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Figure skating coaching in the contemporary sport culture:
Finnish figure skating coaches' perceptions about their work

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ABSTRACT

Coaching as a profession in Finland is perceived as a challenging job. Lack of appreciation and support, scarce resources, and demanding working environment are placing coaches under a lot of pressure. In addition, coaches play a key role in the lives of their athletes and are therefore dealing with a variety of expectations and demands. These are not always set by the coaches themselves, but also from outside stakeholders, such as parents of the athletes, and national and international sport governing federations. On one hand coaches need to be demanding, authoritarian, and goal-oriented, but on the other hand, they need to be empathetic, friendly and supportive. During the past few decades, perceptions and understanding about what coaching as a profession is and requires, has been under discussion.

This study aims at describing and shedding light into the different sides of figure skating coaching as a work and moreover, as a way of life. The purpose is to bring out the variety of emotions and experiences; both the joy and stress situations related to figure skating coaching. In addition, the purpose of this study is to understand the changes occurring in our contemporary sport culture, and how it reflects the experiences that figure skating coaches have about their work and how they can handle these situations. The existing literature about coaching and figure skating is used to reflect the findings of this research. As a theoretical framework for this research, the Finnish coaching excellence model is being used to evaluate the diversity of coaching work.

The data for this qualitative study was collected in four in-depth theme interviews that took place during spring 2015. Four coaches represent geographically different parts of Finland and were rather heterogeneous group in respect to their age, gender, experience, and background. The frames for the theme interviews included sport coaching, well-being of coaches, conflicting pressure situations and coping skills. The data collected from the theme interviews were analyzed using theme coding.

According to the results of this study, figure skating coaches are passionate about their work, and place value on education as part of their work. Coaches are perceived as co-parents in the lives of the athletes, and thus get to experience the highs and lows of their athletes. Coaching is not solely about the sport, moreover it is about teaching athletes to become also good human beings. However, work is often operated with fewer resources, such as time, money and professional guidance. Overall, coaches need to take into consideration the changes occurring in our current society and how it reflects the world of sport.

Key words: figure skating, coaching, perceptions, work, pressures

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1 INTRODUCTION

Finnish sport culture has changed significantly over the past decades. It is said that “sport is a reflection of its time”. Thus this change in our sport culture can be seen as consequence of the more large-scale societal turning point, which reflects in all aspects of sports, both in physical activity and in elite level sports. Demands in contemporary sport culture are placing both athletes and coaches under pressure to succeed, and to perform well in their sport. Indeed, sport has become more serious. These societal changes have also created intense pressure towards sport club activities. Commercialism and popular culture have become competitors for the more traditional volunteer-based sport club activities. (Heikkala 2007, 127.)

The expectations towards sport clubs, and coaches working in sport clubs, have changed significantly over the past few decades. Athletes and their families are no longer just members of a sport club, they are more like customers, who expect high quality service in return on their investment. The societal changes, such as globalization, social changes, political and economic changes are also reflecting the sport culture. These can be seen in globalization, commercialization, and professionalization of sport. (Koski 2006, 12.)

Understanding and evaluating coaching is important for the development of coaching practices, the professionalization of coaching and accountability. It is complicated to make evaluative judgments about a coach’s contribution to the performance of an athlete, and question such as “*how do we come to know about the quality of coaching practice?*” is at key role.

Sport coaching is most successful and fruitful when the athlete is being developed as an individual. This has widened, diversified and deepened the job description of a coach. In this comprehensive coaching of an individual, the coach must take into consideration the athlete’s personal life as well: the coach must have skills to listen, help the athlete to learn, be present in the moment and being adequately available. (Kaski 2006, 23.)

In addition to the above mentioned reasons, the decision to choose figure skating as the topic for my master thesis was based on personal reasons, because figure skating has been long a part of my life. I have been an athlete, fulltime coach, and nowadays a participant of sport club activities in figure skating, and of course, a fan.

Figure skating is in all respects little studied topic even though such a big number of children and young participate in it. Finnish Figure Skating Association is one of the biggest associations in Finland with 84 member sport clubs, almost 8 000 competitive athletes and over 10 000 children involved in skating school activities. Skating is a traditional form of physical activity among Finnish people. According to the National Sport Survey, approximately 200 000 people engage in figure skating as a form of physical activity. Finland is also internationally recognized country in figure skating, especially after the success at the European and World Championship level in the years of 2005-2010.

This master's thesis aims at providing information about the variety of pressures figure skating coaches are experiencing in Finland, and thus focuses on the nature of the coaching work. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine, understand and describe how coaching work is perceived by Finnish figure skating coaches. This is done by exploring and interpreting coaches' personal experiences. More specifically, dimensions related to the challenges and demands set by the contemporary sport culture, and how it affects the performance and well-being of the coaches, is being studied. Moreover, this study aims at studying the pressures coaches encounter in figure skating coaching. In addition, this study describes how these pressures and conflict situations affect coaches' perceptions about their work and work-wellbeing. For these reasons, the research method applied in this study is a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews. This method fits well for the purpose of this study, because it allows to create a description and interpretation of the most essential experiences and perceptions Finnish figure skating coaches have about their work.

The aim of the study is also to provide information and knowledge about the perceptions of figure skating coaches related to their expertise in coaching. The results will be valuable for figure skating coaches and The Finnish Figure Skating Association in order to provide assistance for coaches in the areas where there exists a lack of knowledge and competence. This study will also benefit the coach-athlete relationship by improving their cooperation.

In addition, the results of this study aim to support the coaching education system, in order to guarantee the well-being of the Finnish figure skating. Moreover, this study aims to increase the awareness of figure skating among the general academic world, so that

researches would be inspired to acquire more information about the sport, its requirements and coaching.

Following the introduction of this thesis, figure skating coaching will be introduced more in detail. The literature review will concentrate more deeply on the concepts of sport coaching and coaching excellence. The methodology chapter will outline the research questions and introduce the research design. In addition, the data collection and analyzing processes will be demonstrated in the methodology section. Following the methodology the results will be displayed, concentrating on the findings received from the in-depth theme interviews. The conclusion part will introduce a summary based on the interviews and results, and concluding the research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical part of this study explores the concepts of Finnish figure skating coaching and characteristics of coaching as a profession. Despite a thorough search it was not possible to find many previous researches about sports coaching that had focused in figure skating and towards the perceptions of coaches. Extensive amount of research has been done in the physiological field of figure skating as well as individual narratives of influential coaches. However, there is a lot of current international research generally about coaching excellence, and thus this study will introduce these concepts and at the same time I shall provide discussion and apply this information into existing literature of figure skating.

2.1 Contemporary sport culture in Finland

Finnish sport movement has its roots in the civic activities and in socializing youngsters. Thus, sport has a powerful educational role in Finland, which balances with its intrinsic value, winning. In Finland, the main task of children's and youngsters' sport is to educate healthy and active lifestyle. Sport started to become more competitive in the 1970s as more and more children and youngsters became involved with organized sport activities. National championships were organized in different sports, starting from 12-year olds. At the same time, age limits were set in the adults high-level sport competitions to limit the participation of too young athletes. However, international competitions targeted at young athletes has increased, such as Youth World Championships and European Championships. (Hakkarainen et al. 2009, 15-24.)

Sport is a reflection of its time and society. Changes in society reflect also sports. Therefore the expectations and demands towards sport clubs have also changed during the past decades. Sport club activity is more seen as a client-based activity. The client expects to receive certain level of service in return on their investment. (Koski 2006, 16-19.)

Physical exercise, sports, and some form of competition have always been a part of human life in one way or another. In addition, they have always been associated with a variety of social, educational, and health enhancing objectives and expectations. The Finnish sport culture has changed significantly over the past decades. These changes in both physical activity and high performance sports are reflections of the changes in our society.

Changes in civic activity can be examined and broken down in changes in the general environment and in sport culture. Below are listed some of the key trends in change during recent times, and brief examples are mentioned of their consequences in sport activities. (Koski 2000, 14.)

In general, the level of requirements in sport is increased, which sets more pressure to sport organizations. One of the changes related to this is increased professionalization in sport organizations. These tend to increase the pressures for additional financing sources. (Koski & Heikkala 1998.) Education and research have contributed to the improvement of know-how, which has also led to professionalization of the grass-roots level activities. Sport club activities are aimed at being organized more orthodox, rationally and systematically. With regards to sport club youth activities, this development has meant that athletes and families are expected to long-term commitment. More playful and relaxed activities have changed to more goal-oriented activities. (Koski 2006, 13-18.)

Changes in the society have set challenges in the traditional volunteer work based sport club setting and activities. Commercialism and third sector activities have become competitors for the sport club activities. In addition, lifestyle has become more hectic and families' schedules are more and more limited. People's leisure time is more demanding, and people have become more aware of their versatile possibilities to spend it on. As the awareness of all this increases, it cannot but to affect also the work of coaches in sport clubs. (Koski 2006.)

According to the recent study on top athletes' pathway by Salasuo, Piispa & Huhta (2016), contemporary sport culture has changed the environment of the athlete. The content of sport has changed from playful activities to increasingly competitive environment. Spontaneous, voluntary, and diverse activities have narrowed down. It should be acknowledged in sport coaching that there is no specified methods to reach peak performance and success, moreover, there are a variety of pathways to the top. (Salasuo, Piispa & Huhta 2016, 77-90.)

The field of coaching can be seen as a very wide concept. There are great differences between sports, and even within one sport. In figure skating, there are coaches working with single skaters, synchronized skating teams, ice dancers, and pair skaters. Based on coaching education materials, coaching includes management planning and preparing and educational tasks. In addition, coaching requires good communication, and interpersonal

skills. Coaches need to have all-encompassing information and knowledge about all the different stages involved in the coaching process, such as planning, executing the practices, follow-up, and providing feedback. Thus coaching can be regarded as a specialist work, and at the same time it is about developing the performance of the athlete.

Children become involved in organized sports activities often at a younger age. At the same time, the responsibility of children's physical activity has shifted more and more from families and other supporting network towards sport clubs. Especially child's goal- and success-oriented sport activities, such as figure skating, define greatly the whole family's daily life, and also changes parenthood. Parents are expected to support and encourage their child in the particular sport, and to guide other leisure time activities to serve and favor success in that sport. Thus, sport clubs may leave the parents only in role of the payer, which does not give them the possibility to influence on the contents and policies/practices of sport activities. This might cause dissatisfaction towards sport club activities. Competitiveness, discipline and perseverance are related with the educational sport club activities. The practice of competitive and peak performance sports have become a part of everyday sport hobbies at even younger age. Practices are organized year-round multiple times per week. (Kokkonen 2015, 286.)

Parents usually have a critical influence in children's sport activities. Organized sport activities are perceived as important leisure time activities, because it happens under adult supervision, teaches children to compete and how to behave in group settings, and (also) teaches goal-setting. Parents' support and investments, in the forms of money and time for instance, are essential elements in children's sport activities, especially in competitive sports. However, parents' high level of activity and involvement can also have a negative side, if it changes to demands and too high expectations. (Hakkarainen et al. 2009, 32-33.)

2.2 Sport coaching

Coaching remarks always a certain point in time. Coaching is a reflection of the time we are living. Our ideas and values about coaching are always shaped by the changes in the society, education system, families, culture, and in the world of sport. During the course of time, these perceptions about coaching have expanded and new concepts and ideas have brought additional instruments to old ones.

In the beginning of our modern sport, military education reflected values and ideals of sport and physical activity. Sport was characterized by the tough upbringing both at home and at school system, which was seen in the values of patriotism, national identity, military education and temperance for instance. In the 1960's and 1970's, as a result of urbanization and increase in peoples' leisure, sport began to show changes and development towards more systematic, organized and goal-oriented. (Hämäläinen, Blomqvist, Laitinen-Väänänen, Parviainen & Potinkara, 2012, 5-7.)

Traditionally, Finnish coaching has been based in strong knowledge of coaching physical qualities, meaning the areas of physical condition, skills and technical qualities. Yet, the comprehensive coaching process includes supporting the athlete in the development of their physical-motoric, cognitive, emotional, and social skills. Therefore the coach needs to master a variety of skills to develop both the technical features of the sports as well as the conditions affecting the sport skills. (Forsman & Lampinen, 2008, 24-25.)

Elite sport is a phenomenon, which lacks absolute definition. Elite sport is changing together with the changes in society. In this post-modern society elite sport is characterized by commercialization and the entertainment industry. Other definitions of elite sport in the present time are internationality, professionalism and publicity (Ministry of Education and Culture 2004, 21).

Sport coaching can be defined in many ways, yet there should always be comprehensive development of physical and psychological skills of the athletes. Sport coaching is a very complex and large phenomenon, where the basic chores include developing and improving performances of a team or individuals. Moreover it is also the coach's job to plan and execute practices, create techniques and tactics for competition events, ensure the best possible physical preparation, and lead and support each individual throughout the season or specific time period. (Nash & Collins 2006, 466-471.)

Sport coaching is largely a social activity, where the coach-athlete relationship contributes not only to the excellence of peak competitions but also to the performance culture outside the competitions that support consistent high performance. At the very core of this relationship are emotional bonds, connections of trust and interpersonal expertise, such as to understand how and why a coach can get his or her athletes to perform at a high level. Sport coaching primarily involves teaching the technical and tactical skills of specific sport, but ultimately it includes more than that. Central to their

role, coaches lead and manage the execution of skills by knowing how to lead, inspire and enhance motivation. (Chan & Clifford 2011.)

Nygren (1988) defines sport coaching as systematic improving of the performance abilities of the athlete by implementing practices based on knowledge, skills and scientific research. (Nygren 1988, 158–166.) According to Niemi-Nikkola (2004) the process of achieving the potential and the limitations of an athlete's performance capacities is straightforward, but the process is highly complex and demanding. The more advanced the athlete is in his or her career path, the more important is the coach's professionalism and time investment. (Niemi-Nikkola 2004, 387-397.)

