Exploring Life Skill Development Through Coaching in Emerging Adults

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Context and Objective: Sport offers a context for youth to develop life skills (LS) such as initiative, leadership, and teamwork, which can be transferred to non-sport settings (Camiré et al., 2012; Holt et al., 2017). Coaching offers a natural extension of youth’s sport involvement, as a first employment/volunteer opportunity as youth transition into young adulthood. Given many challenges (e.g., instability, identity) often accompany emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000), there is value in better understanding young coaches’ experiences. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of emerging adults’ coaching experiences, with a specific focus on LS in a sport for development (S4D) facility.

Methods and Results: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 8 emerging adult coaches affiliated with a large S4D facility in Toronto; transcribed interviews were explored through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Five inter-related themes emerged from the data that ultimately contextualized participants’ coaching experiences and informed the purpose of the study: (a) LS developed as athletes, (b) teaching LS at a S4D facility, (c) the contrast between developing LS through high performance sport, and teaching LS in a S4D facility, (d) recommendations for the S4D facility, and finally (e) LS developed through coaching experiences.

Discussion and Conclusion: This project explored a new phenomenon (i.e., coaching as a context to develop LS in emerging adulthood) and offers a foundation for further understanding and investigation. Findings suggest there is value in advancing youth sport participation and development models to consider emerging adults, with a particular focus on optimizing their development through their roles as coaches.