

## COACHING

# Effect of an Educational Intervention on Youth Swim Coaches' Behaviors

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## Abstract

*This research project examined the effects of an external educational training intervention delivered to coaches, parents, and athletes on youth swim coaches' behaviors. Coaches' perceptions of their own behavior, athletes' perceptions of coaches' behavior, and the sport environment were explored. Youth swim coaches within one organization were asked to complete an online survey prior to their involvement in a coach training workshop and another at the end of their sport season. Coaches also participated at the end of their season in a 45-min discussion about their overall experience with the training. Youth athletes completed at the end of the season a one-on-one discussion regarding their experience with their coach. Results of this study indicate the coaches' overall awareness of their behaviors increased after they completed the training. Coaches and athletes reported positive behavior consistent with the concepts emphasized in the educational training intervention. These results may further previous research on coach training interventions examining perceptions of the coaches and youth athletes on the effect of a coach training intervention on youth sport.*

Positive youth development (PYD) is a theoretical approach to the personal development of adolescents and emphasizes growth in attributes, skills, and overall well-being (Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma, 2006; Weiss, 2008). Based on developmental systems

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theories, PYD theory supports the idea that youth become successful adults through social interactions and that young people have the potential for positive change in their lives (Lerner, Brentano, Dowling, & Anderson, 2002). One avenue for the achievement of PYD is organized youth sport. By facilitating positive bonds between young people and adults, the sport context provides opportunities for youth to develop important assets, and an opportunity remains for further development during a critical stage of the athlete's life (Trottier & Robitaille, 2004).

When youth can identify positive emotions, such as happiness or enjoyment, they can access emotional resources that enhance social connections (Gano-Overway et al., 2009). Social connections within a PYD sport setting consist of youth and peer relationships, as well as youth athlete and coach relationships. Specifically, PYD environments build assets by facilitating positive bonds between young people and adults. The quality of the relationships between youth and coaches is important for validating self-worth and creating positive relationships between adults and young people, which ultimately contributes to the development of youth (Jones, 2005). Although many organized youth sport programs are not specifically titled as a PYD program, concepts of PYD that enhance the overall well-being of adolescents should be applied.

## **Relationships**

Self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2002) provides a framework for examining how social relationships interact in predicting positive outcomes through three basic psychological needs, autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which can be evaluated specifically among youth. Autonomy refers to the need for individuals to experience freedom and a commitment to a certain behavior or action (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). Competence refers to the need for individuals to experience the ability to complete an action successfully. Relatedness is the need for individuals to feel connected and have a sense of belonging, according to Niemic and Ryan (2009).

According to SDT, individuals engaged in an activity by choice reap more benefits than those whose participation is less autonomous (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Furthermore, SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2002) consists of three types of motivation leading to specific behavior: amotivation, extrinsic motivation, and intrinsic motivation. Niemic

and Ryan (2009) found that enhancing autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the classroom led to an increase in intrinsic motivation among students. These findings suggest that enhancing a youth athlete's autonomy, competence, and relatedness can lead to an overall positive experience, which coaches can achieve by fostering intrinsic motivation through strategies that enhance these psychological needs in youth sport (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2002; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009).

A strong theoretical foundation explains the importance of social influences, adult and youth relationships, and the effect of these relationships on the experiences of youth within a youth physical-activity-enhanced environment (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2002). Harter (1999) explained the importance of the context in which youth have relationships with adults (e.g., parent-child or athlete-coach relational context). Such importance can be seen when youth participate in athletics and believe athletics is a key component of their life; if they view athletics as a significant part of their identity, they may be more sensitive to feedback provided by a coach within the athlete-coach relational context (Coatsworth & Conroy, 2006). Research by Kenow and Williams (1999) suggests coach-athlete compatibility strongly influences the athlete's self-confidence. The more compatible the athlete perceived the relationship with the coach, the more likely the athlete experienced fewer negative cognitive effects; the more compatibility that existed, the more likely the athlete felt support from the coach. Therefore, coaches must be aware of the environment they create within sport, because it affects youths' perceptions of self and personal and sport development.