The task of a sport coach is to be in charge of developing necessary skills required in executing physical and psychological elements of a specific sport. Some of the sub-areas of coaching are practicing of basic qualities, teaching and refining sport specific skills and affecting attitudes. According to Kantola (1988) the significance of the coach for the success of athletes is great since the coach, alongside the athletes, has the most influence on the improvement or regression of performance. Therefore the professional expertise of a sport coach is of great importance. (Kantola 1988, 220.)

In his research, about the holistic conception of a human man developed by Lauri Rauhala, Puhakainen (1995) wanted to rattle the Finnish coaching field. His research was "a protest against coaching thinking, which is based on interest for technical knowledge and manipulative control". Puhakainen (1995) lists four basic values based on human rights, human dignity, integrity, equity, and autonomy, which should be the basis for all coaching work. All these elements are essential, when the athlete is want to be perceived as a complex human being, rather than just an object. (Puhakainen, 1995, 26-42, 190-195.)

Côte and Gilbert (2009) describe coaching knowledge as follows: Although a major component of coaching expertise resides in one's ability to teach sport specific skills, coaching expertise is also about the ability to create and maintain relationships with others and the ability to learn from one's own practice. (Côte & Gilbert, 2009.)

Traditionally, coach's knowledge about sport has been emphasized as a trait measuring coaching skills. General sport knowledge includes know-how to improve sport performance, which requires knowledge about human growth and development, as well

as understanding of ratio of stress load and recovery of the athlete. At the core of the interpersonal skills are emotional- and social communication skills, organizational skills, and human skills. A foundation base for all coaching skills and learning are created by the coach's self-development skills, which are for instance self-knowledge, self-assessment skills, networking skills, learning to learn skills, cognitive skills and ability to search and assess information. (Hämäläinen2013.)

Many factors are intertwined in the operational environment of coaches. How much they contribute or affect the environment, depend greatly on the level where coaching happens, meaning whether the athlete is in his childhood or adulthood stage, and whether the coaching occurs at grassroots or elite level. In addition to athlete's age and level (environments), gender plays a role (=female, male, or both). When considering the operational environment of the coach, the organization of practice (individual, group, team) and the level of the group (same skill level, unequal level, different sports integrated) are contributing factors. The role of the coach in the athlete's life can be versatile; he can be athlete's personal coach, "specialist" (meaning for example physiotherapist or mental coach) or the head coach. Cultural factors, such as ethnicity, religion, and sport culture and different circumstances, such as the size of the district, training/competition facilities, club-level organization and also parents/families are factors affecting the operational environment of sport coaches. (Hämäläinen et al 2012, 22-31.)

2.3 Figure skating and coaching in Finland

"Speed and movement. Power and grace. Courage and patience. Discipline and freedom. Rhythm. Own interpretation." (Finnish Figure Skating Association 2015.)

These words describe figure skating as a sport and physical activity at its versatility. Figure skating attracts people from all backgrounds and stages of life. At the same time the sport demands highly trained capabilities, such as power, endurance, speed, strength, coordination skills. Yet it demands skaters to be graceful and make movements so that it seems effortless and beautiful.

Finnish figure skating clubs organize a wide range of activities for children, youth and adults. Figure skating includes single skating, synchronized skating, pair skating and ice dance. Figure Skating Association has 84 member sport clubs, who organize highly

professional skating activities to their members. There are over 10 000 children participating in skating school activities and more than 8 000 competitive athletes within the sport clubs. According to the National Sport Survey approximately 200 000 people perceive skating as part of their physical activities. (KIHU-Research Institute for Olympic Sports 2015.)

Finnish figure skating and coaching has long traditions, and Finns have been successful in the figure skating arenas. Ludovika ja Walter Jakobsson were silver medalists in pair skating at the World Championships in 1910, 1912, 1913 and 1922 and World Champions in 1911, 1914 and 1923. They won Olympic gold in Antwerpen 1920 and silver medalists at the Olympic Games in 1924. In the 1970's Finnish figure skating was yet again pointed in the world's map, this time by the success of Kristiina Wegelius, Susan Broman and Pekka Leskinen, who all skated at the European and World Championships. In the 1990's the most famous figure skaters were the ice-dancing pair Susanna Rahkamo and Petri Kokko, who had their best achievements in 1995 when they won gold at the European Championships and were silver medalists at the World Championships.

The real success in Finnish figure skating, however has taken place during the 2000's. Finnish figure skaters have been successful both in single and in synchronized skating. In synchronized skating, Finland has been one of the top countries at the World Championships, where our teams have won more than 20 medals. In single skating the performances of Susanna Pöykiö, Alisa Drei, Laura Lepistö and Kiira Korpi have guaranteed a continuous success at the European Championships as well as at the World Championships. Laura Lepistö has been the first Finnish female skater ever to win gold at the European Championships in 2009, and bronze at the World Championships in 2010 and she was also placed 6th at the Vancouver Olympics in 2010, which is the best performance in Finnish figure skating history in single skating. (Finnish Figure Skating Association 2015.)

Figure skating coaching has changed radically during the past few decades. After reforming the judging system after the Vancouver 2002 Winter Olympic Games, Finnish figure skating coaching and training faced new challenges. As the judgment system emphasized more versatility, figure skating training needed to include more practicing of steps and spins. To be able to compete at the top level, skaters need to be highly versatile in terms of their skating skills, since mastering only difficult jumps is not enough

anymore. As a consequence this puts more emphasis and pressure also on the coaches as they need to make sure that their skaters reach the required level of motoric skills, strong physique and provide training that is consistently progressive and versatile. (Valto and Kokkonen 2009, 445-452.)

The main work in figure skating in Finland is done in sport clubs lead by professional coaches. The foundation for the Finnish figure skating coaching system is in the professional sport club based coaching. Coaches working in sport clubs are creating a strong base for efficient daily training, which is an absolute must in aiming for international success. In comparison to many other sports, figure skating has a large number of professional coaches in sport clubs. They are usually working with both the beginners, as well as skaters competing at international level. Full-time employment enables coaches to focus solely on the coaching work. However, the heavy workload and the skaters' variety of skill level, might limit the coach's abilities to fully focus on the coaching of the high-level skaters. (Finnish Figure Skating Association 2011.)

According to sport analysis a talented figure skater is lightweight, slim, and rather short in height. Skater needs to be quick. The other physical characteristics include explosive strength and elasticity. As figure skating is a skill sport, many of the skill qualities are important in the characteristics of a figure skater, one of the most important element being capability to a fast rotation. All these above mentioned characteristics can be seen in snappy and quick skating and in determination in jumps. Figure skater also needs good coordination skills, and especially important are rhythmic, balance, combination, and orientation skills and abilities. Figure skaters are required to analyze their own performances already at a young age, so self-assessment and ability to reflect are important characteristics. In addition, psychological features, such as motivation, own desire, bravery, perseverance, and fast learning ability are important. Besides being a skill sport, figure skating is also very esthetic and performing sport, and therefore skater needs to possess certain type of charisma, sparkle, and personality in interpreting the music. (Hakkarainen et al. 2009, 446.)

In addition to figure skating, skill sports include gymnastics, ski jumping, swimming, individual ball sports, and sports requiring accuracy. Skill demands in all of these sports are very different from one another, and they require development of very different qualities and elements. What is common for all these different skill sports, is the high

portion of skill and technique compared to other physical qualities of an athlete. In single sports, skill includes also the ability to control the environment, and in team sports, it also includes control of team skills and ability to fast reaction. Mastering a skill requires in addition to sport-specific features, many years of practicing and thousands of repetitions. (Kantola, 1988, 260-265.)

Due to the nature of a skill sport, figure skating requires exceptional determination and high level of requirement from the coaching point of view. Practicing a skill sport requires a lot of time both from athlete and coach. Therefore, it is no surprise that the most top athletes practice 6 to 8 hours a day. The target amount of practice hours in figure skaters aged 8-13 years are 8-17 hours per week, 14-18 years old 20-25 hours per week, and over 19 years old over 25 hours per week. (Nieminen 2001, 3-50.)

The crucial importance in coaching skill sports is creating a strong skill foundation before school age, encouraging and demanding atmosphere, athlete engagement in the sport, optimal environment for training, and a year-round, long-term, and thorough practice plan including great amount of repetitions. (Kantola 1988, 260-262.)

2.3.1 Finnish coaching excellence model

Norms created in organizations, among different sports, sport clubs, and teams determine good coaching. Different sports may have different knowhow demands, which change the requirements of coaching. Naturally, operational environment and background also affect the coach's knowhow demands. The Finnish coaching excellence model aims at describing the entity of coaching. (Hämäläinen et al. 2012.) The model is based on the studies by Côté and Gilbert (2009). They define effective coaching as follows: “*consistent application of professional, interpersonal, and self-assessment skills to develop athlete's performance, self-confidence, sense of belonging, and personality in a particular environment*”. The difference of this model compared to previous models is the fact that, when evaluating the coach's competence, the only areas, which can be evaluated, are the ones where coach can have an effect on. The model includes three categories. Firstly, the coach can affect his own professional skills. Secondly, the coach cannot directly impact the performance of the athlete, but he can affect those certain elements, which affect the performance. Thirdly, the coach may not necessarily have the ability to affect his operational environment, but the expertise of coaches varies in different environments. Norms created within the specific sport, sport clubs and teams or groups are defining

effective coaching, and therefore coaching skills can have a different meaning in different sport or sport club context. (Côté & Gilbert 2009, 307-309.)

In addition, the sport culture determines very much the way good relationship between coach and athlete is perceived. Moreover, the coach's personality and background influences also on the needed skills for coaching, such as the age of the athlete – how much one needs to learn about generation differences.

In the Finnish coaching excellence model, coach's professional knowledge has been divided into four different categories, which are sport skills, interpersonal skills, intrapersonal skills, and resources (table 1). Traditionally, it has been perceived that sport skills determine a good coach. However, the current model aims at providing more in depth and versatile information of what determines good coaching. Sport skills include not only the technical and tactical skills, which are at the very core of the sport specific skills needed, but also more general sport skills. This area includes knowledge of improving performance, which again means understanding human growth and development together with the balance of stress and recovery. At the very core are the sport specific skills, which include the technical, tactical and other requirements of that specific sport, but also the skills of teaching and delivering the information to the athlete. The human interaction skills highlight the emotional intelligence, interpersonal and communication skills, and ability to organize and knowledge of human nature. As a base for all learning and know-how are the coach's self-development skills, which consist of self-knowledge, self-evaluation skills, learning to learn skills, networking skills, data acquisition and assessment skills, and cognitive ability. (Hämäläinen et al. 2012.)

TABLE 1. Professional knowhow of coach. (Hämäläinen et al. 2012.)

PROFESSIONAL KNOWHOW OF COACH		
Physical, social and mental resources: Self-knowledge, creativity, motivation, values and attitudes, coping, health		
Sport knowledge	Interpersonal skills	Intrapersonal skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General sport knowledge • Sport specific skills • Pedagogical skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication and interaction skills • Emotional intelligence • Organization skills • Problem solving skills • Understanding human nature • Negotiation skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-evaluation skills • Learning-to-learn skills • Networking skills • Searching and evaluating information • Reflecting skills

The aim of the Finnish coaching model is to develop competent athletes, who are ready to take on responsibility and ownership of their own training. That is to say, that the athlete has a strong intrinsic motivation towards sport, he or she has grown to take on responsibility of his own actions and training, and has strong ownership in his/her own training. In terms of coach's know-how, it means that the coach strengthens the athlete's intrinsic motivation, allows athlete to take on responsibility suitable for his/her development, and allows space for the athlete's decision-making and to make his/her own choices regarding his training. (Hämäläinen, 2013.) In addition, the Finnish coaching model aims at changing the coaching culture from coach-centered into athlete-centered. This means transformation in coach's actions and know-how, but not decrementing the role of the coach. The role will become even more challenging.

In the Finnish coaching excellence model, the second area relates to things, where the coach can affect in an athlete (table 2). The purpose of this model is to describe that coaching is about supporting the development of the athlete, and about developing coach's own professionalism in a certain environment. Traditionally, coaching has been seen as a process, where the coach is required to have the necessary sport skills in order to develop the skills of an athlete. Throughout the ages, coach has affected other areas as well, but has not necessarily received enough tools and information for this, for example in coaching trainings.

As the table (2) below demonstrates, the coach can affect the athlete's growth as a human being. This entails a variety of things, such as learning about values and norms, grow to take on responsibility, respect towards others, self-respect, interpersonal skills, and even basic things like manners. Development as an athlete and sport specific skills can be seen as two entities. Learning about athletic lifestyle is also associated with growing as a human being. Sport specific knowledge means sport specific skills, tactical and equipment skills, and competition skills. Sense of belonging means that the athlete sees himself as an athlete within his own sport, grows to love the sport, and feels that he is a part of the sport community. Intrapersonal skills, such as goal-setting and self-evaluation skills, allow the athlete to grow in all of the other areas as well. To develop all of these skills throughout the athlete's career, starting from childhood is essential in growing as an athlete. These skills are required in reaching the top, but also in other areas of life. (Hämäläinen et al. 2012.)

TABLE 2. Areas, where the coach can affect in an athlete. (Hämäläinen et al. 2012.)

Areas, where the coach can affect in an athlete			
Growth as a human being	Development as an athlete and sport specific skills	Sense of belonging	Intrapersonal knowledge
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values and attitudes • Responsibility • Empathy • Self-esteem • Interpersonal skills 	<p>Athletic lifestyle:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Athletic lifestyle • Physical fitness and performance • Training • Recovery, rest, nutrition • Motivation • Self-confidence • Enthusiasm <p>Sport specific skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical, tactical, knowledge of necessary tools and equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love for the sport • Commitment • Sense of community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal-setting • Self-evaluation skills • Learning to learn skills • Networking skills • Searching and evaluating information • Reflecting skills

2.3.2 Role of the coach

The meaning of coaching, and the role of the coach is highly connected with the concept of culture and is tied with perceptions of the society about relationships between adults and children and other power relations. The Finnish understanding of coaching has changed from the physical-technical point of view in the 1980s towards more educational viewpoint. In recent years, particularly communication skills and coach's role as an educator of life skills have been emphasized, and have been the enthusiasm of researchers.

