

“You May Have All the Knowledge There Is About the Sport, But Without Pedagogical Skills, It Never Comes into Use.”: Children's Ice Hockey Coaches' Views on the Importance of Pedagogical Skills in Their Work

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ABSTRACT

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The coach's pedagogical skills have been found to play a key role in the quality of athletes' emotional experiences, motivation, and the mastery of sports skills. The purpose of this study was to investigate Finnish children's ice hockey coaches' views on the importance of pedagogical skills in their work. The study placed particular emphasis on exploring the ice hockey coaches' perspective, which has been studied only to a limited extent so far.

This was a qualitative study. Eight coaches of five-year-old hockey enthusiasts participated in the study. The participants were selected from different parts of Finland, and they had diverse coaching and ice hockey backgrounds. The data collection method used in the study was thematic interviews. The data was analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis.

The results of the study showed that the coaches were unanimous in their opinion that children's ice hockey coaches need pedagogical skills in their work. The pedagogical skills needed were grouped under following main themes: planning coaching, implementing coaching, and continuous self-development to meet the demands of the diverse role of a coach. Coaches needed pedagogical skills for encouraging children into physical activity and in teaching children healthy lifestyle, social skills, and life values. The necessity of pedagogical education for children's ice hockey coaches was stated. The study can be utilized for example in the development of junior ice hockey coaching education.

Keywords: physical education, ice hockey, junior coaching, pedagogical skills of coaches

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Valmentajan pedagogisten taitojen on havaittu olevan avainasemassa urheilijoiden tunnekokemusten laadussa, motivaatiossa ja lajitaitojen hallinnassa. Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli selvittää suomalaisten lasten jääkiekkovalmentajien näkemyksiä pedagogisten taitojen tärkeydestä heidän työssään. Tutkimuksessa keskityttiin jääkiekkovalmentajien näkökulmaan, sillä sitä on toistaiseksi tutkittu vain vähän.

Kyseessä oli laadullinen tutkimus. Tutkimukseen osallistui kahdeksan viisivuotiaiden jääkiekkoharrastajien valmentajaa. Osallistujat oli valittu eri puolilta Suomea ja heillä oli erilaiset taustat jääkiekon ja valmentamisen parissa. Tutkimuksen aineisto kerättiin temahaastatteluiden avulla. Aineisto analysoitiin refleksiivisellä teema-analyysillä.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittivat, että valmentajat olivat yksimielisiä siitä, että lasten jääkiekkovalmentajat tarvitsevat pedagogisia taitoja työssään. Tarvittavat pedagogiset taidot jaettiin seuraavien pääteemojen alle: valmennuksen suunnittelu, valmennuksen toteuttaminen ja jatkuva itsensä kehittäminen valmentajan työn monipuolisen roolin täyttämiseksi. Valmentajat tarvitsivat pedagogisia taitoja innostaakseen lapsia liikkumaan ja opettaakseen lapsille terveellistä elämäntapaa, sosiaalisia taitoja sekä elämänarvoja. Lasten jääkiekkovalmentajien pedagogisen koulutuksen tarve korostui. Tutkimusta voidaan hyödyntää esimerkiksi juniorijääkiekkovalmennuksen kehittämisessä.

Avainsanat: liikuntakasvatus, jääkiekko, juniorivalmennus, valmentajien pedagogiset taidot

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1 INTRODUCTION

Hobbies are an important part of children's lives, as they can build social relationships, learn new skills, and enjoy their free time engaging in activities that interest them (Petitpas et al., 2005). Sports hobbies are popular worldwide, with approximately half of children participating in organized sports activities (Howie et al., 2020). In Finland, 43% of 4-year-olds (38% of boys, 48% of girls) take part in organized children's physical activity on a weekly basis (Finland's Report Card 2022 on Physical Activity for Children and Youth). According to Husu and colleagues (2011), 87% of school-aged Finns participated in sports club activities and over half had started their hobby before school age.

Sports clubs play a special role in reaching children and young people of different ages widely and can be seen as an important institution in children's upbringing. Through club activities, young people's health and well-being can be promoted, and they can be offered the opportunity to develop skills that hold significant value later in life (Petitpas et al., 2005). One of the most popular sports in Finland is ice hockey, with approximately 200 000 active enthusiasts playing it (Suomen jääkiekkoliitto, no date).

Ice hockey has recently been in the news in a negative light, with discussions about the sport's long-standing culture. Controversies related to sexual offenses, substance abuse, and racism have emerged in the media in relation to ice hockey both abroad and in Finland (Hoffrén, 2023; Hiitelä, 2022; Seppälä, 2022). Seppälä (2024) suggests that now would be a good time to update the practices of junior ice hockey to become pedagogical.

The importance of physical activity in childhood is unquestionable, as inactivity and obesity are issues today (Booth et al., 2015; Dollman et al., 2005). The goals of physical education are to cultivate movement and educate through physical activity. This means that not only do children learn and adopt a physically active lifestyle through engaging in physical activity, but they also learn other important life skills such as emotional intelligence, teamwork skills,

and motor skills life (Petitpas et al., 2005). Healthy and active habits learned in childhood can extend into adulthood, and good motor skills learned in childhood predict motivation to engage in physical activity throughout life (Loprinzi et al., 2015; Robinson et al., 2015; Webster et al., 2018).

Children's and young people's ice hockey coaching is mostly based on club activities and volunteer work. Coaching often begins after one's own ice hockey career or through one's child's hobby, and formal training is not mandatory for the job (Chroni et al., 2020). This can lead to a situation where the coach may appear skilled outwardly, but the pedagogy that supports child development may not necessarily be realized in the long run. The coach may understand the physical and mental demands of the sport and have excellent technical skills, but he or she lacks the expertise or tools to teach them to others (Chroni et al., 2020).

Teaching and leading a group require pedagogical expertise. It has been shown that pedagogical skills play a key role in supporting children's holistic development, and pedagogical skills are essential in creating a good culture of action in sports hobbies (Smith & Johnson, 2022). Coaches with strong pedagogical skills can create a supportive and nurturing environment for young athletes, making their hobby meaningful and lasting year after year (Côté and Gilbert, 2009).

There are only a few studies focusing on young children's coaching internationally and the research perspectives are usually focusing on the children themselves or their parents. Santos and colleagues (2018) studied the opportunities for field hockey coaches in Portugal to positively impact the development of children and youth. Bartholomew and colleagues (2009) investigated the effects of self-determination theory on the training motivation of young athletes. Vienola's (2010) master's thesis focused on the views of young children and their parents on the educational activities in junior ice hockey. These studies did not highlight the views of coaches. This study aims to fill a research gap by examining coaches' views on the importance of pedagogical skills in coaching young children.

2 EDUCATION AND PEDAGOGY IN SPORTS COACHING

2.1 Defining education and pedagogy

Education is the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes through formal instruction, training, or teaching provided in learning institutions (UNESCO, 2015). It is aimed at developing a person's intellectual, social, emotional, and physical capabilities, as well as preparing them for future responsibilities and challenges (Garcia et al., 2017). Education is a lifelong process that continues beyond formal schooling and helps individuals adapt to new challenges and changes in society; it plays a crucial role in shaping individuals, societies, and nations by empowering individuals to achieve their full potential and contribute positively to society (Kolb, 2014).

According to Freire (2020) Pedagogy is the theory and practice of teaching, especially as it relates to the methods and principles used to educate and instruct students. He emphasizes that it encompasses the strategies, techniques, and approaches used by teachers to facilitate learning and enhance students' academic and personal development. Pedagogy involves a deep understanding of how people learn and encompasses both the content being taught and the methods used to deliver that content effectively (Freire, 2020). In addition to pedagogical and educational terms, teaching is also an essential part of the whole, but it can be described as narrower than education and affecting individual abilities (Hellström 2010; Hirsjärvi, 1983).

Murray and Stern (1999) suggest that there are always two traditions in education: upbringing and pedagogy. Pedagogy, according to them, can be traced back to Isocrates, who taught young Greek aristocrats' rhetoric and other arts to ensure them proper knowledge for life. Education, on the other hand, can be traced directly back to Plato, according to whom learning, and the accumulation of knowledge do not exclude the pursuit of worldly things.

Hinchliffe (2000) defines education as "learning for its own sake" and pedagogy as learning oriented towards a social goal. In the Aristotelian view, education was thought of as education that cultivates the mind and maintains rational thinking, which contributes to the pursuit of the common good. When talking about pedagogy, the intentionality of the educator and the activities of the person being educated, goal-oriented and striving for the gradual independence of the person being educated are emphasized (Siljander, 2014).

In the past, education was provided by family, relatives, and tribes, but nowadays more and more different parties are involved in education, such as daycare centers, schools and, for example, sports clubs (Ranta et al., 2021). Today in modern society, the nuclear family is limited to parents and children. The primary educational responsibility for young children in particular lies with their parents (Ranta et al., 2021). The next most important educator is early childhood educators and education, followed by other people in the immediate circle, such as friends and relatives (Härkönen, 2008).

In early childhood education, the concepts of pedagogy and education are often used in the same context, interchangeably (Heikka, 2014). In addition, early childhood education pedagogy is often associated with practical educational work, goal-orientation, and interaction. For example, according to Hujala and Eskelinen (2013), the definition of early childhood education pedagogy is a practical educational activity for young children. In the definitions of early childhood education pedagogy, goal-orientation has also been seen to be related to learning and curriculum (Hujala & Eskelinen, 2013). In the National Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet, 2022), the importance of early childhood education pedagogy is emphasized.

2.2 Physical education

Education focused on physical activity is called physical education pedagogy or sport pedagogy, which combines physical activity and pedagogy (Chandler et

al., 2007). In this case, the focus is on phenomena related to physical activity from the perspective of education and learning.

