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Abstract

Objectives

Youth sport programs have been designed to facilitate positive development of young people by teaching life skills. It is unclear which life skills are needed by adolescents and which life skills should be included in youth sport programs. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore how life skills are defined, which life skills British adolescent athletes need, and which life skills are the most important.

Method

Nineteen adolescent athletes, ten coaches, four experts in sport psychology (pilot group) and five graduate students (pilot group) participated in a series of focus groups. An inductive analysis revealed how life skills are defined, which life skills British adolescent athletes need, and of these skills which are the most important.

Results

Life skills were defined as ranges of transferable skills needed for everyday life, by everybody, that help people thrive. Participants described the need for interpersonal skills including social skills, respect, leadership, family interactions, and communication. Personal skills including organization, discipline, self-reliance, goal setting, managing performance outcomes, and motivation, were also reported. Social skills were identified as the most important life skills.

Conclusions

In conclusion, findings add support to existing positive youth development research while adding an alternative insight into which life skills should be built into youth sport programs.

Exploring the life skills needs of British adolescent athletes

Adolescence is a critical period of growth and development in which individuals can acquire the skills, attitudes, and behaviors that provide the foundation for thriving in adulthood (Lerner et al., 2006). Unfortunately, not all developmental trajectories are positive. Some adolescents do not meet their developmental needs and they enter adulthood without the skills to enable thriving (Theokas & Lerner, 2006). However, every young person has the potential for successful, healthy development (Lerner et al., 2006). Thus, it is important to understand how to develop this potential. Specifically, if adolescents are to prosper in life it is important to know which life skills are important to young people.

Adolescence is typically viewed as the second decade of life (Lerner & Steinberg, 2004) beginning with biological transitions (e.g., puberty) and ending with cultural and sociological transitions (e.g., enactment of adult roles in society). Due to changes in society, adolescence can be viewed as a longer period than in previous decades (Coleman & Roker, 1998). Contemporary adolescents remain out of the labour market, financially dependent on parents, do not begin capital accumulation, and do not acquire adult roles in society until early to mid twenties, especially if they remain in full time education. As such, contemporary adolescence is a longer transitional period than it used to be. Adolescence appears to be age related but not age dependent (i.e., adolescents may be over 20 years of age). Given the ambiguity of what constitutes adolescence the United Nations (2005) uses the terms youth and young people to represent individuals who are aged between 15-24 years and 10-24 years, respectively. Both adolescents and young people are terms used in the current study to represent participants aged between 15-22 years old.

The World Health Organization (WHO, 1999) defines life skills as the ability for adaptive and positive behavior that enables individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Life skills can be physical (e.g., proper posture), behavioral

(e.g., effective communication), or cognitive (e.g., effective decision making) (Danish & Donohue, 1995; Danish & Nellen, 1997). Positive youth development theory informs life skills research (Pan American Health Organization, 2001) to enhance personal and performance excellence in young people through their experiences in sport. Positive youth development is a strength-based conception of adolescence that emphasizes growth and development (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005). This approach stresses the importance of primary prevention by developing strengths and building competencies rather than treating pathology in later life (Lerner et al., 2005). A range of activities can promote positive youth development providing they are structured, voluntary require effort over time, and include interpersonal relationships with adults (Bronfenbrenner, 1999; Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003; Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003; Larson, 2000). As such, organized sport is a promising potential context for positive youth development.

Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, and Hawkins (1998) described 25 effective positive youth development programs from the United States. Effective programs addressed a range of positive youth development objectives and shared common themes. For example, all effective programs promoted social, emotional, cognitive, and/or behavioral competencies, self-efficacy, and healthy social and personal behavior. Seventy five percent of programs also targeted healthy bonds between youth and adults, increased opportunities for participation in positive social activities, and recognition and reinforcement for that participation.