## **Youth Sport Environment**

Young people who experience a caring environment are more likely to obtain greater happiness and psychological well-being (Noddings, 2006). Coaches can structure the youth sport environment to promote caring through modeling, emphasizing the importance of caring for one another, and creating teachable moments (Gano-Overway et al., 2009). However, coaches also have the potential to structure a negative youth sport environment. According to McPartlin (2010), coaches who place a strong focus on winning and who practice negative reinforcement strategies may cause decreased motivation and an increased risk of injury in their

athletes. Negative psychosocial outcomes including performance anxiety and low self-perception can also be the result of a controlling, winning-based coaching style (McPartlin, 2010; Weiss, 2008).

When youth perceive a positive and caring environment, they are more likely to feel happy, thus finding it easier to establish a relationship with peers and adults (Fry et al., 2012; Newton et al., 2007). Furthermore, if coaches can create a caring environment, they have the opportunity to influence an athlete's psychological development, including the development of self-perception. In a study that investigated connectedness and self-esteem in a sports-based youth development program for girls, Markowitz (2011) found that the program context created an environment for the youth to develop relationships with peers and adults. Leaders in the program had a significant effect on the girls' self-esteem development by providing encouragement, support, and validation to enhance the girls' self-perceptions. Results of this study indicated that the participants continued to gain skills even after program completion. Ullrich-French, McDonough, and Smith (2012) reported similar findings in that perceptions of social connections in a PYD program were related to psychological outcomes. Specifically, an increased perception of self-worth among youth participants occurred over 4 weeks. Youth also experienced enhanced pro-social skills, and the connection, or relationship, between youth and adults played an important role in this development (Ullrich-French et al., 2012). These studies maintain that leaders can enhance their ability to structure a caring, supportive climate and can enhance their relationship with youth through appropriate leadership training.

## **Coach Training**

Coach training programs provide an opportunity for coaches to enhance their coaching behavior and ultimately create an environment where they can contribute to youth development by providing optimal psychological benefits through their participation (Conroy & Coatsworth, 2006). Smith and Smoll (1979) developed a training program for teaching youth sport coaches how to create a positive experience for youth athletes entitled Coach Effectiveness Training. These programs have been effective in changing coaching behavior

by increasing the amount of reinforcement demonstrated by coaches (Conroy & Coatsworth, 2006; Smith & Smoll, 1990).

Training coaches to improve certain behaviors and decrease others can change the quality of the youth sport experience and, if used consistently, may enhance youth development. Conroy and Coatsworth (2006) stated that coach training workshops, or programs based on similar principles, have been effective in changing coach behaviors and eventually led to youths' increased perception of themselves. For example, Conroy and Coatsworth found that girls with low self-esteem who were on the team with trained coaches demonstrated a greater increase in self-esteem than the girls who were playing on the team with the untrained coaches.

Research has found other positive effects of coach training. Specifically, Macdonald, Côté, and Deakin (2010) found that youth athletes who had a coach who underwent training reported higher rates of social skills than athletes who had a coach who was not trained. Cognitive skills, goal setting, and initiative were three positive aspects resulting from athletes who participated on a team with a trained coach, along with personal and social skills (Macdonald et al., 2010). Consistent with Conroy and Coatsworth (2006), Macdonald et al. found that athletes with trained coaches reported higher levels of positive psychosocial skills.

While research has indicated the effect that coach training programs have led to PYD, there is a lack of research on the effect of a training intervention on a sport organization (Conroy & Coatsworth, 2006; Smith & Smoll, 1979; Weiss, Stuntz, Bhalla, Bolter, & Price, 2013). Langan, Blake, and Lonsdale (2013) reviewed the literature on the effectiveness of coach training interventions and coach education interventions and concluded that more research is needed for the effectiveness of such interventions to be understood. While studies have examined the effects of training programs with systematic evaluation measures, they have focused on the Smith and Smoll (1979) Coach Effectiveness Training model (Conroy & Coatsworth, 2006; Langan et al., 2013; Smoll & Smith, 2006).

Despite the lack of research, the literature has begun to expand upon the effect of coach training interventions. Falcão and Bloom (2012) examined the effect of a coach training program based on

coaches' perceptions. Six youth sport coaches participated in a 2-hr workshop and were subsequently asked about their perceptions of the training and the promotion of youth developmental outcomes in the qualitative study. Results indicated coaches perceived positive outcomes for themselves, their athletes, and their teams. Research applications encouraged by Falcão and Bloom (2012) included assessing youth perceptions and more studies of youth development applications to sport. This study fills the gap in research regarding the effect of coach training on a targeted training program based on coaches' and athletes' perceptions.

