

Teacher-coach role conflict in school-based physical education in USA: a literature review and suggestions for the future

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Summary

Teaching and coaching are two different occupational roles, and teachers who also coach have stressful work environments common to all educational settings, but each occupational role has specific stress and burnout problems. The responsibilities of physical education (PE) teachers and coaches are distinguishable from one another. These different roles and role conflicts may create stress among PE teachers who also coach. The history of physical education shows that there are contextual factors that promote PE teacher-coach role conflict. The aim of this paper is to analyse these contextual factors via using a literature review analysis and to provide suggestions about teacher-coach role conflict for school-based physical education in USA.

Key Words: Physical education – Coaching – Role conflict

Introduction

Teaching is a highly demanding occupation that requires effort and commitment. In a typical day, teachers instruct many classes, execute various activities around the school campus, and contribute to committees; a majority of teachers have extracurricular assignments such as coaching athletics in schools. These multi-faceted responsibilities often result in full time exhaustive job conditions [2,6,12,23,25,29]. For many physical education (PE) teachers, coaching a sport is perceived as an expected extracurricular professional commitment. However, coaching is unlike many extracurricular activities in that it demands very intense job performance and daily planning throughout the year. School athletic teams are expected to participate in league tournaments with advancement to state championships and coaches are publicly held accountable for the performance of their teams. School physical education programmes have coaching courses and taught coaching skills to their students. In addition, physical education students had the option of having a minor in coaching as well.

Figure [7] indicated that the origins of the roles of teacher-coach need to be examined to better understand the differences between these two positions. Before 1906, there was a single purpose of physical education curriculum: to increase the health of students through lessons in hygiene and physiology in public elementary and secondary schools [20]. Lewis [13] stated that the origin of the dual roles of teacher-coach began with the “athletics are educational” movement between 1906 and 1916 in USA. Between 1917 and 1939, health and fitness objectives were less emphasised than athletics in the physical education classes. During these years, athletics programmes were also significantly modified to college physical education teacher programmes. Figure [7] quoted: “*Thus, while athletics were incorporated into physical education, there seemed to be an idealistic philosophy that athletics and physical education could integrate and create a marriage that would serve the diverse needs of society despite the increasing concerns regarding athletic abuses voiced by faculty, the media, and a handful of college and university presidents and physical educators.*”

Although the teacher-coach role conflict has not been revisited in the literature from 1997, there are still signs of this problem in our institutions as a hidden agenda. Pagnano [19] conducted a case study to understand dual roles of a teacher-coach using an ecological comparison. The purpose of his study was to examine the similarities and differences between the context of teaching physical education and coaching the same sport (i.e. teaching a softball unit in a regular physical education class and coaching softball at the same time). The participants were physical education students ($n = 23$) and varsity softball team ($n = 15$), and a male physical education teacher-softball coach. Data were collected using field notes, interviews with teacher/coach, student athletes and recording task descriptions and content development during a 5-day softball unit in physical education and 12-week softball training. His study provided three major findings. First, the softball programme was very rigorous in the sport setting while it was very weak in physical education. Second, there were significant differences in the type of tasks, number of tasks and opportunities to respond (OTR, i.e. number of repetitions in performing correct skills for sport related motor skills such as running, fielding, batting, catching, pitching etc.) in each context. Coaching environment had higher OTR and more emphasis on skill and strategy development while physical education had fewer tasks, low OTR and minimal skill practice. Finally, between-group differences in accountability were also reported.

In addition, Yalçın [31] conducted a survey to test the model of role preference, role congruence and job satisfaction among teacher-coaches at the high school level and investigated the differences among subgroups defined by gender, major field of study, and the type of sport coached. The subjects were high school teacher-coaches ($n = 436$). The results of his study showed that gender, major field of study, and type of sport coached had significant effect on teaching/coaching preference.

