Supporting High Performance Athletic Students Balance Sport and Education:

An Examination of the Teacher’s Role

by

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Abstract

The demands placed on high performance student athletes (athletes who perform at a competitive level) continue to intensify (Conzelmann & Nagel, 2003) and finding a balance between athletic and educational responsibilities can be a significant challenge (European Commission, 2004). When students are unable to find a balance between their athletics and education responsibilities, they run the risk of decreased performance in at least one of these areas. I decided to complete qualitative research that examined the role that teachers play in supporting high performance athletes in balancing sport and academic responsibilities. I discovered that limited research has been conducted on the role that teachers play in supporting high performance athletes with their sports and academics. The research indicated that various aspects could influence high performance athletes’ inability to balance their sports and academics. My research examined how private secondary school teachers promote and support a more balanced orientation to athletic and academic development; ultimately, aiming to provide valuable information to teachers on how to do so. This research was conducted through a two-phase, qualitative study. The first phase involved individual interviews with three teachers and three student athletes. The second phase involved paired interviews with the same student athletes and teachers. Three core themes emerged from this research related to teachers’ support for high performance athletes: (a) flexibility, (b) relationship, and (c) support. With the application of these three themes, it is believed that teachers can better assist student
athletes in balancing their athletics and education, which will result in a positive outcome in both areas.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

As an athlete and educator, I have faced the challenges of finding a balance between sport and school responsibilities throughout my life. As a youth I played on various competitive sports teams, both in and outside of school. I spent 4-8 hours travelling to and from sport activities each week and up to 10 hours competing and practicing. With so much time dedicated to sports it left me with limited time to do homework, prepare for classes, or study for tests. Although, I left myself with limited time, I was committed to achieving my full potential both academically and athletically. I knew if I wanted to meet my academic goals in life I had to figure out a way to balance my passion for sports and my school requirements. I often found myself completing homework in the car or on the train while making use of various resources such as audiotaped books. Balancing all that was required became a constant challenge for me.

Additionally, I often found myself questioning if what I was doing was good enough. My results as an athlete were great, I was making all the teams I wanted to, never missing practices or games and enjoying being on the teams. My education, however, didn’t come as easy. I often struggled to find time to study, and would just barely submit assignments on time. I found myself rushing the work I was doing, and never feeling like it was ‘good enough.’ This became a constant pressure throughout my education.

Looking back, I think of what ‘good enough’ meant to me, and who supported me in striving for my ‘good enough.’ It is easy to remember teachers who did not support my
athletic and academic balance, teachers who got annoyed when I missed class for a sporting event, or who wouldn’t take an interest in my athletic life. It is more challenging to think of teachers who helped me find balance and provided support to me, both academically and athletically. However, I remember one grade 9 teacher who was an athlete himself. He was never a coach of mine but always supported my love and enthusiasm for sports. He never hassled me when I had to miss class on a Friday to leave for a hockey tournament and he would even modify due dates to accommodate my athletic commitments. He congratulated me on doing as well as I was academically while being as busy as I was in sports. I remember him taking me aside once and saying “looking at your grades you would never know you are as busy as you really are, you should be proud of yourself.” He helped me define what ‘good enough’ meant for me by taking into consideration all aspects of my life. This encouragement assisted me in achieving a balance between academics and athletics.

My experience as a student athlete and now my position as a teacher have led to my interest in exploring the teacher’s role in assisting athletic students balance academic responsibilities and athletic commitments.

Research indicates that demands placed on high performance student athletes (athletes who perform at competitive level) continue to intensify throughout school (Conzelmann & Nagel, 2003) and finding a balance between athletic and educational responsibilities can be a significant challenge (European Commission, 2004). When students are unable to find a balance between their athletics and education
responsibilities, they run the risk of decreased performance in at least one of these areas. A decrease in academic performance in most schools results in the student being withdrawn or strongly encouraged to disengage from sports. Alternatively, if students focus too heavily on their academic studies, then their athletic performance and skills may suffer. The student is challenged by an expectation to flourish in two consuming areas; whichever aspect the student chooses to favour, some aspect of their growth and development may be compromised (Lavallee & Wylleman, 2000).

1.1 Purpose

This research recognizes the relationship between two competing goals—high performance athlete performance and academic success—and seeks to explore how teachers support students in finding a balance between the demands of sports and academic studies. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to examine how teachers support high performance athletes in balancing sport and academic responsibilities. This research is guided by the following research questions:

a) How do teachers and high performing athletic students describe the relationship between sport and academic priorities?

b) How do students and teachers view the role of the teacher, if at all, in helping high performance athletic students with the relationship between sport and academic responsibilities?

c) What challenges do teachers face in supporting high performance athlete students in their overall growth and development of a student athlete?
1.2 Thesis Structure

The structure of this thesis begins with an introduction that not only identifies the main points of the thesis but also alerts the reader to the potentiality of the topic presented. This is followed with chapter 1 which is a background of why this topic was chosen and of interest to the writer. The sharing of personal information and personal reflection leads into a thesis statement that articulates the purpose of the study and defines the scope of this study. Chapter 2 presents an examination of previous research, which is used as a guide throughout the study. This section is followed by chapter 3, which discusses the methodologies of the study. Chapter 4 discusses the analysis of the data and chapter 5 presents a discussion on key findings.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

To effectively understand the relationship between athletic performance and academic success, it is necessary to examine the educational experience of the student-athlete (in contrast to the non-student athlete) based on previous research. There is evidence that student athletes’ have increased responsibilities and greater complexity in their commitments in comparison to other students (Watt & Moore, 2001). In high school they, like other students, must meet academic requirements (i.e., attend classes, complete homework), join in social activities, and achieve their volunteerism and community service hours. However, they must also practice their sport several hours per day, travel for competitions, and be conscious of their diets and physical wellbeing. Student athletes are also well aware of the importance of maintaining a good academic average so they can get into universities and colleges to continue their sports post-secondary school (Watt & Moore, 2001). These increased demands potentially provoke stress for student athletes, and suggest the need for establishing a supportive community so that they can achieve both their academic as well as athletic responsibilities (Miller & Kerr, 2002). Teachers can serve as a key support structure for these students; however, limited research has been conducted on the role that teachers play in supporting high performance athletes with their sports and academics (Watt & Moore, 2001).
In this chapter, I review literature that relates to the various aspects of student athlete experiences at school and their support mechanisms. I begin by examining the historical characterization of student athletes by looking into who a “student athlete is” and what their role has looked like. I then examine the commercialization of sports and the impact that plays on the academic admission standards. From there I look at how academic performance is impacted by athletics. I then look at how student athletes are influenced by parental pressure and expectations. Finally I examine how the expectations and pressures of the educational intuitions play a role.

2.1 Historical Characterization of Student Athletes

By beginning with a historical context of the world of sport, I set the stage for understanding the dynamics and pressures on all those who have a stake in the student athlete’s success. In 1936, Kurt Lewin stated that “behaviour is a function of the person and their environment” (Watt & Moore, 2001, p. 9). To understand the experience of the athlete it is necessary to view the athlete not only as an individual but an individual who is straddling multiple contexts (e.g., home, school, social life, training/competition).

It wasn’t until the nineteenth century that competitive intercollegiate postsecondary education sports were introduced in the United States (Watt & Moore, 2001). Organized competition didn’t start until 1840 and then became much stronger leading to the emergence of national organizations 40 years later. A rapid growth of sport in Canada happened between 1914 and 1960 (Mair, 2007). Organized sport has gradually intensified over the years resulting in the commercialization of sport. Student athletes
have become a significant focus within this sports movement and a commodity in school cultures (Mair, 2007). As a result, researchers have raised concern over the education of student athletes, arguing that their education is no longer about their personal development but potentially their worth in the sports industry and school environment (Mair, 2007; Watt & Moore, 2001).

Historically, athletes and non-athletes were viewed as two exclusive kinds of students, it was generally accepted that the athletic student wouldn’t survive in an academic world (Eiche et al., 1997). There was a perpetuation of stereotypes (e.g., ‘dumb jock’), where athletes could be heroes but little was expected of them intellectually. The athlete’s sole responsibility was to play sports supported by their parents, their coaches, their teachers, and the media. Teachers tolerated them and often under the pressure of the coach awarded them passing grades even if they weren’t meeting the basic academic standards (Goldman, 1991). Adler and Adler (1987) found that the subculture and social environment among National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division 1 men’s basketball players was anti-intellectual, with low expectations for academic success and little conversation about academic, cultural, or intellectual pursuits (Geiger, 2013). Geiger (2013) also points out that the “dumb-jock” stereotypes are held by faculty as well as the student body, and that this may contribute to the lowering of academic expectations of student-athletes. If an athlete did perform well academically, the people in his/her life would express surprise (Lapchick, 1987-88). Essentially athletes would become victims of a system that willed them incompetent in venues other than sports. As
a result, many youth lost their chance at an education because they bought into a system that pushed them to develop their athletic skills and largely ignore their educational potential.

In today’s sports culture, athletics is big business making athletes marketable commodities. Millions of dollars are spent advertising at major sporting events, millions of dollars are paid to broadcast games and the merchandizing of sporting products is multinational. As James Duderstadt (2000), former college football player and President of the University of Michigan notes, “some universities take advantage of their student-athletes, exploiting their athletic talents for financial gain and public visibility, and tolerating low graduation rates and meaningless degrees in majors like general studies or recreational life” (p. 5, 6). Exploitation of high school athletes was the norm for many years due to a growing commercialization of sport. As a result, student athletes may experience higher pressures at school to not only perform academically but to a high level in their sports activities (Mair, 2007). Students themselves buy into the commercialization of sport, which may skew their focus from academics to sport (Geiger, 2013). As recognized by Harper and Quaye (2009, p. 283), “Intercollegiate athletics in the United States, especially NCAA Division 1 athletics, have become highly commercialized, with some programs, particularly in the sports of men’s football and basketball, generating millions of dollars in revenue through media coverage, television deals, advertising, and maximum attendance at their games and events.” At the core of this sports business is the high performing athlete. The pressure on the athlete to perform
is immense; supporting a balanced orientation toward student athletes’ academic and athletic development is critical (Mair, 2007).

Over the years, the whole issue of athletes who are under-prepared academically being given special allowances has created many debates. “Some NCAA institutions have been known to admit student-athletes who are under-qualified or under-prepared academically for the tradeoff of winning championships” (Harper & Quaye, 2009, p. 284). Today, there is an increasing pressure on institutions to ensure that the student achieves and meets academic requirements. The student could be caught in the middle of two worlds; trying to achieve optimal performance as an athlete and meeting academic requirements.

