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Abstract

Organised sport provides favourable conditions for positive psychosocial development (Larson, 2000). However, few studies have examined how sport facilitates positive development. The purpose of this study was to explore how perceived life skills were developed. Five formal, semi-structured interviews, and around 30 hours of informal discussions were conducted with a single participant. Resultant transcripts were subjected to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Findings reveal an integration of processes, which resulted in positive development. Dispositions (e.g., hard work & self-awareness) facilitated the learning of life skills. Experiential learning was described as the method in which the participant learned new life skills. Specifically, the experience of playing tennis required the participant to develop life skills. Findings provide a unique insight into the development of life skills. Findings are discussed in relation to extant life skill research and positive youth development research.

Exploring Perceived Life Skills Development and Participation in Sport

Organised sport provides favourable conditions for young people to engage in positive psychosocial development (Larson, 2000). Indeed, research has suggested sport participation is associated with academic achievement (Marsh & Kleitman, 2003), reduced use of illegal drugs (Kulig, Brener, & McManus, 2003), and reduced engagement in risky sexual behaviours (Miller, Barnes, Melnick, Sabo, & Farrell, 2002). Sport has also been associated with the development of life skills (Goudas, Dermitizaki, Leondari, & Danish, 2006; Papacharisis, Goudas, Danish, & Theodorakis, 2005). The World Health Organisation (WHO: 1999) defines life skills as the ability for adaptive and positive behaviour that enables individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Danish, Petitpas, and Hale (1995) postulated that sport could be used as a vehicle to teach life skills.

Unfortunately, healthy youth development is an abstract process. Development occurs over long periods and partially within the private thoughts and feelings of the individual (Larson & Walker, 2005). As such, it is hard to observe improvements in life skills. Typically, adults are unaware of development occurring until a young person demonstrates a positive outcome. Therefore, it may be difficult to identify how and when to intervene to augment development. To understand how and when to intervene research is needed that explores how life skills are developed.

To date the majority of research has been quantitative and has focused on the outcomes of positive youth development. For example, Larson and colleagues (Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003; Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006) investigated the types of developmental experiences that youth encounter in different extracurricular activities (including organised sport). Hansen et al. suggested sport was associated with higher rates of self-knowledge, emotional regulation, and

physical skill experiences (compared with service, faith, community, and vocational activities). Sport was also associated with higher rates of negative peer interaction and inappropriate adult behaviour. Larson et al. suggested sport was associated with the development of initiative (i.e., high rates of sustained effort & setting goals). A limitation of this research is the lack of information on the processes related to these developmental experiences. As such, practitioners do not know how young sports people develop and improve their life skills. By omitting procedural information, it is hard to distinguish how life skills were developed and how practitioners can use this information for life skills interventions.

Existing life skills programmes (e.g., GOAL: Danish, 2002a, & Sport United to Promote Education & Recreation: Danish, 2002b) state that life skills need to be systematically taught. However, recent research has suggested that 'teaching' may be more about structuring the sport environment. From this perspective, adults and young people work alongside each other. Development is a process in which young people are conscious and deliberate producers of their own development (Larson, 2000; Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Jellic, 2005). As such, young people should not have to rely on adults to learn life skills.

Larson and Walker (2006) investigated the processes of positive youth development in an organised art context. The analysis of young people's experiences in the Art First youth project revealed that developmental change involved initial conflict followed by stimulated adaptive learning. Young people encountered real-world challenges posed by the situations encountered in the programme. For example, demands for professional behaviour, tedious tasks, and having their work criticised and re-worked. Larson and Walker stated that in this situation young people's initial reaction was often surprise, aggravation, or disappointment. In time, young people actively accommodated and assimilated to the norms of the professional setting. They

described gradually coming to understand how and why things were done and gained confidence in exercising agency in that setting. This was not a simple process. Participants reported cycles of learning as they responded to different challenges during the six weeks of the programme. Larson and Walker stated that in these developmental accounts, young people represented themselves as active participants in the process of adaptive learning in both identifying challenges in the setting and learning from them.

