g., Can you explain what initially motivated you to become a coach?). Section two examined approaches to teaching and coaching (Can you describe your teaching philosophy?). The third section explored teacher-coaches' relationships with student-athletes (e.g., Can you describe the nature of your interactions with student-athletes?). The fourth section examined the outcomes of having a dual role (e.g., Can you explain how teaching and coaching influence your work?) as well as the participants' point of view on the volunteer nature of their coaching role. The fifth section focused on challenges (e.g., Can you discuss the specific challenges you face as a teacher-coach?) and the participants' recommendations to alleviate those challenges.

Data Analysis

Three graduate students serving as research assistants on the larger research project transcribed the interviews verbatim. The researcher emailed the participants their interview transcript for them to confirm the accuracy of the information they shared in interview. All confirmed that the transcripts represented their views on teaching and coaching in high schools. One participant asked for changes related to minor grammatical errors found in his transcript. Once reviewed by the participants, the transcripts were uploaded into the NVivo software (NVivo, Version 10). A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was performed, beginning with the researcher getting familiarised with the data set by carefully reading each transcript, highlighting passages, and making comments in the margins. Then, initial codes were generated to organise the data in meaningful groups using NVivo. The next step in the analysis consisted of looking for relationships between the codes and generating higher and lower level categories. Each category was thoroughly examined to find the most relevant quotes, which were arranged in a single document (i.e., preliminary results section). Contextual descriptions were added to the selected quotes to form a comprehensive portrait of the teacher-coaches' working conditions. The last step in the analysis consisted of refining the results section with colleagues by selecting the quotes deemed to most accurately depict the participants' lived experiences.

Throughout the analysis, several steps were taken to increase the study's rigor. A member-check was performed by emailing the results section to the participants and asking them to answer the following question: "Do the results generally appear to be an accurate representation of the challenges faced by high school teacher-coaches and the recommendations that could help alleviate those challenges?" Eighteen participants responded to the email. Seventeen stated that they were in agreement that the manuscript offered an accurate picture of their perspective on this matter. One participant provided a detailed email in which he discussed key points, which were used by the researcher to nuance the results. The researcher also asked two research group members to read the manuscript and during a meeting, they offered valuable suggestions to improve several aspects of the document. Finally, a senior colleague highly experienced in qualitative research also read the manuscript and made recommendations to better present the views of the participants.

Findings

The findings are organised in three sections. First, the perspectives of the participants on the challenges faced as teacher-coaches are presented. Second, the recommendations provided by the participants to alleviate the challenges faced are discussed. Third, participants' views on the volunteer nature of coaching are provided. Numbers are used for quotes to protect the participants' identity.

Challenges Faced by Teacher-Coaches

The participants identified a series of challenges they face as part of their role as teacher-coaches at the high school level. These challenges were organized in four major themes: (a) time issues, (b) administrative issues, (c) colleague issues, and (d) logistical issues.

Time issues. For the participants, time, or a lack thereof, was perceived as the greatest challenge to being a teacher-coach. Only two participants believed time was not an issue due to their current life situation. One explained: "I don't have kids or a girlfriend so I have lots of free time. Compared to other teachers, it's an advantage. Do I feel a lack of time? Very rarely. I'm young, I can do both" (Participant 5). All other participants discussed how fulfilling the responsibilities of both roles impacted them on many levels. The participants stated how the time they invested in coaching reduced their preparation and marking time. On this notion, one participant said: "With the number of teams I'm coaching here, it's like I have two full-time jobs. I get to school at 7:30 and leave at 20:00. The time I'm putting into coaching, I'm not correcting, I'm not planning" (Participant 14). The participants also discussed how the time they invested in coaching impacted various facets of their health. One participant explained how his physical health was affected during a particularly busy time of the year:

> Some years, I coached girls' basketball, boys' basketball and they overlapped. I remember days showing up for practice at 6:45 and then I had practice after school and left at 18:30. It's November so it's dark, I never saw the sunlight, it's really draining. I used to always get really sick at the end of November and it's all because of fatigue. (Participant 12)