However it is important to point out that Canada has taken a different approach to that of the NCAA in the United States. “The CIS (Canadian Interuniversity Sport) has been committed to maintaining the educational integrity of intercollegiate athletics, encouraging Canadian universities to have their intercollegiate athletic programs be part of the faculty of physical education, along with intramurals and recreational sports services” (Houwing, 1974, p. 8). They have attempted to minimalize commercialization and place the overall development of the student as their primary objective. Although a noble objective, the result has been large numbers of Canadian Students migrating to the United States in search of the opportunity to achieve athletic opportunities. For example, during the 2012-2013 academic year, approximately 3,500 Canadian athletes were enrolled in NCAA institutions competing in sports offered at CIS universities (Johnson,
2013). Somehow, neither approach is meeting the needs of the high performance athlete and they are caught in the middle trying to find a balance and achieve the goals they have set for themselves both academically and athletically. The student athlete could be in the position of choosing education over athletics or vice versa. Historically, athletics and education were viewed as two separate entities and as a result there are many lingering perceptions. The biggest impact historically is the commercialization of sport which requires further investigation.

2.2 Commercialization of Sport

As previously mentioned, in the United States, athletics have become highly commercialized, with some sports generating significant revenue through the marketing of the sport. Harper and Quaye (2009) point out that men’s football and basketball generates millions of dollars through various sources such as television deals, media coverage, advertising and attendance at the sporting event. Media coverage alone translates into big business for post-secondary education athletic programs. The increased media attention and great reputations attract a larger pool of potential athletes from which to draw thereby increasing overall revenue for the University. When athletics are viewed as revenue generating for Universities, the competition for student’s increases and the pressure on athletes intensifies. The increased revenue does enable universities to engage and recruit the best athletes from around the world through scholarships. As a result, in the United States, this opportunity has encouraged educational institutions to now invest significant dollars to recruit and develop the best high school athletes from around the
world. This in turn can potentially cause coaches and others to do what they can to alter standards or academic expectations to get the best possible athletes (Geiger, 2013).

While operating on a different scale, Canadian colleges and universities are not blind to the role that sport can play in building a sense of pride and affiliation among students, faculty and community or to how such attachments translate into sources of revenue. Given that funding dollars in higher education in Canada has been gradually decreasing over the past 20 years, universities and colleges are left in a position of finding alternative sources of funding with sports becoming an additional revenue source. Government funding was significantly cut in the mid 1990’s and remained flat through 2002/3 and has been slowly recovering in recent years (Clark, et al., 2009). The decrease in government funding has caused Universities to consider alternative means of accessing funding. Given that athletics can greatly increase the brand of an organization, Canadian institutions like the United States Universities have also invested significant dollars in the recruitment and development of strong athletes.

The opportunity for enticing scholarships has attracted many Canadians to pursue their post-secondary education in the United States. In my experience, large numbers of Canadian high school graduates move to the states to pursue their athletic goals. Hence the growing commercialization of sports in higher education has a ripple effect on high school athletic preparation. Many high schools are now trying to prepare high performance student athletes for sports and higher education. This added pressure not only has the potential to increase student anxiety levels but also displace high
performance student athletes’ focus on academic development. A study into how student athletes are supported to balance academic and athletic responsibilities is needed, given the growing commercialization and industrialization of sports and education.

2.2.1 Impact of Commercialization on Academic Admission Standards

An issue that can’t be ignored is the impact that commercialization has had on academic institutions specifically admission standards. Many universities and colleges over the years have decreased the admission standards for athletic students to obtain a larger pool of talent from which to draw (Greiger, 2013). Greiger (2013) highlights that over the past thirty to forty years there has been a debate about changing admission requirements for athlete students. The debate on the admission preference given to athletes has caused many organizations to revisit their policies and practices. Harper and Quaye (2009) identify the priorities amongst athlete-focused schools stating that certain NCAA schools have been known to allow student-athletes who do not meet the entry requirements or are under-performing academically to participate in athletics for the trade-off of winning championship. The unfortunate fact is that athletic administrators have become more focused on winning rather than graduating students who could achieve academically and become employable (Geiger, 2013). In the past, activities such as transcript tampering, academic fraud, and similar academic infractions were taking place at campuses across the country. Many studies show that very few educational institutions were immune to this stereotype. Crowley, back in 1930, published a paper entitled, *Athletics in Colleges*, where he questioned how a university focused on securing
teams could maintain the vigour of its intellectual purpose (Watt & Moore, 2001).
Crowley’s (as cited in Watt & Moore, 2001) paper is cited in the context of questioning
the commercialization of sport and the disgrace of using sport in this regard. However,
given that it was written in 1930 he could essentially still be viewing sport and education
as mutually exclusive. If so, he essentially is segregating sport and academics
contributing to and reinforcing the stereotype that the two are exclusive.

From my experience in Canada, the situation is somewhat different. A university
coach in Canada can recruit a strong athlete from high school, however the student still
has to meet the same academic admission standards as other students. In order for
student athletes to be eligible to received an athletic scholarship covering fees in their
first year they must obtain an 80% academic high school average upon entry of university
(Canadian Interuniversity Sport, CIS, 2011-2012). Every year thereafter, student-athletes
must achieve a minimum of a 65% average, or 70% for OUA student-athletes (CIS,
2011-2012). Canadian universities have not taken advantage of the opportunity to
commercialize their athletic programs so as to maintain the integrity of their academic
programs. As early as in 1974, Houwing pointed out that the CIS has never wanted to
become like the U.S.A. in terms of developing a commercialized intercollegiate athletic
system tainted with academic infractions. Canada has minimized commercialization and
instead has focused on the development of the student. This approach, has in fact
contributed to and reinforced the stereotype of one activity being more important in this
case academics being more important than sport. Houwing (1974) continues to point out
that, “in addition, the CIS has been committed to maintaining the educational integrity of intercollegiate athletics, encouraging Canadian universities to have their intercollegiate athletic programs be part of the faculty of physical education, along with intramurals and recreational sports services” (p.8). The interesting fact is, the higher education institutions fail to recognize the valuable role that sport plays in the learning and the development of the student. Maintaining a position of sustaining the educational integrity of the institution has caused Canada to lose many athletes to the United States (Greiger, 2013). Although educational integrity is important, there is more to developing students’ intellect and enhancing their learning experience. Most recently, Canada has been reviewing policies to determine if in fact there should be more attention to the attraction of athletes.

In summary, to understand the experience of the athlete it is necessary to view the athlete not only as an individual, but as an individual within an academic and environmental context. Exploring and understanding the personal and environmental factors that shapes their experience will enlighten educators and others on ways to alter the culture. The tension between academic and athletic requirements can greatly impede a student from achieving their personal best. Assisting the student in balancing academics and athletics allows them to achieve their personal best in both. The following discussion reviews the experience of an athlete as an academic, the impact of elements in his/her environment and how the interaction of two shapes their educational experience.
2.3 Academic Performance

A preliminary scan of the literature highlights many claims about the impact of high school athletics on academic performance; however, very few actually base their claim on empirical data. Many studies have failed to consider the variety of factors that can influence student academic performance such as students’ commitment to sport, the influence of the school, and the degree of academic engagement with the high school. Little research has been completed on the resources available to the student that could assist them in being successful. There has been some work, however completed on the variations in demographic and social factors that may indicate a difference in the performance of athletic students (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Some studies have indicated that differences in environmental factors have an impact on academic performance (Comeaux, 2005, Gaston-Gayles & Hu, 2011) whereas other studies focus more on non-cognitive factors that influence academic performance of athletic students (Ting, 2009; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Bowen & Levin, 2003; Pascarella et al., 1996; Ryan, 1989; Sellers, 1992; Shulman & Bowen 2001). Although this research has informed our understanding of the athlete, it fails to explain the impact of the interaction of multiple elements. Critics of school athletics view sports as interfering with a student’s ability to perform academically. In fact, they often report that the significant time and energy demanded of athletes is a major barrier to academic excellence. Evidence suggests that American intercollegiate teams train and compete up to 20 hrs per week and that this is strictly governed by the NCAA (NCAA, 2012-2013, p. 241). In Canada, we have the Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS) league, however they do not govern the
amount of time an athlete trains but research indicates that Canadian athletes typically spend the same amount of time training and competing as NCAA athletes (Miller & Kerr, 2002). Therefore, there is concern that student athletes in Canada may not have a strong balance between academic learning and their sports commitments. Accordingly, teachers and others need to find ways to support students in their striving towards both athletic and academic development.

Researchers have also argued that there is a positive impact of athletics on academic performance. “Supporters of high school athletics respond that critics lack evidence for their arguments [against sports] and that sports play a critical role in the growth and development of students” (Bowen & Greene, 2012, p.2). The literature reveals that students who participate in sports during high school tend to do better academically. One study considered not only the effect of athletics on academics as a participant in sports but also the impact athletics plays on those in the school who do not participate in athletics. The results of this study concluded that if the high school offers more sports the school tends to do better overall academically (Brown & Green, 2012).

Two schools of thought are found in the literature and both are from the same researcher. One poses that social capital is a key to overall academic success in schools and the other proposes that schools have to first have a focus on academics (educational integrity) before encouraging athletics. The previous study supports Coleman’s (1988, 1990) social capital theory that schools with more social capital foster greater academic outcomes for high performance student athletes (Bowen & Green, 2012).
In addition to the potential for academic performance, other benefits of sports engagement have been identified in the literature. Athlete students are less likely to drop out of school in comparison to students who don’t take part in sports and they have higher aspirations for post-secondary education (Bowen & Green, 2012). In general, the athletic student has lower absenteeism from school and they are diligent in completing their homework (Bowen & Green, 2012). High school students that participate in sports have higher grades and standardized test scores in mathematics and language arts courses (Broh, 2002) and these athletes tend to have better earnings later in life (Bowen & Greene, 2012). The NCAA started collecting stats in 1983 on graduation rates across all divisions in the United States. The results of the data indicate that the athletes had a higher graduation rate. Zimblist (cited from Watt & Moore, 2001, p.10) points out that, “Since 1983, student athletes’ rate of graduation has improved over time.” Watt and Moore (2001) indicate, “in 1998, the graduation rate of all Division 1 student athletes who entered in 1992 was 58%” (p. 10). Given these identified benefits of athletic engagement at school, there is a desire to maintain students’ commitments to sport; not displace them for greater academic engagement. Hence, I argue that balancing sport and academic priorities is critical to ensure that students achieve academically, remain engaged in school activities, and develop into more elite athletes. The difficulty is that the above benefits may not be occurring for all high performance athlete students and teachers may not be providing the necessary supports to ensure a balanced orientation between athletic and academic development. Given that the term “balanced” could be
very different for varying students, the objective becomes providing an environment that supports the student in finding a balance that satisfies them.