In a similar study, Larson (2006) investigated the processes of how young people learned teamwork as a critical life skill for adult life. Larson and colleagues investigated how youth developed computer and video skills. Three perspectives were utilised to investigate the phenomenon including participant observation, interviews with adult programme leaders, and interviews with representative youth. Results revealed that youth learned teamwork in three ways. Youth said they learned from experience, through taking others' perspectives, and through growing trust, which led to the development of collective norms.

The problem exists that extant research has not investigated how to develop life skills through sport. It is unclear whether existing theories of how young people develop positive skills through organised activities is applicable to young people participating in sporting activities. There is a need for research to identify how life skills are developed. Researchers have suggested the use of qualitative techniques to generate alternative, in depth accounts of development (Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003). To this end, the purpose of this study was to explore how perceived life skills were developed.

Methodology

Conceptual context

Semi-structured interviews and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith & Osborn, 2003) were selected as an appropriate data collection technique and methodology to capture the participants' experiences of developing life skills through sport. IPA explores personal, lived experiences, and individual perception of reality. Interpretation in IPA is coined a "double hermeneutic". The participant is trying to make sense of their world and the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants making sense of their world (Smith & Osborn, 2003). IPA is of particular use when exploring the context of individuals' beliefs and experiences and illuminating processes (Smith, 1999). The capacity within IPA to focus on the structure, meaning, and processes of lived personal experiences (Brocki & Wearden, 2006) made it an appropriate methodology. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore how life skills were developed, to provide structure to the interview, and to allow funnelling of questioning from the general to specific (Smith & Osborn, 2003); at the same time allowing the discussion to remain close to the participants' lived experience.

J. A. Smith, the originator of IPA, stated, "Most IPA studies are of a small number of participants. However, it is possible to push the idiographic logic further and conduct an IPA on a single case and I think such work is important" (Smith, 2004, p.42). Additionally, Smith stated, "I think this is an important area for development and would encourage PhD students, for example, to be bold and consider conducting detailed analyses of single cases" (p. 42). By focusing on single cases, researchers can develop detailed studies of great depth. No two people develop in the same way (Lerner et al., 2006). Thus, the topic of life skill development warrants single case exploration.

Sampling

Purposive sampling was employed to recruit a participant with strong life skills, who was willing to share experiences of life skills development. The participant was not selected as a representative of young sports participants and young personhood in general. Rather, she represents a particular case of an athlete's response to organised sport to gain a more detailed picture of this phenomenon.

Participant

All identifying information has been altered to ensure confidentiality. The participant was a female tennis player named Linda. At the time of the study Linda was a 22-year-old full time graduate student at a British University. Linda was classified as a young person based on the United Nations classification that states that the term young person represents individuals who are aged 10-24 years.

Both parents were teachers. She had grown up in an area of the United Kingdom with a total deprivation score of 25108. She grew up in an area of the United Kingdom, less deprived than three quarters of the country (1 = maximum deprivation, 32482 = minimum deprivation: Neighbourhood Statistics, n.d). Linda had experience of hockey, skiing, and rounders, but specialised in tennis aged 13. Linda had achieved success at both regional and national level. At age 18, she secured a full athletic scholarship to a North American university. After one year, she returned to study in the United Kingdom. In North America, she obtained a 4.0 grade point average (highest classification in the North American education system). In the United Kingdom, she gained a First Class Honours degree (highest classification in the British education system) and finished top of her class. Linda had also volunteered to work with children with physical and mental disabilities. Linda scored an average of 9.67 (+/- 0.31) for teamwork and social skills,

9.67 (+/- 0.27) for positive interpersonal relationships, 9.29 (+/- 0.34) for adult networks and social capital, 9.26 (+/- 0.26) for identity development, 8.86 (+/- 0.13) for initiative, and 8.84 (+/- 0.21) for basic skills on a ten point Likert scale version of the Youth Experiences Survey (YES; Hansen & Larson, 2005).

