

COACHING EDUCATION

Student Coaches in Sport Education: A Case Study Examination of Their Influence on the Perceptions and Experiences of Their Players

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Abstract

A developing line of Sport Education (SE) inquiry has been the motivational responses of students. While initial evidence supports that SE can positively influence the motivation of physical education students, there is a continued need for further research in this area. Specifically, there has been call for a deeper examination into the influence that specific features of SE (i.e., roles) have on the outcomes, behaviors, and experiences of physical education students. This study examined the influence of team leaders (i.e., coaches) on the students' experiences and perceptions within their team. This study used a case study approach, with self-determination theory (SDT) as the motivational lens. Qualitative data collection measures of individual and focus group interviews, student journals, and researcher observations and field notes were implemented. Analysis of data was conducted via the constant comparative method and verified with trustworthiness elements of triangulation, member checks, and peer debriefing. Coding of interviews, journals, and observer field notes revealed overarching themes of (a) method of coach selection, (b) knowledge of the sport and practices, (c) leading by example, and (d) managing the downside. The

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coaches led and coached in a manner that influenced the key psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. While each psychological need was influenced, the level of support seemed to align with the style of coaching delivered. The findings of this study can assist the physical education teacher in designing and implementing the role.

Sport Education (SE) has become a well-researched instructional approach over the last few decades (Araujo, Mesquita, & Hastie, 2014; Wallhead & O'Sullivan, 2005). Units taught through SE have been aligned with influencing elements such as psychomotor performance (Pritchard, Hawkins, Wiegand, & Metzler, 2008) and physical activity behaviors (Wallhead, Garn, & Vidoni, 2014). Furthermore, a developing line of inquiry has been the motivational responses of students when taught using SE (Perlman, 2014). The importance of examining motivational research within physical education is the strong association between motivated students and a variety of positive student outcomes, experiences, and behaviors (S. Chen, Sun, Zhu, & Chen, 2014).

As research on SE continues, a trend has been toward understanding and examining specific features of SE so that insight into their influence on the physical education student can be gained (Araujo et al., 2014). In particular, Araujo et al. (2014) suggested a deeper inquiry into understanding elements of the process when students take more control over elements of learning, as occurs in SE. As such, this study used a self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985) motivational perspective to examine the team coaches (e.g., the SE feature of roles) and their influence on the students within their team.

Theoretical Framework of Motivation

This study used SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985) as the motivational framework for examining features of SE, specifically the role of coaches. SDT posits that a person in a leadership role (e.g., team coach or teacher) has a major influence on the motivation of others under their leadership (Deci & Ryan, 2012). The interpersonal style or approach a coach adopts and implements can support and/or thwart key psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness of their peers (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Reeves, 2009). According to Deci and Ryan (2002), autonomy is a perception that students are

provided a sense of control and/or choice over their learning experience, competence is a perception of being successful or provided an appropriate level of challenge, and relatedness is a feeling of being cared for or socially connected with classmates. While each psychological need is important for the facilitation of a student's motivation, an effective leader or coach will be supportive of all three needs (Deci & Ryan, 2012). As a student is supported (at different levels) of each psychological need, this will in turn influence the degree or level of self-determined motivation of a student (Vallerand, 2001). For instance, a coach who is supportive of all three needs will more likely positively influence the motivation and behaviors of his or her players. While supporting all three needs is critical toward influencing student motivation, the interpersonal style plays an important role.

