

Coach, parent, and administrator perspectives on required coaching education in organized youth sport

Nicole D. Bolter¹, Laura Jones Petranek² and Travis E. Dorsch³

Abstract

Previous studies have primarily relied on coaches' perspectives about whether and how to provide formal coaching education in youth sport. This study was designed to highlight multiple perspectives from key stakeholders (i.e., coaches, parents, and administrators) about the need for required formal coaching education programs in a youth sport community. We applied Bronfenbrenner's process-person-context-time framework to understand views on required coaching education and children's development through sport from an ecological vantage. The sample included 202 coaches, 309 parents, and 38 administrators who were involved in youth sport. In an online survey, participants were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that coaching education should be required, followed by an open-ended question asking them to elaborate on their answer. Quantitatively, the majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed that coaching education should be required. Inductive–deductive qualitative analyses resulted in 49 lower order themes representing 11 higher order themes that spanned the four categories of the process-person-context-time framework. Themes highlighted both convergence and divergence among the perspectives of coaches, parents, and administrators about why coaching education should or should not be required.

Keywords

Child development, coaching effectiveness, mixed methods, PPCT model

Introduction

Roughly 90% of North American youth engage in some form of organized sport during childhood and/or adolescence, and it is estimated that 48–64% of youth are participating in any given year.^{1,2} Coaches play a significant role in determining the quality of these experiences, and coach-education and coach-certification programs have been designed to “prepare coaches for their important role in sport settings” (see Lemyre et al.,³ p. 191). A position statement from the Society for Health and Physical Educators (SHAPE America) “recommends that coaches at all levels possess a minimum level of coaching education and hold appropriate certifications in order to effectively meet the changing needs of the athlete” (Murray et al.,⁴ p. 7). The aim of the present research was to highlight multiple perspectives from key stakeholders (i.e., coaches, parents, and administrators) about the need for required formal coaching education programs in a youth sport community.

Perspectives on formal coaching education

Formal coach learning occurs through structured delivery of a standardized curriculum where coaches are exposed to a variety of knowledge necessary to be an effective coach.^{5,6} These coaching education opportunities can be provided by national or regional sport-governing bodies or even local organizations and may result in a certification. In contrast, informal coach learning is ongoing whereby coaches acquire knowledge

¹Department of Kinesiology, San Francisco State University, San Francisco, CA, USA

²Department of Kinesiology, Boise State University, Boise, ID, USA

³Department of Family, Consumer, and Human Development, Utah State University, Logan, UT, USA

Corresponding author:

Nicole Bolter, Department of Kinesiology, San Francisco State University, 1600 Holloway Ave, San Francisco, CA 94132-1722, USA.
Email: nbolter@sfsu.edu

through daily experiences within their environment.^{5,6} Such unstructured learning opportunities occur through hands-on coaching, past playing experiences as an athlete, and mentoring by other coaches and peers.

Formal coaching education has received mixed reviews in terms of its perceived value and effectiveness. For example, Misener and Danylchuk⁷ surveyed coaches before and after taking a course in Canada's National Coaching Certification Program about their perceived value of the course. Results showed that the majority of coaches reported the perceived value of the course to be "good" prior to taking the course and these favorable perceptions improved after completing the course. Moreover, almost all coaches (90%) believed such a course should be required. In a survey of volunteer youth sport coaches participating in an introductory coaching education clinic, Vargas-Tonsing⁸ found the large majority of participants felt that coaching education is important (97%) and should be mandatory (87%).

Other studies have shown that formal coaching education opportunities are not viewed as particularly valuable and that significant barriers exist to receiving coaching education. Erickson et al.⁹ used a structured quantitative interview to understand the sources of knowledge used by developmental level coaches to inform their coaching. More coaches reported using knowledge they acquired from learning by doing (58.4%) and interactions with others (42.7%), while fewer coaches reported using knowledge they had learned from formal education training (32.7%). Wiersma and Sherman¹⁰ completed focus groups with volunteer youth sport coaches to assess their concerns surrounding coach and parent education. While coaches generally supported coaching education, they suggested specific content areas be included: pedagogical aspects, psychological aspects, and leadership skills. Coaches also noted that education places tremendous time and financial demands on coaches who are primarily volunteers. Given the variety of perspectives among coaches, further research is warranted to better understand the value and need for formal educational opportunities for youth sport coaches.