Data collection

A Research Ethics Committee granted full ethical approval for the study. The participant read and signed an informed consent form and was informed she could withdraw from the research at any time without consequence. Five formal interviews, ranging between 31 minutes and 63 minutes, lasting an average of 48 minutes, were conducted. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim resulting in 125 pages of transcript. Approximately 30 hours of informal discussions were carried out during the period of data collection. These discussions built rapport, helped elaborate on interpretations and details disclosed during formal interviews, helped to get background information, and to get to know Linda. By getting to know Linda and building trust, honesty, respect, commitment, mutuality, understanding, and acceptance into the research process strengthened the data (Tillmann-Healey, 2001). Specifically, the data collection became more collaborative. Researcher and participant engaged in intimate and joint sense-making regarding life skill development (Tillmann-Healey, 2001). Informal discussions were carried out in the first author's office, over coffee, over lunch, at the student's union building, and on the tennis court. The first author typically led the discussions by asking whether interpretations accurately reflected the participant's experiences. Once the first author had coded the interview (and before next interview) a meeting was scheduled with the participant. During the meeting, the first author asked the participant whether her words had been interpreted accurately. For example, the first author would read out a quote followed by the interpretation of

the quote. When interpretations were not accurate, the participant then led the discussion to explain what she had meant during interviews. The informal discussions raised issues that had not been discussed in formal interviews and helped inform questions in subsequent interviews. Informal discussions were not audio recorded and transcribed.

The first formal interview aimed to give a general overview of the research, to stimulate reflection, and to give procedural information (e.g., required commitments). The first interview stimulated descriptions of Linda's general lived experience of tennis before probing for specific information (e.g., describe your day-to-day involvement in tennis, describe how tennis has influenced your day-to-day life).

The remaining interviews explored Linda's experiences of developing life skills in depth. Authors created an interview schedule for each interview to guide the discussion, at the same time allowing the participant to talk about her individual lived experience and for the interviewer to probe and follow-up on interesting areas. Findings from previous interviews shaped subsequent interview schedules. Each interview filled gaps and gradually built understanding of Linda's story. Interviews typically began with broad and open questions regarding the experience of life skill development (e.g., how would you describe yourself as a person?). Probes and follow-up questions funnelled the interview (Smith & Osborn, 2003) to gain information about experiences of developing life skills (e.g., how has tennis contributed to you being that person?). A copy of the interview schedules can be requested from the first author.

Data analysis

The analysis of the interview data followed the guidelines of ideographic case study analysis (Fade, 2004; Smith & Osborn, 2003). Analysis started by writing up field notes immediately after the interview, listening to recordings, and reading transcripts several times.

During listening and reading, the first author made notes in the left hand margin of transcripts. Notes attempted to provide to answer the question "what does this statement tell me about developing life skills?" Once the whole transcript had been reviewed, initial notes were transformed into concise phrases that capture the essence of what was reported. These phrases were listed so that the process of grouping could begin. Connections between emergent themes were established so that themes grouped together into higher order themes. Higher order themes were then given names that represented the subordinate themes within that grouping. All groupings were checked with the primary transcripts to ensure higher order themes reflected the actual words of Linda. Themes were grouped into a master table, which was then transformed into a narrative account. The narrative account is supported by verbatim extracts from the interviews.

