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In practice, sports often play a major role in shaping the identity of Catholic schools. Theorists consider how to better integrate religious faith into sports programs. We argue that it is also imperative to investigate how the schools' catholicity influences educator-coaches experiences of sport. Based upon analysis of a phenomenological research project in Edmonton, Canada, our study uncovered factors of lift (i.e., feeling part of something bigger, mentor-coaches as doers of the Word, and communal or relational elements) and drag (i.e., treatment of non-Catholics, seeking an authentic faith, and a lack of reflection on the integration of sport and faith). From these findings, we highlight how factors of lift and drag should effect the way Catholic schools shape their sports programs' religious identity: the importance of the faith community, the value of implicit and explicit signs of faith in secular times, the need for deeper reflection, and possibilities for that reflection.

Keywords

Catholic high schools, sports, educator-coaches, coaches, Catholic identity

Should sports programs have a place in Catholic schools? Historically speaking, Catholic schools globally have included—and celebrated—sports programs in their curricula in modern times (Kelly, 2012). While it might be difficult for many to envision a Catholic school without a basketball or football team, it is necessary to consider how athletic programs support the mission of Catholic schools—and if this can be improved.

In the face of this fundamental question, three American academics, Fr. Richard McGrath, O.S.A., Dr. Clark Power, and Fr. Patrick Kelly, S.J., each examined how sports programs at Catholic schools can better integrate religious faith and character education. Though their explorations help support

the mission of the schools, we, the authors of this article, take a different approach. We look at the situation from the perspectives of coaches and ask: how does a school's Catholic identity impact educator-coaches? Instead of seeking ready-made, applicable means to increase Catholicity in school sports, this article uncovers how educator-coaches presently experience catholicity in sports. Rather than saying what should be done, we take one step back and explore experiences of coaches within religiously-affiliated schools. Naming how Catholic identity helps or hinders (or, as we determine below, lifts or drags) their work as sport educator-coaches enables a more comprehensive way of understanding the religious identity these coaches promote in schools. The work of comprehending and living out the school's educational and religious mission requires thorough engagement, including from educator-coaches. Therefore, reporting the experiences of educator-coaches on this subject is the aim of this article.

Integrating Catholicity in Sports

Fr. Richard McGrath, an Augustinian priest who retired in 2017, advocated that coaches be strongly rooted in the Catholic tradition (McGrath, 2000, 2004, 2006, 2009). In his book *Coaching Catholic: Gospel Values in Youth Sports* (2004), he wrote: "Catholic athletic programs have as their goal the teaching of the values of our faith and of the gospel of Jesus Christ through active participation in sports" (p. 1). He argued that the religious beliefs of schools cannot be compromised, and coaches should witness to their Catholic faith through sport, not hesitating to speak about their relationship to God. McGrath's work was, in part, motivated by a national study about US Catholic schools, which noted that only one quarter of students and teachers surveyed thought athletic coaches brought a high level of faith or religious beliefs to the sports coached (2004, p. viii). In his chapter, "The Ministry of Coaching," McGrath emphasized a muscular Catholicism built first on the integrity of the coach for building character in student athletes, leading to the creation of a "prototypical Christian community" (p. 4). He also wrote about how servant leadership is vital for coaching and that coaches must strike a holistic balance of the moral, spiritual, mental, and physical development of youth.

Professor Clark Power, founder and director of the University of Notre Dame's Play Like a Champion Today Educational Series, argued that the Christian ministry of coaching should focus on discipleship and service to others (Power, 2015). Although his research on youth focused on character education and moral development (e.g., Power & Seroczynski, 2015; Power &

Sheehan, 2014), he linked the latter to youth's spiritual development, where coaches "provide children with the opportunities and support necessary to persons of faith and responsible [moral] agents" (p. 90). Sheehan (2015) unpacked the theoretical make-up of *Play Like A Champion*, which highlights coaching as a form of ministry:

Coaches who see themselves in this level of ministry are called by God to do good for others (not simply for one's own child), by rendering unselfish service (not to feed one's own ego by having the 'best team'), empowered by the Holy Spirit (not by the false god of winning), all for the purpose of bringing about the kingdom of God (not to collect trophies in a case). (p. 189)

With *Power* at its head, this organization gives a sound, accessible, less overtly theological rendering of catholicity than McGrath. Like McGrath, the applied work of the program draws from the practical engagement with coaches over several years.

