Democratic Coaching: A Case Study

by

Darryl P. Giancola

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Abstract

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The thesis is a case study that seeks to understand the democratic coaching style by observing the practices of a specific democratically-minded girls’ varsity hockey coach at a private secondary school in the Greater Toronto Area. The study first characterizes a democratic coach by comparing the democratic leadership style with other styles of leadership; the study then offers a clear understanding of the methods and practices of the case study coach by organizing the findings of the study into four categories: communication techniques, organizational structure, coaching decisions and strategies, and the environment created. Within these four categories, themes emerged that helped answer the following research questions: How is democratic coaching understood and practiced by a democratically-minded coach?
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Chapter 1
Introduction

Rationale and Significance of the Study

As an educator and coach, I have often been intrigued with the role I play as a leader. The impact that leaders in educational settings have on their students or athletes has inspired me to investigate the impact of this role in further detail, as I pursued my studies towards a Master’s level degree in education. During these studies, I have encountered the works of Goleman (2000) who has identified six leadership styles. Of these six styles of leadership, (Coercive, Authoritative, Affiliative, Democratic, Pacesetting, and Coaching) it is the Democratic style of leadership identified by Goleman that most interests me, as it is the style that I feel has worked best in my educational leadership roles and in those leaders whom I have admired. While he clearly suggests that the Democratic style positively impacts climate and organizations, Goleman’s findings were largely gathered from executives of a specific consulting firm. I am curious as to how the democratic style of leadership impacts educational settings. Specifically, as a coach, I am curious to understand the democratic leadership style and to see how a democratically-minded coach might practice it.

One’s style of leadership can determine his or her success as a leader and the success of the group one leads. This premise is often accredited to psychologist Kurt Lewin who designated three styles of leadership; an authoritarian or autocratic style, a delegative or laissez-faire style, and a participative or democratic style (Lewin et al., 1939, p. 272). In his study, Lewin and his research team tried to determine how groups of schoolchildren, who were assigned to one of three groups with an authoritarian, democratic, or laissez-faire leader, would respond to the different styles of leadership. The children were then led in an arts and crafts project. Researchers then observed the behavior of children in response to the different styles of leadership. Ultimately, Lewin and his team found that the participative (democratic) leadership style seemed to generally be the most effective leadership style (Lewin et al., 1939). Many modern
educators, such as the earlier mentioned Goleman (2000), argue that Lewin’s study was accurate and still holds true in educational settings today. The question that remains for this study is based on the specific intentions of these findings to determine if such studies might hold true in the athletic educational setting, where I believe athletes seem to strive and achieve high results when placed in environments with democratic leadership.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate how democratic coaching is understood and practiced by a democratically-minded coach. I believe that this topic is important in education because my experiences have shown me that while many coaches stress democratic values as important qualities for players to learn, there seems to be a lack of democratic practice amongst leaders of athletic settings to serve as role models for young athletes. The intention is to examine a case study of a democratically minded coach of secondary school age teenagers who coaches in a team sport.

**The Research Questions**

The main research question inspiring this research is: How is democratic coaching understood and practiced by a democratically-minded coach?

In order to grasp a full understanding of the topics relevant to answering the question, a number of specific sub questions shall be pursued. These sub questions are:

1) How is democratically-oriented coaching understood?
2) What democratically-oriented coaching strategies are employed?
3) What hinders or facilitates these democratic practices?
4) What are the consequences of democratic practices?

This thesis will be organized in a manner that will include a literature review of relevant works that discuss the topic of democratic coaching. These works will offer an understanding and definition of the democratic leadership style in general, an overview of the current leadership styles in coaching and the role of the democratic leadership style in athletic coaching, and finally, the impact that the democratic leadership style has on individual and team achievement. The literature review will conclude with a conceptual framework of the thesis.
The next chapter of this thesis will offer an explanation of the methodologies used in this qualitative case study. This chapter will include description of the purposes of a case study and specifically, why a case study is appropriate for this particular thesis. The chapter will identify the participants of the case and explain data collection procedures.

The fourth chapter will discuss the research findings of this study and present the aspects and themes observed through data collection of this case study’s democratically-minded coaching style.

Finally, a discussion of the research findings will be offered in the last chapter, with a concluding focus on how the data helps answer the research questions and sub-questions.
Chapter 2
Literature Review

To support this study, I will present research from a variety of literature sources. The literature will consist of research in three general fields of study related to the topic. The first section of the literature review will contain an overview of literature associated with understanding and defining the democratic leadership style as a general term, as it relates to organizational management. The second section will present the variety of current leadership styles in coaching and outline the ways in which leadership can be applied to coaching athletics. The second section will also elaborate on the democratic leadership style in coaching and review literature which discusses the role this style has on coaching athletics and how it is displayed by coaches. Lastly, the third section of literature will dwell on the impact of democratic leadership on both the individual and team achievement. This third section will look at both the individual and team achievement together as much of the current literature discusses the two in similar terms.

Understanding and Defining the Democratic Leadership Style

Perhaps the most recognized early literature on the subject of leadership styles is Kurt Lewin (1809-1947). Lewin is often recognized as the “founder of modern social psychology” (Van Wagner, 2006). Perhaps the reason for Lewin’s wide recognition on the subject of leadership styles is that Lewin did much of his work on leadership styles as they relate to a variety of disciplines. His emphasis was on education and sociology, but applied his theories to numerous disciplines that required organizational management. Lewin is credited with developing three types of leadership styles that are very often used today in some form or another. These styles are: the authoritarian or autocratic style, the delegative or laissez-faire style, and a participative or democratic style (Lewin et al., 1939, p. 272). These three styles were developed by Lewin and his research team when they studied the effects of the leadership styles on schoolchildren (Lewin et al., 1939). For the sake of this
personal study, Lewin’s characteristics and description of the participative or democratic leadership style is the one that I will use as the basis for creating my own characteristics of a democratic leader. Lewin’s study found that participative (democratic) leadership is generally the most effective leadership style of the three that he identified. Democratic leaders offer guidance to group members, but they also participate in the group and allow input from other group members. In the group with the participative leaders, the children were encouraged by group members to participate in decision making processes, but the leaders retained the final say over the decision-making process (Lewin et al., 1939). It is this basic understanding that has come to define the modern day definition of democratic leadership.

Lewin noted in his study that group members felt engaged in the process and were more motivated and creative with the democratic leadership style (Lewin et al., 1939). Ironically, Lewin observed that while the participative style was the most effective of the three styles, the children in this group were ultimately less productive than those children in the authoritarian leadership style group (Lewin et al., 1939). While the basic understanding and characteristics of the democratic leadership style for this study will come from Lewin’s work, there are many other researchers who have added, supplemented, or changed some of Lewin’s trend setting work on democratic leadership. The more modern literature on democratic leadership seems to repeat, and build on much of Lewin’s work, but many modern researchers seem to emphasize the specific characteristics of democratic leadership styles and/or discuss the negative aspects of democratic leadership in more detail. In order for my study to be comprehensive, I gathered a wide variety of literature that discusses these two emphasized aspects. Since Lewin’s study, more recent researchers like Goleman (2000) suggest the idea that the authoritarian style of leadership, often regarded as the opposite of the democratic leadership style, is quite possibly the style that impacts the climate of groups the most. For example, Daniel Goleman developed a framework for defining leadership styles in which he links leadership styles and emotional intelligence. This detailed work on has become the framework for modern day analysis of leadership styles. In his study, Goleman has categorized leadership styles into the following categories:

1) Coercive—Demanding immediate compliance.
2) Authoritative—Mobilizes people towards a self created vision.
3) Affiliative—A style that creates harmony through empathy, communication, and relationship building.
4) Democratic—Forges consensus through participation and collaboration.
5) Pacesetting—Sets high standards for performance and expects those in the team to do as the leader does.
6) Coaching—Develops others through empathetic self awareness (Goleman, 2000).

Through this more specific categorization system of leadership styles, Goleman recognized, based on his research, that democratic leadership styles are not always the most positive as far as impacting climate. In fact, his study showed that it was the authoritative style that had the most positive impact on climate (Goleman, 2000). While this idea of the authoritative leadership style being the most positive on impacting climate is not totally surprising to many, it is one that warrants clearer understanding. This understanding is explained by Michael Fullan who explains the outcome of Goleman’s data collection: “Goleman’s data show that the authoritative leader had a positive impact on climate and performance. So do we need leaders with clear vision who can excite and mobilize people committing to it, or don’t we? Well, the answer is a bit complicated. For some situations, when there is an urgent problem and people are at sea, visionary leaders can be crucial. And at times, it helps when leaders have good ideas. But it is easy for authoritative leadership to slip into social engineering when initial excitement cannot be sustained because it cannot be converted to internal commitment” (Fullan, 2001, p. 39).

Goleman does not stand alone in providing evidence that the democratic leadership style of leading may not be the best approach for leading. Another researcher that challenges the positive impact of the democratic style is one of the most clearly understandable studies on the topic of leadership styles. The research done by Carter McNamara whose Overview of Leadership in Organizations (1999) offers a complete work on leadership with an emphasis on how it might apply to modern day organizations, also offers insight into the democratic leadership style. Taking from Lewin’s work, McNamara discusses the same three styles of leadership. However, McNamara does give
the view that the democratic leadership style has a negative aspect. At first glance, McNamara offers a seemingly positive view of the democratic leadership style when he states, “The democratic leader makes decisions by consulting his team, whilst still maintaining control of the group. The democratic leader allows his team to decide how the task will be tackled and who will perform which task” (McNamara, 1999). While this description of a democratic leader is recognizably positive, McNamara elaborates more on the style in a very intriguing way when he recognized that:

The democratic leader can be seen in two lights:

A good democratic leader encourages participation and delegates wisely, but never loses sight of the fact that he bears the crucial responsibility of leadership. He values group discussion and input from his team and can be seen as drawing from a pool of his team members’ strong points in order to obtain the best performance from his team. He motivates his team by empowering them to direct themselves, and guides them with a loose reign.

However, the democrat can also be seen as being so unsure of himself and his relationship with his subordinates that everything is a matter for group discussion and decision. Clearly, this type of "leader" is not really leading at all. (McNamara, 1999, p12).

It is McNamara’s unfavourable view of the democratic leadership style as an effective means of leadership that makes his work a key component in understanding the impact that democratic leadership has on organizations. McNamara’s work is supported by C. Goodsworth (1988) and others who also see that the democratic leader is often too encompassed with the idea of bringing up all matters for a group discussion and decision making. Goodsworth (1998) and McNamara (1999) argue that often, the democratic leadership style is too democratic and leads to a lack of progress within a group. So, the literature on the subject of understanding the democratic leadership style is diverse, debatable, and complicated.

In educational organizational leadership, there are similar views of the democratic leadership style being diverse, debatable, and complicated, but the democratic leadership style seems to be the most favourable leadership style supported by educational researchers. So, since coaching athletics is an educational setting, I will look at the literature regarding understanding democratic leadership as it pertains to the organization of educational management and leadership.
To begin, it must be noted that the majority of research on the topic of democratic leadership in education suggests that democratic leadership is a difficult and not often used leadership style in the classroom or any educational setting. As stated by Ken Osborne in his work *Democracy, Democratic Citizenship, and Education* (Osborne, 2001) “Too often the hidden curriculum serves to promote qualities that are antithesis of democratic citizenship” (Osborne, 2001, p.48). Osborne elaborates on the issue by explaining that schools have a “hidden curriculum” that is linked to the general organization of schooling (Osborne, 2001). This hidden curriculum is one that Osborn argues is compromising the democratic values that should be encouraged, through specific teaching and through every day learning routines. He argues that “Whatever schools might say about the importance of critical thinking, social participation, personal autonomy, social responsibility, and the like, the message of the hidden curriculum can often be one of conformity, obedience, hierarchy, and order” (Osborne, 2001, p.48). This notion would seem to support the idea that “perhaps a hierarchical organization such as the school is not the best setting for inculcating democratic values” (Oppenheim and Torney, 1975, p. 21). The opinion of Osborn is that the hidden curriculums of educators comes in two forms and are compromising democracy in an educational setting.

The first consists of the rules of conduct that schools knowingly enforce on students, rules about attendance, punctuality, dress, hallway behavior, smoking, and the rest. The second lies more below the surface and can be much less obvious to students and even to teachers. It consists of the social interactions among students, the interchanges between teachers and students, the implicit and often unspoken signals through which teachers reveal their expectations, and the many occurrences that impinge on a student’s day without anyone necessarily doing anything from deliberate intent, but which combine to shape the character traits and behavior patterns that have an impact on the kind of adult citizen a student might become.

(Osborne, 2001, p.48)

While Osborne, a researcher who primarily studied Ontario schools, provides evidence, and supports the claim that this compromising of democracy exists in Ontario’s educational system, he explicitly states that this hidden curriculum cannot be ignored by those seeking to further expand democracy in education. “In short, if schools are to serve as training grounds for democracy, they cannot ignore the so-called hidden curriculum. Democracy depends in large part on students feeling sufficiently capable and competent
to involve themselves in the affairs of their society, to work for their preferred cause without trampling on the rights of others—and these and many other such traits are learned, or not learned, as much through everyday experiences of schooling as through any particular lesson” (Osborne, 2001, p. 49). So, one can see that the teaching of democratic values, while often stressed as important in developing today’s youth as democratic citizens, is not being done through a regular democratic practice within Ontario’s schools. Furthermore, he argues that the reason for this lack of teaching democratic values can be blamed on the lack of democratic teaching styles in a variety of educational means and methods. Yet, while Osborne does stress the need for greater teaching of democratic values in schools, he does not discuss, in the above noted research, the means of making that happen.

The evidence provided by Osborne concerning the hidden curriculum and the lack of teaching democratic values through democratic education, is often linked to a lack of democratic leadership in education. The works of Michael Fullan on the topic of educational leadership are very recognizable in the Canadian educational setting. While most of Fullan’s work regarding educational leadership emphasizes what he refers to as the Cultural Change Leader (Fullan, 2001), a term and book title that he uses to help explain the current role of today’s educational and business leaders, he does illustrate democratic leadership qualities as essential to leading in this culture of change and many would identify democratic leadership qualities in his characteristics of the Cultural Change Leader. Aspects like commitment, relationship building, and knowledge creation and sharing are examples of key democratic style qualities that Fullan suggests are essential to a framework for leadership and evident in a Cultural Change Leader (Fullan, 2001, p.4). This idea is elaborated in other works by Fullan like his article The Change Leader (Fullan, 2002) where he emphasizes the importance of the relationship between principals and teachers. Fullan states, “The Cultural Change Principal knows that building relationships and teams is the most difficult skill for both business and education leaders” (Fullan, 2002, p.18). However difficult, Fullan emphasizes throughout the article the importance of this relationship building and sees it as a key component to educational leadership. The similarities of this relationship building characteristic
described by Fullan with the definitions of a democratic leadership style as defined by the earlier works by Lewin and Goleman, is interestingly similar.

Understanding and defining the democratic leadership style in education is very much the key component in much of the work by Philip Woods (2005). Woods focuses on the idea of democratic leadership, examining what is meant by democratic leadership, what forms it can take, and how it is relevant to school education and learning. He shows how the ideals and theories of democratic leadership can translate into practice, and sets out some of the challenges that democratic leadership poses in the context of modern education (Woods, 2005). I found this study to be an interesting study into the understanding of democratic leadership in education. Furthermore, the most underlying argument made by Woods in his book *Democratic Leadership in Education*, is that the theory and practice of democracy and democratic leadership is essential in understanding how society will understand how to improve schools (Woods, 2005).

The study of democratic leadership in education seems to be linked to the idea of inclusion. Jim Ryan (2005) analyzed the research on inclusive leadership and the importance of leadership as an intentionally inclusive practice that values all cultures and types of students in a school (Ryan, 2005). There is a strong link to democratic style leadership practices in the way that Ryan offers practical suggestions for encouraging inclusive leadership in schools. In coaching team sports, it is essential to the team’s success that all, or at least as many members as possible, feel included in the team. Inclusion of team members is a democratic trait that is very important in educational leaders of all types who inspire to create a democratic atmosphere within their organization. I found that much of the characteristics of an inclusive leader as defined by Ryan are evident in democratic leadership style educators, as well as democratic leadership style coaches.

Continuing with the theme of linking inclusion and democratic leadership in educational leadership, Ryan and Rottman (2009) study administrators who try to create “inclusive communicative practices” in order to promote democratic practices. Interestingly, the study reveals that while the administrators in the study encourage strong communicative relationships, this seemingly democratic process gives way to more bureaucratic, un-democratic and non-inclusive means (Ryan and Rottman, 2009). This
literature offers a look at a democratic leadership practice in an educational setting that suggests that educational leaders who try to practice democratic leadership aspects may move away from those practices when facing bureaucratic administrative pressures.