The interpersonal style and approach used by a leader is the interplay between three overarching concepts of support, control, and structure (Jang, Reeve, & Deci, 2010). Supportive interpersonal behaviors focus on the intrinsic motivations of students such as interest, enjoyment, and personal growth (Reeve, Jang, Carrell, Jeon, & Barch, 2004). A teacher or coach who delivers supportive instruction will relate their activities to the internal motives of students, be flexible in their language in the way they speak to others and how much time is provided to complete a task, and demonstrate empathy and care for those under their leadership (Reeve et al., 2004). Controlling behaviors are implemented when the instructional approach aligns with extrinsic elements, are facilitated through the use of deadlines and statements that lack flexibility, and do not demonstrate care for students or peers in need (Reeve et al., 2004). While supportive and controlling elements are viewed as distant concepts on the interpersonal continuum, a leader can and most likely will use both within their instruction (Silk, Morris, Kanya, & Steinberg, 2003). Furthermore, the concept of structure plays an important role on the motivations and behaviors of students (Jang et al., 2010). Structure is associated with the managerial aspects that align with success or how tasks should be completed in a specific setting (Carter & Doyle, 2006). When a teacher establishes clear expectations and learning goals, and communicates policies and procedures for how things should be done, this aligns with a high level of structure (Jang et al.,

2010). On the opposite end, being vague in terms of expectations that are viewed as a level of chaos aligns with low structure (Jang et al., 2010). Structure within a learning setting allows students to have an increased understanding of the educational direction and gives them a greater ability to perceive a higher level of control over their behaviors (Skinner, Furrer, Marchand, & Kindermann, 2008).

Sport Education and Motivation Research and Literature

In regard to instructional approaches that may facilitate or align with motivation, Perlman (2014) identified a strong connection between elements of SDT and SE. A growing body of knowledge illustrates the motivational influence of engaging students within a unit taught through SE (Perlman, 2014). SE motivational research has focused on the areas of (1) student responses and (2) elements of the learning climate. Student response research aligns with understanding the perceptions and experiences of students as they engage in lessons taught through SE. Engagement within a unit of SE has elicited positive changes associated with student enjoyment (Perlman 2010), perceived competence (Spittle & Byrne, 2009; Wallhead & Ntoumanis, 2004), and psychological needs support (Perlman, 2011, 2012a). In addition, students have reported significantly higher levels of situational motivation (Sinelnikov, Hastie, & Prusak, 2009) and self-determined motivation (Perlman & Goc Karp, 2010) when taught through SE.

Learning climate inquiry has been aligned with the type of educational setting that either thwarts or supports student motivation. Researchers who have grounded their studies in the achievement motivation theory reported that SE assists to create a climate that focuses on elements of personal growth (Hastie, Sinelnikov, Wallhead, & Layne, 2014; Sinelnikov & Hastie, 2010; Spittle & Byrne, 2009; Wallhead & Ntoumanis, 2004), while SDT-grounded projects reported significantly higher levels of a context that is supportive of students psychological needs (Perlman, 2011, 2012a, 2012b; Perlman & Goc Karp, 2010). Irrespective of the theoretical framework, evidence has lent support for the creation of a beneficial educational setting for students.

Previous research into SE has examined the approach in a holistic manner, and the motivational influence has been attributed or inferred to a variety of specific characteristics that the approach encourages. These include the implementation of fair play or sportspersonship measures (Perlman, 2011), peer coaching (Wallhead & Ntoumanis, 2004), and use of roles beyond being a player (Sinelnikov et al., 2007). A limitation of the aforementioned research is that inferences about the mechanics of specific features of SE and their potential influence on student behaviors have been identified. From a holistic perspective, it has been demonstrated that SE can facilitate motivational enhancement, but little is truly known about the specific elements that assist or support such change. Calls for more micro-analysis of SE and an understanding of key elements and their influence on students have been made (Araujo et al., 2014; Perlman & Goc Karp, 2010). Therefore, this study examined the influence of team leaders (i.e., coaches), using an SDT lens, on the students' experiences and perceptions within their team.

Method

Before beginning this study, University Ethics Board approval and participant consent were obtained. As each student was under the age of 18, parental or guardian consent was provided. This study used a case study approach (Merriam, 1998) that was grounded in the motivational framework of SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Qualitative data were collected through individual and focus group interviews, student journals, and researcher observations and field notes. Analysis of data was conducted via the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and supported through trustworthiness elements of triangulation, member checks, peer debriefing, and examination of negative cases.