A third significant and recent voice on this topic is Fr. Patrick Kelly, a Jesuit priest and professor at Seattle University, who has also published on the history of Catholicism and sport (2012). In *Youth Sport and Spirituality: Catholic Perspectives* (2015), Kelly offers a text that begins with theoretical insight into sport and spirituality—drawing on historical examples, Christian spirituality, theology, developmental theory, and psychology—and closes with a number of practitioner chapters for integration of faith into sport (Hastings, 2015; Naggi, 2015; Yerkovich, 2015; Zelenka, 2009). Although not a comprehensive overview, Kelly's edited book engages the Catholic intellectual tradition in an accessible manner to start reshaping a vision for sport in Catholic educational institutions.

A Pathway for Educator-Coaches

Catholic schools have a multitude of stakeholders who shape the complex organizations over time. In the 20th century, many parents consistently wanted religious-based schooling, but they also demanded an education that drew upon the latest curricular innovations and technologies to ensure their children's future success (Hunt & Walch, 2010; Ognibene, 2015). For instance, many schools established strong sport programs to attract students and improve overall standards in the schools. As North American society became more diversified, Catholic educational institutions came to compete in

a pluralistic setting. Changes in the historical reality ensured that issues and responses to Catholic identity would evolve continuously, impacting all areas of education—including sports programming.

Thus, Rymarz argued (2016): “[R]eligious institutions such as schools should place a very high premium on religious identity because these are often central to their mission and foundation” (p. 96), but must avoid “becoming cult-like” and offering “little overlap with the wider culture” (p. 98). Rymarz added: “Catholic schools must serve the common good; the issue is how this wider service is enmeshed with a strong religious identity” (p. 99).

To be sure, a school’s religious identity must be maintained. The Vatican’s Congregation for Catholic Education made this point in *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1998): “The complexity of the modern world makes it all the more necessary ... that the school derives its original characteristics and its structure as a genuine instrument of the Church, a place of real and specific pastoral ministry” (no. 11). While schools’ ecclesial identity requires they fulfill obligations to the Catholic community (*Code of Canon Law*, 1983, nos. 796-806), Fuller and Johnson (2013) named multiple ways to conceptualize Catholic identity: “holistic education, community, relationships, visuals/symbols, Gospel values, Catholic social teaching, and service...” (p. 97). For instance, Cook and Simonds (2012) underscored the centrality of relationships in Catholicism, as made evident through sacramental celebrations, divine mediation through the incarnation, communion and community, and connections to people of the past through various traditions. In asserting the religious identity of schools, there remains no clear-cut way forward, especially with divergent viewpoints about Catholicism within the schools and academic community (Fuller & Johnson 2013). The question of interest for us is how to situate the experience of educator-coaches in such a way that makes available possible pathways for them to take ownership of their schools’ Catholic identity. As Arbuckle (2013) noted, when people own this identity, “the more vibrant and relevant” that identity becomes (p. xvii).

Methodology

The findings presented in this paper are drawn from data collected as part of a larger qualitative study focused on the experiences of coaches in religiously-affiliated schools. The project employed a phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994) because we wanted to understand more comprehensively coaches’ lived spirituality—not what we thought their spirituality should be. According to Moustakas, the aim of phenomenological studies “is

to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience” and from which “universal meanings are derived” (p. 13). The power of this methodology, according to Creswell (2007), lies in its capacity to offer “the study of the lived experiences of persons ... and the development of descriptions of the essences of these experiences” (p. 58) instead of making assumptions about the phenomenon and quickly offering analyses and explanations of the phenomenon. In this approach, there is a refusal to separate the subject’s experience from the object studied: “the reality of an object is only perceived within the meaning of the experience of an individual” (p. 59).

Drawing from Moustakas’ (1994) transcendental or empirical method overall, we concentrate in this paper on data relating to how the schools’ religious affiliation influences educator-coaches. Taking qualitative data from the larger project, we offer a focused analysis on this dimension of the wider research endeavor. Specifically, the analysis presented in this article answers the question: How does a school’s Catholic identity impact educator-coaches?

Sample

Using purposeful sampling, educator-coaches (seven male; three female) were recruited as participants from Edmonton Catholic School District.¹ The interviewed coaches taught at the elementary and secondary levels and had 3 to 27 years of coaching experience. They coached a wide assortment of sports (basketball, cheer, soccer, broomball, etc.) and worked in recreational to highly competitive programs. All were teachers except for one educational assistant; one teacher was also a part-time administrator. All were Catholic except for two actively-practicing Protestants. Many had studied theology/religion in post-secondary education; many spoke openly about participation in church or para-church organizations, such as an adult sport ministry program or outreach group caring for people experiencing addiction. Many were teaching or had previously taught religion class in school. With the exception of one being baptized in adulthood, the rest were raised in the Christian faith with varying degrees of religiosity in the home.

