

# A Discussion on the Role Conflict between Hong Kong Physical Education Teachers and Coaches

## 討論香港體育教師與教練的身份角色衝突

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### Abstract

The present paper attempted to discuss the current role conflicts between the Hong Kong physical education teachers and coaches in the aspects of (1) student/athlete characteristics, and (2) teachers/coaches role characteristics and their role preferences.

### 摘要

本文探討香港體育教師的兩種角色衝突。討論涉及 (一) 學生與運動員的特質及兩者施教時的分別，(二) 教師與教練的角色特點及角色定位的因素。

### Introduction

Teaching jobs in Hong Kong secondary schools include at least six roles such as teaching, extracurricular activities, discipline, guidance, administration and miscellaneous affairs (Tai & Cheng, 1994). The additional duties of Physical Education (PE) teachers include not only training and coaching of school team(s), which may involve team(s) with different sports or different grades, but also the need to maintain sports facilities and purchase equipment. In addition, they also need to organize interclass sports competitions like sports day, swimming galas, and various ball and racquet games. The Hong Kong PE teachers usually employed not only to teach PE, but also other academic subjects. Job demands of PE teachers are high and varied, including cognitive, affective and physical aspects as well as specialized skills. It was a very time and energy demanding profession. This multiple roles of Hong Kong PE teachers created a unique role conflict. According to Sage (1987), the teacher-coach role conflict is defined as "the experience of role stress and role strain due to the conflicting multiple demands of teaching and coaching" (p.217-218).

In Hong Kong, a majority of the practicing PE teachers are trained in the Hong Kong Institute of Education (former College of Education). However, the existing PE teacher-training course in Hong Kong did not include any coaching technique training. Therefore, the value of PE for preparation as a coach comes into question. The belief that PE coursework is sufficient preparation for coaching rests on the assumption that the role of PE teaching is very similar to the role of coaching. However, the two roles are distinct in many ways, among them the skill level of participants, objective, instructor-to student ratios, motivation of participants, time available for instruction, equipment and facilities available for instruction (e.g. Bain, 1978; Chu, 1980; Coakley, 1986; Cote, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, & Russell, 1995; Figone, 1994; Fraleigh, 1985; Locke & Massengale, 1978; Massengale, 1981; Rog, 1984; Rose, 1986; Rupert & Buschner, 1989; Sage, 1987, 1989; Sisley, Capel, & Desertrain, 1987; Staffo, 1992). Therefore, these two roles may be so distinct that preparation for teaching may not serve as adequate preparation for coaching. The following will discuss the causes and nature of teacher-coach role conflict in terms of student/athlete characteristics, and

teacher/coach role characteristics. Finally, the possible explanations making coaching more desirable than teaching are also discussed.

## Student/Athlete's Characteristics

### Size of the Group

There is a difference in the size of the group the teacher or coach has to manage. The coach deals with a smaller group than the teacher. The smaller group size in the coaching situation may afford the coaches greater opportunity to fulfill their commitment.

### Talent and Ability

An athletic team is composed of athletes who are similar in talent and ability. In contrast, students are grouped together into a class based on their academic results not psychomotor abilities, therefore a PE class is likely to include students of varying talent and abilities. The homogeneity in talent and abilities makes it easier for the coach to perform his or her duties, while the heterogeneity nature of student places additional constraints and demands on the teacher. The teacher has to modify his or her teaching objectives and methods to suit differences in talents and abilities within a single class. This difficulty is further accentuated when a teacher has to teach several grades and/or classes of students, in comparison to a coach who deals with just one or two teams. From a different perspective, the participants in athletics are not only homogeneous, but also are at a higher level of abilities, than a typical PE class. Thus, coaches and teachers experience different kinds of challenges and constraints.

### Motivation

With regard to the motivation, the athletic participation is voluntary, whereas participation in PE classes is most often compulsory. Further, athletes may have a choice of a team. The voluntary nature of athletic participation implies a strong motivation to be part of the enterprise.

