Learning From Practice: The Value of a Personal Learning Coach for High-Performance Coaches

François Rodrigue, Pierre Trudel, and Jennifer Boyd

University of Ottawa

Multiple actors and roles are now recognized and promoted to support the development of coaches. Personal coaching is an emerging industry in many professional fields yet remains insignificant in sport coaching. The purpose of this study was to document and assess the value of a 12-month collaborative action research in which a high-performance rugby coach, with the support of a personal learning coach, aimed to learn from her coaching practice. This research was operationalized using an appreciative inquiry framework. Personal coaching was conducted according to the principles of narrative-collaborative coaching. Data collection included interviews, video observation, audio recordings of coaching conversations, notes from phone calls, and email exchanges. Results showed that this partnership created a safe and challenging learning space where different coaching topics were addressed, such as reflective practice, leadership, and mental preparation. A deductive analysis of the debriefing interview was completed using the value creation framework developed by Wenger and colleagues. This analysis indicated that the high-performance coach's relationship with the personal learning coach enabled the development of five types of value: immediate, potential, applied, realised, and transformative. Therefore, it is suggested that narrative-collaborative coaching can complement existing formal and non-formal learning activities.

Keywords: coach learning, narrative-collaborative coaching, reflective practice, rugby, women

Research on how sport coaches learn to coach has shown a variety of sources of knowledge acquisition (e.g., He, Trudel, & Culver, 2018; Mallett, Rynne, & Billett, 2016) and different learning pathways (Werthner & Trudel, 2009), which has led researchers to suggest that learning to coach is a lifelong learning and developmental journey (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Turner, Nelson & Potrac, 2012). Compared to established professions, coach development is a complex and intriguing process (Trudel, Culver, & Richard, 2016). This complexity is caused by a range of factors: the variety of roles and working conditions of coaches (volunteer, professional, part-time, full-time, etc.), variations between sports, and country-specific differences (Duffy et al., 2011). In an attempt to map the roles played by different actors contributing to the coaches' learning journey, a table was created based on the literature (see Table 1). Coaches of coaches have not been studied yet, which is the focus of this article. Only main trends are presented in Table 1, exceptions are both possible and inevitable. This is owing to the lack of agreement regarding the definition of terms, such as competencies, mentors, or 'personal coaching' (Collins, Burke, Martindale, & Cruickshank, 2015; Cox, Bachkirova, & Clutterbuck, 2018; Jones, Harris, & Miles, 2009), and the lack of knowledge about good and bad coaching practice in the performance context (Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2006).

Interviews with coaches who discussed their biography indicate that learning how to coach starts long before their coaching career; the process is typically unconscious. For instance, life experiences as a child, such as being part of a family, allowed the development of key values that influence coaching approaches (Callary, Werthner, & Trudel, 2011; Duarte & Culver, 2014).

Experiences in a sporting context, especially as an athlete, also contribute to the learning process. Within their first years of coaching, coaches often try to either model or avoid replicating the behaviours of coaches they had experienced (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005).

The central role coaches play in the sport system is now widely recognised (International Council for Coaching Excellence, 2014). Many different coach education programs (directed learning) are thus being developed (Callary, Culver, Werthner, & Bales, 2014). Recently, researchers have been studying actors who are developing and delivering these pre-set training programs (Cushion & Nelson, 2013; Horgan & Daly, 2015). The International Council for Coaching Excellence (2014), in a document entitled the *International Coach Developer Framework,* suggests using the term 'coach developer' as "an umbrella term to embrace the varied roles played by personnel engaged in the process of developing coaches" (p. 8). Coach developers are generally employees of national governing bodies, sport federations, or even clubs, that communicate the messages of the organisation's coaching philosophy (Allison, 2016). Their training and the quality assurance of their work (Taylor & Groom, 2016) revolve around their ability to design and/or understand coach education programmes, to deliver courses and workshops, and to evaluate coaching performance (Abraham, 2016; International Council for Coaching Excellence, 2014). Generally, coaches are obliged to attend and obtain certification during the first years of a coaching position, while occasional requests to participate in continuous professional development activities will emerge throughout their career (Armour, 2010). Directed learning activities, such as pre-set training programmes and continuous

François Rodrigue and Pierre Trudel are with the University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Jennifer Boyd is with the Women's Rugby, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
Address author correspondence to François Rodrigue at frodr048@uottawa.ca.

Table 1   Impact of Actors by Learning Category on HP Coaches' Lifelong Learning Journey

	Pre-coaching Career		Coaching Career	
	Child	Athlete	Early Years	Later Years
Unconscious Learning				
Parents	Major			
Sport Coaches		Major		
Directed Learning				
Coach Developers				
Designers			Major	Minor
Instructors & Facilitators			Major	Minor
Evaluators			Major	
Mentors			Major	
Self-driven Learning				
Mentors (informal)			Major	
Peers (network)			Major	Major
Coaches of Coaches				
Performance Coaches				*To study*
Developmental Coaches				*To study*

professional development activities, which are often delivered in classroom setting, have been received with scepticism by high-performance (HP) coaches (Clements & Morgan, 2015; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Rynne & Mallett, 2012). The main complaint directed at these activities is that content is often irrelevant, as it does not represent the realities of coaching and does not address the coaches' needs (Armour, Griffiths, & De Lyon, 2016; Nelson & Cushion, 2006). To solve this issue, some initiatives have been established whereby coach developers deliver these programmes using a combination of formal courses and supervised field practices while assuming the role of a mentor (Allison, Abraham, & Cale, 2016; Mesquita, Ribeiro, Santos, & Morgan, 2014).