Another participant revealed how he believes aspects of his emotional and social health were affected:

> Basketball and curling were at the same time; I was running 4-5 practices a week. It was too much. I noticed that I was often in a bad mood at school so I reduced the number of practices. That was my biggest challenge, I drained myself. On the social side, it caused some friction with my friends and my girlfriend because I was investing so much time at school. (Participant 7)

Participants with children stated how teaching and coaching impacted their family life. Several participants explained how it was often arduous to rationalise the time invested in coaching to family members. One said: "My wife would say: 'These kids, they're strangers, why are you investing 10 hours/week in them? You spend more time with them than with me.' A person who's not a teacher has a hard time understanding that" (Participant 18). One participant discussed how it was very difficult to maintain his coaching role with a young family: "My God it's so hard. We have a two year old and a five week old; thankfully my mother and father are close by to help us or else I don't think I could continue coaching" (Participant 1). One teacher-coach summed up how he believes coaching impacted his family life:

> Time flies by so quickly when you wear so many hats. There are lots of things I have missed with my four children because I've been here [school]. I get flashes of 'crap I was coaching when I could've been with my kids'. Not saying I was a bad dad but no doubt that I spent a ton of time with kids other than my own, but I thought it was the right thing to do. (Participant 10)

Administrative issues. The participants were of the opinion that dealing with administrative work was in most cases a challenge. Some of the more experienced participants discussed how they

have witnessed an evolution in terms of the amount of administrative tasks teacher-coaches have to deal with. One participant said: "My first years, I filled out a sheet, gave it to the principal. Today, like now I'm going to the provincial championships, it's seven forms. It comes to a point where all we do is paperwork" (Participant17). During the interviews, some participants became emotional and expressed a high level of frustration with administrative tasks. One in particular said: "Coaching is becoming harder; it's just more red tape bull shit. Now it's a freaking package that is 16-17 pages thick. I've got to send it off and get it approved by the superintendent. It's just been mounting paperwork" (Participant 13). Another participant made use of sarcasm to express his frustrations related to liability issues:

> I shouldn't have to create a map of where we're playing… and all the emergency routes. Then they want to know, 'Are there chances of injury?' Well, it's a sport, yeah somebody could twist an ankle, you know that going in. This thing about liability has just become too much. (Participant 12)

Interaction with colleagues issues. The participants discussed receiving little support from non teacher-coach colleagues. One participant explained how a decreasing number of teachers are taking part in sport and that coaching positions are therefore assumed by a small number of individuals: "It's always the same teachers that are coaches. You end up having a group of maybe seven or eight teachers that coach 25 sports. That can become a bit overwhelming" (Participant 18). Some participants explained how in their collective agreement, all teachers are required to do a predetermined number of internal supply teaching periods during the school year. One participant discussed how a non teacher-coach colleague confronted him, saying how he did not appreciate having to substitute for him while he was away at a tournament. The situation led to some hostility between both parties:

> I was leaving for the provincials and a teacher tells me 'Well thanks, I'm losing an hour of my life because I have to supply teach for you'. I said 'Sorry for the inconvenience but what do you do for the school other than teach your three classes?' So that's a little conflict we had. (Participant 3)

The participants also stated how it was challenging to be approached by non teacher-coach colleagues asking that they intervene when the students they coach misbehave in class. One participant explained:

> I end up babysitting. Some teachers come see me and say 'your athlete told me to piss off in class, I don't want you to play him in the game today'. Teachers always come see me when there is a problem with a student. They're using sport to ensure that students behave, that's frustrating. I have to use my prep time do deal with this stuff, so it's an extra task. (Participant 18)