Research findings such as the ones noted above are essential studies into understanding and defining the democratic leadership style. While many of the above mentioned authors do discuss leadership in team educational settings, none discuss specific leadership styles as they relate to the educational setting in athletics. The following chapter will elaborate on the literature that discusses the role that the democratic leadership style has on coaching athletics.

**Current Leadership Styles in Coaching and the role of the Democratic Leadership Style in Coaching**

The literature on the current leadership styles in coaching is diverse and opinionated. The variety of sports that are out there makes it challenging to find specific coaching styles because diverse sports and different types of athletes in those sports makes a variety of coaching styles important. The literature on the subject is inconclusive. One of the strategies I tried when searching for literature regarding the democratic leadership style in coaching was to look at well established athletic organizations to find literature that defines the coaching styles that these organizations may promote.

On that note, I searched for documents that emphasized what a good coach was. I found a very clear list of characteristics listed by the United States Olympic Committee’s (USOC) Coaching Development Office. This list defined ten characteristics of highly successful coaches. Within this list were two attributes that were deemed as most important to characterizing a highly successful coach. The two descriptive attributes were attributes that emphasized “commitment to athletes and their institutions” and “value the coach-player relationship” (Walton, 2000) as important characteristics of highly successful coaches. These two attributes are essential character descriptions of democratic coaches as defined by researchers like Lewin and Goleman. This document provides literature evidence of a connection to the importance of democratic leadership qualities in coaching and what the USOC organization deems as highly successful.
coaches. This supports the idea that democratic coaches have attributes that will make them highly successful.

Another recognizable academic piece of literature on leadership styles in coaching was developed in 1978 by Chellandurai and Saleh who designed the Leadership Scale for Support (LSS) to assess aspects of the coach’s leadership behaviour. Two of the five measures of this scale emphasize the importance of the coach’s decision-making style. The authors use a simple approach to defining the styles by referring to only two possible coaching styles; autocratic and democratic. (Chelladurai and Saleh, 1978). In this work, the authors create an assessment piece that assessed the merits and demerits of the two coaching styles as they relate to a coach’s decision making.

In 1998, G. Bennett and M. Maneval of the University of Southern Mississippi administered the LSS to 52 elite Dixie area Youth baseball coaches. Interestingly, the overall data they collected showed that subjects scored high in areas like positive feedback, training and instruction, and social support, while scoring moderate in democratic behaviour and low in autocratic behaviour (Bennett and Maneval, 1998). This study offers evidence that there are Youth coaches who are displaying democratic behaviours, although only at a moderate level. The authors did stress that their “results support the validity of using the scale to compare coaching behaviour” (Bennett and Maneval, 1998, p.87), but the study does little to explain the implementation of these moderate level democratic practices. The research was intended to discuss the coaching practices by using the LSS model, but did not offer case study models to allow for in depth looks at the democratically-minded coaching style, or of any style for that matter. More recently, a thorough investigation of the LSS with intercollegiate NCAA athletes and coaches indicated that an autocratic style dimension of coaching lacks reliability and should be omitted (Sullivan and Kent, 2003).

The use of the LSS has also been used to investigate coach-athlete relations. Using the LSS as a means to determine relationship between coaches’ leadership behaviour and motivational climate, Alfermann, Lee, and Wurth (2005), implemented the scale on 119 young German swimmers (aged 10-18 years) and their coaches. The findings of their study “suggest that coaches typically are perceived as providing instruction, positive feedback, and social support, emphasizing mastery climate and
democratic style” (Alfermann, Lee, Wurth, 2005, p.21). So, it seems that there is some research that suggests that the democratic style of leadership is being implemented by youth coaches.

Employing a more complex categorization system than the above authors, Rainer Martens, founder of the American Sport Education Program (ASEP), suggests three types of coaching style: the command style (referred to as a “dictator”), the submissive style (also called the “babysitter”), and the cooperative style (referred to as the “teacher”) (Martens, 1997, p.11). Martens clearly supports the cooperative style of coaching “because it shares decision making with the athletes and fosters the Athletes First, Winning Second objective” (Martens, 1997, p.13). He points out that some may view the cooperative style of coaching as a coach neglecting his or her responsibilities and allowing athletes to do as they want, but he elaborates that this is not the case at all (Martens, 1997, p.13). Martens feels that the cooperative style coach provides the structure and rules that allow athletes to learn to set their own goals and to strive for them. This is done through a participating relationship with the coach and his or her athletes. Martens does point out that the cooperative coach’s style is different in his mind to what others call participant democracies, that is, it is a system where teams vote on every decision that needs to be made (Martens, 1997, p.13). It seems that Martens tends to agree with the participatory style of leadership defined by Lewin even though he uses different terms to define the same characteristics.

The point of studying the literature on coaching styles and the democratic style of leadership in coaching is to see the similar trends and connections with leadership styles in coaching and leadership styles in any organizational group. Over-all, the literature tends to support the notion that the leadership style of a coach is often determined by that individual’s characteristics in conjunction with the characteristics of the various individuals on the team. In summary, the literature on styles of leadership in coaching athletes indicates that the best leadership approach is a combination of a variety of leadership styles.
The Impact of the Democratic Leadership Style on Individual and Team Achievement

Coaching effectiveness is an area of study that has complex interpretations and a thorough amount of opinion and literature. Effectiveness of coaches has been typically measured on two dimensions: coaches’ feedback patterns (ex. type, frequency, and quality etc…) and coaches’ leadership style (ex. decision-making style, motivational tendencies, instructional focus etc…) (Horn, 2002). These dimensions were designed to see the effects on athlete performance outcomes and psychological responses such as self-esteem and competence. As one can see, half the determining factor of an effective coach, according to these dimensions by Horn, is based on a coach’s leadership style. The research by Horn indicated that a leadership style does have a role in athlete’s performance and behaviour, so much so, that the coach’s behavioural patterns and leadership styles are often duplicated in the athletes’ expectations, values, beliefs, and goals. (Horn, 2002).

In addition to these dimensions, the earlier stated Leadership Scale for Support (LSS) showed in its general findings that changeable factors can influence the type of behaviour and leadership style used by a coach to be effective. For example, situational and personal factors can interact to determine leadership behaviours and styles that might be most effective. In addition, the athlete’s age, gender, and level of competition will also affect the type of coaching behaviour and style (Chelladurai and Saleh, 1978).

With regards to which type of leadership style best impacts athletic individual and team achievement, the literature is mixed in its findings. For example, Penman, Hastad, and Cords (1974) tested the degree of correlation between coaching success (male, interscholastic head football and basketball coaches) and authoritarianism. Penman and his fellow authors found that more successful coaches, in comparison to less successful coaches, exhibited more authoritarianism. However, it has also been indicated that democratic styles of coaching can be effective for certain individuals based on the individual’s unique characteristics and that democratic styles of leadership have proven to be successful. However, some research shows that democratic styles can often be less
effective for complex problems and prove to be more time consuming (Chelladurai and Doherty, 1998). Some literature on democratic leadership’s impact on coaching tends to lean towards supporting the idea that group members tend to be more satisfied with democratic leadership than autocratic leadership (Foels et al., 2000). Democratic behavior and leadership styles, along with training and instruction, and positive feedback, were the three preferred coaching behaviors of Chelladurai et al.’s Multidimensional Model of Leadership (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980). Autocratic and social support proved not to be preferred coaching behaviors by groups or team members within team sports. In any group environment, it is essential to have the support and happiness of the members (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980). I believe this is even more the case for athletes as often their happiness leads to productivity. This alone might be reason enough to see that the democratic leadership style impacts individual and team achievement, or at least the motivation and morale of the athletes. For example, Hollenbeak and Ambrose (2005) found that there was a positive, but perhaps indirect impact that leadership behaviour had on intrinsic motivation in college teams and individual college athletes (Hollenbeak and Ambrose, 2005). However, almost all the literature shows evidence that democratic leadership has some form of impact on individual and team achievement that goes well beyond the satisfaction and positive response that athletes have towards the style. This study’s methodology and conceptual framework will further illuminate the above mentioned point.

**Conceptual Framework**

This research project will attempt to determine how democratic coaching is understood and practiced by a democratically-minded coach. The study is based on previous research by Kurt Lewin (1939) who has studied and coined the definition and characteristics of the democratic or participatory leadership style. The study will also look at the extension of Lewin’s ideas by more modern researchers. It will explore how the characteristics of democratic leadership are applied to secondary school age level athletic coaches by observing the practices of a democratically-minded coach at this level.
Leadership – defined as "the process of influencing the activities of an organized
group toward goal setting and goal achievement" (Stogdill, 1950; p. 4) – is one of the
most important elements in the success and survival of groups, organizations, and teams.
The importance of leadership to athletic teams is highlighted by past research on coaches’
styles of decision making (Chelladurai and Quek, 1995). This research suggests that,
“The social process of decision making refers to the extent to which the leader or coach
allows his/her members to participate in the cognitive process of making a decision. Such
member participation may indeed increase the rationality of the decisions because of the
higher levels of information, ingenuity and creativity available in the group. In addition,
member participation may also lead to a better comprehension of the decision and greater
acceptance of the decision, and therefore to more efficient execution of the decision”
(Chelladurai and Quek, 1996, p.6). A high extent of participatory decision making is
what this study will deem as the democratic coaching style. The present study will dwell
further on this idea by examining how the democratic coaching style and the process for
decision making under this style is to be understood and practiced by the coach and her
coaching staff.

The conceptual framework that I employ in this study to examine this
understanding and practice contains a variety of concepts. The essential characteristics of
democratic leaders, as defined through my literature analysis and the characteristics of
good coaches, are related to the extent that these characteristics combine to define the
democratic coach. Furthermore, I proffer that the democratic coach has a leadership
style that may ultimately have a positive impact on the case study’s views of individual
and team success within athletics. Figure 1 illustrates this framework and the process
description that follows.

The field of coaching is one that faces criticism and often, people determine a
coach’s success with tangible and intangible achievements. While many determine
success in athletics as simply the “wins versus loses” or numbers of championships,
many see these tangible successes as small measures of an individual’s and team’s
achievement’s. Often, coaches define their successes based on the intangible
accomplishments that cannot be measured by outsiders. Hence, the individual and team
achievement as stated in Figure 1 does not illustrate specifics. Simply, the idea of what a
team is trying to achieve is one that is determined by a coach and his or her team. However, the successful accomplishment of reaching those achievements and the factors that impact the success are expected to be measured. While the focus of this study is not on the means by which a coach is measured or how a democratic coach impacts team or individual achievement, it is important to understand that there is a link to team achievement and a coach’s strategies and leadership skills. Often, team and individual members on that team’s success can be measured by the success of the strategies implemented and the effectiveness of such strategies and in fact, strategy efficacy should allow one to predict decision making factors of leadership (Sullivan and Kent, 2002, p.4).

The conceptual framework employed in this study is designed to understand the practices of a specific democratically-minded coach. The specific characteristics listed in Figure 1 are gathered based on the description of “good coaches” and “democratic leaders” as stated by the sources. While there are similarities, it is perhaps the combination of the thirteen stated characteristics that are to be closely examined in this case study to determine if indeed they are characteristics of the democratically-minded coach. These characteristics are the eight that the literature has provided as possible democratically-minded coaching characteristics.

All characteristics of a good coach and a democratic leader are essential to determining the leadership style of a coach. The exemplary case study coach might have these characteristics, but should have the eight characteristics of a democratically-minded coach. The intention of this study is to determine how he or she uses those characteristics within her democratically-minded practices. By observing the practices and behaviours of this case study coach this study will provide a better understanding of what democratic coaching looks like.
Characteristics of a Democratically-Minded Coach

- *Committed to team growth
- *Educators and educated
- *Willing to hear and implement new ideas
- *Value relationships with others in the group
- *Love their sport and work
- *Honest and strong in character
- *Recognize imperfections and their need for others

Characteristics of Democratic Leaders

- *Collaborative
- *Communicative
- *Value input of the group
- *Forge consensus through participation
- *Encourage group members to participate, but maintains final decision-making power
- *Unsure of themselves and their relationships

The above framework takes the characteristics of Good Coaches and the characteristics of Democratic Leaders, which I have determined are criteria for the characteristics of the Democratically-Minded Coach. I will use these elements to explore decision-making issues, leadership strategies, team related methods, and day-to-day practices of the coach. This will allow me to observe how democratic coaching can be understood and practiced within the chosen case study team.
Chapter 3  
Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research design. It involved a case study that focused on a single coach. The field work consisted of shadowing the coach, observing her practices, games, and meetings, conducting individual and focus group interviews, and reviewing journals or logs of players and coaching staff. The case study was designed to provide insight into the ways in which a democratic leadership style in coaching athletics can be understood and practiced.

The methodology that is best able to provide a practical understanding of democratic coaching in this particular setting is a case study. The reason for choosing a case study for this thesis is that a case study which researches a democratically-minded coach will offer a good insight into seeing the democratic style in practice. While there are theories that both support and challenge the understanding and practice of democratic coaching, I intend to observe the style in practice to best be able to understand it.

Often, the term case study is used in conjunction with an ethnography study, but the difference between the two can be recognized by a few factors. Below are the reasons why I chose to make this research a case study. First, case study researchers may focus on a group, event or activity involving an individual or individuals rather than a group (Stake, 1995). Secondly, when case study researchers do study a group, they are more likely to study the activities of the group instead of identifying shared behavioral patterns within the group over time as an ethnography study will (Creswell, 2005, p.439). Thirdly, case study researchers are less likely to be concerned with a cultural theme to study, but instead are interested in an “in-depth exploration of the actual ‘case’” (Creswell, 2005, p.439). Finally, as described by Creswell, “A case study is an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (For example, an activity, an event, process, or individuals) based on extensive data collection (Creswell, 1998). By bounded, Creswell means that the case is separated out for research in terms of time, place, or some physical boundaries (Creswell, 2005, p. 439).

In lieu of the above mentioned factors, this qualitative study is best served through a collection of data using an instrumental case study design. The following is a
diagram used by Creswell to illustrate the instrumental case study data collection that I will use.

**Figure 2—Instrumental Case Study**

![Diagram of Instrumental Case Study]

Study a case that provides insight into an issue (or theme).
(Creswell, 2005, p.440)

This study focused on a specific issue (the understanding and practice of democratic coaching), with a “case” used to illustrate the issue. This research examined a specific individual team coach and her interaction with that team. This coach demonstrated democratic coaching characteristics.

**Participants**

The specific focus of the case study revolves around the participant, Coach D. She displayed a democratic coaching style as she coached a team of secondary school age adolescent ice hockey players. It is not relevant to this study whether or not the coach was one from a school organization or a volunteer from a "club" organization. It was also not relevant, to this particular study, whether or not the coach presided over female athletes. Furthermore, this research chooses not to focus particularly on the gender issues that are associated with exploring democratic practices in coaching. This study is not linked to the gender issues of sport and I chose not to make that relevant. The participant simply needed to be a current and team sport coach. Both these aspects were essential as I needed to find a “case” who was currently coaching so that I could observe coaching practices during the study. Therefore, in choosing Coach D, I found a team sport coach who was democratically-minded. That was predominantly the reasoning for choosing this specific coach and her team for my case study. The goal was to find a coach within the
southern Ontario area so that geographically, the selected case would be in an area close enough for me to study on a regular basis.

The coach in this study displays the characteristics of a democratic coach. These include:

a) Collaborative  
b) Communicative  
c) Values input of the group  
d) Forges consensus through participation  
e) Encourages group members to participate, but maintains final decision-making power  
f) Willing to hear and implement new ideas  
g) Strong and honest in character and leadership ability  
h) Recognizes their imperfections and the group's need for other opinions

I determined that Coach D was a democratic coach based on a personal search given my background in the field (I have coached elite level girls hockey at the provincial and national level), recommendations from colleagues in the coaching fraternity, and supported by evidence gathered from her team, who determined her to be a democratic coach based on a survey/questionnaire. Coach D is a high school physical education teacher at a private Catholic school in the Greater Toronto Area. At the time of the research, she had been teaching for four years and coaching for the same amount of time. Her record as a hockey player herself is extensive. Coach D played club hockey in the Toronto area and captained her high school team’s girl varsity hockey program, (the same team she now coaches in this case study) to a league title. Coach D played five years of Canadian university hockey at a prestigious school where she was a captain for the team in her last two years. She had a successful career there where she won three national bronze medals as a player on the university team. In determining if Coach D was an adequate democratic coach for this case study all members of the team were asked to complete a survey/questionnaire entitled *Levels of Democratic Coaches* (Appendix 1). One of the purposes of the survey/questionnaire was to determine that the researched coach (Coach D) was democratic.

Of course, some of these were minors and proper procedures (consent forms) were followed to obtain their information. The team itself is a varsity girls’ hockey
program at a private school in the Greater Toronto Area. The school team competes against private schools form across the province. The school itself has an academic reputation and a proud Catholic tradition. The school does not give athletic scholarships for any of their sports. The team had twenty members of which twelve were returning players from the previous year. While the team competes at the high school level, the league does not mandate the specific grade level of the players competing on a varsity team. Thus, because the school begins enrolment at grade 5, the team had players as young as grade 7. While the team members did play a role in this case, specific emphasis for observation was placed on those players who are in leadership roles on the team. Particularly, this team had a Leadership team of five upper class students that met with the two members of the coaching staff as representatives of the player body. These players were appointed by the coaching staff.