Once certified, coaches have little pressure to continue their learning, apart from providing proof of development credits when required (Nash, Sproule, & Horton, 2017). Therefore, it is the responsibility of coaches to deliberately take actions to become lifelong learners (self-driven learning). In their first years, coaches might seek an informal mentor who is willing to discuss their coaching practice (Mesquita et al., 2014; Young, 2013). Coaches also value their peers, but interactions between them are rare due to their competitiveness, even later in their career (Collins, Abraham, & Collins, 2012; Rynne & Mallett, 2012). According to Trede and McEwen (2016), deliberate practitioners are continuous learners who question what they do, are curious of what others are doing, and "aspire to learning more than mastering measurable knowledge and skills; they also aspire to acquiring the means to support their need for perspective, value and meaning-making through a lifelong journey of learning and change" (p. 9).

Studies involving HP coaches suggest that everyday coaching experiences can provide meaningful learning experiences (Marshall, Nelson, Toner, & Potrac, 2014). Unfortunately, HP coaches often feel isolated, lack guidance, and have difficulty reflecting and sharing (Rynne & Mallett, 2012). Considering that HP coaching is evolving quickly with advances in technology, the entry of specialist disciplines, and more requests regarding leading and managing HP sport programs, finding methods to support HP coaches in learning from their practice is urgent (Mallett, Rynne, & Dickens, 2013). Few HP coaches make time to critically reflect on their practice (Cushion,

2018; Rynne & Mallett, 2014) although the importance of taking time to reflect on one's own coaching practice is strongly promoted (Dixon, Lee, & Ghaye, 2012; Knowles, Borrie, & Telfer, 2005). One of the reasons might be that learning to reflect is rarely integrated into HP coach education programmes (Callary et al., 2014). Moon (2016) explained that "coach educators have not known how to facilitate the learning of such practices and in particular there has been little distinction between superficial description and the deep reflection from which good learning can emerge" (p. 66).

Recently, it has been suggested that offering a personal coach to sport coaches would help them to learn from their coaching practice (Leaders Performance Institute, 2019; McCarthy & Brady, 2018; Trudel, Gilbert, & Rodrigue, 2016). According to Cox (2013), personal coaching can provide an environment for reflective learning, and "is best done by creating a psychological space that allows clients to withdraw from the workplace in order to stand back and think, thus enabling them to gain some perspective on their experiences" (p. 73). There are many types of personal coaching approaches based on different theories (Cox et al., 2018). Researchers have suggested that it is important to distinguish between performance and developmental coaching (Jackson & Cox, 2018; Parsloe & Leedham, 2009; Silsbee, 2010). Performance coaching "is often informed by some form of gap analysis, 360-degree feedback, or another assessment of the competencies that the organization considers important" (Silsbee, 2010, p. 9) while in developmental coaching "the learning and development of the person being coached is the primary driver of the coaching" (p. 9). Because an individual's agenda prevails over an organization's agenda, although there will be some overlap, the developmental coaching process is based on a constructivist position, suggesting a movement from where the clients are now to where they want to be (Jackson & Cox, 2018). Thus, development emerges from working on the coachee's current needs rather than from the result of an intervention designed by others that consists of teaching predetermined topics or procedures to fix attitudes or behaviours (Drake, 2015).

Narrative-collaborative coaching (NCC), a form of developmental coaching, has been popularised by three researchers: David

Drake, Ho Law, and Reinhard Stelter (Drake, 2015; Drake & Stelter, 2014; Law, 2013; Stelter, 2014; Stelter & Law, 2010). According to Stelter (2014, p. 5), NCC is defined as follows:

> Coaching is reflection between two people, and precisely because it is reflection, it involves both parties' inner and outer life as well as the interaction that develops between them and their mutual reflections. Coaching is a meeting between two people, a coach and a coachee, which is continually aimed at creating optimal reflection between them. Both parties contribute to the reflection that develops every time they meet.

What differentiates an NCC approach from other forms of assistance is that the personal coach—referred to as 'personal learning coach' (PLC) for the remainder of this paper—does not only support, they also participate in the learning process. The PLC is a 'fellow human companion' that "shares his or her considerations and reflections with the coachee in order to serve as a witness and co-creator in the dialogue. The coaching conversation can be described as a co-creative and collaborative process" (Stelter, 2014, p. 52). Similar to most types of personal coaching, the success of NCC depends on the readiness and capability of both partners to fulfil their respective roles. It means that HP coaches must have the desire to develop as a coach by showing openness to critically reflect on their practice and to take appropriate actions. For the PLCs, it can be argued that they must have knowledge and skills in three domains. First, they should be familiar with sport coaching practice since HP coaches are suspicious of those suggesting how to coach without concrete experience (Watts & Cushion, 2017). Second, a PLC must be able to refer to sports science literature to introduce new ways of doing things into the conversation. Coaches and sport organisations are generally not well equipped to use sports science, even though it has become a key component within the HP context (Reade, Rodgers, & Hall, 2008). Third, PLCs must be able to demonstrate a proficiency of some core competencies of personal coaching, such as co-creating relationships and communicating effectively (International Coaching Federation, 2019). Specific to developmental coaching, it is suggested to have a personal coach outside of the organisation, to target clients' developmental needs without compromise (Silsbee, 2010).