Participants

Twenty-five (15 male, 10 female) students were placed into five teams. Each team engaged in a 15-lesson unit of basketball taught through SE. The basketball unit was taught toward the end of the semester. Each team had one head coach for the entire unit, while the rest of the players were provided various roles throughout the unit such as record keeper and official.

Sport Education Unit and Fidelity

The unit of study was a 15-lesson basketball unit taught to a required ninth-grade physical education class. The SE unit was conducted in phases of (a) player development, (b) regular season, and (c) postseason. Each phase lasted five lessons. Player development engaged students in a variety of games and activities that focused on the development of psychomotor and cognitive elements of basketball. During Phase 1, students were placed into teams and coaches were selected. Many of the activities were initially teacher designed and allowed each student to gain a sense of their own ability to play basketball. Beginning in Lesson 3, coaches were given greater responsibility to implement and design learning activities with their teams. The regular season (Phase 2) consisted of a combination of preseason and regular season games. Throughout the phase, students were taught concepts of fair play and game evaluations. The postseason (Phase 3) was a double round-robin tournament in which each team played each other twice. The team with the most points at the end of the postseason tournament was crowned the champion. Table 1 provides more details about the SE unit.

The researcher used the benchmark assessment for verification of SE grounded in the work of Ko, Wallhead, and Ward (2006) and Perlman (2010). During each lesson, the researcher identified when a key feature of SE was implemented (see Table 2 for more details). The researcher identified that all elements and features of SE were implemented in the unit. While the study was only focused on the coaches and their players, it was deemed important that SE was taught in a manner that was appropriate to the model.

Data Collection Measures

Interviews (individual and focus group). The intent of the interviews was to investigate the perceptions, experiences, and thoughts of students (coaches and players) within each team throughout the unit in relation to the coach, player, and team dynamics. Each student was interviewed individually once per week, while focus group interviews were conducted each Friday. Focus group interviews were conducted as a team, players only or coaches only. Each interview was conducted in the physical education office with an audio recorder placed on the table to record all verbal statements and lasted between 20 and 30 min. The interview protocol

Table 1
Sport Education Unit of Basketball

Lesson	Content
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unit introduction • Small-sided games (assessment of student abilities) • Class vote of coaches
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaches and players announced • Teacher-led practice and activities (passing and dribbling) • Inter-team games (3 vs. 3) • Team activities (introduce duty team and team name)
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher-led practice and activities (shooting and attack) • Teacher-created team practice (coach implemented) • Inter-team games (3 vs. 3) • Student roles
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher-led activities (defense) • Coach-created team practice • Inter-team games (3 vs. 3) • Introduction of fair play and sportspersonship
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher-led activities (defense) • Coach-created team practice • Inter-team games (3 vs. 3) • Introduction of game-play scoring rubric
6–7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team warm-up/practice • Preseason games (3 vs. 3)
8–10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team warm-up/practice • Regular Season (3 vs. 3)
11–14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team warm-up/practice • Postseason tournament
15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final competition • Awards ceremony

followed a semistructured format (Merriam, 1998) with the use of follow-on or probing questions when more detail, clarification, or information was deemed necessary. Sample questions focused on constructs of Sport Education (How do you think your coach is doing? What are his or her strengths as a coach? What are his or her areas for improvement?) and SDT (Are you able to provide your opinion within the team?)

Table 2
Verification Criteria of Sport Education

Sport Education aspect	Criteria
Season	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students placed on a team • Season elements (preseason, regular season, and postseason) • Championship game(s)
Affiliation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students involved in the team selection process • Consistent teams throughout unit or season
Formal Competition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formalized schedule of games • Evaluation of games (winning, completion of roles, etc.)
Record Keeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students keep record of game elements (winners, completion of roles, fair play)
Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of student roles • Students are accountable for elements of model • Teacher supports student knowledge of sport

Student journals. Each participant completed a weekly reflective journal. Each week, students responded in detail to specific prompts. Topics included perceptions of their teammates, their role within the team, motivational constructs (e.g., enjoyment, choice, social connection), and elements of SE. Each journal entry was electronically submitted via a confidential and password-protected online submission system supported by the university. Typically, each week focused on one or two prompts so as to not overwhelm students and to allow for a deeper reflection and response.