2.4 Parental Pressure and Expectations

Limited research has been completed on how parents impact their child athletes however significant research has been completed on parental influence over academic performance, social development and emotional wellbeing. To fully comprehend the total students experience it is necessary to investigate parental influence and the role that parents play.

“Despite the clearly important role that parents play in youth sports, the research on family socialization in the sport context is relatively limited” (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004, p. 145). With increased attention to sports, the expense of post-secondary education, an intense pressure is placed on athletes and teams by parents and many community members. A strong message from parents and educators is that athletes can get their education paid for; get into some of the best schools and gain fame and attention in their communities. Many parents assume their child, if good enough at a sport can earn a College scholarship that will pay for their full education. If the child earns a full scholarship they save money and avoid debt. At a very young age, the student athlete recognizes their interest and will to participate in sport and is encouraged by parents to start competing even prior to elementary school. The parents feel they have invested significantly and are looking for a return on their investment. These items alone can propel parents to push and pressure their children. Based on this literature, I argue that
unrealistic parental expectations of a child’s performance can create further pressure for their children and later influence their ability to balance athletics and education.

There are reasons to believe that parents do have a significant role to play in their children’s life when it comes to sport. Through their own beliefs and practices, parents can provide children with opportunities and teach children values that can influence their choice of different activities and goals (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Applying the research of parental influence to another domain is a relatively logical connection like the relationship between academics and athletics.

Many parents recognize the importance of social development in their child’s overall development. They frequently place their children in playgroups at a very young age and often register them in organized sport. Howard & Madrigal (as cited in Fredricks & Eccles, 2004) point out that “it is typically the parent (usually the mother), who enrolls children in their first sports program. Many parents coach their children in sports and attend all their games as a spectator, coach on the side or as their child’s cheerleader.” Parents who live through their child’s accomplishments can put excessive stress on the child (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Young athletes feel the stress that adults bestow upon them and don’t have the psychological development to deal with it. “A mismatch in sports readiness and skill development can lead to anxiety, stress, and ultimately attrition for the young athlete” (Markel, 2013, p. 152).

Developmentally young athletes do not recognize that their self-worth is based on more than the outcome of the activity. Research is now supporting that if a person is
under pressure, they are more anxious and self-conscious about their performance, and, consequently, try to exert more control over their actions and they don’t perform as well. Scanlan (as cited in Fredricks & Eccles, 2004) points out that, “because athletics is a highly public context, parents have several opportunities to provide immediate and specific feedback to their children.” The parents can influence a child’s experience and their enjoyment of the sport. If there is unrealistic expectations and too much pressure the outcome can be very negative for them and inhibit them from achieving optimal development.

Horn and Hasbrook’s (as cited in Fredricks & Eccles, 2004, p. 146) research indicates that “the younger child relies much more on parental feedback whereas older children rely more heavily on social comparative sources.” Parents expose their children to sporting events, signing them up for additional lessons and by purchasing toys and equipment. This early exposure influences the child’s interest and ability. Parents can also influence a child’s motivation level by encouraging or in fact by discouraging their experience. Although positive reinforcement has long been thought to reinforce specific behaviours, too much positive reinforcement can actually decrease behavior. Deci and Ryan (as cited in Frendricks & Eccles, 2004, p. 149) identifies that “excessive positive reinforcement that is not linked to the quality of children’s performance can decrease the likelihood that they will participate in the activity in the future.” Striking a balance of positive reinforcement or encouragement that is specifically related to performance has the most impact. Positive motivational outcomes can be the result of appropriate
feedback and praise from ones performance (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Eccles (as cited in Fredricks & Eccles, 2004) argues the expectancy–value model where parents adjust their behaviors in response to the child’s interest, aptitude, performance and their stereotype of gender. Parental behavior sets an expectation for the child and can greatly influence their interest or performance in an activity.

Parents can influence children’s behavior in sport through their own belief and value system as well. The relationship between parental beliefs, children’s motivation and achievement have all been well established in the educational literature (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Parents who believe that males are better at sport than females will influence their daughter(s) and their choice of sport. The same can be true of males not being encouraged in a sport that was traditionally considered a female sport. It is common for parents of adolescents to hold gender-stereotyped beliefs, often believing that males have more athletic ability than females (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Gender-stereotyped beliefs have been a significant focus of research and will not be the focus of this paper. However, the impact of gender stereotyped beliefs and its influence on children cannot be understated. Through longitudinal data, the researchers Fredricks and Eccles (2004) provided evidence that “When parents had high expectations for children’s sport ability, children had less dramatic declines in their self-concept over time” (p. 152).

There continues to be concern in the literature about the impact of parental pressure. Brustad (as cited in Fredricks & Eccles, 2004, p. 151) recognizes that “behind much of this research has been a concern over the high level of stress, anxiety and
burnout experienced by some young athletes.” One study documented a correlation between motivation to play soccer and lower maternal control (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). For some parents their own self-esteem is connected to their child’s athletic performance, which results in a focus on winning and being number one. Research is starting to identify the impact of parent’s excessive involvement in sports. Coackley (1992) reported that highly accomplished athletes whose parents made great commitments of time and energy most frequently experience burnout. Clearly, parents have significant influence over their children’s academic and athletic performance. If one is weighted heavier than the other it could offset the balance between academic and athletic performance.

2.5 Educational institutions expectations and pressures

Again, to truly understand the experience of the athlete, the student athlete and the educational environment must be taken into consideration. The two elements are critical and could be a predictor of student performance. In my experience, many high school programs are emphasizing competitive performance rather than athletic development, which is limiting the full potential of the athlete. In response, I have noted that some schools provide additional services to support the struggling student.

In a worst-case scenario, teachers report that there is pressure in some schools for them to make an allowance for the high performance athlete. Beem (2006) cited, the pressure school districts encounter from parents and community members to produce winning programs. As cited, evidence indicates there has been limited change
historically. The pressure to win gives rise to lower academic expectation for student athletes. White (2005) found teachers were pressured by school officials to award passing grades to student athletes. Halley (2007) cited the findings of a federal judge, who found grade tampering and inexplicable exam, retake options for select student-athletes at one high school.

Some coaches emphasize winning at all costs and will do what it takes to recruit or retain a particular student. There are schools that pressure teachers to make exceptions for student athletes. These exceptions potentially leave students with the perception that academics are secondary to athletics: Students don’t perform to their full potential because it is not expected. Unfortunately it’s the student that suffers in the end when schools or post-secondary institutions lower standards of academic requirements in order to support the athletic development. Accordingly, lowering academic expectations and making exceptions for student athletes may perpetuate the “dumb jock” stereotype for student athletes (Geiger, 2013).

There is a vast amount of research that paints a clear picture that student-athletes identify strongly as athletes before they identify as students (Houle, Brewer, & Kluck, 2010). If students identify as athletes first than it is likely that priority is placed on sport and academics may suffer. Additionally, the act of trying to balance athletic schedules and educational commitments creates a level of stress that often leads to the student-athlete choosing the former most often (Brewer, Raalte, & Linder, 1993). Watt and Moore (2001) point out that often these choices can be a positive factor in retaining
student-athletes, it can also have very harmful effects on the student-athletes in other areas as they may become stagnated. It appears that, for the student the only way to cope with the dichotomy of sport and academics, is to let one go (Watt & Moore, 2001). My research examines how teachers promote and support a more balanced orientation to athletic and academic development; ultimately, aiming to provide valuable information for teachers on how to better support student athletes.
Chapter 3

Methods

The purpose of this research was to examine how teachers support high performance athletes in balancing sport and academic responsibilities. Previous research (Caulley, 2007) has indicated that a qualitative study would provide valuable data on the lived experiences of student athletes and the supports they need from teachers in order to be successful in both academics and education. Therefore, I investigated this purpose through a two-phase, qualitative study that used interviews to examine teachers’ practices in supporting high performance athletes. The first phase, involved individual interviews with teachers (n=3) and student athletes (n=3). The second phase involved paired interviews with the same teachers and student athletes.

3.1 Participant Selection

Initially, three urban athletic focused schools were identified based on the following criteria:

1. Schools were private schools (i.e., to enable increased access and ethics expediency);
2. Schools must have had an athletics program; and
3. Schools must have been located in an urban center (i.e., population of >1000).

The selected schools were located in South-Eastern Ontario. Once the schools were identified, school administrative staff (principal or vice principal) were contacted
and asked to nominate two high performance athletes to participate in the study. Specifically, school administrators were asked to “nominate two high performance athletes (athletes who compete at a competitive level).”

Based on their list of suggestions, I randomly selected one student from each of the three schools for participation in the study. The students were then contacted and asked to nominate two teachers who he/she felt contributed to his/her success as an athlete and as a student. Based on the student’s recommendation, I then selected one teacher at random for the study. Each selected student and teacher pairing constituted one case. This study targeted students and teachers at private athletic schools. In total, 3 pairs were identified for participation in Phase 1 and 2 data collection across three school sites. The three selected school sites were Hubert College and Clint College both located in Eastern Ontario as well as Westney College located in Central Ontario. As such, the data included three school sites with one student and teacher at each:

- Hubert College: Grade 10 student named Adam and his head teacher, Joanne.
- Westney College: Grade 12 student named Matt and his teacher, Ryan.
- Clint College: Grade 10 student named Lindsay and a math teacher, Rob.

At Hubert College I interviewed a grade 10 student athlete named Adam and his head teacher Joanne. Joanne was not currently teaching Adam but she played a vital role in assisting him with motivation and organization to keep him on track. Adam is a high-level slope style skier for team Ontario and will be trying out for the National team. During the winter months, Adam is very busy travelling for skiing with daily fitness
training and practices. He also plays a variety of schools sports, one where he made it to the provincial finals. Adam has set both athletic and academic goals for himself continues to improve in both areas.

Ryan and Matt were interviewed from Westney College. Ryan and Matt have known each other for many years; Ryan teaches and coaches Matt. Matt was in grade 12 when he was interviewed, he plays hockey and lacrosse competitively. He is the captain of the hockey team and won the athlete of the year award. Matt has won the provincial championship with his hockey team and continues to play both sports at a highly competitive level. Matt recently got accepted into an Ontario University where he hopes to pursue business studies and play on the lacrosse team.