In summary, Table 1 presents the key people that sport coaches will encounter during their lifelong learning journey to help them to become 'serial winning coaches' (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). Whilst these learning opportunities can be easily recognised as cumulative, the pathway will always be different because it is impossible to guarantee the same access to these helpers and the quality of support will vary. Support provided by parents and coaches have been described as both positive and negative (Côté, Baker, & Abernethy, 2003). The same can be said for coach developers in their different roles: instructor/facilitator (Nelson, Cushion, & Potrac, 2013), evaluator (Gillham, Hansen, & Brady, 2015), and mentor (Sawiuk, Taylor, & Groom, 2018). Studies on the support provided by personal coaches to HP coaches are lacking. The only publication which studied an NCC approach discussed a six-month learning journey of a tennis HP coach with his PLC (Milistetd, Peniza, Trudel, & Paquette, 2018).

Research Purpose

While the importance for sport coaches to reflect on their practice is clear, studies that examine its facilitation and report outcomes are lacking (Picknell, Cropley, Hanton, & Mellalieu, 2014). Therefore,

the purpose of this study was to extend the work of Milistetd et al. (2018) by documenting and assessing the value of a 12-month NCC involving a female HP rugby coach and a PLC. Specifically, the following two questions were considered: (a) How did this learning journey form and evolve during a period of 12 months? (b) What value, if any, did this collaborative learning experience create for the HP coach?

Methodology

Participants

In an NCC approach, the coachee and the personal coach are partners; therefore, information on both of these parties must be provided. The HP coach and the PLC have agreed to share their names.

Jennifer, the HP rugby coach. At the time of this project, Jennifer was a 42-year old rugby coach with over 20 years of coaching experience at high school, club, college, university, and national levels. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree with a major in Chemistry, and a Bachelor of Education with specialisations in Science and English. In terms of coaching education, Jennifer possesses a certification from the Coaching Association of Canada (CAC), and at the time of the study was involved in the Advanced Coaching Diploma (also offered by the CAC).

In 2013, Jennifer moved to her current position, where she works full-time as a head coach of a Canadian university women's rugby team. During her first five years with the programme, her team completed four undefeated regular seasons, winning the Conference title each year. Jennifer started to work with Rugby Canada in 2013 and is now an assistant coach with the National Senior Women's Team. Her goal is to reach the 2021 Women's Rugby World Cup.

François, the PLC. François' athletic and coaching career made him familiar with coaching practice. At the time of the study, he was 29-years old with 16 years of cumulative experience in Canadian football as both an athlete and coach. After his athletic career, he coached a junior college football team for three years whilst occupying various coaching roles with regional and high-school teams. He then worked as an assistant coach with a Canadian university football team.

François completed an undergraduate degree in Human Kinetics (sports science), and then co-founded an HP training centre, where he worked as a registered strength and conditioning coach training athletes of all levels. This experience fuelled a desire to complete a Master's in Sports Management. Subsequently, he pursued a Doctorate to examine HP coach development, during which he published papers on reflection and coach development (Rodrigue, He, & Trudel, 2015; Rodrigue & Trudel, 2018).

François also has experience as a coach developer. He is a trained coach developer (with the CAC), and has facilitated many workshops. He acts as a consultant for sport programmes and national sporting organisations. Specific to his role as a personal coach, François was supervised during this study by someone with the following key attributes: a personal coaching certification, experience of coaching HP coaches, and helping university professors in their career development. In conclusion, François is qualified as a PLC because he has fundamental experience, knowledge, and skill, in three important domains: coaching practice, sport science, and coach development.

Research Structure

The evolution of this study meets many of the principles of action research used in sport coaching research (Rossi, Rynne, & Rabjohns, 2016). In collaborative action research, many decisions regarding the structure of the research emerge as opposed to being decided in advance. However, researchers can use some guidelines to organise a non-linear learning initiative. Appreciative inquiry (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010) can provide such general structure and is advised when working in the field of coach development (McCarthy & Brady, 2018; Trudel, Gilbert, & Rodrigue, 2016). Appreciative inquiry can also be integrated into NCC "because it is often much more helpful not to focus on the problems of the situation but on the possibilities and strengths of the participants involved" (Stelter & Law, 2010, p. 157). Although generally used with an organisation, the four phases of appreciative inquiry (discovery, dream, design, and destiny) can be modified to work with an individual (Milistetd et al., 2018).

In this study, the discovery and dream phases were completed simultaneously and form the inception of the collaborative learning experience. The former served to examine the HP coach's past experiences and strengths, whilst the latter was a positive exploration of her future. In preparation for a narrative interview reviewing her biography and her coaching practice, the HP coach was asked to write a table of contents illustrating her autobiography. The title of each chapter had to be meaningful and refer to an event that helped her become who she is today. Narrative interviews are key in accessing the tacit knowledge of professionals (Perret, Berges, & Santoro, 2005). To complement the narrative interview, the HP coach was then invited to discuss her coaching practice over eight video clips from one training session. Video recordings can facilitate such discussions as coaches tend to be inaccurate when recalling their actual coaching, when only relying on their memory (Mead, Spencer, & Kidman, 2016).

The design phase generated a list of coaching topics that the HP coach was interested in working on to improve her coaching.

This list was created to generate uplifting propositions for her future and was prepared in advance by the HP coach after being discussed in a semi-structured interview.

Finally, the destiny phase was the safe and challenging space where the co-creation of knowledge materialised through coaching conversation sessions, emails, and phone calls. Although all aspects of the list of coaching topics were considered, the learning journey was flexible, and priority was given to the HP coach's just-in-time needs. Beforehand, the HP coach and the PLC agreed to limit coaching conversation sessions to one 90-minute session per month. Both felt that this commitment respected the HP coach's workload and optimised engagement.

