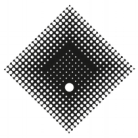

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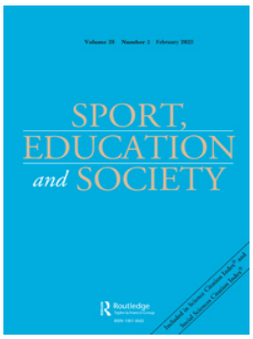

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Social inclusion through sport? Pedagogical perspectives of Dutch youth sport coaches

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ABSTRACT

The impact of organized youth sport on youth development depends on various conditions in the pedagogical climate, such as how sport is delivered by youth sport coaches. While this is broadly acknowledged and provides a basis to improve youth sport and its developmental outcomes, little is known about the pedagogical perspectives of youth coaches on their practice. This study uses semi-structured interviews with 32 youth sport coaches in diverse youth sport contexts in the Netherlands. Reflexive data analysis is employed to garner insights into coaches' role perceptions, coaching goals, and underlying values. The findings show that while youth coaches focus on sport-centered activities, many foreground non-sport dimensions such as life mentoring and working towards social inclusion as critical elements of their work, reflected in five pedagogically-oriented goals: discipline, autonomy, resilience, social abilities, and aspirations. Underlying these goals are pedagogical values such as building and maintaining caring relationships with participants. These goals and values echo scientific literature on pedagogical sport climate conditions (e.g. positive youth development), and challenge notions of youth sport as a performance-oriented and uncaring setting. The results contribute to existing knowledge about youth coaches' pedagogical orientations, and inform the development of strategies to stimulate positive sport practices and developmental outcomes for participants.

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Youth sport; coaching perspectives; pedagogical values; social inclusion; caring relationships; life mentoring

Introduction: 'acceptance, that's all they'll get from you'

Shadows of dribbling balls compete with joyful April sunlight shining through the high windows of Calvijn College's sport hall in Amsterdam West. ASV Lebo's Under 17s youth team is its final training before the big away game next Saturday in Heerhugowaard. Coach 'Mo' enters the pitch: "All right! As a last exercise, we'll play practice matches. The teams that win are selected for the next game; the weak stay home". Mo hands out vests and participants look like they believe that he is not joking. One boy breaks the silence: "But coach, this looks kind of … unfair". "Well then Brahim", replies Mo, "You drop and give me fifty pushups!" As Brahim drops, another boy raises his hand: "Coach, I'll take over half, 25–25". Mo sneers, "You're so noble, aren't you?" and applauding (seemingly sarcastically) turns to the team: "Thanks to our hero here, all of you will give me 100 pushups!"

Shortly after the last burning pushup, the game commences, intensely and even violently. Mo loudly berates losing teams and makes up new rules as they go. "You weak losers! Get out!" A boy stumbles to the side: "But the score; they haven't scored!" Mo shrugs, "Boohoo, call your mommy […]".

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> However, despite his perceived provoking and bullying, Mo does have positive interactions with the boys. Although only heard from afar, his words seem to be comforting and encouraging: "Can you give one more round?" he asks softly, as he hugs a player. The boy nods and takes deep breaths, preparing himself for one more battle.
>
> Finally, Mo signals the end of training and players crash to the ground. But Mo orders them to stand in a circle: "back straight, chin up!" for breathing and stretching exercises. He then seems to offer comfort. "I'm proud of all of you and I'll need all of you next Saturday", he says, and hugs them one by one. "But remember, next Saturday, in Heerhugowaard, everyone will be against you. From the crowd to the referee, everyone. And not like I just acted for practice, but much, much worse. Subtle, civilized, and unbeatable. They will do everything in their power to shut you down, to reduce you to what you are in their eyes. Foreigners. Ugly brutes, outsiders. Malicious, or pathetic at least". The participants continue to stand in a circle, apparently carrying the burden of these words. Mo continues: "But you won't let it get it to your heart; acceptance, that's all they'll get from you. Stick to this game plan, and you will be victorious. Here, and in life".

The above scene is an open observation from field research. For some, it might demonstrate a typical case of aversive youth sport practice or social reproduction of a self-excluding mindset. For others, it might be interpreted as preparing and teaching marginalized youth to cope with the harsh reality of their social world. This scene contains different themes and layers, and provides insight into the complexities and nuances of youth development and coaching in sport. It also raises questions regarding the pedagogical value and conditions of youth sport, especially through the eyes of youth sport coaches.

This article addresses the research question: What are the role perceptions, coaching goals, and underlying values of youth sport coaches in the Dutch youth sport context? The central aim of this study is to add to our understanding of youth sport coaches' perspectives within their youth sport contexts. This knowledge can inform strategies that stimulate pedagogical conditions for constructive sport practices and positive developmental impact on participants (e.g. Kochanek & Erickson, 2020; Newman et al., 2020). Specifically, understanding coaches' perspectives within youth sport contexts is important to address gaps in current youth sport programming and to train and guide coaches towards positive youth sport practice, wherein positive impact of sport can be maximized and potentially negative effects be diminished and transformed into opportunities for growth (Gould & Carson, 2008; Newman et al., 2020; Newman & Alvarez, 2015; Santos et al., 2018).