### Characteristics of Teacher/Coach Roles

It is obvious to note that there are differences between working with students and working with athletes. A coach cannot fill the PE position, however PE teachers have to be a teacher in school time and be a coach after school time or during holiday.

## Instructional Behaviors

The instructional behaviors of PE teachers who are involved in teaching and coaching are different. The results from Rupert and Buschner (1989) show that managerial episodes are significantly greater when the PE teachers taught their PE classes than during coaching school teams. These episodes consist of taking roll, handling misbehavior, retrieving equipment, picking teams, and giving directions for class organization.

### High Task Identity

Concerning the high task identity, coaches try to develop the athletic potential of the few students who report for the team. This development is easily identified and attributed to the coach, who is usually the sole individual responsible for that task. In contrast, PE is part of the larger system aimed at developing the whole individual, a function shared by other teachers in the school. Thus, PE teachers cannot easily identify their end product or personal contributions to that end product (Chelladurai & Kuga, 1996).

### Skill Variety

When consider the skill variety, coaching entails greater variety than teaching because coaching involves teaching of more sophisticated skills, tactics and strategies, while teaching is concerned only with basic skills (Chelladurai & Kuga, 1996). On the other hand, teaching may consider greater variety because the teacher deals with a large number of students with varying abilities and talents.

### Duration of Contact

Regarding to the duration of contact, a teacher is likely to be in contact with his or her students for about 2 hours a week. While the coach is in contact with his or her athletes may be up to 6 - 8 hours a week. The lengthy periods of contact permit a coach to gain greater understanding of individual differences among the members, and better adapt to their needs and desires. Findings from Hong Kong Sports Development Board (1991) concerning 272 PE teachers in Hong Kong show that 46% of these PE teachers spent 5 to 12 hours per week on training and coaching sports teams while 10% had to spend 13 hours or more every week. Ng (1998) in his study regarding the coaching workload of 181 Hong Kong PE teachers showed that they spent average 4 hours per week after school on training and coaching school sports teams. This prolonged working hour may constitute PE teacher role overload.

## Exposure

Another distinguishing characteristic of coaching is the public performance of an athletic team. Athletic competitions are carried out in the presence of spectators, with the results publicized in the media like television and newspapers. Although coaches spend most of their time in training held in school, which is usually private, the competitions are open to the public. Some individuals may relish that the outcomes of their efforts are on public display like newspaper, while others may experience undue stress and tension.

## Feedback

Concerning the feedback received by both teachers and coaches from their job, such feedback is likely to be more specific and concrete in coaching. Since teaching is largely focused on student's skill learning, the feedback is derived largely from a teacher's own evaluation of the student's skill performance. On the other hand, the feedback in coaching is more objective and based on external standards such as the opponents' performance and/or existing records. Since the competition is regularly scheduled, the feedback in coaching is periodic and progressive. That is, every competition is a test of coaching effectiveness, and therefore, a source of realistic feedback. Such periodic and objective assessment against an external standard is not customary in teaching (Siedentop, Mand, & Taggart, 1986). Another characteristic that sets coaching apart from teaching is the competitive nature of the competition. They must win to receive extra credit for their role (Massengale, 1977).

## Appraisal

Different from other teachers, PE teachers' performance are supervised and evaluated by their principals based on their teaching and coaching duties. The evaluation of the performance of several studies identify that teaching and coaching are differences relative to respect and support, accountability, and reward systems (Bain, 1978; Bain & Wendt, 1983; Chu, 1984; Locke & Manningle, 1978; Rupert & Buschner, 1989; Chandler, Lane, Bibik, & Oliver, 1988; Hart, Hasbrook, & Mathes, 1986).

## Autonomy

Authoritarianism in coaching is caused by the institutional demand that coaches be given total accountability for outcomes in a situation filled with uncertainty (O'Sullivan, Siedentop, & Tannehill, 1994). The coach has complete control over the selection and retention of team members, and their use in competitions.