Data Collection and Analysis

Multiple methods of data collection were used in this study because different phases were incorporated into the methodology. Data was gathered from audio recordings of the narrative interview ($n = 1$), the semi-structured interviews ($n = 2$), and the coaching conversation sessions ($n = 6$). To answer the first research question, a narrative analysis (Schutt, 2012) was completed to reconstruct the journey timeline (see Figure 1). Narrative analysis is useful for studies that examine a series of events rather than each event separately, especially when studies need to consider the participants' biographies (Riessman, 2002). This was achieved by listening to these audio recordings several times, by reviewing notes taken during phone calls, notes taken during short unplanned meetings, email exchanges ($n = 29$), and documents developed by François ($n = 5$). All of these elements were then classified into stories within Jennifer's learning journey.

For the second research question, one debriefing interview was conducted at the end of the study. The interview guide was based on the value creation framework (Wenger, Trayner, & de Laat, 2011). This framework allows for the collection of data according to five types of value-creation cycles: (a) immediate value—direct
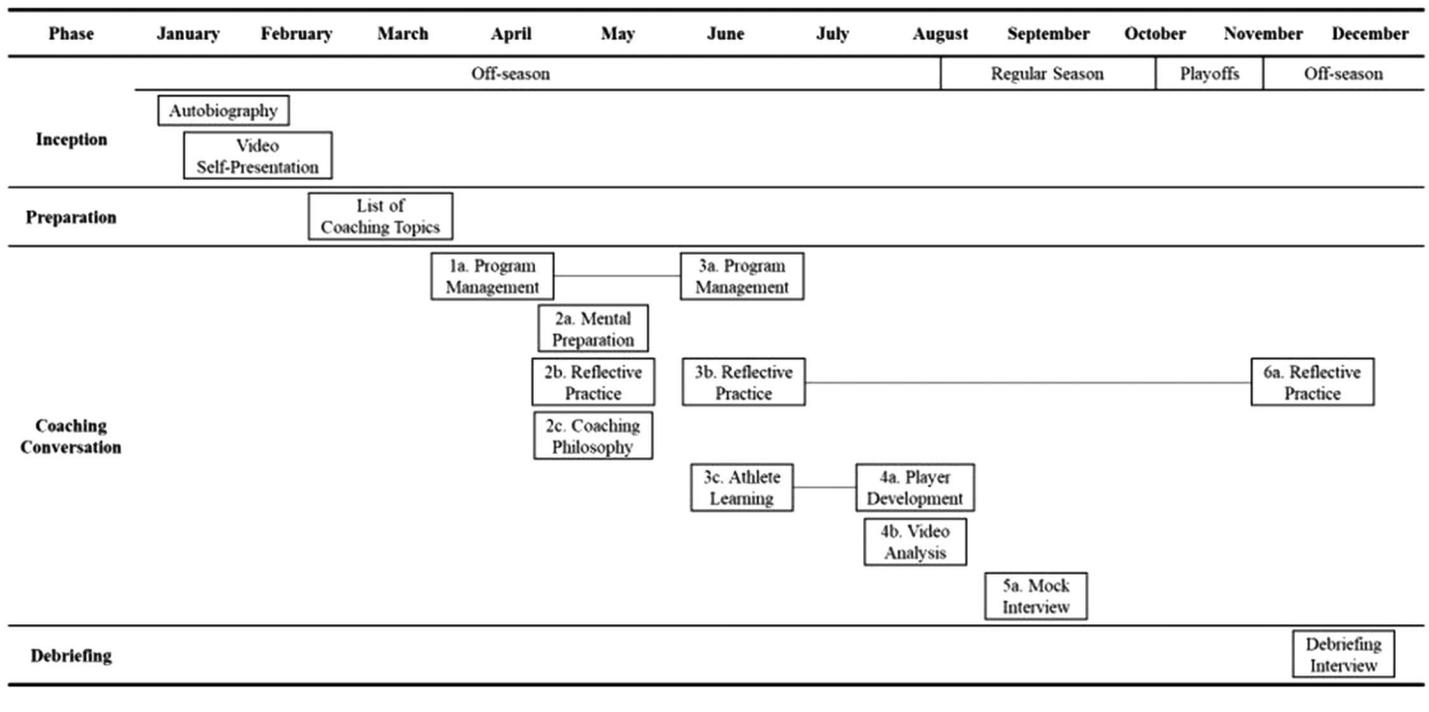

Figure 1 — Phases conducted, activities performed, and coaching topics discussed during Jennifer's 12-month learning journey.

experience of the activity, (b) potential value—learning from the activity, (c) applied value—learning put into practice, (d) realised value—outcomes reached from application, and (e) transformative value – reframing of beliefs. The value creation framework has been used in previous professional development studies (Cowan & Menchaca, 2014; Van Waes et al., 2016), including research in sport coaching (Bertram, Culver, & Gilbert, 2016, 2017). Prior to the debriefing interview, François provided Jennifer with a matrix that summarised the work completed in relation to the content of each coaching conversation session. The two-hour debriefing interview was recorded, and the transcription produced a 35-page transcript. Prior to analysis, the transcript was sent to Jennifer for member checking.