Youth sport shows two faces in terms of its pedagogical[1] value. On the one hand, research views youth sport as a vital, socializing environment (Holt, 2016) and as a learning experience (Stafford et al., 2013). Further, research suggests that sport is a potential source of psychosocial development opportunities for youth that relates to social inclusion (e.g. Coakley, 2011; Haudenhuyse et al., 2012) that can be defined broadly as access to resources and rights, and the ability to participate in societal relationships and activities. For example, research shows that sport is positively associated with the formation of social and cultural capital (Lawson, 2010; Spaaij, 2012), and of social values (Camiré & Trudel, 2010). Moreover, Mortimer et al. (2021) find that 'spirit of sport' values such as fair play, honesty and solidarity positively predict prosocial sport behavior, while Lee et al. (2008) observes that if these values are defined as stable guiding moral principles, then it is reasonable to assume that coaches hold the same values in sport as they do in other areas of their lives.

On the other hand, the detrimental psychosocial effects of youth sport can include unsanctioned aggression and violence (Spaaij & Schaillée, 2019), anti-social peer group dynamics (Larson et al., 2006), and impediments to participants' moral development and empathy (Harvey et al., 2011; Mies & Meijs, 2012). In the Dutch context, Schipper-van Veldhoven (2016) finds that about 10% of youth sport participants under 18 years have experienced sexual intimidation and/or physical violence, with about 25% reporting bullying by peers, coaches and other adults involved in their sport, particularly in team sports such as football.

These contrasting tendencies indicate that sport participation in itself does not automatically foster positive youth development. Rather, developmental outcomes depend on conditions in the pedagogical climate (Coakley, 2011; Gould et al., 2012; Schaillée et al., 2017). In other words, whether youth sport participation leads to outcomes such as social inclusion depends on various

pedagogical conditions in different spheres of influence in the participants' lives, such as the involvement of peers and parents (Chow et al., 2009; Kay & Spaaij, 2012), the context in which it is practiced (Light, 2010), and coaching style (Boardley et al., 2008).

There is broad concern, however, that youth sport coaches lack pedagogical perspectives (e.g. Anderson, 2010; Hyman, 2009). Indeed, Newman et al. (2020) show that while some youth sport leaders perceive sportsmanship as important, they barely recognize social issues such as mental health, LGBTQI, disabilities, and race/diversity as important in their sport context.

While some studies do demonstrate the positive contributions of youth sport to youth development (e.g. Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Holt, 2016; Ronkainen et al., 2021), others portray youth sport coaching practices as often hyper-masculine, highly competitive and fostering aggression, with training through exhaustion and injury considered to be 'part of the game' (e.g. Coakley, 2011; Stafford et al., 2013). Additionally, a 'win at all costs' and rule-sanction mentality (Anderson, 2010; Baar & Wubbels, 2013; Nucci & Young-Shim, 2005) are recurring characteristics of some youth sport coaching practices, particularly at higher levels of competition. Evidence exists that relations between coaches and participants can yield important developmental outcomes (e.g. Holt et al., 2017; Schaillée et al., 2017), but these relations are frequently characterized as asymmetrical, authoritarian, and pedagogically uncaring (Kirby et al., 2000; Vertommen et al., 2016). Endresen and Olweus (2005) relate this to sport's inherently 'macho' attitudes, with its norms and ideals focused on physical strength. Altogether, these findings are alarming, and point to a competitive youth sport culture and a lack of pedagogically sound approaches amongst coaches that can engender hostility, aggression (Baar & Wubbels, 2013; Nucci & Young-Shim, 2005), and social exclusion (Spaaij et al., 2014).

Conversely, research also demonstrates that youth sport coaches do care about youth development, and that dealing with the social issues that young people experience is an important part of their role (Adams, 2020; Newman et al., 2020). Although not always explicitly, coaches do invest effort into facilitating positive youth development through sport and into transferring developed lessons and skills to other life situations (Kochanek & Erickson, 2020; Newman & Alvarez, 2015). However, a discrepancy can occur between their intentions and delivery of this pursuit. Youth sport coaches often feel ill-equipped in terms of knowledge and skills to promote positive development or mitigate risk factors (Kochanek & Erickson, 2020), with many struggling to articulate strategies, methods, and techniques to positively facilitate youth development through sport (Newman & Alvarez, 2015; Santos et al., 2018).

In response, research explores how youth sport practice can be improved to facilitate positive youth development (PYD). It should be noted that sport-based PYD is not a unified theory; rather, it encompasses a range of approaches and frameworks. For example, Bean et al. (2018) offer an implicit/explicit continuum to stimulate youth coaches' praxis (i.e. awareness and action) and, as a result, focus more explicitly on life skills development and transfer. In addition, Newman and Alvarez's (2015) Wave model offers a series of steps (i.e. initial assessment, determining coaching strategies, debriefing the experience, evaluating the process) to achieve this outcome. Newman et al.'s (2018) Adventure pedagogy framework provides key tenets and their application (e.g. physical and emotional safety, and challenging group exercises) to increase youth sport coaches' ability to bring about positive youth development. Camiré et al. (2011) also offer strategies to help coaches facilitate in-sport positive youth development, while Pierce et al.'s (2018) study focuses on coaching for life skills transfer. Further, Kochanek and Erickson (2020) explain how critical race theory can be applied to question and further develop youth sport practice.