Life skills training is used in a variety of contexts to reduce negative behaviors and to promote positive youth development (Pan American Health Organization, 2001). Within the sporting context, there has been a propensity for life skills training to promote positive youth development (e.g., Danish, Fazio, Nellen, & Owens, 2002; Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2007). The Sport United to Promote Education and Recreation (SUPER; Danish et al., 2002) provides an illustration of a sports based life skills program. SUPER is an 18 session, peer-

led program, which integrates sports skills and life skills [see Danish, Forneris, & Wallace (2005) for a full program description]. SUPER aims to provide participants with the skills to set and achieve goals, overcome obstacles, and think positively. Several studies have shown that SUPER is an effective program to increase knowledge of goal setting and self beliefs regarding the ability to set goals, thinking positively, and overcoming obstacles to achieving goals (Brunelle, Danish, & Forneris, 2007; Goudas, Dermitizaki, Leondari, & Danish, 2006; Papacharisis, Goudas, Danish, & Theodorakis, 2005). Derivatives of SUPER and associated life skills programs (e.g., Danish, Forneris, Hodge, & Heke, 2004; Petitpas, Van Raalte, Cornelius, & Presbury, 2004) have been developed and delivered in different sports, cultures, and settings strengthening the applicability of the life skills approach. Petitpas et al. developed the Play It Smart program to enhance adolescent athleteôs academic, athletic, career, and personal development. The program, based on the life development intervention (LDI; Danish & DôAugelli, 1983), was designed to create a team environment where young people could learn about themselves and develop life skills. Two hundred and fifty two male high school student athletes, from three inner-city North-eastern American high schools, participated in the pilot phase of the program. The two-year pilot phase included an evaluation of the following three primary outcomes goals of the Play It Smart program: improve grade point averages and graduation rates; increase participation in community service activities; and increase knowledge and use of health enhancing behaviors. Results from the pilot program revealed that participantsô grade point averages increased from 2.16 to 2.54, 98 percent of the seniors in the sample graduated from high school on schedule, and 83 percent of this group went on to higher education. Additionally, participants engaged in a total 1,745 hours of community services activities.

Despite the propensity to teach life skills, it is unclear which life skills are needed by adolescents. Research that espouses the need for certain life skills (e.g., identity exploration,

goal setting) is potentially limited because it is based on retrospective analysis of what was needed in adolescence of the past, is based on outdated conceptions of adolescence, and may not be applicable across cultures and settings (Lerner et al., 2006). During the past decade, there has been continuous growth in research and understanding of adolescence as a period of multiple transitions that start earlier and last longer. Adolescent research has also moved from a deficit model that suggests adolescence is a period of storm and stress (i.e., Hall, 1904) to a positive model (Damon, 2004; Lerner et al., 2006; Petersen, 2004). The deficit model suggests adolescents need to be taught how to avoid and diminish negative behaviors, whereas the positive model sees young people as resources to be developed. From the positive perspective adolescence is viewed as a time of growth and increasing competence, during which young people develop knowledge of themselves and their place in society. Adolescence also provides a time where habits and skills can be nurtured to allow fulfilment of personal potential. As a period when young people begin to adopt behavioural patterns in education, relationships, health, and leisure pursuits adolescence provides a time of potential positive development and growth. A key feature of the positive model of adolescence is that young people who are problem free may not be fully prepared for adult life (Lerner et al., 2006). That is, adolescents who do not have psychological problems who are not targeted by deficit-based programs may not possess the skills, talents, and character strengths to fully survive and thrive in adulthood. As such, the positive model focuses on developing young people who are safe, happy, moral, and fully engaged in life. One method of achieving this is by improving a young personôs life skills. By turning attention to the limitless potential of youth, young people can be provided with experiences that will not only facilitate the transition into adulthood but will also help them achieve higher life satisfaction and thriving in their adult pursuits (Damon, 2004).

Previous research has yet to specify how adolescents define life skills and to uncover the life skills needs of adolescent athletes. As a result, life skills interventions may not accurately reflect the needs of adolescent athletes, particularly adolescent athletes from outside the United States. Thus, research is needed that examines the life skills needs of contemporary adolescents to gain a better understanding of what todayôs young people need to thrive in adulthood, and to develop appropriate positive youth development interventions. To this end, the purpose of this study was to explore how life skills are defined, which life skills British adolescent athletes need, and which life skills are the most important.

Methodology

Participants

Male and female athletes, coaches, experts, and graduate students were sampled to explore reality from different perspectives. The purpose was not to explore differences between sub-groups. By asking a range of people about their beliefs and opinions objectivity could be better approximated because of the triangulation across multiple potentially biased perspectives.