At Clint College, I interviewed Lindsay and Rob. Rob is a Math teacher who has never taught Lindsay but is well aware of her accomplishments, both academically and athletically. Lindsay a grade 10 student is a competitive rugby and soccer player, playing on both school and club teams. Lindsay plays school soccer with the boy’s team as she finds it more competitive, she also plays in the highest level of competitive soccer with a club team. In rugby Lindsay’s school team has played in the provincial finals and she also trains with a University level team. Academically Lindsay has set a goal for herself to maintain a minimum of a 90% average to get into an Ivy League school in the United States where she can pursue her academic goals as well as her athletic ones.
3.2 Data Collection

A two-phase data collection protocol was used to identify teachers’ roles in supporting high performing athletes balance academic and athletic responsibilities. These phases are described below.

3.2.1 Phase 1: Individual Interviews

In the first phase of the study, I conducted individual interviews with three students and their teachers individually from three different schools. The interviews were semi-structured and the interviewees were provided with the topics and issues in advance with hopes of keeping their interviews fairly conversational and situational. In addition, each individual was provided with the key interview questions (see Appendix A) prior to the interview. The interviews focused on the student teacher relationships in regards to the student’s education as well as their athletics. I explored the actions the teachers take to help student athletes balance their sport and education. I used the interviews to get specific examples of how they feel this is accomplished. The individual interviews took place at the interviewees’ schools and each interview took approximately thirty minutes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed to allow a more thorough examination of what was said in the interviews. All students and teachers were provided with a letter of information and asked to sign a consent form prior to any data being collected.

3.2.2 Phase 2: Paired Interviews

The second phase of the study consisted of semi-structured interviews with the student/teacher pairings (i.e., interviews that involved both students and teachers
together). Paired interviews provided me with an opportunity to observe the interactions as well as the relationship between the student and teacher. An interview guide was developed and distributed prior to the interviews. The interviews focused on the student’s and the teacher’s personal experiences as well as their thoughts on what is required to help student athletes balance their sports and education. The interview took twenty to thirty minutes in length. The interviews were recorded and transcribed to allow a more thorough examination of what was said in the interviews.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using an inductive thematic approach. Data were first inductively coded. The researcher developed and defined coding categories. The approach involved the reading and re-reading of themes that were developing through the study to ensure a comprehensive review (Rice & Ezzy, 1999). The transcript of each interview was carefully reviewed and analyzed. Each transcript was summarized outlining the key points made by each participant in response to the interview questions. Additionally, the data were coded according to the labels identified for the coding process. The data collected from all the interviews were integrated together, then organized to identify recurring themes or patterns. Themes were generated by collecting similar codes or based on co-occurrence. Codes and themes from the individual interviews and paired interviews were compared. There was a high degree of consistency in the themes between individual and paired interviews. This information along with
participant direct quotations were organized into a table to demonstrate the relationship between data, codes, and themes (see Table 4 in Appendix B).

### 3.4 Ethical Clearance

All data for phases 1 and 2 received ethical clearance from the university ethics board and from private schools in alignment with their research ethics policy. Appendix D provides the Queen’s General Research Ethics Board’s clearance letter. For privacy and confidentiality purposes, pseudonyms were used to replace the actual names of all participants and the names of schools. All participants received a letter of information and signed a consent form prior to participation.
Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this research was to examine how teachers support high performance athletes in balancing sport and academic responsibilities. Specifically, I used the following three questions to guide my results analysis:

1. How do teachers and high performing athletic students describe the relationship between sport and academic priorities?
2. How do students and teachers view the role of the teacher, if at all, in helping high performance athletic students with the relationship between sport and academic responsibilities?
3. What challenges do teachers face in supporting high performance athlete students in their overall growth and development of a student athlete?

In this chapter, data from interviews are presented to respond to these research questions (i.e., thematic analysis as presented below). In summary of these findings, data from this study suggest that athletes recognize the importance of succeeding in both academics and athletics. They acknowledged that to achieve success in both areas, significant sacrifices on their parts and supports from teachers are required. For example, student athletes in my study reported that their social life suffered as a result of their athletic commitments. Athletic students recognize that in order to get into the best schools, or to access scholarships, they must sustain a good academic average in addition to excelling at their sport. The athletes in this study seemed to exercise significant self-
discipline in order to sustain both. Interestingly, the athletes that were interviewed demonstrated significant maturity in presenting their goals and aspirations related to both academic and athletics.

Teachers who have been athletes themselves recognized the sacrifices required of students and tended to be more flexible in adjusting their expectations of students. Rob identified that “if you have a high performance athlete who is a high performance student who is setting a pretty high standard of where they want to go, you have to go above and beyond what other people are doing and most often they recognize this.” All of teachers in this study expressed that at one time they were athletes, with some still participating in various recreational sports. They were all very clear about students meeting their academic requirements but were also willing to adjust timelines, alter testing schedules, and provide additional supports to ensure the student athlete could manage his/her expectations. These teachers all encourage their students to pursue athletics and provided supportive accommodations so that students could be successful in both sport and school.

The second research question that guided this study asked, “How do students and teachers view the role of the teacher, if at all, in helping high performance athletic students with the relationship between sport and academic responsibilities?” The student athletes interviewed clearly articulated their responsibilities in the process of managing and balancing athletics and academics. Although, teachers played a role in their view, the students recognized that they had to build a relationship with each teacher in order to obtain the support they needed. Lindsay made this point clear when she pointed out that
as the student it’s your responsibility to demonstrate to the teacher that you are committed, and that she said was the first step to a relationship. When students didn’t feel supported by their teachers, their distress increased and they looked to other individuals to help them through difficult situations. For example, one student expressed significant distress when he couldn’t resolve an issue with the teacher and had to obtain the support of his parents to deal with the situation. He indicated that this did alter his ability to re-engage the support of this teacher. Most teachers recognized that they play a role in assisting students in balancing sport and academics, as well as alleviating some of their stress in balancing these two important aspects. Some teachers went to great lengths to adjust their evaluation approaches to allow the students the flexibility to meet academic expectations and to reduce unneeded stress for students.

The final research question that was addressed in this study was, “What challenges do teachers face in supporting high performance athlete students in their overall growth and development of a student athlete?” As evident from this study, there are many challenges that teachers face in supporting high performance athlete students. Teachers require tremendous flexibility and patience. In particular, these teachers were required to provide alternative assignments, additional resources, and alternate evaluations methods; all of which places additional pressure on a classroom teacher. The teachers may also have to open up their hours of availability and be open to the idea of online or email submissions of assignments and tasks. The teachers may face the challenge of being open and taking an interest in something they may not have before.
The above research questions were asked with the aim of identifying common themes that can help guide teachers’ practices to support high performance athletes in balancing sport and academic responsibilities. Below I present the thematic analysis results for this study.

4.1 Thematic Analysis

Based on inductive analysis of individual and paired interviews across students and teachers, three common themes emerged: flexibility, relationships, and support. These themes were consistently represented across individual and paired interviews as well as between students and teachers. Each theme is discussed below and elucidated with direct participant quotations.

4.1.1 Flexibility

Nearly every participant expressed flexibility as a key way teachers supported student athletes. In particular, flexibility was described in relation to assessments, attendance, curricular expectations, and deadlines.

All the high performance student athletes reported that they have very busy schedules due to the many demands on their time as an athlete and as a student. Training, team development and actual competitions require significant amounts of their time. As well as being involved in external sports, many are also active in school-based sports. One student Adam noted, “I ski competitively outside of school but at school they want me on all the teams so I play soccer, basketball, rugby and track.” These demands require flexibility, which is most important in relation to the completion of assessments.
Assessments were described as coursework tasks such as homework to more formal summative tests and assignments.

Flexibility around assessments was viewed as important because of the degree of absenteeism for student athletes. One student athlete, Adam, stated, “I miss a lot of school, like up to a month at once.” Time and scheduling issues result in absences from school on occasion or having to leave school early or arrive late. The school teachers interviewed recognized the students’ athletic abilities, and they want and encourage these students to take part in school sports as well; however, they acknowledged that sports require time away from class for the students and possibly for them if they are coaching.

Ryan spoke about his experience as a coach and teacher, “having coached at a high level (resulted in) a lot of time out of the classroom for not only the coach/teacher but for the student as well. I did a lot of teaching on the bus trips, I was team coach, strength coach, and tutor.” The combined requirements on their time over and above academic requirements create significant challenges as the students indicate that all missed time must be made up. Adam talked about being away for sports and trying to complete schoolwork, stating “it can be hard when others aren’t doing homework.” He was referencing being away for ski training with other people who were not in school and therefore did not have homework.

Missing class is particularly difficult for these students when they are absent for an assessment task. Having to make up assignments or complete a test within a given amount of time creates significant stress for the students. Students feel like they need to
make a difficult decision in these instances as both academic and sport responsibilities are a priority for these students. One student, Lindsay, stated, “when I have free time at school for example I can’t always being doing what I want to do I may have to go see a teacher because I’m missing class for sports. It is a lot of sacrifice and time management.” These students recognized that they have to excel at both academics and athletics, not just meet expectations but exceed expectations. One student Matt, noted that “valuing them both, athletics and education the same, taking pride in both areas, not letting one over shoot the other is important.” Not only do they experience pressure from their team, their coaches, and others, but they feel the pressure from their classroom teachers to complete all academic requirements in spite of their absences. For example, student Adam noted that, “I have to get all my work done or I loose marks.”

A teacher, Rob, pointed out “we as teachers don’t always set up a student for success as we find it a burden to have to write up a different exam or test however that little bit of extra time and flexibility can make a huge difference for a student athlete.” Rob explained that although teachers want to support all students in the classroom, the demands are increasing and their availability is decreasing. Matt speaks of his experience as a student-athlete, “my English teacher was good to give me extensions if I needed it.” Matt recognized that his teacher valued his athletic ability and was willing to be flexible when it came time for tests and exams. The teacher recognizing and understanding Matt’s need to be a good academic student and athlete relieved some pressure and allowed an openness to work out a viable solution and option for assessment. This left Matt feeling
more comfortable and supported. Matt stated, “he (his teacher) appreciated what we were doing for the school with sports, he was more understanding and accommodating.”

Clearly the teacher has a responsibility to ensure the student is meeting educational expectations thus inadvertently creating additional pressure for the student and the teacher. The high performance athlete is also very aware that they must be solid in education if they want to go anywhere with their sport thus creating personal pressure. Lindsay stated, “the schools that I want to go to are very academically demanding, so that makes me very academically demanding of myself.” It appears that in the educational settings researched, the responsibility is on the student to figure out the best choice and how best to manage these situations.

Lindsay reflected on her experience at Clint College, particularly looking at this past semester. She discussed how Rugby OFSAA (Ontario Federation School Athletic Association) fell at the same time as their exams. She said in this situation the teachers didn’t have a choice, they had to write a second exam as there were many students away. As a result, teachers let students come in on the weekend to write their exams. “Clint College is very accommodating for all students who have conflicts with exams” expresses Lindsay, something she appreciated as she felt it helped her be more successful in both her academics and athletics.