NVivo 12 software was used to organise and code the interview transcript (NVivo, 2018). Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process for deductive thematic analysis was completed as follows: (a) familiarisation with the data, (b) data was initially coded based on the five value-creation cycles, (c) the first author then searched for value creation stories, (d) both authors reviewed those value creation stories, (e) value creation stories were defined and named by both authors, and (f) the first author produced a report.

The research project was submitted to, and approved by, the Ethics Board of the university prior to conducting the research. Subsequently, with the collaboration of the HP sport director, a meeting was organised to introduce this non-mandatory coach development project to a group of full-time university sport coaches. Five of the 14 coaches attending the session agreed to participate. From that point, individual meetings were scheduled, informed consent was obtained, and the collaborative action research commenced. Out of the five coaches, Jennifer represented a unique case for a potential contribution to the coach development literature, because she was a successful full-time head coach of a women's HP team and there are few examples of female coaches in the literature (Harvey, Voelker, Cope, & Dieffenbach, 2018).

Results

Sequence of the 12-Month Narrative-Collaborative Coaching

Figure 1 presents a visual representation of the phases' content, which shaped Jennifer's learning journey with François. In the discovery and dream phases, two activities (autobiography report and discussion of video) helped to familiarise François with Jennifer's strengths and coaching philosophy. In the first activity, Jennifer prepared a table of contents composed of 11 chapters of her hypothetical autobiography. Each chapter had a title along with a few details and keywords. Jennifer listed the following key elements that contributed to making her a HP rugby coach: (a) playing for the National Senior Women's Team, (b) coaching and teaching at high-school level, and (c) acting as head coach of the Under-20 National Women's Team. The second activity involved François and Jennifer talking about her coaching practice while watching eight video clips recorded during one of her training sessions. This dialogue revealed the following: (a) she trusts her assistant coaches to lead parts of the training session, (b) she is aware of her mannerisms, and (c) she frequently adopts the role of a motivator.

In the design phase, Jennifer and François discussed six coaching topics that matched Jennifer's priorities (see Table 2). This list allowed François to prepare, if needed, relevant material to nurture future coaching conversations.

Table 2   List of Prioritised Coaching Topics

Coaching Topic	Sub-Topic
1. Technology	How to deliver film effectively?
2. Mental Preparation	Stress management of student-athletes.
3. Physical Preparation	Time and duration of warm-up exercises.
4. Program management	Integration of assistant coaches.
5. Nutrition	Post-game and pre-game in particular.
6. Periodization	Organizing a year of athlete training.

The destiny phase then regrouped six coaching conversation sessions. In Figure 1, the coaching topics discussed during the coaching conversations are named inside the boxes. The lines that connect the boxes indicate that this coaching topic was addressed between those sessions. It should be noted that the coaching topics do not exactly match the list produced in the design phase. The HP coach–PLC interactions prompted a reorganisation of the learning priorities to allow for topics to be covered 'just-in-time' for Jennifer's professional responsibilities. For instance, program management, mental preparation, and video analysis were discussed; hence, these activities coordinated best with the spring season debriefing, the summer internship of master students, and the start of the regular season, respectively. Two urgent coaching topics were also added (reflective practice and mock interview) with mutual agreement. For example, the mock interview was added because Jennifer had to prepare for an upcoming job interview. It should be noted that there were no coaching sessions in July, due to the summer holidays and a tournament, as well as October, because of the playoffs and the national championship tournament.

As mentioned previously, the coaching conversation sessions are moments for co-creation. The topic 'reflective practice' was selected as an example because it became a central learning element in Jennifer's learning journey, although it was not present in the list of coaching topics developed in the design phase. Familiar with the coaching literature, François noticed that Jennifer was rarely taking time to reflect critically on her coaching practice. François first investigated her knowledge of reflective practice and then presented some relevant material including an overview of reflective tools available. The following excerpt continues this coaching conversation, starting when they discussed the reflective tools:

> François: *On the top of your head, right now, which reflective tool would you like to use?*
>
> Jennifer: *Probably a journal. I could write after every session everywhere I go.*
>
> François: *One thing that we can do is set it up now so that it's ready to go in August.*
>
> Jennifer: *Yeah, mid-June probably . . . so I will have the summer to get ready.*
>
> François: *I have an example from a coach. He writes dates on top of the books he used . . . "August 2016". Some others do it by topics. Is there one that you would prefer?*
>
> Jennifer: *By dates. I have lots of books on the go, with topics like defence, attack, etc. I would rather do self-reflection on the athlete and how they reacted to certain things.*
>
> François: *Writing is your preferred way of doing it . . .*

Jennifer: *Yeah. For me, a journal, it's easy. You can add diagrams. You can throw it in your bag. You don't worry about a battery.*

François: *Written it is. I will comeback next time with a suggestion for a structure.*

In the next session, François and Jennifer critiqued her reflective journal entries. This process focussed primarily on comparing some excerpts with the four stages of critical reflection that François presented earlier.

François: *When we look at the four levels of reflection, where do you think yours are?*

Jennifer: *Probably three.*

François: *Why do you say three?*

Jennifer: *Because I am not just telling a story like this is what happened. I am conjuring emotions. As soon as I read that entry, I almost got emotional. I remember that day at the field, it was special. Anyway, I think I am at a level three, am I reflecting critically? Maybe, maybe not.*

François: *So, what's a four again?*

Jennifer: *Critical is looking into the ways to improve or to better. Not just being content with how it is. Not because you are not good enough, it's just how can we be better today? Like I say to the girls all the time. I think that's what critical reflection is. You can solve problems if you think critically. That critical piece is pivotal.*

François: *Critical reflection is really about exploring multiple perspectives that can explain what went well or what went wrong so that you can improve. What you told me earlier is one explanation, what could be other explanations?*

Jennifer: *The emotions of the game, we were playing another Ottawa team. Like you want to be the best team in Ottawa. From what the athletes said after the game, it could have been because they had faith in me and the game plan.*

This dialogue, which builds on Jennifer's reflective practice, led to contemplating the implementation of reflective learning with her athletes. The intention was to improve the athletes' development by enhancing the enactment of the leadership triad, which is a component of her coaching philosophy. Jennifer outlined her plan for inviting athletes to reflect on their performance every week.