Procedures for determining this sample were as follows: The lead researcher, who is also this study’s first author, was a speaker at one of dozens of possible sessions for school staff across the city, at which he introduced

1 Catholic schools in Edmonton, like those elsewhere in the Province of Alberta, receive full public funding, their teachers are certified by the state, and democratically-elected trustees oversee their governance via a district-wide school board.

the study and asked for potential volunteers. Because only a few interested educator-coaches responded to this request, the District sent out three general email invitations for interviewees over subsequent months. Respondents could email the lead researcher if interested and if they met inclusion criteria: (a) an educational District employee; (b) English-speaking; (c) at least three years coaching experience; and (d) willing to talk about spirituality and religion and its relationship to coaching sport. Further information was emailed to the interviewees prior to contact. Informed consent was obtained from the educator-coaches at the beginning of each individual interview.²

Data Collection and Analysis

The lead researcher completed 10 interviews from September–October 2015. Participants were interviewed individually in face-to-face settings using a semi-structured interview guide. Interview lengths ranged from thirty to ninety minutes. The interviews were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcribing company and checked by the lead researcher for accuracy. Using phenomenological analysis (Moustakas, 1994) of the transcripts, the lead researcher categorized each “nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statement” (p. 122) and clustered these statements into thematic clusters. Individual descriptions of the textures and structures of each interview were composed, followed by composite statements of each for the interviews overall. After writing individual descriptions of each interview, the lead researcher mailed each interviewee’s description to them with an invitation to discuss the statements. This researcher met two of the educator-coaches to review their responses. While the topics of the interviews ranged broadly to include a wider sense of spirituality (i.e., reasons for and stories about coaching, use of spiritual practices such as team prayer, ways they integrate religious faith into sport, ways that sports and faith conflict), they included questions about comparing coaches to religion teachers and how coaching at a Catholic school is different from coaching at a public school. The transcripts were reviewed by the second researcher, who is the second author of this article, who also read the descriptions and responded to the themes generated by the first author. Ongoing discussions determined the themes of the larger project and this particular article.

2 Ethical approval for the study was obtained by the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board and operational approval was obtained from the local Catholic board.

Findings

Set within the larger research project's phenomenological methodology, the below themed results focus on how the catholicity of the school influenced these educator-coaches. The themes are categorized into two larger classifications: those responses that revealed how the religious affiliation of these schools caused (a) lift or (b) drag for the educator-coaches. Imagine, for a moment, these forces acting upon a soccer ball, where lift and drag compose a single aerodynamic force. Lift acts perpendicular to the force of the kick, e.g., it is seen when the ball "bends" or travels in an arch, fighting against gravity; drag acts in opposition to the kick, e.g., when a head-wind slows its speed and hampers its distance traveled (Hall, 2015). Just as many factors affect the lift and drag on a soccer ball (i.e., shape and size of the ball, the speed of its rotation, its stitching, air conditions), there are many factors that influence the effects of catholicity on these educator-coaches. Overall, we found three major influences of lift linked to the religious affiliation of the schools. Coaches described how religious affiliation: (a) made them feel part of something bigger; (b) supported their mentor-coaching as doers of the Word; and (c) had a strong communal or relational element. There were also three drag resistance forces acting on the educator-coaches: (a) uncertainty around the treatment of non-Catholics; (b) seeking an authentic faith; and (c) a lack of reflection on the integration of sport and faith. In the sections that follow, we examine in depth each of these forces of lift and drag.

Forces of Lift

"We're all a part of a bigger picture." This quote from Coach 3 reflects a sentiment shared by the educator-coaches in the study. Educator-coaches generally agreed that there were ways that religious affiliation influenced their coaching in a positive or uplifting way. Some educator-coaches found it difficult to put into words the uniqueness of Catholic schools. However, Coach 1, an elementary teacher of eight years and who attended Mass on occasion, explained how the openness of Catholic schools to faith translated into a communal sense that "there is more out there than just where we're at right now." Life includes recognizing one's relationship to one's surrounding and oneself, along with knowing "what God asks of you." This coach thought that the faith of the school enables deeper existential understandings about life, which includes his felt-call to contribute as a coach.