Some student-athletes don’t always have as pleasant an experience as Lindsay. Matt reflected back on one teacher in particular who did not appreciate him missing his summative assessment for a sports commitment. “There was one teacher last year who
was my science teacher, I made it to OFSAA for track and field, and I was missing a summative, she said I had to be at the summative, so it was either one or the other.” Matt recalled being very upset and unsure of how to handle the situation; he let his parents know of the situation and they were not happy at the teacher’s lack of flexibility. Matt’s parents ended up calling the head of the school, who subsequently discussed the issue with the teacher. Matt was able to attend OFSAA that year and wrote the summative at a different time. This conflict created a challenge for Matt and placed him in a very difficult situation. It also placed the teacher in a very difficult situation preventing her from managing her class in the manner she saw as most appropriate. Matt mentioned that he felt like he and the teacher didn’t get along as a result of this conflict and that it could have been partially due to the fact that she didn’t see much value in the athletics he was doing. “I see that it was a hassle to have me write a summative at a completely different time then the rest of the class, seeing as we were supposed to do it in class with a partner but I really never got along with that teacher” Matt commented. Regardless, both the teacher and the student were caught in a difficult situation that would ultimately impact their varying perceptions of the event and the learning environment.

When the topic of flexibility was brought up to Clint College teacher Rob, he was quick to mention how teachers can be flexible with not only the days that exams are written but also the value of exams and summative assessments. “Sometimes as a school we can help them, maybe don’t make them write an exam but make their summative worth more,” Rob commented. He pointed out that you “can’t change the curriculum,
everyone needs to be taught the same materials but that you can be flexible with the weight of exams and summatives.”

Flexibility was described in relation to other curricular and educational situations. For example, Rob discussed how it is possible to have flexibility with evaluation without hindering the curriculum guidelines. “In certain subjects, you might be able to lighten the load. In English, if you’ve already evaluated their essay writing, maybe for the second essay they can just write their outline, you already have evidence of their writing so it’s essentially evaluating the same expectations” states Rob. He points out that this may not be possible in every subject area but where it is possible it should be considered because this form of flexibility within assessment can create less stress on a student athlete by lightening their load.

Students identified the importance of teachers not being rigid in their approach to their students. Ryan supported this assumption. “Being flexible for me is the most important but I think being an active role model, a lot of my teaching comes from experience” commented Ryan. Ryan felt that you should challenge your athletes in the classroom but with an understanding of what they are taking on both in and out of the classroom. An increased understanding of the students’ challenges in managing a very active life supports the students and contributes to their success. A teacher being flexible recognizes these challenges and demonstrates to the student how things can be managed and achieved.
Joanne supported Rob’s idea as she pointed out the importance of “looking at what are the main pieces of assessment that you need from a kid who is not there all the time and collect those essential pieces.” Joanne mentioned though that teachers have to ensure the student understands the value of what they are missing. Adam, Joanne’s student, valued the flexibility that he receives from his school. Adam pointed out that a lot of his learning is done online; “Moodle, I work off of that a lot. Usually they give me an idea of what I am going to be missing and they often just have me do projects that I am going to be missing and if it is math, I just do the math work I am missing. I try to keep up with a lot of the things.” Joanne recognized that ultimately, the way teachers accommodate Adam is really up to them. “If he has missed something and he says to the teacher I really need these formulas, can I bring these formulas in then I am sure the math teacher would say absolutely. It would be dependent on the teacher.”

Ryan, a teacher at Westney College, pointed out that teachers could prepare for the absences of their students if they know ahead of time. Ryan says although you can’t alter your expectations you can accommodate them. Specifically, Ryan stated:

“Accommodating a program for me is really important to showing a kid that there can be a balance and that they can work at a pace that they can be successful. Modifying is if you don’t have to write that test because you were absent those days, and that will not fulfill the curriculum…so I don’t want to cut corners on the curriculum end but I also want to be fair, for whatever reason…you sustain a concussion and you’ve been out of the classroom for three weeks and you’re in the recovery process, I can’t expect you to be up to speed in just one week.”
Students like Lindsay understand the difficulty of teachers having to accommodate: “it is harder because it means more re-adjusting for them and they have to put more effort into helping that student succeed.”

Another area of flexibility that the students identified was *flexibility with deadlines*. Summatives and exams frequently have strict deadlines, which can often put added pressure on high performance athletes. If a teacher or school can allow some flexibility with these deadlines the students feel they will perform better academically. Rob (teacher) pointed out that teachers need to be reasonable with their expectations when it comes to deadlines. He considers the following when providing flexibility around a deadline or assessment: “Are the students ready to write that exam, are they capable of completing that summative?” Rob identifies this type of flexibility as consideration for the specific needs of students: “there has to be consideration given for when they are not going to be ready to write stuff. What is a reasonable expectation and that differs from teacher to teacher but what would be a reasonable time line for getting caught up on stuff.” Adam feels that his teachers are less strict about deadlines but that it is because he has proven to them that he will get the work done: “I think they are a little less strict on due dates, like I finished my summatives the same day as them, I just sent them in at night. Usually if it is just homework then I can show them whenever I get back.” When speaking with Adam, he felt that flexibility with deadlines was crucial for him. However, Rob (teacher), points out that he has seen many students who had teachers not willing to be flexible about deadlines. “Generally, not all teachers are willing to give, however, if
they see the student is working hard and meeting the requirements they will be flexible. They still have to meet the same standards though, they have to produce the same work, it could be on a different timeline though” Rob commented. Accordingly, all flexibility is ultimately up to the teacher. Through this research both the teachers and the student identified the importance of flexibility. Teachers indicated various ways the teacher could alter their practices to be more flexible and responsive to student needs. Both identified the importance of the student engaging the confidence and willingness of the teacher to do so.

4.1.2 Relationships

It became quite evident when speaking with students that it was important for them to have a relationship with their teachers. Through positive relations they were able to express concerns, stress, and seek advice. They felt that they needed support from their teachers and that this support would only come from those teachers with whom they had a strong relationship. The students felt that part of the relationship building process had to come from their teachers taking an interest in what they did outside of their academics. One student Lindsay noted, “the teachers have to be willing to accept and take the time to have those relationships with each of the students.” In particular, the following codes were associated with the theme of relationship: showing interests (outside of the education), open communication and school community/family.

Lindsay, an athlete who competes for both school and non-school related teams felt that a relationship with your teacher can help motivate the student to learn. She
stated, “your athletic growth comes from your coaches but academically if your teachers show support for you athletically then you will be more motivated and grow academically.” All participants were in agreement that students tend to have better relationships with those teachers who coach them. Lindsay, among other students, did however mention that if students liked their teachers they would work harder in their course.

As a teacher, Joanne discussed the importance of relationships and how within her school there was a sense of pride for student athletes. Adam, her student, recognized that although not all teachers can help him athletically that their support could go a long way and mean a great deal to a student athlete. “Athletically they are always asking how I am doing, they aren’t so much of a help there, but they are always supportive of what I am doing” Adam pointed out. Lindsay expressed a similar comment and felt that the students could initiate the relationship but that the teachers had to be open to the relationship. “I think it is more on the student but the teachers have to be willing to accept and take the time to have those relationships with each of the students” Lindsay commented. Along with Adam, Lindsay mentioned that it could be as simple as asking how they are doing in their sport or even asking them how their weekend away went.

Rob, a teacher at Clint College, seemed to feel that in order for the teachers to truly understand the life of an athlete the teacher themselves would have had to have played sports or have an interest in athletics. Rob felt that “if the teacher is not a sports person, they didn’t play sports growing up they won’t realize what it means.” He pointed
out that the life of a high performance athlete is very complex and that there will be teachers who will appreciate that commitment. However, Rob further expressed that there could be teachers who see it as an inconvenience: “They don’t realize how much you have to put into it to balance all you are doing academically along with everything else.” Lindsay agreed with Rob, stating, “teachers and even parents, don’t seem to realize how much the student is doing, so yes they are doing school and yes they have this sport but then there is community service and leadership opportunities and then you have to also enjoy life and have a social life.” Her solution to this dilemma was to develop a better student teacher relationship where the schedule of the student athlete would be clearly communicated and where the teachers can understand the effort the student athlete is putting it.

When speaking with the students and teachers, it became evident that there was a need for positive and ongoing communication between the student athlete and their teachers regarding their athletics. Being able to establish a relationship early on where there are open lines of communication seems to be a vital part of the success of a student athlete. “It is a connection through the teacher, open lines of communication are really important” Ryan stated. “Its good if they establish relationships with their teachers early and if you can tell that they are trying early it goes a long way” Rob mentioned when speaking about the efforts of student athletes. All of the teachers seemed to have a similar opinion in that if the students were keeping the teachers in the loop then things would go a lot smoother. Ryan agreed in saying, “I find a kid who is adamant about his academics
as well as his athletics will always make time to email his teacher if he knows he is going to be away for a certain game, tournament, event.” Ryan felt that this type of communication would help the student be successful in the classroom. Open communication elicits a mutual respect between student and teacher thereby setting the stage for understanding and support.

When referring to his specific student, Ryan pointed out that Matt has always been good at communicating with his teachers. “Open lines of communication, Matt has always been really good right back to grade 9 when I was teaching him geography that if there is something on his mind he would come and talk to me even though I knew his dad was in the school” Ryan stated. Matt felt that having open lines of communication with his teachers “helps you feel comfortable and also motivates you, it just creates a good environment.”

Although it was evident that the student had to take responsibility and inform their teachers when they would be away, the role of the teacher in communication also became evident. “I think in terms of facilitating it, having an open door policy with kids is sometimes a lot easier then talking to mom and dad” commented Ryan. He felt that if you are open and flexible then the students will respond well to you and want to contact you if they are going to be missing school. Lindsay couldn’t agree more, “It is important to have a good relationship with all of my teachers just because it lets me be more open with them if I am having a problem, I feel like I can approach them and ask for help. I think if the relationship wasn’t there then I would just suffer quietly.”
Joanne talked about her school and how at it they try to support their athletes. “The teachers here are 100% behind kids like Adam. If he reaches out and says like I was out west and they know he is true to his word then they will accommodate him with whatever he needs but it comes down to building that trust and sense of responsibility from him” Joanne commented. Adam, her student agreed, he felt that his teachers were a guide for him and that he could refer to them whenever he needed. It is this type of support that all students felt was the most significant, the feeling of belonging and openness.