Participants were selected from a range of sources in England. Sources included sports teams and clubs, national governing bodies of sport, and graduate students and members of staff from an English University. Individuals were selected on the following criteria: they coached British adolescent athletes between the ages of 15-22; they were a British athlete between the ages of 15-22 years. Additionally, a panel of experts and a group of sport psychology graduate students who had conducted youth sport research or had consulted within the context of youth sport as a sport psychologist piloted the interview guide and refine moderating procedures. Given the richness and detail of responses in both pilot groups, the data from these groups were analyzed and included in the results. Athletes were defined as people training in their sport at least once a week with the intention to compete. Athletes

were competing at club (n=6), county (n=4), and national (n=9) standards. No athletes were competing in international competition. Coaches had experience of grassroots through to full Olympic and international coaching. In total 38 participants participated in one of nine focus groups (one graduate student pilot group, one panel of expertôs pilot group, three coach groups, and four athlete groups). Participants represented figure skating, ice dance, tennis, soccer, rugby union, gymnastics, athletics, hockey, and basketball (see Table 1). All participants volunteered to participate and were given the opportunity to freely withdraw from the research. Participants under 18 years were asked to read and sign informed consent forms prior to participation to gain participant assent (Jago & Bailey, 2001). Parents and/or guardians were also asked to read and sign informed consent forms to get legal consent. Participants were also informed of the ethical approval procedures from the first authorôs ethical committee verbally at the beginning of each focus group.

Procedure

Focus groups were the most appropriate data collection technique because of their capacity to provide rich data from a variety of perspectives. Group discussions facilitated the emergence of the shared perceptions of what young people need and facilitated corroboration of a life skills definition. The first author scheduled the focus groups at the convenience of the participants. Based on the suggestions made by Krueger and Casey (2000), the first author moderated the focus groups because of his extensive knowledge of the topic of discussion, ability to place comments in perspective, and ability to follow up on critical areas of discussion.

Focus Groups

Focus groups ranged between 32 and 111 minutes, averaging 75 minutes (SD=29 minutes). A semi-structured questioning route developed from a review of life skills, positive youth development, and focus group literature helped moderate the focus groups. Two

experts knowledgeable in qualitative research methods checked the route to ensure the questions were understandable and that questions encouraged discussion. Finally, pilot interviews with individual members from the focus group populations, a group of sport psychology graduate students, and a panel of experts refined the route.

Opening, introductory, key, and closing questions provided structure. Opening questions consisted of demographic questions (e.g., date of birth, sport, number of years coaching) and sought to break the ice and encourage active participation. Introductory questions were used to introduce the general topic of discussion of the life skills needs of adolescent athletes and to provide participants the opportunity to reflect on their involvement and experience with the overall topic (e.g., what are the positives that can be learned through sport?). Key questions were the main questions that drove the research (Krueger, 1998). Key questions focused the discussion on the needs of adolescents in different life domains (e.g., what life skills do adolescents need for successful sport performance? What life skills do adolescents need to manage the demands of being a student athlete/ amateur athlete? What life skills do adolescents need when they retire / make the transition out of sport?). Finally, closing questions were used to bring the discussion to an end, and to ensure participants felt they had had an adequate opportunity to talk about issues they felt relevant (e.g., of all the things we discussed today which life skills are the most important? Why are they important?). Moreover, these closing questions made clear which life skills participants felt should be included in a life skills program for British adolescent athletes. A full copy of the questioning route can be requested from the first author.

Data Analysis

Focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The first author conducted the first phase immediately after transcription and before the subsequent focus group. This process helped strengthen the data by developing the next focus group and allowed the first

phase of analysis to be broken down into manageable sections over a period of months. Transcripts were organized into meaningful themes. Raw data responses, such as quotes or paraphrased quotes that represented a meaningful thought, were established and coded with a meaning unit. Making several more cycles through the transcript refined and revised the meaning units. Similar meaning units were organized into patterns of comparable responses to create larger, more inclusive groupings. These groupings were assigned an ñessence phraseò that conveyed the essential meaning of the grouping. The next focus group was the conducted and analyzed. When no new themes were emerging from the analysis the first and second author made the decision that saturation had been achieved.

The second phase of computer-assisted analysis then began, with the option of conducting more focus groups if it appeared that the saturation decision had been premature. The purpose of the second phase of analysis was to re-analyze the data as a whole. Re-analyzing data ensured rigor by comparing and contrasting quotes across focus groups and ensuring quotes had been placed in the correct groupings. QSR NUD*IST software (Non-numerical unstructured data indexing searching and theorizing: http://www.qsrinternational.com/) was employed to organize data electronically and conduct the second phase of analysis. Facets of NUD*IST included instant retrieval of data, augmented management of data, and easy comparison of themes. Finally the use of NUD*IST meant transcripts could be sent to several people via email for the inter-rater reliability check. Once both phases of analysis had been completed a random selection of transcripts and themes were checked by independent researchers to gain consensus in the interpretations made.