Another insight was uncovered by the most senior educator-coach, Coach 7, who had coached for more than two decades, became an administrator, and

had recently undertaken an overseas teacher exchange. On that exchange, Coach 7 taught in a public school and felt that as a teacher he had lost “a very important reference point.” He added: “There’s a commonality of having spirituality in a school and you lose that . . . [significant] reference point” in a non-religious school. It was as if the Catholic identity of the school shaped a larger vision of life and set things within different parameters. This unique institutional reference point could be drawn upon and considered, whereas public school teachers did not have this possibility or particular language (as noted by Coach 9) at their disposal. In line with this thought, several educator-coaches believed this reference point acted as a moral compass for the school, establishing a shared-ethic drawn from the teachings of Jesus.

Despite not having taught in public schools, Coach 4 cautiously speculated on the value of the Catholic school’s religious affiliation. He had coached more than 10 years at the high school level in Catholic schools and claimed he did not want to belittle public schools. Yet, he said: “I definitely think there is a little bit more sense of respect or morality [in Catholic schools], do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” He based this institutional reality on the fact that the Catholic school district supports teachers’ integrating faith throughout the day, and he added, “we try to instill that in our students and athletes.” He thought that through this environment and through Religion classes that enable discussions about “world religions, and morals, and what’s right and wrong” there can be a slight edge over “what happens in public schools.” In a Catholic school setting, Coach 4 found that a school’s religious ethos set higher expectations for teacher and student behavior.

These educator-coaches felt part of something bigger, that there was inclusion of something beyond the here-and-now of everyday life, that things beyond the physical world could be discussed and taken seriously as reality. As Coach 9, a junior high volleyball educator-coach, explained: “If I can talk about how I think religion is real and not just this thing that people made up and that God is something that exists, that’s a big deal to me.” Whether this had spiritual or moral implications, educator-coaches depicted faith as an invisible dimension in the school that was part of their lives and strongly agreed that it could not be separated from their work as educators or coaches.

“A lot of our people are doers.” This quote from Coach 5 emphasized the shared value educator-coaches placed on acting according to gospel values. A common refrain was that educator-coaches in Catholic schools were doers

rather than preachers of the Word. Coach 6, a high school volleyball coach, who was a practicing Protestant, explained that she was not preachy with colleagues: “I don’t come in and preach the gospel, but ... I listen because that’s showing the gospel. I’m really good at showing the gospel” (Coach 6). Coach 8, a junior high educator, was frustrated when she heard coaches not caring for players and instead saw them berating student-athletes:

I’m just not the preachy kinda person. I’m more of the look at what I do versus what I say, so I try and live it [Players say]: ‘You never yell at us.’ And I’m like, ‘Well, because I wouldn’t want you to yell at me. If I have a problem with you, you’ll know it and we’ll talk about it and we’ll get it resolved but I’m not gonna sit here and scream at you and I expect that same respect from you.’

In both examples, it was the value of respecting the dignity of each human person that motivated educator-coaches. Coach 9 said that he shows the Christian life through his actions, along with asking for forgiveness from his players sometimes: “I’ve made mistakes as well and I’ve had to come to my boys’ next practice and be like, you know what, sorry, I overreacted there.”

Another high school basketball coach (Coach 4) explained that he lives out his beliefs through his team’s acts of charity, but also in his own sportsmanlike actions: “We won’t cheat in regards to score. If the scorekeepers mess up and we know the score’s supposed to be 76 to 68 and they have us up 10 instead, we’re always honest about that. Whereas I don’t think [that’s the case with] all schools. Some coaches let that go The right thing to do is to have the correct score.” In these examples, educator-coaches try to live with integrity and a sense of responsibility for their actions. In answering Jesus’ call to serve and love others through their coaching, these educator-coaches showed students how to live. Preaching and teaching were not the priority. Through their mentorship and actions, they could show the gospel to students.

“**There’s a deeper sense of community.**” In this quote, Coach 3, a practicing Catholic, underlined the strong bond among members of the school community, especially in sports. This was a common theme. Coach 5, who led high school basketball and was also a practicing Catholic, spoke about the connection made through coaches modeling for the players: “There’s that demand of excellence and knowing that we’re relying on you, and knowing that your commitment to us and our commitment to you is a bond that has

to lead to something good. So even if the team fails, something good has to come out of this time together.” Coach 5 acknowledged that other teachers also model and mentor students, but that coaches do it on a larger scale due to the time given to coaching sports: “And so if kids are equating giving up time and sacrificing time and being invested and knowing that they have to be loved and nurtured and cared for, then coaches do it.”