Limitations of previous research

One limitation of previous coaching education research has been its singular focus on coaches' perceptions. McCullick et al.¹¹ note that the scholarship on coaching education has centered on coaches' perspectives of what they want and need from coaching education. According to McCullick et al.,¹¹ this focus provides a myopic account of the need; therefore, these authors called for additional lenses and methods to be used in evaluating

coaching education programs. Because parents and administrators are important decision makers in youth sport, their opinions should help shape whether and how coaches receive formal coaching education. Perspectives from parents and administrators, in conjunction with coaches' perspectives regarding formal coaching education, may illuminate the complexities that exist within the context of youth sport. Therefore, the present study extends past research by including parents' and administrators' perspectives on coaching education, in addition to coaches' views.

Applying a theoretical lens to understanding coaching education

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of human development^{12,13} has been applied to understanding development through sport¹⁴ and sheds light on how adults play key roles in children's sport experiences over time. Importantly, it also helps clarify how coaching education may affect children's experiences in sport by enhancing the contexts in which they participate. According to Bronfenbrenner's process-person-context-time (PPCT) framework,^{12,13} an individual's development is a function of four domains of influence: process, person, context, and time. For process, Bronfenbrenner focused on proximal processes, which he defined as the repeated and increasingly complex patterns of interactions individuals encounter in their immediate social environment.¹³ In youth sport, one of the primary processes that impacts youth development are the daily interactions (e.g., communication) that take place between coach and athlete.¹⁵ For the purposes of this study, we were most interested in perceptions of youth sport coaches, parents, and administrators surrounding required coaching education and how those perceptions relate to the proximal processes that occur between athletes and their coaches.

Person characteristics are the traits of an individual that impact her or his trajectory of development.¹² In organized youth sport, coaches come from varying backgrounds, ranging from novice parents to former professional athletes. These experiences shape their coaching philosophies and the ways in which they interact with athletes, parents, and administrators. In this study, we were interested in how various person characteristics shape coaches', parents', and administrators' perceptions of the need for compulsory coaching education. Context is defined by four progressively broader systems of the environment that influence the course of that individual's development. In sport, the microsystem includes the coach-athlete relationship in an individual's immediate social context, while the mesosystem reflects the interaction between two or more microsystems, such as links between the

parent–athlete relationship and the coach–athlete relationship. The broader exosystem influences the child indirectly, for example, through the interactions among coaches, parents, and administrators. Finally, the macrosystem comprises the broadest layer of social environment and includes the direct (e.g., laws) and indirect (e.g., cultural values of youth sport) societal imperatives that guide behavioral interactions. For this study, we sought to understand how aspects of the immediate and broader context inform coaches', parents', and administrators' views on required coaching education.

Lastly, time refers to the impact of temporal changes in a person and their environment and has been largely overlooked by developmental sport psychology researchers.¹⁴ According to Tudge et al.,¹⁶ this can be accomplished by examining individuals longitudinally, or by inferring change from cross-sectional work or retrospective examinations. In the present cross-sectional study, we were interested in inferred developmental changes within young athletes and their environment that occur over time and how these transformations influenced perspectives on requiring coaching education. Using Bronfenbrenner's¹² PPCT framework as an orienting lens, the present study was designed to examine the perspectives of coaches, parents, and administrators about the need for required formal coaching education programs in a youth sport community. Our work extends previous research by including the perspectives of parents and administrators, in addition to the perspectives of coaches who have primarily been included in previous research.

Method

Participants

The sample included 202 coaches (146 men, 55 women, and 1 did not report), 309 parents (224 women, 77 men, and 8 did not report), and 38 administrators (25 men and 13 women) currently involved in youth sport in a small metropolitan area in the Pacific Northwest. Collectively, participants represented over 20 different team and individual sports and activities that included both boys and girls aged 3–17 years. Participants represented a wide age range; coaches were 16–70 years old, parents were 29–62 years, and administrators were 18–62 years old. A large percentage of participants identified their race/ethnicity as White (92.6% of coaches, 85.1% of parents, and 94.7% of administrators). Coaches' years of experience ranged from less than a year to 30 years or more, with 66.3% of coaches indicating more than 5 years coaching youth sport. About half of the coaches (56.4%) indicated they

were paid for their coaching position and 39.1% reported their child was on the team they coached. Administrators also had a wide range of experience in their role (less than a year to 30 years or more), with about half (55.3%) reporting over five years in their administrative position. Less than half of administrators (47.4%) reported working in a setting outside of a school, and 31.6% indicated that coaches in their organization do not get paid at all for their coaching. Over 75% of parents reported being involved in youth sport for more than five years and most (78.6%) indicated they finished college or graduate school.