Many factors, such as character and backgrounds of both coach and athlete, and life experiences affect the coaching relationship. The relationship can be seen as a technical relationship, where the coach's role is purely to assist the athlete in sport related issues, or it can be a more profound relationship, where both parties have in-depth information about each other, also from other areas in life besides sport.

Coach is affected by his or her own past experiences. How he/she has been coached, taught, and brought up are affecting in some ways his actions. His perceptions about human being, learning, and sport will guide his way of coaching. The same principles apply for the athlete as well. Experiences about adults in general can be significant especially when coaching children. In addition, parents and their expectations affect the coaching relationship especially when talking about children and young athletes.

Hämäläinen et al (2012) point out that the environment and surrounding society's expectations, rules, and norms guide the coaching relationship. There exist different subcultures within national sport federations and sport clubs, which have created their own procedures and norms. These subcultures may highly guide what it means to be a coach or an athlete in that particular sport or club (figure 1).

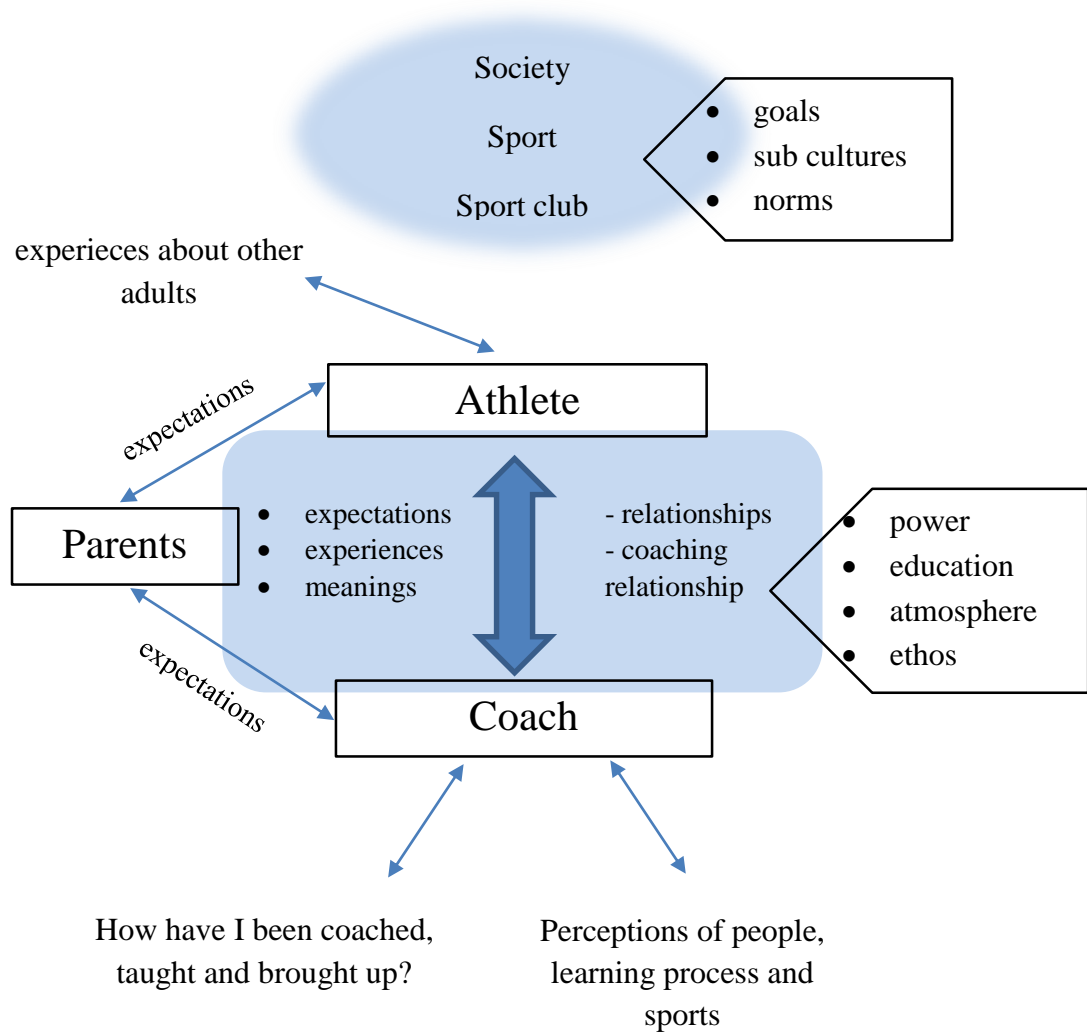


FIGURE 1. Relationship between coach and athlete and its determining and affecting factors. (Modified from Hämäläinen et al 2012.)

The relationship between coach and athlete is a power relation. The athlete is more dependent on the coach than rather than the other way around. Athletes understand from the start that in order to achieve the best performance they are ineluctably dependent on factors outside of their control.

Coaches perceive their main role in assisting the athlete to reach their ultimate potential and best performance. In figure skating this means mainly preparing the athlete to their competitions. Moreover, coaches often perceive themselves as educators and responsible for the athlete's general psychological and social well-being in addition to planning and running daily practices. Therefore, many coaches see as their duty to also prepare their athletes for future, "outside of sport" world. (Hämäläinen et al 2012, 42.)

2.3.3 Interpersonal skills

The relationship between the coach and the athlete is very confidential, sensitive, and therefore very demanding (Heino 2000, 115). Personality, previous experiences, and assumptions of the current situation are factors affecting the interaction between coach and athlete. These characteristics affect the way the coach or athlete listens, sees, feels, and thinks. An effective coach uses these experiences to evaluate his interaction and communication skills. (Autio & Kaski 2005, 77-78.)

Human interaction is not merely about communication and discussion, it is present in every coaching situations. Social interaction is a tool for communication, which is based on both verbal and non-verbal communication. Verbal communication is often perceived as intentional, but also non-verbal communication can become intentional. Non-verbal communication often informs the recipient about mood, emotions, attitudes, and intentions by using facial expressions, signs, and look, sometimes even unconsciously. (Laine 1997, 73-75.) Often in coaching situations, the coach uses verbal communication to advice the athlete or correct their mistakes. However, the non-verbal communication is highlighted in situations, where the coach is aiming to influence of the emotions of the athlete, such as preparing the athlete for competition situations or handling disappointment. (Heino 2000, 116.)

The most important interpersonal skills the coach can have, is the skill of listening. When the athlete feels that he is being heard, his trust towards the coach increases and this will lead into a more open communication between the coach and athlete. (Autio & Kaski 2005, 82.) In addition, the coach should treat all athletes in a group situation equally. This can be sometimes become a challenge for the coach in figure skating, since all practices are kept in groups, and communicating with all individuals can be demanding sometimes. However, this is a key element, since this enables the athletes' social skills development and moral understanding. (Aho 1997, 144.)

The coach's interest, respect and trust towards the athlete become very important in terms of interpersonal and communication skills. The coach should be able to constantly demonstrate all the above mentioned to all of his athletes in their interaction situations. (Heino 2000, 117.) The young athletes should be involved in planning stages and in decision-making processes in order to demonstrate respect towards them. This will increase trust and acceptance in the coach-athlete relationship.

Coaches have a significant role in the lives of their athletes. Coaches can often be perceived as a co-parent, a person setting boundaries, teacher or even a friend. Relationship formed between the coach and the athlete can turn into a lifelong friendship or something that wants to be forgotten. Whether the coach wants it or not, the coach always has also a role in raising a child or a young person. A coach and an athlete can have a variety of different types of roles in a coach-athlete relationship. This close relationship may have different nuances and may change over time in the case where the relationship between the coach and athlete is long-term. Often a coach-athlete relationship is very strong and significant, whereas sometimes it shows no significance to either parties involved. Once again, the purpose of this chapter is not to demonstrate that one style of relationship would be somewhat better or more successful than the other. (Hämäläinen 2012, 243.)

A good coaching relationship can be summed up as producing positive experiences. According to Fry et al. (2012), who conducted a study about athletes' perceptions of caring atmosphere and its effects on their experiences, athletes who experienced the atmosphere as more caring, described that they enjoyed more, had more positive attitude towards team members and coaches, had higher levels of dedication towards the sport and behaved more politely towards other people. The coach has a central role in creating that type of atmosphere. In order to create that atmosphere, all individuals need to be treated with respect and encounter by listening, empathy and acceptance. (Fry et al 2012 44-57.)

Firstly I shall discuss about a particular type of coach-athlete relationship, where the coach acts as the main creator of discipline and boundaries and the role of the athlete is solely to obey. In this case, the main role of the coach is to be the authority, and the practices are characterized by an atmosphere of discipline and strict training pace. This type of coach-athlete relationship is characterized by a strong unquestioned decision-making power of the coach, who is responsible of planning and deciding the content of each practice, where reaching for the set goals is supervised by strong drive, shouting and high demands. This type of style surely makes the athletes perform at their best limits when this particular coach is present on the ice. The coach might think he or she is teaching the athletes to take responsibility, but on the contrary he is not, because he is not giving any responsibility to the athletes. He determines tasks and ultimately takes the responsibility by demanding and shouting. This becomes an evident problem, when the

coach is absent and a substitute coach is responsible of the practices. In most cases, the athletes' own discipline is not strong enough to practice hard when the "discipline coach" is absent.

Certain amount of discipline creates feeling of security. When the coach decides what to do and maintains order, it makes the athlete feel safe. The determined coach may seem trustworthy and expert. Athlete may also feel safe, because by demanding the coach shows that it insignificant what the athlete is doing at practices. Sense of security can also come from the fact that the athlete can only perform what is asked by the coach, without having to think too much.

The second type of coach-athlete relationship describes a distribution of roles, where the coach is rigorous and fear is the main characteristic during practices. The main goal and measurement of success are results, wins and records. The versatile development of individual is of secondary importance as long as the athletes keep performing to their expectancies. In addition to an atmosphere of strong demands and discipline, practices are characterized by shouting and rage. There is no genuine discussion in this type of relationships, or it can seem clumsy. The coach remains distant from the athlete, and as a result all interaction outside of the relevance to performance, seems vague. One key factor separating this style of all others, seems to be the core issue that the coach does not believe to possess a role as an educator or in the upbringing of the young athlete. (Finni et al. 2012, 42-44.)

In the third type of coach-athlete relationship the essence is in admiration. The athlete looks up to the coach, and the admiration is unconditional and unlimited. This type of behavior is especially typical with young children, when the coach is some sort of a superhuman, whom they want to become. The atmosphere at practices is characterized by mainly joy and enthusiasm, and there is a lot of discussion in this type of relationship. The coach may or may not be aware of the depth of the athlete's admiration, and thus the consequences of what the coach says might have a significant meaning. The role of the coach in this relationship as an educator is high, because the coach has such a high authority in the life of the athlete. The young child might look up to the coach and listen to him more than anyone else at this point, and therefore the coach has a significant power and opportunity to teach and educate that athlete. The coach might also put himself on a

pedestal, where his friendship, trust and respect are worth pursuing for. (Finni et al. 2012, 44-45.)

Lastly, the coach – athlete relationship can also be a type of relationship, where the coach becomes a sort of a parent – a mother or a father, to the athlete. Then coach's role is more holistic and emphasizes the education of the athlete as a human being, and roles and tasks related to the sport are secondary. The relationship between the coach and athlete is very close, and they are able to discuss about everything. In some cases the athlete might find it even easier to talk to the coach about personal issues rather than to his own parents. (Finni et al 2012, 46.)

From the coach's point of view, building a good coach-athlete relationship generates good sport performances. According to studies done by Could and Carson (2011), athletes perceive that when coaches invest in creating good relationship with them, it has many positive effects on their performance. Gould, Collins, Leuer and Chang (2006, 2007) explain that coaches perceive good coaching relationship as a critical factor in their success as coaches. On the other hand, coaches perceive their role also as educators, and often see themselves as having a role in affecting the growth of the athlete in areas such as confidence, sense of belonging, performance and growth as a human being. In addition to these attributes, also life skills, atmosphere, positive impact, and positive psychological attributes were mentioned.

2.4 Professionalization of sport coaching

According to a study published by KIHU - Research Institute for Olympic sports, the Finnish coaching genre has professionalized during the past decade. In 2002, the number of professional coaches was almost 1200. Nine years later, in 2011, the number of professional coaches had increased by more than 400 coaches, making it total of 1600 coaches. Over ten years ago, approximately 60 percent of the coaches worked part-time, whereas currently, approximately 80 percent of the coaches are working full-time. (Kärmeniemi 2012, 30-32.)

The study also revealed that sport clubs continue to be the main employer for professional coaches. The number of professional coaches has increased the most in ice hockey, football, tennis, figure skating, and in swimming. In turn, the numbers have decreased in basketball, gymnastics, athletics, and in orienteering. The average age of sport coaches

has risen over the past decade. This can be seen as an indication of more permanent jobs, but which have not been offered to young coaches. The study also indicates that a qualification in coaching and special qualifications are a standard educational level coaches are striving for. In addition, written contracts of employment have become more common and standard, and there has been a positive development in the earnings. (Kärmeniemi 2012, 20-27.)

In order to develop the knowledge, amount of professional coaches, and enhancing the position of professional coaches, some significant development measures have been made since 2002. The foundation of Professional Coaches in Finland (SAVAL), which is a service and lobbying organization for professional coaches and sports directors working in coaching, was one of the turning points of coaching becoming more professional. SAVAL works to ensure the prestige coaches and to improve conditions they are working in the society. Other significant steps include the development project of the Coaching – Instructor Education Programme (VOK-project) during 2005-2010, and recruitment project for Youth Olympic Coaches, which was initiated in 2006. (Kärmeniemi 2012, 4-5.)