Some of those studies indicated that there were still contextual factors that promoted the teacher-coach role conflict in school-based physical education. These contextual factors and multiple roles may cause a “role conflict”, defined as the degree of perceived conflict between expected role behaviours. Role conflict occurs when an individual has conflicting expectations from the social environment and the workplace conditions. This conflict is considered to be a crucial issue for both individuals and their workplace. Therefore, the purpose of this review was to analyse these contextual factors via using a literature review analysis and provide suggestions about teacher-coach role conflict for school-based physical education in the USA.

Role Conflict and Physical Education Teachers

Locke and Massengale [14] stated that the teacher-coach had a unique and complex role that may greatly vary from the roles of other teachers in the school. This unique situation may cause occupation-related value, status, self/other, load, and teacher-coach conflicts. In addition, role overload is a primary concern perceived by teachers who coach. At the high school level, coaches may have different organisational and administrative responsibilities that cause overload. Furthermore, teaching duties as a yearlong commitment may also cause overload [4]. Consequently, the review of history of physical education shows several contextual factors that promote PE teacher-coach role conflicts [11,15,24,30]. These factors are explained below.

1. Background of PE majors: Many of the PE majors have a competitive background in secondary school athletic programmes. In result, students come to PE programmes with different expectations.

2. Design of physical education programmes: Historically, PE programmes were based on a traditional training that tended to emphasise coaching rather than the preparation to teaching.

3. Expectation of schools: Physical education teachers are well known for their commitments to athletics in schools. Therefore, in general, PE teachers are supposed to accept coaching roles upon being hired.

4. Career objectives and job satisfaction: When PE teachers are hired to have extracurricular duties in-out-of class situations they may find more success and satisfaction by devoting themselves to coaching athletics.

There is research evidence that the teacher-coach role conflict is an international concept. Although these factors were historically related to the US, O'Connor and Macdonald [18] organised a case study with in-depth interviews to determine the effects of different expectations for occupational roles in Australia. Participants were 5 PE teachers who had dual roles as teacher-coaches. Their study showed that PE teachers had teacher-coach role conflict in their job but they stated that they had managed these issues with a perception of a positive and rewarding work environment.

The heart of the matter is that when defining the coach's role within the framework of a career, the contingencies must be analysed very carefully. At the secondary school level, a coach will usually be hired as a teacher and has different duties. At the high school level, on the other hand, coaches are employed for the following needs ([26], p.193):

1. To reconstruct the athletics programme with an emphasis on major sports;

2. To win, and bring success to the athletics programme;
3. To show up in state ranking with the team;
4. To establish new recognition and spirit to the school and community with ranking;
5. To win in-state championships and other tournaments;
6. To gain all-state and all-star recognition for special athletes;
7. To fulfil the Booster Club.

Furthermore, in terms of institutional organisations, Figone [8] stated that many institutions combined the roles of physical education and athletics under one title by emphasising the dual responsibilities of teacher-coaches as:

1. Teacher-coaches can efficiently perform dual roles;
2. Teaching has the same basic role as coaching; the main differences are skill level and motivation of students;
3. Professionals planning a career in teaching and coaching are fairly interested in both roles and will advocate equal time to both.

However, Figone [8] pointed out that the realities of most teaching-coaching positions are different from the perspectives above, because:

1. The time requirement of coaching is much higher than expected;
2. Teaching and coaching are different occupational roles in terms of instructional objectives, motivation, student skill levels, time devoted and facilities;
3. Teacher-coaches are not equally interested in their achievements in dual roles.

In general, teacher-coach role conflict occurs when the teachers frequently find that coaching skills are more valued and motivated than teaching whereas teaching is usually ignored by administrators [5]. For example, Stroot *et al.* [27] document the following statements from PE teachers:

“I did not have any support for my teaching. They supported me as a coach, but as a teacher, I could do anything or nothing at all. To sit on the bleachers and roll out the ball would have been fine. Without anyone caring about what you teach and with so many other responsibilities, it would have been easy for me to do that.”