Measures

Required coaching education. We asked coaches, parents, and administrators to rate how much they agreed with the statement, "Coaching education should be required for all coaches." Participants selected one of four responses: *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *agree*, or *strongly agree*. Based on their response, we asked the participants to explain in an open-ended response why they *strongly disagreed/disagreed* or *strongly agreed/agreed* that coaching education should be required for all coaches. Wiersma and Sherman¹⁰ used a similar question during focus group interviews with volunteer youth sport coaches.

Procedures

Upon receiving approval from an institutional ethics board, administrators of youth sport organizations and school athletic directors were identified through publicly available websites and emailed and/or called with an invitation to participate. Administrators were provided a description and purpose of the study and, if interested, emailed a link to the online survey. Administrators were then asked to send the survey link to coaches and parents, as well as to complete the survey themselves. Secondary recruitment strategies included advertising on University- and department-affiliated listservs and websites, and posting fliers in the community. The online survey was created through *Qualtrics*, a web-based software. Informed consent was solicited through a cover letter on the first page and obtained if participants continued with the survey. Participants who occupied more than one role (e.g., parent and coach, coach and administrator) were asked to complete the survey for the role they were most involved. Most participants completed the survey on their own computers, while a few used portable tablets provided by researchers at a youth sport event.

Data analysis

Quantitative analysis. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to assess the proportion of participants

who *agreed* or *disagreed* on whether coaching education should be required. A chi-square test for independence was used to determine the relationship between agreement about requiring coaching education and role in youth sport. Statistical significance was established if $p < .05$.

Qualitative analysis. Participants' qualitative responses to open-ended questions were examined using content analysis.¹⁷ Responses from coaches, parents, and administrators were read and coded separately for later comparison across groups. Although participants responded differently to the quantitative questions (i.e., agreed vs. disagreed coaching education should be required), all responses within each group were coded collectively. The first two authors read the raw data several times and identified meaning units, cooperatively grouped meaning units into lower order themes, independently grouped lower order themes into higher order themes, and together agreed upon the final higher order themes through a series of consensus meetings. The initial stages of analyses (i.e., coding and creating lower order themes) were primarily inductive, whereby researchers allowed for lower order themes to emerge based on interpretations of participants' meaning. Later stages of analysis (i.e., forming higher order themes) reflected a more deductive approach in that themes were evaluated and categorized using Bronfenbrenner's¹² PPCT framework. Specifically, themes that related to the interactions between the coach and athlete (e.g., significant relationships that are developed daily, over a season, or consecutive years) were categorized as *process*. Themes that highlighted coach characteristics (e.g., previous playing experience, knowledge of sport) were categorized as *person*. Themes related to aspects of the environment (e.g., resources, type of organization) were categorized as *context*. Finally, themes referencing change within a young athlete and the sport environment were categorized as *time*.

Subsequent to the initial coding, the third author reviewed the proposed lower order themes and offered feedback on their conceptual and theoretical coherence. The third author also offered feedback on the first two authors' deductive clustering of themes into the four categories of Bronfenbrenner's framework. This has been described as an important step in identifying whether each theme was conceptually distinct.¹⁷ Trustworthiness of the data was established through several means.¹⁸ First, triangulation of the data was established by using multiple sources: coaches, parents, and administrators. This afforded a number of complementary perspectives regarding the need for required formal coaching education programs in a youth sport community. The third author served as a

Table 1. Crosstabulation of role in youth sport and agreement with required coaching education.

Role	Agreement with required coaching education			
	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)
Coach	41.6	41.6	9.5	6.5
Parent	37.3	41.2	12.3	9.1
Administrator	44.7	42.1	7.9	5.3
Total sample	39.6	41.6	11.0	7.9

critical friend by evaluating and providing feedback on lower order themes and a second time for higher order themes.¹⁹ This feedback resulted in a number of minor adjustments to the naming of the lower order themes and to their clustering within Bronfenbrenner's higher order categories. Finally, the researchers engaged in reflective analysis and acknowledged post-positivist and discipline-specific biases about the topic of coaching education in youth sport.²⁰

Results

Quantitative findings

Table 1 shows the percent agreement and disagreement with the statement "Coaching education should be required for all coaches" separated by role (i.e., coach, parent, and administrator). Percentages suggest the majority of all participants *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that coaching education should be required for all coaches. A chi-square test of independence was non-significant, $\chi^2 (8, 549) = 4.82, p = .78$, suggesting no relationship was between role in youth sport and degree of agreement with whether coaching education should be required.