Jennifer: *The first pages are going to be about core values, the mission, the team's code so that their journals look the same. I want them to always have their journal. If we do some tactical stuff, they'll add it. Our mental performance coach will add to it as well.*

François: *Last time we talked about reflective practice, we raised those three questions. What did you do well today? What did one of your teammates do well today? What will you do better tomorrow?*

Jennifer: *Yeah, I forgot! That's what I did with my U20s.*

François: *Another key element will be how these strategies are integrated with your leadership group . . .*

Jennifer: *Every Monday at the end of practice, we have "connections" where they sit in their small teams, and chat. I think this might be a good time to [reflect]. I'll talk about this with the leadership group.*

From here, Jennifer discussed the implementation of journaling (by the athletes) with the mental performance support team. Jennifer and François continually exchanged views on this topic, whether for guiding the athletes' reflective learning or enhancing her own self-reflection. It was agreed that the next coaching conversation session would focus on both Jennifer's and the athletes' use of journals.

Value Creation Stories of the 12-month Narrative-Collaborative Coaching

Table 3 presents data relevant to the value-creation cycles generated during Jennifer's learning journey. The table is adapted from Wenger et al. (2011) and relates to the inception and coaching conversations. The table contains quotes from the debriefing interview that best summarised the value created.

The table indicates that the value creation framework was a powerful instrument to assess the values of this collaborative learning experience. For most of the inception and coaching conversation, Jennifer expressed the view that value was created for all five value-creation cycles. However, two activities in the discovery and dream phases (autobiography and video self-presentation) created minimal value, which was immediate for both, and potential for the autobiography. It is important to remember that these activities were primarily planned for the benefit of the PLC, to understand the coach's background, and to prepare the learning journey. Thus, the potential impact of these two activities, although minimal, has been underestimated. Jennifer perceived the autobiography positively and can now use the document for the certification she was completing. The video observation did not create much value, because Jennifer's past experiences had possibly familiarised her with her behaviours, as she had been observed many times as a teacher.

The coaching conversation in the destiny phase completed a cycle of value creation, from 'immediate' to 'transformative' value, for many coaching topics. Table 3 illustrates the value creation for each coaching topic, and some of these results require further explanation. First, the initial reflective practice coaching conversation (2b) scaffolded into a multi-level value creation story. This created value for Jennifer's 'cognitive housekeeping', helped to establish her coaching philosophy (2c), and materialised into athlete development activities (3c). Subsequently, she used the leadership triad as a rallying point in the national semi-final and for a presentation about her coaching. The transformative value shows that reflections on her coaching philosophy changed her perception of priorities that influence performance, while reinforcing the importance of transparency. For 'athlete learning', the quotes indicate that Jennifer believed her reflective practice had improved her relationships with athletes. The athletes' reflective practice also transformed her perspective on efficient athlete learning. In addition to the benefits of this value creation story, Jennifer reflected regularly on her coaching practice. She felt that reflection enhanced her motivational skills and increased the importance she attributed to documenting her coaching practice.

Second, the value creation analysis revealed the importance of the PLC listening to the HP coach's urgent needs. Jennifer reported value for all cycles of coaching conversations that arose from

Table 3 Jennifer's Perception of Values Created During This Collaborative Learning Experience