Physical education is part of general education, and as a concept it is simplest to define when talking about physical education at school (Chandler et al., 2007). According to Graham and his colleagues (2010), physical education is a school program that aims to guide young people towards lifelong physical activity. Green (2008), on the other hand, sees it as all physical activity organized by the teacher. When physical education is examined even more broadly, it can be noticed that physical education also takes place outside school, for example in families and sports clubs. In the end, physical education can be seen as all activities that examine phenomena related to physical activity from an educational point of view, which is why there are many parties that educate physical activity (Chandler et al., 2007).

Physical education has many different goals, and the concept of physical education includes education in physical activity and education through physical activity (Bailey, 2006). According to Laakso (2003), the purpose of education in physical activity is to create a permanent interest in physical activity in the child, as well as to provide the opportunity to practice activities appropriate to each age period. Laakso (2003), emphasizes that the most important thing is that children enjoy and rejoice in the feeling of well-being that exercise brings. Education through exercise, on the other hand, includes not only health and staying fit, but also other goals, such as developing interaction skills or awareness of ethical values (Bailey, 2006). According to Bailey (2006), physical activity can also be used to promote a sense of community, equality, and non-discrimination. The curriculum of basic education (Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet, 2014), also aims to emphasize physical activity, embodiment and doing things together. According to the curriculum, positive experiences and a sense of competence are also important, as they are known to be linked to the formation of an active lifestyle that lasts a lifetime.

Every Finnish child participating in early childhood education and care has the right to planned, goal-oriented and versatile physical education (Ranta et al.,

2021). The basics of early childhood education plans oblige the staff to plan and implement early childhood education and care that supports the child's comprehensive growth and development (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet, 2022). Early childhood education staff must also plan their activities in such a way that the importance of physical activity and physical activity in promoting the child's learning, health and well-being is realized (Sääkslahti et al., 2016).

2.3 Pedagogical skills

According to Husu and Toom (2016, 18), pedagogical skills refer to the utilization of extensive theoretical frameworks as part of practical teaching activities. They emphasize that those engaged in pedagogical teaching activities are required to have the ability to think professionally in accordance with requirements and goals, to develop a continuous knowledge base and to be sensitive to wide-ranging practical activities. Pedagogical skills can be divided into planning, implementing, and evaluating activities (Mohr et al., 2002). These components and stages also make up high-quality sports coaching (Heikka et al., 2014).

Planning. According to Mohr and colleagues (2002), in the planning phase the aim is to create pedagogical activities that support the objectives. They also highlight that to consider individual goals within the group, it is important to consider the athletes and their voices in the planning process. By observing the athletes, an understanding of their needs and desires can be formed (Mohr et al., 2002). Collaborative planning and active commenting on the plans among coaches often helps create a unified coaching approach and continuity that doesn't break in special situations (Light & Harvey, 2017). When the aim is to efficiently implement activities, it is important to evaluate the use of time; careful pre-planning allows for the effective utilization of available resources and maximizes learning opportunities (Heikka et al., 2014). Collaboration between sport coaches in planning and actively commenting on plans often helps

everyone involved in coaching to create a consistent coaching line and continuum (Husu & Toom 2016, 18).

Athletes' learning and development are supported by feedback received from the coach, which is called formal evaluation (Mason et al., 2020). The goals and core elements of the exercises, which are considered during the planning phase, allow for targeted observation, making feedback easier to provide (Light & Harvey, 2017). Feedback should be diverse: external as well as internal and the coach, another athlete, or a video recording can serve as an external feedback provider, whereas internal feedback can be obtained through considering internal sensations, such as body posture (Mason et al., 2020).

Creating long and short-term coaching plans provides the framework for coaching (Heikka et al., 2014). Seasonal or annual plans are intended to ensure comprehensive coaching throughout the year. In ice hockey, a seasonal plan is often a plan created by coaches together, outlining how the coaching will progress in terms of physical performance over the course of the year or season (Dhahbi et al., 2018). Good pre-planning enables the coach to quickly react to the progress of individual training sessions and adapt their actions to meet the requirements of the situation, serving the long-term goals (Light & Harvey, 2017).

Implementing. The implementing phase of coaching often starts with instruction, where athletes are given an image of what they are being taught, the procedures and key aspects. The instructions should contain essential information about the activity, which can focus for example on technique, tactics, results, or sensations (Schlapkohl & Raab 2016). Instructions can be given verbally or visually, using methods such as drawing or video, creating mental images, or demonstrating model performances (Starr, 2016). Different coaching methods provide equal learning opportunities for different types of learners. Also taking into notice different learners is important. According to Ashworth and Mosston (2008), there are visual, kinesthetic, auditory, and social learners and they all benefit from an emphasis on a different teaching style. This applies also in coaching.

Short, clear, and simple instructions enable sufficient memory capacity and minimize environmental distractions for learning and to ensure clarity in the instruction-giving situation, the instructions should contain one or at most two things to remember at a time before starting the performance (Cheon et al., 2014). After athletes have tried out self-directed instructions, more new instructions can be given. For clarity in the instruction-giving situation, the coach should consider their own positioning in relation to the athletes, clear vocal articulation, and explaining concepts. Model performances and demonstrations enhance coaching, especially in learning new skills, and are often more effective than spoken instructions (Starr, 2016).

The meaningfulness of training is influenced by the factors of autonomy and feelings of competence (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Feelings of autonomy and competence are further examined in chapter 3.3. For athletes to experience feelings of success and competence, training needs to be diverse, varied, and appropriately challenging – and individual differences should also be considered in training (Martens & Vealey, 2023). According to Deci and Ryan (1985), motivation levels remain higher, and experiences of competence increase when coaches give athletes freedoms in their actions and do not try to control everything. Thus, giving athletes responsibility increases their perceived autonomy and enhances their commitment to the activity (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In self-determination theory is emphasized that this way, training is not perceived as a forced action implemented by coaches, which is a significant factor in the development of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Evaluating. Evaluation phase includes reflections of the actions and performance of athletes and the coach. In this section the focus is on the coach's assessment of athletes. The evaluation of the coach's own activities and self-reflection are investigated on chapter 4.3.4. Coaches have a great responsibility in evaluating the successes and failures of athletes. When evaluating, it is important to consider the individual's personality as part of all activities, while avoiding assessment that targets the personality specifically (Gagnon-Dolbec et al., 2019). According to Husu and Toom (2016, 18), systematic and pedagogical

agency in sports requires a holistic approach to humanity, from planning to evaluation. They emphasize that proper evaluation promotes the creation of a positive self-image, the development of self-confidence, and athletes' trust in their own abilities. Just like in life in general, mistakes should be seen as a natural part of learning in sports as well. Public criticism diminishes enjoyment and creates social performance pressure, which has a demotivating effect (Zhuoyuan, 2021). Involving athletes in the assessment process supports realistic connections between goals and actions, while also strengthening the experience of autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Giving feedback is one of the most important parts of evaluation and promoting athletes' development (Ratten, 2011). Feedback should be given individually and focus on skills that can be improved, as publicly given feedback often leads to unnecessary social comparison (Gagnon-Dolbec et al., 2019). According to Tzetzis and colleagues (2008), positive feedback should be given particularly for hard work, effort, and successful teamwork. They highlight that the experiences of autonomy and physical competence diminish if feedback is given only by comparing performances to other athletes. However, competition, and social comparison are essential aspects of sports. Constructive feedback helps athletes develop appropriate actions and enhance their own thinking and from the perspective of individual consideration, it is advantageous if feelings of competence do not solely rely on comparison (Horn, 2019).

Feedback can be given during or after a performance: delayed feedback enhances the learner's ability to analyze, and problem solve, when feedback given during a performance can temporarily improve the performance of experienced athletes who can react to instructions during the performance (Zhuoyuan, 2021). The amount of feedback affects the learning process. According to Harrison and Dossinger (2017), if the learner does not immediately receive the outcome of the performance or the task is challenging, frequent external feedback should be provided. They emphasize that giving feedback after every other performance has been found to be the most effective amount for learning. This allows the learner to utilize the messages of internal feedback

better, as giving feedback too often can confuse the learner and thus impair performance (Harrison & Dossinger, 2017).

3 CHILDREN'S SPORTS COACHING

3.1 The importance of physical activity in early childhood

Over the past three decades, children's lifestyles have developed in a worrying direction in terms of normal growth and development; children's daily physical activity has decreased, and children spend more and more time in front of different screens (Booth et al., 2015; Dollman et al., 2005).

Children's obesity rates are on the rise, and one of the reasons for this is the decrease in activity, and parents find it challenging to teach their children to live an active life (Niemistö et al., 2019). Deteriorating lifestyle changes partly explain the alarming decrease in activity and increase in childhood obesity observed around the world (De Onis et al., 2010; Ng et al. 2014). It is estimated that 10–20 % of Finnish children aged 6–8 years are overweight or obese (Eloranta et al. 2012; Vuorela et al., 2009). Eating and exercising habits learned in childhood often continue throughout life (Telama et al., 2014), and lifestyles that are harmful to childhood health and growth are reflected in poorer health and well-being in adulthood (Pälve et al., 2014).

Children's physical activity as a concept includes all activities that are part of children's lives, such as playing and doing things both indoors and outdoors, household chores and supervised exercise. Physical activity in childhood is important for the physical health reasons, but it is also associated with better learning outcomes in school (Haapala et al., 2014; Syväoja et al., 2013). It seems that especially boys could benefit from physical activity since participating sports club activities, which is one form of physical activity, is associated with less inattention and hyperactivity in classrooms (Haapala et al., 2014).