Logistical issues. Going to and from practices and competitions was challenging for participants in urban and rural settings. One participant explained the challenges of getting to matches at other schools in large cities: "Most times, we use public transit. I have to think about bus tickets, when to let students out of class, how long it's going to take to get there. I'm responsible for them as soon as we leave school" (Participant 14). Another participant discussed how in his isolated Northern community, great distances must be covered to compete against other schools which gets expensive:

> Before, the buses were paid through a government grant. Then it got cut by half, then cut completely. That's five or six thousand dollars. I convinced the girls to do a school play to raise money for the bus to go to a tournament. It was a success, the girls had fun but those activities, but you have to manage them and it's an organisational challenge. (Participant 20)

Other participants expressed how accessing formal coach education opportunities was challenging. One in particular shared how his school did not offer him any support to get certified as a coach: "I'd like to get certified but taking a course that's not paid for, I'd have to take a sick day from work on top of paying $400 for the course, I'm not interested" (Participant 7). Another participant explained how challenges related to accessing coach education are magnified in isolated rural areas: "When I can take

a course, I try to do it. The problem with that obviously are the distances. Most courses I could take, the closest ones are six hours away [by car] so it becomes problematic" (Participant 21).

Recommendations Made by Teacher-Coaches

The participants provided a number of recommendations to alleviate or eliminate the challenges they face as teacher-coaches. These recommendations are presented in a manner consistent with the four major themes developed to organize the challenges.

For time issues. The teacher-coaches believed they should be relieved of some duties at school because they coach. One participant discussed teaching load: "Maybe one semester, we teach one less course. If I put in so many hours in coaching, then I have one less class to teach. For me, that would be ideal" (Participant 14). Another participant discussed being relieved of morning and lunch supervisions:

> Let's say we have 40 minutes of supervision time a week. Well, if the school says 'you're a coach, your 40 minutes, we'll give it to you so you can prepare your practices'. It sends the message that they appreciate what we do here, that they see the importance of our task. (Participant 3)

Participants also recommended that their internal supply teaching obligations be replaced with extra preparation periods. On this issue, one participant said: "If you're coaching, we'll give you one prep period a week more to build your practices, do photocopies, do marking… at least compensate us with time" (Participant 2). Other participants suggested administrators should consider establishing day cares at school. One participant with young children who holds morning practices for his team discussed the potential benefits of implementing such an initiative: "A day care at school, as crazy as it looks, would mean that I have one less thing to do in the morning. I could leave with the kids, arrive at school, and coach" (Participant 19). One participant explained how students could amass the mandatory 40 hours of volunteer work needed to graduate from high school in Ontario in such day cares: "If you want a suggestion, we could have day cares in all high schools so that we could bring our kids. After-school care could be provided through volunteer hours by the grade elevens and grade twelves" (Participant 10).

The participants believed that time issues could be greatly alleviated if sport was a part of the school's curriculum rather than an after-school activity. Some participants shared how this concept was being tested at their school in specialised physical education courses. One said: "Having sports recognised on an academic level is already possible. For example, this year, I didn't have to practice after school with my basketball team because I had a specialised basketball class for grade 10. We practiced everyday" (Participant 14). Other participants discussed the notion of 'sport schools,' which are growing in popularity in Ontario. In such schools, class time is reduced to integrate sport during the school day. One participant was in favour of the formula these schools use to integrate sport in the curriculum, but believed it had to be done for the right reasons: "Most high school athletes won't become professionals. If sport is used to develop respect and teamwork, then I think sport should be part of the school but it shouldn't dilute the academics" (Participant 7)

For administrative issues. The participants discussed how the ever-increasing administrative tasks should be streamlined. However, they did not believe such tasks would in fact be simplified moving forward. Alternatively, most participants recommended that a person at school be designated to assume this type of work. Several suggested this person should be the athletic director. One said: "Have a solely dedicated athletic director who would help with all that stuff. Their role would not necessarily be that of a teacher. They would order uniforms, create schedules, help with booking trips, and fill out the paperwork" (Participant 12). Others suggested administrative assistants working in the principal's office could be called upon to help with such tasks: "If we had a system in place for these tasks… We have administrative assistants here, why couldn't they be responsible for these things?" (Participant3).