### **This Study**

In an examination of perceptions of the youth sport climate and coaching behaviors, the effectiveness of a specific coach training intervention was explored. This study examined the effect of an educational training intervention on youth sport coaches' behaviors. Coaches were taught the concept of being a "Double-Goal Coach," with coaches having two main goals: to win and to use sports to teach positive character traits and life lessons. To accomplish both of these goals, coaches were introduced to different coaching strategies that would contribute to achieving the program goals. Core concepts and behaviors covered in training included praise, appreciation, positive recognition, listening, and nonverbal support. Thus, the training instructor emphasized the importance of these five behaviors for coaching in a youth sport context, concluding that youth will have a more pleasant sport experience when these aspects are present (Thompson, 2003). In addition to coaches attending training, the athletes completed an athlete workshop and parents of athletes completed a parent workshop. These workshops discussed concepts specific to athletes and parents.

This study explored coaches' perceptions of their own behavior, athletes' perceptions of a coach's behavior, and the sport environment. Implementation of strategies learned was also explored. Perceptions of athletes and coaches were examined based on one athletic season following a coach training intervention. It was hypothesized that the coaches would implement strategies that they learned in the coach training into their coaching practice and behavior.

## Method

### Participants

Coaches and athletes from one swim organization in a Midwest suburb participated in the study. Initially, parents also participated in the study; however, there were not sufficient data for analyses. The organization consists of 10 coaches and approximately 100 youth athletes competing in club swimming. For this study, coaches were recruited based on their involvement in a coach training workshop. Athletes were recruited if their coach was involved in the training workshop.

**Coaches.** Four coaches participated in the study. Three coaches completed the preseason questionnaire, and two coaches completed the postseason questionnaire and an interview. One coach completed all three means of the data collection process. The three coaches who completed the preseason survey identified as White/Caucasian and ranged in age from 29 to 45 years ( $M = 37.33$ ,  $SD = 8.02$ ). All three coaches had 3 years of experience working with the current swim organization, and competitive coaching experience among them ranged from 11 to 30 years ( $M = 20.33$ ,  $SD = 9.50$ ). All coaches had completed American Swimming Coaches Association (ASCA) training, and one coach had a master's degree in coaching, while the other two had a coaching license. The coaches had never completed the educational training intervention.

**Athletes.** Athletes were recruited based on their coach's involvement in the training workshop. Sixteen athletes completed a postseason interview. Demographics were obtained for 15 of those athletes (11 males, 4 females), who ranged from ages 10 to 17 years ( $M = 13.5$ ,  $SD = 2.21$ ). Eleven athletes indicated their race as White/Caucasian, while the remaining five indicated their race as Asian, Asian/White/Caucasian, or Other. The athletes' experience in competitive swimming ranged from 2 to 10 years ( $M = 5.87$ ,  $SD = 2.33$ ), and the athletes had competed under their current coach for half of a year up to 4 years ( $M = 1.77$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ).

### Measures

Four measures were used: one quantitative measure and three qualitative measures. Qualitative measures included open-ended

questions and semistructured interviews. Brief semistructured interviews were the primary method for data collection from the coaches and athletes.

**Coach behavior change.** Self-reported coaching practices were measured with questions developed by the author based on the concepts that were part of the coach training curriculum (see Appendix A). Questions from the Coach's Character Development Self-Evaluation Checklist were also used as a reference for these questions (Davidson, Moran-Miller, & Beedy, 2004). Questions were open ended and included topics of character development and coaching philosophy. An example of a provided question is "As a coach, I try to develop positive character in my players by..."

**Athlete perception of coach behavior.** Athletes' perceptions of coach behavior were assessed through semistructured interviews with athletes discussing their coach's behavior from the beginning of the season to the end of the season (see Appendix B). Questions explored whether the athlete recognized a difference in her or his coach's behavior throughout the season and ultimately investigated if the coaches were implementing concepts from the training. Questions included "What were some of the most common behaviors you saw your coach do throughout the season?" and "How did your coach handle situations where an athlete made a mistake?"