In intervention studies, high levels of physical activity have generally been associated with better motor skills such as running, throwing, and jumping in children under five years of age (Logan et al., 2012; Jones et al., 2016). Early Learning and developing basic motor skills are known to be most effective in the early years of human life (Gallahue et al., 2012, 187). Supporting children's

learning of basic motor skills is considered particularly important in early childhood between the ages of three and seven, because at this stage of a child's development, practicing various motor skills leads to learning (Gallahue et al., 2012, 187). Neural development has been found to be fastest during the first six years of life, which may also contribute to the learning of motor skills (Gabbard 2018, 53). Learning basic motor skills enables children to cope independently with everyday physical challenges and participate in various health-promoting physical activities later in life (Stodden et al., 2008). For this reason, it is important to master basic motor skills already before school age (Rintala et al., 2016).

Sääkslahti and Niemistö (2021) found that the motor skills of Finnish children from age two to seven are of a high level compared to the rest of the European population, perhaps because Finland is known around the world as an outdoor nation and children exercise outdoors in a variety of different weather conditions. One of the findings of their study showed that in early childhood, the development of motor skills carries well into adolescence and adulthood, maintaining an active lifestyle, while on the other hand, passive early childhood in many cases leads to an increased passive lifestyle and an increased risk of obesity. Also, Robinson and colleagues (2015), found that early mastery of basic motor skills also predicts higher physical activity, better physical fitness, and a lower risk of being overweight (Robinson et al., 2015). Basic motor skills are the basis of all physical activity, and therefore people with great motor skills are more likely to enjoy exercise throughout their lives (Loprinzi et al., 2015; Webster et al., 2018)..The management of motor skills and physical activity are seen to have positive links not only with overall wellbeing and functional capacity, but also with school performance, quality of life and social relationships (Syväoja et al., 2013).

By the age of five, children become more aware of the environment in which they grow up and other people who belong to it and the importance of friendships increases and friendships become somewhat permanent (Mannerheimin lastensuojeluliitto, no date). Leisure activities such as sports clubs offer children the opportunity to have fun and learn new things in the

company of children of their own age, thus enabling the development of social abilities (Niemistö et al., 2018). The environment should support children's motor development and create sufficient opportunities for motor skills training. In the best case, the environment can promote children's motor skills, and learning and developing motor skills can also be seen to increase motivation to maintain a physically active lifestyle (Laukkanen et al., 2019; Niemistö et al., 2018.) However, the different training and movement conditions made possible by the environment can create major differences in children's basic motor skills (Malina et al., 2004, 202).

Participation in supervised physical activity has been found to be associated with better basic motor skills in five to seven-year-old children (Näppilä & Tuomi, 2019). Ice hockey is conducive for practicing motor skills, as it includes exercises for balance, coordination, jumping, and puck handling (Barnett et al., 2009). In addition to these, a hockey player must also master skills such as skating technique and passing and shooting techniques (Malina et al., 2004). Sääkslahti and Niemistö (2021) also suggest that ice hockey and skating that challenges balance and leg muscle strength is seen to have particularly positive effects on learning basic motor skills.

3.2 Sports clubs as a growth environment

Sports hobbies are popular worldwide, with approximately half of children participating in organized sports activities (Howie et al., 2020). In Finland, 43% of 4-year-olds (38% of boys, 48% of girls) take part in organized children's physical activity on a weekly basis (Finland's Report Card 2022 on Physical Activity for Children and Youth). According to Husu and colleagues (2011), 87% of school-aged Finns participated in a sports club and over half had started their hobby before school age. No other organizations beside schools reach children and young people of different ages as widely as sports clubs, and this can be considered a special feature of sports clubs. Due to their great popularity, sports

clubs are seen as an important institution for raising children, and club activities enable positive guidance for comprehensive growth (Itkonen & Nevala, 1993.) Ice hockey is one of the most popular sports in Finland, played by approximately 70,000 junior-aged children and youth (Suomen jääkiekkoliitto, no date).

Sport clubs as a growth environment can be examined through Urie Bronfenbrenner's developed ecological systems theory (1994), which suggests that an individual's development occurs through interaction with the environment. Bronfenbrenner divides the environmental influences on development into four systems: micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems. These systems can be seen as layers of an onion, with the individual at the center. The microsystem represents the individual's immediate family, which is closest to the individual. A sport team can be considered to fall within the mesosystem level in an individual's life, like school, for example. The exosystem would then include the wider sports club to which the team belongs. Macrosystems in an individual's life can include society and culture, which the individual represents. The values, norms, practices, and goals within a sport club form the foundation for its activities and influence the kind of environment it provides for growth (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Pedagogically built sports club activities support the goals of early childhood education in supporting children's comprehensive growth, development, and learning (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet, 2022). It is proposed that sport coaches are designers of learning environments and that both learning and performance improvement are seen as emerging from the interaction of key constraints (Correia et al., 2019). In addition, physical activity interventions for children should be designed to meet multiple objectives, e.g. optimize physical fitness, promote health-related behaviors that offset obesity, and facilitate mental development (Tomporowski et al., 2011).

Team sport participation may have a positive impact on mental health of children and adolescence and should, therefore, be encouraged (Guddal et al., 2019). Many parents also consider it important to offer supervised sports activities to children under school age, as parents who are especially physically

active feel that belonging to a hobby community and practicing an active lifestyle are important already as children (Watson et al., 2019). According to Guddal and colleagues (2019), conceptual skills and verbal abilities have been proven to be better in the children if they attended sports clubs. They also suggested that children's cognitive abilities may benefit from better cardiorespiratory fitness, reduced sedentary activity and less screen time.

Physical activity is generally seen as enriching children's lives, and almost all children who engage in organized physical activity and sports emphasize the positive aspects of sports more than negative ones and find the hobby very pleasant (Alexander & Stafford 2011, 1-11). The generally accepted goal is that exercise should become a natural part of normal life. Physical activity is more likely to continue into adolescence and beyond when children enjoy their sports hobby (Webster et al., 2018). Organizers of organized sports could take better account of children and young people who do not want to engage in sports in a goal-oriented manner and participate in competitive activities by lowering the threshold for participating in sports and not obliging them to participate in competitions (Alexander & Stafford 2011, 1-11).

3.3 Self-determination theory to support children's sports coaching

According to Côte and Gilbert (2019), a coach can influence the athletes' process of growing as a person, developing self-development skills, and feelings of solidarity and being heard. They emphasize that through comprehensive human encounters, the coach can help the athletes achieve their sports goals also by utilizing their expertise in the sport. As is evident in the objectives of physical education (section 2.3), one of the goals is to get children excited about exercise and to keep them engaged in it until adulthood; positive experiences in sports activities help in achieving these goals. Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (1985) have created a theory of self-determination that can be used to encourage children into physical activity by creating a pleasant and motivating environment for them. To be self-determined means to act with a full sense and

choice (Deci & Ryan, 2000). According to Norrena (2019), self-determination increases creativity, curiosity, and satisfaction. Behaviors are fully endorsed by the individual and engaged in because they are interesting or personally important; contrastingly, to be controlled means to act with the feeling of pressure (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Self-determination theory is the most cited scientific theory in modern motivation research. It explains motivation through three basic psychological needs: autonomy, perceived competence, and social cohesion (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Autonomy, perceived competence, and social cohesion can be satisfied or hindered in children's sport activities; if these needs are satisfied in sport activities, the child finds the hobby internally motivating and the motivation is positive (Norrena, 2019). Intrinsic motivation can manifest itself, for example, as children's enjoyment of hobbies, concentration, commitment to training, and increased experiences of ability (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

In self-determination theory the combined effect of social and cognitive factors creates motivation for action. The resulting motivation results in affective (e.g. enjoyment), cognitive (e.g. attitude towards exercise) and behavioral (e.g. recreational sports) consequences (Deci & Ryan, 2000.) Internal motivation produces comprehensive well-being for children. However, there are situations in sport that do not satisfy the needs for cohesion, autonomy, and competence. According to self-determination theory, the consequence in such a situation may be a change in motivation to an external one or its complete absence. As a result, the child may stop trying, become anxious or do not see reason to try the exercise tasks offered by the coach (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

In line with self-determination theory, it has been proposed that coach behaviors employed to pressure or control athletes have the potential to thwart athletes' feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Blanchard et al., 2009). This, in turn, undermines athletes' self-determined motivation and contributes to the development of unwanted motives. When athletes feel pressured to behave in a certain way, a variety of negative consequences are expected to ensue which are to the detriment of the athletes' well-being.

Extreme mental and physical demands towards children and adolescence in the sport context can lead to damaged self-esteem and affective disorders, such as anxiety and depression (Scanlan et al., 1991). Sundgot-Borgen and Torstveit (2004) have discovered that other serious problems, such as eating disorders, occur more amongst athletes compared to general population. Ultimately, the chronic stress associated with participation in competitive sport can lead to burnout and these negative outcomes can be particularly apparent when children and adolescence experience pressure from coaches or other close adults (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Udry et al., 1997).

4 COACH AS AN EDUCATOR

4.1 The Finnish Coaching Competence Model

The Finnish Coaching Competence Model (Hämäläinen, 2013) was created in accordance with Côté and Gilbert's article (2009) about "Coaching Effectiveness and Expertise" to illustrate the holistic nature of coaching. The purpose of The Finnish Coaching Competence Model is to explain what coaching is and what coaches should take into consideration in coaching. With the help of this model, the coaches can assess their own competence and development extensively, through which they can influence the coaching support of the athletes.

The Finnish Coaching Competence Model can help comprehending the significance of pedagogical skills for children's sport coaches for many reasons. The Finnish Coaching Competence Model emphasizes holistic development, focusing not only on athletes' physical abilities but also on their overall well-being and personal growth (Hämäläinen, 2013). Pedagogical skills play a crucial role in fostering this holistic development, as coaches with strong pedagogical skills can create a supportive and nurturing environment for young athletes (Côté & Gilbert, 2009).

