EXPLORING A COACH’S APPLICATION OF ANDRAGOGICAL PRINCIPLES IN THE FACILITATION OF LEARNING FOR MASTERS AND YOUTH CANOE/KAYAK ATHLETES

Justin MacLellan1, Bettina Callary2, & Bradley W. Young1
1School of Human Kinetics, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, ON, Canada
2Department of Community Studies and Sport & Physical Activity Leadership, Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS, Canada

INTRODUCTION

Adult sportspersons, or Masters athletes (MAs), require coaching approaches that are nuanced compared to those with younger age cohorts (Callary et al., 2015; Ferrari et al., 2016; Young et al., 2014). Callary et al. (2015) noted that aspects of such nuanced approaches appear to closely parallel some of the principles in Knowles et al.’s (2012) Andragogy in Practice Model (APM). The APM is used to understand principles that help instructors facilitate learning in adults. Six core principles relate to learners’ need to know the purpose and content of learning before undertaking it; self-concept as being capable of self-directed learning; prior experiences that influence current learning; readiness to learn in response to a specific need or desire for the learning outcomes; orientation to learning that is life-centered; and learners’ motivation to learn on the basis of internal needs (Knowles et al., 2012). Although studied broadly in adult learning, APM has yet to be examined in sport coaching.

PARTICIPANT & METHODS

An instrumental case study design (Punch, 2005) focused on one participant:
• A female, 30-year-old canoe/kayak coach at an Eastern Canadian club.
• She had 14 years of experience coaching MAs, and 9 years with youth.
• Certified with Competition-Development NCCP accreditation.
• At the time of the study, she coached both MAs (30-65 yrs) and youth athletes (12-15 yrs) in separate groups: 1-3 sessions, for 2-6 total hrs/ wk with MAs; up to 8 sessions, for 20 hrs/wk with youth.

Data collection & analysis:
• Three semi-structured interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) with the coach, each lasting 90-120 minutes in duration.
• Probes were informed by participant observation of learning situations that occurred during coach-facilitated training sessions prior to the interviews.
• Data were analyzed using a deductive analytical approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), organizing quotes into categories representative of the APM’s six core principles.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The learners’ need to know
• The coach used an informational approach with the MAs to respond to their inquisitive, detail-oriented nature:
   “For example, some MAs didn’t understand the ‘wobble’ drill. They said, ‘You’re telling me to wobble, but does that mean it?’ And I’m like, ‘Just slide around on your seat’. And they said, ‘But I’ll go’. So they think so much about things, whereas kids are like, ‘You asked me to do that, ok, I’ll do it.’”
• The MAs’ desire to know the content and reasons before comfortably partaking in the learning is consonant with Knowles et al. (2012)’s need to know principle.
• The coach recognized that the youth were far less inquisitive and appeared uncomfortable approaching her with questions. In response, she explained how she would intervene with information without their prompt:
   “I have to pull [their thoughts] out of the youth. They don’t come up as much. Their parents will tell me, ‘Oh my gosh, he’s been so nervous’. So then I really make a note to go up to the individual and see what I can do to help.”
• The coach provided this information in a strategic and motivational manner. She provided explanation for drills so that the athletes could understand their reasons for training:
   “With youth, I say, ‘This is why we’re doing what we’re doing’. We’re going to train eight times a week all year round because everyone else (in competitive club) is doing it, so we have to keep up. And we’re going to take advantage of eight practices a week to try to do every single pillar of performance.”

Prior experiences of the learner
• When considering the MAs past experiences, the coach spoke only of those from sport or similar motoric domains. She described MAs as having minimal prior sport experiences which translated to challenges in their current learning:
   “When the MAs learned to paddle, they developed certain habits and they’re hard to come out of. And also they just can’t change their habits because they don’t have the skill.”
• The coach’s low estimations of MAs prior motor skill and experience, as well as her disregard of experiences from non-sport specific domains contradicts Knowles et al. (2012)’s core principle which proposes that educators may benefit learners by acknowledging and valuing their prior experiences brought to current learning situations.
• In contrast, the coach did not speak of a lack of experience being an issue with youth. Instead, she sought to understand how she could use the specific skills the athletes learned from other coaches as tools in present learning situations:
   “Youth tend to be coached by different coaches prior to working with me. So I made a note to never contradict another coach, but to ask an athlete, ‘Hey, do you want to explain to me what it is that you were working on, and how you came to have that skill? They’d say, ‘Oh, this coach told me to do it’. And I’d say, ‘Alright. Do you know why? We’ll just have a dialogue.’”

Motivation to learn
• The coach worked to facilitate a training climate for MAs that was one of encouragement and support. She felt that this approach was important in responding to the intrinsic motives (Knowles et al., 2012) of the athletes:
   “With Masters, I don’t want to discourage them. So I find out what they’re working on, I’ll let them know, ‘Hey, I could tell you were working on that’ or ‘This is really good, but I want you to add this’. I had a whole athletic career of being critical and the reality is that constructive criticism or applause feels really good, too, sometimes. So I praise their efforts and let them know that, ‘Hey, I can tell what you’re working on, so that’s great.’”
• In contrast, she described taking a stricter approach with youth in response to competitive goals that were very pronounced in their training, and in response to extrinsic motives she felt they needed:
   “For the kid who doesn’t want to be there, I’d say, ‘You’re here anyway, so do the work’. Perhaps I’m hard on them; I wouldn’t say that to a MA. I would say, ‘You’re here, you can do the work’. I’d say, ‘That was great! How did it feel?’”

CONCLUSIONS

There is evidence of the andragogical principles in the coach’s approaches with both older and younger cohorts of athletes. The APM (Knowles et al., 2012) appears to have utility in the sport coaching domain, however, it may not be a model of instruction that is applied uniquely to older adults.

The coach’s perceptions of her approaches with MAs were largely andragogical, or adult-oriented, and those for youth were more closely aligned with traditional pedagogical approaches (Siedentop & Tannehill, 2010). We note however that notions of both andragogy and traditional pedagogy were evident, to some extent, with both MAs and youth. Thus, we acknowledge andragogy’s application in sport coaching discussions. Coaches can pick and choose certain principles on the basis of the cohort they are working with and the learning needs of those specific athletes.

REFERENCES


This project was funded by SSHRC, a CBU RP Grant & an Uottawa Research Travel Grant. Please address correspondence to Justin MacLellan at jml3974@uottawa.ca