While these approaches are valuable, some scholars call for a more integrated theoretical basis to understand underlying mechanisms and enable applicable pedagogical approaches for youth sport coaches (e.g. Newman et al., 2018). These scholars advocate for going beyond current positive youth development frameworks to account for diversity and contextual, critical reflection (e.g. Kochanek & Erickson, 2020), and to understand youth sport coaches' perspectives in diverse contexts. Further, more needs to be known about coaches' pedagogical perspectives

(Newman et al., 2020), especially in the context of youth sport clubs that serve marginalized youth (Schaillée et al., 2017) and in contexts such as Dutch youth sport where coaches are predominantly untrained volunteers. It is this specific knowledge gap that may hinder the development of strategies to stimulate pedagogical conditions for constructive sport practices as well as positive developmental outcomes for youth participants (Spaaij & Schaillée, 2019). As implied in the research question, this article explores coaches' role perceptions, coaching goals, and underlying values of training and coaching.

In the following section, we discuss the central concepts that guide this study. This is followed by a description of our field research methods and the youth sport landscape in the Netherlands. We then present our findings on coaches' role perceptions, coaching goals, and underlying values. Finally, the discussion and conclusion section compares the key findings with previous theoretical notions and discusses the implications of the study for future research and practice.

Youth sport in the Dutch context

Sport is popular in the Netherlands, especially amongst youth. Of the Netherland's 17.3 million inhabitants in 2019, the Dutch Olympic Committee and Dutch Sports Federation (NOC*NSF) found 5.1 million sport memberships, with about 32% of members aged 5–18 (i.e. nearly 1.4 million youth sport members.) Within this population, there are significant differences and trends. Regarding gender, statistics show that boys are over-represented in sport clubs compared to girls, who more often play sport outside the youth sport club context. Football is by far the most popular sport in the Netherlands for boys with 463,000 members, more than the next nine most popular sports altogether. Gymnastics is the most popular sport for girls, with the success of the women's national football team attracting more girls to the game (NOC*NSF, 2020).

There are also interesting differences and dynamics regarding social class. Although sport is generally viewed (or at least intended) as an inclusive endeavor, reality often shows a different face. Cultural and economic factors that include membership criteria, fees, and uniform and equipment costs have a selection effect on youth sport participants (Andersen & Bakken, 2019; Lake, 2013). This could be why (kick)boxing and futsal tend to be popular amongst marginalized youth, that is, those living in circumstances of relative poverty and material, social and cultural deprivation, while hockey and horse riding tend to be accessible (financially, socially and culturally) primarily for their more affluent counterparts.

Methods

To answer the central question of this research, this study employs a qualitative, exploratory design (Bryman, 2016). Using a phenomenological approach, it focuses on the lived experiences of youth sport coaches with key concepts such as social inclusion brought to life from the viewpoint of respondents. This postmodern perspective considers reality to be understood through personal and social meanings and negotiations. Hence, observational field research preceded interviews with the coaches when they were asked questions regarding their background, role perception, motivations, goals, and underlying values.

Participants

From February 2019 to June 2020, observations were carried out and interviews were conducted with youth sport coaches of participants aged 12–17 from diverse sports clubs. These interviews focused on the most popular sports in the Netherlands. Herein we have selected diverse types of sport, sporting level (recreational to performance-oriented), and socioeconomic status of the youth sport participants (marginalized youth to high socioeconomic status youth). The sporting level was determined by team admission (open or by selection),

sporting goal (recreational or career-oriented), and competition level. Field research consisted of 23 open observations. This was followed by interviews with 32 youth sport coaches at 18 sport clubs in several urban districts. Sports include football (16 coaches at 7 clubs), futsal (7 coaches at 2 clubs), (kick)boxing, Brazilian jiu jitsu and karate (5 coaches at 5 clubs), hockey (3 coaches at 3 clubs), and gymnastics (one coach) (Appendix A). In total, we conducted 32 interviews across various youth sports.

Respondents were garnered through a snowball method, starting with those recommended by sport associations for their extensive coaching experience and networks. At the conclusion of interviews, they were asked to recommend colleagues for our research and to help in our initial approach. To increase our sample diversity (especially focusing on sport type, socioeconomic status of participants and sporting level) we also took the initiative and approached youth sport coaches at sport clubs and other public places. The prospective respondents were asked by telephone or via WhatsApp if they would like to participate voluntarily.