In addition to building an open communication with teachers, evidence from the interviews suggested the importance of building a strong relationship between the school community. When speaking with both the students and the teachers an important part of their athletics and education was feeling like part of a community. For most of the students this came easily with the different teams they played on, however it was within the school which most of them were trying to achieve this sense of community or family.

Adam has had a great experience with his school acknowledging that it is like a family, everyone knows what is going on with his athletics and if he falls behind academically they don’t come down on him hard instead they support him. Adam commented “it is really easy at Hubert, because it is the family.” “I think it is that sense of accomplishment and sense of pride that perhaps that everyone in community feels for Adam,” Joanne, Adam’s teacher stated, “whether he does well or doesn’t do well there is a sense of pride within the community with what he is trying to achieve.”
Lindsay has had a bit of a different experience; although there is a sense of a family within her school there is also a sense of competition and often she does not want to be recognized for everything she accomplishes as it may come across the wrong way. Lindsay feels that because the students are afraid to come across as bragging about their accomplishments outside of school they don’t get recognized for the extra efforts they are putting in. “Schools tend to not recognize the effort someone puts in outside of school and they only give the recognition to students who are succeeding on the sports teams at school” Lindsay pointed out. However she has learned to deal with that, “I think if someone is more humble, staying on track, keeping in touch with teachers then I think that they would have a positive image in their school.” Lindsay’s teacher supports her in saying that it can be a difficult balance but that the school tries its best to recognize all of their athletes. He feels that the teachers can assist in the creation of the school “community or family” by taking an interest in what the student athletes are doing outside of academics and outside of school athletics.

At Westney College, an all boys school, Ryan as a former student and now educator feels that there is a sense of brotherhood within the school and that the students are able to lean on one another. “We are going to try to make them lean on the right kid obviously so that they don’t slip behind and pick up bad habits a long the way” Ryan pointed out. Matt, Ryan’s student, feels that his support system is built up of his family, friends, teachers and classmates. Unlike Lindsay, when Matt returns from a sporting event his classmates are eager to know how it went. “There is a standard you are
expected when you play in the sports, you’re expected to be good, your friends and teammates all hold you to a high standard” Matt stated. But Matt, like Adam and Lindsay pointed out that he wants to do good and not just for personal reasons, “I really want to do well for my friends and for my brother who might be playing on the team next year.” Relationships are a critical component in the acquisition of balance for the student. It is not only about the relationship with the teacher but with fellow students, family and friends. Where there is a culture of support within a school, the students indicated increased motivation.

4.1.3 Support

The final theme that emerged across all the data was support. In particular, support was described as being a foundation that supplies the student athletes with the necessary things to be successful. The necessary things that were identified in the interviews were (a) acceptance, (b) strategies, and (c) availability, these became the codes for the theme of support.

One of the primary factors that assisted athletic students was a teacher’s acceptance and recognition that sport was important and respected. When speaking with the students they discussed how this recognition made them feel as if they were supported. Adam discussed how his teachers were part of his support system, “they are always trying to help me get everything done.” Adam pointed out that it could be difficult to balance everything but that when you have “their support you can do anything.” Clearly a teacher’s acceptance encouraged and motivated these students. Lindsay agreed,
stating, “it is them saying I’m fine with you going to that athletic event as long as you are able to catch up. It is their support that is helping me.” Lindsay, like Adam, felt that the acceptance from their teachers was a crucial aspect because it helped to build a relationship of trust and respect. These students really want their teachers to value their interests and motivation. “The need from the student for the teacher is to be supportive of what they are doing,” stated Lindsey. Conversely, a teacher who was not in agreement with time being missed for sports created significant duress for a student athlete.

In addition to acceptance, students and teachers discussed support strategies. Specifically, when speaking with the teachers it became evident that there were some key tools they used when working with student athletes. Teachers discussed support strategies related to organization and time management to support student athletes. Joanne spoke about organization, “it just means that making sure you are able to support them, which means being organized.” She feels that if the teachers are organized then the students will be organized as well, and be better able to deal with balancing their athletics and academics. Teachers who demonstrate organizational skills and time management become a role model for students. They can greatly influence a student’s ability to manage their own time effectively and efficiently.

Another support strategy that was mentioned is ongoing and immediate feedback for students. Students need to hear how they are doing in relation to the outcomes of the course. Providing immediate feedback is an opportunity for a teacher to talk to the students about how they are coping and managing the many responsibilities placed upon
them. Joanne talked about the teachers ensuring they check in regularly with the students and provide regular feedback. Ongoing feedback allows a student to gauge their learning and performance in relation to the teacher’s expectations, providing an opportunity to encourage a student to take responsibility for their planning, learning, and actions. Matt reported, “teachers need to help you stay on track by providing feedback to you.”

“Trying to make them aware that if they missed an hour of class that’s probably an hour and a half of time that they need to make up” stated Rob. Assisting a student in recognizing that they can alter their plans to manage and meet all the expectations placed upon them is a skill and requires support. Rob discussed the importance of balancing academics and athletics; “I think so, that is where the teacher can help a bit, helping them out with a plan.” Working with the student to develop and/or revise a plan for themselves, is a critical skill for the students to learn. From a teachers perspective Rob indicated “That’s where you can help them out, giving them the information that allows them to make the best choices even though it’s not the easiest choice for them.”

The final strategy of support for student athletes was availability. Students made reference to the availability of the teacher being a great support for them. Adam indicated, “I can always email them and they respond in like 20 minutes, unless it is like 11:30 at night.” Students report that they just need to ask for assistance from their teacher and they will assist them. “If that athlete is willing to help themselves, ask for extra help or extra work in order to catch up then I think the teacher will be accommodating” stated Lindsay. Adam supported this comment by stating, “I email my
teachers and if I need to I can talk to them on the phone personally but I can check what everyone is doing in the class to keep my homework up.” Teacher availability seems to play a significant role in the students being able to keep up with the schoolwork that is happening. Adam talked about the following: “Definitely, academically, my math teacher, I could email her. I emailed her Sunday afternoon at like 12 and she replied within 15 minutes to say she was doing extra help at the school from 2:30-4. She said to come over. I can email my teachers and they are always ready to help me,” stated Adam. Lindsay felt similar to Adam, adding to it the importance of flexibility and a teacher’s willingness to give extensions if required. “Specifically teachers, they are available outside of class time. I can email them at 8 at night if I have question, they are completely willing to give extensions, very flexible and support of what I am doing” stated Lindsay.

The teacher being available to the student seemed to have a significant impact on the student. This availability included not only being accessible outside of the classroom but also being supportive, flexible and willing to support the students in achieving their goals regardless of the traditional classroom approaches. The teacher’s availability to the student was a clear indication to the student that they were receiving support.

In summary flexibility, relationships and support were identified and defined as key themes that both students and teachers recognized as important in their quest for excellence. Flexibility is willingness both on the part of the student and the teacher to work respectfully to achieve a reasonable plan and approach that allows both parties to achieve their goals. The student is able to meet academic requirements while pursuing
their athletic goals and the teachers is content that the student has met academic requirements and expectations. This flexibility is more likely to be successful if there is a good relationship between the teacher and the student. Students in this study recognize the importance of their relationship with their teacher and the impact this relationship can have on their ability to achieve both academic and athletic success. The students took ownership for this relationship and discussed various ways to build and sustain the relationship. Support as defined by the students combined the elements of a good relationship, mutual understanding resulting in a willingness on the part of the teacher to support and make themselves available to the student. All the former were clearly key elements to making this experience work for all parties.
Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the teacher’s role in assisting the athletic student in achieving a balance between academic achievement and athletic performance. Much of the previous research indicates that students experience challenges successfully achieving in both academics and athletics (Bowen & Green, 2012). An exploration of previous scholarship identified a number of factors that influenced both the teacher and the student to adjust their expectations to enable athletic students to succeed academically and in sports. Historically, teachers felt pressured by coaches and others to overlook academic performance to sustain the athlete’s role on a team (Goldman, 1991). My research study allows educators to consider the role that both athletics and academics play in preparing a student for college, university, or the workplace. Previous research highlights the value of both academics and athletics and the role that the teacher can play in supporting the student in achieving their best.

Data from this study suggest that it is possible for teachers to be supportive agents for student athletes. Through flexibility, support, and building relationships, teachers can enable student athletes to achieve at both sports and academics. Students in this study commented repeatedly on the value of teachers’ supports, which allowed them to pursue a high commitment to athletics. The conclusions made in this study relate to previous literature, which identified that over the history of athletics in schools, it has become more and more competitive to get acceptance into post-secondary educational facilities.
With both students and teachers identifying this, it became evident that there was a connection between athletics and education. In more current research it has been made clear that in order for students to remain eligible to stay in sports they must be strong academically (Canadian Interuniversity Sport, CIS, 2011-2012). In this study the students I interviewed did not report feeling external pressure to perform well academically but indicated they exerted significant pressure on themselves.

In my research there were many examples of teachers being highly available to the student and supporting them on an individual basis. If the school supported a culture of academic and athletic excellence, the teachers’ role in assisting the athlete was greater. These conclusions relate to previous literature, which identified a need for support of students who are actively involved in extracurricular activities (Bowen and Green, 2012). This study found that if teachers are willing to become a support system for the student athletes then it is likely that the students will work harder for them in their respective classroom.

Previous literature also pointed out that there are many different pressures on teachers. When it comes to having a student athlete in your classroom, previous research has pointed out that you may receive pressure from the coaches who can’t have their athletes fail (Geiger, 2013, Goldman, 1991). These pressures on the teachers can lead to them discouraging student athletes.

Data from my study add to the extant literature by presenting the views of both students and teachers in relation to balance and support for student athletes. Upon
completion of the interviews there were three common themes that emerged that were of importance to both the teachers and the student athletes. The themes of flexibility, relationships, and support, all seemed to play a vital role in the success of student athletes. Both the student athletes and teachers felt that in order for the student athletes to be able to perform to their utmost potential these themes needed to be present.

5.1 Theoretical and Practical Contributions

Although much of the literature presents the dilemma of the athlete versus the academic (Geiger, 2013), very few studies have addressed the combination of the two and the role of the teacher in supporting high performance athletic students. This research contributes a unique theoretical contribution for the existing literature by providing a new perspective of how the teachers role can specifically assist the student athlete in sustaining a balance and being successful at both. Past research has shown that it is difficult for student athletes to be successful in both areas due to the high demand of each. However, there is limited research completed on how teachers could play a role in assisting students with dealing with this dichotomy. Theoretically and practically, the present research proposes that teachers can help student athletes to balance their academics and athletics by developing a relationship with the student, being flexible, and supportive.