Two coaches detailed their reasons for building this strong community at a school. Coach 2, who coached high school volleyball and attended Mass regularly, drew upon religious teaching for his rationale:

One of the things that religion teaches us, especially the Catholic faith, is to love one another. You might not like the guy ... on the other team but guess what, he’s another athlete and that’s another person. It showcases ... that we are a part of a greater community regardless of denomination. We are all God’s people.

A second example comes from a junior high soccer coach who explained the impact of empathy he has for kids at his school:

Every Christmas we put together [care-packages] for students in need, and the number is overwhelming It’s very humbling when we go and deliver these hampers, you see where they live, and how excited they are for your help We see what kind of living conditions they’re faced with, and you see how much this [school] means to them.

Because of the empathy felt and the generosity offered, this Coach 10 noted in a tangible way that the school community supports his rationale for coaching his kids.

The strong communal bond in a Catholic school is supported by its religious affiliation, as Coach 7, who was also an administrator, noted: “Because we have a commonality, there’s a reason that we are brought together. And I think that if you can refer to this, like it’s one more thing that you have that I found I didn’t have elsewhere.” This additional reason for being together—that God brought the school community together—was also highlighted in recognizing the schools’ patron saint (Coach 3) or local legendary priest (Coach 5). These further cemented the people in the school and lifted their work as educator-coaches. Drawing from religious teaching, reaching out to the marginalized, or thinking that the bond forged must lead to good, all underline the support drawn from the community of a Catholic school.

Forces of Drag

Educator-coaches generally agreed that there were ways that religious affiliation created points of tension or drag on their coaching. These were not necessarily perceived as negative, as some contained positive elements.

“If I was to bring [faith] to these [players], I don’t know if they’re Muslim ... Jewish ... Christian ... [or] Catholic.” This quote from Coach 6 emphasizes educator-coaches’ feelings of uncertainty when working with a diverse student body. Without question, the educator-coaches wanted to support all students and respect their religious backgrounds. Yet there remained uncertainty or tensions that arose because of the challenges diversity raised in a sporting environment at a Catholic school. Coach 6 stated above her concern with doing much of anything overtly Catholic. She had played volleyball all her life and had not had former coaches pray before a game, for instance. She explained that she did not bring her Christian faith to sport even though, as she reported,

I bring the bible into all areas of my life because it’s me . . . because it’s my choice, my religion, my bible. But if I was to bring it to these guys, I don’t know if they’re Muslim . . . Jewish . . . Christian . . . Catholic.

Her concern to respect the religious traditions and background of all students clashed with her own evangelizing faith, as she determined that she would not force her faith on anyone. In the end, she realized that respect and tolerance of others were sometimes at odds with her missionary zeal.

In particular, the most varied answers toward leading religious practices in sport arose with the topic of prayer in sport. There were many who always had their teams pray before a game (Coaches 2, 4, 5, and 9), while some reserved prayer for certain important games (Coaches 1, 7, and 10). Still others reported they would not lead this practice (Coaches 3, 6, and 8). Coach 8, a junior high educator who coached a number of different teams and sports outside of the school, stated:

And maybe this is part of why I don’t do a prayer, but I just never have, but we don’t have a lot of Catholics in our school anymore. We have a high percentage of either other Christian denominations or no religious affiliation or other religious affiliation. And so that’s always interesting too, so we go to Mass and over half our kids just get the Blessing. They don’t go for Communion.

The challenge of a diverse student body did not stop others. They offered generic prayers to God, asking for a game well-played, the safety of the players, and offering a moment of thanks. Finding it acceptable to pray came with the notion that the prayer would not explicitly be Catholic, it would try to respect and support all students. To make it palatable to the diverse group of students, coaches would sometimes contextualize their faith by explaining their religious background (Coach 5), affirming the school's Catholic identity (Coach 2), or sharing how God had helped them directly (Coach 10). Couching the prayer within the context of why it was personally important made the coaches feel like they were being more honest and authentic.

"I try not to be the person who does things to be Catholic because I'm supposed to be Catholic." As noted in the previous section, coaches who prayed with their teams tried to be more honest and authentic with their teams through explaining the context of this spiritual practice. Some educator-coaches remained uncomfortable with praying in the context of sports and expressed a need to individually own their faith rather than doing it because of the school's religious identity. This was most clearly articulated by junior high Coach 8:

I try not to be the person who does things to be Catholic because I'm supposed to be Catholic. I wanna be authentic and so I've never, you know, 'OK I'm Catholic so I should be doin' this prayer'. It's not a good enough reason for me. Everything I do I try and have a reason for.

She added that she had seen kids from Latin America cross themselves before a game but did not think this was needed for the whole team.