Qualitative findings

In an open-ended follow-up question, 173 coaches (85.6%), 245 parents (79.3%), and 30 administrators (78.9%) explained why they *agreed/strongly agreed* or *disagreed/strongly disagreed* with requiring coaching education. The average word count per response was 41.08 words and was similar among those who *agreed/strongly agreed* ($M = 41.39$ words) and those who *disagreed/strongly disagreed* ($M = 39.62$ words). Responses totaled 34 single-spaced pages of text. Analyses resulted in 49 lower order themes reflecting 11 higher order themes. Table 2 displays the PPCT categories, higher order themes, and lower order

Table 2. Categories, higher order themes, and lower order themes from coaches, parents, and administrators.

Category	Higher order theme	Lower order theme	Coach	Parent	Administrator
Process	Coaches significantly impact young athletes	Coaches develop the whole child	X	X	X
		Coaches impact athletes' psychological and physical outcomes	X	X	X
		Leads to positive experience for youth	X	X	X
		Coaches are role models	X	X	
	Coaches need content knowledge	Helps coaches focus on goals of youth sport/athlete development	X	X	X
		Need to know about sportsmanship and life skills	X	X	X
		Need to know about injury and safety	X	X	X
		Need knowledge about working with children	X	X	X
		Need knowledge about teaching methods	X	X	X
		Need to know about motivating athletes	X	X	X
Person	Coaches learn from formal coach education	Need sport-specific knowledge	X	X	X
		Need knowledge about administration and managing a team	X	X	X
		Need knowledge about working with parents	X	X	X
		Need to know about communicating with athletes	X	X	
		Need to know about philosophy and ethics	X		
		Need knowledge about organizing and planning practices	X		
		Need to know about coaching girls		X	
		Need to know how to deal with bullying		X	
		Need to know about discipline and class management			X
		Need to know about sensitivity and inclusion			X
		Way for coaches to learn new things and refresh skills	X	X	X
		Coaches should be educated like teachers	X	X	X
		Need more than playing experience	X	X	
		Need education to be effective coaches	X	X	
		Offers a different perspective	X		
		Other sources of information besides coach education	X	X	X
		Parent as coach	X	X	X
Context	Coaches use other sources of information Coaching depends on the individual	Depends on the coach	X	X	
		Provides support for coaches	X	X	
		Recruit/retain volunteer coaches	X	X	
	Supportive infrastructure	Fear of losing coaches	X	X	X
		Burdensome for coaches	X	X	
		Cost increases will negatively affect participation		X	
	Barriers to coaching education				

(continued)

Table 2. Continued

Category	Higher order theme	Lower order theme	Coach	Parent	Administrator
Time	Environmental factors	Needs to be timely and concise		X	
		Depends on age and competitive level	X	X	X
		Depends on the class	X	X	
		Depends on the parent	X	X	
		Depends on sport type	X		
	Expectations and accountability	Depends on setting		X	
		Depends on the organization		X	
		Creates consistency across coaches	X	X	X
		Parents expect and trust educated coaches	X	X	
		Sets expectations and holds coaches accountable	X		X
	Long-term impact on young athletes	Decreases liability			X
		Coaches impact athletes during a critical period of development and have long term effects	X	X	X
		Coaches influence future participation in sport	X	X	
		Way for coaches to stay updated on changes and current trends	X	X	X
		Need to be aware of increasing competitive environment and intensity of youth sport		X	X
	Changes in the youth sport context	Need to be aware of pressures and complexities of parenting in youth sport		X	

themes, indicating whether the theme was mentioned by coaches, parents, and/or administrators.

Process. The primary proximal process (e.g., coach–athlete interactions) that emerged in the qualitative data was that *coaches significantly impact young athletes*. This higher order theme was supported by five lower order themes, three of which were identified by all participant groups.

Coaches significantly impact young athletes. Coaches, parents, and administrators supported required coaching education because coaches play an important role in children’s physical and psychological development and make a significant difference in the child’s experience. One administrator said, “Coaches should understand how much influence and impact they may have on a young person.” One coach wrote, “As coaches, we are responsible for the ‘whole child,’ and thus coaching education is vital for our knowledge and shared expertise.”

Comments from parents and coaches suggested that coaching education is necessary to teach coaches how to focus less on winning and more on helping each athlete be successful. One coach shared, “When dealing with young or inexperienced athletes, the coach must build in a ‘fun level’ where winning is not the most important thing.” A coach who had been coaching for over 60 years commented, “I am to the point of fright concerning the desire to live through kids to stroke the egos of MOST of the young coaches I have encountered over the past few years. Winning seems to be ALL that drives them to coach.”

Person. Four person characteristics of the coach emerged in the qualitative data: (a) coaches need content knowledge, (b) coaches learn from formal coach education, (c) coaches use other sources of information, and (d) coaching depends on the individual. The four higher order themes were supported by 23 lower order themes, of which 12 were identified by all three participant groups.