For interaction with colleagues issues. The participants spoke of higher-level changes that should occur to facilitate not only interactions with colleagues but also coaching in schools in general. One participant discussed how he believes a cultural transformation is needed for all staff to recognise school sport's importance: "Sport comes in second. We emphasise literacy, numeracy with little energy on physical activity programs. We need a vision change. It's a value [physical activity] that has diminished greatly, it's important to put the emphasis on this again" (Participant 21). Another participant shared how he doubts that the current school sport system can be sustained if the status quo is maintained. However, he suggested that even small initiatives in terms of recognition could make a big difference in increasing morale:

> We have to question the fact that the current system is entirely based on volunteers. The number of coaches is declining; it's the same people who are doing more. How long is it going to take before the whole thing crumbles? Sometimes, it's small things. Being thanked by the administration, that they recognise what we do, it's enjoyable and gives us a little boost. (Participant 14)

For logistical issues. The participants discussed the need to be more proactive when dealing with transportation issues by requesting greater involvement from parents. One participant suggested that teacher-coaches organise early season meetings with parents to discuss the type of help needed: "We could better inform parents by inviting them one night to talk about particular things related to sports" (Participant 9). One participant discussed how the school sport system could benefit from having parents fulfil key roles: "Maybe it's about involving parents more in the actual activity. This way, maybe you'll be able to find a trainer or a manager for your team" (Participant 21).

As it relates to accessing coach education, the participant suggested it should be easier for teacher-coaches to take time off from work to get certified as coaches: "There needs to be an ability for teachers to go and get higher qualifications through the NCCP. They need to be allowed to take time off from school and go take those courses" (Participant 10). Another participant believed coach education opportunities should be recognised as legitimate activities that occur during professional developmental days: "The training you can get with the NCCP, it should be part of the things you can do during the professional developmental days. The school should pay for the course and you wouldn't have to use your personal time" (Participant 14). One participant believed the easiest way to make coach education accessible is to bring it to the schools: "Maybe it's utopian but why not go in the schools? There would also be students interested in this type of training. You would have the coaches and the future coaches taking part; that would be interesting I think" (Participant 1).

Volunteer Nature of Coaching

Only a few teacher-coaches suggested being financially compensated to coach would help improve their working conditions. One saw being paid to coach not as a requirement but simply as an extra form of validation: "I'd take it more as a bonus. I wouldn't say it'd motivate me to coach because I'm already doing it for free but if I got paid, it'd just be 'hey, they're recognising me for this'" (Participant 9). Another participant explained how he believes being paid to coach might benefit younger teachers who have lower salaries at the beginning of their careers: "New teachers, they make less money, if they could make $2000 or $3000 more because they coach a team, maybe more would do it" (Participant 14). However, money was not a source of motivation to coach for the majority of the participants. Rather, most discussed how they would prefer retaining their volunteer status because they are intrinsically motivated to coach: "The people here, they don't need to get paid. They're here because they love coaching and love the contact with students. The money doesn't make a difference" (22). To truly optimise their work conditions, being compensated in time was deemed more valuable than receiving money: "We don't care for money. You don't coach in Canada to make money. The most important resource, as a teacher, as a coach is that we don't have enough time" (Participant 1).

Several participants warned of the dangers of paying coaches as it might attract individuals with self-serving motives:

> The set up right now is good because you get people who want to be there. So to pay teachers, I think you might get some people abusing that. It wouldn't be people who want to be there, but an opportunity to pay off the mortgage a little bit faster. (Participant 15)

Although the participants did not venture to financially benefit from coaching, they strongly believed that additional financial resources are needed to adequately support the school sport system. However, the participants were all markedly cynic, believing that there are simply not enough resources available or that the available resources are being wasted elsewhere. On this notion, one participant said:

> I can't imagine the school board being ready to invest in that [sport] because you're talking about millions of dollars. For the school board, it's all about statistics on academic success. Right now, they're spending a fortune to increase the success rate on the OSSLT [Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test], a test that I believe is useless. We could use that money to reach out to students in so many other ways, notably with sport. (Participant 18)

Discussion

The current study's purpose consisted in examining the perspectives of Ontario high school teacher-coaches to better understand their working conditions. The findings demonstrated how the participants faced many challenges that impacted their ability to efficiently navigate the duties inherent in the role of teacher-coach and led to outcomes such as negative effects on health, strained colleague relationships, and frustrations with bureaucratic processes. Lack of time was deemed the major obstacle for teacher-coaches with families who discussed the difficulties of effectively balancing their teaching, coaching, and family duties. In contrast, teacher-coaches without families suggested how they had ample time to meet the demands of teaching and coaching. Such findings are in line with Richards and Templin's (2012) model as the family status of teacher-coaches influenced their perceptions of interrole conflict and ultimately the amount of time they believed they could dedicate to teaching and coaching. These findings also mirror those of previous research indicating how many teachers are motivated to coach early in their careers, but are often required to shift their priorities and reduce or cease their involvement in coaching when family obligations increase (Lacroix et al., 2008). The volunteer nature of coaching in the Ontario high school system appears to offer teachers with families few incentives to maintain their involvement in coaching on a long-term basis, which has been shown to lead to issues of retention (Camiré et al., 2011; Lacroix et al., 2008). However, it is essential to note that in the current study, many teacher-coaches with families had accumulated over 15 years of coaching experience. Hence, it appears that despite facing interrole conflicts due to time constraints and a lack of incentives, some of the teacher-coaches with families chose to remain involved in coaching on a long-term basis and contributed to the 'gift economy' system that is Ontario high school sport (Kenway et al., 2004). Moving forward, additional research is needed to further explore the motivations of these individuals as well as the coping strategies they employ to remain involved in coaching.

Beyond family status, the participants also provided tangible examples of situations where their role as a teacher-coach brought about conflicting sets of expectations, which led to interrole conflict (Richards & Templin, 2012). In the current study, a number of participants expressed how they were often asked by their teacher colleagues to use their influence as coaches and menace taking away students' privilege to sport. Such requests occurred when students, coached by the teacher-coaches, misbehaved in their colleagues' classrooms. Such pressures created delicate predicaments for teacher-coaches who found themselves having to decide whether precedence should be placed on helping colleagues or whether it is morally indefensible to use one's position of authority to threaten students' athletic eligibility. In addition to the moral quandaries created, the participants stated how in practical

terms, dealing with such matters led to the inefficient use of their preparation time. For administrators, such findings are of importance as they demonstrate how teacher-coaches encounter unique (interrole) conflicts not experienced by other school staff which can lead to decreased productivity and reduced job satisfaction (Richards & Templin, 2012).

To alleviate the challenges faced, the participants provided a number of recommendations such as establishing day cares at school, receiving assistance to deal with administrative tasks, integrating sport in the school's curriculum, and receiving support for coach education. Although they stressed the utility of their recommendations, the participants were not convinced that these would be implemented in reality due to the limited funds allocated to sport. As such, the participants questioned the viability of the current gift economy system for high school sports, with some suggesting it might even be approaching potential collapse. Though they believe the status quo should not be maintained, most participants discussed how receiving financial compensation for coaching is not the ideal solution moving forward. Rather, they made it known that they would prefer to maintain their volunteer status because their motives for coaching are altruistic, focused on sharing their passion for sport and offering students a gratifying learning experience. As such, the current study's findings suggest that it might be in the best interest of all for high school sport to continue to function in many ways as a gift economy (Kenway et al., 2004, 2006) to avoid the pitfalls of transitioning to a market economy and risk attracting self-serving individuals who do not genuinely have a desire to coach.