Other members of the coaching staff and managerial staff were also involved as participants. Specifically, assistant Coach MD was the assistant coach to Coach D. Assistant Coach MD is a 31 year old male history teacher at the school and a teacher who has coached a variety of team and individual sports. While not having played at as high a level as Coach D, assistant Coach MD is vital to this case study. It is imperative to see how he was included in the team's democratic process, what role he played in the entire democratically-minded practice, and his input into the decision making practices of Coach D.

Although they will not be studied, the parents of these players are actively involved in the organization. Their approval for the study was required and their relationship with the coach also had an impact on her coaching style.

**Research Procedures**

Once it was made known who my participants were and introductions were made, participants were shown a copy of my thesis proposal's methodology, procedures, and research questions as developed by myself, with the assistance of my thesis supervisor. Upon agreeing to be a case study participant, the coach needed to get the permission of any superiors (General Manager or Principal). The approval was granted by the school and I invited all members of the team (coaching staff and players) as well as the parents
of the players, and the Principal of the school to attend an informational meeting. Since all the players are minors, complete understanding of the thesis needed to be explained to the parents in order to obtain their consent. Consent letters were issued at this informational meeting. (Appendix 4, 5, 6).

The consent and information regarding the research was gathered through the following process:

1) A meeting took place between the chosen coach, her staff, and the researcher. The point of the meeting was to explain the purpose of the study and to state the responsibilities of all concerned and the time consumption of all participants. It was clearly stated that the role of the researcher is strictly as an observer and interviewer. It was also emphasized that participation is voluntary and that a participant can withdraw at any time, that all identities will be protected, and that all data collected or expressed to the researcher will be confidential. Upon completion of the meeting, the coach and his staff were given the "Coaching Staff Informed Consent Form" (Appendix 6) to be signed.

2) A meeting then took place between the organization's Athletic Director/Principal and the researcher. The point of this meeting was to explain the purpose of the study and to state the responsibilities of all concerned and the time consumption of all participants. It was clearly stated that the role of the researcher was strictly as an observer and interviewer. Upon completion of the meeting, the Vice Principal who attended was given the "Organizations Informed Consent Form" (Appendix 4) to be signed.

3) I scheduled a meeting with the players and parents of the team and the researcher. However, no parents attended. They were all content in obtaining the informational sheets provided about the research. It should be noted that the Vice-Principal of the school did attend his meeting and all players and parents accept for one team member gave their consent. The point of this meeting was to explain the purpose of the study and to state the responsibilities of all concerned and the time consumption of all participating players. It was noted that those chosen for the coaching staff decided that the leadership team might have a greater time commitment in this research. It was clearly stated that the
role of the researcher was strictly as an observer and interviewer. Upon completion of
the meeting, the players and their parents were given the "Player/Parent Informed
Consent Form" (Appendix 5) to be signed by both the parents and player.

The data were gathered by using a variety of means. First, it was imperative for
the study to obtain consent of the entire team (organization head, coaching staff, and
players). This was done through various separate meetings with the above mentioned
groups. These meetings were essentially information sessions. As mentioned in later
sections of this Methodology chapter, letters of consent were signed (see Appendix 4, 5,
6).

Upon obtaining this consent, I sought to determine how the team understands and
interprets the coaching style of their coach. The first process in obtaining this was to
have each player and member of the coaching staff complete the confidential Levels of
Democratic Coaches Survey (Appendix 1). This survey allowed me to do a number of
things. First, it allowed the work to be introduced to all my participants and then to
create pseudonyms for them. Secondly, I was then able to determine how the team and
staff view the democratic mindset of their coach. Furthermore, the survey also allowed
me to help the participants understand the study and to learn some of the characteristics
employed by a democratically-minded coach.

It was a priority for me to determine who the "leadership team" was among the
team's players. These could be formal or informal leaders. These leaders could be called
"captains" or be informal leaders with different roles and namesakes. It is important to
ask questions of the coach that determine how these members were chosen. This is a
good indicator of the coach's democratic tendencies. This leadership team would prove
to be essential to the data collection as the members were deemed as the "second in
commands" to the coaching staff. They would essentially be the voice of the players and
the means by which the coach and players would often communicate. The members of
this leadership team would be key informants in the study.

Participation observation was used. The researcher (myself) was inserted into the
research setting only as an observer and interviewer. The observation occurred on a bi-
weekly basis through attendance at the team's practices and meetings. Also, attendance
at the team's Leadership team meetings would be essential. Throughout the study, I
attended Leadership team meetings four times for a combined total of roughly 320 minutes. At this meetings, I was a silent observer and took field notes. It was also imperative that I attend team staff meetings, but formal meetings between the two coaching staff members was rare (only once). Many informal meetings took place throughout the days, but as someone who was not regularly at the school as all team members were, I could not observe or record these meetings. However, coaches and Leadership team members were given a journal and were asked to update them with all team relevant discussions and issues. Often, due to the Leadership team meetings serving as the forum for discussions of coaching decisions in this democratic coaching style, much of the understanding of this coaching style was taken form those Leadership team meetings.

The case also employed an interview format, using both structured and unstructured interviews with individual players and coaches at two various times throughout the year. The first set of interviews occurred just as the season began (December) and the second interviews were completed after the short high school season (April). The structured interview questions were asked at the first interview. It was my intention at this time to ask more directed questions. Later, the variety of variables that exist throughout the team’s season made structured interview questions difficult. I developed secondary interview questions as the research developed, but found that I often included some of the original interview questions also. This was done in order to recognize and change or maintain continuity in answers. It was useful to see how the participants might change their answers to the same questions as the season elapsed. Appendix 2 (Initial Interview Questions for Players and Coaching Staff) had a series of questions that were initially asked. All members of the team, including the coaching staff, were interviewed.

The democratically-minded coach was also interviewed. Questions were designed to prompt her to define her own democratic style and to discuss scenarios in which the style might be used. (Appendix 3) Both Appendix 2 and Appendix 3 contain protocol forms of the type of information that I was looking to gather.

Furthermore, as stated earlier, I asked the coach and the Leadership team to keep a log or journal that he or she will use to discuss relevant decision making issues that she faces as the season progresses. The purpose of the log or journal was to have the coach
write down her thoughts to major decisions as they happen. Likewise, the assistant coach and Leadership team journals were also imperative to be able to identify major democratically-minded issues as they happened. This was essential because I was not present at every decision making scenario throughout the season. The journal was important in that it helped me formulate questions to ask the coach later in the season. The journal and the interview process with the coach was also designed to obtain examples of her democratic practices and behaviours. The gathering of these data proved to be essential because it revealed these practices and behaviours and assisted in formulating structured interview questions for the players. Some of these questions asked; for example, how effective was the coach’s practice or behaviour in achievement according to the staff and team members? I determined that I could not create an effective interview guide design for the coaching staff and team members until I had conducted a first interview with the coach. Thus, I prioritized this initial meeting.

This case study also entailed extensive field work consisting of shadowing the coach at certain practices, games, and meetings, conducting focus group interviews, and reviewing journals or logs to inform me of the coach’s leadership style and its impact on each individual and on the team’s achievement. It was difficult to determine how often the coach would be observed until I could determine the schedule of the team. The reason for this is because I needed to know how often the team met for practices, games, meetings etc. Once that was made known to me, I was able to put a schedule together and decide when I would observe the team. In all, I was able to observe all the “formal” leadership team meetings, a few practices, and two games. The emphasis for me was not in observing games or practices as this study was not trying to understand the skill development potential or game play of the team, but rather to observe the organizational and management structure of the team. It was determined that two formal interviews with the coach would be sufficient. Most of the observation data and journal notes collected were excellent sources of information. Simply, the interviews proved to be about clarifying or getting first hand opinions form the coach. I valued the observation more and did not want to influence the opinion or coaching style of the coach by having mid-season interviews.
My field work and observations were done in a variety of forms. I used an observational protocol form to record data that I observed. This form modeled the style of observational protocol forms used by Creswell in his work (Creswell, 2005, p.223). After conducting field work in the form of interviews, journal collection, and observation, I spent significant time reading and reflecting on the data in order to identify patterns, themes, and trends that illuminated the coach’s leadership practices.

The process of configuring the field notes into data for analysis is called transcription (Creswell, 2005, p.233). As stated above, procedures for my transcription process model Creswell’s guidelines (Creswell, 2005, p.234). The coding of this data also followed a modeled a design by Creswell (2005, p. 238), in which the text of the interviews and other field notes were broken down into segments and themes. This process allowed for the easier collection. Most of the themes I looked for in my data interpretation were ones that showed decision-making instances and the results of the decision. These were often large group decisions and/or smaller individual decisions.

In my observational protocol I decided to use observed themes that helped me to understand the practices of democratic coaching. These were based on the research sub-questions. However, I also looked for aspects and instances that showed how my case study coach demonstrated the characteristics that determine a democratically-minded coach. These characteristics are listed in the Conceptual Framework design section of this thesis (Figure 1). The idea was to see through observation, how these characteristics and practices are displayed by the coach. This gave me a further understanding of democratic coaching. Furthermore, I also observed using the characteristics and sub-questions as themes, in order that I might see how the coach’s actions or ideas impact the individuals and the entire team.

Once the protocol forms assisted in collecting data, and all the data were organized into identified themes, I isolated the four themes that seemed to be consistently mentioned as important aspects of managing this democratic style, (Communication, Organizational Structure, Coaching Decisions and Strategies, and Environment Created). Then, I looked for "sub-themes" or aspects that helped define what the democratic coaching style looks like in each theme. I then summarized these findings.
Chapter 4
Research Findings

The findings for this study were based on the interviews and observations that I conducted. There were some findings that stood out as relevant to the research, but could not conclusively be linked to the democratic coaching style. For example, it should be noted that the team improved their on-ice record quite considerably. By the time the team reached their third game of the season, the team had already amassed more wins than they had the previous year. Furthermore, there seemed to be a greater general improvement in areas of the team that were less statistical and performance based, such as player attendance, enthusiasm, dedication to development, and more fervor for participation in all activities. This was the one general area of improvement that was mentioned by students like SB who stated in her first interview “This year, we have been winning, but I think we moved a tier down, but that’s besides the point. The coaching (this year) is designed so that everyone feels more comfortable and it’s clear. Everyone seems to show, it’s clear, that there is a positive attitude this year. People are trying to go to practice and its fun this year.”

The most important data collected in the research were linked to the democratically-minded coaching style. These data were organized into four categories: communication techniques, organizational structure, coaching decisions and strategies, and the environment created. Within the four aspects, themes emerged that helped answer the research question and sub-questions. A model based on the data collected is offered below.
Using these four aspects and the themes that emerged through data collection, I offer the following narrative discussion of these thematic findings. The discussion of these findings is broken down into the four aspects of communication techniques, organizational structure, coaching decisions and strategies, and the environment created.
**Communication Techniques**

Throughout the data collection, it became evident that communication was an important component of democratic leadership. It seemed to be an aspect that was mentioned by all members of the team as an important quality of a good coach. Communication seemed to be an aspect that was at the heart of the managing style. Coach D stressed in her second interview the importance of communicating matters of decision making with staff and leadership team members in order to have success. As she states, “even last minute meetings”, are extremely necessary so that there is an open line of communication and an efficient means of problem solving or decision making. In fact, as Coach D states, “As for common democratic practices that are imperative, I would say that day to day communication is important. However, even more importantly, I feel that the players have better lines of communication with each other and with the coaches because of this practice”. One can see that Coach D is emphasizing the importance of regular communication, but communication is also important for the creation of a communicative relationship amongst all members of the team. The report of these findings will discuss how communication is practiced in a democratically-minded coaching atmosphere, by looking at the three themes of communication that emerged in the findings.

**Approachable**

It is important to point out that both members of the coaching staff mention the importance of approachability as a key theme of communication in the democratic coaching style. Assistant Coach MD states in his personal definition of democratic coaching that “…the coaches remain open for suggestions and tips, and any other questions or complaints that the players have, and that they (players) are made to feel free to approach the coaching staff”. This creation of a “made to feel free” atmosphere of approaching coaches is not only very relevant and evident in this research, but it was interesting to see throughout the research how the democratically-minded coach and her staff encouraged and created such an atmosphere.

Throughout the research, team members mentioned Coach D’s past coaching styles. It seems that many of the older girls who have been coached by Coach D for a
number of years, did not see her past managing styles as democratic; however, her style has changed in more recent times. It is unclear as to how or when Coach D began to change this style, but it is recent. Nonetheless, it is the theme of being approachable that is one of the changes that players noticed in Coach D as she developed a more democratically-minded style of coaching. For example, student and team captain LF’s first interview provides an example of comparing Coach D’s past and present approachability.

DG: Do you have any input, or do you feel comfortable that if you have to change that warm-up, or if there’s something that…well, clearly the warm-up has become one of your responsibilities, if you feel that it is not working for this team, do you feel comfortable in being able to talk to her (Coach D) about that and that you would feel you would be able to change things up?

LF: I think I am still getting used to her doing that. So I think this year, I would be able to talk to her about it. And, well, I know that it is her say, so I wouldn’t be quick to challenge it, but I might in the future.

Furthermore, LF elaborates in her second interview by saying that Coach D’s approachability increased compared to previous years. LF states that “Her (Coach D’s) approachability went from below a five out of ten last year, to as a high as a democratic coach can be”. In her opinion, this led to players being afraid to approach her last year and not willing to improve as she was more isolated, but now, she (Coach D) is friendlier and this influenced team play and improved attendance. This provides a vivid understanding of Coach D’s past practice of players feeling she was less approachable, versus her seemingly more approachability as a democratically-minded coach.

Players seemed to be comfortable approaching her. This is something that was witnessed throughout the meetings that I attended also. Coach D provided opportunities for her players to speak freely. Players felt that they could approach her individually and in group environments. Coach D nurtured an environment that sent a message that she was approachable. For example, her terminology was very welcoming. Language that
included, but was not limited to, such things as asking the players, “What do you think?” or encouraging the students to offer their suggestions by continuously asking them for their opinion on matters. This was a constant aspect of Coach D’s communication that the researcher noticed very regularly and in a variety of atmospheres. It was important for her to create a mentality amongst her players that she was approachable. She did this by being willing to hear what they had to say, and team members knew that Coach D would value their opinions.

There was also a strong connection between meeting the team’s goals and the approachability of the coaching staff. When he was asked questions regarding team goals, assistant coach MD referred to the importance of being approachable as a democratically-minded coaching staff.

DG: What were your team goals? Were you made aware of them season long and at each individual game?

MD: Yes, she (Coach D) and I tried to push home as often as possible that it is a sport, and I might have even been stronger on this point, actually that’s not a fair thing to say. [Have] fun, and to do as best as we could to improve on our individual goals in order to improve as individuals and as a team. That would have been our constant goals. To get as far as you can in the season, of course that’s always fun to win a championship and all that, but that is not ever the number one thing that we’re trying to push home as coaches.

DG: How did the coaching staff’s democratic style accomplish those goals?

MD: Being encouraging and approachable. I think taking kids to the side, and telling them how important it is for them to achieve their individual goals, in doing this we would know what their individual goals were or we would recognize them. For example, if a kid couldn’t skate or whatever. So, noticing weaknesses and jumping on those in a friendly manner. During practice I would take a kids aside and ask them what they could do better and how they could
improve or give them skill tips on how they could do one thing better. So I think encouragement, being approachable, being friendly, having a fun atmosphere. We had one day that was sort of a skills competition. It was actually a scheduled practice, but we decided to make it something more fun between the regular season and the play-offs. So, just that whole atmosphere of having a good time and playing a good game that everyone loves.

Finally, the Levels of Democratic Coaches Survey provided the following data. When asked whether or not “Your coach has established open lines of communication that makes you feel comfortable to approach him/her with ideas”, of the fourteen team members who completed the survey, five of the members disagreed (one being Coach D herself), while nine members agreed or strongly agreed. All of the five members of the leadership team, with the exception of one (CW) and Assistant Coach MD agreed with the statement. No member chose “Strongly Disagree” as an option.