Coaches need content knowledge. Coaches, parents, and administrators felt coaching education was necessary because coaches need specific knowledge about how to coach. Participants in each role agreed that coaches should be knowledgeable about sportsmanship and life skills, injury and safety, working with children, methods for teaching, motivating athletes, sport-specific knowledge, managing a team, and working with parents. One parent commented,

Knowledge like injury prevention and identification, child development, and how to provide feedback are

not intuitive. Most people do not possess the entire skill set that would make for a well-informed coach. Many coaches come with the knowledge of their sport—period.

In addition to the themes cited across groups, each group identified unique areas of knowledge they felt coaches needed to be educated about. For example, coaches alone identified that coaches needed to know about philosophy and ethics as well as organizing and planning practices. Only parents responded about coaches need for knowledge about coaching girls and dealing with bullying. Administrators were uniquely concerned with coaches knowing about discipline and class management, and sensitivity and inclusion.

Coaches learn from formal coach education. All three groups reported that requiring formal coaching education can be useful and a way for coaches to update their skills. Participants considered coaches similar to teachers and felt the formal education a teacher receives should also be afforded to youth sport coaches. A parent wrote, “Coaching is not easy; it does not always come ‘naturally.’ Coaches, like teachers and other professionals, must be updated and educated on current practices.” Coaches and parents felt coaches needed more information than simply relying on their personal playing experience and that education was necessary for coaches to be effective. One parent wrote, “It has been our experience that just because a coach played that sport in college, they are not necessarily prepared to coach children in that sport. Playing and coaching are two completely different things.” Coaches alone felt that formal coaching education provides them a different perspective on how to coach. One coach wrote, “It never hurts to hear new ideas and get new tips for success. We tend to coach as we were coached.”

Coaches use other sources of information. Participants from all roles reported required coaching education may not be necessary because coaches learn from other sources than formal education. One coach wrote, “Education comes in many forms; life maturity, on the job training, self study, and formal education.” Another coach commented, “Coaching knowledge is highly obtained by personal experience and through being mentored by other knowledgeable coaches.” In explaining why coaching education is not valuable, one parent shared, “Many coaches receive ‘education’ already through the league in which they coach, but the training isn’t comprehensive or hands on, so it isn’t very effective.” One coach elaborated on the value of experience, “just because you have a piece of paper, it does not make you a better coach. I have coached with great,

State Championship coaches that had no certifications, only real life experience.”

Coaching depends on the individual. Parents and coaches felt requiring coaching education would depend on the individual coach. That is, some coaches need education but others do not. One parent elaborated, “I have seen coaches who are gifted in teaching and managing their teams, and other coaches who could not control the group long enough to...teach them anything. You can’t lump ALL coaches...because their experience varies so widely.” All participant groups expressed a need for requiring coaching education because many coaches are volunteer parent-coaches who could benefit from such education. Coaches, parents, and administrators commented on the dual role many parents play and expressed concern about the quality and knowledge of parents who coached. One parent explained, “They are all parent volunteers and many times do not have the skill set or background to be coaching young athletes... There is a big need for coach training in programs that are run by volunteers.”

Context. Four higher ordered themes of the immediate and broader youth sport context emerged, namely (a) *supportive infrastructure*, (b) *barriers to coaching education*, (c) *environmental factors*, and (d) *expectations and accountability*. These themes were supported by 16 lower order themes, of which three were identified by all participant groups.

Supportive infrastructure. This higher order theme reflected the sentiment expressed by coaches and parents that creating a supportive coaching education climate would be a way to recruit and retain more volunteer coaches. One parent wrote, “I think that coaches want this [coaching education] for the most part. They are looking for support and help in managing the teams.” One coach wrote, “It will also help the coaches who struggle; providing them with tools and ideas to help teach young athletes.” Another parent elaborated on how education could be used as a recruiting tool for additional coaches commenting, “At the rec level, often parents are jumping to coach a sport they know little about...organized coaching education would be very helpful in enticing other parents who might be reluctant to jump in without any training.”

Barriers to coaching education. All participant groups worried that requiring coaching education would reduce the number of volunteer coaches. One coach said, “I just feel that if it is ‘required’, you may lose out on some great coaches because they may not have the time, money, or desire to get educated.”

Administrators echoed similar concerns as one administrator said, “We wouldn’t get as many volunteers if we required coaching education. If we offered it free, it might be ok. But we still wouldn’t get all volunteer coaches to attend.” Many parents commented about the potential problems with requiring coaching education. One parent noted, “By requiring this, I fear you will have less available coaches and the cost of programs would increase.” Another parent elaborated, “At the recreational level, especially for young children, coaching education seems a heavy burden to place on volunteer parents who are already sacrificing a great deal of time and effort.” Some parents wanted to make sure there were enough coaches to allow for their child to participate. One parent wrote, “If no one volunteers, the team can’t participate. I would prefer an inexperienced coach than no coach or team at all.”