## **Training Intervention**

The educational training intervention consisted of three workshops delivered by an external agency that has been conducting workshops for over 10 years (Thompson, 2003). The mission of the training is to develop better athletes and better people through coaches and parents in youth sport. The three workshops conducted in this study included a coach workshop, an athlete workshop, and a parent workshop. For this study, the effects of the coach workshop as it related to coach and athlete perception were addressed. The athletes were not questioned over the workshop they completed nor the information obtained from it.

The coach workshop spanned 2 hr and provided information through an oral, in-person presentation on the concepts of positive coaching. The mission statement of the training program is to "develop 'better athletes, better people,' by working to provide all youth and high school athletes a positive, character-building youth

sports experience” (Thompson, 2003, p. 8). Behaviors taught in the training and targeted in this study included praise, appreciation, positive recognition, listening, and nonverbal support by coaches.

## **Procedure**

Following approval from the institutional review board, the external agency that delivered the educational training was asked to participate in the study and to provide information on local trainings planned for the near future. A member of the agency then connected the researcher with a director of a swim organization who had completed the educational training for the first time. The director of the swim organization was contacted and asked to participate; after the director agreed, he became the point of contact throughout the study.

Coach e-mails were obtained from the director of the swim organization. All 10 coaches were sent a recruitment e-mail that asked them to complete the preseason survey. One coach completed the survey within a week; a reminder e-mail was sent 2 weeks after the initial e-mail, and two additional coaches completed the preseason survey thereafter. The questionnaire took about 15 min for the coaches to complete. At the end of the season, coaches were contacted again via e-mail and asked to complete postseason measures including the questionnaire and the interview. A reminder e-mail was sent 2 weeks after the initial e-mail; two coaches completed the postseason questionnaire up to a month following the end of the season. The same two coaches also agreed to participate in an interview that took 10 to 20 min and occurred within a month after the end of the athletic season. Only one coach completed all preseason and postseason measures.

To obtain athlete participation, parents were asked to consent for their child to participate in the study. Parent e-mails were also obtained from the director of the swim organization. Informed consent from parents was collected in person by the research team. Athletes gave assent prior to participating in postseason interviews, which took 2 to 10 min to complete. All consent and assent were collected by the research team prior to the interviews, which were completed in person and via phone based on the athletes' availability. In-person interviews were completed during a practice, and parents

of athletes not in attendance at practice were contacted and asked for a phone interview for convenience purposes.

## **Design and Analysis**

This case study has a qualitative design. The semistructured interviews were transcribed verbatim. Minor edits for purposes of confidentiality and clarity were made. The interview data were analyzed through identification and classification of themes (Côté, Salmela, Baria, & Russell, 1993). Two members of the research team analyzed the interview data independently and collaborated to compare conclusions. Themes were determined based on frequently used concepts; eight themes were identified.

## **Results**

Four coaches participated in the study; three (Coaches 1, 3, and 4) completed the preseason open-ended questionnaire and two (Coaches 1 and 2) completed the postseason open-ended questionnaire and semistructured interview. Only one coach completed premeasures and postmeasures. Sixteen athletes completed postseason semistructured interviews.

Eight themes were identified based on the information obtained from the preseason and postseason questionnaires and interviews, from a combination of the coach and athlete data. The preseason questionnaire aimed to identify coaches' expectations of the training and coaches' current behavior. The postseason questionnaire and semistructured interview sought to identify concepts or strategies from training that coaches utilized. Of the eight themes, six related to coaches' behaviors and two related to coaches' perceptions of training.

The themes for coaches' behaviors based on concepts learned from the educational training included (a) an increase of coach awareness of behavior, (b) coaches' focus on effort, (c) coaches' use of positive reinforcement, (d) coaches' focus on the athletes, (e) athletes' openness with coaches, and (f) working to improve the coach and athlete relationship.

Two themes were based on the coaches' perception of the training: (a) planning for the future and (b) positive experience. The results are presented with interview statements and are cited by

either “Coach” or “Athlete” followed by a number to represent the different individuals.