	Immediate Value	Potential Value	Applied Value	Realised Value	Transformative Value
Inception					
Autobiography	It was a good exercise of self-reflection to reflect on my coaching career.	I now have it in my final presentation for my diploma. It paints an complete picture of my career.	N/A	N/A	N/A
Video Self-presentation	It was interesting to be recorded coaching and to have clips of my own coaching.	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Coaching Conversation					
1a. Program Management	N/A	I now collect feedback from recruits. It is key – returning players know what to expect but rookies are very nervous.	I create clearer practice plans which I share prior to camp with coaches and the leadership group. They help me adjust.	Athletes and coaches are better prepared for our practices and games.	We will be better prepared mentally, physically, and emotionally to play the big teams this year.
2a. Mental Preparation	I did not remember all the work I had done with François.	François and I defined roles for the support staff. The first years would work with the assistant and the 2nd to 5th year would work with the head.	That all happened! I applied it 100%. I had little experience working with a MPC, François helped me set up a structure.	It helped to achieve my goals in terms of helping my athletes in their psychological preparation on our way to win the National Championship.	It changed my view on the support that my athletes need in that department, support that I am unable to provide.
2b. Reflective Practice	It was good and interesting, because François helped me come up with my reflective questions and an action plan.	That is where I identified my leadership philosophy: the leadership, culture, and relationship triad; It became Boyd's triad.	I sat down to reflect pretty much every week from May to the season. I also wrote down my philosophy for the first time ever.	It made me understand my athletes better and I was able to motivate them just right.	I realized the value of writing down what I do, so that I remember and document changes. I have to make the internal, external.
2c. Coaching Philosophy	N/A	N/A	I talked about the leadership triad in my university teaching, with the directors, and with my leadership group.	Understanding my philosophy helped me to motivate my athletes better in the semi-finals, which we won after trailing at half.	It helped me understand my strengths and what I can share with my athletes. It's not about the rugby, it's about everything else.
3c. Athlete Learning	We talked about player development, evaluation criteria, and using journals during the season.	I planned Monday Connections with input from the leadership group. I also learned about a different terminology to evaluate players.	Every Monday, they sat in their groups for 15 minutes, shared journal entries and discussed three questions. I now use the individual scorecards criteria with my U20s.	I think the group got more heterogenous and that it strengthened our relationships. Girls would cry, and laugh.	I am going to buy more journals next year. I learned that providing athletes with time to reflect is beneficial. Players struggle to evaluate themselves, they need coach support.
4b. Video Analysis	We wrote on the whiteboard all that I was going to do, and you then sent it to me.	I got the idea to reach out to other coaches and laid out a draft plan for video analysis.	I did the Google Drive thing. I met with the Volleyball coach.	For sure, I was better at video analysis this year, I felt more prepared.	To me, it reiterated the importance of video feedback. I do not do enough video.
5a. Mock Interview	The mock interview was really good. It included unique questions.	I learned that I was not ready. I gained confidence in how to present my strengths and my philosophy.	I practiced and changed some things before the actual interview. After, I was interviewed by Rugby Canada and USA Rugby.	When it came to the interview, I was ready, even though I did not get the job. I had two other successful interviews.	It made me realize that I cannot be hesitant and that I have to have a plan for job interviews. Preparation is key.
Entire Learning Journey	Although it was weird to be coached, it was comfortable, and I liked the way François was holding me accountable.	During the project I gained insights on my capabilities and deficiencies. It opened my eyes to PD in places I had not considered before.	François made me take the time to develop. This was done in a way that I can remember what I have done. I also self-reflected and journaled more.	We win a gold medal for the first time, I do not think this was a coincidence.	It made me realize that I have to do more than diplomas. It happened so organically, that is what makes this approach great.

current needs of her coaching practice (such as mental preparation and mock interview). For instance, the mock interview only appeared as a need late in this collaborative learning experience; however, it created value for all cycles. Furthermore, Table 3 indicates that some data are missing for some value creation cycles of coaching conversations (program management, leadership triad, and player development). The reasons for this might be that François and Jennifer did not expand sufficiently during the debriefing interview or that Jennifer did not have any value to report. Additionally, the generation of data showing realised value might be delayed, because the impact of potential and applied value for player development may only be meaningful in subsequent years.

Finally, Jennifer's perceived values of the entire learning journey with François are presented in the bottom row (see Table 3). It is interesting to note that Jennifer believed she has learned how to learn and could more easily compare this non-linear learning approach with other coach education programmes: "Working with François made me realise how much more I have to do than just my Advanced Coaching Diploma. It happened so organically, that is what makes this approach great".

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to document and assess the value of a 12-month NCC relationship between a HP rugby coach and a PLC. Considering the collaborative relationship that characterised this developmental coaching approach, it is appropriate to start this section by discussing how both partners have contributed. In line with the NCC approach, François was required to be a learning companion, supporting and contributing to Jennifer's development by using knowledge and skills from three domains: sport coaching practice, sports science literature, and personal coaching. Therefore, the content of the interactions between François and Jennifer had to be different than usual discussions with her peers. This was apparent in the excerpt of the coaching conversation on reflective practice. Here, François (a) suggested addressing this topic after noticing its absence in Jennifer's routine, (b) checked Jennifer's familiarity with the concept, (c) provided information on what reflective practice entails, and on different reflective tools, (d) let Jennifer decide which tool she wanted to use, and (e) worked with her to apply the reflective journal to herself and her athletes. As stated by Parsloe and Leedham (2009), personal coaching is "a very specific type of conversation and not everyone, in [sport coaching] for instance, is used to having the patience and skills to help people learn in this way" (p. 9). The role that François played was also influenced by the fact that he was from outside the organisation; hence, he did not have any kind of imposed performance goals for the HP coach, and could accommodate Jennifer's just-in-time developmental needs. Considering that sport organisations tend to prioritise performance outcomes over career development (Dawson & Phillips, 2013), having access to a PLC can be a way for HP coaches to handle the pressure of their job (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Rynne & Mallett, 2014), which is a factor that can impede the learning process (Silsbee, 2010).

Jennifer's strong desire to learn and her commitment helped foster a shared process of learning and development, which is typical of a productive NCC partnership (Stelter, 2014). It can be determined that Jennifer acted like a 'deliberate practitioner' (Trede & McEwen, 2016) for the following reasons: (a) she was open to reflection on her coaching practice, (b) she did not blindly accept François' suggestions, but engaged in the negotiation of meaning,

(c) she honoured the agreement of meeting once a month, and initiated many exchanges between meetings, and (d) she saw her development as a lifelong learning process. The success of a personal coaching process depends strongly on achieving the right match between the HP coach and the PLC (Law, 2013), which appears to have been the case in this study. While François and Jennifer shared common interests, they each brought their own complementary expertise.