2.5. Health-enhancing sport club

When looking at the development towards becoming an elite athlete, the essential focus has justly been on the factors closely connected to sport, such as practicing and its quantity and versatility. However, from the versatile development point of view, it is essential to consider also the health habits of young athletes. There is a variety of reasons why health habits and athletic lifestyle should be focal points of coaching children and youth towards elite athletes. In this chapter I will examine three largest entities.

First of all, children and youth are encountering the same current inactivity issues of modern society as everybody else. Moreover, the increasing level of leisure inactivity, decreasing amount of leisure activities and overweight are setting challenges in the process of developing from a child athlete to an elite level athlete. Secondly, lifestyle habits have many direct effects on the athlete's wellbeing and health, which consequently affect in their levels of readiness, recovery and learning process. Especially in figure skating training, where muscle damage, bruises and contusions are common due to the nature of the sport and frequency of practices, it is essential that nutrition, proper warm-ups and cool-downs, and rest can prevent these and enhance recovery. Thirdly, lifestyle

habits are strongly shaped at early stages of childhood and adopted habits at that age are also affecting youth stages, when the load and amount of practices need to be increased. In addition, childhood habits can influence all the way up to adulthood, in other words the elite-level. Therefore it can be by no means assumed that healthy lifestyle habits are automatically intrinsic, but needs to be actively taught to the athletes. (Kokko 2010, 35-39.)

According to recent health enhancing research material, it has become more essential to study the effects and impacts of the environment on the shaping of healthy lifestyle instead of decisions and choices made by the individual. It has been acknowledged that merely developing the individual knowledge and skills will not create significant changes in developing the individual, but it is also needed to create changes in the environment. In the context of sport, the sport clubs become essential creators of environment. Sadly, often the sport clubs have insufficient resources to provide support and information for the coaches, which results often in the case where the coach is left alone dealing with these issues. The outcome is dependent on the coach's own activity, interest and know-how. (Kokko 2010, 35-39.)

Practical education work, in terms of health-enhancing activities, focuses on the responsibility of the adults working in a sport club. Especially the role of a coach is significant. Increasing the awareness of athletic lifestyle should be perceived as built-in issue in the daily coaching work. Surely, it is a first step to provide educational material, organize lectures, but these alone will not be sufficient enough. Important elements are the adults' attitudes and approach towards specific health issue as well as own behavior. Sometimes the coaches are not even aware that their unconscious attitudes and behavior have as much effect as their conscious ones.

2.6. Wellbeing in sport coaching

Coaches' wellbeing has been mainly researched from the point of view of stress symptoms and burnout (e.g. Frey 2007; Kelley 1994.). However, very little research related to Finnish coaching context can be found. Kaski (2013) has researched in her doctoral dissertation work related well-being of coaches within competitive sports. Moreover she studied the occurrence of burnout and work engagement among sport coaches and how they relate to the demands and resources of that job. The study was conducted in 2007-2008 with 499 coaches. The respondents were 77% male, and 23%

female, out of which in total 35 % were full-time coaches, and 65% were part-time coaches. According to the results, 24% of the coaches experienced work-related burnout, and 30% had encountered fatigue, which is a core symptom of burnout. At the same time, majority of the coaches experienced high level of motivation towards their work, especially dedication, which was experienced daily by more than half of the respondents. Full-time coaches reported higher levels of motivation as well as burnout than the part-time coaches. (Kaski 2013, 73-117.)

Coaches have a variety of work-related roles. They are responsible for planning and operating the practices, teaching the required skills, techniques and tactics, acting as decision makers, coordinators, and responsible for cooperating with the outside world. Very often the coach handles all this work alone. According to Weinberg and Gould (1999) the coach's possible prolonged fatigue and dissatisfaction towards the settings of the work, such as pressure to win, constant travelling, and demanding roles may lead into the coach's exhaustion, burnout. (Weingberg & Gould 1999, 518.)

Raedeke (2004) pointed out that with work-related pressures and demands increasing, coaches might start to doubt their own professionalism and skills, which can result in fatigue. In addition, it is very common to underline hard work, long hour and dedication in the coaching culture, which can also cause excess stress and exhaustion for some coaches. However, not all coaches experience the demands and requirements in a similar way, and coaches may have different ways of handling stress and use of coping skills. (Raedeke 2004, 335-339.)

The job description of education professions (such as teacher, coach, and instructor) changes continuously and has faced changes according to developments in conception of learning, as well as continuous demands in the society and working life. Wright (1987) emphasizes that same individual may possess several different roles in the same social position. The roles of figure skating coaches may vary several times during one working day or even during one practice session: he or she may have roles from a facilitator for favorable environment, maintaining law and order, to a motivator. (Wright 1987.)

According to a variety of international research, coaching has been recognized as a demanding profession. This occupation has also been associated with a range of stressors, and the extent to which the coaches perceive these is likely to be influenced by several of personal and situational factors. According to Fletcher and Scott (2010), it is recognized

that encountering such stressors can result in a number of negative responses, mainly decrementing coaching performance due to coaches' inability to work and reduced ability to focus on tasks. Coaches, who perceive high levels of stress in their work, might also experience some certain negative physical and mental health outcomes, such as mental fatigue, decreased job satisfaction, and, in some cases, burnout. (Fletcher and Scott 2010; Kelley 1994; Olusoga et al. 2010; Pastore 1991.)

As Lyle (2002) points out, coaches have multiple roles to perform in addition to their coach-athlete relationship, including role of instructor, mentor, friend, organizer, educator, and counselor, which all include variety of technical, physical, organizational, and psychological challenges. However, coaches are often judged by the success of their athletes. Therefore, it is no surprise that coaches experience stress as a result of the growing demands they encounter in their work. (Lyle 2002, 64.)

Indeed, in a study from 1982, Kroll and Gundersheim (1982) found that in their study sample all coaches experienced their job as stressful, and especially interpersonal relationships identified as the most significant. In their study, Sullivan and Nashman (1993) identified stressors associated with sport coaching. They found that selecting athletes, lack of preparation time, and spending time away from family were some of the primary stressors experienced by Olympic head coaches. Also, another study done in this field by Wang and Ramsey (1998) revealed that effective communication, creating a positive and motivational atmosphere, and lack of financial assistance were significant challenges for new beginners in coaching.

3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research design used in this study by discussing five different aspects: approach and strategy, data collection, data analysis and trustworthiness of the study. A more theoretical explanation is provided in the beginning of each chapter followed by a more in-depth discussion of its relevance to this particular study.

The main purpose of this research is to examine, understand and describe how coaching job is perceived by Finnish figure skating coaches by exploring and interpreting their personal experiences. More specifically, dimensions related to the challenges and demands set by the modern sport culture, and how it affects the performance and well-being of the coaches are examined. Moreover, this study aims at studying the pressures coaches encounter in figure skating coaching. In addition, this study describes how these pressures and conflict situations affect their perceptions about the work.

The research question of this study can be defined as follows:

How do Finnish figure skating coaches perceive their work and how they manage the pressures and demands set for them in contemporary sport culture?

3.1 Research approach and strategy

In sport management research both quantitative and qualitative research approaches are strongly supported and used. The important thing is to choose from the start which approach is the most effective for the resolution of the research problem. In a qualitative research results are not acquired by statistical methods as in quantitative and individual answers are more emphasized. Qualitative research approach investigates especially the why of decision making and also how it happens. It is also an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social problem. (Creswell 1998, 4). In this approach sample size does not really play a role, but in this particular research smaller but focused sample groups are needed and therefore respondents need to be elected beforehand. Qualitative approach is often used to gain information about people's attitudes, behaviours, motivations and lifestyles. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2005, 130-131.) Considering the nature of this particular research and the purpose to study the figure skating coaching in the contemporary sport culture, and Finnish figure skating coaches' perceptions about their work, a qualitative research approach was undoubtedly the best option.

In this research semi-structured interviews are used as a data collection method, and also my personal observations and engagement comprehensively describe the cultural and social setting of figure skating coaching. In light of these issues this study explores the personal experiences of a four Finnish figure skating coaches and their perceptions about their work in contemporary sport culture.

In the world of sport there exists many subcultures and micro-cultures, such as in figure skating. Likewise, any group, or a certain location can develop its own culture, or collection of behavior patterns and beliefs that constitute a set of norms for the people being involved in that particular team or sport. As a role of the researcher, it is my intent to understand how a particular culture operates, how it has evolved and how it influences the people who are part of it. (Tenenbaum & Driscoll 2005, 606.)

Gaining entry into a particular culture has to do with access and gaining permission to be involved in the field setting. This can be challenging in the case where the research question is of a sensitive nature. In order to gain entry into the world being studied, it is important to have permission to legitimate one's presence in the setting.

In conducting this study it was important to find informants who were willing to provide an insider's point of view on the research question being studied. These trustworthy individuals are in the possession of useful information and do not have ulterior motives for sharing their knowledge and information on the issue being studied.

3.2 Data collection

There are various ways of collecting data in a qualitative research approach. In general it can be said that in qualitative researches four main methods are utilized for data collection. These are fieldwork, observation, interviewing and analyzing documents and other supporting materials. The decision of choosing data collection method is dependent on the specific nature of the particular research. (Edwards & Skinner 2009, 102.)

A very often used method is interviewing. In sport management research in-person interviews are one of the most effective procedures, although interviews can also be performed via Internet or telephone. In-person interviewing has its strengths in providing more accurate responses, likelihood for authentic and individual responses, and effectiveness in dealing with complex issues. This type of interviewing also enables mutual interaction between the interviewer and the person being interviewed. (Gubrium,

Holstein 2001, 540-550.) Interviewing has also gained popularity among sport coaching research as it has potential for understanding and gaining “rich” insight into a coach’s perspective. This method has enabled researchers to develop a better understanding of what coaches do and why, how they perceive their work and their role. (Nelson et al. 2014.)

The interview form can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured and can be performed in a group setting or individual interviewing. All of these three forms have benefits and consequences and thus it is important to choose which form is most appropriate for data collection my study. While structured interview approach provides possibility for focused agenda consisting of predetermined questions, semi-structured and unstructured interview approaches possess more flexibility to explore also additional areas. Semi-structured interviews consists of a set of pre-determined questions or issues to be explored with each person, but allow possibility for exploring areas that may emerge during discussion. In this approach plan for interview is used to outline the main topics of conversation. Interview is not restricted to a fixed agenda, and allows the phrasing and order of the questions to be adaptable. (Nelson et al. 2014.)

According to Nelson, Groom & Potrac (2014) one-to-one semi-structured interviews are popular in sport coaching research as it allows for an in-depth examination of an individual’s attitudes, opinions, beliefs and values about a particular phenomenon. The aim of the interviews is to explore topics in depth and often times interviews are time consuming and thus usually involving few participants. According to recent publications (Norman 2008; Olusoga et al. 2009) with a focus on sport coaches, the number of participants ranged from one person to twelve and ranged in duration from 45 to 135 minutes.

As Eskola & Suoranta (1998, 85) explain, interviews are a process of interaction where both parties interact with each other. If we look at the interviewing process from an interaction point of view, it is typical that it is pre-designed, initiated and guided by the interviewer and, most importantly, the interviewee must rely on the fact that their stories will be treated confidentially. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 1980, 41.)

For this particular study, a set of semi-structured interviews with open ended questions provide in-depth information about the participants’ thoughts and perceptions about the topic of this study. Moreover, the interviews are the main data collection tool in this study,

which enabled me to gather sufficient amount of information needed for the reliability of this study. The interview questions were categorized by themes according to the research questions of this thesis.

3.3 Implementation of the study

In the initial phase of this study altogether six figure skating coaches were involved in the research process, and filled in the acceptance form. For the interviews four coaches were selected, as two of the coaches had never been coaching full-time. The reason for choosing these particular four coaches was their high level of interest in developing their own expertise and knowledge of coaching, and provide academic information regarding figure skating coaching in general in Finland. Another important reason was the fact that I had good connections to most of the coaches beforehand and had also had many discussions with them reflecting this topic issue. In addition, all these four coaches had shown personal interest to talk about these issues, and also increase the awareness of the issues within the whole sports community. The purpose was also to find different types of coaches from different backgrounds to tell their story in order to receive more diverse and heterogeneous stories. For the quality of the study, it was important to have both single skating and synchronized skating represented.

The interview requests (Appendix 1) were sent to each participating coach via email in March 2015. The coaches were also asked to fill in a consent form informing the participants about anonymity and confidentiality of their participation to the study. They were also informed about the possibility to withdraw from the study in case they felt uncomfortable during the research process. Each coach was asked to suggest a suitable time and place for the interview and afterwards we were able to agree the meetings. The interviews were recorded using my personal Iphone-device, where I had downloaded a recording application called "iRig Recorder". This application enabled me to record all the interviews, and afterwards download all the interview material into my computer and save it there for further analysis.

The first interview was conducted on 8th of April 2015. The interview took place at the Sport Institute of Finland, Vierumäki. The interviewed coach was a male single skating coach from the capital area of Finland. He has been coaching full-time in different sport clubs in Finland, and has worked in his current position for five years. The interview lasted 1 hour and 19 minutes.

The second interview was conducted on 10th of April 2015. The interview took place in the city of Lahti in a restaurant. The interviewed coach is a female single skating coach from the Eastern part of Finland. She has worked in her current position for two years, and is a full-time coach. The interview lasted 1 hour and 15 minutes.

The third interview was conducted on 15th of April 2015. The interview took place at the home of the interviewee in Helsinki. We had some dinner first and discussed about various topics, also related to figure skating, so the actual interview was comfortable to set up. The interviewed coach is a female single skating coach from the capital area of Finland. She has worked as a full-time coach in the past for four years, but currently she is coaching part-time. The interview lasted 1 hour and 2 minutes.