“He could have been a good teacher-he knew what to do-but no one required anything be done, so he put all his energies into coaching.”

“I usually spend 5 hours a day on volleyball. Last night, I did not get home until 10:30. Right after volleyball practice, we had a coaches meeting until 10:00. I'm not doing my best as a teacher, and it makes me feel incompetent.”

In contrast, Napper-Owen and Phillips [17] found that a few teachers perceived limited benefits of the dual teacher-coach role. One of the teachers reported that she

benefited by giving feedback during her coaching occupation, which she then transferred to her teaching role. In addition, as Rovegno [21] stated, teachers may stay in their “curricular zone safety” during teaching. For example, if they are coaching several different sports such as basketball or football, teachers will teach same subjects in their physical education courses because they will feel more comfortable to teach in these areas because of their coaching duty and dual roles. In summary, a majority of PE teachers may be required to coach, and some of the literature indicates that teaching and coaching roles require different characteristics and abilities.

Suggestions for Potential Future Teacher/Coach Role Conflict Experience

The teacher-coach role conflict experienced by a PE teacher who coaches is rarely resolved for teachers who hold two different roles at the same time. In this reality, the teacher-coach model in American school systems leaves few choices for physical education teachers. Therefore, if a teacher chooses to stay in both roles he/she should accept the reality of both roles and develop skills to cope with stress. Withdrawing one of the positions that causes role conflict is a way that is frequently preferred as a possible strategy [23]. However, this solution is rarely presented to physical education teachers, with the exception of those with health problems or other alternative jobs. As an alternative to the total removal of one position, Sage [23] suggested decreasing the time demands of one or both occupational roles.

On the other hand, it is possible to train undergraduate physical education majors about teacher-coach role conflicts by providing proper education and practicum in appropriate settings, the non-traditional FLIGHT [3] programme at the Brigham Young University being a good example. In spite of systematic data about that programme being limited, it integrated coaching courses into its design, and student experienced both teaching and coaching settings very clearly defined. In reality, it is best to have a separate undergraduate major for coaching programmes in Health and Human Performance, Kinesiology or Exercise and Sport Sciences departments in the future. Thus, a different professional coaching identity may occur, and this may promote the removal of role conflict problems. In general, as long as institutions have and offer dual roles to physical education teachers, a teacher-coach role conflict will exist. Therefore, physical education majors must be educated according to realities of these conditions.

As a professional movement under the leadership of National Association of Sports and Physical Education

(NASPE), national standards movement started in 1994 to establish a coaching identity and advocate quality coaching and coaching education. In this process, over 100 organisations and other individual experts were invited to participate in the summit and representatives from these organisations drafted the National Standards for Sport Coaches [16]. The main purpose of these standards was to provide direction for administrators, coaches, athletes, and the public about the skills and knowledge that coaches should possess. The 40 standards were grouped in eight domains:

1. Philosophy and ethics,
2. Safety and injury prevention,
3. Growth and development,
4. Physical conditioning,
5. Evaluation,
6. Sport skills and tactics,
7. Teaching and communication,
8. Organisation and administration.

National standards for coaching are not a certification programme but a framework that guides organisations and institutions that currently certify coaches and provide education and training in coaching sports. Thus, this movement may lead to development of a professional identity for coaching in the 21st Century.

According to Graham [9], a teacher constructs and then shapes the climate for a classroom environment by running a number of different tasks that lead to a pleasant environment for learning. Overall, the ideas below generally emphasise a well-organised teaching and learning environment with different instructional strategies. At this point, Aicinena [1] proposes a five-step behavioural strategy to become a better teacher and coach:

1. Organise skeletal block plans for yearly PE activities to have better and clear objectives;
2. Not to compare the achievements of non-athletes *versus* athlete PE students;
3. Understand and prepare for PE classes prior to teaching;
4. Have clear, appropriate and different objectives to work effectively with PE students and athletes;
5. Avoid teaching highly skilled and performance-oriented sports in PE and coaching in a single day. This directs the teacher/coach sense of working on the same sport and objectives in a single day.