To identify a variety of perspectives, we selected a diverse sample of youth sport coaches. This enabled us to make richer comparisons and to find recurring results across multiple contexts. While this sampling approach was consequential for the representativeness of the sample, it did not aim to produce generalizable findings in any statistical sense. Rather, it sought to produce naturalistic generalizability by inviting readers to relate and compare the findings to their own experiences and contexts as a way to identify patterns of convergence and divergence (Smith, 2018).

Procedure and interviews

On average, interviews lasted 80 min. Respondents were explicitly asked for their consent for unrecorded observations and audio recorded interviews. The purpose of this study was explained, and respondents were assured that their personal details would be fully anonymized.

Fieldwork mainly relied on interviews, with observations forming a preliminary and orientational function, as explained below. Observational data are therefore not used explicitly (e.g. cited) in the presentation of the research findings in this article. Interviews were conducted in Dutch, sporadically in Arabic, once in English, and with the occasional use of slang words. The included interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The interview topics are: (1) personal background and upbringing, including education and association with sport and related inspiration (drawing from the life-history method); (2) Task description and role perception; (3) Goals of youth trainers, especially goals in addition to sport skills and performance; and (4) Coaching values, that is, how youth trainers shape their training and sport climate.

In many cases, interviews were directly preceded by open observations of training sessions and other moments of interaction between coaches and participants. The observations focused on the general structure of training and coaches' behavior towards participants in order to generate input for interview questions, especially concerning coaches' role perceptions, goals and values. Observations included interactions before and after training, on the field, in locker rooms, hallways and canteens. These observations captured coaches' 'real time' behavior and the immediate context that normally they might consider mundane and not worth mentioning (Smith, 2018). On average, observations took approximately two hours.

Combining general observations and interviews can provide multidimensional understanding of youth coaches' perspectives (Williams, 2018). Importantly, time spent at the club watching training and other interactions helped us to develop trust and rapport with the coaches, thus enhancing interview authenticity. Specifically, the observations provided information for interview questions about coaches' understanding of coaching and how their ideas relate to certain observed practices. For example, coaches were probed about seemingly complementary aspects (e.g. 'Can you recall a moment in this training when you felt insecure, as you have mentioned previously?'), and contrasting aspects (e.g. 'How does your position on inclusion relate to that moment when you sent that boy

off the field?'). From this, several themes recurred, such as the coaches' central values and their attitudes towards social inclusion in sport.

Coding and analysis

Building on (reflexive) thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2020), interview transcripts were analyzed using the following steps. This process was supported by the use of Atlas.ti software. The first step involved the first author's familiarization with the data that led to the production of initial notes including brief records of preliminary interpretations and ideas for coding. This was followed by systematic data coding and writing reflexive coding notes, such as explanations of why a certain code was attributed (e.g. 'Respondent means this as a strategy to deal with adversity, therefore, this is coded as 'Acceptation') and/or how the code compared to related codes (e.g. 'This seems strongly related to respondents' view of social exclusion as an inevitability'). Codes were derived primarily from respondents' explicit responses, whilst others were more interpretative (such as values) derived from their implicit responses. The codes were then used to generate four main topics: coaches' background; role perception; coaching goals; and values. Topics, themes, and subthemes were subsequently reviewed and refined through discussions between the authors. For example, through several revisions of verbatims, we came to the consensus that goals such as teaching participants 'to stand up for themselves' and 'self-reflection' were forms of autonomy and therefore coded as such.

Researcher positionality

All observations and interviews were conducted by the first author. He was raised in an immigrant family in Amsterdam Slotervaart, and has been active in football and boxing since childhood. His background and familiarity with many of respondents' habitus contributed to his connection with their language, manners, ideas, and sentiments.

Findings

As described above, four interrelated topics are distinguished from the interviews: background, role perception, goals, and values. Within the topics, we identified the following themes and subthemes that were conceived as patterns of shared meaning united by a central concept or idea (Braun & Clarke, 2020). This is illustrated in Table 1. Below we discuss and illustrate the findings for each topic.

Table 1. Identified topics, themes and subthemes.

Topics	Themes	Subthemes (where applicable)
Background	Personal details	
	Social class of respondent	Low, Average, High
	How respondent became sport coach	E.g. Via family, Sport club, Own initiative
	Education	Low, Average, High
	Motivation	E.g. Career oriented, Heroes Journey
	Sport type	E.g. Basketball, Football, Boxing
	Sporting level	Recreational, Mixed, Performance oriented
	Socioeconomic status of participants	Low, Medium, High
Role perception	Personal coaching, Sporting development, Organizational	
Goals	Sport skills	E.g. Passing, Defending
	Character development	Discipline, Resilience and Autonomy,
	Connection skills	Social abilities and Aspirations.
Values	Sport related qualities	Fun, Technical sport quality, Challenging activities, Organization
	Caring relationships	Personal involvement, Positive communication and feedback, Bonding, Role modeling, Involving parents

Backgrounds

The youth sport coaches reported diverse personal backgrounds that corresponded with their context, especially social class and related themes such as perceived social exclusion in their own past. Youth coaches who grew up (and usually remained) in disadvantaged areas such as Amsterdam New West looked back on a socially challenged or even marginalized youth characterized by relative poverty, lack of guidance and a subsequent sense of frustration. Remarkably, all these coaches narrated a *hero's journey*; they had overcome their challenges and learned to accept or deal with them. For example, Nourdin immigrated from Morocco at the age of 13 to the Netherlands, where he initially felt alienated and marginalized. He then became involved in sport (futsal) where he developed a broad social network, social skills, and cultural knowledge. Despite adversities and setbacks, he was proud to eventually earn a BA in Education, forge a career as a PE teacher and own a gym.