As demonstrated in a study from Brazil (Milistetd et al., 2018), structuring the 12-month learning journey with an appreciative inquiry approach was effective. The first three phases (discovery, dream, and design) allowed Jennifer to present who she was, determine her coaching approach, and decide on what aspects of her coaching she would like to improve. This approach of commencing an HP coach development initiative contrasts with the more common approach that consists of identifying the gap between a coach's competencies and an 'ideal' coach's competencies, and then selecting learning activities to address these identified weaknesses (Collins et al., 2015). Coachees will only be willing to share their challenges and take risks to innovate when they feel secure (Parsloe & Leedham, 2009). The last eight months of the journey were full of interactions that enabled the co-creation of knowledge between François and Jennifer. Having monthly face-to-face meetings (for approximately 90 minutes each) was convenient, productive, and respected the recommendations made by established personal coaches (Parsloe & Leedham, 2009). Jennifer's request, at the beginning of some coaching conversations, to change the plan to address emerging challenges, confirms that HP coaching is a non-linear, complex activity that exists at the edge of chaos (Jones, Bailey, & Thompson, 2013).

Jennifer's learning journey was marked by her interest into learning about reflective practice and the use of a reflective journal. The former should not be a surprise, considering that the main goal of NCC is to create a safe space for the partners to reflect (Stelter, 2014), and that effective HP coaches use deep self-reflection (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). However, the latter contrasts with the literature, which suggests that coaches struggled to use a reflective journal (Koh, Mallett, Camiré, & Wang, 2015). In Jennifer's case, she selected the journal among other tools, after being introduced to the concept of reflective practice and, most importantly, she could rely on François as a partner in its application.

A debriefing interview was conducted at the end of the project. This interview echoed comments from Mallett et al. (2013) regarding the creation of impactful learning opportunities in the HP context, which fundamentally relies on the coaches' perception of the learning environment rather than simply on the organisation of a prolific learning environment. The value creation framework developed by Wenger et al. (2011) was used to develop the interview and to analyse the transcript. As found in other studies (e.g., Bertram et al., 2017), this framework allowed the participants to discuss different types of values in depth. In this study, the results indicate that Jennifer was able to gain different value types: immediate, potential, applied, realised, and transformative (see Table 3). Contrary to most episodic learning activities – such as short courses and continuous developmental activities – that provide immediate and potential value, NCC has a strong impact on the coachee due to its longer-term partnership (Stelter, 2014).

As discussed so far, NCC has the potential to help HP coaches in their learning and development, but some challenges should be highlighted. First, because personal developmental coaching is a new concept in sport coaching, researchers do not have many studies to refer to when designing a study or discussing their

results. Accordingly, more case studies are needed. However, it will be difficult to establish best practice because of the unique profile of every HP coach and every PLC. Second, sport administrators might be sceptical of a coach development initiative that focuses more on development than performance (Silsbee, 2010). While NCC is presented as a journey into the unknown (Drake & Stelter, 2014) because it develops from the emerging challenges, stakeholders currently need and demand further evidence-based research and assessment of its effect (Law, 2013). For many sport organisations, a paradigm shift from the traditional learning approach (just-in-case) to a constructivist and learner-centred approach (just-in-time) is not an easy transition (Hussain, Trudel, Patrick, & Rossi, 2012; Paquette & Trudel, 2016). The third challenge relates to who can adequately fulfil the role of a PLC in an NCC. It was argued earlier that PLCs should possess knowledge and skills in three domains while there are no specific standards that PLCs must reach. Other supportive learning approaches can become fixated on their paradigm and impose a structured methodology, whereas NCC is based on principles that provide flexibility (Drake & Stelter, 2014). According to Stelter (2014), an efficient personal coach will be a lifelong learner with the ambition of being a reflective practitioner. The final challenge is that although the ultimate goal of personal coaching is for the HP coach to develop an independent capability to learn after the relationship has ended (Drake & Stelter, 2014), there is a risk of developing dependency (Brennan & Wildflower, 2018).

Conclusion

Coach development is a lifelong learning journey, which means that HP coaches will be involved in many different learning situations, and they will meet many individuals who will contribute to their development. Trying to identify which learning situation is more effective than others has little value because each has its unique contribution and impact (Mallett, Trudel, Lyle, & Rynne, 2009). Thus, NCC should not be seen as a panacea, but rather as a new learning opportunity that HP coaches can freely choose to use when the 'trial and error' approach can no longer help their progression (Rynne & Mallett, 2012; Watts & Cushion, 2017). Having a PLC does not preclude HP coaches from engaging in discussions with their peers, consulting experts, or even attending formal courses. More importantly, the PLC is a learning companion, who can help HP coaches to take the time to reflect on their practice in a safe place whilst encouraging them to act.

Author Biographies

François Rodrigue is currently studying high-performance coach learning at the doctoral level and teaching courses at the University of Ottawa. He also acts as a consultant for sport federations and coaches working with national, university, junior college, and high-school sport teams. He holds a master's degree in sport management. In the last few years, he has co-owned a high-performance training centre and has coached football at the college level.

Pierre Trudel is an emeritus professor in the School of Human Kinetics at the University of Ottawa in Canada. He has published over 100 articles, and has been a consultant for many sport organizations, developing programs and acting as a personal learning coach for high-performance coaches. During the Olympic Games in Rio (2016), he conducted, for the Canadian Olympic Committee, a research project called: Rio as a learning environment.

Jennifer Boyd is an award winning rugby coach and faculty member at the University of Ottawa. She has been a national team coach since 2013, working with Rugby Canada's U20W and National Senior Women's teams. She holds an advanced coaching diploma and teaches in the Human Kinetics Faculty at uOttawa. Her teams have won numerous conference, provincial and national championships.

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