Methodological Rigor

Constructive and evaluative methods of ensuring rigor were employed (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). By collecting and analyzing data simultaneously authors

could identify and rectify potential threats to the rigor of the research before conducting the next focus group (Morse et al., 2002). Implementing inter-rater reliability checks achieved evaluation of methodological rigor. The first author gave three graduate students, who had not participated in the graduate studentôs pilot group, one third of un-coded interview transcripts. Hurley, Moran, and Guerin (2007) stated one third of focus group transcripts give an adequate representation of responses collected during the focus groups. Raters were asked to code the transcripts to form a series of raw data themes. These themes were compared with the raw data themes from the initial analysis, which were revised as necessary. Following the review the raw data themes were organized into first order and higher order groups. The second author reviewed a full print out of raw data, first order, and higher order themes. The process of showing the development of the coding framework as well as initial coding decisions facilitated the transparency of the analysis process.

Results

The analysis procedure resulted in three higher order themes related to the life skills needs of adolescent athletes, namely a life skills definition, interpersonal life skills, and personal life skills. We first present how the participants defined life skills and an exploration of a range of life skills needed by adolescents followed by which life skills are most important.

Life Skills Defined

The authors asked the participants what they understood by the term life skills. Three first order themes of responses emerged from the data that were related to this initial question. One of these themes was the belief that there is ambiguity in how life skills are understood. For example, one coach said, ñlife skills are kind of fuzzy, in terms of what it means . . . . The term is banded about without clearly defining what they meanò. Ten raw data

themes, many of which overlapped with one another, made up this general definition theme. For example, one coach said:

> I think they [life skills] are the multitude of skills that allows you to have a comfortable life, for your entire life, to live well, to cope well with the unknown things of life and to be able to pass through the difficult moments.

A point emphasized by participants was that life skills are not just the skills needed to be a successful athlete. Life skills are skills that can help in many areas of life. For instance, an athlete said, ñI think everyone should learn them really because everyone needs these things in everyday life, not just in sportsò. Participants also talked about life skills to thrive and prosper, one of the athletes said, ñI think life skills are skills that help you generally in life and get by but also the skills that help you cope with what life throws at you and enables you to prosperò.

Participants talked about the transferability of life skills. Some participants believed that transfer between life domains was possible. For instance, one of the graduate students said, ñif you are naturally sporty and you have spent a lot of your life and your upbringing thatôs where you have learned the skills but then you can take them into your work or into other areasò. One of the coaches also talked about transferability when defining life skills:

> I would say life skills as a whole are skills you need in different domains that you can take into different domains. . . I think that there are skills that you can take into other areas; they are not just limited to one area. I am not saying every skill can be applied to every domain but there are certainly ones that apply to many life domains.

Interpersonal Life Skills

Four first-order themes including social skills, respect, leadership skills, and family interaction skills made up the interpersonal life skills dimension. Participants talked about the importance of social skills helping them in multiple life domains (e.g., sport, workplace,

relationships, and school). A member of an athlete group referred to skill of making friends: ñwhen you stop playing tennis you have got to be able to socialize with people and make other friendsò. Communication skills were described alongside the need for socializing skills ñI think being able to talk to people really . . . you canôt just walk around on your own. If you donôt talk with anyone you donôt make any mates, itôs important to be able to do thatò. Similarly, communication skills were important in being able to work with others and becoming a better athlete. For example, one of the athletes said, ñIf you are trying . . . to be the best tennis player you can then you have to communicate with your coach to find out what he is seeing.

Teamwork and the ability to work with others were mentioned alongside communication. For instance, one coach said, ñqualities like reliability, being able to communicate with people and gradually building self confidence through teamwork are importantò. Participants talked about working together in order to accomplish a certain outcome. For instance:

> Quite often in free skating side, many people who train together on the same piece of ice are competing against each other. You have people going for first, second, and third spots on the same pad . . . You do not have to like them but you have to learn to work with people even if you do not necessarily want to.

Related to working as a team was the issue of respect, for instance, one athlete described why respect was an important life skill as follows: ñyou need the right attitude and respect. Thatôs important because you get some players who only respect themselves and donôt respect other people around them and they donôt ever reach their potentialò. Similarly, one coach said:

> I would say that respect is the thing we should focus on. You need respect for your coaches, for the opposition, and for your team-mates. Turning up on time and looking

> after yourself and making sure you train regularly, and even respect for the facilities that you are using.