Environmental factors. Participants mentioned several contextual factors that would affect whether required coaching education was needed. Participants were considering the quality of the class (e.g., some classes are too general and thus boring), the setting (e.g., coaches in school districts should be certified), the organization (e.g., each organization should decide what education their coaches need), and the parents’ role (e.g., parents are responsible for ensuring their child’s coach is certified). Considerations of age and competitive level were mixed. Some said coaching education is more important at more competitive levels to properly develop advanced players but only minimal education was needed at lower levels. One coach wrote, “If you are coaching 5–8 yr. olds...only a basic knowledge of the game is needed.” One parent commented, “It’s overkill at the younger ages. Maybe the more competitive and the older kids get, it becomes a bit more critical.” Others felt coaching education was needed at the younger level because as one coach said, “Good coaching skills are extremely important at the younger ages so kids enjoy the game and learn proper techniques.”

Expectations and accountability. All participant groups agreed that requiring coaching education would help coaches understand the expectations placed upon them, while also holding them accountable. Participants also felt coaching education could foster consistency across coaches. One coach commented, “Training also implements a common level of expectations and standards,” while a parent noted that coaching education was needed to “level the playing field from coach to coach.” Administrators were concerned with communication in terms of letting coaches know their responsibilities as well as the policies and procedures of their organization. One

administrator said, “it is important for administration to make a stand and communicate the goals and objectives for the program and hold those leaders responsible.” Parents realized that coaches spend a significant amount of time with their children and expected the coach to be knowledgeable, especially if they are paying for their child to participate. One parent wrote, “As a parent when I pay a lot of money for my child to play on a team, I do expect the coach to know what he is doing.”

Time. Two higher order themes reflected changes across time within the athlete and the youth sport context. These themes—(a) *long-term impact on young athletes* and (b) *changes in the youth sport context*—were supported by five lower order themes of which two were identified by all participant groups.

Long-term impact on young athletes. Coaches, parents, and administrators felt required coaching education was important because coaches have a lasting impact on participants. One coach reported, “They are coaching young men and women in their formative years and what they say and do can have long term positive and/or negative effects.” A parent elaborated, “One day, my children will stop playing sports but what they learn on the field, sportsmanship and being a good teammate, will stay with them.” Coaches and parents highlighted that coaches can determine athletes’ future participation, such as whether youth continue to participate and develop interest in being physically active or dropout. One parent wrote, “Coaching education should be required since they are impacting (positively and negatively) children, their view towards athletics, and long-term attitude towards physical activities.” Another parent commented, “I’ve seen many participants turn away from sports due to an under educated coach.”

Changes in the youth sport context. This theme focused on the need for required coaching education so coaches can understand changes in youth sport that have occurred over time. According to all participant groups, coaching education helps coaches stay updated on current trends and recent changes in the youth sport environment. An administrator said, “Coaches need training to handle the problems of today even if they have coached for a while.” Parents and administrators noted that coaches need to be more aware of how to handle the increasingly competitive and intense environment of youth sport. One parent said, “Sports are becoming more and more competitive, advanced, and intense at younger and younger ages... Coaches need to be trained on injuries, psychological aspects, and overall health of children before they are allowed to

coach.” An administrator commented, “Due to the increased pressures from parents, coaches need all of the tools possible to effectively handle their coaching responsibilities.” Parents alone were concerned with coaches not understanding the complexities and pressure of parenting in youth sport these days. One parent said, “Kids are pushed at younger ages to commit and specialize in one sport, which puts more pressure on the child to play hard, and more pressure on the parents to play outside of the designated spring or fall timeslot.”

Discussion

The present study was designed to elicit multiple perspectives from key stakeholders (i.e., coaches, parents, and administrators) about the need for required formal coaching education programs in a youth sport community. Quantitative results showed that the majority of participants—coaches, parents, and administrators—*agreed* or *strongly agreed* that formal coaching education should be required for youth sport coaches. This finding is consistent with previous research showing that most coaches agreed coaching education should be mandatory.⁸ Our study extended previous findings by showing that parents and administrators also agree with requiring coaching education, highlighting consensus among key adult stakeholders in youth sport.