**Facilitator in Communications**

Another evident component of communication was that the democratically-minded coach was a facilitator of communication. The earliest team meeting that this researcher witnessed was on November 25th, 2008. It was a meeting with the coaching staff and the Leadership team, and there was a “light environment where people felt comfortable”. This meeting was one that defined the roles of people in the leadership team, but also was a brainstorming session about a variety of team related issues like a team theme, goals, and even season-long preparation. It was clear that both coaches encouraged and facilitated the brainstorming by the players. They guided the players with their ideas, but followed through with proper dialogue like “What do you think?” or “Is anybody ready for another idea?” This was predominately the atmosphere established by the coaching staff. In fact, throughout the season, the research showed numerous examples of dialogue in the form of questions to encourage the players to take initiative in decision making. Coach D was predominately the one giving the questions to encourage discussion, but seemed to guide the discussion towards the answer she wanted. As this type of question and answer brainstorming went on, Coach D would write notes on a constant basis, while she facilitated the discussion. It was also clear that the players
knew that Coach D was the leader and respected her authority to have final say. This was evident in two areas. First, the players often respected her final say authority even in a facilitator role. For example, Leadership team member LF states in her first interview that “As captain, I do have a little bit more influence (than other players), but obviously, Coach D. would have final say in things. And that’s a good thing”. This opinion was not just individualized to the team captain. SB in her first interview, assured the interviewer that, “I feel that in the end, decisions should be up to the coach, as in terms of democratic coaching, but I feel that it (democratic coaching style) just gives me more responsibility to be on the Leadership team, and it gives me more responsibility to have more input into decisions on the team. But in the end, the coach makes the final decisions, which I think is good in the end.”

Secondly, there were examples of players and assistant coach MD asking for the input and opinion of Coach D. Often, in the first Leadership team meeting and in all subsequent meetings, it was recognized that the Leadership team asked Coach D for questions of clarity or help on matters of decision making. While assistant coach MD seemed to suggest things more regularly and almost in conjunction at times with the players, it seemed that Coach D, in her facilitator role, seemed to offer suggestions only when asked, or if the team was getting side tracked or completely off the intentions of the discussion. However, it was noted that Coach D always had final say, and re-iterated, mostly through her written notes, the team’s final decisions on the issues, only after her influence and input was given, offering conclusions to the topic by summarizing and moving on to the next issue at hand. Thus, while there clearly was evidence of Coach D being an assertive and influential leader, this was done through facilitation more than through a dominating authoritarian style.

Further to the observation at team meetings, Coach D emphasized the role of facilitator in practicing the democratically-minded coaching style when she was asked about her role on the team.

DG: So your role in that is to provide guidance.
Coach D: Yeah, I think it’s guidance and leading them to get them to I guess understand what it is that they want to accomplish and trying to get that out of them and then myself, trying to facilitate that with the other coaches and through coaching and through the involvement of everyone on the team to reach whatever those goals are.

**Open-minded, but Opinionated**

One theme that was noticeable during observations and explained during interviews and members’ journals was that all members of the team felt comfortable in communicating their opinions to Coach D and the other team members because it was understood that communication was open-minded, but opinionated.

The open-minded atmosphere regarding communication within the team was something that was observed often in Leadership team meetings. In the observation notes taken on November 25th, 2008, it was noted that the Leadership team meeting was a “light atmosphere where players feel comfortable in stating their opinions”, where players on the Leadership team “seem to feel comfortable taking and helping others”. The comfort level that players seemed to display at all meetings led to an environment where players communicated openly and with little worry about suggesting wrong or inappropriate things. For example, it was noted at a later meeting that the players felt comfortable stating new ideas. The evidence for this observation note came from an incident where a Leadership team member (CW) suggested the creation of a player of the game award for the game’s best player in order to spark further motivation and interest in playing for the team. This comfortable feeling when communicating prompted students to speak and listen with an open mind about new or different ideas. The above suggestion by CW was simply one example.

In another example, it was brought up to Coach D at a January Leadership team meeting that the Leadership team players were concerned about the “poor focus” for pre-game warm-up. Interestingly enough, this warm-up was a responsibility that the coaching staff delegated to the Leadership team at the beginning of the season, and thus, they were concerned about the direction of their delegated responsibilities. In this meeting, LF suggested that “Since we (the team) are winning, we are forgetting how the warm-ups are important”. When this opinion was stated, a discussion arose about how to
solve this problem, or to decide whether it was even a “problem”. Coach D encouraged openness to talk by asking members of the Leadership team and Assistant Coach MD “Do we want to keep the warm-up?” This question sparked a discussion of the matter, beginning with a consensus from all in attendance that the warm-up was important and needed to be kept. However, there was debate about what to do to solve the problem.

From within the team, there were a variety of opinions about the issue. Below are the opinions about the issue that were presented at this meeting, along with the pseudonym name of the member who provided the option.

1) Practice the warm-up again (Coach D)
2) Spread out Leadership team members within the team ranks to set a better example (Assistant Coach MD)
3) A stronger and more enthusiastic pre-game cheer to motivate a focused warm-up (Leadership team member MF)
4) A “lead by example” approach by the Leadership team to encourage more focus (Leadership team member SB)

Each of these opinions was heard with every individual present having an open mind to each other’s ideas. The Leadership team, led by Coach D, agreed to adopt all these measures as ways to solve this issue. While not all agreed with all the mentioned ideas, the open-minded atmosphere regarding how this team communicated was evident and a consensus was established. Ultimately, it was agreed through consensus of all members that all of these above mentioned possibilities should be administered to solve the warm-up issue.

The open-minded example mentioned above and the constant open-minded mentality regarding communication that was displayed throughout the research also showed how individuals were opinionated about their ideas or plans. In fact, at no time throughout the data collection was it observed that team members were unwilling to state their opinions. This is true for stating initial opinions on a matter, and for opinions that were given about any other teammate’s suggestions. This is best recognized with the way the communication process proceeded in what might have been the team’s most interesting dynamic situation. This situation concerned a player (NM) who was suspended for two games because her lack of attendance at
practices, a violation of team rules. After an open and constant communication from the coaching staff, NM began to feel that she wanted to be part of this team and began showing up again for practices. The dilemma faced for Coach D and her staff was that if they were to put NM back into the line-up, then another player would have to sit out the next game. Coach D brought this dilemma to the Leadership team so that the issue might be communicated and opinions heard. Coach D made the Leadership team aware of the entire situation, and offered her opinion to the matter. “I think that if she (NM) does not play, she will be really upset, and I don’t think this is what we want to do.” She then opened the meeting up to hear the opinion of the Leadership team members. Players were very opinionated on this matter as some saw it is a potential rift in the team because NM was well liked and a friend with many on the Leadership team. After agreeing that “she (NM) has been showing up to practices and doing her best to fit in”, the players expressed various opinions. Some felt she was “ready and deserving to play”, while others felt it was “not fair to the others” by asking “Who will sit for her?” Suggestions included; rotating shifts and dressing all, sitting younger players, and even not allowing NM to play. The communication of these opinions was open-minded, but still very opinionated. In her facilitator role, Coach D summarized and concluded by asking for “Any last thoughts on the issue?” and then confirmed that it seemed that the players supported the playing of NM. She finalized this by stating that her and assistant coach MD would ultimately decide this issue after speaking with two other players who might sit out for NM. She assured the Leadership team that their opinions were warranted, understood, and “would be taken into consideration”. Ultimately, the open-minded and opinionated communication on the NM issue was resolved with one of the two players that the coaches spoke to agreeing to sit out for NM.

**Organizational Structure**

In order to best be able to understand the way in which the democratically-minded coach implements a hierarchical management structure, the research focused a great deal on trying to understand the organizational structure of this team. In collecting these data,
three themes emerged: the creation of a Leadership team, the importance of delegation, and a categorization process of *A Line* and *B Line* players.

**Creation of a Leadership Team**

Perhaps the most consistent tool used by Coach D in her quest for democracy was the creation of the Leadership team (L.T.). In her own words, Coach D suggests that, “As for strategies, the leadership team is important. They were essential in the whole process and important in the style.” To discuss this theme, I offer a description and definition of the L.T.’s creation, purpose, and function.

The L.T. was created by the coaching staff as a means to allow players to have representation in decision-making matters of the team. The members of the L.T. were not elected by the players, but chosen by the coaching staff. It should be noted that Coach D had the most input into the decision on who should be on the L.T., but only because assistant coach M.D. was less aware of leadership qualities of team members, since he was a first year coach for this team. However, as a teacher at the school, he was somewhat aware of the players’ qualities, but more so in the classroom setting rather than the sporting arena. Thus, while he had input into who could be on the L.T., he deferred final decision on the selection of L.T. members to Coach D. Essentially, Coach D chose L.T. members based on the leadership potential displayed by the player’s past performances and characteristics. In her first interview, Coach D described the selection process and initial creation of the L.T.

DG: What democratically oriented coaching strategies have you employed?

Coach D: Well, first, we decided that we would have a Leadership team. What we did was, the other coach and myself, sat down and looked at the team, and having coached in the past, I had an idea about some of the players and their roles on the team in the past, and knew a little bit about them, their characteristics and their qualities. So, we determined the members of the Leadership team, who we could then meet with, and sit down and discuss some of our plans, and some of the things they felt were important for the team. And sort of explained to them how they would get to have some ownership over the team. Obviously,
leadership meetings are important in order to facilitate the ideas and goals for the team.

It is of importance to note Coach D feels the creation of the L.T. was an important part of democratically-minded coaching. The simple fact that Coach D states the creation of the L.T. as her first response to the above question stresses the L.T.’s importance for this democratically-minded coaching style. It was decided by the coaching staff that players LF, SB, CW, MF, and AS, joined assistant coach MD and Coach D on the L.T. Of these players, LF was chosen as team captain. At no time, was an election done to decide this player representative group. All positions of leadership were appointed by the coaching staff.

The purpose of the L.T. was at various times, both simple and complex. While the purpose of the L.T. was to be a form of player inclusion in the team’s decision making process, it was neither a true representation of the team, nor was it limited to just being a communication method for the players to voice their opinions to the coach.

To discuss the first point, the reason that the L.T was not a “true representation of the team” was because many players on the team were not represented. For example, while the team did have members from grades 7 – 12, only upper classmen (grades 10 – 12) were on the L.T. Also, there was no first year player on the team, regardless of grade level. Furthermore, captains were also appointed from within the L.T. To summarize this point, the best account of this comes from Coach D’s journal entry describing the first L.T. meeting. “We (assistant coach MD and herself) made a conscious decision to choose players from grade 10, 11, and 12, and to represent the varying skill levels. Initially, we allowed students to choose three players from this list of players (L.T. members), but after looking at the votes and discussing it, assistant coach MD and I decided to have one captain and two (permanent) assistant captains, and the other two players on the L.T. would wear an ‘A’ on either their home or away jersey. This way, all five girls would be recognized for their leadership”. In the opinion of Coach D, “When announced in front of the team, all girls seemed pleased”.
Secondly, the L.T. was not just limited to just being a communication method for the players to voice their opinions to the coach. When first being asked what some of the specific things the L.T. would be doing or already have done, Coach D stated:

We have looked at setting team goals and team themes. So, what it is, is that this will be ongoing throughout the year. Looking at things that they (all players) can then do to reach those goals. For example, they (L.T.) really wanted to make sure that everyone is really included in the team, so they decided that they should go out and make an effort to talk to each player five times specifically throughout the season.

So, one can see that the initial goal setting and season long themes of the team would be very much influenced by the L.T. Later in the season, the L.T. elaborated on their goal setting initiative by guiding each player on the team to create their own game by game individual goals. One can see that the L.T. was allowed to play an important role in team and individual goal setting. This was not coincidence, but something designed by the coaching staff as a role for the L.T. As stated by Coach D, “The leadership team and their role in goal setting is very important.” Furthermore, the L.T. was used in the role of helping to plan on-ice or game drills and procedures. Some of these examples were explained by L.T. member SB in her first interview.

DG: What examples could you give that shows your coach fostering your decision making role?”

SB: Like specifically?

DG: Yes, exactly.

SB: Well she gives us tasks, like choosing music to play and things like that. So it kind of adds a more personal feeling to the team. It’s good to be involved in the things that we get to choose. Like, she obviously has these drills that we’re going
to do in practice, that we know are designed to help us, and that’s understandable, but she lets us, (the leadership team), flow the warm up, she gives us, she designates decisions. Like, she asks the captain, (LF) and I, if we have any ideas and then she let’s us, well…we gave her the idea of everybody creating a goal on the card, and she let us do it. So, she let us make up goals for the team.

DG: Did she ever ask your input before or after a game about the team on ice, or anything like that?

SB: Informally, yeah. She will ask us how we thought it went, but not so much after about what we want to do to improve. She kind of takes that upon herself to do that, but she does ask how we thought it (the game) was good or not. Not just the leadership team, but the whole team about how we thought we did, and usually it’s a pretty fair consensus. Everybody feels that if they did bad or could have improved, but lately we have been playing pretty well and everybody seems to be working hard. We have won all our games so…

In a later instance, Coach D even asked the L.T.’s input into two very important matters regarding the ice time and inclusion of two different players who were either unwilling or unable to consistently attend and contribute to team events. The situation regarding these two players (NM as stated in the Communication Aspect), and CO were very much represented by the L.T. As players themselves, the L.T. understood their situations better and were able to freely state their opinions on the matter to the coaching staff.

The purpose of the L.T. was made very clear through the data collected. While they were members of the team, and did serve as representatives of the players, that representation was limited and not entirely representative. As stated by L.T. member SB, “I kind of see it (leadership team) as me and the leadership team as a connecting entity between the coach and the other players”. Furthermore, the vast amount of input and contributing roles of the L.T. show that their purpose was to help the coaching staff and players to communicate, to allow representatives of the team to be included in on and off
ice decision making, to establish team and individual goals, and to assist in implementing improvements to individual skills and team achievement.

How the L.T. functioned was quite elementary and not very complicated at all. Once the L.T was created and membership on the L.T. chosen and responsibilities described, the L.T. met regularly throughout the season. These meetings were always done in a classroom setting with desks arranged in a circular position so that all members could face each other. The coaches never sat, nor stood in a position where they seemed to be in a higher status of authority than the rest of the members. However, the functioning of these meetings were initiated and led by the coaching staff that clearly set the agenda for the meetings and facilitated discussion. In these meetings, Coach D would lead by following her agenda and encouraging organized discussion on all topics, while she asked questions, listened, and took notes. It is important to note that, when in attendance, assistant coach MD was helping to steer the discussion in the direction that the coaching staff would approve of. He knew the agenda of the meeting ahead of time, and what outcome the coaches were hoping for. He essentially functioned as a guide and support for Coach D’s agenda. As for the players within the L.T. membership, they functioned freely and maturely by providing answers and opinions that were important to the operation of the team. Essentially, the L.T. functioned as equal individuals in these meetings with the coaching staff facilitating open-minded discussions on the issues at hand.

To conclude the discussion on the L.T., it is imperative to understand how important it was to the democratic-coaching process. The L.T. not only represented the team in communications with the coaching staff, but through a variety of performance tasks (ex. creating warm-ups, goal setting, theme building, and decision making about players), seemed to be a vital component of the team’s organizational structure.

Delegate

Like many democratically-minded leaders, Coach D implemented a great deal of delegation in her organizational structure. Delegating roles and responsibilities seemed to be a necessity of the democratically-minded coaching environment. Perhaps the strongest support for delegating in a democratically-minded coaching style is that it seemed to take more time to manage this style than many other coaching styles, and
therefore, delegating responsibilities helped to compensate for this extra time. The extra
time was one of the most consistently stated negative qualities of the democratically-
mined coaching style and that point was confirmed by Coach D on a few occasions. In
her first interview, she stated that “A hindrance (to the democratically-minded coaching
style) could be that the coach is needed to facilitate things and meetings are very
important. This takes time.” Later, in her second interview, Coach D emphasizes that
“Time and energy is needed to organize and to keep kids in the loop”. In fact, Coach D
mentioned that one of her own personal consequences as a result of the democratically-
oriented coaching style was “…..using time and energy, in terms of organizing meetings,
coming up with strategies with the kids, keeping them in the loop. It took up more of my
time than what I think an authoritarian coach would”. However, when asked what her
opinion was to the concept that the democratic coaching style takes more time, the
following discussion took place:

Coach D: I think that if the kids are invested in the team, then it is worth it. If they
want to have input into the team, then it is worth it. Absolutely. I am not
thinking, “I am wasting my time” If they are feeling involved and feel like we are
all getting something out of it and they are investing themselves into it, then I
don’t think that it is really a big consequence.

DG: So can I quote you as saying that investment and ownership, and inclusion of
the kids make the time it takes worth it?

Coach D: Yeah.

DG: Did other things become easier due to the sacrifice of time it took to have
these meetings and other time consuming things?

Coach D: I think that the LT started to do more and more on their own as a result
and it took less time to guide them. They become more confident I think and they
began doing more things like even pep talks with players, so I did not always
become the one initiating it or suggesting it.

DG: So, it made your job somewhat easier by having them be more responsible?