They demand the complete authority to make any decision they deem necessary for team success. Moreover, coaching decisions are characteristically practical, rational, expedient, and often made in the shortest possible time and according to game-to-game situations. On the other hand, the teacher's job may be perceived to be more regulated relative to the coaching job in terms of scheduling and covering curriculum content in each class.

## Punishments

Another difference between teaching and coaching is the type of punishments to students like oral reprimands and/or suspensions. The normative and professional expectation in this regard varies between teaching and coaching. For instance, it is not acceptable for a teacher to verbally punish a student when the student does not execute a skill well. On the other hand, it is permissible for a coach to yell and scream at athletes when they perform poorly. In the case of suspensions, the power or impact of such actions may be greater in coaching than in teaching. For some of the students in a PE class, a suspension may be a reward, as they do not want to attend the class.

## Teacher/Coach Role Preference

Although many PE teachers expressed an equal commitment to teaching and coaching, they may reduce role conflict by having a strong preference for one role over the other (Bain & Wendt, 1983; Segrave, 1981). Coaching is the role usually preferred (Chu, 1984). The reasons for the coaching preference over teaching are discussed which are related to individual differences in needs, personality, reward system, and socialization.

Coaching is seen as satisfying their needs more than teaching in terms of challenges, recognition, and satisfaction. Some of the PE teachers are attracted to coaching because their personality traits and abilities are consistent with the demand of coaching (Sage, 1987; Segrave, 1981; Siedentop, Mand, & Taggart, 1986; Templin, Sparkes, Grant, & Schempp, 1994). Refer to the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, successful performance in coaching is the major basis for one's job security, salary, recognition, social support, status, and opportunities for promotion (Bain & Wendt, 1983; Chu, 1984; Figone, 1994; Massengale, 1981; Sage, 1987; Segrave, 1981; Sisley, Capel, & Desertrain, 1987; Staffo, 1992; Stroot, Collier, O'Sullivan & England, 1994). Another individual difference variable is the notion of occupational socialization. Individuals who choose coaching tend to have been former athletes, who are influenced by their own coaches (Bain & Wendt, 1983; Sage, 1989; Dewar & Lawson, 1984). Coakley (1986) explained that prior athletic participation offered insight into the general

description of the coaching occupation and, therefore, exposed athletes to a career with which they are already familiar. Such socialization manifests coaching more favourable over teaching (Chu, 1984; Coakley, 1986; Dodds et al, 1991; Massengale, 1974; Templin, Woodford, & Mulling, 1982).

Regarding the supervision and evaluation method, when the performance of PE teacher is evaluated, it may perceive that administrators consider coaching success more important than teaching success (Massengale, 1981; Segrave, 1981; Sisley, Capel, & Desertrain, 1987). In addition, a school system that favors coaching over teaching may be using its athletics teams to create publicity and prestige for the school, while bringing together the school community (teachers, students, parents, alumni, and community-at-large), and facilitating fund-raising for the school. These external forces that direct the PE teachers favor coaching over teaching (Figone, 1994; Massengale, 1981; Sage, 1987; Segrave, 1981; Sisley, Capel, & Desertrain, 1987; Staffo, 1992).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, several explanations have been given for why some PE teachers prefer coaching to teaching. However, further studies should be carried out to investigate the extent of the role preferences by age, sex, ability, socio-economic status, and sports participation backgrounds. On the other hand, professional preparation programs in PE should highlight the significant differences between teaching and coaching, and the opportunities, challenges, and constraints associated with each role. Finally, as a PE teacher, we shall bear in mind that the goals of teaching PE are psychomotor, cognitive, and affective development of students (Fraleigh, 1985). The PE teachers should realize that the less skilled and unfit students are in greater need to help change their attitude and behavior toward exercise and lifetime sports. Therefore, we should pay attention to effective planning including student pacing, interests, and measurable behavioral outcomes so that they would voluntarily participate regularly in physical activity after school. On the other hand, the highly skilled athletes also need the opportunity to more fully realize their potential.

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