Athletes and coaches reported family interaction skills. For example, an athlete said, ñyou need to appreciate your parents because they do loads for us. Some mums live and breathe skatingò. In terms of transferring into different life domains an athlete talked about the impact of parents in helping their own parenting skills in the future as follows: ñyou need to appreciate what your parents do for you. You would be a better parent because your parents have sacrificed so much for you that you would put your child ahead of youò.

Personal Life Skills

Organization skills, discipline, the ability for self-reliance, goal setting, managing performance outcomes, and motivation made up the personal life skills dimension.

Time management skills were seen as crucial organization skills. For instance, one athlete said, ñyou have to organize your time so that you know where you have to be . . . so you have the time to do all your work and football without getting behindò. Similarly, one of the coaches referred to time management: ñI think time management . . . Especially the children that are coming in the morning and training before school. They have to be able to balance their lives in order to fit it all inò.

Planning was also reported as an important organizational skill. One athlete group member referred to planning for his post sport life:

> You have to realize that everything comes to an end and you have to prepare yourself for what you are going to do when it does end. Like most of us now, not many of us if any will make it as a professional footballer. So, we need to be working on something to fall back on.

One of the coaches also talked of the issue of post sport career planning, ñthey have to plan ahead and be realistic and say, OK I have come to the end of this part of my skating career as an amateur but I have opened a door in a different directionò

Participants talked elements of discipline as life skills, which adolescents need. For example, a member of the athletes group said, ñYou have to be determined because if you want to make it in anything you have to give it 100 percent.ò Another member of the same group gave the following quote, ñyou have to be committed to the sport. Like if you like drinking [alcohol] then you have to stop to get the most out of football. You have to get your priorities straightò. Another athlete talked about the need for dedication, ñyou obviously need to be dedicated . . . all through life but then itôs also essential in your sportò. When relating sacrifice in sport to broader life contexts one of the coaches said, ñits part of sport to do things that you donôt want to do but you have to do . . . maybe later you realize it is a lesson for life because I have to do things that I donôt likeò.

Many of the coaches and athletes deemed being able to rely on oneself important. One of the athletes said, ñYou have to be responsible for yourself. Sometimes it [sport] has to teach you to train on your own; I think self responsibility is a big thing.ò An important facet of relying on oneself was the ability to overcome peer pressure. For example, ñyou do have to fight against peer pressure . . .I was fully used to just saying no to things, you have got to say no and you have got to be strong enough to say noò. Participants also talked about motivation in relation to being self-reliant. For example, an athlete said:

> You have to drive yourself . . . There is no point in just doing it for the sake of doing it you have to want to do it. You have to be able to motivate yourself to get the best out of yourself.

When referring to managing performance outcomes a member of an athletes group said, ñYou need to learn from your mistakes. You cannot learn from things that you have not

experienced. Like when you miss penalties, you learn from itò. It was also deemed crucial that people learn how to bounce back from perceived failure and adversity. For instance, one of the coaches said:

> Individuals have not only qualified through their national championships and through the heats and semi finals, performance wise to get there [major championships]. They have qualified through the championships and the heats and semi finals of life. The illnesses, the injuries, the setbacks

Crucial Life Skills

During the closing stages of each focus group, the first author asked participants to describe which life skills were the most important life skills for British adolescent athletes to learn. The group discussion that ensued revealed that social skills, particularly communication skills were the most important skills for British adolescent athletes to learn.

A member of an athleteôs group described why he thought communication was so important ñItôs the most important because itôs something that is going to benefit you when you go out into the world when you are older like in jobs and that.ò Another athlete said:

> Something that ties in with what you talked about with respect is communication and listening to other people . . . we talked about it as a two way thing, and you know having the respect to listen to somebody and to here their point of view and then react to it in a diplomatic fashion. Itôs in everything, in every interaction that you have really for the rest of your life. . . . If you canôt do that or you are not very effective at doing that then you are going to struggle.