Pedagogical skills enable coaches to create positive learning experiences for children (Stone et al., 2021). By understanding how to effectively communicate and engage with young athletes, coaches can ensure that training sessions and competitions are enjoyable and meaningful: this fosters a love for sports and encourages children to continue their participation in sports activities (Stone et al., 2021).

Children have unique learning needs and capabilities. According to Bennet and Culpan (2014), a coach with strong pedagogical skills understands how to adapt their coaching style and techniques to suit the individual needs of each child and this individualized instruction helps children progress at their own pace, build confidence, and develop their skills more effectively. According to Smith and Johnson (2022), pedagogical skills involve creating a safe and inclusive

environment that respects the rights and well-being of every child. They emphasize that coaches who understand The Finnish Coaching Competence Model prioritize the physical and emotional safety of children, ensuring that sports activities are free from any form of harm, discrimination, or bullying.

The Finnish Coaching Competence Model emphasizes long-term athlete development rather than short-term performance outcomes (Hämäläinen, 2013). Pedagogical skills are crucial in nurturing sustainable athlete development, as coaches need to understand how to motivate and support children throughout their athletic journey, considering their individual goals, interests, and abilities (Bennet & Culpan, 2014).

Multiple parties in sports club activities in Finland utilize The Finnish Coaching Competence Model when training their coaches for coaching work (Hämäläinen, 2013). According to The Model, coaches can influence their own professional skills, but not directly on the athlete's competitive performance or operating environment. Above all, The Model highlights the coach's possibilities to influence the development of one's own competence needs (Hämäläinen 2013).

In The Finnish Coaching Competence Model, coach competence is categorized into four larger areas: interpersonal skills, personal resources, self-development skills and sports competence (Hämäläinen, 2013). The category of sports competence, on the other hand, links the coach's general sports competence, sports competence and teaching and guidance skills. (Hämäläinen, 2013).

4.2 Coaching children

In coaching children, as in other human interaction, it is important that the coach is present and a reliable adult for the children (Blomqvist & Hämäläinen, 2016). Children are sensitive to pretense and their thinking is very concrete. For this reason, it is important for the coach to always read the situation and mood so that there are clear reasons for the action and the children do not have to guess, for example, why the coach acts in a certain way (Blomqvist & Hämäläinen, 2016).

The coach's own, especially tired, or negative, mood is also under observation by the children, which should be considered by explaining it openly (Autio & Kaski 2005, 64.). A coach can be an object of admiration for a child, in which case the coach's responsibility for setting an example is great, because children openly accept operating models and copy behavior from people they admire (Blomqvist & Hämäläinen, 2016).

Coaches can support the child's comprehensive growth through their own activities, and education should be the starting point for all leisure activities with children. A study among parents of children who play sports showed that parents value a coach who meets children with warmth and understanding, and sports skills are secondary in order of importance (Benson et al., 2019). In addition, the topic should be studied further, as sports competence is made even more important than pedagogical skills in children's and young people's sports activities, when this should not be the case (Bjørndal & Gjesdal, 2020). The overemphasis on competitiveness in junior sports was also highlighted by a recent case reported by *Ilta-Sanomat*, where the father of a junior hockey goalie stole equipment from other goalies on the team so that his son could play more (Moilanen, 2024).

4.3 Interpersonal skills as the basis for coaching children

Interpersonal skills can be considered the basis of coaching (Shanmugam & Jowett, 2016). Interpersonal skills are described through The Finnish Coaching Competence Model (2013), mirroring emotional and interaction skills and human knowledge. In addition, organizational skills, leadership skills and problem-solving skills are part of the coach's interpersonal skills (Hämäläinen, 2013). According to The Model, the coach's interpersonal skills shape the implementation of coaching activities on a practical level (Hämäläinen, 2013).

According to Shanmugam and Jowett (2016), coaching is demanding interpersonal work, and coaches must practice skills through which to examine themselves both as a person and as an active participant in a children's sports

context. They emphasize that the awareness of the background factors affecting the coach's activities helps the coach to examine their pedagogical solutions from the perspective of goals and evaluation more effectively; conscious practice of pedagogy makes it possible to comprehensively coach athletes. The elements of The Finnish Coaching Competence Model can be the factors behind the pedagogical skills of coaches (Hämäläinen, 2013).

4.3.1 Emotional and communication skills

According to Opstoel and colleagues (2020), the emotional and communication skills of a coach are extremely important in working as a children's sports coach. They emphasize that with these skills, the coach can create a positive and safe atmosphere that promotes the well-being and development of children in sports. The coach's emotional skills help him or her understand and recognize the emotions and needs of children. The coach can provide support, encouragement, and praise to children at the right moment (Chan & Mallett, 2011). It is important to be able to handle different emotions, such as disappointment or frustration, that children may experience in sports and the coach should be empathetic and understanding to address these emotions by listening to children and considering their needs (Aronen et al., 2021).

With good communication skills the coach will be able to communicate clearly and constructively with children at their level: the coach can provide clear instructions, explain the purpose of exercises, and give feedback to support children's development (Martens & Vealey, 2023). Positive feedback and encouragement help children commit to training and increase their motivation (Opstoel et al., 2020). Good communication skills help the coach to solve potential conflicts or disagreements within the team, which also includes setting appropriate boundaries and using discipline, when necessary, in a fair and equal manner (Martens, & Vealey, 2023).

4.3.2 Psychological and problem-solving skills

The basic psychological needs, feeling of autonomy, competence and belonging discussed in the self-determination theory section (3.3) are at the core of the coaches' humane work. The athletes' experience of meeting basic psychological needs provides a basis for achieving the goals of sports activities. Through their activities, the coaches can support the fulfilment of basic psychological needs, for example, by supporting motivation, commitment to action and ways of dealing with adversity (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

According to Blomqvist and colleagues (2016), coaching situations that require problem-solving are linked to the coaches' pedagogical skills. They suggest that coaches are expected to be able to face challenges and problem areas by actively seeking solutions to them that lead to the examination of different pedagogical solutions. Cooperation with athletes in problem-solving processes supports athletes' growth, however, ultimately the coach is responsible for adapting different pedagogical solutions to the prevailing circumstances (Forsman & Lampinen 2008, 235–236). Bloom and colleagues (2008), suggest that it would be beneficial for sport coaches to use a team-intervention program, activities for bonding to support their abilities to work together as a group. According to them, these kinds of activities would also improve coaches' own personal abilities of communication.

4.3.3 Organizational and leadership skills

The coaches' organizational skills are part of interpersonal skills. Organizational skills refer to the ability to be systematic, prioritize and plan (Bakunas & Holley, 2001). These skills are emphasized when coaching children who still lack these skills. Especially for young children, it is important that the coaching is consistent and repeats familiar patterns and routines (Mcnamara & Humphrey, 2008). The purpose of consistent coaching is to maintain the predictability of the coach's actions and a safe coaching atmosphere (Packalen, 2015, 40–43).

Working on pedagogical solutions during the organization of coaching also guides the fluency of interaction situations (Blomqvist & Hämäläinen, 2016).

Coach management methods can be roughly divided into authoritarian coaching, democratic coaching, and combinations of these. (Forsman & Lampinen 2008, 417; Mero et al., 2004, 416.) Authoritarian coaching does not give athletes the responsibility to influence decision-making, which emphasizes a task-oriented approach to coaching, when a democratic coaching approach considers the limits set by the coach, but athletes also can participate in decision-making (Forsman & Lampinen, 2008). The best result is achieved when athletes' participation in decision-making is also considered to enable athletes' autonomy, competence, and feeling of belonging (Deci & Ryan, 1985). By adapting the coaching style, the coach can build an open, positive, and encouraging atmosphere in training situations (Mero et al., 2004, 416).

4.3.4 Skills of self-improvement

The coaches' ability to evaluate their own coaching and learning processes creates opportunities for extensive development in different areas of coaching (Gagnon-Dolbec et al., 2019). Through self-reflection, the background factors guiding the coaches' actions settle into consciousness and thus enable them the production of goal-oriented pedagogical solutions (Packalen, 2015, 53–55). Coaching competence emphasizes coaches' ability to learn from their own activities and coaching situations (Culver et al., 2007).

The coaches' actions are subject to several immeasurable factors, such as the environment and its changes, people, and experience. In practicing critical thinking, new perspectives and broader thinking, interaction with external actors, expert help and colleagues are also at the core of coaches' work (Packalen, 2015). One of the goals of The Finnish Coaching Competence Model is for the coaches to be able to guide athletes to take greater responsibility for their own agency (Hämäläinen, 2013). The coaches' goal-orientation and self-leadership skills make it possible to link continuous learning and the goals of coaching activities to each other by creating functional pedagogical solutions for athletes (Forsman & Lampinen 2008, 24). According to Packalen (2015, 52-55), the coaches' awareness of their own goals and the questions set for development contribute

to the development of thinking. He emphasizes that identifying and acknowledging one's own values guides the development of coaching activities to be more consistent, which in turn strengthens the preservation of the coach's authority and appreciation.

4.3.5 Teaching and guidance skills

According to Forsman and Lampinen (2008), comprehensive coaching activities include the development of physical-motor and cognitive areas. They also emphasize that a good coach masters the elements related to physical fitness, skill and technique from the point of view of the demands of the sport. The development of the above-mentioned components requires knowledge and skills from the coach to master sport-specific techniques, trajectories, mechanics, timing, and power generation (Forsman & Lampinen 2008, 24). Coaching is traditionally seen as the development of an athlete's performance, but it is also about teaching athletes in a pedagogical sense (Martens, & Vealey 2023). In addition to guidance and teaching based on sports expertise, coaches should pay attention to the psychological factors that are central to the sport, through which they support and guide the comprehensive development of athletes (Mero et al., 2004). The teaching and guidance situations created by the coach should strengthen the athletes' faith and trust in their own activities (Forsman & Lampinen 2008, 233). The learning environments provided by the coach play a significant role in creating the psychological characteristics of athletes, such as self-esteem, self-concept, and the experience of competence (Deci & Ryan, 2020).