Results

Analysis of the results revealed an integration of process that helped develop a range of life skills. Linda felt that she had developed into a positive young person because of an integration of the skills she was born with (her dispositions) and the experimental learning associated with playing tennis. Skills were then transferred across life domains, making them life skills (not domain specific sport skills). When asked about which life skills Linda felt she had learned through sport she replied:

Specific skills I've learned through playing tennis were - these are in no particular order - Err, communication, like leadership and team stuff from when we go away for county tournaments. I learned, kind of, about myself like needing to be hardworking and resourceful. I guess that links to communication. You learn about developing relationships. . . . I learned about, very much about the importance of about planning and trying to make

sure everything fits into the day. Where and when I'm gonna get everything done. I

wouldn't like to say I learned about goal setting but I learned about setting targets and stuff and kind of realistic aims for different situations. . . . Like a lot of it for me, a big part of it was the interaction side of it and developing relationships, leadership, and communication.

Although she felt tennis had taught her many skills she felt she did not develop certain skills, specifically confidence in social situations. Although tennis had taught many valuable lessons it was clear, in her case, sport was not a panacea for life skill development.

She felt skills learned were a reflection of the requirements of the sport and the unique experiences she had. Linda said, "I would assume that different environments and different structures of sport would mean that different sports would emphasise different skills and obviously that is why not all athletes end up exactly the same." Therefore, not all young people will develop in the same way. The remainder of the analysis focuses on how Linda developed life skills.

Dispositions

Linda talked about skills, which she was born with, that were further developed, refined and reinforced through her experiences in sport. She used the term dispositions to describe these skills. This is the beginning of Linda's developmental process. Her dispositions led her to act in certain ways and encouraged her to develop specific skills. For example, Linda talked at length about being born with a hard work ethic. Here is an extract that highlights this theme, "I think you probably are going to have to have a personality trait to allow you to be hard working and disciplined and all those kinds of things. . . I guess I have those traits."

Linda talked about “you” needing to be hard working. It seems like Linda believes hard work values are a social imperative. She believes everyone needs these skills but not everyone has them. However, she demonstrates her lack of assurance in saying “I guess I have those traits.”

Her personality played a role in developing life skills. She felt that being a perfectionist was not bad. It had helped her achieve, helped her to learn how to deal with failure, and was associated with striving to be the best. The following extract describes how sport helped her adopt this view:

A massive thing for me is having perfectionist tendencies and dealing with failing. In tennis, you are always going to lose. . . . Being in a situation that goes against my personality means I have developed skills that I wouldn’t have. Had I been in situations all my life where I hadn’t had to face up to aspects of my personality then I wouldn’t have developed the skills to deal with it [perfectionist personality].

Here, the situational requirements of having to manage failure directed her to learn the skills to manage that experience. Had she not played tennis she would not have developed the ability to manage failure. Therefore, an integration of dispositions and situational requirements appear to have developed the skill of managing failure.

Experiential factors

Linda talked about experiences that reinforced her dispositions and taught her new skills. She said, “The whole make up of tennis as a sport and all the experiences I had within my own tennis playing life just demanded that those skills developed.” The key point Linda made was that skills were learned because the situation required them. For example, she said, “The life skills and the values and how I have developed as a person have occurred through tennis because of the situations and the environments you encounter in the sport.” Similarly, she followed up

with, "If you are going to have a tendency to work hard and you are put in an environment which rewards and values hard work then you are going to increase your hard work." This quote demonstrates how she combined her disposition for hard with the experiential learning through tennis in order to increase her ability to work hard.

She believed the process of life skills development was implicit, no coach, parent, or peer had ever taught her life skills.

I never consciously thought I needed to learn to communicate and I never consciously thought I am learning to communicate I never sat down and learned the skills I needed for tennis. Like, I just, [pause] gained them because I needed them for that environment.

An example of Linda using communication skills when playing tennis was described:

In matches, you are obviously calling your own line calls and stuff and in many situations, all tennis players will say you always come up against people who cheat. Communicating in those situations when you are in a situation where you are pretty pissed off or it is an important part of a match That is a communication thing and I think it could be specific to tennis but kind of communicating in difficult situations as well as kind of normal, standard, day-to-day, communications when you need to get things done.