In addition, the study findings suggest some practical strategies that teachers can employ to support high performing student athletes. Based on data from this study, the following practical strategies were identified by high performing students and their
teachers as ways teachers can support elite athletes balance academic and sport responsibilities:

• Encourage student athletes to be the best that they can in both areas. For example, encouraging them in athletic events as well as educational ones can do this.

• Support student athletes in both education and sport. This means not only taking an interest in what you teach them but also other areas as well as taking an interest in their athletics.

• Appreciate their interests. See the value in where their interests lie.

• Be considerate and flexible. Have an understanding of what their schedules may look like and take that into consideration when creating deadlines, assigning tasks, implementing testing, etc.

• Encourage open lines of communication. Provide students with an opportunity to meet and have a conversation with you. This could be achieved through having an open door policy (where you are available to meet whenever they need to).

• Accept that they are a student athlete and embrace what a student athlete can bring to the classroom. This could be skill sets such as time management, teamwork, etc.

• Be understanding that student athletes have a lot on their plate. Be understanding of the pressures they are under, some you may not even be aware of, this could be academic pressure, athletic pressure, social pressures, etc.

• Provide support and guidance. Be there for them when they need you the most.
• Be open to change. Don’t be close-minded, their schedules may change and that could influence their ability to achieve, be willing to change requirements or methods of submitting work.

• Seek alternatives methods of teaching if needed. Consider using online tools like Blackboard or Moodle as a way to communicate with student athletes who may not be present at the school.

5.2 Limitations

As with any interview study, there are some limitations that the reader should take into account when reviewing the findings from this study. This research did not take into consideration the perspectives of policymakers, principals, educational assistants, parents, or school board administrators. These stakeholders may also play an important role in helping student-athletes balance their academics and athletics. The study is also limited by a modest sample size and therefore it would be important to replicate and further expand this study with a larger population. Accordingly, the study findings are not generalizable. Rather, these finding might provide a reference for others’ experiences and may provide a basis for future research. Increasing the number of participants in future studies would also allow for more advanced analysis. As well, only one data collection method was used in this research (i.e., interviews). This research design could be strengthened through greater triangulation from other kinds of data (Patton, 2015). Lastly, this study only looked at school from the private school board, the research could have been fortified if it were to compare the role of the teacher in the public system.
5.3 Implications for Future Research

Ideally this research will help teachers assist student athletes in their pursuit of both athletics and education. Encouragement and guidance are necessary for the success of any student but especially crucial for student athletes. This research opens up the doors for future research in this area. It would be interesting to see how the public school system differs from that of the private system in terms of flexibility. There would be many ways to compare the ability for teachers to be flexible in the public system compared to that of what was studied from the private system. It would also be interesting to complete a longitudinal study that follows student athletes through their high school career and into their post secondary adventures. This type of study could allow for examinations of teachers who have a positive impact on student athletes and those who do not, and allow for a comparison of what made or didn’t make it a positive impact.

This research aimed to explore the teacher’s role in supporting high performance student athletes in achieving a balance between academic achievement and athletic performance with the goal of being able to provide teachers with practical tools in doing so. Through this research, it became evident that this type of study had not been conducted and that there was a need for it. This study allows educators to consider the role that they can play in assisting the student athletes in meeting their athletic and academic goals. The provided practical strategies are an easy way for teachers to help
student athletes meet their upmost potential without putting tremendous stress on the student athlete or the teacher.
References


Table 1 - Interview Question Guide for Student

*Interview question guide for student*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Corresponding Interview Questions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. How do teachers and high performing athletic students describe the relationship between sport and academic priorities?</td>
<td>1. How do you balance your academic responsibilities with your sports responsibilities?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. How strongly do you value your academics? Your sports?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. What do you think it means to have a balance between your sports and your education?</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. How do students and teachers view the role of the teacher, if at all, in helping high performance athletic students with the relationship between sport and academic responsibilities?</td>
<td>1. What role, if any do you see your teacher playing in assisting you in reaching your goals both as an athlete and as an academic?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Does your teacher assist you in balancing your academic and athletic responsibilities, if so, how?</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. What challenges do teachers face in supporting high performance athlete students in their overall growth and development of a student athlete?</td>
<td>1. How do you think teachers perceive high performance athletes?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Do you feel your teachers support you in the right ways? If so how?</td>
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Table 2 - Interview Question Guide for Teacher

*Interview question guide for teacher*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Corresponding Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| a. How do teachers and high performing athletic students describe the relationship between sport and academic priorities? | 1. Do you feel student athletes can balance and succeed in both athletics and academics?  
2. What skills do you think student athletes have that are transferable into the academic classroom?  
3. Is it important for students to get involved with athletics? Why or why not? |
| b. How do students and teachers view the role of the teacher, if at all, in helping high performance athletic students with the relationship between sport and academic responsibilities? | 1. Do you feel you have a role in supporting students in both athletics and academics?  
2. If so, what tools do you use to support your students’ balancing academics and athletics? |
| c. What challenges do teachers face in supporting high performance athlete students in their overall growth and development of a student athlete? | 1. What difficulties do having student-athletes in your classroom present?  
2. Does having a student-athlete in the classroom change your role as the educator? If so, how? |
### Table 3 - Paired Interview Question Guide

**Paired interview question guide**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Corresponding Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| a. How do teachers and high performing athletic students describe the relationship between sport and academic priorities? | 1. Who do you feel defines academic and athletic excellence?  
2. Do athletics influence academics or vise versa? If so, how?                                |
| b. How do students and teachers view the role of the teacher, if at all, in helping high performance athletic students with the relationship between sport and academic responsibilities? | 1. How do you feel student athletes should be accommodated, if at all for competitive athletic competition?  
2. How can teachers and student athletes work together to achieve academic and athletic excellence? |
| c. What challenges do teachers face in supporting high performance athlete students in their overall growth and development of a student athlete? | 1. Are you aware of any negative stigmas attached to student athletes?  
2. Do student-athletes need support from their teachers when trying to balance athletics and education? |
### Theme Results

**Table 4 - Results (Themes)**

Themes with associated codes and supportive quotes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Supportive Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>• “My English teacher was good to give extensions if we needed it. He appreciated what we were doing for the school with sports, he was more understanding.” - Matt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• “Ashbury is very accommodating for all students who have conflicts with exams, Rugby OFSAA fell at the same time as exams so there was lots of shifting there, moving it to the weekends, etc.” – Lindsay</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• “Sometimes we don’t set them up for success with the idea that it may be easier on us not to write a third exam. Sometimes a little extra time or flexibility can go a long way for student athletes.” – Rob</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>• “Sometimes as a school we can help them, maybe don’t make them write an exam but make their summative worth more.” - Rob</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
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<td>“Looking at what are the main pieces of assessment that you need from a kid who is not there all the time and collect those essential pieces. And ensure that the groundwork is laid in that when he is away that there is not something that he is going to miss out on that is crucial to his learning.” - Joanne</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• In reference to accommodating students... “It is up to the teachers, if he has missed something and he says to the teacher I really need these formulas, can I bring these formulas in then I am sure the math teacher would say absolutely. It would be dependent on the teacher.” - Joanne</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• “Moodle, I work off of that a lot. Usually they give...”</td>
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me an idea of what I am going to be missing and they often just have me do projects that I am going to be missing and if it is math, I just do the math work I am missing. I try to keep up with a lot of the things.” -Adam

- “Knowing a kid may be away for two or three days for a tournament at length and sustain an injury the expectation can’t be the same because it is different. I wouldn’t say alter my expectations, I would say more accommodating. Guidelines, knowing if they are away, if they told me well in advance and they have three test booked on that day then don’t worry about it write you’re other two test and you can write mine another day. At the end of the day we are still going to be covering the curriculum and the course material so I think that stretching out the process, some of the students if they are multi-disciplinary students and an athlete in both seasons, it’s a lengthy year.” -Ryan

- “Accommodating a program for me is really important to showing a kid that there can be a balance and that they can work at a pace that they can see success. Modifying is if you don’t have to write that test because you were there those days, and that will not fulfill the curriculum…so I don’t want to cut corners on the curriculum end but I also want to be fair, for whatever reason…you sustain a concussion and you’ve been out of the classroom for three weeks and you’re in recover process, I can’t expect you to be up to speed in just one week” -Ryan

- “It is harder because it means more readjusting for them and they have to put more effort in to help that student succeed” –Lindsay

- “In certain subjects, you might be able to lighten the load. In English, if you’ve already evaluated they essay writing, maybe for the second essay they can just write their outline, give me this, give me that but you already have evidence of their writing so its essentially evaluating the same expectations where as in math its rare that something is repeated.” -Rob
| Deadlines                                                                 | • “I think they are a little less strict on due dates, like I finished my summatives the same day as them, I just sent them in at night. Usually if it is just homework then I can show them whenever I get back.” - Adam  
• “Generally, not always teachers are willing to give if they see the student is working hard and meeting the requirements they will be flexible. They still have to meet the same standards though, they have to produce the same work, it could be on a different timeline though.” - Rob  
• “Well mostly the academics with the idea of a little bit of flexibility and there has to be consideration given for when they are not going to be ready to write stuff. What is a reasonable expectation and that differs from teacher to teacher but what would be a reasonable time line for getting caught up on stuff.” - Rob |
| Relationship Showing interest (outside academics)                          | • “Athletically they are always asking how I am doing, they aren’t so much of a help there but they are always supportive of what I am doing.” - Adam  
• “Whether he does well or doesn’t do well there is a sense of pride within the community with what he is trying to achieve. We are completely supportive of it. I think it is that sense of accomplishment and sense of pride that perhaps that everyone in community feels for Adam.” - Joanne  
• “I think when you have the relationship and you have the willingness of the student, the growth comes from the teacher, well your athletic growth comes from your coaches but academically if your teachers show support for you athletically then you will be more motivated and grow academically” – Lindsay  
• “I think it more on the student but the teachers have to be willing to accept and take the time to have those relationships with each of the students.” – Lindsay  
• “If the teacher is not a sports person, they didn’t play sports growing up they won’t realize what it means. A lot of teachers will be impressed by what athletes do where as others will see it as an
inconvenience because they weren’t a sports person or part of a team they don’t see the benefit, they don’t realize how much you have to put into it to balance all you are doing academically along with everything else and that is where the balance is such a tricky thing.” –Rob

- “Teachers and even parents, don’t seem to realize how much the student is doing, so yes they are doing school and yes they have this sport but then there is community service and leadership opportunities and then you have to also enjoy life and have a social life. I think a large part of trying to develop the better student teacher relationship is having your teachers and your parents fully understand to what extent you are doing these things and the effort you are putting in.” –Lindsay