Volunteering to coach sport teams is intrinsically part of the teaching culture in Ontario high schools (Brown, 2012) but the current study's findings reveal that concrete initiatives, preferably of little to no cost, must be implemented to better equip teacher-coaches with the support and resources they need to manage their responsibilities. Richards and Templin's (2012) model highlights how the support received from colleagues and administrators represent a key socialisation factor that can greatly influence the amount of role conflict experienced by teacher-coaches. First, several researchers (e.g., Wilson et al., 2012; Winchester et al., 2013) have recently proposed that learning opportunities related to coaching be afforded to prospective high school teachers during their university studies and that such opportunities be "aligned with the realities of teacher-coaches' lives" (Winchester et al., 2013, p. 423). Based on Richards and Templin's (2012) model, such initiatives during professional socialisation would enhance teacher training and diminish assumptions about the role of the teacher-coach, thereby contributing to the reduction of role conflict. From the onset, teachers who assume coaching positions would be better equipped to avoid role overload as their careers progress and as their family situations evolve (Konukman et al., 2010). Second, administrators should encourage continued involvement in coaching by explicitly communicating in various ways their gratitude (e.g., thank you letters, coach appreciation days at school) to the teachers who dedicate themselves to their school's sport program through coaching. As the current study's findings have shown, simple acts of recognition can go a long way to validate teachers' involvement in sport and help maintain the volunteer nature of coaching. Third and most importantly, administrators must earnestly consider the participants' plea of being granted more time to fulfil their teaching, coaching, and family obligations. Although school administrators have little manoeuvring room due to the strict job descriptions found in teachers' collective agreements, efforts should be targeted at findings ways to reduce teacher-coaches' peripheral responsibilities (e.g., internal supply teaching, school yard supervisions). As such, teachers who view their coaching as a priority could choose to allocate more time to their duties in this area, without incurring higher levels of interrole conflict (Richards & Templin, 2012). The initiatives suggested are not revolutionary but if implemented correctly, they can greatly help teacher-coaches attain a healthy work/family balance and focus their efforts on offering students a quality educational experience in the classroom and on the playing field (Figone, 1994). If the mandate of the education system, and by default high school sport, is to ensure 'the success and well-being of every student and child' (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014), then targeted efforts are needed to enhance the working conditions of the

countless individuals who ensure the 'gift culture' that is high school sport in Ontario continues to exist for generations to come.

Although the current study is of significance for having shed light on important elements relating to the working conditions of Ontario teacher-coaches, it is not without its limitations. First, the sample was comprised mainly of male teacher-coaches. As a result, the challenges they faced and the recommendations they suggested are specific in nature and might not reflect the positions of females who also hold concurrent teaching and coaching positions. Future research should examine more closely the perspectives of female teacher-coaches to derive a more comprehensive picture of how they confront the challenges of their dual role. Second, the participants emanated from Ontario and the working conditions of teacher-coaches in other parts of Canada might differ. As such, moving forward, larger scale studies with nationally-representative samples are needed to provide a more inclusive portrait of the status of teacher-coaches across Canada.

Conclusion

Every academic year, tens of thousands of teachers volunteer their time to assume coaching positions in Ontario high schools (School Sport Canada, 2013). The current study's contribution lies in highlighting the numerous challenges these teacher-coaches face as well as the strategies they believe should be implemented to alleviate such challenges. Teacher-coaches represent influential external assets who play crucial roles in promoting the positive development of students at school (Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte, & Jones, 2005). However, the current study's findings demonstrated how being a teacher-coach is highly demanding, leading many teacher-coaches to experience role conflict (Richards & Templin, 2012). As such, it is essential to find way to improve the working conditions of high school teacher-coaches who volunteer in a sport system that generally does not provide them with much recognition for investing themselves in positions that are continuously evolving and increasingly demanding. Moving forward, concrete initiatives must be implemented to help teacher-coaches fulfil their multiple responsibilities given that they comprise a large and dynamic volunteer workforce playing indispensable roles in our school system.

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