At the other end of the spectrum, coaches from affluent areas such as Hilversum described their upbringing in positive terms. Many of them grew up and have continued to live in affluent areas, perceiving themselves as having a privileged childhood and youth. For both these cohorts and those in between, the coaches' backgrounds explicitly and implicitly serve as a platform for their ideas and practices as youth coaches.

All 32 respondents have been devotedly engaged in sport since their youth and considered their sporting experiences to be important dimensions of their lives and, in particular, their decision to become a youth coach. In this study, the coaches tended to live in the same environment that they grew up in, suggesting that typical contexts have typical coaches. The coaches have remained active in the same or similar sports, types of sport clubs, sport levels and local districts. Accordingly, they described the community and youth that they work with as similar to those from their own community and youth.

Role perceptions

All coaches provided clear task descriptions primarily focused on leading practice sessions, coaching during competition matches and, in many cases, taking care of broader organizational matters. These included *participating in meetings and assisting in practical matters*, for example, *coordinating transport during away games* and *maintaining accommodation*.

Coaches in disadvantaged contexts who tended to deal with marginalized youth added a non-sport dimension to their task and role, that is, 'personal coaching' (life mentoring). This manifested in diverse activities such as providing *individual consultation* about matters outside the field, *maintaining contact* with parents/caregivers, *financial aid* and, as observations revealed, providing *involvement in day-to-day matters*. Much of this support resulted from requests from the participants or their parents/caregivers, or was intuitively derived from their own life experience. This is illustrated in the following from the interview with youth coach Gregory:

> You will see that for boys, Surinamese, Antillean, Moroccan … when the mother is single, he [the boy] comes to you a lot. The mother will be calling or texting you: " … he misbehaved at school", or "he doesn't listen to me, help me … ". I tell the child, "I'm doing my best for you"; I am here for you. I leave my wife and children at home to make you a better football player. … But [when] you are being rude to your mother, I'm a little bit done with you. … When he [the boy] knows that we have contact, his behavior at home gets ten times better. So, you get so much responsibility … .

This finding resonates with principles of sport-based positive youth development (e.g. Holt, 2016; Kay, 2009), and ethics of care (Debognies et al., 2019), in which educational values, harmonious relationships and child centeredness are key foci. It also resonates with scientific recommendations for constructive youth sport coaching. These include the intention and competency to create necessary conditions that foster positive youth development (e.g. Holt et al., 2017; Kay, 2009) and a focus on enjoyment (Gano-Overway & Guivernau, 2014; Schipper-van Veldhoven, 2016).

These empirical findings further support literature that reports coaches' pedagogical orientations (e.g. Kochanek & Erickson, 2020; Newman & Alvarez, 2015) and challenge the aforementioned views that youth sport coaches typically lack pedagogical perspective (e.g. Anderson, 2010; Hyman, 2009) and that youth sport is subjugated by a hard-hearted and negative sport culture. For example, across all sport types and levels, youth sport coaches strongly opposed 'winning at all costs' (Baar & Wubbels, 2013; Nucci & Young-Shim, 2005) and condemned aggression amongst participants and colleagues.

Goals

Youth coaches perceive sports as more than a game or physical endeavor; rather, it is a way of life that provides learning opportunities for development and wellbeing. Coaches explained how they perceive sports as 'society in miniature' (Mo), and a 'model for life' (Nourdin), where participants get the chance to practice and experiment in a safe environment. Further, sport-related concepts such as dealing with winning and losing, finding creative solutions (especially in football), maintaining balance and a straight posture (e.g. in martial arts) serve as metaphors or lessons for life. This finding is illustrated by the following quotes from youth coaches Nourdin and Daniel.

Nourdin: … with sports you really have to deal with people, [it's] dynamic, anything can happen. Sometimes it is impossible to make sense of it. But you can really learn to work together there. … In a team you have to cooperate, … you have a mixture of agreements, sharing the same feeling, having purpose. That is monitored by each other and the trainer; it is exactly [like] a society.

Daniel: … for example, how people stand. Women who are always leaning their hips a bit, we really try to unlearn that. Because even before the fight, someone is going to assess you [based on] how you stand. That determines whether someone is going to see you as a victim. … As a woman, if you stand in a certain way … you come across as more vulnerable.