Coach D: Yeah. As the season wore on, they started to recognize that they could
do this and I think that in their pasts, everything was sort of directed form coaches
to players.
This important demand on time for the coach seemed to be a possible barrier; one that will be discussed later in the analysis of the findings. In order to best manage the extra time, Coach D delegated responsibilities when able and appropriate. Such tasks like off-ice warm-ups, team building activities, and locker room management was delegated to the L.T. However, the delegation of responsibilities to the L.T. was not limited to off-ice situations. In fact, Coach D often delegated on-ice skill development as well. This is something that can be rare for many coaches and unique in the sport of ice hockey. To best explain this, L.T. member LF offers this description: “She does ask for our input on games, and she asks me to run warm-ups on and off the ice before games, and so, essentially this year I have felt like a third coach. I am helping out a lot, teaching the younger girls skills”.

The other person that Coach D delegated responsibility to was assistant coach MD. Being the only other member of the coaching staff, assistant coach MD was given a great deal of responsibility. His opinions were heard and he felt included in all decisions. There are two examples that show how Coach D delegated responsibility to her assistant coach. The first is the off-ice responsibility of helping to facilitate L.T. meetings and discussions with players. Assistant coach MD was always consulted before the meetings and his opinions were asked. He also knew that his role was to guide the L.T. meetings while Coach D asked questions and even transcribed notes. As for on-ice or game day responsibilities, Assistant coach MD offered his opinion to the delegation of his responsibilities when he stated, “We had a few times in game time situations what lines to put out, whether to play only our best players at the end of the game, that sort of thing”. Also, another example of Coach D delegating responsibility to assistant coach MD, was when Coach D put him in charge of defense. “I was in charge of defense and I never had to consult her on my choices. Essentially, game time decisions, regarding the defense, were left to me. I often consulted her (Coach D), but she often consulted with me, but never overruled my decisions”.

For the sake of time management and because it is a vital component in making teams democratic, Coach D used delegation as a form for her organizational structure.
Categorization of Players: ‘A’ Line and ‘B’ Line Players

In managing the organizational structure of a sports team, one might be challenged to offer the level of inclusion necessary to practice a democratically-minded coaching style since there will always be some players who are more skilled than others and these higher skilled players may be better able to assist the team in winning games. Thus, it is often difficult for a democratically-minded coach to include all team members in on ice performance. Coach D puts forth her best solution to this difficult challenge with the categorization of players into ‘A’ Line and ‘B’ Line players. The following paragraphs offer a description of this unique coaching organizational strategy as described by the team’s coaches and observed during data collection.

The idea for this categorization process originated at the tryouts for the team. Attending the tryouts were twenty players: twelve returning and eight new players. After three tryout skates, the coaching staff agreed that there was little need to cut players from the team because they could not see a clear cut off point in the skill level of the lesser skilled players. Basically, they believed that all could participate on the team in some form. So in keeping with the democratic coaching style, Coach D and assistant coach MD created a categorization method so that they could best include all players for the team. This method was strictly based on the coaching staff’s assessment of player skill. Essentially, the coaching staff created an ‘A’ Line and ‘B’ Line grouping of players. In all, there were ten ‘A’ Line players and eight ‘B’ Line players (The sole goaltender of the team was not categorized and one player from the original tryouts did not participate in the team after all). It was decided, and clearly communicated to all the players, that the coaching staff would keep all players who chose to play for the team and the player categorization method was explained. The basic structure of this player categorization was that should there be no player illness, discipline matters, or unavailability of players for whatever reason, ‘B’ Line players would be the first to sit out games. It was agreed upon that no ‘B’ Line player would ever sit out more than two games. The line combinations for each game would include ‘A’ Line and ‘B’ Line players to be evenly spread out to increase the depth of the line-up. It was decided that only in critical need would ‘B’ Line players be called upon to sit out shifts as ‘A’ Line players might more than likely be needed more so to win the game. In this case, players were told that the
coaching staff had discretion on moving around line combinations. Players were told that likely, in these rare “must win” situations, ‘A’ Line players would get ice-time priority. In communicating this strategy to the whole team and to individuals chosen for the team, it was explained that this method would more than likely not cost any player ice-time. The reason for this was that coaches were aware that at this level of high school ice hockey, there are many scheduling conflicts and there would be quite a few absences from practices and games. The coaching staff emphasized to players that commitment to attend all team functions (practices and games) was mandatory, and any absences were disciplined with the absent players not dressing for games.

Throughout the season, a few incidents arose that tested the use of this player categorization method. The first issue was the situation regarding player NM as stated earlier in the Communication Aspect of this findings report. The lack of attendance at practices by NM, as described earlier, forced the coaching staff to sit her out of two games and allowed the coaching staff to not have to sit out a ‘B’ Line player. A similar situation happened with another player (LM) who missed one practice and sat out one game. It should be noted that in making this decision, the coaching staff did not hesitate to discipline players for a lack of attendance. In fact, NM was an ‘A’ Line player whose skill level was high.

Another incident was one that could have been a potential catastrophe for the entire organizational structure created. While it was a test for the ‘A’ Line / ‘B’ Line categorization method, and ultimately helpful to this organizational strategy, it was a serious challenge for the entire democratic coaching style. This challenge involved a senior level ‘B’ Line player named CO. CO was told, along with all the members of the team, that attendance at practices was mandatory for participation in games. CO made it clear through communication with the coaching staff that she could not give a total commitment to the team and that, in light of her busy academic schedule, she could not make high school hockey her number one commitment. CO did not show up to practices and never dressed for a game. It was communicated to her that she was more than welcome to attend practices, but the coaching staff categorized her as an “unofficial player”. As stated by assistant coach MD, “Coaches have ground rules and so does our school. There are consequences for actions.” CO disregarded both team and school rules
for attendance. This was not a problem for the coaches or CO. It was understood that she
could not make hockey her number one commitment. I never saw it as the team ‘losing a
player’. She (CO) was free to come to practices, but did not attend many and therefore,
she did not play any games”. In interviews with Coach D and with assistant coach MD, it
was clearly stated that the leadership team had opinions on this matter and all regarded
CO as an “unofficial player” on numerous occasions. So with CO’s lack of attendance at
practices, another spot was made open for a ‘B’ Line player.

Other issues, like illness, doctor’s appointments, school work, and commitment to
their club teams, forced players to miss games. This allowed the coaching staff to dress
and play all players that were available for every game. Only once did an eligible player
not dress for a game. This was communicated to the player and she was perfectly fine
with it, and attended the game as a spectator.

As summarized by Coach D, “Our decision for categorizing ‘A’ Line and ‘B’
Line players helped create an atmosphere of inclusion and commitment. Equal
commitment made all players play. This player categorization could have impacted ice-
time, but it did not, and all players were understanding of it because we communicated it
to them”. When asked if players could move from lines, Coach D stated that, “We never
discussed it because we never had the need, but I guess we could after talking with the
leadership team”. Finally, regarding the ‘A’ Line and ‘B’ Line categorization of players,
Coach D stated, “We never lost games because of this categorization process, outcomes
may have been different, but not absurdly in our favour. The inclusion of all members on
the ice, even though the skill levels were different, helped kids get better and more
involved, regardless of how much they contributed to on-ice winning. We never had a
problem with ‘B’ Line players or ‘A’ Line players wanting more ice and I will continue
to do this for this level of hockey”.

Coaching Decisions and Strategies

The coaching decisions and strategies displayed by any coach provide the clearest
look into a coaching style. For many, it is the area of decisions and strategies that give
the best insight into the mindset and techniques practiced by a coach. In what follows, I
will report the findings that specifically revolved around times when the coach was
involved in decision making. While this can often produce insights into one’s coaching style, the data can also be misleading. For example, in observing Coach D, it was imperative that I understood that not all of her decisions or strategies would be the same for each individual player on this particular team, nor might they be the same for future individual team members or for future teams that she might coach. Furthermore, it was very apparent that much thought went into each of her decisions and deployed strategies, as expected, but it was noted that there seemed to be hesitation in making decisions. Thus, it was challenging to identify specific skill sets that were demonstrated by the coach. Instead, the data collected in this aspect focused on general and “non-player specific” themes. While this aspect will be discussed and analyzed further in later sections of this thesis, it is relevant to mention this now as an addendum to help understand that the data presented through these themes is general in description, as it will make for a better understood look at the decisions and strategies implemented by a democratically-minded coach. Therefore, in forming a report of the findings of the aspect of decisions and strategies, some important themes emerged as general understandings into the practices of a democratically-minded coach: they are inclusive, collaborative when necessary and possible, and ultimately the coach is the final decision maker.

**Collaborative Inclusion**

It is important to note that an inclusive environment is a very important theme that emerged in the democratically-minded coaching style. The data collected demonstrate Coach D’s inclusive atmosphere in the sense of allowing team members to be included in decisions and strategies. Furthermore, inclusiveness as linked to decision making and strategies was also collaborative. Simply, decision making and the implementation of strategies was not only inclusive, but collaborative amongst team members. It was not just enough to include others in her decision making, but Coach D seemed to feel that it was also important in her democratically-minded coaching style to establish a mutual sharing of the ideas in decision making and strategies.

With regards to allowing the team members to feel they are included in a collaborative decision making process, Coach D allowed players to have input. This was a constant theme during all decision making moments. Collaborative inclusion into
decision making seemed to be an essential part of team chemistry that helped the team to understand that they had ownership of the team’s direction. Further to this point, it seemed that Coach D did not practice this inclusive decision making process consistently in the past, or if she did, decisions were not seen as collaborative by her players. Interestingly, as mentioned earlier, her past team accomplishments were not as successful prior to becoming a more democratically-minded coach. L.T. member and veteran player LF explained the impact that an inclusive and collaborative decision making coach has had on the team. As a long time member of the team, she was able to compare this democratically-minded practice of collaborative inclusion in decision making with past practices displayed by Coach D. The following segment of LF’s interview from December 16th, 2008 shows how important collaborative inclusion of all team members in decision making is, but also elaborates on a comparison of past inclusive practices by Coach D with her current democratically-minded practice of collaborative inclusion in decision making.

DG: How is democratic coaching understood by you in your role on this team?

LF: I kind of understand it as when the coaches, when the coach gives everyone an opportunity, various team members of different backgrounds, skill level, and grade, to have some say in decisions being made. Major decisions mostly.

DG: Already. I’d like to discuss your Levels of Democratic Coaching Survey responses. You were one of the ones that put down answers to a couple of questions that I found interesting. That is, questions #2, #5, and #14, and #15 (Levels of Democratic Coach Survey), all gave signs of you not agreeing with the statements. And, the statements included non-inclusiveness. Would you say that that has been something that has happened this year? Non-inclusion of teammates.

LF: As far as Ms. Donohue’s coaching style?

DG: Yes.
LF: Actually no. This is, well, (SB) and I talk about it a lot. This year, she (Coach D) definitely made more of an effort to include, everyone, like the leadership team, in the decision making. Last year, it was very different because she seemed more detached. It was more like, she is the coach and we are the team, so we listened to her. I was the captain last year, but with anyone else, it was kind of me, then her, and then the team. So, I didn’t feel like it was such an inclusive team. Very different than it was this year.

Examples of the coach including team members, as stated by LF, in the decision making process were mentioned by many different team members. An excellent example came from assistant coach MD. In the example he gave, assistant coach MD mentions how Coach D included himself and the L.T. in a variety of decision making scenarios. When asked if he could give a specific example of an issue that came up where she (Coach D) needed his advise in a decision making issue, he stated, “Yeah, we had a few times in game time situations what lines to put out, whether to play only our best players at the end of the game, that sort of thing. There were a couple of students who were missing practices, so we had to talk together about what to do with them and in the end we included the leadership team, some of the other players as well, to decide what to do with them. Of course as adults, and the coaches, I was asked first. And ….things such as that”. Furthermore, when assistant coach MD was asked if he felt he had input into all matters of this team in the decision making process, his reply was a simple “Yes”. As evidence, he offered the way in which the two most pressing team chemistry decision issues, the attendance issues with team members NM and CO, were both very inclusive and he and players, through the L.T., were included in all decisions on those matters. He also very clearly stated that “I had input and inclusion into all practice planning” and that his opinions were often heard and acted on.

As for the players, it seemed that they all felt a stronger sense of ownership regarding the direction of the team because they were included in decision making. As recognized by assistant coach MD, “…it felt like the players had more ownership on the team”. He would also make the interesting comparison of “ownership equals
commitment”. This was a statement made to show a direct link to an increased commitment level that will be discussed later. Largely, the availability of player input into decision making issues allowed this sense of player ownership to flourish and ultimately, players were consulted on major, and often minor, decision making issues. Examples of this can be found in the instance with player DT who was facing discipline for breaking a coaching and team request to not run up the score versus weaker opponents, and in the attendance cases of NM and CO. In all of these major team impacting decisions, Coach D received the input of the members of L.T. who represented the entire body of players. Specifically, both in her journal and in interviews, Coach D waited for the L.T. input before making any decision. In other examples, Coach D consulted the entire team on certain issues, such as in decisions of cancelling some practices, setting team goals, and even skill development. As stated by a team player in her journal, “My input is valued, I have helped shape the team, and I really care about it.”

There was one noticeable barrier that made collaborative inclusion of team members in decision making a challenge. At times, it seemed that Coach D did not consult the L.T. or any other player member of the team and when this happened there was a sudden change to the collaborative inclusive decision making atmosphere. There were simply times where the coaching staff was unable to meet with any players to gain their input. This seemed to be an inevitable reality of this high school level of sport. Most players understood this. The following transcribed interview offers further understanding of this barrier to a collaborative inclusive decision making process.

DG: Are there any things that hinder these democratic practices? Like barriers to these democratic practices.

LF: Nothing huge. I mean sometimes it is difficult at school because Ms. D. has to make a decision and it is hard to find all the people of the leadership squad, so it easier for her to just find (asst. coach MD) if she wants to talk about stuff. So I think it is difficult in that sense, because she cannot call a meeting everyday after school just to discuss.
DG: So, in previous interviews I have heard this, sometimes it is easier for her to just go to another coach and say, ‘let’s just make this decision’, or for herself to just make the decision, as opposed to the more difficult thing, which is including people in the decision.

LF: Yeah. Exactly. It is not always easy to find us (LT) because we have different classes, have work to do, we are all over the place.

DG: So that’s your answer for a thing that hinders?

LF: Yeah. It is a convenience thing. Yeah.

Coach D sees this collaborative form of inclusion of players as a vital element in her role as a democratically-minded coach.

DG: How is democratic coaching understood by you, in your role on the team?

Coach D: I think that democratic coaching is important in terms of getting the kids to be involved in what’s going on with the team. Not necessarily whose going out in terms of the next shift or whose going to be playing on the powerplay, but more so, how their going to guide where we want to go as a team. So, whether it is that they want to get shut-outs, or whether they want to get as may wins as possible, or maybe even just as simple as having input in terms of how they want, not ice time divided, but sort of the goal in terms of what the whole team wants to accomplish. That could be on the ice or off the ice

Coach D provided examples of strategies that help create a collaborative and inclusive decision making atmosphere. When asked in her first interview for a strategy or idea to include the L.T. in decision making, she stated:.
We have looked at setting team goals and team themes. So, what it is, is that will be ongoing throughout the year. Looking at things that they can then do to reach those goals. For example, they really wanted to make sure that everyone is really included in the team, so they decided that they should go out and make an effort to talk to each player five times specifically throughout the season.

In fact, the L.T. itself was a strategy used by the coaching staff to encourage player collaboration and inclusion. As stated in the previous theme that discussed the L.T., its entire role was to help players to feel included and be their “voice”.

A good summary of the reason for implementing collaborative team inclusion strategies into decision making processes was given by Coach D when she discussed the differences between a democratically-minded coaching style and authoritarian and laissez-faire coaching styles. Coach D suggests, “I see that the players like having input and they like playing more. An authoritarian style tends to get more selfishness from players, as it tends to become less about the team because players do no have individual ownership into what happens. This creates selfishness”. She continues with her comparison of the styles by stating, “I have never really practiced a laissez-faire style, but I believe that a laissez-faire style of coach would be more concerned about who goes out, and things like that and perhaps caring less about what happens in the dressing room, and other such things. A democratic coach, because they are needed as a facilitator and still actively involved in decision making, is more in tune with what is going on throughout the team and is very involved in team inclusiveness”.

**Coach as the Final Decision Maker**

In the midst of the collaborative and inclusive decision making atmosphere, the data showed that decision making strategies were also made with the understanding that the coach had final decision making authority over all issues. This was not as contradictory as it sounds, however. Being the final decision maker did not contradict with the collaborative inclusion discussed earlier. As clarified, collaborative inclusion simply meant the inclusion of players, but this was not to be confused with a laissez-faire view of decision making. Merely, decision making by Coach D asked for player opinion and personal input, but all members of the team clearly understood that final decision
making authority was the responsibility of the head coach. When asked for her role on the team in this democratically-minded team, SB stated that “I feel that in the end, decisions should be up to the coach, as in terms of democratic coaching, but I feel that it just gives me more responsibility to be on the leadership team, and it gives me more responsibility to have more input into decisions on the team, but in the end, the coach makes final decisions, which I think is good in the end”. To elaborate on this, L.T. member LF believed that she (Coach D) “Can’t give the players everything that they want. Final say should always be hers or else there would be too much say and not enough action. Besides, she balanced her decisions well with our opinions”. This final statement by LF was the essential component in Coach D’s decision making.