### **Increase of Coach Awareness of Behavior**

An increase of the coaches’ awareness of their own behavior was found based on the coaches’ experience with the training. Overall, coaches stated that after completing the training, they were more aware of their interactions with their athletes and the behaviors that they exhibited, as well as the effect it had on their interactions with athletes. For example, Coach 1 said,

I was definitely a lot more aware of my interactions with both one-on-one individuals and also the group. I kind of paid a lot more attention to the language that I was using . . . one of the challenges for me was avoiding sarcasm . . . working with teenagers, I had to kind of really be aware of that and had to catch myself to avoid using sarcasm with them.

Coach 2 shared,

We noticed that we were lacking in individual attention that we were giving the kids . . . we don’t put enough time in our schedules to have the one-on-one with all of the athletes.

### **Coaches’ Focus on Effort**

With an increase in awareness of their behavior, coaches reported the use of specific strategies that aligned with concepts learned in the training, specifically encouraging effort in the athletes. The athletes also indicated that they felt their coach wanted them to put forth their best effort in practice and in competition. Coach 1 stated,

One thing we discussed a lot more was effort . . . we would talk about how giving your best effort is one of the main objectives that we would have on a daily basis, just to get the best effort out of the athletes . . . just had a team focus on effort.

This theme was also supported by the athletes’ perceptions of coaches’ priorities or goals for practice. Athlete 5 stated, “Just try your hardest but have fun.” Athlete 8 responded, “He wants us to race

hard and put our best effort forward.” When asked what the most common word or sentence their coach said throughout the season, Athlete 10 stated, “Work hard but have fun.” Athletes consistently reported that their coach not only wanted them do their best and work hard but also wanted to ensure they were having fun in the process.

### **Coaches’ Focus on Positive Reinforcement**

Coaches also reported using positive reinforcement, another strategy that aligned with concepts from the training. Positive reinforcement was directly identified as a theme based on the coaches’ quotations, verbatim. Coaches were asked questions based on their coaching philosophy and on character development in the post-season questionnaire. Specifically, coaches were asked to complete the sentence, “As a coach, I try to develop positive character in my players by \_\_\_\_\_.” Coach 1 reported, “. . . allowing mistakes, encouraging effort and reinforcing actions that are positive toward others.” Coach 2 reported, “. . .encouraging positive reinforcement, teamwork, and character development.” Positive behavior is emphasized as a part of the educational training. Furthermore, when asked questions regarding coaching strategies learned in the training, Coach 2 said, “We try to do more of that positive reinforcement and, you know, getting the kids to buy into being better teammates.”

### **Coaches’ Focus on the Athletes**

The coaches reported that they work to improve athletes’ well-being. This theme was identified based on coaches’ responses related to how they enhance the athlete as an individual. Both pre-season and postseason questionnaires, as well as interview results, reflected that the coaches universally had a strong focus on the athletes. Specifically, coaches were asked what they expected to gain from the training workshop, which the majority responded by saying they wanted to be a better coach for the benefit of their athletes. For example, Coach 1 shared that the training workshop would give him “. . . more tools to help me better develop athletes,” and Coach 3 responded he wanted to “. . . learn new, improved, ways to motivate my swimmers.”

Coaches also answered questions based on their coaching philosophy and on character development. Coaches 1 and 4 indicated

that they think character development involves “teaching life lessons.” Coach 3 reported trying to develop positive character in the athletes by “focusing on the process,” and Coach 1 reported trying to develop positive character by “leading by example.”

### **Athletes’ Openness With Coaches**

Athletes’ openness with the coaches was identified through the athletes’ responses that their coach was a good listener and was willing to accept their feedback. When asked about coaches’ listening behavior, Athlete 7 responded, “I think he listens really well, like he’ll take our suggestions into practice.” Coaches also explicitly stated that they saw an increase in openness from the athletes after they made changes based on attending the educational training. When asked if coaches saw any direct influence in changes of behavior during individual meetings, Coach 2 responded, “I think the kids are more willing to give us their feedback . . . it kind of allows them to give us that feedback a little easier than just keeping it to themselves.”

### **Working to Improve the Coach–Athlete Relationship**

The coach–athlete relationship reportedly improved throughout the season. The coach and athlete relationship was identified through the coaches’ interactions with the athlete and through the athletes’ responses to their coaches’ behavior. For instance, Coach 1 responded,

I felt like . . . some of the athletes did seem more comfortable coming to me, and open with me when they had, I guess, problems or concerns with, maybe the way things were going for them personally, or issues with teammates . . . so I think I saw this past season a little bit high level of openness I guess with my athletes . . . I think there was some definite growth in, kind of, our relationship between the coaches and athletes from [the beginning of the season] through [the end of the season].