However, despite the overwhelming quantitative evidence regarding the benefits of compulsory coaching education, our qualitative data reveal concerns surrounding its implementation. Coaches, parents, and administrators were afraid that requiring coaching education might adversely affect the number of coaches available and interested in serving, especially given many coaches were parent volunteers. Wiersma and Sherman¹⁰ documented similar worries from coaches regarding the cost and time demands associated with mandatory education. Our results show that parents and administrators share concerns about not having enough coaches. These perspectives from parents and administrators make sense because willing and available coaches are necessary for these parents’ children to participate in sport as well as for the administrators to successfully run their youth sport organizations.

While our sample represents the perspectives of only one youth sport community, concerns about having enough coaches to provide participation opportunities may be a widespread issue, given the substantial number of youth who participate in organized youth sport.^{1,2} Moreover, coaches, parents, and administrators were also concerned about whether requiring coaching education was necessary for every coach at every age and competitive level. The International Council for

Coaching Excellence (ICCE) recognizes that youth participate at different levels of sport and thus different levels of coaching education exist to align with these participation levels.²¹ The ICCE advocates for educated coaches, indicating that certifications for coaches should be tailored to the sport community. Recommendations from SHAPE America echo similar sentiments, proposing that coaches at all levels participate in a least some coaching education.⁴ Ultimately, the implementation of coaching education will depend on what coaches, parents, and administrators deem appropriate and necessary for their athletes, coaches, and youth sport community. In some cases, these decisions may or may not include requiring formal coaching education.

Collectively, open-ended responses suggest coaches, parents, and administrators appear conflicted about whether to require coaching education, despite agreeing with the statement that coaching education should be required. These conflicts are echoed in the literature when considering the costs and benefits of requiring coaching education. It is well documented that cost, whether it be financial or time, is a deterrent associated with coaching education.^{7,22} At the same time, studies on coaching effectiveness show that young athletes who are coached by trained coaches experience greater self-esteem and less anxiety (i.e., benefits) compared to athletes whose coaches are not trained.^{23,24} What is missing in the literature is a direct cost-benefit analysis of coaching education. Future studies are needed to determine whether the benefits of requiring coaching education outweigh the costs of requiring it; such information is essential for coaches, parents, and administrators to make the best decisions for their athletes and organizations.

In addition to the consistent themes cited across groups, our study design allowed for distinct thoughts on coaching education to emerge from each of the three groups. For example, parents alone reported wanting coaches to be educated to better address bullying, coaching girls, and understand the pressures faced by children and parents in youth sport (e.g., early specialization). Coaches and parents, but not administrators, felt requiring coaching education provided support for inexperienced coaches, while only administrators expressed that coaching education can address liability issues. To our knowledge, this is the first study to solicit opinions from parents and administrators on coaching education, complementing previous research that has relied largely on coaches' perspectives.^{10,11} The differing perspectives among the participant groups make a unique contribution to the literature and suggest that coaches, parents, and administrators at least to some extent consider different factors when deciding whether coaching education should be required. What remains unknown is how these perspectives translate into the

actions of coaches, parents, and administrators and affect whether or not coaching education is required. For example, if parents are scared of losing volunteer coaches, they may not put pressure on administrators to provide or require coaching education.

We employed Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development^{12,13} as an orienting lens in the present research. This was a fruitful decision, in that it allowed us to examine many of the proximal processes, personal characteristics, and facets of the youth sport context that impact coaching behaviors and athlete experiences across a window of youth development. Inductively coded themes emerged from the qualitative data that align with Bronfenbrenner's¹² PPCT framework, reinforcing the idea that children's experiences are affected by both proximal and distal factors and confirming the validity of using the PPCT model to understand perspectives on coaching education in youth sport. Applying this ecological framework gives a broader and more comprehensive understanding of the numerous factors that may affect key stakeholders' perspectives on formal coaching education in youth sport. In turn, this model helps clarify how and why development may occur through sport.¹⁴ Using the ecological model, it becomes clear that it is not the child's choice whether they have an educated coach but rather the decisions of significant adults around them that determine whether children have a quality sport experience.

One limitation of the present investigation was that perspectives were gathered from a predominantly White, educated youth sport community and thus results cannot be representative of other youth sport settings. Because this is the first study to include parents' and administrators' perspectives on coaching education, a valuable path will be to replicate this study in a different community to see if similar perspectives emerge from key stakeholders. A second consideration was the limitations inherent in using open-ended questions in an online survey. Future researchers should consider in-depth interviews to explore participants' perspectives through a more inductive and interactive process. Focus groups comprised of parents, coaches, and administrators together would be particularly interesting, allowing participants in different roles to respond directly to each others' views on coaching education. Finally, participants may have occupied multiple roles (e.g., coach and parent) but were asked to complete the survey based on only one of their roles. While we analyzed the data by three discrete groups, it is important to realize the categories were not mutually exclusive and the perspectives of coaches, for example, included those who only coach as well as those who coach and parent youth sport participants. Future studies within this line of research should consider ways to capture these nuances, such as distinguishing

coaches and parent-coaches. In conclusion, results from the present study provide multiple perspectives on requiring formal coaching education in youth sport. It appears there is support for formal coaching education across coaches, parents, and administrators. Yet, much remains to be understood about how best to provide these educational opportunities such that the benefits of having knowledgeable coaches are maximized and the burdens of cost and time are minimized.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