Altogether, the reported goals are strongly pedagogically-oriented, focusing on wellbeing and the development of participants rather than sport-related success and progress. In accordance with this idealistic view on sport, youth coaches reported diverse pedagogically-oriented goals. Undoubtedly, these goals held different meanings in different contexts and in conjunction with other goals and notions of youth sport and, clearly, all contextual and conceptual nuances cannot be conveyed within the space of this discussion. However, for the purposes of this analysis, conceptually-related goals are grouped as follows: (1) sport skills; (2) character development; (3) connection skills; and (4) pedagogical values. The following text explains these goals and their mutual relations.

Sport skills

Development of sport skills is often talked about in terms of goals and outcomes, especially in performance-oriented sport clubs such as Ajax and AZ where coaches frequently relate this to broader development such as developing a healthy body and lifestyle. Respondents in this current study, however, stressed that the development of sport skills was closely aligned with pedagogical values and conditions such as caring relations, player safety and fun:

Orlando: But you can also achieve your goal with great pleasure, can't you? Football is fun. It starts with fun!

Lars: Especially in the meantime [between exercises], I make jokes every now and then, you know, and then you immediately see the whole group becomes hanging on your every word. If you have that bond and you [know when to] joke around a bit, then they feel that [motivation] much more than [when] you are only demanding. … that's kind of that fun-learning idea.

These quotes made in performance-oriented contexts highlight how youth sport coaches can perceive sport skills development as a goal that is provided by pedagogical conditions such as having fun and bonding with participants.

Character development

Youth sport coaches consistently considered character development to be a central goal, with subthemes related to *discipline*, *resilience* and *autonomy*. Particularly in a disadvantaged context, youth coaches considered discipline to be an important aspect of this goal. The coaches often explained it as dedication to sport, generally linked with notions of obedience to the rules and to acceptance. Coaches interpreted acceptance as the ability to cope with adversity, such as sport-related misfortune and perceived injustice, including bad refereeing. They alerted participants to the need to recognize and accept such situations and processes without having to protest against or change them. In sporting terms, this is often referred to as "not letting it get to your head". Coaches also mentioned that acceptance is an important strategy to deal with adversity outside the sport context, including social inequality and injustice, discrimination, and other forms of marginalization.

> Mo: That most things are not fair [is something] you have to accept. … you can do two things: you can stick to thinking it's unfair. Or you can make sure … it doesn't bother you anymore.
>
> Daniel: I also literally [think] you must try to behave and not show protest. Because you are lagging behind. You are less likely to be accepted.
>
> Ishaan: Last year we played against Roda JC. There, a referee raged against our boys: "You surely leech on welfare in Bijlmer [a supposedly deprived area.]" … I teach them … if you look at the bigger picture, [you realize] that [protesting] might not be the solution. I'm teaching them to rise above that … . It's not that we approve [racism], we just learn that the moment you rise above it, you end up being the better person.

A closely-related aspect of character development, among coaches across youth sport contexts is developing *resilience*. This is often mentioned explicitly, probably because it is part of sport vocabulary. The coaches' reoccurring interpretation of this goal was mental ability (often referred to as 'mindset') that is, to pursue goals despite adversity and insecurities. Several coaches highlighted diverse subsequent or intertwined abilities, such as the ability to cope with loss and allow oneself to make mistakes as a way to learn and develop.

> Lars: For me very much, [it is about] being allowed to make mistakes, but also just doing something you are not very good at, so that you become good at it … . Yes, you can call it dealing with resistance … . Then you become more resilient or something … .

As with the aforementioned aspects, youth sport coaches' understanding and prioritizing of resilience is strongly entwined with their perceptions of society and their background narratives. Subsequently, they generalized the relevance of resilience to life outside the sport context. For example, Gregory explained how he teaches youth participants to pursue their goals, despite being discriminated against based on ethnicity and skin color.

> They didn't like black people. Now, they can't make it to the European or World Cup without black people [in the National team]. They didn't want Moroccans. Now, the best player in the Netherlands is a Moroccan. … Whether they like it or not, the world has changed, and we shape that world.

At the same time, coaches mentioned stimulating autonomy amongst participants as an aspect of character development, and explained how they teach participants to make 'their own' non-coerced choices, be self-reflective and, ultimately, take responsibility. Often, coaches translated this to emancipatory behavior such as breaking with stereotypical masculine (sport)culture, asking 'why' questions, verbalizing one's ideas and feelings, and standing up for oneself in democratic and non-violent dialogue.

Some youth sport coaches in this study reported aspects of character development that appear contradictory, with their perceptions of autonomy seemingly at odds with the primary goals of discipline and obedience. However, a closer analysis shows that this dichotomy is more nuanced. Coaches widely regarded discipline and obedience as goals that should be balanced with autonomy, and that discipline was in fact a precursor of autonomy. This will be discussed below in terms of its pedagogic value.

The coaches' prioritizing and understanding of discipline, resilience and autonomy seem strongly entwined with their perceptions of society and their background narratives. Correspondingly, youth sport coaches valued the development of social abilities and aspirations as an important condition for becoming a 'valued member of society'.

Connection skills

Youth sport coaches also outlined connection skills as an important goal of their coaching. They aimed to develop social (peer) networks and social attitudes amongst the participants, alongside maintenance skills. This is often expressed as openness to cultural diversity, standing up for each other, resolving quarrels and giving respect.