One of the coaches gave his opinions of why social skills are so important: ñbeing able to socialise is definitely the most important things for kids to learn because itôs important in so many areas of life. Like getting a job, finding a partner, making friends, just getting ahead in life. Finally, another coach said:

I think itôs important what we have been saying about the social side because if you didnôt have it, later on in life when you go into the real world and get a job then everything would seem really alien to you because you have been so focussed on skating.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how life skills are defined, which life skills British adolescent athletes need, and which life skills are the most important. The findings provide a unique contribution to the sport and exercise psychology literature in several ways. Firstly, a new participant-centered definition of life skills as ranges of transferable skills needed for everyday life, by everybody, that help people thrive was developed. Secondly, a variety of interpersonal and personal life skills were revealed which had not been uncovered in previous sport and exercise psychology research. Finally, social skills were identified as the most important life skills for British adolescent athletes to develop.

The development of a participant-centered definition of life skills provides a unique contribution to the research by demonstrating how the participants themselves understand life skills. Dworkin et al. (2003) stated that adolescents see themselves as agents of their own development and adults should focus on helping young people teach themselves. Thus, gaining adolescents opinions and views is critical in facilitating optimal development. Existing research has produced several life skills definitions. For instance, UNICEF (n.d.) defines life skills as a large group of psychosocial and interpersonal skills, which can help people make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and develop coping and self-management skills that may help them lead a healthy and productive life. The WHO (1999) defines life skills as the abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Finally, the life skills center (n.d) defines life skills as the skills that enable us to succeed in the environments in

which we live (Life Skills Center, n.d.). The problem with existing definitions is that they are researcher driven and might not accurately reflect what adolescents and those working closely with adolescents, understand by the term. Lerner et al. (2006) stated that research driven definitions grounded in the deficit model of adolescence might be very discouraging for young people who learn that they are regarded by adults as someone who is likely to be a problem. Asking the adolescents as well as adults overcame this problem. Participants freely defined life skills in a positive manner (i.e., no participants defined life skills in terms of removing problems or preventing negative behavior), which would suggest they endorse a positive model of adolescence. In sum, the participants defined life skills as ranges of transferable skills needed for everyday life, by everybody, that help people thrive. A key difference between existing definitions and the current definition is the issue of transferability. Participants suggested that skills had to be transferable across life domains for it to be classified as a life skill. If adolescents only used skills in one life domain, they were context specific and not life skills.

The second unique contribution to the literature was the participant-driven exploration of which life skills are needed by British adolescent athletes. No previous research in sport and exercise psychology had explored the needs of adolescent athletes and therefore existing life skills programs may not reflect the needs of those participating in the program. Two higher order themes were explored. These included interpersonal life skills and personal life skills. Hansen et al. (2003 p. 28) defined Interpersonal skills as ñthose skills that involve developing social connections to others and learning skills for cultivating these social connections.ò Hansen et al. also defined personal skills have as those skills and developmental processes that are occurring within the individual. Results from the present study suggest British adolescent athletes require a range of interpersonal and personal life

skills. These results show support for existing positive youth development research while providing a unique contribution to the sport and exercise psychology literature.

Specifically, Lerner et al. (2005) described, and provided evidence for, the latent construct of positive youth development through the five Cs. Positive youth development is conceptualized as competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring/compassion. Competence is a positive view of onesô actions in domain specific areas. Confidence is an internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy. Connection refers to positive bonds with people and institutions. Character is respect for societal and cultural rules. Finally, caring/compassion are a sense of sympathy and empathy for others. Finally, when the 5Cs are present, a sixth C, contribution, emerges. Contribution involves individuals giving back to themselves (e.g., maintaining oneôs health, being an active agent in oneôs own development), the family, community in which they live, and general society (Lerner et al. 2006).

Of these five Côs four can be categorized as interpersonal skills. Specifically, competence refers to a positive view of oneôs actions in domain specific areas, including social areas; confidence refers to positive bonds with people and institutions in which both parties contribute to the relationship; character refers to respect for societal and cultural rules and finally caring and compassion refers to a sense of sympathy and empathy for others. Results also show similarities with Bensonôs (1997) model of developmental assets. This model suggests there are 40 developmental building blocks of healthy development that help young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible. These assets are categorized into external assets and internal assets, and further sub-categorized into support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity. There are several assets and skills evident in the current results and the developmental assets model, including family support, positive

family communication, other adult relationships, adult role models, positive peer influence, interpersonal competence, responsibility, and conflict resolution.