Two-way interaction between athletes and coaches enables a comprehensive analysis of training situations from the perspective of planning, implementation, and evaluation (Lu et al., 2016). Pedagogical actions take center stage when considering the possible effects of cause-and-effect relationships in learning and guidance situations (Packalen, 2015, 50–51). It is also essential for a coach to recognize different personalities and learners among the athletes. According to Mosston and Ashworth (2008), adjusting teaching styles as suitable as possible for every learner enables all children to be treated equally. This

applies also in coaching children: the coach's equal actions and attitudes towards children also strengthen the children's experience of being understood and valuable.

5 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDY

5.1 Purpose of the study and research questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the views of Finnish junior ice hockey coaches on the importance of pedagogical skills in their work. The views of the coaches were examined, regarding the need for pedagogical skills, the justifications for the need for pedagogical skills and the perceived usefulness of possible pedagogical training for coaches.

The participating coaches in the study coached 5-year-old ice hockey enthusiasts. These children are among the youngest participants in guided ice hockey club activities, making it important to understand the views of the adults coaching them about the importance of pedagogy in sports coaching. The coach of a 5-year-old child may also be one of the first adults outside the child's home and daycare, and the coach may play a significant role in the child's life.

The following research questions were selected:

1. Do children's ice hockey coaches need pedagogical skills in their work and if so, what kind?
2. Why do children's ice hockey coaches feel they need pedagogical skills in their work?
3. Would children's ice hockey coaches benefit from pedagogical education tailored to them?

The connection between coach behavior, methods, athlete motivation and well-being has been widely studied internationally. The coach's pedagogical skills have been found to play a key role in the quality of the athlete's emotional experiences, motivation, and even physical development. The most important task of a children's sports coach is to support their growth, rather than to just

develop their athletic skills (Calvo et al., 2010; Jowett, 2017; Olympiou et al., 2008; Ruiz et al., 2021). However, there is limited existing research on coaches' own views on the necessity of pedagogical skills, which is why the research questions are designed to address coaches' own perspectives. The third research question summarizes the potential need to invest in pedagogical skills.

The research questions are derived from the theoretical framework of the thesis, which explains the skills and qualities required of a person working as a children's sports coach to make their participation enjoyable, developmental, and educational for everyone. The research aimed to provide an overall understanding of whether ice hockey coaches understand the importance of their work for children's growth and development. The results of the research can be used in the developmental work of children's sports coaches.

5.2 Research approach and research subject

This study is of qualitative nature, meaning it is qualitative research. Overall, qualitative research can be described as a process where the data and researcher interact with each other. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), qualitative research does not have a measurable truth value but aims to understand the phenomenon being studied. The goal of the research is to understand human behavior and explore a certain phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Qualitative research can be conducted in various ways, and due to the focus on people's experiences and meanings, it is important to consider the purpose of the research (Braun et al., 2017). In qualitative research, meanings are discussed, and a small number of cases are analyzed in detail, emphasizing quality over quantity as a criterion for scientific rigor (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The goal of the researcher is to place the research subject in social contexts and provide a detailed and precise description (Creswell & Poth, 2016) or theories and conceptual models (Glaser, 2002).

According to Braun and colleagues (2017), qualitative research is a process where the research subject is examined comprehensively, but the progression of

the research may not be clearly structured into distinct stages, and decisions regarding the research question or data collection may gradually emerge as the research progresses. They emphasize that the research problem is not always clear at the beginning of the study, but it becomes more specific throughout the research process. According to Creswell and Poth (2016), qualitative research favors the use of people as instruments of data collection and methods that allow for the perspectives of the participants to be heard, which means that methods such as thematic interviews, participant observation, group interviews, and discursive analysis of various documents and texts are used. In this study, the focus was on the views of a purposefully selected target group, as is typical in qualitative research.

The philosophical basis of this study is hermeneutic-phenomenological. The hermeneutic-phenomenological approach combines principles from hermeneutics and phenomenology. This approach aims to understand the experiences and meanings that individuals have in relation to the phenomenon being studied. The hermeneutic approach emphasizes interpretation and understanding, and it is based on the idea that people's experiences and interpretations are culturally and historically mediated (McCaffrey et al., 2012). The researcher's task is to interpret and understand these meanings in the phenomenon under study, while also organizing and clarifying these meanings (Gadamer, 2013).

According to Bachkirova and colleagues (2020), the phenomenological approach focuses on observations and experiences and its aim is to understand human experiences of the world and phenomena. The researcher strives to get close to the phenomenon under study to understand its characteristics and meanings in their manifestations (Bachkirova et al., 2020). The phenomenological approach emphasizes individual experiences and their meanings, seeking to uncover the subjective world of the individual (Larkin et al., 2021).

The hermeneutic-phenomenological approach combines these two approaches by emphasizing both interpretation and observation (Brodin, 2007). The research examines people's experiences and meanings, as well as their

transmission in cultural and historical contexts (Heidegger, 2002). The researcher seeks to understand the phenomenon being studied in a multidimensional and comprehensive way (Brodin, 2007). This approach is particularly suitable for research aimed at deepening understanding of people and their perspectives and it is useful in research that seeks to investigate, for example, people's values, beliefs, or viewpoints (Heidegger, 2002).

5.3 Research participants

5-year-old children are the youngest ice hockey enthusiasts who participate in coaching without their own parents present, making it important to examine the understanding of pedagogy among the adults coaching them. The eight coaches participating in the study were selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling refers to a method in which the researcher selects interviewees based on specific criteria or characteristics (Leavy, 2022). The selection of purposive sampling is based on the goals and research questions of the study, and it helps the researcher gather valuable information and obtain a diverse picture of the research subject (Leavy, 2022).

To obtain a wide, diverse, and truthful understanding of the coaches' perspectives, coaches with different coaching and educational backgrounds were selected. The group of interviewees consisted only of male individuals, as there were only a few female coaches that could be reached for this research. Their participation in the study was not possible due to various scheduling reasons. The participants were selected from different parts of Finland, as the resources and emphasis on coach training differ between the Helsinki metropolitan area and provincial junior ice hockey activities. The participants of the study are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1*Research participants*

Coaches	Coach's background		
Coach 1	Junior pathway	Former active hockey enthusiast	Coaching as a full-time job
Coach 2	Junior pathway	Former professional ice hockey player	Coaching as a full-time job
Coach 3	Junior pathway	Former active hockey enthusiast	Coaching as a full-time job
Coach 4	Junior pathway	Former active hockey enthusiast	Coaching as a full-time job
Coach 5	Junior pathway	Former professional ice hockey player	Coaching as a part-time job
Coach 6	Junior pathway	Active hockey enthusiast	Coaching as a part-time job
Coach 7	Junior pathway	Former professional ice hockey player	Coaching as a full-time job
Coach 8	Junior pathway	Former professional ice hockey player	Coaching as a part-time job

“Junior pathway” is a term that appears in the table. It is used in the ice hockey world to describe a player who starts playing hockey from a hockey school at around the age of four to five and progresses through the hobby age group one by one until the age of 18-20. The children coached by the participants were all boys, which was not intentional. However, this was not considered relevant for the study, as the children were below school age and not, for example, adolescents, when assumed gender could potentially have more significance for coaching.

Finnish ice hockey is characterized by a diverse group of coaches with varying backgrounds in the sport and education. It is common for individuals to

become coaches after their own ice hockey careers or as parents, based on their child's ice hockey hobby. In addition, "side job" coaches, meaning coaches who engage in junior ice hockey coaching alongside their full-time jobs, are also prevalent. (Olympic Committee, 2019). Therefore, it is understandable that not all coaches have a pedagogical education. However, there are also coaches in the field who coach as their main occupation and have completed, for example, a higher education degree in coaching.

5.4 Data collection

The data collection method chosen for this study was thematic interview. According to Bryman (2012), thematic interview is a research method where the participant is given a specific topic or theme around which the conversation revolves. This means, that the interviewer provides questions and instructions to the participant, but the flow of the conversation is flexible and not strictly limited to specific questions. Thematic interview is suitable for subjects that are not strongly conscious, such as values, viewpoints, ideals, and attitudes (Bryman, 2012). The goal is to gather deeper and broader information about the topic of interest, while also giving the participant the opportunity to express their own perspectives and emotions (Bryman, 2012).

Thematic interview was chosen as the data collection method because the coaches being interviewed may not be experts in pedagogy, and interactive interviews allow for the exploration of concepts and the expansion of their understanding, as well as a more diverse expression of their own perspectives. For example, when filling out a questionnaire, people may respond quickly and with less focus compared to a conversational interview.

Before the actual research interviews, a pilot thematic interview was conducted with a person working as a children's ice hockey coach. The purpose of the pilot interview was to test the thematic interview script in practice and identify any areas that required modification. The aim was also to gain experience of the interview situation for the researcher, so that the actual research

interviews would proceed with less nervousness. As a result of the pilot interview, a few additional questions were added to the interview script, which could be used in the actual interviews if necessary. A question about the participants' sports, education, and coaching background was also added to the interview script, as it was considered potentially relevant to how the participants perceive their role as practitioners of pedagogical activities.

In the interview situation, it is important to ensure that the researcher does not influence the interviewee's answers with their own opinions (Alshenqeeti, 2014). In this study, the researcher chose not to participate in the conversations with her own opinions to avoid leading the interviewee. The researcher asked the interviewees a question and, if necessary, a follow-up question if the interviewees could not answer without it. Then, the researcher moved on to the next question in an ergonomic manner. If any answer touched on a later question in the interview script, the order of the questions was deviated from to keep the interviewee well-focused on the topic.