The fourth interview was conducted on 16th of April 2015. The interview took place at the practice ice rink, where the sport club had their training session. We discussed about various topics before starting the interview as the coach had just finished her training session, so I wanted her to be able to relax and get comfortable. The interviewed coach is a female synchronized skating coach from the capital area of Finland and she has worked full-time two years at her current sport club. The interview lasted 1 hour 25 minutes.

All of the interviews were made in Finnish due to their mother tongue, and as a request from them. In addition, I preferred to use Finnish language in order for them to be comfortably share their thoughts, and without having to think about the correct words or grammar. I wanted to ensure a relaxed atmosphere throughout the interviewing process. Therefore the interviewing took place at the home surroundings of each participant, whether it was at their home ice rink, at their office, or locker room. One of the coaches I interviewed at her home. I also wanted to discuss freely before starting the interviewing, so that the discussion would flow freely. In addition, I organized some coffee snacks for us, so that it would be like two friends having a discussion.

3.4 Data analysis

The purpose of data analysis is to clarify the collected data in a way to help in creating new information in line with research aims and supporting the existing literature. There exists a large number of different ways to analyze qualitative data and the procedures are being developed constantly.

Very often data can be organized into different types or themes. One common approach is theme coding. This approach allows the researcher to highlight themes, which illustrates the research question. Theme coding is also a preferred method in explaining and resolving a more practical research question, and this approach enables to find the most essential information related to the research question. (Eskola and Suoranta 1998, 160-174.)

Savolainen (1991, 454) describes four different methods in typifying the data. First of all, text extract can be used to justify the interpretation made by the researcher. Secondly, citation can serve as an example illustrating the material. Thirdly, quotations may help enliven the text, and fourthly, the material can be reduced into summarized narratives. Very often in qualitative research problematic are the compromises made in the reporting stage, especially when considering the amount of citations used versus researcher's own analyses and interpretation.

After recording of the interviews, I transcribed the total content of the interviews in Finnish into a separate Word-document. The transcribing process took five days, and altogether they produced 38 pages of transcribed material. During this transcribing process, I deleted some phrases that had no special meaning, expletives, yawns, and laughter and so on. After transcribing the interview data, I familiarized myself with the data by reading and rereading the data. In addition, I kept writing notes about ideas and thoughts, which derived from the data. In other words, the analyzing process was started by focusing on each interview separately and familiarizing with the total data. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 155-158.)

In the next phase of the analyzing process, the transcribed data was further analyzed by listening the interviews once again several times, and reading the written data. I repeated this process approximately 2-3 times per interview. After this, the data was analyzed using coding system followed by sorting them into interesting themes. At this phase, all relevant data was categorized under the pre-selected interview themes. For this procedure, the themes presented in the theme interview planning and in formatting the interviews, were helpful. As a next step, it was essential to review the themes carefully once more again in order to find the most essential and relevant themes according to the research question, and leave the less relevant out. After such careful and profound familiarizing with the data, finding the main themes for the data was rather smooth. However, I needed to back

to the themes a few times during the process in order to truly find the correct meaning for the themes and the data itself. Eventually these eight (8) themes were chosen:

1. Background information
2. Reasons affecting the choice of coaching career
3. Role of the coach
4. A strong coach-athlete relationship
5. Training culture
6. Lack of resources and professional guidance
7. Body image
8. Resources and coping skills

All main findings were first translated into English, and the defined and named properly. In the final phase, the reporting and presenting of the results was decided. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 175-182.)

3.5 Trustworthiness

To evaluate the trustworthiness of this study, following steps were taken: prolonged engagement, peer debriefing, and member checking. Prolonged engagement was ensured due to the fact that I have been a member of the figure skating world for my whole life and I knew all of the coaches beforehand. Also my own background in some of these clubs ensured prolonged engagement and therefore also persistent observations.

In peer debriefing I was be in contact with my supervisor and other possible mentors in order to assist and give guidance during the whole research process. Interview question were be checked by my supervisor at the University of Jyväskylä. Another technique to ensure credibility is member checking. It means that collected data is not used before it is returned to the original source of information for checking and approval. In this research, the transcribed interview data was sent back to the person being interviewed and he or she was able to read it through and make possible adjustments in statements if desired. (Lincoln & Guba 1985, 313-315.)

This study focused merely on the point of view of coaches. Understanding that coaching is a complex process, the opinions and viewpoints from athletes as well as parents should also be included. This information would surely benefit many stakeholders and would also provide a more comprehensive picture about figure skating coaching and generally

describe the culture more. This can be seen as a limitation to this study. On the other hand, it can also be seen as a recommendation for further studies in this area. However, my personal interest was specifically in understanding the coaching culture and the worlds of coaches and therefore wanted to focus my study solely on these issues that were raised. Secondly, collecting various types of data to support the findings of the interviews would increase the validity of this study. As a limitation to this study can be said that only interviews were used for data collection, whereas for example questionnaires, and observation methods could have been used as well. This can be a recommendation for further studies.

4 COACHES' EXPERIENCES ABOUT THEIR WORK

In this chapter the results of this study are presented. The data for this thesis was based on the interviews that I conducted with four Finnish figure skating coaches. The findings will be introduced based on the themes of the research. The findings are divided into seven themes. The themes are organized in a way that the Finnish figure skating coaching is described widely using multiple aspects. In order to protect the anonymity of the coaches, no names or other indicators of identity have been used.

4.1 Background information

In this section, the background information of the figure skating coaches is explained, and more precisely the purpose was to understand some of the reasons affecting their choice of pursuing a coaching career (table 3). All of the four coaches, who were interviewed for this study, were aged 25-40 years old.

Often figure skating coaches are assumed to have a personal competitive background as figure skaters. According to a variety of international research, possessing a personal background in high-level sport is beneficial and important in coaching work. (Erickson et al. 2007; Gilbert et al. 2006.) Indeed, all of the four coaches, who participated in this study, had their own background in figure skating, either in single skating or in synchronized skating. The prevalence of transferring from a skater to a coach became evident in the interviews. In addition, many of the coaches described the process of becoming a coach as a very natural choice for them, and also something that happened by coincidence. In other words, none of them had made specific plans about becoming a coach, and having a career in figure skating.

TABLE 3. Background information of the coaches interviewed

	Current coaching position and coaching experience	Background information
Coach 1: male 37 years old	Head coach at a figure skating club in the capital area of Finland. Also responsible of the administration of the club. Experience over 10 years	Single skater until the age of 22 years old at the highest Finnish national and international level, and he was also a part of the men's national team of Finland. In his words, he has dedicated his whole life to figure skating. When he was a skater himself, he always prioritized training before anything else. He had made his choices in life always based on figure skating, and therefore he had also moved from his home to another city for better training conditions at the age of 15 years old. He also feels privileged to have been able to practice with some of the most merited coaches in Finland, and also whilst living and training in Russia.
Coach 2: female 30 years old	Part-time single skating coach in a figure skating club in the capital area. Coaching on the side of her studies. Experience 7 years	She had started coaching whilst she was still actively skating herself, mainly helping with the youngest children. Background in single skating, and she skated almost 20 years at the highest Finnish national and also international level. She was part of the women's national team of Finland.
Coach 3: female 32 years old	Head coach in synchronized skating in a figure skating club in the capital area. Experience over 10 years	Prior to synchronized skating, she had also gained experience as a single skating coach for the younger skaters. She has also experience from other clubs outside capital city area. She had many years of experience as an assistant coach, but the past few years she has been the head coach.
Coach 4: female 26 years old	Currently assistant coach in the Eastern Region of Finland. Experience 5 years	She has worked a lot with younger and local level skaters, but the past two seasons she has worked as an assistant coach in single skating. For many years she worked part time, but currently she is coaching fulltime at a figure skating club outside the capital city area. She has also worked abroad as a single skating coach.

4.2 Passion and past experiences affecting the choice of coaching career

At this point, the purpose was to understand some of the reasons affecting the coaches' choice of career. Based on the findings of the study, the coaches reflected largely on their own past experiences as athletes and memories related to their own coaches. In this part, I wanted to prevail some of the reasons why figure skating coaches perhaps want to start coaching in the first place, and how it had become their choice of career later on.

Based on the findings of this study, a background in personal skating career was prevalent among figure skating coaches, but the level of skating did not seem to be the most essential aspect in becoming a coach. Compared to some other sports, where it is possible to see parents coaching junior athletes without personal background in that sport, in figure skating coaches needed to have own background in the sport in order to understand not only the technical things, but also some of psychological demands and challenges related in the sport. As figure skating is a skill sport, the coach needs to understand the fundamental elements of figure skating in order to teach proper technique and practices. According to Dowdell (2010), a gymnastic coach teaches gymnasts hundreds of skill movements and their variations. Mastering these skills would be impossible without the assistance and instructions from a coach. These same principles also apply in figure skating practicing. Due to the demanding nature of a skill sport, independent practicing on one's own time is thus rather limited. (Dowdell, 2010, 15–24.)

Three of the coaches had a highly competitive figure skating background at Finnish national and also international level. One of the coach had a background in a more national and regional level. However, all of the coaches had pursued their coaching career very ambitiously and educated themselves through several coaching courses.

“Becoming a coach...It sort of happened by itself, by coincidence. I really had no specific idea about coaching at the time I started. It just sort of happened.”

“The transfer from a skater to a coach came very naturally. Of course, first it was hand in hand with my studies, and I was asked to cover some practices occasionally when I was still skating myself. But it was always an option, I don't know why... I just loved skating so much, so I always knew

it would somehow continue to be a part of my life even if I quit skating myself.”

Based on the findings of this research, the way coaches' own athlete careers had ended seemed to have an important role in why they have wanted to begin coaching. All of the interviewed coaches mentioned *how* their athlete career ended has had an impact on the reasons of becoming a coach, and moreover on the way they think about and perceive coaching. Three of the coaches were rather satisfied with their skating career and how it had ended, but one coach mentioned being slightly bitter of how her career had ended, mainly due to lack of success. One of the coaches told that he was satisfied that he was able to finish his career at his own terms. He had been able to test his limits and capacities to the point where he knew he could not reach anything higher. He had been fortunate to have such good coaches in his career who gave him all the possibilities to succeed as an athlete.

“I got to try the limits and was able to stop knowing there were no unfinished business concerning my athlete career... So mostly just positive experiences, and that reflects a lot the way I see coaching, because I was able to finish on my own terms and a positive image of the sport has remained.”

Indeed, how the coaches are able to look at coaching as a work, reflects a lot their experiences from their own skating career. In the case there are some issues unsolved, this might affect their coaching and satisfaction towards their work. Coaches might end up expressing their bitterness about their own career towards their skaters. However, they might also use this as their strength and use those experiences to guide their own coaching philosophy. Especially in the beginning of their coaching career, the coaches reflected a lot their own past experiences, and the things they would want to do differently compared to their own coaches. The coaches have learned a specific style of technique from their own coaches, which they mainly use also with their current skaters. All of the four coaches described their coaching methods as similar to the ones their own past coaches had, but also modifying them to suit their own coaching philosophy. In other words, the good things can be replicable, but the bad things want to be done differently.

“Maybe also the fact that I feel I had many unsolved issues related to my athlete career. Somehow you want to help others, so that the same thing

doesn't happen to them. But yes... if I had reached everything I ever wanted in my career, or even parts of it, I wouldn't have necessarily had the same passion and desire for coaching as much as I have now. So you know... Still, this is my way of expressing myself through skating."

"In my mind, the sport specific knowledge and teaching techniques is mainly based on the way I was coached. But also, I want to do differently some the things my coach did that I don't think were correct."

All of the four coaches discussed about their passion and love for the sport. It seemed to be such a powerful reason why they wanted to become coaches. Based on the interviews, coaching is not only seen as a profession and a nine-to-five job, but more as a way of life. Many of them started their coaching career whilst still practicing actively, and continued to educate themselves more through coaching courses provided by the Finnish Figure Skating Association or other institution. Based on the findings, coaches express high levels of pride towards what they do, and feel privileged to be able to do the thing they love the most.

"Well yes...it's a passion. Love. I don't know where it comes from, I guess it has started already during childhood. And like I've said, I don't know any other life besides this..."

"This is based on the love for the sport. For me, figure skating is the absolute best thing in the world, it is my passion, my motivation to work... you know, I'm able to express and fulfill myself through this sport and work."

In addition, the coaches experience great amounts of vigor, dedication and absorption towards their work. Sometimes these elements can cause fatigue, and stress in work life, but at the same time they can be seen as positive elements. For many coaches, and also all four coaches in this study emphasized that work is their passion and a way of life, which leads to high levels of dedication towards their work.

Coaches described their vigorousness as being energetic, mental resilience, and willingness to invest in their work, and perseverance despite the difficulties they face in their everyday working life. Figure skating coaches are highly dedicated to their work. This means they are experiencing feelings of meaningfulness, inspiration, excitement,

pride, and challenge about their work. Coaches also seem to be very absorbed in the work they do. They are completely focused and immersed themselves in the work, which sometimes can also lead to difficulties in separating work life and personal life. Most of the coaches did not perceive it as a negative thing, as they enjoy what they do and the work provides them with challenges in a good way.

4.3 Coach as a co-parent in the lives of the athletes

The main finding related to the way the coaches perceive their role in the lives of the athletes, is that of an educator. As already discussed in the theory part, the role of the coach is very significant in the life of an athlete, and coaches possess a great level of authority figure and influence in the lives of the athletes.

Describing coaches as co-parents is one way of describing how meaningful coach's caring is. Caring is also to show that the athlete is more important for the coach than the sport. In times of failure, coach is there to support and comfort. Respectively, coach's anger or turning their back in times of failure or difficult times, can be perceived as disregarding. (Hämäläinen, 2008, 79.)