The results from the current sample provide a unique contribution to the literature because existing lists of positive youth development outcomes (e.g., Benson, 1997; Lerner et al., 2005) have not been developed for adolescents who participate in sporting activities. For example, Bensonôs 40 developmental assets focus on educational settings as the context for positive development. Similarly, Lerner et al. have explored positive youth development in a range of organized activities, but not sport. In the United Kingdom organised sport represents a large proportion of the free time of adolescents. The Sport and Leisure General Household Survey was conducted with approximately 14,800 adults aged over 16 and over (Fox & Rickards, 2004). Results revealed that 72 percent of young people aged between 16-19 years of age and 61 percent of young people aged between 20-24 years of age participated in sports, games, and physical activities (excluding walking) in the four weeks prior to the research in 2002. Furthermore, 33 percent of 16-19 years olds and 32 percent of 20-24 year olds had been members of sports clubs and 42 percent of 16-19 year olds and 31 percent of 20-24 year old had participated in competitive sport in the 12 months prior to the research. As such, it is important to explore which life skills this population needs along side the needs of adolescents in other organized activities. This research provides the first example of exploring the life skills needs of adolescent athletes.

The final contribution of this research is the identification of social skills as the most important life skills for British adolescent athletes to develop. Several personal skills have been reported in previous life skills literature using sport. For example, Danish, Petitpas, and Hale (1993) highlighted the development of planning skills, specifically goal setting, as an integral element in the GOAL and SUPER life skills programs. The current findings suggest that these programs would not represent the needs of the adolescent athletes in this sample.

The current results suggest social skills are the most important life skills and therefore need to be integrated into life skills programs for this population.

Most sports require social skills in order to compete successfully (e.g., communication, teamwork). However, adolescents competing in these sports may not be aware of the skills they have developed and therefore they are not transferable across life domains. Danish et al. (1993) stated one of the barriers to skill transfer may be that athletes are not aware of the skills they have developed through sport that are transferable to other areas of life. They suggest several factors and characteristics that can encourage transfer of skills. Life skills could be transferred to other life domains if athletes increase their awareness of the skills they have acquired through their experiences in sport, knowledge of how and in what context skills were learned, and awareness that these skills are valued in other life domains and that these skills can be applied in other life domains. Mayocchi and Hanrahan (2000) also suggested self-awareness was a critical element in developing life skills. In order to facilitate transfer they also suggested athletes should be encouraged to increase their awareness of the skills they possess, when to use skills, and how skills were learned, Furthermore, athletes should be provided with feedback about their attempts to transfer skills and help in developing action plans for use of skills in the future. The objective of a life skills program would therefore be to create a way of increasing an adolescentôs awareness of the skills they have developed through sport, why these skills are useful in other life domains, and ultimately to improve upon the life skills they already have.

Marsick (1988) suggested that engaging in reflection could increase personal awareness and self-understanding. Furthermore, Edwards (1999) stated reflection is the mechanism by which people learn through experience. Thus, a life skills program should be developed based on reflection. Adolescents should be encouraged to reflect on their sporting experiences so they can understand how they have developed social skills (and other life skills) through their

participation in sport (e.g., friends they have made through sport, experiences of working in teams, experiences of settling disputes). The tacit knowledge of life skills developed through sport can then be made accessible through reflection on action (Schön, 1987) allowing life skills to be transferred across life domains. Essentially, the familiar experiences from sport function as a precedent, a metaphor, or an exemplar for experiences across life domains. Such a program should then be subjected to rigorous evaluations to strengthen sport as a context for positive youth development.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations were evident in the current study. Firstly, some of the needs described by the participants may not necessarily be skills (e.g., learning social rules, being respectful, appreciating family). Despite not being skills as such, they are still important for adolescents and should not be overlooked. Perhaps the term positive development outcomes would better describe the range of needs, which may include life skills. Future research may not specify life skills but rather ask participants what adolescents need in general. This may generate an alternative insight in what adolescents needs in order to thrive in adulthood.

The second limitation relates the higher proportion of males to females in this sample. The higher proportion of males may have influenced the results and as such, results may only represent the life skill needs of male adolescent athletes. Future research should consider the life skill needs of females by purposively selecting a homogenous sample of female adolescent athletes.

While focus groups were effective in getting participants talking, the chosen methodology may have inhibited some participants talking about life skills that were more personal, socially undesirable, and/or potentially embarrassing (e.g., sexuality, health, religion). Similarly, quiet participants may not have had an equal input in the discussion if another participant dominated the group. Dworkin et al. (2003) suggested focus groups might

not be the best method for investigating information and developmental processes that are less conscious. For example, Eccles and Barber (1999) suggested internalizing group norms is a less conscious process, which would be less likely to come up in a focus group discussion, yet may still be considered an important life skill.