The female senior high volleyball coach (Coach 6) who emphasized repeatedly that the diversity of the student body made team prayer a "real challenge" also noted that churches often lose youth in their teens. She wanted to respond eagerly to this problem—"you can lose them really fast and that's a challenge"—but also noted that she "saw one of the boys on my team talking to one of the priests. We had a huge celebration here and I thought to myself, 'Wow, maybe it does matter, maybe faith does matter 'cause why would he be talking to [the priest].'" As she sought to avoid forcing her Christian faith on others, this incident made her realize that faith is not explicitly lived out for many and religious faith isn't always easily seen. Placed in a dilemma, she felt like she wanted to live out her faith authentically and respectfully but

did not know how this could be done: “there’s a [godly] reason I have those kids [on my team] but yet I’m not sharing any of the gospel with them. Zero. So I don’t know why I don’t do that.”

It should be noted that both Coaches 6 and 8 were not socialized into team prayer in their youth. In fact, Coach 8 wanted to promote an authentic faith where she encouraged youth to search for their faith: “It’s OK to struggle with your faith. Faith is a journey and if you don’t ask questions you’re not gonna grow.” Also seeking out an authentic faith, Coach 9 liked that he could live out his faith in his professional life and challenge, for instance, player’s moral decision-making in a real yet not pushy manner. Coach 9 thought he could live out faith authentically without needing to question so much. Coach 5 saw authenticity in the values Jesus taught and that he tried to incorporate: “Love, compassion and all the things that you’d want to model.” Both of these coaches saw authentic support for their teams coming from the values of the school.

Coach 2, who was a practicing Catholic, tried to actively integrate faith into sport and believed in the importance of drawing on more explicit religious practices: “What makes us distinct? Nothing when we don’t pray, when we don’t do stuff before the game, it just means nothing.” In fact, he found that by praying with his team other coaches were uncertain how to act: “It’s always fun to play another Catholic school that doesn’t pray and then they look at us and they go, ‘What? Wait a second here. We all gotta pray as a team’.” While he tried to authentically incorporate faith, other coaches seemed to be haphazard or uncertain about incorporating prayer into sport.

Wondering about the authenticity of faith also has social ramifications: How different can religious affiliation make educator-coaches before that distinctiveness distinguishes them too much from other coaches? Coach 1, who was a nominal Catholic and taught in an elementary school, noted how overly identifying as a Catholic potentially makes a coach an outsider among other coaches: “There’s a challenge of being accepted in terms of being Catholic. There’s always that question of whether or not you’re gonna be accepted. That’s really the path of being righteous: that it doesn’t really matter and you’re gonna stand up for what you believe in.” While Coach 1 had a clear sense of the need to stand up for “the path of being righteous,” he found this path difficult to navigate and made living the Christian life very hard.

“You don’t think about specific questions ... about spirituality or your religion ... you just do it, but you’re not really thinking” (Coach 4). Educator-coaches frequently reported a lack of reflection upon the influence of

catholicity on sport. They were sometimes left with a loss for words despite their considerable formal and informal religious training. Coach 4 exemplified this:

I don't think I think about it though it's who I am, so it's just consistent through whatever I do, whether it's my faith, or my prayers, or my church, or my teaching, or my coaching. It's my beliefs in general, so I guess a lot of my beliefs are the same beliefs as my Catholic religion or faith. It just flows [together].

This high school basketball coach of over 10 years explained that he didn't lay out specific goals on this integration—"OK, how am I gonna implement my Catholic faith in my team this year?"—but instead he explained that "when you think about it and you talk about it, then you're like, yeah, we are focusing quite a bit on it or it is important." For Coach 4, he simply did this integration and didn't really think about it. Two other coaches, however, struggled to make sense of this. The senior high volleyball coach who was coaching for the first time in a Catholic school found it strange to put coaching and religion together: "They're separate to me. I've never thought about spirituality and coaching, that they were together." Coach 10 worked at a junior high and struggled to explain this integration. Instead, he offered a simple comparison: "It's similar to a Catholic teacher teaching in a Catholic school board," where the teacher almost unknowingly integrates faith and education.