Similarly, she said:

A big thing for me in terms of communicating was kind of before matches and having to ask people to kind of warm up and stuff, I didn't like to do that until I was kind of 14 or 15 again I guess. Then I kind of realised that if you get chatting to people and if you talk to them then you could obviously ask them to hit with me and stuff which is important to warm up.

She felt she had a high level of dispositional self-awareness and knew what was required for success. Once she knew what she needed to do, she developed specific skills in order to do her best. The following extract describes the requirement and development of organisational skills:

I knew that I needed to fit in my work . . . and I wanted to fit tennis in. I knew that I couldn't waste time watching TV or whatever. I knew what I had to do. . . . I knew exactly when I was going to fit it in. . . . I was in a situation where I had to do my work and I had to do my tennis so I kind of worked out how I was going to do it.

The self-awareness of Linda is evident throughout this extract. She talked at length about what she needed and what she had to do. This self-awareness appears to drive the development of this life skill. Once she is aware of the situational requirements, she works out what skills needed to be initiated and then employs these skills in order to manage the demands. She then talked about using organisation skills she had learned as a junior player when she got to university:

When I came to [University] I was club captain and team captain of tennis. . . all the things I had done and all the things I had to do as a junior county tennis were 25 fold once I got here! You know, where you had to organise matches and transport and courts and the whole deal of sorting out 180 people who were in the club.

Linda then talked about how her experience of learning organisation in tennis had been maintained:

I learned that I need to be organised and I need to know when I am doing things and what I am doing Even in terms of just things like I did my own entry forms, I organised my tournament schedule, mum just wrote the cheques, I wrote the cheques and she just signed them in fact. I did all of it. If I didn't enter a tournament, it was my fault because I hadn't organised it and I am exactly the same now.

Whilst checking our interpretations Linda said that during the actual experience she was unaware of what she was learning, it was not until she was required to think about her experiences that she realised she had learned specific life skills. In the following interview she followed up that discussion by saying, "You are not necessarily thinking I need to develop these skills. It is just you are in situations where they are required and the environment requires, and the situation requires them of you." She followed up with,

No one sits you down and says "to be successful in tennis you need to be organised, you need to be self aware. . ." you just learn it. I think I realised it quite young compared to some people.

Linda described how her parents structured her sporting experience to stimulate learning of life skills. For example, her parents encouraged her to plan her tournament schedule and fill in entry forms, facilitating organisation skills. Linda talked about how her parents had supported her during her tennis career, reinforcing her perceived dispositions and newly acquired skills. For example, "I was very much brought up on the idea that whatever you do you've got to do to your best ability . . . and that, kind of, is what I've always lived by." Here Linda talked about being brought up, which would suggest her parents encouraged these skills. Linda also says, "Always lived by" which would suggest that this particular value is something that was present before initiation into sport but was reinforced while playing sport. Linda talked about the interaction of education, her values, and the family, "My experiences in terms of my family values and the values placed on education alongside the value placed on sport means I was probably developing different skills because I was balancing." Linda talked about balancing two activities (i.e., sport & education) and the interaction of the two activities in her life. The specific requirements placed on her because of this interaction required her to develop organisation skills.

Her family also provides meaning to her experiences in sport. This meaning altered as her circumstances changed. In her early teens the meaning of tennis was associated with spending time with her father, "Tennis meant I could spend time with my dad. . . . That wasn't about me being a tennis player. That was about me being a teenage kid away having fun with my dad." By developing skills to succeed in sport, Linda could spend more time with her dad. Therefore, it was very important for her to develop the skills for success. As Linda progressed the meaning of tennis changed. When Linda secured a university scholarship, the meaning shifted to giving something back to her parents:

I also felt that my parents had invested a lot of money and a lot of time in playing tennis and I felt that it was a way in which tennis could give something back. . . . There was an opportunity to have a scholarship so my parents wouldn't be funding college . . . so I felt like that tennis was really important.