Having final decision making authority was something that Coach D clearly knew and practiced. Coach D had no hesitations making final decisions and does not consider her authority to have final say as un-democratic. She compares the democratic coaching style and the authoritarian style by clarifying her role as a democratic leader with final say on decisions: “Well, first of all, while democracy was and is always the goal, at times, what most people would call an authoritarian style was used. So, I think many people think that democratic is an absence of a tough or strong leader, but it is not. It is just a process of including all on the team in the decision making process, but you (the coach) are still the final say. At times, you have to make decisions that are tough, and you have to lead as tough”. In her journal, she mentions how she needed to discuss the attendance issue regarding NM with the L.T. and assistant coach MD, but she emphasized through her language that ultimately, any decisions are hers. However, it should be noted that there were times when Coach D disagreed with the collaborative consensus of the players, but still allowed the player opinion to be the one that they followed. This was her choice and she felt it was imperative to maintain the collaborative inclusion and ownership that the team worked so hard to establish. The best example of this was the team motto that was created by the L.T. Both coaches thought that it was an inappropriate team motto, but did not see it as harmful to the team and thus allowed it to be used. In observing the players, they were proud of the motto and felt ownership in creating it. Coach D also clearly stated in her second interview that players did not really have final decision making in game play, ice time, or starting line-ups, but she did hear
their opinions often on those types of matters. She simply felt that the coaches, especially as adults leading children, had better understanding of those types of decision making issues. However, as stated, she did allow players to have final decision on issues like the motto, warm-up, team goals, and objectives.

A Conducive Environment

Perhaps the most telling aspect that helps one to understand the practices of a democratic coach is the type of environment created by a democratically-minded coach. And, in fact, in a qualitative thesis such as this, the best understanding of a case study is to observe the influence on the environment. While the term “environment” is a general term, for this case study, it can essentially be understood as the basic atmosphere or settings that were established by the practices of this particular democratically-minded coach. With that clarity, it is important to understand that there are different influences, outside of the democratically-minded practices, that could have shaped the environment. Such influences will be discussed in the interpretation of the findings section of this thesis. The data reveal that Coach D created an environment that empowered players, created positive relationships, had committed members, and was trusting.

Empowered Players

When attending the meetings for this team, it was made very apparent that the players had ownership of the direction of the team and the environment that was created. At all team functions players and coaches valued each others’ inputs and therefore, the players felt that they were empowered to mold the team’s direction. In her journal, LF stated that “My input was valued. I have helped shape the team (as have the other leaders), and really care about it (the team)”. This empowering of players seemed to lead to their stronger ownership and commitment. The practice of creating an empowered environment was by design, but the data suggest that much of this empowerment was specifically given to the L.T. above others. Of course, as mentioned earlier, this L.T. represented the whole team and designated leaders of the team. Coach D expresses the importance of empowering players for democratically-minded coaching success. “…the leadership team gets the chance to build their own leadership skills and communication
skills. This is an important part of coaching as we are educators. I see that the players like having input and they like playing more. An authoritarian style tends to get more selfishness from players, as it tends to become less about the team because players do not have individual ownership into what happens”. Furthermore, assistant coach MD states “I think the kids felt more empowered by being asked”. Thus, the coaches specifically tried to create an environment where players felt empowered.

Examples of how the coaching staff created an empowered environment were clear and definitely planned by the coaching staff. For example, decision making, as earlier stated, was inclusive and open for player-coach cooperation, but the empowered environment seemed to go much beyond just decision making. There were many situations where the coaches gave out tasks to the players and specifically, the L.T. These were not just menial or tedious tasks, but ones that gave the players specific and important duties, ones that affected the direction of the team. Input into the team theme and music, help designing practices and giving input into the performance of the team at practices and games are but a few examples of empowering the players. What was even more interesting was that as the season advanced, so did the amount of empowerment the players had. By the end of the season, it was the players, through the L.T. mostly, that created the end of the season playoff theme, motto, and goals. For the most part, these were entirely decided on by the players.

To summarize the role of empowering players in the democratically-minded coaching practice, player SB defined the coaching style as a way “To develop involvement, enthusiasm, and a positive attitude where the girls wanted to involve themselves for the betterment of the whole team. Where a coach gives power to certain players, but keeps the authority and makes the final decision”.

**Positive Relationships**

After creating the L.T., Coach D asked the L.T. members to create team objectives and the accomplishments they hoped to achieve throughout the season. She noted that this process became “less about goals, and more about how they wanted the team to feel”. Much of what the democratically-minded coach was trying to do was to create a positive environment that was more about the right feelings on the team than about on-ice winning. In saying that, it becomes important to the democratically-minded
coaching practice to create an environment where there are strong and positive relationships amongst all team members. Thus, this section will look at the positive relationships created by the democratically-minded Coach D between coaches, the relationship between coaches and the leadership team, and finally, the relationships observed within the team players themselves.

The creation of these relationships was hierarchal in form. Essentially, strong relationships within the coaching staff were established. Perhaps the best look at this relationship can be understood by how assistant coach MD felt his relationship and input into coaching decisions were encouraged. In his first interview, assistant coach MD explained his role, but with regards to his relationship with the head coach. In describing his relationship with Coach D, he felt he could “give his opinion and suggestions”, but even more so, “suggestions were asked for every time”. Furthermore, he was “never shut out” of any process. In concurrence, assistant coach MD felt that there was “inclusion in all practice and game planning”. For example, he states that he was “always offered things to add after drills and before the players arrived”. Assistant coach MD also felt that he was involved in goal setting and his opinions about the direction of the team were heard. Often, assistant coach MD also stated that Coach D created a better relationship environment by “stepping back when he was sharing with the team, and physically let me coach”. He stated that Coach D was “not on a power trip”, nor making him feel like he was not a head coach himself. This positive relationship building between the coaches was one that relied on Coach D being open and trusting to allow input from her coaching staff. Below, is a transcription of the explanation of how the building of a relationship between the two coaches was implemented.

DG: Was that the same for assistant coach MD as well? Did he have input into decision making?

Coach D: Absolutely. Assistant Coach MD and I were always communicating about things that were going on with the team and how we would handle those things.
DG: Would you ever overrule him?

Coach D: NO. I don’t think so. I think the kids saw me as the head coach, but ultimately, we were working together, and really on the same page.

DG: Do you feel that a democratic head coach can overrule his/hers assistant coach?

Coach D: In what kind of context?

DG: I mean, I have heard numerous times from him and from you, that you were very working together and that his opinions were very much heard. It seemed like there was never an opportunity for either of you to overrule each other, partly because it seemed like you two were often on the same page. My question is, would you, as a democratic coach, have overruled him if there was something you disagreed with that would have made your team or individual players better?

Coach D: Uhhm. I don’t think so. I remember one time he generally,(pause) this was during a game, he worked with the def. and I worked with the forwards. We got scored on and I think I told him to change the def. Now, that was at the beginning of the season. So, I guess in that case I did direct him in what to do.

DG: How did he react to that?

Coach D: I don’t think it was a problem

Building on this relationship, Coach D established better relationships with her L.T. It was clearly evident that Coach D felt her L.T. was essential to her coaching style. “As for strategies, the leadership team is important. They were essential in the whole process and important in the style”. However, most indispensable to the L.T.’s effectiveness was the creation of good relationships between the coaching staff and the
L.T. Simply, Coach D created an environment where the L.T. members not only felt included, but were feeling there was a positive relationship with the coaching staff. In her journal, LF states that “In past years, I don’t think she (Coach D) would have been able to laugh at herself. It’s nice to see her be this fun around us now. I think, in the past, she was afraid to lose our respect and took herself way too seriously as a result. Now, while considering all ideas with an open mind, she enabled me to hold her in higher esteem than before. This may come from spending more time with us and building relationships, or maybe because she is becoming more comfortable as a coach, but either way, it is a good thing for both her and the players”. The data confirmed this statement by LF; the findings showed that meetings with the coaching staff and the L.T. created an atmosphere where all felt comfort and valued. However, this atmosphere was coupled with an environment where the order and control was recognized as belonging to Coach D.

The positive relationship building between the coach and the L.T. emphasized aspects like individuality within the team, having the coaches be approachable and encouraging, but also making being on the L.T. fun. One can clearly see this type of environment being a specific goal of the coaching staff through a statement given by assistant coach MD when he was asked what his goals were.

MD: Peggy and I tried to push home as often as possible that it is a sport, and I might have even been stronger on this point, actually that’s not a fair thing to say. Fun, and to do as best as we could to improve on our individual goals, in order to improve as individuals and as a team. That would have been our constant goals. To get as far as you can in the season. Of course that’s always fun to win a championship and all that, but that is not ever the number one thing that we’re trying to push home as coaches.

DG: How did the coaching staff’s democratic style accomplish those goals?

MD: Being encouraging and approachable. I think taking kids to the side, and telling them how important it is for them to achieve their individual goals. In doing
this we would know what their individual goals were or we would recognize them. For example, if a kid couldn’t skate or whatever. So, noticing weaknesses and jumping on those in a friendly manner. During practice I would take a kid aside and ask them what they could do better and how they could improve or give them skill tips on how they could do one thing better. So I think encouragement, being approachable, being friendly, having a fun atmosphere. We had one day that was sort of a skills competition, it was actually a scheduled practice, but we decided to make it something more fun between the regular season and the play-offs. So just that whole atmosphere of having a good time and playing a good game that everyone loves.

In establishing a positive relationship between the coaching staff and the L.T., there was an environment created where people enjoyed playing for Coach D and were motivated to succeed and be committed to the team. As the next theme will make clear, this higher level of commitment was a key to the team considering the season a success.

The final look at relationships associated with democratically-minded coaching practice, involves the relationships amongst the players themselves. Frankly, the environment around this team was light and friendly, but with a “team first” mentality. This “team first” mentality is not to be confused with a loss of individuality. In fact, the relationships created within this team encouraged individuality. Much of this was facilitated and instilled by Coach D, but was implemented by the L.T. members who themselves felt committed and motivated to the “team first” mentality. The role of the L.T. in creating a team with strong relationships is a vital component of their purpose. This component was fostered by Coach D who expressed quite often how important the L.T. was to the whole democratically-minded practice. One can see how important this is when observing the L.T.’s role in creating better relationships amongst all players on the team. In fact, when asked about a possible hindrance to the democratically-minded coaching practice, Coach D responded that “Well, the players, especially the leadership team, must buy into it in order for it to be at its best”. This was clearly something that an observer could recognize as something that Coach D was very aware of as she created the environment needed for her coaching style. Having said that, the data showed that the
L.T. did “buy into it”, and they were instrumental in creating the better environment that Coach D envisioned in order to make the team function well under her style.

The question of how Coach D encouraged the L.T. to play a vital role in creating positive relationships amongst players is best explained by leadership team member SB. When asked about her decision making role on the team, SB explained that,

I’m definitely one of the older girls on the team. I’ve been on the team for four years. She made me the assistant and I guess in a nutshell she lets us (leadership team) run our own things, like organizing, that makes us have better relationships in the dressing room. Things like a seating plan so that we’d be able to talk to each other better because in a school there’s a division outside of the team because of different grades and this year more than others, you can tell that the girls are talking to each other more than any other of the years. So, she kind of trusts our choices and the things that we do and it’s really working well.

There was a considerable amount of effort put into creating a positive environment within this team. It was clear that the coaching staff emphasized the importance of having a positive environment where people felt comfortable with all relationships. Observations showed that the democratically-minded coaching style influenced positive relationships throughout the team – between coaches, between coaches and the leadership team, and among the team players themselves.

**Committed Members**

One of the most challenging aspects of a team is having large numbers. In their 2003 work, *The Wisdom of Teams*, Jon Katzenbach and Douglas Smith state that large teams (more than twelve members) constrain the effectiveness of teams and it becomes hard to manage commitment (Katzenbach and Smith, 2003). The level of effectiveness for Coach D’s past teams was limited due to a lack of attendance, and ultimately commitment by players. Furthermore, this lack of commitment in the past extended to coaches who often felt uninspired and unwilling to put a solid effort into team development when player’s attendance and commitment was low. So for the coaching staff, attendance was an indicator of commitment. The following interview which took place on December 10th, 2008, about one month into the season, supports this view. In the interview, Coach D compares the past attendance level at practices with the democratically-minded coaching style’s impact on attendance.
DG: What achievements have been met as a result of these strategies you have employed?

Coach D: Well, we have created an inclusive atmosphere and have helped establish certain people as leaders. I have also recognized more fun before the games, but perhaps the biggest achievement has been the increase in attendance at early morning practices.

DG: Do you have an estimated rate of improvement of attendance at practices?

Coach D: I have no real statistics, but I would say that it has greatly improved since last year. As a result, our team record at this point is 2 wins, zero losses, and one tie. In the past year, we finished 3 – 9, so we are well ahead of the game. I think.

The impact the democratically-minded coaching style had on attendance was an indicator to the coaching staff that their players were more committed. It should also be noted that there was a team policy implemented that encouraged attendance at practices. This policy basically stated that all team members had to show up to practices or they would not play. The best example given was the case where team players NM and LM missed practices and therefore, did not play games. This policy was not one that can be specific to any coaching style. In fact, it is a school policy for all their athletic teams. While this might have encouraged players to attend practices, it is important to note that the same policy was in place in preceding years and in those years, the attendance at practices was not as high as during the year when Coach D participated in this research as a democratically-minded coach. Assistant coach MD offered an interesting insight on the issue of why there was an increase in attendance and commitment when he stated in his second interview that “ownership equals commitment”. He elaborated that, “While players had consequences for missing team practices, they all understood those consequences and that they were team based. They (players) all had influence on
decisions”. He also said that the increased attendance shows that “They care, and care equals ownership”.

Two other examples of players being committed were much more practical. Perhaps the strategy best used to encourage better commitment was the categorization of A Line and B Line players. In the words of Coach D when asked about a specific strategy she used to encourage a democratically-minded coaching style, she stated, “There was also a certain level of commitment that we created. I think the ‘A Line’ and ‘B Line’ players helped that. Basically, in that strategy, all players, as long as they were committed, played”. In her second interview, Coach D explains the methods of the categorization of players regarding the level of commitment.

DG: Did any players have input into the categorization?

Coach D: No.

DG: Could players move up or down from categories?

Coach D: I guess they could have, but none did. Our season was probably just too short, but I could see that happening in a longer season. So, basically, ice-time was understood based on this level of player, and who sat out, etc…. but commitment being equal, all players would play equally based on their category. At times, I might have preferred to have played other players, if we were concerned about playing entirely for the win, but it seemed more appropriate to follow this strategy and play all the players so that they would get the opportunities.

DG: Having said that, do you feel you lost games because of the A player, B Player strategy?

Coach D: mmmm (pause). Well, most of the games it would not have made a big difference because we were winning those games quite easily. But, I think
towards the end of the season, maybe in the final game, which we lost, it was the quarter-finals, the outcome may have been different, but not necessarily. I mean, it wasn’t like I was putting 5 non-skaters on the ice at a time. I mean I tried to balance the lines knowing that we wanted to play players equally, and still win.

DG: Okay, still keeping with this, do you think you won games because of that A/B strategy? Did that strategy play a role in you becoming a winning team?

Coach D: Well, I think it certainly gave us the opportunity to develop players that did not have a lot of hockey experience, and they got to play in more games, their confidence went up, they got more comfortable skating with the puck, and you know, getting used to their teammates. I don’t know if it ever contributed to winning, but I think it was more of that idea of good feelings off the ice as members of the team and feeling valued, and having a strong commitment to the team.

So, Coach D is suggesting that this categorization of players helped create a high level of commitment because commitment was the thing needed to play. Having enough players, due to the ‘A’ Line and ‘B’ Line categorization method, developed commitment. Another example of a specific strategy used to create commitment was the role of the leadership team. As Coach D suggests, “As for strategies, the leadership team is important. They were essential in the whole process and important in the style.” This importance was not just limited to the earlier mentioned decision making, but was vital in strengthening player commitment. Basically, the older, and more experienced L.T. members created an environment where missing practices was frowned upon by teammates. This is recognizable through the L.T.’s decision to encourage and vote in favour of the coaching staff’s decision to discipline their own teammates (NM and LM) for missing practices.