> Sanne: Yes, I think that is the important thing for me. That they learn to communicate towards each other, me and the other trainer. And that they indicate what they want. That when you are in pain, you ask for things.
>
> Zaid: Also social skills, like communication skills. … How do you deal with feedback? How do you give feedback? Do you think in assumptions? [like] 'Ewa he puts me on the bench, [so] he hates me.

As another aspect of connection skills, coaches aimed to broaden participants' social world to develop positive aspirations. They did not explicitly express this aspect; rather, they did so implicitly by talking about how they inspired participants to take a more positive view of their abilities and opportunities. Some coaches reported that they stimulated this aspect through diverse strategies, such as introducing role models and encouraging participants to explore their talents.

> Brahim: We try to tell them that everyone is good at something … that they should try to discover those talents. … Look, all they are interested in is what's on TV or YouTube. … It's all about guns and fast money. … But I try to show them something of that world outside. Therefore, I often use role models. … They are sitting here now and they have a very low self-esteem, because they are pupils of [name of urban college] … I then say: No, you can become whatever you want. I have an old colleague who I also invite as a role model who started in practical education … and now is a gym teacher.

Upon elaboration, youth sport coaches reported that, as with discipline and autonomy, they perceive the development of social abilities and aspirations as an important precursor for becoming a valued member of society.

The findings provide insight into how youth sport coaches' perceptions of youth sport are related to their life world and background narratives. Particularly in contexts of marginalization, youth sport coaches expressed comprehensive ideas on how sport relates to the recurring theme of 'becoming a valuable member of society', which adds to our understanding of social inclusion through sport. In this regard, findings show a contradiction or nuance at least. On the one hand, coaches view social exclusion as a social inevitability that their marginalized youth must learn to accept, while on the other hand they perceive social inclusion as something that can be stimulated or earned by developing social abilities and aspirations. This alludes to Schuyt et al.'s (2000) notion of social exclusion, that is, a subtle slide of people to the margin of society that manifests itself in them being unable, not allowed or unwilling to participate in key societal domains. Youth sport coaches felt that participants' feelings of being unable, disallowed or unwilling to enter these areas could be transformed through coaching. Moreover, the coaches' idea of willingness (agency) as an ability that can be stimulated through sport corresponds with the concept of 'capacity to aspire', which Baillergeau and Duyvendak (2017) describe as the outcome of personal needs and cultural values that can be socialized by agents such as youth coaches.

Pedagogical values

Through explaining their role perceptions and coaching goals, youth sport coaches implied diverse coaching values. In addition, the coaches expressed explicit values that they held as a normative

base for their envisioned pedagogical sport climate and consequent actions. Although coaches seemingly lacked pedagogical jargon, their reported values were strongly pedagogically-oriented, revolving around (caring for) participants' wellbeing and personal development. The pedagogical values identified in this study can be grouped into two themes: Technical sport quality and Caring relationships. In terms of the former, coaches valued being able to provide technically sound, challenging, and fun sport activities, and caring for broader club interests. The latter entails a more layered and complex set of values to stimulate personal development and wellbeing. In this regard, positive communication and feedback were mentioned frequently, as was 'personal involvement'; that is, maintaining caring relationships with participants. Coaches also valued bonding amongst the participants, involving parents/caregivers, and being a good role model. However, coaches reported diverse and often contradictory ideas about their coaching style. For example, some coaches reported that while they valued discipline, resilience and authority, they also encouraged autonomy in participants. In many instances, coaches who mentioned diverse values seemed to be seeking a balance among them.

Discussion and conclusion

In the introduction, we stated the scientific and practical need for contextual understanding of youth sport practice (e.g. Evans et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2018, 2020), especially in the context of youth sport clubs that serve marginalized youth (Schaillée et al., 2017) and in contexts such as Dutch youth sport where coaches are predominantly untrained volunteers. Therefore, this article explored the pedagogical perspectives of youth sport coaches, focusing on their role perceptions, coaching goals and underlying pedagogical values. Methods complied with recommendations from relevant research, such as using a qualitative, open-ended approach and differentiating contextual factors of youth sport, by including diverse types of sport, sporting levels and socioeconomic locations in the Netherlands (Newman et al., 2020).

Results showed that youth sport coaches have strong pedagogically-oriented perceptions that resonate with principles of sport-based positive youth development (e.g. Holt, 2016; Kay, 2009) and ethics of care (Debognies et al., 2019) in which educational values, harmonious relationships and children's wellbeing are placed at the center. This study adds to our contextual understanding of youth sport coaches' perspectives within their practice. This understanding provides an important basis to further develop current youth sport programming and to train and guide youth sport coaches to maximize the positive impact of youth sport (Gould & Carson, 2008; Kochanek & Erickson, 2020; Newman et al., 2020; Newman & Alvarez, 2015; Santos et al., 2018).