Researcher observations and field notes. Researcher observation and field notes helped the researcher to identify during the SE unit students' critical behaviors, statements, and interactions that align with elements and concepts of student motivation. Using the guidelines of Burgess (1991), the researcher recorded notes during data collection and followed with field note preparation (e.g., detailed

description of observation). Furthermore, a daily self-reflection on lessons provided further meaning or understanding of researcher field notes.

Data Analysis

Data from all qualitative sources were analyzed via the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Initially, data from interviews, student journals, and observer field notes were transcribed verbatim and reviewed for accuracy. Two researchers conducted open coding whereby initial codes, descriptions of each code, and supportive quotes were created within each data set. Cross-checking of codes and themes was conducted each time the researchers met. The aforementioned process of analysis was continued and reviewed ongoing until both researchers felt a level of saturation was achieved.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established through the use of triangulation, member checks, and peer debriefing (Creswell, 1998). Triangulation of data was achieved through the use of the three overarching data sources (interviews, journals, and field notes). Data were member checked whereby a research student or lead researcher provided each participant with their individual data sets and analyzed interpretation to ensure the intent and meaning were accurately portrayed. Peer debriefing was achieved through two independent coders cross-checking all information to ensure a level of consistency in the analysis and representation of data.

Findings

The major focus of this research was how a student placed in a leadership position (i.e., coach) influences the experiences and perceptions of students within their team from a self-determination perspective. Initial coding of interviews, journals, and observer field notes revealed within this study overarching themes of (a) method of coach selection, (b) knowledge of the sport and practices, (c) leading by example, and (d) managing the downside. While the four themes were consistent throughout the data analysis, it seemed that the use and implementation of the aforementioned themes supported players' motivational constructs in a range of different ways. This section

provides a brief definition of each theme, supporting raw data, and an explanation of each theme aligned with the motivational theory of SDT.

Method of Coach Selection

The theme of *method of coach selection* aligned with how team leaders within the SE unit were chosen. Coach selection in the unit was determined through a ballot system. Each student was provided a list of behaviors and characteristics of a good leader and coach. The teacher developed characteristics and behaviors of a good coach, based on the concepts of a coach listed on page 37 of the *Complete Guide to Sport Education* (Siedentop, Hastie, & van der Mars, 2011). For instance, a good coach provides “good leadership to players within a team.” Students read the list and ranked the top five students in their class who best represented these characteristics. Ballots were collected and tallied, and the five students who earned the most votes were selected as coaches. The teacher then allocated those not selected as coaches into five teams. From a motivational perspective, the process of voting for team coaches can be conceptually aligned with supporting the need of autonomy (*providing control*), relatedness (*giving students a voice*), and structure (*expectations of an effective coach*).

There was a range of student responses in relation to the ballot process of coach selection. First, the majority of students indicated that the process for selecting coaches was a positive experience as reflected in player and coach comments: “I like that we got to vote for the coach” (Player 7, Interview) and “Voting is something I have never done in PE . . . I see the value in it” (Coach 4, Reflective Journal).

The selection process also yielded students who both played the sport and were perceived as “good” players generally in sport. This is reflected in both coach and player responses. For example, Coach 2 during an interview suggested that he or she was selected for the following reasons: “Look, I am the coach because people in the class know I play basketball . . . am good at most sports.” Player 18 said, “[Coach 1] should be a coach . . . he is a good athlete . . . we seem to follow his lead in class.” (Interview).

However, popularity also became a key indicator of coach selection in the response from players. For example, “Just look at the

people [coaches], they are all the sporty and popular” (Player 12, Interview). In addition, Player 3 suggested that the coaches represented “the more popular students in the class” (Interview). While Deci and Ryan (1985) indicated that a key element for creating a setting that is supportive of students’ motivational needs is providing choice and making sure students’ voices are heard, the exercise in coach selection and the reasons for selection did not always allow increased control or choice. For example, a few students felt that their voices were not heard despite the voting process, and they questioned the use of the process itself: “They [the coaches] always get to be the leaders in class, even if there is a vote” (Player 5, Interview).