A seamless fit between Catholic beliefs and his own life may have been experienced by Coach 4; but, although it wasn't the case for everyone (Coaches 6 and 10), no one claimed to have given it a lot of consideration. Consequentially, several issues arose that individual coaches had not worked out. For example, Coach 5 admittedly felt "like a hypocrite when I'm reconciling my intensity in coaching attitudes with my [faith];" he thought that others were probably more spiritual people. Another instance came from the experience of Coach 1, who coached multiple sports in an elementary school and wondered if "being Catholic [schoolteacher] or being public [schoolteacher] ... has a huge implication." He wondered how, and if, things would have been different if he had become a public schoolteacher and coach. This lack of in-depth reflection on the religious identity of the schools and how this impacts their work as coaches leaves many unearthed discussion topics left buried beneath the busyness of an educator-coach's life.

Discussion

In keeping with the phenomenological method of this study, this paper offers six reported forces of lift and drag which resulted from analysis of the educator-coaches' experiences within the Catholic school setting. Again, our present aim is not to articulate how educator-coaches can better integrate religious identity in schools but is rather focused on thoroughly exploring the impact of Catholic education on them as educator-coaches.

Interviewees appreciated the strong communal element found in Catholic schools, which helped shape their identity. Convey (2012) argues that “the vast majority of teachers and administrators” surveyed in U.S. Catholic schools reported that “a school’s culture or faith community is viewed as the most important component of the school’s Catholic identity” (p. 208). Why? Successful American Catholic schools functioned as communities at a high level, creating social capital that was pragmatically important for the school’s effectiveness (Convey, 2012). Cook and Simonds (2011) add that “out of these life-giving relationships ... the mission priorities of the school emerge” (p. 323). In particular, we found that the more the experienced educator-coaches were, the more heavily they emphasized the importance of relationships and the school community—a finding confirmed by Convey (2012) in Catholic schools overall. Convey (2012) explains that “it takes time and experience for teachers to grasp fully the importance of the faith community and their role in creating and sustaining it” (p. 208). The Catholic identity that grows from the communal element leads to the feeling of (a) being part of something bigger and motivates them as (b) doers of the Word.

Despite this strong communal element, educator-coaches were challenged to have a clear understanding of Catholic identity in athletics. Fuller and Johnson’s (2013) case study of a school’s Catholic identity differentiated between implicit religious identity elements that are a part of everything a school does (e.g., “human dignity, a whole person approach, relationships, work and drive, and academic excellence”) (p. 104) and explicit elements that are overt signs of Catholic identity (e.g., “opportunities for prayer, masses, and retreats; the presence of priests on the faculty; and religious symbols in the school”) (p. 108). The drag forces reported by the educator-coaches—i.e., uncertainty around the treatment of non-Catholics, seeking an authentic faith, and a lack of reflection on the integration of sport and faith for educator-coaches—point to the challenge of integrating the implicit and explicit religious elements with their own personal and professional identities.

In particular, the lack of rigorous reflection reported by educator-coaches reveals the difficulty of balancing multiple identities. This is unsurprising when we acknowledge that educator-coaches are busy people teaching a host of courses and taking on many coaching duties. Fuller and Johnson confirm that the school context and multiple responsibilities of staff “can sideline rigorous reflection on the relationship between the implicit and explicit dimensions” of Catholic identity, making it difficult “to articulate the school community’s collective and individual Catholic identities” (2013, p. 115). Naming, shaping, and re-shaping these identities is time-consuming, and particularly difficult when “contemporary Catholic schools may find a greater sense of confidence, achievement, and public recognition by concentrating their energies in the market curriculum rather than in the relatively invisible outcomes of their spiritual and moral curriculum” (Grace, 2002, p. 51).

Those coaches who expressed and called for an increase of explicit signs of Catholicity in athletics stood out as different from the broader coaching body. Specifically, Coaches 2 and 9 were most open to many explicit elements of faith and this was based on their own personal faith background. Others avoided sounding preachy and generally did not want to make a big deal about these external elements. Those who were strictly doers of the Word were uncomfortable with using explicit signs of catholicity in sport because it did not feel authentic to their own spirituality or because they did not feel that it respected the beliefs of non-Catholics in the sports programs. The emphasis on tolerance toward others is arguably the central value toward religion in contemporary Canada (Thiessen, 2015). Because of this belief, public institutions in Canada find it difficult to promote explicit religious expressions in the public space. Implicit elements are more easily assuaged with the public at large and this reflects many of the study’s participants. Explicit preaching to youth was frequently frowned upon, praying together was endorsed by some but not others, and focusing on promoting general values like love and kindness were supported by all (in almost all circumstances).