- “Someone you’ve coached, sometimes you’ll have better relationships with different people.”–Rob

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open communication</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In reference to his teachers…”They are like a guide for me, so I can always refer to them when I am needing help with anything else.”–Adam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The teachers here are 100% behind kids like Adam. If he reaches out and says like I was out west and they know he is true to his word then they will accommodate him with whatever he needs but it comes down to building that trust and sense of responsibility from him.”–Joanne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It is a connection through the teacher, open lines of communication are really important. I find a kid who is adamant about his academics as well as his athletics will always make time to email his teacher if he knows he is going to be away for a certain game, tournament, event.”–Ryan</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I think in terms of facilitating it, having an open door policy with kids is sometimes a lot easier then talking to mom and dad. If you are an open coach, being flexible and open.”–Ryan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| “It is important to have a good relationship with all of my teachers just because it lets me be more open with them if I am having a problem, I feel like I can approach them and ask for help. I think if the relationship wasn’t there then I would just suffer
| School Community/Family | • “This school is more helpful, the whole school itself is like a family, everyone knows what is going on and if I can’t do something it’s not like everyone is like “oh he can’t do something lets grade him a zero”-Adam  
• “whether he does well or doesn’t do well there is a sense of pride within the community with what he is trying to achieve. We are completely supportive of it. I think it is that sense of accomplishment and sense of pride that perhaps that everyone in community feels for Adam.”-Joanne  
• In reference to building relationships… “it is really easy at Albert, because it is the family.”-Adam  
• “Here we have a big sense of community and brotherhood that they should be able to lean on one another. We are going to try to make them lean on the right kid obviously so that they don’t slip behind and pick up bad habits along the way.”-Ryan |
| Support Acceptance | • In reference to teachers..” Yes, definitely, they are a very big support system, same with my parents they are always trying to help me get everything done.”-Adam  
• In reference to teachers… “with their support you can do anything”-Adam  
• “It is them saying I’m fine with you going to that athletic event as long as you are able to catch up. It is their support that is helping me.”-Lindsay  
• “The need from the student of the teacher to be supportive of what they are doing.”-Lindsay  
• “Typically the students who are the high level athletes are very responsible with regards to reaching out to teachers and getting the support they need. The teachers here are 100% behind kids like Adam. If he reaches out and says like I was out west and they know he is true to his word then they will accommodate him with whatever he needs but it comes down to building that trust and sense of” |
responsibility from him. Then it can be balanced.”

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• “We can put everything in place, he’s just needs to follow along.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>• “It just means that making sure you are able to support them, which means being organized.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>• “Just organization, regular meetings, check ins with them, and regular feedback. Haven’t had to do a lot but for Adam it was for every week he had to send me an update on how he was doing in class.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In references to tools used to help student athletes… “Being flexible for me is the most important. I think being an active role model, a lot of my teaching comes form experience.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “I find as a teacher and as a coach, challenging your student athletes.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>• “Trying to make them aware that if they missed an hour of class that’s probably an hour and a half of time that they need to make up.”</td>
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<td>• In reference to balances athletics and academics…” I think so, that is where the teacher can help a bit, helping them out with a plan.”</td>
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<td>• “I email my teachers and if I need to I can talk to them on the phone personally but I can check what everyone is doing in the class to keep my homework up.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>• “Teachers need to help you stay on track”</td>
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</table>
| • In reference to support…”Definitely, academically, my math teacher, I could email her. I emailed her
Sunday afternoon at like 12 and she replied within 15 minutes to say she was doing extra help at the school from 2:30-4. She said to come over. I can email my teachers and they are always ready to help me.”-Adam

- “as a teacher and educator I want to make sure I am approachable and being someone who is honest and fair.”-Ryan

- “Specifically teachers, they are available outside of class time. I can email them at 8 at night if I have question, they are completely willing to give extensions, very flexible and support of what I am doing.”-Lindsay
Appendix C

Letter of Information, Consent Form, and Participant Questions

LETTER OF INFORMATION

Research Study: Supporting High Performance Athletic Students Balance Sport and Education: An Examination of the Teachers’ Role

This research study is being conducted by Jessika Diakun (Master of Education, Candidate) under the supervision of Christopher DeLuca, Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education at Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario. This study has been granted ethical clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethics guidelines and Queen’s policies. It has also received ethical approval by your school.

What is this study about? The demands placed on high performance student athletes (athletes who perform at a competitive level) continue to intensify and finding a balance between athletic and educational responsibilities can be a significant challenge. The expectation of excelling in two consuming areas can be challenging and often leads to the compromise of one aspect over another. As such, the purpose of my study is to examine how teachers support high performing athletes as they balance academic and sport responsibilities.

What will this study require? If you agree to participate in this research you will be required to complete two interviews. First you will complete an individual interview. This interview will be conducted at your home school, will last a maximum of one hour, and will be recorded in digital audio files.

A second interview will then be completed. The second interview will consist of interviewing both a teacher and student together. This interview will be conducted at your home school, will last a maximum of one hour, and will be recorded in digital audio files.

The total time for participation in this study is 2 hours.
**Is participation voluntary?** Your participation is completely voluntary and choosing not to participate will not result in any adverse consequences. There are no known physical, psychological, economic, or social risks associated with this study. Further, you are free to choose, without reason or consequence, to refuse to answer any questions. You may withdraw from the study at any time with no negative consequences. If you withdraw from the study, you may choose to have your data removed. In order to withdraw you can contact the primary researcher, Jessika Diakun (in person or via email - 11jdmd@queensu.ca).

**What will happen to my responses?** The interview recording will be transcribed and then the recording will be destroyed. All electronic files will be password protected. Paper and audio data will be secured in a locked cabinet. Copies of the transcripts will be maintained for a minimum of 5 years and may use the data (with names removed) in subsequent research. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent possible. None of the data will contain your name or the identity of your home school. Given the relatively small number of high performing athletes in your school area, there is a small chance that your identify may be deduced by others. To protect your identity a pseudonym will replace your name on all data files and in any dissemination of findings. This research may result in publications of various types, including journal articles or other professional publications.

**What if I have concerns?** Any questions about study participation or a request to withdraw from the study may be directed to Jessika Diakun at 11jdmd@queensu.ca or my supervisor Christopher DeLuca at cdeluca@queensu.ca or 613-533-6000 ext. 77675. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at (613) 533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca.

Thank you for considering participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Jessika Diakun
CONSENT FORM (If 18 or over)

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Name (please print clearly): ____________________________

1. I have read and retained the Letter of Information and have had any questions answered to my satisfaction.

2. I understand that I will be participating in the study called Supporting High Performance Athletic Students Balance Sport and Education: An Examination of the Teachers’ Role. I understand the purpose of this research is to examine how teachers support high performance athletes in balancing sport and academic responsibilities. I understand that participation in this study will entail a maximum of 2 hours of my time involving: an individual audio-recorded interview (maximum 60 minutes), and paired audio-recorded interview (maximum 60 minutes).

3. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without adverse consequences. I understand that if I withdraw from the study, I may choose to have my data removed. I understand that the data may also be published in professional journals or presented at academic conferences. I understand that every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality to the extent possible now and in the future.

4. I am aware that any questions about study participation or a request to withdraw from the study may be directed to Jessika Diakun at 11jdmd@queensu.ca or my supervisor Christopher DeLuca at 613-533-6000 ext. 77675. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at (613) 533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca. Please sign one copy of this Consent Form and return to the researcher. Retain the second copy for your records.

I have read the above statements and had any questions answered. I freely consent to participate in this study.

Participant’s Signature: ____________________________

Date: __________________________
Interview Question Guide For Student

1. Can you describe to me what a typical day looks like for you?

2. How strongly do you value your academics? Your sports?

3. What do you think it means to have a balance between your sports and your academic studies?

4. What are some things you do to balance your academic responsibilities with your sports responsibilities?

5. Do you feel your teachers support you in balancing your academic responsibilities with your sports responsibilities?

6. How do you think teachers perceive high performance athletes?

7. What role, if any do you see your teacher playing in assisting you in reaching your goals both as an athlete and as an academic?

8. Does your teacher assist you in balancing your academic and athletic responsibilities, if so, how?
Interview Question Guide For Teacher

1. Is it important for students to get involved with athletics? Why or why not?

2. Does having a student-athlete in the classroom change your role as the educator? If so, how?

3. What challenges do you face having a student-athlete in your classroom?

4. How would you describe academic and athletic balance?

5. Do you feel student athletes can balance and succeed in both athletics and academics?

6. What skills do you think student athletes have that are transferable into the academic classroom?

7. Do you feel you have a role in supporting students in both athletics and academics?

8. How do you feel student athletes should be accommodated, if at all for competitive athletic competition?
Paired Interview Question Guide

1. How is academic excellence defined?

2. How is high-performance athlete defined?

3. Do you feel that athletics influence academic performance or vise versa? If so, how?

4. How does the student-teacher relationship provide balance for athletic and academic balance?

5. What social, personal, or practical pressures do you – as a student and teacher – committed to athletic and academic excellence face within your school context?

6. Beyond supporting each other, what benefits do you think a student-athlete has for the school culture generally?
Appendix D

GREB Ethical Approval

May 13, 2015

Miss Jessika Diakun
Master’s Student
Faculty of Education
Queen’s University
Duncan McArthur Hall
511 Union Street West
Kingston, ON, K7M 5R7

GREB Ref #: GEDUC-775-15; Romeo # 6015434
Title: "GEDUC-775-15 Supporting High Performance Athletic Students Balance Sport and Education: An Examination of the Teachers’ Role"

Dear Miss Diakun:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled "GEDUC-775-15 Supporting High Performance Athletic Students Balance Sport and Education: An Examination of the Teachers’ Role" for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS) and Queen's ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (article D.1.6) and Senate Terms of Reference (article G), your project has been cleared for one year. At the end of each year, the GREB will ask if your project has been completed and if not, what changes have occurred or will occur in the next year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB, with a copy to your unit REB, of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (access this form at https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher/ and click Events - GREB Adverse Event Report). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes to the level of risk, applicant characteristics, and implementation of new procedures. To make an amendment, access
the application at https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher/ and click Events - GREB Amendment to Approved Study Form. These changes will automatically be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Gail Irving, at the Office of Research Services or irvingg@queensu.ca for further review and clearance by the GREB or GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

Joan Stevenson,
Ph.D. Chair General Research Ethics Board

c: Dr. Chris DeLuca, Faculty Supervisor Dr. Chris DeLuca, Chair, Unit REB
Ms. Erin Wicklam, c/o Graduate Studies and Bureau of Research