The different backgrounds of the coaches were considered during the interviews, so that additional questions clarifying concepts were used when necessary. These additional questions were not asked if the researcher felt that they might lead the interviewee to give a certain answer. Observing the coaches' understanding of pedagogical concepts also proved to be one way to assess their understanding of the importance of pedagogy in their work.

The interview structure consisted of three sections: background information, coaching section, and final questions. The interview structure was designed in such a way that the questions did not directly influence the interviewees' responses. The interview questions are introduced in appendix 1. In the final question section, the interviewees had the opportunity to add or raise any further points related to the interview. They were also asked if they would like to provide feedback to the interviewer or if they were interested in reading the completed thesis.

In the interview invitation, the interviewees were briefly introduced to the research topic and had the opportunity to ask additional questions about the

topic. Once a time was agreed upon, a reminder and a Microsoft Teams meeting invitation were sent to them by email approximately one day before the scheduled time. The interviewees were instructed to approach the interview with an open mind and to share their own views, and no specific preparation was required. All interviews were conducted using the Microsoft Teams application, allowing the interviewees to participate from their own homes at a time of their choosing. The interviews were conducted in Finnish as it was the native language of each participant. The researcher later translated the quotes directly into English in the written output.

The interviews were recorded by audio recording using the transcription feature of the Microsoft Teams application, with each of the eight interviews transcribed separately. All interviews took place within a month of each other and lasted approximately 45 minutes each. All interviews can be considered successful, as they were conducted without any problems or external disruptions. All interviewees answered the questions asked, and in many cases, discussions went beyond the planned questions. Additional questions or explanations of concepts were also asked during the interviews if it seemed necessary.

5.5 Data analysis

The transcribed data consisted of a total of 130 pages, when the font was Times New Roman, size 12, and with 1.5 line spacing. The transcription included interviews as a dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewees. The individual transcripts were combined into one document and the interviewed coaches were named as "coach 1" and "coach 2" and so on. Before analyzing the material, the researcher clarified the finalized transcripts created by the Microsoft Teams application by removing any recorded sounds such as "hmm" or "uhm" from the material. Therefore, only the dialogues of the researcher's interview question, and the interviewee's responses remained in the final data which consisted of 97 pages.

The chosen method for analyzing the data was reflexive thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2022), reflexivity describes the researcher's role and relationship to the research material. They emphasize that in reflexive thematic analysis, the researcher acknowledged her own preconceptions, attitudes, and ways of acting during the research process. The goal was to understand the researcher's influence on the research and thus make the research more transparent and reliable. Reflexivity added an additional dimension to thematic analysis, examining how the researcher's existence and experiences affect the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Without reflexivity, thematic analysis is a method focused solely on identifying, classifying, and analyzing ideas, concepts, or themes related to the same topic (Silverman, 2016).

In reflexive thematic analysis, the researcher pays special attention to his or her own observations, interpretations, and reflections during the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In this study for example, the researcher wrote down her own thoughts and reactions during interviews. These reflective notes were used as an aid in the analysis and helped the researcher become aware of her own assumptions. This method also emphasizes the researcher's responsibility and role in conducting the research (Creswell, 2013).

According to Teräs and Toivainen (2014), reflexive thematic analysis can be divided into six phases, which act as guiding principles for the analysis. The first phase of analysis in this study began with familiarizing oneself with the research material. The material was read through thoroughly. At this stage, excerpts relevant to the research questions were highlighted, which could potentially be used later as quotes to support the results. In the second phase of analysis, the material was divided into smaller parts and coded focusing on the research questions. Similar views, thoughts, or opinions were placed under the same code. Reflexivity in the analysis phase was achieved when the researcher identified her own expectations, thoughts, and feelings while collecting codes and assembled them truthfully as they appeared in the material, without emphasizing her own assumptions or viewpoints (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In the third and fourth stage, subthemes were first formed from the codes. This was done by reflecting on the

coded data and identifying emerging subthemes. Then subthemes were first examined in relation to each other and then in relation to the entire dataset. The aim was to clarify if the subthemes were viewing the main points of coaches' viewpoints of the researched issues. At this point, it was considered whether some subthemes could be merged, as there should be clear distinctions between different subthemes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Some of the subthemes were able to be merged. In the fifth stage, subthemes were further specified, and main themes were formed from them. Finally, key themes were formed from the research questions, under which the main themes were placed. An example of coding the data is presented in table 2.

Table 2.

Division into sub-themes and main themes in the analysis of the data

Excerpt from the data	Code	Sub-theme	Main theme	Key theme
" ...First of all we think about what we want to learn..." (Coach 1)	Learning goals	Setting goals	Planning the coaching	Pedagogical skills
" ...Focus is... getting them excited about physical activity." (Coach 8)	Enjoying physical activity	Offering positive feedback	Encouraging children into physical activity	Reasons for the need of pedagogical skills

The sixth stage of reflexive thematic analysis was presenting and interpreting the results, which is presented in the discussion section of this thesis.

5.6 Ethical solutions

When conducting a research, one must always strive for reliability and consider ethical considerations and in Finland, general ethical principles guide the actions of researchers in all fields of science. According to Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity TENK (2019, 7), the general ethical principles include

respecting the dignity and autonomy of research subjects, ensuring the realization of rights according to the Finnish Constitution, as well as respecting the material and immaterial cultural heritage and biodiversity of nature. It is also emphasized that research must also be conducted in a way that does not pose any significant risk, harm, or detriment to the individuals, communities, or other subjects involved in the research.

Human research is guided not only by general ethical principles but also by legislation (Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity TENK, 2019). The basic principles of good scientific practice include reliability, honesty, respect, and accountability (Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity TENK, 2023), which have also been followed in this study. Data collection, research methods, and work practices have been ethically sound. The work of other researchers has been acknowledged and appreciated with appropriate citations (Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity TENK, 2023).

To research participants' privacy and sensitive information must be paid proper attention. Anonymization or pseudonymization is necessary to ensure that individuals' identities cannot be identified from the research results (Guest et al., 2011). In qualitative research, reliability is enhanced by providing detailed descriptions of the research process, and reader understanding can be facilitated through direct interview quotes or other authentic documents (Hirsjärvi et al., 2000).

The researcher was working in administrative roles within a hockey organization at the time of the study. This enabled the researcher to explore the culture of the community of people being studied in accordance with ethical principles (Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity TENK, 2019). Some of the research participants were working in coaching roles in the same organization. This was acknowledged during the research process and did not have an impact on the study, as the researcher and the coaches in question were not in a hierarchical relationship and were therefore independent in their work relationships with each other. The researcher's role in administrative tasks was known to all participants in the study.

Before participating in the research, coaches were sent an email containing a privacy notice and other essential information about the study, such as who would handle the collected data and how it would be treated after the study. The key principle of research involving humans is informed consent (Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity TENK, 2019). In the beginning of the interview, the coaches were asked for their consent to participate in the study and have their spoken words recorded as a text file. Interviewees were also informed that the anonymity of research participants would be protected, and any quotes used in the written work would be edited to ensure that the speaker's identity remains undisclosed. Cancelling participation at any stage should be as easy as giving consent (Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity TENK, 2019) and the possibility of cancelling participation at any stage was communicated to the participants. Coaches were assigned numerical identifiers, and interview recordings were labeled as "Coach 1" and "Coach 2" etc. These identifiers were later used when including direct quotes from the interviews in the research findings.

To provide a clear picture of the coaches who participated in the study, a table was compiled listing each coach's most important background factors in ice hockey. The potential identifiability of them was tested by presenting the Table 1 to a coach who participated in a pilot interview. This coach did not recognize any coaches based on the table. It was concluded that the coaches' anonymity was maintained in the table as well.

Some coaches mentioned feeling slightly nervous before the interview, and one requested to see the interview questions in advance to better prepare. Interviewees were informed that this was not a test and there were no right or wrong answers, as the research was qualitative and aimed to explore individuals' own perspectives. The interview script was not provided to anyone in advance to avoid coaches researching the topic from the internet or other sources specifically for this research interview. The goal was to elicit interviewees' truthful perspectives. Also, the interviews were recorded as text files with a

password protection on the cloud service of the University of Jyväskylä and were destroyed after data analysis.

6 RESULTS

6.1 Do children's ice hockey coaches need pedagogical skills in their work and if so, what kind?

Coaches were unanimous in their opinion that children's ice hockey coaches need pedagogical skills in their work. One of the coaches described the importance of pedagogical skills as follows: "...pedagogical skills hits that most important core, which is working with people and understanding different people and styles, so it is the be-all and end-all that even if you know technically and skillfully and intellectually everything, but you can't be with people so that knowledge is in your head and it never moves from there. Or in other words, you may have all the knowledge there is about the sport, but without pedagogical skills, it never comes into use." (Coach 2). The important main themes of pedagogical skills that emerged from the data were planning of coaching, implementing of coaching and continuous preparation for a diverse nature of a coach's role (see Table 3).

Table 3.

What kind of pedagogical skills did coaches feel they needed in their work?

Sub theme	Main theme	Key theme
Setting goals Selecting motivating exercises Considering age and skill level	Planning of coaching	Pedagogical skills
Emphasis on core skills Differentiation Individualized approach Emotional skills	Implementing of coaching	
Multiskilled encountering Interpersonal skills Self-improvement	Continuous preparation for a diverse nature of a coach's role	

Planning of coaching. The main theme “Planning of coaching” was divided into three different sub-themes: setting goals, selecting motivating exercises, and considering age and skill level of the target group. Setting goals was seen as important in the planning process of coaching. According to coaches, it was essential to consider how goals could be achieved in a way that motivates children. One of the coaches described goal setting and selecting motivating exercises in coaching planning as follows: “First of all, we think about what we want to learn there. Then we always try to think about how to make it exciting for children, through various games, competitions, and learning through play. And then, in a way, the coach brings the quality factors into the play.” (Coach 1). Considering age and skill level was described as follows: “When you are working with children, being able to explain things in a way that children understand is important.” (Coach 4). When planning coaching sessions, coaches unanimously considered it most important to determine who the exercises are targeted towards, meaning what is the age and skill level of the target group.