Finally, the findings showed that playing time was also important in achieving a high level of commitment. It was clear that the coaches played all players. There were very few times where any player missed shifts. The only time that this happened was to
put players on the ice more when they were short handed. No team player really lost a shift. As stated by Coach D, “We organized our line combinations and at times, smartly recognized who to put out, but it was pretty fair regarding who would go out.” Her reasoning for this equality of playing time was based on her seemingly important desire to have a committed group of players. “Commitment is important, so playing in games was essential to gaining this commitment, and it forces the coaching staff to have close to equal ice time for all”. It should be noted that in games where there might be a need to “shorten the bench”, Coach D listened to the opinion of the leadership team, but also addressed the entire team prior to the game so that all were aware, in her words, “that their roles were all defined”. When asked if this equality of playing time was a hindrance at all, Coach D states, “To win the game was not the priority at this level. It is competitive, but players did not challenge our decisions. The goals of the team mattered, but the coaches determined how those goals are to be met, and at what expense. This was understood by all team members all year long”.

**Trusting**

The trusting environment that was created was initially recognized through observations as something that was more out of necessity than style. During the first L.T. meeting on November 25th, 2008, Coach D stated that “Myself and MD have less meaning that the players stating things”. She was creating an environment where players might listen to their co-players more because she allowed players to feel that team leaders had the trust of the coaching staff. That they, the leadership team, essentially had the coaches trust to communicate to the players. It was not clear whether this was out of a necessity to the coaching style, simply because this particular team had a core and influential leadership group, or because the coach wanted to get the L.T. to have that sort of influence on the players. The only observed findings were that the coaching staff offered their trust, clearly and explicitly, to the L.T. As this trust was offered, season long trust was created between the coaching staff and the L.T.

Perhaps the most important characteristic of the trusting environment was that players felt that they were trusted. The trusting environment was not just one that coaches felt they created, but it was affirmed by the players. Specifically, the L.T., the dominant player leadership rank, felt that their superiors, the coaching staff, trusted their
decisions and how they dealt with issues. L.T. member SB stated, “So, she (Coach D) kind of trusts our choices and the things that we do, and its really working well…..she trusts us to do things like communicate to the team. She lets us think of goals for the team, she really lets us think for ourselves as we created them.” The reference to “she lets us” as stated by SB is not only an example of L.T. members feeling that they have the coach’s trust, but also there seemed to be certain level of confidence displayed by the L.T. members as they felt trusted by the coaching staff. Because the members of the L.T. felt trusted, exuded a sense of confidence in their demeanors. This player confidence seemed to help develop the players more as leaders and decision makers. A player comment that explained the link between the players feeling trusted and the enhanced confidence they felt due to that trust was given by team captain LF. When asked about how the democratically-minded coaching style has impacted her own individual achievement, LF stated,

It hasn’t impacted my hockey ability all that much, but I think that it has given me more confidence that she values my opinion and certainly I have been a lot more vocal with the team. I don’t know if it is because of what she has been doing, but I definitely see that. Because of the leadership squad, I can be more of a captain, because last year, as I said, it was really the coach, me, and then there’s the team. You know, people believed, you talk to Coach D, she likes you, and I was like a middle between the two of them, but now I am more comfortable with the team because they know that there is a squad or team, so I am finding that I am a lot more vocal, and I don’t know if that is because of the confidence she gave me, or because I am more involved with the leadership squad.

This was not the only statement given by LF that showed her confidence level increasing as a result of trust given by the coaches. When asked how Coach D has allowed her to have input into the team’s achievement, LF offered the following answer:

I think it helps them (the coaching staff) because sometimes we (L.T.) notice things that the coach won’t always notice, so me having the confidence helps the team more. This year, I have more confidence to tell them (team) where they should be, when they should be prepared in the room, (etc…) So, I have more confidence to be the help with the team’s success. So that has a small role really. Also, during games, like during the Greenwood game, I noticed a couple of the girls on their team, so I asked the coaches if I could talk a little about her, she is a fantastic player, but she shies away from contact, so we don’t need to be a fantastic player to make her ineffective. So, Ms. Donohue acknowledged that to be a good comment, so it’s just little things like that.
In this comment, LF equates her own confidence and the trust of the coaching staff with helping the team more as she feels “…we (L.T.) notice things the coach won’t always notice….”. This increase in confidence, the product of a trusting environment, was not just the view of the team captain, but felt by many team members. When asked about how the democratically-minded coaching style has impacted her individual achievement, S.B. also offered a similar response to LF, but suggested that confidence and trust was something that a majority of players felt.

It has given me more confidence, and a sense of being needed on the team. I think that’s a key element in this, and that’s not just me. A lot of us feel that way, not just those on the leadership team. That’s important, the aspects on the ice, that’s important too, but off the ice, when you feel that you actually are needed to be there, that makes you feel really good. And, I feel a positive feedback, that I gave an opinion. Last year, so much of it was, well, we didn’t really give a lot of opinions, we just sort of wait through the paces sort of. But, this year I feel more inclined to say what I think and have it either come back, not in agreement with everything I have to say, that’s not what I mean, but giving positive feedback really helps in our winning.

The level of trust the players all felt can be seen in the Levels of Democratic Coaches Survey. In this survey, question 8 asks the players if “Your coach entrusts tasks to other group members without overly influencing the outcome of the task”. Of the members of the team who completed the survey, 84.6% either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Only one member (KR) strongly disagreed.

In summary, the environment of trust that was created by Coach D was not apparent in the environment that pervaded all meetings, practices, and games. Furthermore, creating an environment of trust was imperative for the implementation of many of the democratically-minded practices. Examples of the display of trust included the support of the players for the ‘A’ Line and ‘B’ Line categorization, the fact that Coach D continued to trust the L.T. even during a potential team break-up and the NM and CO attendance scenarios, and finally, in the relationship Coach D had with assistant coach MD who felt that he “never got the feeling that I wasn’t a head coach myself”.

To conclude the research findings chapter, I offer the following summary of the democratic coaching style as provided by L.T. member SB in her last journal entry. It is a fine interpretation of the democratic coaching style. She states,
I define this coaching style as a way of joining a group of players on and off the ice. To develop involvement, enthusiasm, and a positive attitude where the girls wanted to involve themselves for the betterment of the whole team. Where a coach gives power to certain players, but keeps the authority and makes the final decisions. To work as a unit, making decisions that will move the team forward by a popular vote, and understand that everyone is different and have different visions, but to interpret that into one, complete image of what a team should be.
Chapter 5
Discussion and Conclusion

The athletic coaching ranks are diverse and varied. For example, the world of coaching consists of members who coach individual sports and those who coach team sports, female sports, male sports, and even mixed gender sports, and there are those who coach non-competitive as opposed to competitive sports. It would truly be an unrewarding task to try and determine a coaching style that can be argued to be the “best” means of coaching a team. This study does not attempt to determine the most effective styles. Instead it explored how the least used coaching style – a democratic approach -- might be understood and practiced. This section discusses the findings of the study, and in doing so, answers the study’s research questions.

The data revealed four important themes associated with a democratic coaching style. They were communication techniques, organizational structure, coaching decisions and strategies, and environment. This chapter will summarize those findings associated with these themes, and in doing so, illuminate the strategies employed by a democratically-oriented coach, summarize what hinders and facilitates these democratic practices, and finally, discuss the consequences of these democratic practices.

Perhaps the biggest misunderstanding that many have about the democratically-minded coaching style is that the style is one where there is an absence of strong leadership and the players or team members have total, and arguably too much, say in the decision making of the team. This misunderstanding occurs because there is confusion with the often-referred-to laissez-faire style of leadership. As Rainer Martens suggests, many feel that the democratic style or as he refers to it, the cooperative style coach, is often misunderstood as a style where the coach neglects his or hers responsibilities and allows athletes to do as they please (Martens, 1997, p.13). Not only is this not the case in Martens report, it was also not the case for Coach D. As Martens puts it, the cooperative style coach provides structure and rules that allow athletes to set their own goals and strive to accomplish them. This is done through participation with the coach and often, more responsibility is placed on the coach (Martens, 1997, p.13). A laissez-faire style of coaching where all members vote on every decision and the coach allows the players to
be his or her equals in that decision making process, while could be seen as a democratic principle, is not what a democratically-minded coach does. In fact, the findings suggest that when speaking about decision making and strategies, Coach D was very collaborative and often included her players, but she did have the final say in every applicable scenario. This was clearly demonstrated by her in numerous decision-making issues, and was understood and supported by her players. Coach D herself acknowledges this misconception — that democratic coaching displays a lack of leadership, and players always have an equal say in decision making. This clarification was offered by her comparison of the democratic coaching style with an authoritarian coaching style. She suggested that many people think that democratic coaching is an absence of a tough or strong leader, but it is not. It is just a process of inclusion of team members in the decision making process, but, in the democratic coaching style, the coach is still the final decision maker. She believes that the coach is basically a facilitator who promotes player development of leadership, responsibility, and many of the other aspects stated in his research’s findings, and that the coach has final decision making power. This often misunderstood fact is supported by Lewin’s original study which determined that participative or democratic leadership is one where the leaders offer guidance to team members who participate in decision making processes; however, as Lewin notes, leaders hold final decision making authority (Lewin, 1939).

One of the most interesting links to the literature and the collected data was how Coach D and her team were able to adapt to change within their team culture. This was evident in the team’s most trying challenges such as the absence of players from practices, the poor team performance at warm-up, and even simple day-to-day changes in scheduling. Fullan’s 2001 Cultural Change Leader explains that the democratic leadership style is essential to leading in a culture of change and that the democratic leadership themes displayed by Coach D in the data collection suggest that Fullan is correct in suggesting that such a democratically-minded coach shares qualities of a cultural change leader. The importance of relationship building to lead in a culture of change is vital according to Fullan (2001). He suggests that building these strong relationships amongst team members through democratically-minded methods helps a team and the leaders to better prepare for a changing culture (Fullan, 2001). This was
very true for Coach D and her team. Because of the strong relationships built through her
democratic leadership style, specifically the empowerment of players, the positive
relationships created, the collaborative inclusion in decision making, and the creation of
the leadership team, Coach D’s team was able to handle change well.

There are a number of strategies reported in the findings that were employed by
Coach D that I would like to discuss. Coach D suggests that, one of her most important
implemented strategies of the democratic coaching style was the creation of the
leadership team. She believes that they were essential in the whole process and important
in the style. It was through the L.T. that Coach D communicated to her players and
allowed them to feel that they had representation in decision making as well as a direct
line of communication with her. Furthermore, as suggested by Horn (2002), not only
does a leadership style have a role in athlete’s performance and behaviour, but in many
cases, athletes often duplicate the coach’s leadership patterns and behaviours. In the case
of the L.T. in this study, the members were what Coach D wanted the team to look and
act like. They were all supportive of her and through her strong facilitation and
establishment of trust, they led and represented the team in the image she wished it to be.
This was important as the L.T. needed to model the democratic practices and behaviours
that Coach D and the assistant coach were demonstrating. Of course, Coach D needed
good leaders who would in her own words, “buy into the style” and be positive
representatives for the players. In referring back to the findings, it is interesting to note
that Coach D did not allow a player vote in choosing the L.T. The members were all
appointed by her and perhaps; they were team members who demonstrated leadership
qualities in the past, or potentially in the future. However, they could have also simply
been leaders who she knew would conform to this style and follow her lead. If this is
true, one might question the L.T.’s creation as a democratic practice. However, even in
the most popular definition of democracy in political terms, there are appointed positions,
such as the Canadian Senate and even the Governor General of Canada. Few would
suggest that because of appointed positions in its government, Canada is a dictatorship or
autocratic. However, some critiques of Canada’s political system do suggest that it is
undemocratic. For example, in 2006, New Democratic Party Member of Parliament Bill
Blakie stated that, “A Canadian Prime Minister can appoint judges, ratify treaties, send
Canadian men and women into war, negotiate trade agreements, make patronage appointments, set the date of elections to suit his or her political advantage, determine when Parliament will be prorogued, when it will be recalled, and appoint the most senior public servants, all without reference to the MPs Canadians have elected to represent them. This is a parliamentary dictatorship and it must be brought to an end." This point is a valid one when discussing whether or not the L.T. was a democratic practice or not. However, according to the definitions of democratic leadership discussed in the Literature Review chapter by the likes of Lewin and Goleman, this appointment of L.T. members is not a contradiction of their defined characteristics of democratic leadership, especially that characteristic which puts the onus of major decision maker as a responsibility of the democratic coach.

Another democratically-oriented coaching strategy employed by Coach D was the creation of the ‘A’ and ‘B’ Lines. This strategy allowed all to feel included and it was important to the style. As suggested by Chellandurai and Saleh (1980), it is important to have the support and happiness of group members in any group environment. The support and happiness that Coach D sought for her team was through the inclusion of all members. The categorization of players allowed her to make all players feel committed and included. This was an important strategy to building the high level of commitment that the team members had, as demonstrated by their increase in attendance.

Finally, Coach D’s democratic coaching style employed a strategy where regular communication with players through formal meetings and L.T. representation helped the players create goals and themes that they would have ownership of. In fact, Stogdill (1950, p. 4) defines leadership itself as “the process of influencing the activities of an organized group toward goal setting and goal achievement”. Allowing the players, through her participation as a facilitator, Coach D allowed the players to independently create. As Chellandurai and Quek (1996, p. 6) state, “…member participation may also lead to a better comprehension of the decision and greater acceptance of the decision, and therefore to more efficient execution of the decision”. This was a specific and purposeful strategy of Coach D. Allowing players to have ownership of goal setting and themes for the team were essential to her style’s success.
It is important to understand some of the issues that hindered and facilitated these democratic practices. First, I would like to discuss the factors that hindered the democratic practices. One of the constant comments that came up in the data collection was the suggestion that democratic leadership is more time consuming than any of the other leadership styles. Chellandurai and Doherty (1998) suggest that research shows that the democratic styles can be more time consuming. In fact, Coach D’s opinion to the matter suggests that using time and energy, in terms of organizing meetings, coming up with strategies with the kids, and keeping players in the loop took up a great deal of her time. However, she believed that the time needed for democratic practices was worth it due to the players having personal investment and ownership into the team, as well as the inclusion of team members and the creation of a delegated organizational structure that lessened her time commitment in other areas.

In offering a defense of this time dilemma issue being a hindrance to the democratic coaching style, assistant coach MD seemed to agree with the idea that the democratic style takes more time, but offered this statement as his answer to why it is not a hindrance. He believes that because he and Coach D are naturally democratic leaders and see the importance of time commitment to the players, would spend that time talking to the kids on the ice and off the ice anyways. He suggests that time commitment is willing and has been used by himself on any other team he has coached before. Simply, he has never seen the time dilemma as a negative anyways, just as something that coaches need to do. This concept offered by assistant coach MD alludes to another possible hindrance to the democratic practice as well as possibly the greatest facilitator—that perhaps this style is only successful due to the personal characteristics of these two members of the coaching staff which seem to fit this style, and perhaps this style only works well for this case study team because their team characteristics and dynamics happen to work best for this style. As stated in the Literature Review chapter, there is a relationship between coaching success of male, interscholastic, head football and basketball coaches with the authoritarian style of coaching (Penman, Hastad, and Cords, 1974). This would support the claim that Coach D’s democratic style would fit her team dynamics (she coaches a female, high school level ice hockey team), but perhaps not for others. Further to this point, it was also suggested in the Literature Review chapter that
the democratic styles of coaching can be effective for certain individuals based on the individual’s unique characteristics (Chellandurai and Doherty, 1998). This may be true for Coach D and assistant coach MD who might just fit the ideal character profile to make the democratic coaching style as successful as it was in this case. Assistant coach MD did suggest that this is not the case and argues that people can change and adapt their coaching styles. In his past, he had been the assistant coach with someone who would be considered what he referred to as a “dictator like coach”, but he noticed that his own democratic coaching beliefs influenced that person to adopt more democratically-oriented coaching practices and he suggests that democratic coaches can influence a position. Thus, he would argue that while character traits of the democratic coach are important, the style allows for adaptation and can work for those who do not inherently fit the character traits of the democratic coach.

There were two major consequences of the democratic practices employed by Coach D. The first was the time issue mentioned earlier. The second consequence was team performance. While there is literature that suggests the democratic leadership style is an effective leadership style for teams (Foels, et al., 2000), that it encourages player ownership and greater acceptance of goals (Chellandurai and Quek, 1996), and that the style fosters inclusion of team members (Ryan, 2005), there is also literature that states that the authoritarian style tends to be used by more “successful” coaches (Penman, et al., 1974). With regards to Coach D’s team, one might conclude that the team’s on-ice success rate was actually reduced by the democratic coaching style. While the team did finish with more wins that the previous season, it should be noted again that the team was placed in a lower tier and arguably played weaker competition. What is known is that the team set a clear on-ice goal of making it to the finals, but they did not achieve that goal. Furthermore, Coach D’s democratic practice of creating the ‘A’ Line and ‘B’ Line players and playing everyone fairly equal may have contributed to team losses. When asked about her bench management techniques and if sitting players was democratic, Coach D stated that she tried to keep players in the game and committed. She believes that roles for players get more defined as the season moves on and that coaches organize lines and at times smartly recognize who to fairly put out on the ice. With that in mind, the question arises, does the democratic style make coaches less likely to win because
they are not putting their best players on the ice. In response, Coach D believed that winning was not the priority in determining team success. She put the most competitive line up that she could on the ice and players did not challenge that. While the team’s goals mattered, Coach D determined how the goals were to be met, and at what expense. This was understood all year long and she did not think her team’s goals included sitting players. In her final statement on the issue, of the democratic style being a consequence to the team’s on-ice performance, Coach D believed that losing their last game was not due to the democratic style. In fact, she believes the players were instilled with motivation and confidence heading into the last game, and they played very well in the quarter finals game, and as a result they were therefore not disappointed with the outcome.