While it could be interpreted as discontent due to not being selected, other responses indicated support for this:

I know that based on the list we were supposed to use, the best person to be a coach is Sandra. Yet she didn’t get voted in. I’m not sure if people really looked at the list or just picked their friends. (Player 19, Interview)

It was pretty clear that when the coaches were announced there were two camps of students. Those that agreed with the decision and those that did not. The overall mood of the class was positive, yet you can see the group of students who did not agree with the vote are immediately disengaged. (Field Notes, Week 1)

From the onset of the SE unit, the selection of the coach had a clear impact on the motivation of all students in class. The students’ need for autonomy seemed, for the most part, to be supported or satisfied through the ballot system. However, the disconnect between the identified behaviors needed to be a good coach and those who were selected is of interest. In particular, conducting an exercise designed as fair (e.g., ballot) resulted in some students’ need for relatedness diminishing, because they perceived the basis for fairness (the selection criteria) was connected to those selected. This meant that these students felt they had no meaningful voice. While the teacher created a list of behaviors of a quality coach and a process by which those with the characteristics could be recognized, these behaviors could be open to interpretation. Thus, while there was a

vote, selection could have been because (a) there may not have been five students who appropriately demonstrated all the behaviors of a quality coach, (b) the clarity of the qualities needed by a coach may have been vague, and (c) the students interpreted the qualities in a range of ways or ignored and replaced these with their own criteria. This meant the high level of structure as espoused by SDT was not met. Research supports the notion that students engaged in a unit taught through SE can be supportive of the need for autonomy and relatedness, based on giving students an increased sense of control and voice over their learning and through the infusion of different roles such as a coach (Perlman, 2011; Perlman & Goc Karp, 2010; Wallhead & Ntoumanis, 2004). While this theme supports the research, this level of psychological needs support may not be enough for all students. Simply giving students a voice in selection may not be enough to support these areas and, if not well managed, can create the attributes of “captains” selecting “teams” in class. A vote in selection, enacting of process, and the integrity of the process maintained by matching those selected to the set criteria are also required for SE to remain supportive of these two needs.

Knowledge of the Sport and Practices

Once the voting process determined the five coaches, the design and development of practice sessions was the responsibility of each coach. During the initial lessons of the season, the teacher engaged all coaches and players in a variety of activities aimed at developing psychomotor and cognitive skills related to basketball. As the season progressed, the coaches were given the responsibility of creating a practice plan that included (a) practice focus, (b) two activities or drills, and (c) strategy session. This was submitted to the teacher via e-mail. While coaches could create their own practice sessions, they could also reuse previously designed activities demonstrated by the teacher.

Once in lessons, players and coaches felt that the level of basketball knowledge their coach possessed in practices and game play was a key element that influenced their motivation in the lessons. Players in teams with coaches who had a high level of knowledge in activities to use and ability to give feedback on play reported an increased desire to be involved and engaged in practice sessions and games. For example, Player 11 noted, “It was clear that [the coach] knew a

lot about basketball . . . we did practices that were fun and I actually learned some stuff about basketball I didn't know about" (Player 11, Interview). Player 5 also noted,

I have to admit that this is the first time that I get what we are doing in basketball. The games [practices] that [Coach 1] has us do are pretty cool. We don't just dribble a ball and not know why we are doing it. He is great. (Reflective Journal)

On the other hand, coaches with a lack of sport-specific knowledge created and implemented practices and activities that were deemed to be not as engaging and players indicated less desire to be involved. For example, Player 7 noted, "Sue is funny and stuff, but she didn't really know much about basketball. She would get us into our roles and that was about it . . . I know I would just shut down [and] not do much . . . IT'S BORING!!!!" (Student 7, Reflective Journal). Player 15 reported the same feelings: "We just do the same every time...dribble...lines...shoot. It is boring and I know that we [teammates] don't want to do this anymore" (Interview). This was also evident to the outside observer, who noted,