References

1. Jellinek M and Durant S. Parents and sports: too much of a good thing? *Contemp Pediatr* 2004; 21: 17–20.
2. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Morbidity and mortality report*. Vol. 59, No. SS-5. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5905a1.htm#tab88 (2010, accessed 10 April 2017).
3. Lemyre F, Trudel P and Durand-Bush N. How youth sport coaches learn to coach. *Sport Psychol* 2007; 21: 191–209.
4. Murray M, Schoenstedt L and Zwald D. Recommended requisites for sport coaches. *J. Phys Educ Recreat Dance* 2013; 84: 7–12.
5. Nelson LJ, Cushion CJ and Potrac P. Formal, nonformal, and informal coach learning: a holistic conceptualisation. *Int J Sports Sci Coach* 2006; 1: 247–259.
6. Trudel P and Gilbert WD. Coaching and coach education. In: Kirk D, O'Sullivan M and McDonald D (eds) *Handbook of physical education*. London: Sage, 2006, pp.516–539.
7. Misener KE and Danylchuk KE. Coaches' perceptions of Canada's National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP): awareness and value. *Int J Sports Sci Coach* 2009; 4: 233–243.
8. Vargas-Tonsing TM. Coaches' preferences for continuing coaching education. *Int J Sports Sci Coach* 2007; 2: 25–35.
9. Erickson K, Bruner MW, MacDonald DJ, et al. Gaining insight into actual and preferred sources of coaching knowledge. *Int J Sports Sci Coach* 2008; 3: 527–538.
10. Wiersma LD and Sherman CP. Volunteer youth sport coaches' perspectives of coaching education/certification and parental codes of conduct. *Res Q Exer Sport* 2005; 76: 324–338.
11. McCullick B, Schempp P, Mason I, et al. A scrutiny of the coaching education program scholarship since 1995. *Quest* 2009; 61: 322–335.
12. Bronfenbrenner U. *Making human beings human: bioecological perspectives on human development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005.
13. Bronfenbrenner U and Morris PA. The ecology of developmental process. In: Lerner RM and Damon W (eds) *Handbook of child psychology: vol. 1. Theoretical models of human development*. 5th ed. New York: Wiley, 1998, pp.993–1027.
14. García Bengoechea E and Johnson GM. Ecological systems theory and children's development in sport: toward a process-person-context-time research paradigm. *Avante* 2001; 7: 20–31.
15. Horn TS. Coaching effectiveness in the sport domain. In: Horn TS (ed.) *Advances in sport psychology*. 3rd ed. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2008, pp.239–267.
16. Tudge JR, Mokrova I, Hatfield BE, et al. Uses and misuses of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development. *J Fam Theory Rev* 2009; 1: 198–202.
17. Patton MQ. *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. 3rd ed. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 2002.
18. Lincoln YS and Guba EG. But is it rigorous? Trustworthiness and authenticity in naturalistic evaluation. In: Williams DD (ed.) *New directions for program evaluation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1986, pp.73–84.
19. Hill GW. *Critical friendship*. Toowong, Australia: Mottram d'Hill & Associates, 2002.
20. Finlay L. "Outing" the researcher: the provenance, process, and practice of reflexivity. *Qual Health Res* 2002; 12: 531–545.
21. ICCE, ASOIF, and LMU. *International sports coaching framework version 1.2*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, www.icce.ws/_assets/files/iscf-1.2-10-7-15.pdf (2013, accessed 21 September 2017).
22. Cushion C, Nelson L, Armour K, et al. *Coach learning and development: a review of literature*. Leeds, UK: Sports Coach UK, 2010.
23. Smith RE, Smoll FL and Cumming SP. Effects of a motivational climate intervention for coaches on young athletes' sport performance anxiety. *J Sport Exer Psychol* 2007; 29: 39–59.
24. Smith RE, Smoll FL and Curtis B. Coach effectiveness training: a cognitive-behavioral approach to enhancing relationship skills in youth sport coaches. *J Sport Psychol* 1979; 1: 59–75.