Athlete 13 commented,

I think that from an athlete and coach standpoint it was really good because he got to really meet and . . . meet every individual athlete and it was good because it was easier for

him to give you advice when you needed to fix something, something that might have been easier for you to personally understand.

## **Planning for the Future**

The first theme identified based on the coaches' perceptions of the training was the coaches' plan to use strategies from the training in the future. This theme was identified based on the coaches' responses to several questions in the interview. They indicated that with more time and preparation, they planned to use more of what they learned in their future training. Coach 1 described strategies he implemented directly from the training and how he plans to continue to implement them in the future:

One of the things we used was . . . the "Athlete of the Day," where we would pick one athlete without them knowing . . . we would go out of our way to find them doing things correctly . . . that would usually be somebody that needed kind of a positive emotional boost . . . feeding them positive energy and really just catching them doing things correctly. Another strategy that we used was what we called the "Winners Circle," and it was the athlete . . . it wouldn't be the whole team . . . it would just be 20 or 30 kids at a time and they'd all just be in a group and they had to just say positive, one thing positive about one of their teammates and how they have helped them or how they have encouraged them in the past week.

When asked about the strategies implemented from the training, Coach 1 said, ". . . We do plan on doing a goal meeting with them after our break . . . [the Winners Circle] is something we're considering adding on a weekly basis . . . for the future." Coach 2 stated, ". . . as far as making some subtle changes . . . sit down with every kid individually, setting enough goals . . . try to make a little more conscious effort to spend a little more time with those."

## **Positive Experience**

The coaches reported an overall positive perception of the training and also reflected on their desire to continue to implement

strategies in the future. Coach 1 provided his overall perception of the educational training, saying it was a “. . . positive experience, it’s something that I would definitely look to do again with the coaching staff.”

## Discussion

This study examined the effect of an educational training intervention on youth sport coaches’ behaviors. Specifically, athletes and coaches from one swim organization participated in the study, sharing their perceptions on the effect of the training on coaches’ behaviors. Eight themes were identified, six related to coach behavior and two related to the perceptions of the educational intervention. The themes related to PYD, the coach training intervention, and SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2002).

The themes identified in this study are consistent with concepts of PYD and the training intervention. Specifically, coaches’ focus on effort, use of positive reinforcement, and coaches’ focus on the overall well-being of the athletes create a positive environment for youth athletes (Benson et al., 2006; Trottier & Robitaille, 2014; Weiss, 2008). Athletes’ openness with coaches and an improvement in the coach–athlete relationship contribute to the youths’ overall experience (Jones, 2005; Lerner et al., 2002). Coaches in this study were trained on concepts within positive coaching (Conroy & Coatsworth, 2006; Smith & Smoll, 1979), and coaches and athletes in the swim organization reported behaviors consistent with positive coaching.

The theoretical framework in SDT explains the importance of social influences in adult and youth relationships in youth sport (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2002). The themes related to coaches’ behavior included how the coaches interact with the athletes. Athletes unanimously reported that their coaches listened to them. Coaches 1 and 2 reported satisfactory relationships with their athletes and that their athletes were more open with them. The coach–athlete relationship within the youth sport context can have a pivotal effect on the youth sport experience (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Jones, 2005), and according to SDT, social relationships interact in predicting positive outcomes for young athletes (Niemic & Ryan, 2009).

For the effectiveness of the training on the coaches, coaches reported being more aware of their behaviors and the language they used with their athletes. The educational training was the first

time the coaches had been presented material on positive coaching. Coaches were taught positive coaching strategies, such as how to balance winning and teaching positive character traits and life lessons. In this study, coaches indicated after the intervention that they believe character development involves teaching life lessons, which aligns with concepts of the training. This finding corresponds with those in other studies examining the effectiveness of other coach training interventions, which found that coaches perceived the training to be positive for themselves and their athletes (Conroy & Coatsworth, 2006; Falcão & Bloom, 2012).