In any future studies related to this topic, one must consider the implication that this style might not be the best style for every athletic coach, nor should it be for every athletic team. This research suggests that this particular case study might be unique, as the democratic style seemed to fit well with the coaching staff’s characteristics and the particular team member’s traits. It would be interesting to observe the democratic style of coaching with a wider sample – perhaps, male teams, or with younger or older athletes. Perhaps, future studies might also find some different themes of the democratic coaching style with a club sports team that is not connected to the educational and academic setting of a high school. Furthermore, it would be interesting to see how the democratic coaching style could be introduced and taught to a coach that has never used the style. Essentially, this study offers a good list of themes and practices that could help one understand and integrate the democratic coaching style into his or her coaching style and team dynamics.

What conclusions can one draw from this research? When collecting data for this research, it was challenging to not create a predisposition that the democratic coaching style is a successful method of coaching. The positive effects that it had on the individual team members and on the team as a whole was exciting. However, the significance of this study was not to determine whether or not the democratic coaching style was a successful style, but simply to try and comprehend how it can be used and understood. Having said that, it has become clear that there are not enough coaches at the secondary
education level who are using this democratic coaching style, but perhaps there should be more. At the very least, this study offers coaches some very good coaching practices that can enhance individual and team performance. Conversely, these themes do not just enhance individual and team performance, but the themes that emerged form this study also show how the democratic coaching style develops individual and team values, moral principles, and even life lessons that go way beyond the performance skills of an individual or a team.
References


Taken from: www.managementhelp.org/ldrship/ldrship.htm#anchor282848 on November 11th, 2006.


Appendices

Appendix 1
Levels of Democratic Coaches survey

Below is a twenty-item Likert Scale that attempts to estimate the level of democratic leadership style evident in a coach. Notice that this instrument has no center or neutral point – you must declare a level of agreement or disagreement with the item.

INSTRUCTIONS: Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by placing a check mark in the appropriate box.

Name of Coach: _______________________

Question 1
Your coach considers suggestions made by others in the group, but has the final say.

☐ Strongly disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Agree
☐ Strongly agree

Question 2
Your coach accepts input from group members on matters that concern the group’s success.

☐ Strongly disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Agree
☐ Strongly agree

Question 3
Your coach asks for advice from group members when things go wrong.

☐ Strongly disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Agree
☐ Strongly agree

Question 4
Your coach makes group members feel involved and relevant in the decision-making process by routinely asking their input.

☐ Strongly disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Agree
☐ Strongly agree
Question 5
When there are problems in the group, your coach works with members to arrive at a reasonable resolution.

- [ ] Strongly disagree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Strongly agree

Question 6
Your coach prefers when decisions are made through group consensus.

- [ ] Strongly disagree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Strongly agree

Question 7
Your coach feels that his or her major decisions should have the input of the majority of the group.

- [ ] Strongly disagree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Strongly agree

Question 8
Your coach entrusts tasks to other group members without overly influencing the outcome of that task.

- [ ] Strongly disagree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Strongly agree

Question 9
Your coach allows other group members to share in his or her leadership power.

- [ ] Strongly disagree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Strongly agree

Question 10
Your coach has regular group meetings to discuss the current situation of the group and to generate ideas of the group’s future

- [ ] Strongly disagree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Strongly agree
**Question 11**
Your team has some form of leadership team within that can influence the coach’s decisions

- □ Strongly disagree
- □ Disagree
- □ Agree
- □ Strongly agree

**Question 12**
You feel that your opinions are heard within your group

- □ Strongly disagree
- □ Disagree
- □ Agree
- □ Strongly agree

**Question 13**
You believe that your opinions have influenced your coach to change existing policy or regulations

- □ Strongly disagree
- □ Disagree
- □ Agree
- □ Strongly agree

**Question 14**
Your coach has supported the majority opinion of the group on most occasions

- □ Strongly disagree
- □ Disagree
- □ Agree
- □ Strongly agree

**Question 15**
Your coach makes major decisions only after consulting with the entire group

- □ Strongly disagree
- □ Disagree
- □ Agree
- □ Strongly agree

**Question 16**
If a decision made by your coach is not working, he or she is willing to hear other opinions from the group

- □ Strongly disagree
- □ Disagree
- □ Agree
- □ Strongly agree
Question 17
Your coach always asks the group, “What do you think?” with regards to major decisions

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Question 18
Your team members feel that they have complete participation in the decision making process for the group

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Question 19
Your coach has established an open lines of communication that makes you feel comfortable to approach him with ideas

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Question 20
Your coach has many members of the team confident in him or her and has established over-all consensus on decisions made that affect the whole team.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
Appendix 2
Initial Questions for Players and Coaching Staff

Pre-Interview Information

Name: __________
Pseudonym: ______________
Date of Interview: ____________
Gender of Interviewee: __________
Position/Title on the team: ____________

Interviewer’s Introduction

Your willingness to be interviewed today is greatly appreciated. Before we begin, I
would like to remind you that all the information you provide in this interview is
confidential and your written consent was given. For the sake of confidentiality, a
pseudonym has been created for you and will be used in this research. This interview
will be recorded using audio and transcribed through my notes. As indicated earlier, the
purpose of this research is to determine how democratic coaching is understood and
practiced by your democratically-minded coach.

This interview should last from _____ to _____ minutes. In earlier communications with
you, we described the type of interview format and the nature of the interview questions.
Should we go over the nature of the questions at this time, or do you have any further
questions before we begin the interview process? (Pause for response)
Initial Interview Questions:

1) How is democratic coaching understood by you in your role on this team?

2) What is your decision making role on the team?

3) How is that role fostered by the coach?

4) What examples can you give that show your coach fostering your decision making role?

5) How has your coach incorporated you as a decision maker on this team?

6) What examples can you provide of your coach asking for your input on the team’s direction?

7) How has this impacted your individual achievement?

8) How has this impacted the team’s achievement?

9) Do you feel that you have input into all matters of this team’s decision making?

10) Can you mention democratically-oriented coaching strategies that have been deployed by your coach?

11) What hinders or facilitates these democratic practices? (Explanation if required)

12) Have there been any consequences to you as a result of these democratic practices?

13) Have there been any consequences to the team as a result of these democratic practices?
Appendix 3
Initial Questions for the Coach

Pre-Interview Information
Name: __________
Pseudonym: ______________
Date of Interview: ____________

Interviewer’s Introduction
Your willingness to be interviewed today is greatly appreciated. Before we begin, I would like to remind you that all the information you provide in this interview is confidential and your written consent was given. For the sake of confidentiality, a pseudonym has been created for you and will be used in this research. This interview will be recorded using audio and transcribed through my notes. As indicated earlier, the purpose of this research is to determine how democratic coaching is understood and practiced by you as a democratically-minded coach.

This interview should last from _____ to _____ minutes. In earlier communications with you, we described the type of interview format and the nature of the interview questions. Should we go over the nature of these questions at this time, or do you have any further questions before we begin the interview process? (Pause for response)

Initial Interview Questions:
1) How is democratic coaching understood by you within your role on the team?

2) What democratically-oriented coaching strategies have you employed?

3) What achievements have been met as a result of these strategies?

4) What hinders or facilitates these democratic practices?

5) What are the consequences of these democratic coaching practices?

6) Which of the democratic practices you have employed are most imperative for the team’s successful achievement?

7) Coaching is often linked to an authoritarian style of leadership. How has the democratically-minded approach to coaching been more successful for you?

8) Can you provide an example of democratically-minded strategies working more effectively than an authoritarian approach?

9) What is the difference between your democratically-minded practices and a “Laissez-faire” approach to coaching?

10) What plans do you have for the “evolution” of your democratic coaching practices as the season progresses?
Title: “How Democratic Coaching is Understood and Practiced”

My name is Darryl Giancola and I am currently a Masters of Education student at the University of Toronto, conducting a thesis study on the topic of democratic coaching. I am requesting to use a team within your organization as my case study for my study. The following information is provided to help you decide whether you wish to allow the team to participate in the present study.

The purpose of this research is to investigate how democratic coaching is understood and practiced by a democratically-minded coach. This is a case study where observation and interviews will be used to collect data. I would like your permission to invite the members of (Team’s Name) to participate in this research because the coach has been designated as a democratically-minded coach. All members of the team, including the players and staff, will be participants in the study. It is my hope that the organization gives their consent, and that you, as (Title within the Organization) will agree to monitor the study.

Some of the further conditions for this study are as follows:
1) All participants and the parent’s of those participants under the age of 18 will be required to sign a similar informed consent form.
2) Participation is voluntary and no compensation will be granted.
3) All participants may decline to answer any questions or to complete any parts of the procedures.
4) Upon signing the consent, participants agree to have the researcher present at meetings, practices, and other team functions.

It is not necessary for all individuals to consent to all aspects of the research. The researcher will respect any individual dissenter’s desire to speak “off the record” in any setting that is being observed.

Data for this research will be collected in the form of observations and interviews. All these will be recorded. This may include written as well as audio/video recording. This data will be collected when the participants are at the rink or in meeting areas and would require little additional time. However, there may be times when participants will be asked to stay later or attend earlier. These times will be planned and scheduled to their convenience.

All participants, including the coaches, will be able to withdraw with a written request to do so. I will be happy to share all the data and the final thesis findings with you after the research is completed. However, I will not share individual-level data with the
group, but will report back aggregate level or summary level data in reports. Please be aware that there could be limits to confidentiality even with aggregate level or summary data in any courtesy reports given back to the group. These limits will be discussed with the University of Toronto Supervisor of the research for his advice on the issue. Furthermore, the data will be retained for three years from the date of the thesis’ completion in order that the data might be made available for continued research interest, and so that the data can be kept for possible future professional expectations.

Names will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and only the researcher will know the identity of participants. This confidentiality will be maintained through the use of pseudonyms and no information collected will be shared with the staff or other participants.

There are no risks associated with this study. The expected benefits associated with your participation are the information concerning the understanding and practice of democratic coaching. If this study is later submitted for further study, publication, or presentation of any kind, the anonymity of all participants will be maintained and you will be notified.

Do not hesitate to ask me questions about the study before or during the research. My contacts are below, as well as the contacts for my supervising professor at the University of Toronto. You may also wish to contact the Ethics Review Office at the University of Toronto at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or at 416-946-3273.

Please sign this consent form. You are signing it with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of your involvement in the study. A copy of this form will be given to you to keep.

Participants Signature: __________________________ Date: ______________

Darryl Giancola, giancola@smcsmail.com (905) 876-7242

Supervisor: Jim Ryan, University Of Toronto, jryan@oise.utoronto.ca (416) 978-1152
Appendix 5

Player/ Parent Informed Consent Form

(This will be presented on OISE letterhead)

Title: “How Democratic Coaching is Understood and Practiced”

My name is Darryl Giancola and I am currently a Masters of Education student at the University of Toronto, conducting a thesis study on the topic of democratic coaching. The following information is provided to help you decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that regardless of the team’s decision, you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with this team or any of its members.

The purpose of this research is to investigate how democratic coaching is understood and practiced by a democratically-minded coach. This is a case study where observation and interviews will be used to collect data. As a member of the (Team Name), you are being invited to participate in this research because your coach has been designated as a democratically-minded coach. All members of your team, including the coaching staff, will be participants in the study. The organization has given their consent, and the (Head of the Organization) has agreed to monitor the study.

Some of the further conditions for this study are as follows:

1) Participation is voluntary and no compensation will be granted.
2) All participants may decline to answer any questions or to complete any parts of the procedures.
3) Upon signing this consent, participants agree to have the researcher present at meetings, practices, and other team functions.

It is not necessary for all individuals to consent to all aspects of the research. The researcher will respect any individual dissenter’s desire to speak “off the record” in any setting that is being observed.

Data for this research will be collected in the form of observations and interviews. All these will be recorded. This may include written as well as audio/video recording. This data will be collected when the players are at the rink or in meeting areas and would require little additional time. However, there may be times when players will be asked to stay later or attend earlier. These times will be planned and scheduled to your convenience.

Players will be able to withdraw with a written request to do so. I will be happy to share all the data and the final thesis findings with you after the research is completed. However, I will not share individual-level data with the group, but will report back aggregate level or summary level data in reports. Please be aware that there could be limits to confidentiality even with aggregate level or summary data in any courtesy
reports given back to the group. These limits will be discussed with the University of Toronto Supervisor of the research for his advice on the issue. Furthermore, the data will be retained for three years from the date of the thesis’ completion in order that the data might be made available for continued research interest, and so that the data can be kept for possible future professional expectations.

Names will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and only the researcher will know your identity. This confidentiality will be maintained through the use of pseudonyms and no information will be shared with the staff or other participants.

There are no risks associated with this study. The expected benefits associated with your participation are the information concerning the understanding and practice of democratic coaching. If this study is later submitted for further study, publication, or presentation of any kind, the anonymity of all participants will be maintained and you will be notified.

Do not hesitate to ask me questions about the study before or during the research. My contacts are below, as well as the contacts for my supervising professor at the University of Toronto. You may also wish to contact the Ethics Review Office at the University of Toronto at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or at 416-946-3273.

Please sign this consent form. You are signing it with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of your involvement in the study. A copy of this form will be given to you to keep.

Participants Signature: __________________________ Date: ______________

Parent Signature: ____________________________ Date: ______________

Darryl Giancola, giancola@smcsmail.com (905) 876-7242

Supervisor: Jim Ryan, University Of Toronto, jryan@oise.utoronto.ca (416) 978-1152
Appendix 6

Coaching Staff Informed Consent Form

(This will be presented on OISE letterhead)

Title: “How Democratic Coaching is Understood and Practiced”

My name is Darryl Giancola and I am currently a Masters of Education student at the University of Toronto, conducting a thesis study on the topic of democratic coaching. The following information is provided to help you decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that regardless of the team’s decision, you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with this team or any of its members.

The purpose of this research is to investigate how democratic coaching is understood and practiced by a democratically-minded coach. This is a case study where observation and interviews will be used to collect data. As a member of the (Team Name’s) coaching staff, you are being invited to participate in this research because you and your coaching staff colleagues have been designated as democratically-minded coaches. All members of your team, including your players and staff, will be participants in the study. The organization has given their consent, and the (Head of the Organization) has agreed to monitor the study.

Some of the further conditions for this study are as follows:
1) Participation is voluntary and no compensation will be granted.
2) All participants may decline to answer any questions or to complete any parts of the procedures.
3) Upon signing this consent, participants agree to have the researcher present at meetings, practices, and other team functions.

It is not necessary for all individuals to consent to all aspects of the research. The researcher will respect any individual dissenter’s desire to speak “off the record” in any setting that is being observed.

Data for this research will be collected in the form of observations and interviews. All these will be recorded. This may include written as well as audio/video recording. This data will be collected when the participants are at the rink or in meeting areas and would require little additional time. However, as the democratically-minded coach who will be a major participant for this case study, there may be times when you will be asked to stay later or attend earlier. These times will be planned and scheduled to your convenience.
All participants, including the coaches, will be able to withdraw with a written request to do so. I will be happy to share all the data and the final thesis findings with you after the research is completed. However, I will not share individual-level data with the group, but will report back aggregate level or summary level data in reports. Please be aware that there could be limits to confidentiality even with aggregate level or summary data in any courtesy reports given back to the group. These limits will be discussed with the University of Toronto Supervisor of the research for his advice on the issue. Furthermore, the data will be retained for three years from the date of the thesis’ completion in order that the data might be made available for continued research interest, and so that the data can be kept for possible future professional expectations.

Names will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and only the researcher will know your identity. This confidentiality will be maintained through the use of pseudonyms and no information collected will be shared with the staff or other participants.

There are no risks associated with this study. The expected benefits associated with your participation are the information concerning the understanding and practice of democratic coaching. If this study is later submitted for further study, publication, or presentation of any kind, the anonymity of all participants will be maintained and you will be notified.

Do not hesitate to ask me questions about the study before or during the research. My contacts are below, as well as the contacts for my supervising professor at the University of Toronto. You may also wish to contact the Ethics Review Office at the University of Toronto at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or at 416-946-3273.

Please sign this consent form. You are signing it with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of your involvement in the study. A copy of this form will be given to you to keep.

Participants Signature: __________________________ Date: ______________

Darryl Giancola, giancola@smcsmail.com (905) 876-7242

Supervisor: Jim Ryan, University Of Toronto, jryan@oise.utoronto.ca (416) 978-1152