Implementation of coaching. The main theme “Implementation of coaching” was divided into four sub-themes: emphasis on core skills, differentiation, individualized approach, and emotional skills. The emphasis on core skills was evident in coaches' perspectives as they began describing the implementation of coaching by describing what should be taught and learned in children's hockey practices. Training sessions should be structured in a way that allows for “adjustments in difficulty levels within each exercise so that everyone can experience feelings of success” (Coach 2). This highlighted the importance of differentiation. Observing children during training sessions was seen as a crucial for individual approach, as it allows noticing individual differences in “who needs encouragement and who may prefer more space to practice independently” (Coach 5). One coach mentioned the need to consider individuality and different learning styles in supporting skill development, as illustrated by the following example:

While doing this job, I have noticed that some people learn better when you just tell them verbally, while others need to see it, some even need to see a video to understand. It's a big thing that I have learned and realized is important to treat everyone as individuals. I can't just say "do it this way" and assume everyone will succeed. The main message is to provide a common understanding for everyone and then closely observe how each individual acts, and if I notice that someone, like Kalle, didn't grasp the idea when I explained it verbally, I will try a different approach. I will show him a video or walk him through it step by step until he understands. (Coach 5)

Coaches also mentioned the need to vary teaching styles based on individual children, as not all teaching methods work for everyone, as evident from the following quote: "With some, you maybe need to be a bit closer in contact so that others can do things more independently, and with some you need to work more and encourage and talk." (Coach 7). Among noticing individual differences also emotional skills were highlighted. Coach 2 described emotional skills as follows: "The ability to sense the room temperature...what is the group's energy and thus being able to adjust one's own actions...whether to calm down or energize the group." Ice hockey involves a fast pace, and coach 5 described a coach's reaction to the sport's demands as follows: "The pace of the sport is intense and that's why I have noticed calmness and consistency to be effective in coaching." This was also one way to implement emotional skills in coaching. Also, emotional consistency in approaching children was seen as important in implementing of coaching. One of the coaches described emotional consistency as follows: "Children need a certain consistency, meaning that they know what kind of person you are and that your temperament doesn't fluctuate from day to day." (Coach 4).

Continuous preparation for a diverse nature of a coach's role. The main theme "Continuous preparation for a diverse nature of a coach's role" consisted of three sub themes: multiskilled encountering, self-improvement, and interpersonal skills. The work description of a coach was perceived as diverse and extending to other areas of life than just practice situations. One of the coaches described the role of a coach as follows: "The ice practice is the easy part,

you coach, inspire, make sure things work. But then you also have to be a caretaker, educator, support for parents, leader." (Coach 4). The implementation of the training was considered to be very multidisciplinary involving for example planning the training sessions, organizing team activities, communicating with players, parents, and other coaching staff. Coaches also saw interpersonal skills as important in their work as a coach. One coach reflected that the interpersonal skills required of a coach are "effective communication and leadership skills". (Coach 7). Among pedagogical skills the research data also highlighted the qualities of a good coach, including courage, authenticity, and the ability to engage in play. These could be seen as emotional or interpersonal skills that can be developed through self-reflection or as qualities that someone has, and someone does not.

Self-improvement as a coach was seen very important. According to the data, it is the coach's responsibility to ensure their self-improvement as a coach. One of the coaches described it as follows: "The coach's job includes self-improvement. So, we are helping children and people, which means that the better we are as coaches, the better we can help these players or children that we work with." (Coach 2).

6.2 Why do children's ice hockey coaches feel they need pedagogical skills in their work?

Coaches' reasons for feeling that they need pedagogical skills in their work were divided into two main themes, which were "Encouraging children into physical activity" and "The societal significance of the coach's work" (see Table 4).

Table 4.

Why did coaches feel they needed pedagogical skills in their work?

Sub theme	Main theme	Key theme
Offering positive feedback Offering encouragement	Encouraging children into physical activity	Reasons for the need of pedagogical skills
Teaching healthy lifestyle Teaching social skills Teaching life values	Societal significance of coach's work	

Encouraging children into physical activity. The main theme “Encouraging children into physical activity” was divided in two different sub themes: Offering positive feedback and offering encouragement. According to coaches, becoming inspired requires receiving positive feedback and encouragement. The most important factor in encouraging children was “the coach's own example and positive energy” (Coach 8). An inspiring and positive approach of coaching creates a good atmosphere and allows children to experience the joy of movement. Coaches unanimously found it important that the coach actively participates in the activities and one of the coaches described it as follows: “Coach should show example being involved in play” (Coach 4). Nonverbal communication and enabling experiences of success were also seen as important in encouraging. One of the coaches described the coach's role in encouraging into physical activity in the following way:” We are of course learning hockey, but the main focus is not just on that, but also on getting them excited about physical activity in general”. (Coach 8).

The societal significance of coach's work. The main theme “The societal significance of coach's work” consisted of three different sub themes: Teaching healthy lifestyle, teaching social skills, and teaching life values. Among encouraging children into physical activity, these were another reason why coaches felt that they needed pedagogical skills in their work. As coaches, they felt that they are contributing to the holistic growth of the children they coach, making their work also socially significant. The challenges of children's

insufficient physical activity were often mentioned, and the coach's example in fostering an active lifestyle was considered important. Learning and teaching social skills were also seen as a great value that a coach can teach children. The biggest value of playing junior ice hockey seemed to be its educational significance. All coaches felt that their role in the lives of young children was important outside of ice hockey as well. They felt that the meaning of ice hockey in childhood is educational, teaching not only hockey skills but also "life values, such as how to treat others, social skills, and an active lifestyle" (Coach 6). This demonstrates coaches' understanding of the two goals of physical education presented in chapter 2.2, which are promoting physical activity and educating through physical activity, as the following quote aptly expresses.

Primarily... the role is primarily focused on teaching good manners, how to treat other people, such as working in a group in a team sport, which can then create that value system even outside the ice rink. And a really big thing for oneself is also being able to teach or give examples and perhaps experiences to children that even if you don't immediately know something, but if you keep trying, you will learn that thing. You fail, you try, you fail, you try, and at some point, you will succeed so that is a very important value for oneself, if you can convey that to children so I believe that it is a great value in life which takes you a long way in life. (Coach 2)

Two coaches felt that their opportunities to support children's personal growth are even greater than those of teachers at school, as participation in sports is voluntary and children are more open to receiving stimuli. Most coaches mentioned that they see themselves as an authority figure to children. According to the coaches, they "should not be too friendly" (Coach 4). On the other hand, some thought that they wanted to be "friendly, fun adults" (Coach 8). The coach's view on authority seemed to affect how they saw their role in relation to the children they coach. The coach's age and family situation also influenced their role as a caregiver for children. One coach, who has own children, mentioned that he sees himself as a "hockey dad" to his players, while another, younger coach without children felt he was a "hockey brother" to his players.

6.3 Would children's ice hockey coaches benefit from pedagogical education tailored to them?

All coaches thought that pedagogical education for coaches would be extremely useful. Since most hockey enthusiasts will not become professional players, coaches viewed teaching life skills such as interacting with different people, promoting healthy and active lifestyles, and instilling a strong work ethic as more

important goals than developing players' hockey skills for a professional career. One coach succinctly summarized everyone's views as follows: "many children go through their life following the hockey path from childhood to adulthood and the coach leaves a mark on them regardless." (Coach 8). Another coach described the necessity of pedagogical education as follows:

In my opinion, pedagogical training should be somewhat mandatory for participation, because the hobby is such a significant part of a child's daily life and growth. Therefore, in my opinion, it should be required, just like you can't become a teacher without proper training; it's actually quite a similar thing. (Coach 6)

7 DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the views of Finnish children's ice hockey coaches on the importance of pedagogical skills in their work. The results highlight the importance of pedagogical skills in the work of children's sports coaches. In this respect, the results are in line with the most recent studies about children's sports coaching and pedagogy (Benson et al., 2019; Blomqvist & Hämäläinen, 2016; Lu et al., 2016; Martens, & Vealey 2023; Opstoel et al., 2020; Packalen, 2015 & Stone et al., 2021). However, the results provide also new insights into coaches' own perspectives.

The coaches participating in the study had diverse backgrounds, but it was noted that their backgrounds did not influence their views on the need for pedagogical skills in their work. Coaches at the beginning of their careers had the same view on the importance of pedagogical skills in coaching as more experienced coaches. Among pedagogical skills the results also highlight the qualities of a good coach, including courage, authenticity, and the ability to engage in play. All coaches had experience in training as players in their childhood and adolescence, which may have influenced their perception of the pedagogical skills they believed a coach needed in his work.

7.1 Previous research

Chroni and colleagues (2020) presented a common scenario in which a coach may have excellent technical skills, understands the physical and mental demands of the sport, but lacks the expertise or tools to teach them to others. The same phenomenon was also observed in this study, as one coach mentioned that pedagogical skills are at the core of coaching, because even if the coach has all the essential knowledge of the sport and its nuances in his mind, without pedagogical skills, the knowledge remains in the coach's head never being put into practice.