Developing the skills to succeed in the sporting context enabled her to receive an education and saved her parents money. It is the meaning and importance of a situation that contributed to life skill development.

Transfer

Linda believed life skills could be transferred between domains. Linda talked about transfer from tennis into academia. Linda said, "I've always very much believed that they [life skills] are mainly transferable. I think I'm good at academics because I used to play a lot of tennis." Linda described several factors that helped her transfer skills. Linda talked about similarity of contexts, confidence in applying skills, successful application of skills, and the meaning and importance of the new context. Linda said:

For me developing communication and similar skills, once I felt that they were successful then I felt confident enough to do the same sorts of things in other domains in life. But things like being hard working and stuff, I don't really know. I just think . . . you realise they work so you just do them in other things.

It emerged that Linda had different classifications of life skills in terms of transferability. Linda described how some skills, like communication, are transferred by building confidence across contexts. Linda then talked about other skills, such as her hard work in a different light. Thus, transfer is dependent on the type of skill one is transferring across domains.

Meaning and importance were important to transfer. Linda talked mostly about transfer of skills from tennis to academia, at the same time describing a change in the importance of the context. As academia became more important Linda invested more time and effort to academic goals and used the skills Linda had developed in tennis. The following quote highlights this shift in importance:

I have always been very realistic with my tennis and I knew that pretty early on [pause] well you always dream that you are always going to get as far as you can with your sport but I always knew that in the end, well from the age of 15, 16, that academics were as important to me.

The shift was the result of a realisation that Linda was as good as she could be in tennis, but this would not lead her anywhere (in terms of a career). Alternatively, being good in academia could result in a career.

Summary statement

Towards the end of the study, Linda was asked to reflect on previous interviews and articulate how she felt she had learned life skills. The following extract provides a summary statement of how Linda felt she developed life skills:

I guess it goes back to having those personality traits and being in a situation that demanded it, me perceiving that it demanded those things of me, and being in a family environment where only your best is good enough. . . . So I guess it's a combination of my personality, the environment, the sporting environment, and now the academic environment, and my family values.

Discussion

Findings from the current study provide a unique contribution to the sport and exercise psychology literature by using IPA to explore how life skills have been developed. Findings drew attention to the role of dispositional factors and experiential learning as key elements in the development of life skills. Linda believed that she was born with certain dispositions that served as a foundation for the development of life skills (e.g., having high self-awareness helped her understand that she needed communication skills in order to work with other tennis players). Her experiences in sport also developed new skills that were required in order to succeed in tennis (e.g., needing organisation skills to organise tournament entry). Her familial experiences provided meaning, structure, and tangible and informational support, which augmented positive development. Finally, Linda talked applying skills in different life domains and making skills learned in sport life skills (i.e., transferable across life domains). No other studies have used IPA, with a single case, to explore in detail how life skills have been developed through sport.

This qualitative study complements previous quantitative and outcome driven studies of life skills (e.g., Goudas et al., 2006; Hansen et al., 2003; Larson et al., 2006; Papacharisis et al., 2005) by exploring the processes of life skill development experienced by one young person. Current findings suggest life skills were developed from the interaction of dispositions and experiential learning. Our findings indicated that Linda's life skills resulted from an interaction dispositions (e.g., hard work, self awareness, perfectionism), her parents bringing her up to encourage these values and supported her choices throughout her life, and sport providing a structure that gave her a context to practice skills and develop new skills. The structure of tennis, and her unique experiences, also required her to demonstrate certain life skills in order to survive and thrive in tennis. For example, Linda was required to be organised in order to fit in her tennis and schoolwork.