Figure skaters spend much of their awake time with their coaches, sometimes even more than with their parents or teachers. In addition, coach is an important role model and authority figure for children and youth. In that sense, it is a good opportunity for the coaches to teach their athletes also about, for instance, correct behavior, manners, discipline, and goal-setting in addition to sport skills. All four coaches discussed about the importance of education as a part of their work. In fact, they described education as being the biggest aspect in their work, and emphasized the importance of educating the athletes about values, correct behavior and good manners. According to Kokkonen (2015, 349), the educational role of sport clubs has always been connected to children and youth sports. Organized sport activities can be seen as an important way to guide children and youth to the right direction in their lives. Sport clubs are believed to protect the youth from bad influence, but studies have also shown that children learn adults' customs in good and bad. (Kokkonen 2015, 347-349.)

Based on the findings of this study, teaching the correct technique, training the athletes' physique, and preparing them for the competition period, was the core task and role of the coaches. Also, it was the role of the coach to teach their skaters about how to become

an athlete, and what choices it requires from them. Athletes are expected to take responsibility about their own training and development, and coaches need to have the skills to teach this responsibility for them. Based on the findings, coaches emphasized the importance of them being the facilitators in the athlete's path, but it is the role of the athletes to prepare themselves correctly for each practice. Figure skating is a skill sport, and therefore requires a lot of sport-specific expertise from the coaches, and they need to be aware of all the latest rules and trends related to the sport.

In addition, coaches were aware of the critical issue that children are becoming more and more inactive, and spending more TV-screen time. It is important that sport clubs would provide sport for all activities, and not solely high performance training. However, there is controversy on whether coaches should take care of all levels of skaters just for the sake of it that they do not end up dropping out and become physically inactive. Coaches did experience that there might be some athletes, who drop out due to high level demands in their sport clubs. Based on the findings of this study, the coaches were not willing to lower the level of their demands. They were not either willing to make any compromises, even though it might mean that some children end up dropping out. Kokkonen (2015) argues that this phenomenon is an undesirable progression from the educational point of view, as many teenagers drop out of sport clubs due to the high-level demands. He also points out that ultimately continue their physical activities in a different form that is suitable for them. (Kokkonen, 2015, 347-349.)

“In regards to inactivity...surely we should aim at trying to keep all the skaters in our club and avoid drop out. But if they drop-out due to too demanding training, then I don't think it is the job of elite sports to keep them active...”

Based on general discussions in the field and on the interviews conducted for this research, it is important that children and young athletes would not only be involved in physical activity during organized practice session, but also during their leisure time. It is vital also for their development as athletes that they spend some time per day doing leisure time activities and uncontrolled and unorganized physical activity. Coaches who were interviewed for this study had noticed this also, and see it of some level of concern.

All of the coaches shared their concern about increased inactivity among children and youth, but had slightly different reactions about their own role in this process. One of the

coaches mentioned that she was very concerned and sees her own role as a coach very critical in this matter.

“It is not all about coaching your own sport, but it’s more about general sport and health education, in a way. So yes, I see my own role of huge importance in this case, especially due to the role model you set for the kids. On the other hand, this is also a bit contradictory... because I’ve had the complete opposite role model, a Russia coach smoking cigars... I mean, it doesn’t always have to be the case that the coach is athletic, and health-enhancing role model, but anyway, that’s my approach.”

Figure skating coaches are under a lot of pressure in terms of the expectations that are set for them. Figure skating coach is not only responsible in teaching the sport specific skills, techniques, and training their physique, but also in a growing sense, responsible for educating them to become good people. This is also the aim of the Finnish coaching excellence model. The coach cannot be solely evaluated by the success of their athletes and results. The coach can affect the athlete’s path in many ways. The coach can affect the athlete’s growth as a human being in addition to teaching them the correct techniques required in the sport. (Hämäläinen et al. 2012.)

“I see my role as an educator, to sum it up. My role is to teach them how to become good athletes, but also grow to be good people.”

“In addition to educating them, I see my role also a quality controller. If it starts to look like they (athletes) are not holding on to the rules we have agreed together, it is my duty to remind them about it. Sometimes it happens with a very loud voice... I’m not afraid to be straightforward and authoritarian, IF they are not doing the right things.”

In our modern society, children and young people are exposed to a wide range of influences, especially media affects a lot on their mind, opinions, and possibly the choices they make in life. According to the findings of this study, the coaches have acknowledged this, and understand their role in educating the right choices for their athletes. Based on the findings of this study, the coaches also want to be perceived as figures of stability in the lives of their athletes. They wish to provide stability for their athletes, who are allowed to make mistakes during practices. It is important that the athletes acknowledge that they

are being loved, cared, and looked after, and that certain limits are set. For some children, the sport setting might be the only environment where they can truly express and fulfill themselves. In sport activities, athletes can share many things with their coach and discuss about issues that might be difficult for them to share with their parents. It is also said that it is possible to argue with the coach, or the coach can be seen as a problem solver with issues between athletes. In these types of situations the coach can teach tolerance, failure resilience, and deal with disappointments. (Hämäläinen, 2008, 79-80.)

“My role has changed a lot during the years. Now I see myself as a certain mother figure to the athletes. I want to be trustworthy, warm and demanding, all at the same time... And of course provide stability, so that the athletes know that I’m not going anywhere even if they are doing poorly at the practices and competitions.”

According to the findings of the study, the role of the coach also depends and varies a lot depending on the status of the coach. The head coach has often a different role than that of the assistant coach. Based on the findings of this study, the head coach is often the highest authority figure, who takes a lot of the responsibility of the big picture. The assistant coach is more supporting the head coach. Head coach is often the more authoritarian, whereas the assistant coach can have the role of listening and discussing with the athletes about their concerns or troubles. As long as the roles are clear for everybody in the coaching team, and they all pull in the same direction, work is effective. However, they might appear role conflicts if the roles are not clear and tasks are not clearly divided.

“You know, being very authoritarian...I wouldn’t even fit into that kind of category, they (athletes) wouldn’t take me seriously, if I tried to be something else than I am... I think your role and leadership style should walk hand in hand with your own personality. You know, if you are a very straight-laced in person, so then that type of style works well also in practice situation. So, that it is not superimposed. As long as there is that consistency, so that the children feel safe, that the coach is not being nice and kind on one day, and shouts and screams the second...”

4.4 Importance of building a strong coach-athlete relationship

Based on the finding of this study, the coaches had built a close relationship with their athletes. One of the reasons for this very special and close relationship is that they spend a lot of time with their athletes in practices, competitions, and training camps. Inevitably, the coaches share most of the athletes' moments of joy and success, but also the moments of frustration, failure, and sadness.

In his research, Puhakainen (1995) strongly protests against Finnish coaching, which, in his opinion, has been too much based on natural scientific thinking, and forgetting to analyze the athlete from a holistic point of view. (Puhakainen 1995, 26-96.) This research also supports this holistic way of looking at coaching. Figure skating coaches are able to follow the development of their athletes not only from the physical point of view, but also from the development as human beings point of view. The coaches live in such a close relationship with their athletes that they have the possibility to follow the athletes' growth process and how they develop in all levels. This close relationship is rewarding, when it is possible to see the positive effects on the athlete, for example in the choices he or she makes in life or succeeds in life. However, it is sometimes very challenging to live so deeply involved in the athletes' life, especially when talking about teenagers. As teenagers are going through big changes in their lives, the coaches also need to adopt to the changes and possible mood swings.

"My aim is to keep all relationships with the athletes purely professional, as coaching relationships. I never allow to mix that with friendship."

The coach-athlete relationship was described as a professional and coach-oriented partnership. The level of the relationship depends a lot on the age and level of the skaters. The relationship with smaller children, and beginners is strongly coach-oriented and task-oriented. When moving on to the older and higher level skaters, the relationship becomes more about mentoring and being an advisor for the athletes. At this level, the relationship becomes also more personal, individual, and includes more discussing with the athlete. When the athletes have gained more experience as skaters, it is possible to provide them with more responsibility in terms of their practicing. In the research by Hämäläinen (2008, 80-91), athletes have also reported different perceptions about their coach. With teenage athletes, coaching is usually based on controlling. Coach is strict, rigorous, and demanding. Coach sets the limits, and explains the rules. Sometimes, demanding

atmosphere can be too demanding, it can be scary, and can prevent success due to fear of failure. Thus, it can be suggested to create a safe and trusting environment with the athletes as a first step, before providing them with too much responsibility. (Hämäläinen, 2008, 81.)

”If those issues have not been discussed and walked through with the athlete, you can’t expect or demand that they would be ready to take on the responsibility”.

In synchronized skating, creating contact and a strong coach-athlete relationship with all the individuals within the team can be challenging. Easily the situation can turn into coaching a one major group, when in fact the coach should be coaching a group of individuals. In this sense, it is essential that the coaching team is built in a way that there is a clear distribution of roles and responsibilities. For instance, the head coach can focus more on the technical side and stay more distant, whereas the second or third coach can work more with personal connection with the athletes. This division of roles is often perceived as refreshing also from the athletes’ point of view.

“It’s very challenging, especially when we’re talking about a team. Easily you start to create a more close relationship with someone, and thus start to coach that person more...But you really need to pay a lot of attention to it, and so that you recognize also the quiet ones...”

4.5 Training culture has become more serious – quest for success

In this part of the study, the goal was to understand more about the pressure situations coaches are facing in their everyday work, and how the coaches are experiencing the pressures of facing some of the pressure conflict situations related to sport coaching, especially in figure skating. This theme was exceptionally interesting, as it reflects greatly our current sport culture, where expectations towards athletes and coaches have increased, and the environment has changed into a more demanding atmosphere, also in children’s sports. However, there has been a lot of critical discussion in the field of sport about children’s and youngster’s competitive sports, and how it can have effects later on in life. (Hakkarainen et al. 2009 15-25.)

This theme discusses about the variety of pressures figure skating coaches are experiencing in their work, where these pressures come from, and how they are coping with them.

Based on the findings, the coaches acknowledged that the world of sport has changed more severe and goal-oriented. The demands of the sport have changed over the course of time, and figure skaters are expected to master a wide scale of skills, in addition to technical demands. The physical demands of the sport require the athlete to be in good condition throughout the season in order to practice and succeed at high level.

As a main finding related to this topic is that the culture of practicing has changed in figure skating. This became evident in the discussions with the coaches, and they also expressed slight concern about this phenomenon. For some reasons, skaters have become more aware and scared of making mistakes and failing, not only during competition performance, but also during practices. This creates tension in practices, and results in negative atmosphere during practices. Coaches themselves explained they never took their hobby as seriously as the children and youngsters of today. When they were skaters, they had time during practices to “do funny things”, which were not controlled by their coach. This evidently increases the pleasure and joy towards practicing and that sport, and provides possibility for the skaters to be creative and challenge themselves in their own terms. This type of training is not anymore as evident in current figure skating training as it maybe once was. Surely, knowledge and expectations have increased during the past decades, and skaters and families are more aware of the amount of work it requires to be among the top skaters in the world. However, training should not become too serious, moreover it should take into consideration the free creative side as well.

One of the things that concerned the coaches, was the level of demands set in the world of today’s sport. Sport activities have become more serious, starting already at younger age. Nowadays parents are more aware and well-informed, and are demanding more value for their investments (money and time). Youth is being drawn into many different directions and high demands are already set at home. According to Puronaho (2006), generally Finnish children aged 6-14 year olds are participating also in some other sport activities in addition to their “main” sport. However, gymnasts, riders, and figure skaters participate the least to other sport activities. In figure skating, only half of the athletes have another hobby in addition to skating. However, this can be explained by the high

amount of practice hours in the particular sport. Puronaho has also studied the costs of youngsters' sports in 13 different sports. According to his study (2006), on average the highest total costs of the hobby were in figure skating, skiing, horse-riding, and ice hockey. The average total cost in 6-10 year old figure skaters were 3423€ per year, and 11-14 year old figure skaters the total cost was 4240 € per year. (Puronaho 2006, 116, 119-123, 208-233.) Time and money spent on figure skating creates inevitably some level of pressure towards skaters and coaches.

There are a variety of expectations set for the coaches, some of them more realistic than others. The main contradiction seemed to be the parents' unrealistic expectations towards the work of coaches. Sometimes the role of the athletes themselves seems to be forgotten, and the coach is expected to be a miracle maker. However, based on the discussions with the coaches, they were able to place value on smaller things rather than success at competitions, or solely performance-related aspects. It seemed that the coaches have a realistic attitude towards their work, and the possibility of actually finding the right individual who could succeed at international figure skating level, is rather slim. They did not feel too overwhelmed by the expectations coming from outside (parents, federation, club, society). Coaches themselves do not expect medals and success of their athletes, but these expectations come often from outside.

“Success and medals are dreams, but my expectations are more about developing my athletes and myself.”

One of the biggest contradiction related to the figure skating coaches' work are the parents and families of the skaters. Most of the coaches described their relationship with the parents contradictory. On one hand, coaches want to listen to the parents and engage them in cooperation, but on the other hand parents' involvement had to be controlled in a certain way and keep them at distance. As a reason for this distance was that the coaches wanted to keep the coaching relationship between the coach and the skater, and create a trustworthy atmosphere.

“I tell the parents that this is between me and the athlete. I want to create a relationship with them, not you (parents), because this is “our” thing.”

Mostly the expectations from parents are reasonable and understandable, but in some cases coaches needed to deal with expectations and demands, which were unrealistic and

challenging. Coaches also pointed out that most of the parents are communicating politely and in a correct manner, and usually there are only a few parents whose behavior is incorrect. Unfortunately, too often these are the parents receive more coach's attention, energy and time than the others. Also, in modern society, parents are more willing to do anything for their child and this can also be seen in the world of sport. However, coaches still realistically acknowledged the fact, that parents are a part of their work and they just need to find the right tools and methods to communicate with them.

“It is their (parents) role, and it just belongs to this work. It is slightly the negative side of this work, but you just have to swallow it. You just do it.”