Finally, some of the participants appeared to talk about the life skills they had learned through their experiences in sport rather than the life skills adolescent athletes need. Although personal experiences were sought during data collection to provide depth it became evident that some participants diverged from the main topic. A strength of concurrent data collection and analysis procedure meant that this issue could be confronted early in the investigation before validity could be compromised.

Further needs assessments should be carried out that differentiate between gender, sport, and developmental stage to increase our understanding of the life skills needs of adolescent athletes and how needs change across adolescence. Although it was beyond the specific scope of this study, the relationship between life stage and life skills should be noted. Specifically, lifespan development models suggest that different life skills are needed across life stages (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). As such, future investigations need to explore whether there are differences in life skills needs across life stages.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings highlight the life skills needs of British adolescent athletes. The findings add support to existing life skills and positive youth development research while adding an alternative insight into which life skills should be built into applied positive youth development programs using sport as the context for growth and development. Social skills were identified as the most important life skills to be developed. Methods of developing social skills were then highlighted as a potential life skill program using sport as the context for positive change.

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Table 1

Focus group details

Focus group	Male to female ratio	Age range	Mean age (S.D.)	Sports represented
Graduate students (Pilot group)	4:1	N/a	N/a	N/a
Panel of experts (Pilot group)	3:1	N/a	N/a	N/a
Coaches	3:1	26-57	35.48 (14.38)	Hockey (n=2), rugby union (n=1), basketball (n=1)
Athletes (National n=6)	2:4	15-18	16.78 (0.58)	Figure skating (n=2), ice dance (n=4)
Coaches	3:0	26-66	48.02 (19.92)	Track & field athletics (n=1), tennis (n=1), gymnastics (n=1)
Athletes (National n=3)	2:1	20-22	21.72 (0.81)	Figure skating (n=1), ice dance (n-2)
Coaches	1:2	31-53	39.27 (11.83)	Figure skating (n=2), ice dance (n=1)
Athletes (County n=4)	4:0	15-17	15.62 (0.46)	Tennis (n=4)
Athletes (Club n=6)	6:0	16-18	17.23 (0.56)	Soccer (n=6)

Figure Caption

*Figure 1.*Coding framework

Raw data theme	First order theme	Higher order theme
Skills used in everyday life	General definition	Life skills definition
Range of life skills needed		
Life skills needed across domains		
Essential skills for life		
Life skills needed by everyone		
Dealing with everyday events		
Skills needed for entire life		
Dealing with unknowns of life		
Life skills linked together		
Skills to prosper in life		
Belief of transfer between domains	Transferability	
Sport teaches transferable life skills		
Definitional ambiguity	Definitional ambiguity	
Getting along with people	Social skills	Interpersonal life skills
Interaction skills		
Making friends		
Socializing skills		
Verbal communication skills		
Listening skills		
Non verbal communication		
Learning social rules		
Developing a social life		
Diplomacy		
Empathizing skills		
Relationship skills		
Team commitment skills		
Responsibility skills		
Teamwork skills		
Accepting roles in teams	Respect	
Respect for others advice		
Accepting criticism		
Respect for teammates		
Respect for others		
Respect for managers / coaches		
Respect for officials		
Leadership skills	Leadership	
Delegation Skills		
Appreciation of family	Family interaction skills	
Utilizing support from family		
Dealing with pressure from parents		
Managing parents		


Punctuality skills
Time management skills
Post sport planning skills
Prioritizing
Multi tasking skills
General planning skills
Financial organization skills
Organization skills
Discipline
Determination
Commitment / dedication
Ability to sacrifice
Ability to sacrifice social life
Persistence /perseverance
Ability to work hard
Managing distractions
Discipline
Self responsibility / reliance
Learning to be mature
Overcoming peer pressure
Self awareness skills
Self reliance
Goal setting skills
Ability to achieve your goals
Breaking down goals
Goal setting
Learning from mistakes
Bouncing back
Dealing with setbacks
Dealing with injury
Dealing with pressure
Dealing with stress
Dealing with fatigue
Managing performance outcomes
Motivation to succeed
Self motivation
The ability to enjoy what you do
Drive to thrive
Empowerment /autonomy
Motivation to improve
Learning the value of effort
Motivation
Personal life skills