Although it cannot be claimed that sport taught dispositional skills results do suggest that sport gave Linda a context in which she could demonstrate her dispositions and use them to develop other life skills. Linda talked about her dispositions being reinforced through her experiences in sport. Linda also described how her dispositions were matched with her environment (i.e., Linda was able to succeed in tennis because she was naturally hard working). The concept of matching intrapersonal assets and ecological assets is a fundamental concept of Developmental Systems Theories of human development (e.g., Lerner et al., 2006). Developmental Systems Theories state that positive youth development is the result of bi-directional relationships between the individual and his/her environment. When these relationships are matched there are mutual benefits (Jelicic, Theokas, Phelps, E., & Lerner, 2007). In Linda's case, her intrapersonal assets (i.e., her dispositions and developing life skills)

were matched with ecological assets (e.g., rules of tennis, structure of practice, tournaments, coaches, & parents) which enabled her to succeed in tennis and improve her life skills.

Experiential learning was regarded as an important process in learning life skills. There was no mention of anyone explicitly teaching her life skills. Linda talked about an unconscious process of life skill development. Linda had rejected the idea that she needed to be told which skills to learn. Linda said she had learned unconsciously and had only realised she had the skills after the event. Current results suggest it is possible that young people can develop life skills, providing they have the awareness to understand what is required of them and they are motivated to develop themselves. By encouraging awareness of situational requirements and structuring experiences, in line with positive development, young people can catch life skills.

Bourdieu (1990) argued a similar process in the learning of skills or dispositions, which orient the action of people in the social world. Bourdieu introduced the concept of habitus, as dispositions (lasting, acquired schemes of perception, thought & action) that become unconscious and spontaneous. The individual agent develops dispositions in response to the conditions he/she encounters in the field (i.e., in sport & family). Individuals practice is always socially situated and therefore is specific to the field in which one is acting at that moment. Bourdieu stated that our being in the world is largely a practical mastery of the implicit principles of the social world, not the explicit symbolic mastery of explicit consciously recognized rules. The current results suggest the social locations of the tennis club and the family provided Linda with habitus (i.e., the skills needed in those social locations). It was not the explicit rules set out by a coach or parent of what should be learned that enabled Linda to develop life skills. Bourdieu (1996) stated that persons are personifications of the requirements of the field. Thus, the requirements of sporting contexts will reflect the skills that young people

learn. For example, a team sport like hockey will require young people to learn teamwork skills whereas sports like golf, where young people call their own fouls, may result in honesty and sportsmanship.

Linda talked about *doing* life skills (e.g., communicating with coaches, organising tournaments) as opposed to describing specific strategies of learning life skills. This suggests that knowledge is in action, where knowledge of life skills resides in the actions that are lived and experienced by Linda. Schön (1987) coined the phrase reflection in action to describe learning by doing. Reflection in action, also known as thinking on your feet, involves developing new understandings to inform actions in the situation that is unfolding. Schön suggested that when individuals go about the spontaneous, intuitive performance of actions of everyday life, they demonstrate specific knowledge. However, often this knowledge cannot be articulated; individuals cannot say what they know, they do what they know. It is apparent that this is how Linda learned life skills. In the actions of everyday life in and around the tennis club Linda was demonstrating specific skills (e.g., communication, organisation, hard work, & developing relationships) which became life skills as she transferred them into other life domains (e.g., academia).

Schön's (1987) theory of experiential learning has been suggested to stand apart from the other theories of learning because it centres on the construction of domain specific knowledge, through the context of practice (i.e., learning via personal experiences). Schön denounced technical rationality (e.g., direct instruction of life skills from coaches, parents, peers) as the grounding of knowledge, suggesting it is an inappropriate practice in a dynamic world. Schön compared learning through technical rationality to the charging of a battery. He suggested this epistemology of practice, which aimed to charge people up with information in training so that

the information can be discharged in practice, is not an accurate representation of how people think and act (Schön, 1987). As such, Schön presented an alternative epistemology of practice in which knowledge is gained through experience. In the current study, knowledge of life skills was gained through the experience of sport.