“The culture of respect and communication was completely lost in this club when I first started coaching here. The parents were shouting comments like “faster”, “that looks horrible” in the middle of training session. I had to yell at them to get the hell out of there. And I mean, there are always the few difficult ones in any club, but here... this was from another planet...I didn't even know this could exist.”

One of the biggest reason for the coaches' reluctance towards parents seems to be a fear that the parents will intervene too much in the child's training and as a result it becomes the hobby of the parent. Especially the coaches wished that parents would trust them more and allow them (coaches) to do their job. Based on the findings of this research, the coaches were also concerned about the amount of “home-coaching”. It has been argued that parents are contributing to too early specialization on one sport by providing the child with special equipment, demanding additional coaching and training camps, and building training areas and equipment to their home. (Hakkarainen et al. 2009, 32-33.)

“If they (parents) know a lot of things of what we do and emphasize in practicing, there is a risk that they start to coach the kids at home. Then, there exists no normal family-life at home, and the whole thing might become too heavy for the athlete.”

“What happens at home has such a big meaning on how the athlete is coping with the amount of training load. I mean, they (parents) really shouldn't push them (athletes) too hard, otherwise that's it then.”

All four coaches arranged regularly parents' meetings and discussions where parents can attend together with the athlete. All coaches experienced these meetings as useful, since it allows them to receive more information about the athlete's life at home and at school. These meetings also allow them to discuss about training, and how the skater is developing. This is also a chance for the coaches to explain about their coaching philosophy, rules of training, and why they (coaches) make some of the choices they make, and reasons behind those choices. Once all this is also clearly explained for the parents, it is much easier for the coaches to make their decisions once they have justified the reasons for it. Issues that usually can cause conflicts with parents are, for instance, group transfers, training methods, healthy lifestyle. According to Hakkarainen et al (2009), this a sign of a good coach. Also, assertiveness and good spirit are signs good coaching. (Hakkarainen et al, 2009, 44.)

Coaches also had their own expectations and demands towards parents. All coaches emphasized the main three themes in adolescent sports, which include supporting, and providing transport and resources. Despite the hesitations coaches have towards parents, they all still agreed that the parents are an essential part of the athletes' life and well-being.

“They are important, and not the necessary evil... You know, when you have issues like bullying in a group, like what we had last week, it is much easier to go to the parent and discuss about these issues when you know them well.”

4.6 Lack of resources and professional guidance as a hindrance

Practicing in a sport club setting is the most common sport training structure in Finland. This traditional sport club based setting was perceived partially as a hindrance to focus solely in figure skating coaching work. Sport club activities are mainly based on voluntarism, which means that majority of the people are working for the sport club on their free time. Based on the findings of this study, the sport club management is mainly based on voluntarism by the parents and families. However, there are some exceptions to this as there are some sport clubs, which have a paid employee working at the office taking care of the management and administrative work of the sport club.

Training and coaching in a sport club setting includes some conflicting issues related to the coaches' work. According to the findings of this research, one of the challenges coaches are facing in the sport club-based training is the organizational structure of sport clubs, and lack of organizational support. Coaches described these as technical challenges, as well as challenges in communicating with the sport club managers, mainly volunteered parents. Overall, frail organizational structures do not seem to have been very well planned and, therefore, provides very little support for the coaches. In addition, insufficient resources were seen as a restraint to the coaches' work. Moreover, the findings emphasize the basically nonexistent professional guidance, supervision of work, and basic support provided. In many international research this becomes also evident. According to these, dissatisfaction towards social support predict stress and symptoms of burnout. Also, coaches experienced the lack of time to focus solely on coaching, meeting the athlete's needs, and negative media publicity as stressful. In addition, unsupported organization structure and unrealistic expectations from parents caused above all frustration among coaches. Overall, the dissatisfaction towards organizational structures is seemed to be closely linked to work-related burnout and fatigue. (Kelley et al. 1999; Capel et al, 1987; Gencay & Gencay 2011.)

Based on the findings of this research, most of the coaches felt that they did not have a real superior. Often, the head coach is seen as the superior, but evidently they are not professionals in human resource management. All these issues increase the pressures related to the work, and takes a lot of energy from the actual coaching work.

“I don't want anybody breathing on my neck, but it would be nice that somebody sometimes asked me how I'm doing, do I need anything, and do I want to participate in some educational courses, and so on. It would be nice to know that are all in this together.”

“In my opinion, it (organizational work) takes a lot of my energy from the actual coaching work. It makes you feel too alone.”

Based on the findings of this research, the coaches were concerned about the effectiveness of our current sport club system in Finland. The athletes start most of their days with morning ice practice, and then spend approximately six hours in school, and afterwards return to the ice rink for their most important training session of the day. These afternoon sessions usually last two hours, including on-ice and off-ice practices, such as ballet or

strength training. The total length of a typical day can be approximately 10 hours, before athletes go back home, where they need to prepare their homework. More free time should be left for the athletes to recover, and to spend it on non-organized activities such as spending time with friends and family. As a consequence, this increases the pressure for the coaches to take a variety of things into consideration, such as the level of alertness and recovery of their athletes. Based on the discussions, sport club training sessions should be partially included in the school system and curriculum. Also, sport academy activities could be enhanced to support this.

“It is crazy to think that the kids need to spend up to 10 hours on the move, and we expect them to be fully alert when they come to the practices. However, they (athletes) are used to this system from a young age, so it also provides them with much needed routines and scheduling.”

Also, scheduling the day sets conflicting demands for the coaches. Many of the coaches start their day with morning practices, followed by hours of management and administrative work at the office, and after already working for eight hours, they need to be prepared for the most important training sessions. Usually, the coaches are responsible for most of the groups within their sport club. Based on the interviews, the coaches might have approximately four groups to run practices for, and usually the group with most talented skaters is the last one of the day. This sets challenges for the coaches to be able to provide the most effective training for them, as the coaches have already been working for hours.

“There really is a contradiction that during the same work day you should be able to teach how to skate forward to the youngest athletes, and then again, teach the correct technique of a triple Lutz. The very fact that you need to have a whole different mindset in different things during a short period of time. Your role also as a coach varies from being the nice skating school teacher to a demanding high-performance coach.”

Based on the discussions with the coaches, there should be more emphasis given on finding the right individuals and the truly talented skaters. These individuals should be given more attention and coaches should have the ability to push them forward, which means having more resources on the high performance related work.

Also related to the topic, this challenge has been or should be tackled by increasing the number of coaches present at practices, both on-ice and off-ice. For the coaches interviewed for this study, they all emphasized the importance of having enough professional assistant coaches in their team in order to provide high-quality practices for the skaters, and also ease the work load. Having enough coaches during practices, the practice groups can be divided into smaller units, based on for instance their age or level of skills, and thus each coach has a smaller number of skaters to coach. This makes it easier and more efficient to correct errors and provide feedback individually.

Another challenge that the group training portraits, is the expanding of the skaters' age span in a particular training group. Although the skaters are selected to the group mainly due to their skill level, there are still some issues related to their physical development, which are not at the same level. Thus, the coaches need to be aware of this, and plan their practices in a way that is suitable for each skater's individual development level. In addition, as they are competing in different competition categories, the skaters have their competitions and periods, when high peak performance is required at different times. The preparation period for competitions, training in between competitions, and practices after competitions need to be all planned separately and individually. As mentioned already earlier, this is especially the case in single skating, whereas the training situation is very different in synchronized skating. In synchronized skating, the training is more coherent, as the whole team is aiming for a certain goal at the same time.

4.7 Body image and importance of teaching healthy nutrition habits

This theme deals with the importance of teaching healthy and athletic lifestyle to athletes. All four coaches emphasized this aspect in their everyday coaching work, and acknowledged their educational role in teaching and explaining their athletes about the correct choices to make. Figure skating is a highly demanding skill sport, which requires a strong physique, mental resilience, as well as aesthetic and graceful movements. By combining all these elements together, nutrition has a significant importance. Athletes, especially early teenagers, can start to observe and monitor their eating. This maybe the result of issues related to body image, peers, and media and so on. Coaches need to be constantly aware of their athletes' physical and mental condition and health in order to avoid any possibilities of growing an eating disorder.

As Kokko (2010) describes the coaches' role in educating health-enhancing habits and lifestyle is primarily about teaching and providing information in order for the athletes to understand the choices they make also in their future life. As the athlete and the coach progress towards youth stages and more intense training, health issues need to be integrated within the daily routines. This can be done by supporting and encouraging the athletes to make healthy choices on a daily basis and find ways to follow-up this process. (Kokko 2010, 35-45.)

Based on the interviews, it was also evident that figure skating coaches did not want to over-emphasize the importance of monitoring, since in their opinion it could lead into a too controlled behavior and possible lead into unhealthy results, such as eating disorders. One of the coaches mentioned in her interview that she is very precise that her athletes are not allowed to eat unhealthy food or sweets during practices, competitions, camps or during their other sport club activities. However, this is communicated to the athletes in a way that helps them to understand the values of healthy lifestyle and appropriate dieting needed to become an athlete.

“I think our whole club has a good, healthy mentality. The young kids learn it from the start. We coaches of course try to lead by example, like, you would never see our coach eating sweets at the ice rink. So that they understand they are not the only ones to whom healthy lifestyle applies to...”

“I believe in positive reinforcement. You know...when you practice so much, you need to have that energy from highly nutritional and healthy diet and that is of high quality. Especially as a male coach, I would never go and mention to anyone about their body figure or weight... I personally feel that is everybody's own choice.

According to Kokko (2010) the coaches should strive for creating such an environment for their athletes that promotes health-enhancing choices. (Kokko, 2010, 35-45.) According to the findings of the interviews, all four coaches agreed that they should lead by example. Figure skating is perceived as a very aesthetic sport, where body movements need to be aesthetic, gentle and effortless. Yet, figure skaters need to be physically strong, quick, and powerful. This controversy sometimes leads into unhealthy body image and even eating disorders. In this matter, coaches need to be highly aware of the way they talk

with athletes about nutrition and training. Athletes need to understand that in order to practice and succeed at a high level, they need to take care of their healthy and highly nutritional food. Figure skating is a sport that requires a strong physique in order to be able to perform highly demanding technical elements.

“The coach needs to show example of healthy nutrition and choices for healthy snacks. Personally I have tried to include all this in daily practices and involve the athletes also to think about the choices and so that they also understand why it is important, for example keeping “workshops” where we prepare healthy snacks.”

“Coach needs to be very careful in the way to talk about nutrition and about body weight. I remember once, where a comment from the head coach resulted in an eating disorder with one girl. The coach’s words were not of course the only reason, but it was enough to push the girl over the edge... It is a very dangerous position, being a coach... you really have to be careful of what you say, and how you say it...”

Based on this thesis, teaching healthy lifestyle and healthy choices to the young athletes is an essential role of the coach, but on the other hand it is their duty only when the child or young athlete is within their club activities. Outside of this time frame, it is mostly the responsibility of the families and school system. However, the cooperation between families, schools, and sport clubs can and should be increased. The coaches had faced challenging situations related to teaching healthy eating habits and in general healthy lifestyle. This is closely linked to the education work coaches do. Based on the discussions, they might even feel that they have failed their duties and work as educators, if they make poor choices in regards to healthy lifestyle and dieting.

However, there are so many factors affecting what the athletes eat and how they live their lives, that the coach is not able to control it completely. Coaches discussed a lot with their athletes about healthy snacks and recovery nutrition during practices, and training camps. Usually, it is the parents who buy the food at home, and take care of the grocery shopping. Therefore the coaches feel their role is not only to educate the athletes about healthy lifestyle, but in a more growing importance, they need to educate the parents. However, one coach pointed out her concern that even though there is so much information out there

about healthy nutrition and people are nowadays more aware and conscious, their actions seem nevertheless completely different.

“In my opinion, the parents still have the ultimate responsibility, definitely... The coach can provide guidance, and include it in daily practicing, but the families have the full responsibility in this case.”

“I will not start to raise anyone’s child or criticize somebody’s upbringing methods. That is where I always draw the line. It is everybody’s own choice, I only try to provide the right choices for the child, and also to educate the parents.”

4.8 Importance of personal leisure activities as an empowering resource

The last theme of this research went deeper on how the coaches perceive that they can handle the variety of conflicting stress situations they encounter in their everyday working life as figure skating coaches. In this part it was also important to discuss what are the coping skills and methods they use in order to balance between their work life and personal life.

To take into consideration all of the above mentioned aspects of the challenges in figure skating coaching, it goes without saying that sometimes coaching work can be exhausting and overwhelming. As a last part of this study, I wanted to gain understanding on how the coaches are able to balance their everyday life with their challenging work. As already described in the previous sections, coaching work is a passion and a lifestyle for the coaches, and they are really dedicated and passionate about what they do.

However, taking this into consideration it is possible that it creates challenges to set boundaries for the time spent at work and find limits for their own wellbeing. Based on the findings of this study, all the four coaches work whole-heartedly and with complete dedication, and sometimes the work load, whether it is set by themselves or outside, it can become too overwhelming. Three of the four coaches interviewed for this study, had replaced another coach due to their sudden sickness leave, or other absence, and consequently their role and responsibility had increased, and one of the coaches had replaced another coach even due to a burnout.

Coaching is a lifestyle job, and most of it is pleasant work for the coaches, but occasionally pressures and stress can build up, and then there should exist simple and clear coping methods. There has been a lot of discussion in figure skating community about the risks of burnout, and this phenomenon is rather evident in this sport. One coach talked about his own experiences and how he has learned to detect the signs already in advance:

“It is a thing you need to work on constantly. The previous coaching job basically ended up in me having a burnout. I’m quite sure every coach goes through the same thing at some point in their career. Now I consciously try to detect the signs in advance, and I try to avoid it. For instance by not discussing figure skating once I come home, nor do I check my emails in the evenings. It’s a challenge, but I know that my own well-being is the most crucial thing in order for me to be there for the athletes.”