Educator-coaches, who juggle multiple identities, need opportunities to reflect on their coaching in relation to the school’s Catholic identity. Shuttloffel (2012) explains that Catholic identity is not predictable and, “in a secular society ... [remains] fluid and often not connected to dogmatic definitions or organized church participation” (pp. 152-153). O’Gorman (2015) asks how the Church is helping Catholics negotiate an increasingly complex world of multiple identities? Are educator-coaches properly prepared for integrating the transformational message of the gospel into sport today? Here lies a

noteworthy concern with McGrath's writings on sport in Catholic schools. While we support his work theologically and endorse his use of explicit elements of Catholicity, his work overlooks internal and external tensions for the coaches that arise from differences between doctrines and lived experiences. Only Coaches 2 and 8 in our study would have been minimally affected by such tensions, which could mean that many of the educator-coaches' experiences are presumably disregarded. Taking other elements into consideration is not, as Convery, Franchi, and McCluskey (2014) argue, a "concession to secularism," but a way to "ensure that the Catholic school offers an alternative view of education" (p. 19) where educator-coaches can continually contemplate how they engage Catholic traditions in the sporting arena. If, as the Congregation for Catholic Education claims, the Catholic school is to be "a synthesis of culture and faith" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, no. 14), how will this be accomplished amid tensions felt in the lives of educator-coaches? This is no small task. If it is not integrated and appropriated into the lives of educator-coaches, as Krebbs remarks, the religious identity of these teachers "will remain vague and elusive" (2000, p. 313). Power's (2015) model for coaches is based upon the theme of ministry or service, which subscribes to the ideal of doers of the Word and is more in line with the lift force reported by the educator-coaches in our study. This is more helpful, but how to integrate explicit elements of Catholic faith remains an open question in some respect—which might be the best way forward.

Fuller and Johnson (2013) give further direction. They argue for "sufficient opportunities for both teachers and students to develop or foster a religious identity, whether individual or collective, whether Catholic or other faith traditions" (p. 116; see also Maney, King, & Kiely, 2017). Instead of Catholic identity being thrust upon educator-coaches, what is needed is the school faith community to work together to forge "a synthesis of ideas, values and beliefs" (Fuller & Johnson, 2013, p. 117). In this process of dialogue and reflection, tensions between personal, professional, coaching, and religious (both implicit and explicit identity) identities arise. Instead of viewing the process as threatening, Rymarz (2016) remarks that these discussions about the future of Catholic identity in educational settings like sport can bring "with [them] energy and purpose" (p. 94).

Conclusion

This research has limitations like every qualitative study. Specifically, the educator-coaches interviewed for this study were, relatively speaking, very active in religious life, whether in terms of current church attendance or theological training and were potentially more capable at making connections between faith and sport. Perhaps educator-coaches who were unwilling to be interviewed would have lacked a similar ability. Would the lifting influence of religious affiliation be weaker for other educator-coaches? Furthermore, we also interviewed only educators employed by the School District; however, it is a common occurrence for non-staff to coach extra-curricular sports in Catholic schools. For instance, McGrath notes that surveys of U.S. Catholic schools report nearly 50% of coaches in the schools are not teachers or staff (2004, p. viii). Camiré (2015) notes the benefits of having educators coach in schools, and we wonder how the absence of a professional educational background may limit non-educator coaches.

Because this paper focuses on the experiences of educator-coaches, we purposefully have avoided trying to resolve the perceived lack of Catholic identity in sport programs. We support attempts to find solutions that are reflective of the school's mission and educator-coaches' lived identity: one that communally examines how sports programs engage explicit and implicit elements of Catholic traditions, and seeks support and re-examination of coaches' sporting, educational, and Catholic identities (as drawn from the work of Shuttloffel [2016] and Arbuckle [2013]) that exist within a diverse student body. Examining Catholic traditions in sport should, as best as we can determine, draw from "the heritage of accumulated wisdom" of the Catholic faith (Franchi, 2014, p. 68) along with ideals and vision of sport from Catholics over the ages (e.g., Kelly, 2014) and in more recent times (e.g., Fr. David Bauer, csb). A more particular example can be found in Fr. Kevin Lixey (2012), former head of the Vatican's Church and Sport Office, who saw in sport ascetical and disciplinary qualities that give purpose and act as an antidote to indifference and apathy among today's youth.

Like Lixey, scholars McGrath, Power, and Kelly have argued for ongoing involvement in sports by Catholic churches and schools. Because these sports programs, are, as Porath (2000) asserted, "not a distraction from the school's purpose," to disband them would "deny the Catholic school's essential character and role in the progress of culture" (p. 236). Doing justice to Catholic educational history in sport requires careful consideration of the role of educator-coaches and the ongoing shaping and reshaping of Catholic identity in these sports programs.

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