This research aims to inspire future research concerning coaches' (pedagogical) perspectives on youth sport. In line with Newman et al. (2020), the findings show that coaches' perceived role, goals and values strongly correlate with their background and the context in which they operate. This highlights the importance of a more comprehensive understanding of the patterns of convergence and divergence in coaching values across diverse youth sport contexts. In turn, this prompts further questions as to what degree a particular context requires or produces a particular type of coach, and what influence this has on the pedagogical quality of coaching. While youth sport coaches can use their experience and deep understanding of their specific sport context and its participants for effective coaching, operating within a closed context may hinder the development of a diversity-oriented pedagogical sport climate (e.g. Spaaij, Knoppers, & Jeanes, 2019). For example, coaches' emphasis on acceptance rather than emancipation amongst marginalized youth might reproduce a self-marginalizing mindset. Similarly, coaches' appreciation of developing 'resilience' might do little in terms of acknowledging youth's lived social inequality, injustice, and the need for social change, or stimulating their ability to negotiate challenging circumstances. Indeed, this idea of youth needing to be more resilient based on their social background could reinforce a history of marginalization (Outley & Blyth, 2020). This also calls into question how youth sport coaches' intentions

and efforts are interpreted by participants, and to what extent and how they contribute to coaches' intended goals.

Furthermore, one can ask to what degree youth sport coaches translate their reported pedagogical values into practice. To put it simply: do they practice what they preach? To study this, an integrated concept of pedagogical sport climate is helpful. Although several dimensions can be derived from concepts such as motivational climate (e.g. Curran et al., 2015), caring climate (e.g. Fry et al., 2012) and sport-based PYD approaches, it seems that theory is still somewhat fragmented in the context of youth sport. Dimensions emanating from diverse frameworks have varying levels of specificity; some dimensions can be considered as a general vision, while others can be interpreted as actual conditions, process outcomes or concrete actions. A coherent and practical framework for this area of enquiry is yet to be developed.

This research also has practical implications. The findings support the notion that youth sport exists in a social, cultural, and political context that affects sport practice, including youth sport coaches' perceived role, goals, and values. This highlights the importance of taking contextual factors and relevant social issues into account for youth sport policy and coaching education. For example, the current Dutch policy that advocates for the broad stimulation of a pedagogical sport climate at youth sport clubs should be made relevant and translated for specific contexts, rather than be a generic, top-down policy. Coaches' notions of the pedagogical sport climate can further be used to assist the development of youth sport policy in general and effective training of youth sport coaches in particular. Youth sport coaches' experience, expertise and pedagogical orientations suggest that research and policy should not be developed simply *about* or *for* them, but rather *with* them. Their perspectives, as documented in this article, can inform the development of pedagogically-oriented sport practices and positive developmental outcomes for participants in meaningful ways.

Note

1. In this research, pedagogy refers to promoting the holistic development of youth in accordance with their development phase (Newman et al., 2018; Tinning, 2008). However, the degree to which values, climate conditions and orientations are 'pedagogical' depends on the orientation of intention.

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Data availability statement

The de-identified data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to their containing information that could compromise the privacy of research respondents.

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Appendix A: Interviewed youth sport coaches

Alias	Club No.	Sport	Target group	Sporting level
Emma	1	Boxing	Disadvantaged	Mixed
Gabriel	3	Jui Jitsu	Mixed	Recreational
Daniel	4	Karate	Mixed	Recreational
Anna	5	Kickbox	Advantaged	Recreational
Chantal	6	Kickbox	Disadvantaged	Recreational
Erica	7	Gymnastics	Advantaged	Performance-oriented
Sanne	8	Hockey	Advantaged	Recreational
Lianne	2	Hockey	Advantaged	Mixed
Esmee	9	Hockey	Advantaged	Mixed
Lars	10	Football	Mixed	Performance-oriented
Kamal	11	Football	Disadvantaged	Mixed
Abdelkarim	11	Football	Disadvantaged	Mixed
Younes	11	Football	Disadvantaged	Mixed
Nourdin	12	Football	Mixed	Mixed
Frank	13	Football	Mixed	Mixed
Rayan	14	Football	Mixed	Performance-oriented
Michael	15	Football	Advantaged	Mixed
Klaas	15	Football	Advantaged	Mixed
Rolf	15	Football	Advantaged	Mixed
Andre	15	Football	Advantaged	Mixed
Marissa	16	Football	Disadvantaged	Recreational
Clarence	16	Football	Disadvantaged	Performance-oriented
Orlando	16	Football	Disadvantaged	Performance-oriented
Gregory	16	Football	Disadvantaged	Performance-oriented
Ishaan	16	Football	Disadvantaged	Performance-oriented
Fouad	17	Futsal	Disadvantaged	Performance-oriented
Mo	17	Futsal	Disadvantaged	Performance-oriented
Brahim	17	Futsal	Disadvantaged	Performance-oriented
Hussein	17	Futsal	Mixed	Performance-oriented
Raymon	17	Futsal	Disadvantaged	Performance-oriented
Mohamed	17	Futsal	Disadvantaged	Performance-oriented
Zaid	18	Futsal	Disadvantaged	Recreational