Life Skills in Youth Sport: Creating 15-Minute Lesson Plans

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Summary of Presentation

Nearly 7.7 million boys and girls participate in a wide variety of interscholastic sports (NFHS, 2011). The high level of participation requires many athletic directors to rely on lay coaches, without whom there can be no programs. Athletic administrators have recognized the need to train all coaches and have taken steps to require (or recommend) participation in state or national (or some combination of both) training programs. While administrators should be commended for this positive step, a significant deficiency remains. These training programs provide little guidance on how to intentionally integrate life skill training in the youth sport practice which may perpetuate the assumption that learning life skills are a natural byproduct of sport participation.

This step-by-step training process for teaching life skills in youth sport is grounded in Kolb’s (1984) *Experiential Learning Model*. Kolb’s learning cycle has four components: 1) experiencing, 2) reflecting, 3) generalizing, and 4) applying. Though presented as discrete stages, the individual may experience multiple components at the same time.

At the onset, the coach (with input from parents) will select only one or two “priority” life skills to work on during the season. This choice is based on the coach’s philosophy or agency’s mission-based outcomes and the developmental level of the athlete(s). The life skill(s) should be matched to and integrated with an activity already in the practice plan. It is not an “extra” component of practice.

*Step 1: Prior Preparation.* As a normal part of practice preparation, the coach will: a) describe athlete characteristics, b) identify the drill to be used, and c) specify the allotted practice time.

*Step 2: Developing the Lesson.* As a normal part of practice preparation and then implemented during practice, the coach will: a) define the life skill, b) explain the drill, and c) briefly describe the connection between key aspects of the life skill and how it is reflected in the practice drill.

*Step 3: Reinforcing the Lesson.* During the designated activity in practice, the coach will: a) instruct to promote correct action, b) reward/reinforce to increase repeatability, and c) question to engage the participant.
Step 4: Transfer the Lesson. Immediately following the designated activity in practice, the coach will: a) relate the life skill to another relevant setting, b) encourage the athlete to apply the life skill in another setting, and c) follow up and reinforce at a subsequent practice session.

There are a few key points the coach should remember. First, athletes respond most effectively to reinforcement – notice and encourage behaviors that display the life skill. Second, focus instruction on correcting technique, skill, and behavior rather than on what the athlete did wrong. Third, engage athletes in sport participation – athletes want to feel valued and be active in the learning environment. Finally, life skill development should be a routine part of practice but does not have to be in every practice session.
Resources


Author Bios

Kimberly J. Bodey, EdD, serves as an associate professor and sport management concentration coordinator in the Department of Kinesiology, Recreation, and Sport at Indiana State University. Dr. Bodey has a research interest in coaching education policy development and was a member of the National Coaching Report (NASPE, 2008) taskforce.

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