On the other hand, there is another side to this ongoing teacher-coach conflict and the stress and problems it brings to everyone involved: the teacher-coach, the school administration, the student-athletes, and the students. The majority of the arguments are over how the teacher-coach should cope with the situation. What kind of behaviour

should be displayed by the administrator, who is pressed by the community to create a winning team and is also responsible of creating the best educational atmosphere for the teachers and the students? What takes priority? It is easy to answer – “The education of our children”. However, creation of a school atmosphere that places importance on extracurricular sports activities is also a part of the educational process as well as a part of the American culture. Therefore, problems and concerns of teacher-coach conflicts from the perspectives of school administrators must be investigated. School administrators can find ways and means to effectively utilise the services of teacher-coaches without creating conflicts and sacrificing the quality of their educational programmes.

At this point, although there is no research about the role and effects of contractual obligations, this may be a solution for teacher-coach role conflict as one of the contextual factors because when school administrations pay extracurricular stipends to coaches, this may lead to work overtime and teacher-coaches burn out, get tired and sacrifice their regular teaching duties. In addition, some contracts for teacher-coaches are now interdependent. For example, if a teacher-coach resigns from the coaching position, he/she unfortunately loses the teaching position as well. Therefore, this kind of contractual obligations should be avoided. However, it is possible to have different contracts where the coaching duties bring an essential portion of salary but teaching responsibilities are shortened and well balanced, like e.g. teaching half day and full time coaching duties with the same amount of salary.

Moreover, the recent role of physical education is changing rapidly in schools. It is known that regular physical activity provides health benefits for participants. Despite the recent emphasis on physical activity of children, according to the Surgeon General’s Report [28] the increase in child obesity is recognised as the number one threat to the lives of children in the USA. These recent trends emphasised the concept of a “New Physical Education.” The role and function of the physical education curriculum has started to change in many schools. “New PE” emphasises integration of health and fitness concepts into school curriculum with individual and lifetime activities as well as cognitive and affective development. These new roles and concepts increased the responsibilities of PE teachers who were already giving full time commitment and dedication to their work. Therefore, it is better to separate the responsibilities of both teaching and coaching in our schools to get maximum efficiency.

Although the teacher-coach role conflict has not been frequently revisited since 1997 in the literature,

today's schools still have teacher-coach role conflict which affects the quality of education in terms of the teacher and students' perspectives. There are several recent studies emphasising the existence of teacher-coach role conflict in physical education. Herbert [10] conducted a study to investigate physical educator-teacher coach role conflict in secondary education. The author conducted a qualitative research to determine how physical education teachers coped with this dual role and daily stressors. He interviewed high-school PE teachers who coached basketball. In addition, teachers recorded their daily activities with a daily log. The results of that study indicated that the subjects believed their job was to win basketball games, but they were not as clear in their specific physical education teacher roles and outcomes. Moreover, the subjects reported their focus was on coaching responsibilities in order to win games, rather than on teaching responsibilities. Another study investigated antecedents of the high-school teacher-coach role conflict. Ryan [22] conducted a web-based survey; the questionnaires were sent to 635 participants and 135 questionnaires were returned in addition to 12 arriving by surface mail. The results showed that that role preference, age, school size, and number of coaching jobs were significantly related to the role conflict. Also teacher-coaches who preferred coaching or teaching experience had more conflicts than those who showed no preference or a balanced one.

In conclusion, by having a separate coaching major, redefining and reorganising institutions, using behavioural strategies, by changing contractual obligations and under the guidance of NASPE's National Standards for Sports Coaches, it may be possible to see promising signs of role conflict reduction in physical education and coaching in the future. Future studies should look at how gender, age, different occupational roles, type of community (e.g. rural or suburban) affect the teacher-coach dual role duties in physical education and other teaching subjects.

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