You could really see the difference in motivation, engagement and involvement among teams depending on what the coach had designed and implemented . . . I wonder if there is a connection between the experience level of the coach in basketball and what they can do for their team. (Field Notes, Week 2)

Allowing coaches to create their own practice sessions seemed to bring out differences between coaches in terms of their sport-specific knowledge and impact on the motivation of their players. While the intent of coach-created practices was to allow more autonomy, the resulting sessions had a major impact on motivation from an SDT perspective. While coach-designed and -planned sessions were implemented to support autonomy (e.g., choice of practice sessions), this theme seemed to translate more toward influencing a player's need for competence. According to Deci and Ryan (2002), competence should be viewed in a manner that allows each student to demonstrate success (*winning or improvement*) and/or provides challenge at an optimal level (*balance between success and failure*). As

indicated through the data sets, from a player perspective those with coaches who were comfortable and knowledgeable in the content area reported a sense of being challenged and continually learning, while those on teams with coaches who did not have or were “perceived” not to have these qualities were bored (e.g., challenge could be deemed too low). From a selection criteria perspective, the support for autonomy via voting was not necessarily reflected in the criteria for coach selection. From a player perspective, the relatedness of giving the students a voice in selecting a coach was sometimes at odds with the coach they voted for. This, then, meant that that a rise in initial autonomy could result in a decrease in perceptions of competence.

Leading by Example

The *leading by example* theme relates to the degree by which coaches would put actions behind their words. Students within each team tended to be more motivated when their coach would “do what they would ask others to do” (Player 7, Interview). The following raw data sets support this: “It was really nice that [the coach] would do anything that needed to be done. He didn’t just say it and have someone else do it” (Player 11, Interview) and “I struggled getting the field set up and [the coach] just jumped right it. It was nice to have someone help me” (Player 2, Interview).

While coaches (1, 2, and 4) would take the initiative to help players within their team complete a variety of tasks, two coaches (3 and 5) adopted the opposite style.

There seemed to be two very different leadership styles displayed this week. The first was where the coach seemed to do anything and everything. With that it seemed that their teams were extremely engaged and almost everything was done at a high level. Very impressive!!! On the other hand, there seemed to be the “do as I say and get your role done” model. The players on these teams were fine and doing what they were supposed to do, but if something needed to be done that seemed to fit into two roles it did not get done, tension started and it put a bit of a downer on the day. (Field Notes, Week 3)

Coach 5 stated, “I’m responsible to make sure that [players on her team] do their job. If I do it for them . . . what does that mean for them and the rest of the team” (Interview).

A logical inference could be made that this theme aligns strongly with supporting the need for relatedness and the concept of structure. When a leader interacts and behaves in a manner that puts the collective group (i.e., team) over him- or herself, this can create a sense of caring. According to Gibbons (2014), a key strategy for the facilitation and support of relatedness is for people to act in a personally responsible manner that is focused on both themselves and others. This idea of coaches acting in a caring manner is further supported by students who reported that they witnessed their coach “doing more of their fair share” (Player 9, Interview) and they “felt like their team was a family” (Student 14, Journal). Furthermore, elements of this theme align with the concept of structure. Structure is where a leader or coach implements boundaries that direct students toward an intended learning goal (Carter & Doyle, 2006). Coaches who led by example used structure, as espoused by SDT, in a meaningful and motivationally supportive manner. According to Reeve (2006), coaches can provide structure by offering verbal guidance and assisting those in need. On the other hand, a coach who provides limited help and is critical of those who do not get their role done can be viewed as creating a low level of structure (Reeve, 2006).

Managing the Downside

The theme of *managing the downside* is associated with behaviors and actions of the coach when something within the lesson or unit did not go to plan or presented a level of challenge. It is unavoidable within an educational setting that elements of a lesson will not go to plan and some form of challenging situation will occur. In the unit of basketball, losing the game and having records not kept according to the prescribed rules were viewed as challenges: “You think you have everything planned and organized . . . [player] doesn’t hand in the fair play record sheet” (Coach 3, Interview). Another coach said, “No matter what I do either [mentioned two players names] does the opposite or forgets to do it” (Coach 4, Journal).