The important pedagogical skills in the work of a children's sports coach include the emotional and interpersonal skills emphasized in The Finnish Coaching Competence Model (Hämäläinen, 2013). In The Model, teaching and guidance skills, leadership skills, effective communication skills, and self-improvement skills are highlighted. Those are also emphasized in the results of this research. Interpersonal skills in coaching are also emphasized by Stone and colleagues (2021), Martens and Vealey (2023), Opstoel and colleagues (2020), Packalen (2015), Forsman and Lampinen (2008), and Mero and colleagues (2004). In this study, the coach's own emotional skills were seen as important pedagogical skills, and Autio and Kaski (2005) suggest that a coach's emotional state easily conveys to children, and the coach must be aware of his or her ways of reacting to different situations. Ilmanen (2004) also found interpersonal skills to be the foundation of coaching.

From the data of this study, it was evident that planning coaching tailored to the target group is crucial in coaching children. Light and Harvey (2017) and Forsman and Lampinen (2008), also state that in coaching, the players' abilities and selected training methods are essential. However, there was a difference between the results. Light and Harvey (2017) and Forsman and Lampinen (2008), showed that coaching style should be chosen according to the group's goals, while this study revealed the importance of considering individual needs in coaching implementation. Also, consistency was mentioned as important in implementing coaching in this and in previous research in two different perspectives. Mcnamara and Humphrey (2008) stated that especially with young children, it is important that coaching is consistent and repeats familiar patterns and routines. This study, on the other hand, highlighted the importance of consistency in emotionally engaging with children.

This study highlighted the challenges of children's insufficient physical activity today and the importance of the coach's example in promoting a physically active lifestyle. This was also confirmed by Benson and colleagues (2019) in their research on physical education. According to Blomqvist and colleagues (2016), a coach can be an object of admiration for children, placing a

great responsibility on the coach to set a good example. The power of example was also evident in this study, especially in creating a positive atmosphere and learning environment during training sessions. This was also found by Lu and colleagues (2016).

The results of this research also highlight the importance of self-improvement as one of the needed pedagogical skills in the coach's work. Reflecting on one's own actions and monitoring the development of players to some extent occurred, but this would require further depth and clear definitions of what to evaluate for the reflection to be beneficial. For example, monitoring and evaluating training sessions from the perspective of the coach, players, and tasks would bring new insights into planning future sessions; however, this kind of evaluation was not reported in the study. Coaches could create clear and objective evaluation criteria to assess players' performance and hold regular individual or group evaluation discussions with players. In these discussions, the player's strengths and areas for development could be reviewed and goals for the future could be set. Encouraging players and coaches to reflect on their own performance would also be very beneficial.

Husu and Toom (2016), suggest that coaches would benefit from collaborative planning and Dhahbi and colleagues (2018) suggest that in ice hockey, a seasonal plan is often a plan created by coaches together. Also, according to Forsman and Lampinen (2008), cooperation with athletes in problem-solving processes would be beneficial for athletes' growth. This is also suggested in The Finnish Coaching Competence Model (Hämäläinen, 2013). None of the interviewed coaches mentioned planning training sessions together with their coaching colleagues, seeking advice from others, or cooperating with athletes. According to the coaches, coaching a team always involves more than one coach, so it may be that collaborative planning was obvious to the coaches, and they therefore did not even bring it up.

Mastering the elements related to physical fitness, skill, and technique from the sport-specific point of view have been highlighted in the previous research about good coaching (e.g. Forsman & Lampinen, 2008). Also, monitoring athletes'

development has also been found to be essential for achieving set goals (Forsman & Lampinen; 2008, Martens & Vealey, 2023; Mero et al., 2004). These were not mentioned by the coaches participating this study, perhaps because this study focused on coaching young children who are not yet at a high skill level, and therefore the coach does not need to demonstrate top-level performance. Also, the physical characteristics of 5-year-old hockey school children are not yet tested, so perhaps this topic was left out for that reason. This also suggested that coaches might see the athletic goals of coaching (such as performance or strength) and pedagogy in coaching as separate aspects rather than supporting each other.

7.2 Research reliability and limitations

The study was conducted following the generally guiding principles of scientific research, so it was independent. The interpretations made were supported by other studies examining similar phenomena, which bolstered the research's credibility (Eskola & Suoranta, 1996). It is possible that the information about participating in educational research created a situation for the interviewees where they were aware of the researcher seeking educational answers. The interviewees' responses were very unanimous, raising the question of whether they were trying to answer truthfully or "correctly". One may wonder whether the research information given to the participants in this study influenced their responses, and whether the responses have been different if the interview questions had touched on some other everyday conversation. It is human nature for the interviewee to feel the need to respond in a way they believe will please the researcher, even though all leading was attempted to be minimized in the interviews (Josselson, 2013). From the researcher's perspective, in interviews, the interviewees may have talked about the "ideal coaches" and not necessarily the coaches they actually are in practical coaching situations. In this case, the coaches' views were completely true, even though they may not always be realized in practice. However, this had an impact on the reliability of the study.

Out of the eight conducted interviews, responses started to become repetitive after the fifth interview, which means that there were enough interviews. During each interview, the researcher wrote down her own thoughts and feelings to ensure reflexivity. These thoughts were not vocalized by her to prevent the researcher's own views from influencing or opposing the perspectives of the interviewees. This was done to achieve reliability and objectivity.

According to Sarajärvi and Tuomi (2017), credibility of qualitative research is enhanced by providing a sufficiently detailed description of the participants. This was implemented in this study in the form of a table (Table 1). The participants in this study were exceptionally educated and had played a long career in ice hockey compared to the general training level of children's ice hockey coaches in Finland. For example, in the provinces and small towns, children's team coaches are usually someone's fathers or mothers who have no experience or training in coaching or even personal experience in playing ice hockey (Finnish Olympic Committee, 2019). It is also possible that the coaches who wanted to participate in the study were those who had a greater understanding of pedagogy rather than those for whom the topic was more unfamiliar. When looking at children's ice hockey coaching in general, it is important to consider that the activities are often run on a small budget without sport experience or the possibility of training. Also, one of the limitations of this study was that the participants were all male.

This study proved to be quite accurate, as in the past year the ice hockey world has woken up to the idea that Finland's long-standing ice hockey culture may need a new, more educational approach to coaching children and youth. The ice hockey culture has also been under scrutiny internationally due to various crime scandals (Hoffrén, 2024). Finnish junior teams have also become aware of coaches' questionable methods and practices that do not stand up to scrutiny through a pedagogical lens (Rämänen, 2023). Perhaps for these reasons, the results of the study were unanimous, and the participating coaches possibly had a greater understanding of the importance of pedagogical skills. The views

expressed in the interviews were very consistent with the theoretical framework of the study and the ideals formed by previous research. If this study had been conducted, for example, two years ago, the coaches' views might have been different and less understanding of the topic, as the lack of education and shortcomings within ice hockey coaching were not yet as prominent. Back then, a positive response to coaching pedagogical skills may not have been completely unanimous. One of the criteria determining the reliability of a study is the transferability of the results to other contexts (Sarajärvi & Tuomi, 2017). The results of this study can also be transferred to other junior sports contexts.

After collecting the data for this study, discussions have been held in the coaches' own ice hockey clubs about the significance of the topic, and information about this has reached the researcher since the participants of the study have been interested in discussing more on the topic with her. The topic has also been raised in a popular Finnish ice hockey-themed podcast (Mäkinen & Timonen, 2024). This led to the belief that this study may have been part of a larger context and a kind of upheaval in Finnish ice hockey culture. This belief seemed to be true as Seppälä (2024) states in his article on Yle News: "It is now time in Finland to finally take matters into our own hands, because hope always lies with children and youth. The sore spots in ice hockey culture must be openly acknowledged and children must be raised even more strongly into a new, healthy culture. We do not yet have that, and if anyone claims otherwise, they are either lying to themselves or to their listeners."

7.3 Topics for future research

The views of children's sports coaches on the importance of pedagogical skills have been studied to a limited extent, making it challenging to create a theoretical framework and find sources from previous research. By utilizing research from other sports, the challenges were nevertheless overcome. One of the limitations of this study was that all participants were male. An interesting perspective would be to study female ice hockey coaches in this male-dominated field; does

gender have an impact on coaching philosophy or interactions with children? Furthermore, follow-up studies before and after pedagogical education for coaches based on observation could provide valuable information on the necessity and effectiveness of such education. It is noted that in many sports clubs, sports expertise and competitiveness are seen as greater values than a pedagogical approach, hence the need for more research evidence on the pedagogical approach to coaching children in sports (Bjørndal & Gjesdal, 2020).

Sports club activities in Finland are mainly based on voluntary work enabled by the players' parents (Finnish Olympic Committee, 2019), and sometimes competitiveness takes over even from the parents heavily involved in club activities. As previously mentioned, Moilanen (2024) recently wrote an article in *Ilta-Sanomat* about a hockey goalie's father who stole equipment from other goalkeepers on his child's team so that his son could play more. Due to the development of the surrounding culture in ice hockey, it could also be studied the involvement of parents in children's team sports, which may not always be positive and encouraging.

The interview script attached to this work could be used in the future to support coaches in their own development, as in the discussions after data collection, the research participants have mentioned that the themes of the interview triggered thought processes in them and in their coach colleagues as well. In these discussions it has been expressed that developing pedagogy in ice hockey activities is important and should be the next step towards a new kind of junior ice hockey culture in Finland.

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APPENDICES

Appendice 1: Thematic Interview Script

1. What is your ice hockey and coaching background?
2. What qualities do you think a good coach needs?
 - a. Why specifically these qualities?
 - b. Could you provide concrete examples?
3. What factors do you consider when planning exercises?
4. How do you consider different children in your coaching?
 - a. In planning?
 - b. In execution?
5. What kind of methods do you use to inspire and motivate children?
6. What is your role in relation to those you coach?
 - a. Does your role extend beyond hockey practices?
7. Describe the work of a coach.
 - a. What happens before, during, and after practices?
8. What is the societal significance of your work?
9. Would you benefit from pedagogical education specifically tailored for children's hockey coaches?
 - a. If yes, why, and what kind of education?