Coaches and athletes in this study discussed how effort was encouraged, which aligns with the educational intervention's focus of rewarding effort, developing effort-based goals, and targeting symbolic rewards. Athletes stated that their coaches used "encouraging" words and athletes reported an overall positive experience. These results are consistent with those in Markowitz (2011), who found that providing encouragement and support enhanced participants' self-perceptions and self-esteem in a youth sport program.

The effect the educational intervention had on coaches' behavior is apparent, although arguably minor. Because this is the first time the coaches have undergone the training, they may not have had enough time to implement the strategies (Falcão & Bloom, 2012). Nonetheless, coaches reported being more aware of their behaviors and planned to use concepts and strategies from the training in the future. Athletes discussed behaviors their coaches exhibited that were consistent with positive coaching and with the training workshop. Thus, coaches may need to receive multiple training workshops and be offered reminders about the targeted positive coaching behaviors emphasized by the training workshop.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This study found that an educational training intervention had an effect on coaches in a youth swim organization. Though it appears that the results of the study reveal an effect on the coaches, it is important that the limitations are noted and ideas provided for future research to expand upon the literature. One limitation is that, based on the data from the preseason questionnaire, at least one coach was already using some of the coaching strategies that were consistent with the concepts taught in the training. Because of this

limitation, measuring the direct effect from the training was difficult. It may be necessary for future research to distinguish coaches' behaviors and beliefs prior to and after the intervention to discover the changes, if any, related to the training intervention.

Results of this study were explored through concepts of SDT and the effect of social relationship on youths' experience in a youth sport environment (Deci & Ryan, 2002). However, this study did not examine the effect of the training on youths' experiences or developmental outcomes. Further research should include a longitudinal study observing youth athletes' developmental outcomes in a coach training environment.

This study also examined the effect of an educational intervention at one swim club in the Midwest suburbs. Further research should include more than one swim organization either in the Midwest or nationwide and an increased number of participants. Having a control group would strengthen the results and implications of the effectiveness of the training.

## **Implications**

Overall, the educational training intervention had an effect on the coaches. Though this was a pilot study, the findings provide coaches and coach educators with information on the effect of implementing coaching techniques. Ultimately, coach training has helped coaches promote youth development (Conroy & Coatsworth, 2006). In addition to training coaches, youth sport organizations can learn the importance of employing educated coaches so that youth athletes have the opportunity to have a positive sport experience.

## **Conclusion**

The educational training intervention had an effect on the coaches who underwent the program. Coaches reported implementing strategies they learned and planning to more frequently implement concepts and strategies of the training in future seasons. Overall, coaches were more aware of their behaviors and interactions with their athletes. Athletes expressed that their coach created a positive youth sport environment and encouraged them to put forth their best effort. Further research should continue to expand upon youth developmental outcomes and coach training literature.

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## Appendix A: Coach Questionnaire

1. What do/did you expect to gain from completing this coach training workshop?

Please complete the following statements

2. My coaching philosophy is...
3. As a coach, I think character development involves...
4. As a coach, I try to develop positive character in my players by...

Please indicate how frequently the following occur on a Likert-type scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *always*) and explain your response.

5. At the beginning of the season, coaches, players, and their parents explicitly discuss the core values that will define our team.
6. As a team, we regularly discuss our team's values, what they mean, how we live by them, and why they are important.
7. As a coach, I focus on effort over results.
8. Athletes are challenged throughout the season to develop performance character (e.g., work ethic, perseverance, self-discipline).
9. Athletes are challenged throughout the season to develop moral character (e.g., respect, responsibility, honesty, caring).
10. As a coach, I reward unsuccessful effort.
11. I meet with athletes individually to help them construct a vision of who they want to be as athletes.
12. I meet with athletes individually to help them construct a vision of who they want to be as people outside of their sport.
13. I use communication to help athletes deal with nervousness or fear of failure.
14. I use communication to teach athletes how to deal with mistakes.

## **Appendix B: Athlete Interview Questions**

1. How was your coach similar or different in his/her behaviors towards the end of the season compared to the beginning?
2. What were some of the most common behaviors you saw your coach do?
3. What was the most common word or sentence you heard your coach say throughout the season?
4. How well does your coach listen to you?
5. How did your coach handle situations where an athlete made a mistake?
6. What are the main priorities or goals of your coach for practices? For competitions?
7. How did you feel overall with your coach this season?