Transferability is a fundamental characteristic of a life skill (Gould & Carson, 2008). Danish and Donahue (1995) stated life skills can be physical (e.g., proper posture), behavioural (e.g., effective communication), or cognitive (e.g., effective decision making). Gould and Carson stated that life skills learned through sport must help the individual in non-sport settings. Therefore, for something to qualify as a life skill it has to have potential transfer to other life situations. If a skill cannot be transferred, it is a sport skill not a life skill. Linda enforced the belief that skills learned through sport could be transferred. Transfer was based on confidence in applying skills in different domains, the familiarity and meaning of the new domain, and successful application of the skill. Danish et al. (1995) suggested several factors that can induce transfer. Linda described several of these factors. A belief that the acquired skills and qualities are valued in other settings, having an awareness of current skills, and confidence in the ability to apply skills in different settings facilitated transfer across life domains. Current results suggest that the meaning of the new context is also important. Specifically, tennis was very important to Linda. Linda had aspirations of a tennis career and used tennis as a vehicle to spend time with her father and as such, Linda spent a lot of time playing tennis and learned many skills. Later in life, academia became equally important and she shifted her career aspirations from tennis into academia. Linda also used many of her tennis skills in academic pursuits (e.g., organisation, hard work) and as such, they became life skills.

Limitations and future research

We want to be cautious in the claims we make from this study. The study is a single case and was not meant to be representative of all young sports people. Daly et al. (2007) stated that well-conducted single case study provides poor evidence-for-practice (i.e., empirical generalizability), but they can generate hypotheses for later studies. For example, the current study highlighted issues of experiential learning and knowledge in action which had not previously been uncovered. This should be explored in future research.

It should not be assumed that similar findings would come from all sports participants in similar situations. The selection of the participant allowed for a detailed analysis of developing life skills. However, the participant was 22 years old and was not competing at the time of the interviews. Findings came from retrospective recall of what had happened in the past and faulty memory may have obscured findings. Future investigation may choose to examine the process of life skill development by interviewing young people who are still actively involved in competition. Furthermore, conducting longitudinal research following a set of participants from initiation into sport, through adolescence, and for two or three years after adolescence would highlight additional processes.

The interviewing and questioning procedures of funnelling from open and broad questions to more specific questions (Smith & Osborn, 2003) developed detailed understanding of Linda's experience. However, asking specific questions about transferability of life skills may have influenced the themes related to life skills transfer. For example, asking questions theoretically relevant questions about how life skills are transferred may have triggered ideas about interconnections of different parts of Linda's life (e.g., sport & academia), which Linda may not

have been aware of before. Future research may need to develop alternative questions to address the issue of transferability without inadvertently leading participants.

Linda had strong indicators of positive youth development (e.g., YES scores & academic achievements). Linda also had 13 years of competitive sport experience. Future investigations may take a different approach to life skill development by studying people with low indicators of positive development. Investigations may also focus on young people who have dropped out of sport to see whether they had learned skills, to see whether sport had played a role in that development, and to provide grounds for comparison with the current participant.

Findings from the current study have implications for intervention research. To date the majority of life skills programmes have favoured a direct approach to teaching life skills, however findings suggest experience can teach life skills. Therefore, future research should test the efficacy and effectiveness of experiential learning interventions with young sports people. Furthermore, research is needed to expand our understanding of family issues in promoting life skills (Holt & Sehn, 2007).

Conclusion

In conclusion, findings from the current study suggest development of life skills does not necessarily happen because of systematic, direct teaching strategies. Practitioners can use direct teaching methods; however, an interaction of factors lead to life skill development. Experiential factors provided the trigger for skills to develop. The requirements of an experience, coupled with an awareness of these requirements left Linda feeling as though she needed to learn these skills in order to be successful in the contexts she valued. As other contexts increased in their value, Linda began to transfer skills across domains. Her dispositions of high self-awareness,

working hard, and wanting to be the best drove her through this process with her family providing support to facilitate her navigation through the world of competitive sport.

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