How each coach dealt with these challenges was interesting, in regard to the style or approach they adopted. Coaches were either

disposed toward a strengths-based or deficit model of dealing with challenge.

The strengths-based coaches were more likely to try and find a solution to the problem and/or focus on elements that went well. For example,

[Coach 1] was the coach of a team that lost a few games in a row. Instead of focusing on losing, he tried to come up with ways to help the team win by mixing up players in different positions or focusing on attacking the rim and not worrying about giving up easier chances on the defensive side of the ball. (Field Notes, Week 4)

Player 4 noted, “I think we all wanted to win, but it just didn’t happen. Coach 1 was good at highlighting what went well” (Interview).

On the other hand, the deficit model coach was more likely to focus on the negative aspects of the situation or what went wrong: “If we lost points we all seemed to get this better than [sic] thou attitude by [the coach]. Like we wanted to not get something done or completed” (Player 17, Journal). Coach 4 noted, “Look, when a player does something wrong, [he/she] should know about it” (Interview).

From a self-determination perspective, these styles of coaching (e.g., strengths and deficit) align strongly with specific behaviors that a teacher or leader can use that either support or hinder the motivation of their students. Specifically, supportive leaders encourage persistence when challenged, praise improvement, and facilitate progress when a student is stuck or unsuccessful (Reeve, 2006). On the contrary, hindering motivation can occur when a leader places pressure on his or her team and judges performance based on their inabilities (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, & Thogersen-Ntoumani, 2010).

Conclusion

Findings from this study indicate that coaches can play an integral part in influencing motivational elements such as the psychological needs of their players. While these findings align with previous motivation-grounded SE literature (Perlman, 2014; Wallhead & Ntoumanis, 2004), the unique contribution of this study is that it examined the role of the coach using a motivational lens.

The findings lend support that each psychological need of students was influenced, yet the level of support seemed to align with the individual coaching style. As such, when a teacher implements an SE unit and uses students in leadership roles, he or she should carefully consider (a) the specific qualities needed to be a coach and (b) how much responsibility or accountability to give the students.

When creating and implementing a unit that uses coaches or some form of team leader, the teacher and their students may benefit from having students who possess an adequate level of unit- or sport-specific knowledge and dispositions that align with good leadership qualities and the ability to connect with their players. The level of content knowledge may allow coaches to design activities and take on a role that allows for meeting the distinct and unique needs of their team. Designing activities that are engaging and educationally relevant is a key element to enhancing student motivation (Martin, 2006). It is important that students engage in relevant learning activities so that they understand the purpose of each activity and how it is important to them as students (Kember, Ho, & Hong, 2008). Furthermore, A. Chen and Ennis (1995) illustrated that when teachers (and in this case coaches) have a high depth of content knowledge, they are better armed to implement educationally relevant activities and in turn motivate students.

Dispositions of a coach should be considered. As with educational professionals, coaches may best be aligned to a caring person who is flexible and allows all students to voice their opinion. Implementing student roles in a meaningful way can be a daunting task. As such, teachers may need to become more flexible within their teaching to know how much responsibility and control each coach needs, to allow learning to continually occur.

The findings from this study illustrate that when creating and implementing specific roles, teachers should carefully consider the specific elements needed by the students to complete each role. In addition, as with the implementation of any role, the teacher needs to be able to support and balance the needs of the students in terms of how much responsibility and information each coach needs. While this study extends the body of knowledge around SE and motivation, more inquiry is needed. More micro-analysis studies that examine specific features or elements of SE would provide more insight into

the specific mechanics of the model and their influence on student outcomes and experiences. Second, this study was conducted at one school with a few coaches and teams. Possibly a multisite research project could illustrate the generalizability of these results and consider additional variables such as motivational profiles of players during the unit.

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