“I always remind myself that I don’t always have to be the role model and the coach. I’m also a friend, girlfriend, daughter...In my free time I am allowed to have fun, party, and enjoy life...”

According to the interviews, figure skating coaches are very dedicated to their work. In a way, they have set the wellbeing of their athletes before their own. Coaches seemed to be concerned about what would happen to the development of their athlete, if for some reason they had to be away from practices or be away on a holiday.

“You easily begin to wonder, how will they (athletes) develop and cope during three weeks of summer camps, if I’m not there coaching... But then again, you need to keep in mind the courage to sometimes let go and that I will be a better coach during the actual season then.”

Own resources and management of work-related stress are dependent on the culture of each particular sport club. Sport club culture builds through time and by educating the parents about the training culture and how each stakeholder should operate in it. Therefore it is very important to create clear set of rules for everyone involved in the sport club activities.

“In some clubs, the parents might even call you in the middle of the night... In a way, there is no respect towards the leisure of the coach. But then

again, there are sport clubs where parents appreciate the coach's free time, and understand that coach is not always on duty."

Based on the findings of this study, often other peoples' and stakeholders' expectations are unrealistic towards the work of the coaches. The success or the development of the skaters is not solely on the hands of the coach. Often the role and responsibility of the athlete itself is forgotten.

"I remember the feeling of constant requirements and demands... and that you are being required such things that aren't realistic in relation to the resources you are given or the level of the skaters you have..."

It also depends a lot on the personality of the coach. One of the coaches pointed out that some of the coaches are "workaholics", and are not able to stop working even when they are at home, whilst others are more able to relax during their leisure time. In addition to these personal characteristics, also environment affects the ability to separate work and leisure. Kaski (2013), points out also in her research that overall one of the most evident reason for fatigue and burnout symptoms in work seems to be different role conflicts, and contradiction between times spent at work and at home. In her study, 47% of the coaches reported to work mainly during evenings, which explains also the contradiction between work and family time. In addition, schedules in work are not flexible, so the coach needs to make constantly adjustments with the time spent with family. This can result in the fact that the coach has to neglect her / his family in order to take care of work duties. (Kaski, 2013, 88-93.)

In many figure skating clubs, coaches have their own office at the proximity of the ice rink. Anyhow, this is not always the case, and in those cases it is more difficult to separate home from your office.

"As this coaching is a lot more than just spending time at the ice rink, so you have to prepare all kinds of schedules and planning, and all other paperwork... So if you don't have a separate place, then home becomes the work environment ..."

5 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research was to examine, understand and describe how coaching work is perceived by Finnish figure skating coaches by exploring and interpreting their personal experiences. More specifically, dimensions related to the challenges and demands set by the modern sport culture, and how it affects the performance and well-being of the coaches are examined. Moreover, this study aimed at studying the pressures coaches encounter in figure skating coaching.

Coaching as a profession in Finland is perceived as a challenging job. Lack of appreciation and support, scarce resources, and demanding working environment are placing coaches under a lot of pressure. However, all challenges aside, coaching work entails many positive aspects and offers emotions that are difficult to find elsewhere. For this reason, coaches, who participated in this study, have wanted to continue to stay at the ice rinks.

Although all of the interviewed coaches described figure skating coaching work in rather similar ways, some of the viewpoints and perceptions seemed to vary. It seems that the level of stress and pressure the coaches are expressing, depends a lot on the level they are coaching and what kind of role they have in that sport club. Assistant coaches or part-time coaches experienced lower levels of work-related stress and pressure as the head coaches or other full-time coaches. This seems to be in line with the study made by Kaski (2013). In her research, results show that full-time coaches experience higher levels of demands and stress related to their work than part-time coaches. This is a very obvious result, as the full-time coaches have more responsibility and tasks. For part-time coaches, coaching can be a break from their other job or studies, so it can be perceived more as a voluntary hobby. (Kaski 2013, 118-121.)

One of the most noticeable findings related to this theme was the fact that coaches truly emphasized the importance of education in their work more than the importance of teaching about specific technique and details related to the sport. One might think that coaches emphasize and place value on the results of their athletes' performances, but it truly was a secondary motive for them in their work. As the Finnish coaching excellence model discusses also, coaches can't be evaluated solely by the performance of their athletes. Moreover, coaches should evaluate also themselves on the areas, where they can affect in an athlete.

5.1 Evaluation of the study

This study includes some points, which should be viewed critically. Conclusions and interpretations of this study are most likely affected by the researcher's own background, which I have in figure skating. It is worth considering whether results and conclusions would have been interpreted more objectively by a person outside of the figure skating world. However, on the other hand, a strong know-how and expertise as being "an insider" has enabled a better understanding and interpretation of the participants' stories.

Conducting a qualitative research process was in some parts new to me. In the early stages of this research process, I studied and evaluated many different research methods. It is worth thinking whether the results would have revealed more about the perceptions and stories about coaching work, had I chosen a more in depth ethnographic design for this study, and included more observation in the data collection. Reflecting back to the beginning of this research process, I would most likely choose an ethnographic design.

This research provides perspective on only a small population of figure skating coaches, and coaching genre in general. Thus, no major conclusions or assumptions should be made solely based on this study. However, I need to point out, the purpose of this study was above all, to increase awareness and discussions. Reflecting back, small number of participants can also be seen as a weakness of this study. Furthermore, it would have been even more fruitful to include also older figure skating coaches. In this study, the participants represent the younger generation of coaches.

5.2 Suggestions for further studies

Figure skating coaching is still rather new topic within the academic research, and this topic is often studied from the physiological point of view. There are yet so many different possibilities to research. There are some academic recommendations that can be introduced for further studies as a result of this research. This study was somewhat subjective, and limited only on the perceptions of the coaches themselves. In order to ensure more objectiveness and wider perspective, other stakeholders need to be engaged and involved in the study. Initially, the purpose was to include athletes and parents in this study as well. However, I wanted to focus solely on the experiences of the coaches, so I decided to limit this study only on coaches. Still, by engaging athletes, parents, sport club, national sport association, and schools, results could provide more in depth analysis.

Another limitation for this study is that the figure skating coaches interviewed for this research represent the younger, newer generation of figure skating coaches, at least to some extent. It would have been interesting, and had increased the quality of this study, to include some of the top professional coaches of Finland, who represent more the older generation of figure skating coaches. My hypothesis is that the results and findings of this research would have been different and more heterogeneous. Having not included these coaches in this study, was mainly due to challenges in scheduling.

Conducting this research has definitely been a fascinating learning process. During the course of the time dedicated to this research, I was able to find many different points of view in the topic about coaching. Because of this master's thesis process, I have been able to gain a more holistic perspective to coaching, and learned about the complex process of coaching. Although having the background of figure skating coaching myself, I would not have been able to understand the demands and conflicts of the job in such a way that this learning process has provided.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. THEME INTERVIEW

1. THEME. Urheiluvalmennus
 - a. Miten päädyit rooliisi jossa nyt olet? (kerro hieman omia taustojasi)
 - b. Mitä taitoluistelu merkitsee sinulle valmentajana / Mitä se toisaalta vaatii?
 - c. Mikä on parasta työssäsi? Mikä on haastavinta työssäsi?

2. THEME. Urheiluosaaminen
 - a. Kuinka tärkeänä pidät sitä, että valmentamasi urheilijat oppivat noudattamaan terveellisiä elämäntapoja ja vaalivat urheilullista elämää?
 - b. Minkälaisena koet oman lajiosaamisesi? (lajitekniikat, ideologia)
 - c. Minkälaisena koet oman tietotaitosi urheilijoiden kilpailuihin valmistautumisessa?

3. THEME. Urheilijakeskeisyys valmennustoiminnassa
 - a. Kertoisitko hieman omasta valmennustyylistäsi?
 - b. Minkälaisena koet valmentaja-urheilija suhteesi?
 - c. Mitä mieltä olet siitä, että urheilija on aktiivinen toimija valmennukseen liittyvissä päätöksissä?

4. THEME. Ihmissuhdetaidot
 - a. Millaiseksi koet hyvät vuorovaikutustaidot valmentajan työssä? Miten olet kokenut tämän omalla kohdallasi?
 - b. Minkälaisena olet kokenut työssäsi:
 - i. valmentajan suhde urheilijoihin
 - ii. valmentajan suhde vanhempiin
 - iii. valmentajan suhde muihin sidosryhmiin, esim. omaan seuraan, Suomen Taitoluisteluliittoon
 - c. Minkälainen on mielestäsi hyvä valmennustiimi?

5. THEME. Itsensä kehittämisen taidot (ammattissa kehittymisen taidot, ihmisenä kehittymisen taidot)
- a. Minkälaisena olet kokenut mahdollisuutesi kehittää omaa ammatillista osaamistasi?
 - b. Minkälaisena koet oman roolisi valmentajana?
 - c. Mitä toiveita / odotuksia sinulla on valmentajana eri tahojen suuntiin? (esim. perheiden toimintaan, seuraan työnantajana)
 - d. Toisaalta, minkälaisia odotuksia / vaatimuksia sinuun valmentajana kohdistuu ulkopuolelta?
 - e. Minkälaisia tavoitteita sinulla on valmentajana? (Tulostavoitteita, menestystavoitteita, urheilijaksi kasvattaminen)
 - f. Mihin sinun oma valmennus ”pohjautuu”(esim. arvot, henkilökohtainen valmennusfilosofia)
6. THEME. Elämänhallinta
- a. Miten koet tasapainottelun työn ja vapaa-ajan kanssa?
 - b. Minkälaisia paineita kohtaat työssäsi? Miten käsittelet niitä?



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Suostumuslomake

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Olen liikunnan yhteiskuntatieteiden opiskelija Jyväskylän Yliopiston kansainvälisellä maisterin tutkinnon linjalla “Master Degree Programme in Sport Management and Health Promotion”. Kirjoitan tällä hetkellä pro gradu-työtäni ja tutkin taitoluisteluvalmentajien kokemuksia päivittäisestä työstään Suomessa. Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on selvittää taitoluisteluvalmentajien kokemuksia valmennuksesta ja erityisesti haluan selvittää tutkimuksessani minkälaisia kokemuksia valmentajilla on urheilijoiden kokonaisvaltaisesta ja urheilijalähtöisestä valmennuksesta sekä miten kokevat oman oppimisensa mahdollisuudet ja kehittämisen valmennustyössään. Tutkimuksen tulokset voivat tulevaisuudessa hyödyttää valmentajia sekä urheilijoita.

Pro graduni on laadullinen tutkimustyö ja tärkeimpänä ja ensisijaisena tutkimusmenetelmänä ovat syvennetyt teemahaastattelut. Haastattelut tullaan nauhoittamaan. Tämän haastattelun aikana sinulta tullaan kysymään kysymyksiä teemoittain, kuten valmennustyylistäsi, valmennusympäristöstäsi sekä kokemuksistasi eri vuorovaikutustilanteissa.

Haastattelun kesto on suunniteltu kestämään noin 1,5-2h kokonaisuudessaan. Varaathan aikaa, jotta voit myös vapaasti kertoa ajatuksiasi ja myös laajentaa aihealuetta halutessasi. Myös, jos sinusta tuntuu että et pysty tai et jostain syystä koe haluavasi jakaa joitain asioita, niin voit vapaasti ilmaista sen missä tahansa vaiheessa haastattelua, joten siirrymme seuraavaan aihealueeseen. Haastattelun jälkeen tarkoitukseni on teemoittaa keräämäni aineisto, ja analysoida niitä tuloksissani peilaten niitä kirjallisuusosiooni. Ennen näiden julkaisemista, tulen lähettämään teille litteroimani aineiston, jotta voit vielä halutessasi vapaasti tehdä korjauksia tai kommentteja aineistoon.

Kaikki keskustelut ja tieto on luottamuksellista ja se tullaan pitämään turvatussa paikassa. Ainoastaan tutkijoiden on mahdollista tarkastella aineistoa. Tutkimuksen raportoinnissa ei mainita nimiä tai sellaisia piirteitä, joiden avulla haastateltavan voisi tunnistaa. Kenenkään tutkimuksen osallistuvan valmentajan henkilöllisyyttä ei paljasteta missään julkaistussa raportissa.

TUTKIMUKSEN TOIMENPITEISTÄ:

Olen tietoinen, että tähän haastatteluun osallistuminen on vapaaehtoista. Jos missään vaiheessa haastattelua toivon haastattelun keskeyttämistä, se on minulle sallittua eikä velvoita minulta mitään selvityksiä.

Ymmärrän tämän tutkimustyön tarkoituksen ja päämäärän. Tutkija on käynyt kanssani läpi tämän tutkimuksen yksilölliset ja sosiaaliset hyödyt ja haitat kanssani.

Olen tietoinen, että aineistoa tullaan käyttämään tutkimustyön ja luokkaesityksen tarkoituksiin. Minulla on oikeus oikolukea, kommentoida ja / tai poistaa tietoa ennen tutkimuksen julkaisua ja esittelyä. Tämän tutkimuksen kerätty aineisto on luottamuksellista ja anonymistä kunnioittaen minun henkilöllisyyttäni ellen tarkenna toisin.

Allekirjoittaessasi tämän suostumuslomakkeen, suostut osallistumaan tutkimukseen, jossa on tarkoituksena selvittää taitoluisteluvalmentajien kokemuksia päivittäisestä työstään, sekä urheilijalähtöisestä valmennuksesta. Tutkimukseen osallistuminen merkitsee osallistumista yksilölliseen teemahaastatteluun.

Olen lukenut ylläolevan lomakkeen ja ymmärrän että voin vetäytyä tutkimuksesta missä tahansa vaiheessa. Näihin viitaten, haluan osallistua tähän tutkimuksen haastatteluun.

Osallistujan allekirjoitus

Paikka / aika

Haastattelijan allekirjoitus

Paikka / aika