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The Agony and the Ecstasy: Student-Coaches' Perceptions of a Heutagogical Approach to
Coach Development

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14 Abstract

15 Heutagogy is the focus on self-determined learning by the learner. In a recent insights paper,
16 Stoszowski and Collins offered a critical overview of heutagogy, highlighting the potential
17 advantages for coaching and coach education, as well as some concerns with its use. The aim
18 of the present study was to offer insight into student-coaches' experiences on a sports
19 coaching bachelor degree module that was underpinned by a heutagogical approach to
20 learning. Twenty-six student-coaches (6 females and 20 males) took part in semi-structured
21 group interviews, 19 of whom had completed an end of module survey. Data were analyzed
22 inductively and findings revealed that performance on, and perceptions of, the module
23 showed the approach was differentially effective, with three higher order themes representing
24 the student-coaches' articulation of their experiences: (a) attitudinal disposition, (b)
25 knowledge and experience, and (c) skill set. Although the findings of present study suggest
26 heutagogy is a potentially useful method in coach education, we also highlight some
27 potentially essential caveats to the use of the method.

28 *Keywords:* heutagogy; self-determined learning; andragogy; coach education; coach
29 learning

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Introduction

After a long stagnant period, coach education has recently received an input of some theory driven progression (Cushion, Nelson, Armour, Lyle, Jones, Sandford, & O’Callaghan, 2010). For example, the recognition of coach development as an aspect of adult learning has led to greater consideration of andragogy (the art and science of adult learning – Knowles, 1970) in the design of coach education; although notably well after the date of publication! Thus, while recent research still stresses the preference of coaches for informal learning (Stoszowski & Collins, 2016), as opposed to formal accreditation courses, consideration of andragogy has had an influence, albeit delayed, on several recent initiatives such as the University-based, UK Coaching Certificate Level 4 which represents the highest award for many sports (Sports Coach UK, 2015). This influence needs to be considered against the different perspectives on coach learning and development, even though some authors (e.g., Abraham & Collins, 2011) have suggested that these perspectives agree more than they differ. Such nuances notwithstanding, there is little doubt that andragogy has offered something to the debate, albeit in the form of a useful summary about learning design, methodology and environment for adults in coaching.

However, although the influence of andragogy has hardly been rapid, another new approach has recently come hovering into view in coach education (Ayres, Price, Monk, & McCarthy, 2016); namely, heutagogy, or the study of self-determined learning (Hase & Kenyon, 2000). In a recent insights paper, Stoszowski and Collins (2017) offered a critical overview of this extension from andragogy, highlighting the potential advantages for coaching and coach education. As they observed “the heutagogic learning process is characterised by highly autonomous learners taking personal responsibility for, and control of, what will be learnt, when it will be learnt and how it will be learnt” (p. 353). As such, the approach appears to offer a great deal for the self-motivated adult learner coach. From

56 another perspective, however, Stoszkowski and Collins also highlighted some concerns with
57 the approach. Specifically, was the approach suitable for all? As a related issue, were there
58 any essential precursors needed; certain levels of knowledge, motivation or perhaps even
59 maturity, without which the heutagogic approach would be less effective? Indeed, heutagogic
60 enthusiasts justifiably state the need for a level of maturity and independence in the learner;
61 characteristics that are also central to the application of andragogic approaches (Knowles,
62 1975).

63 Certainly, caution is generally advisable when new techniques or methods are
64 suggested. Several authors have stressed the complexity of interpersonal tasks such as
65 coaching, emphasizing the consequent need to consider the pros *and* cons of a new approach
66 (Collins, Martindale, Burke, & Cruickshank, 2015; Collins & Collins, 2016). In addition,
67 others have highlighted the difficulties involved in making an epistemological change as part
68 of the learning process (Entwistle & Petersen, 2004). In sum, knowledge and careful
69 consideration are always positive inclusions when considering the implementation of new
70 ideas.

71 Accordingly, we saw the *application* of heutagogic approaches in coach development
72 as an important topic for investigation. One issue we thought fundamental was the
73 perceptions of trainee coaches who had experienced the approach, something which is
74 currently underexplored. It has certainly been tried in some higher education environments
75 (e.g., teacher training, Canning, 2010) and, with the delivery of bachelor degree programmes
76 in sports coaching becoming more common (Lara-Bercial et al., 2016), this controlled setting
77 may offer a good laboratory to test some of the potential drawbacks or delimitations to the
78 approach in coach education. Accordingly, we asked convenience samples of undergraduate
79 student-coaches what their experiences had been of a heutagogical approach to learning. The
80 current paper reports what we found.

81 **Method**

82 **Participants**

83 The sample in the present study consisted of a module cohort of 26 sports coaching
84 undergraduate students (six females and 20 males, $M_{\text{age}} = 21.5$ years, $SD = 0.81$). The
85 participants, who were studying full-time at a UK university, were purposively sampled from
86 a final year undergraduate module that employed a heutagogical framework in the design of
87 its learning activities. At the time of data collection, 16 student-coaches were qualified at
88 UKCC Level 1 and ten at Level 2 in a range of sports (see Table 1), with coaching experience
89 ranging between 3 and 6 years ($M_{\text{experience}} = 3.65$ years, $SD = 0.89$).

90 **Procedure**

91 The module in question, titled “coaching practice and reflection”, aimed to facilitate
92 heutagogy by providing opportunities for self-directed learning and professional
93 development, with student-coaches responsible for completing a 6-month long work-based
94 placement in a community coaching setting of their own arrangement. The module was an
95 “optional” module, self-selected by student-coaches and studied alongside a range of
96 compulsory modules required for the degree award. In an initial introductory workshop, the
97 aims and intended learning outcomes of the module were outlined. A second workshop then
98 focused on heutagogy as an educational concept, with particular focus placed on its purpose,
99 process and potential value. Then, during the undertaking of their placement, and consistent
100 with the protocol used by Stoszowski and Collins (2015), the student-coaches were asked to
101 engage as active participants and co-producers of knowledge, rather than passive consumers
102 of content, by reflecting upon their on-going self-determined learning and practical
103 experiences. Online group blogs, administered using WordPress (www.wordpress.com),
104 provided the main teaching and learning environment, with student-coaches encouraged to
105 find and share relevant resources to inform ongoing supportive discussion and exploration

106 with their peers. Each group blog (two groups with nine members, one group with eight
107 members) was private and could only be viewed by its members and the two module tutors
108 (cf. Stoszkowski & Collins, 2015). Each student-coach's final module grade was based on the
109 quality of their individual participation in their group blog. Prior to data collection, ethical
110 approval was obtained from the authors' institutional ethics committee.

111 *Survey*

112 As part of a standard end of module review process, a survey was developed to
113 provide feedback about participants' perceptions and general experiences of the heutagogical
114 module design (Fraenkel, 2006). An initial 16-item survey was developed by the two authors
115 then reviewed for face and content validity (Dillman, 2000) by two other colleagues, both
116 experienced university lecturers in sports coaching. This process resulted in two
117 modifications, with five items removed and three new items included. Then, the revised
118 survey was evaluated for clarity and comprehensibility through a pilot study with a small
119 convenience sample of graduate student-coaches (N = 5). The survey took between 8 and 13
120 minutes to complete, and follow-up cognitive interviews (Willis, DeMatio, & Harris-Kojetin,
121 1999) resulted in the rewording of seven items to improve intelligibility and clarity. The final
122 version of the survey was comprised of 14 items, three of which required a yes or no
123 response; eight required an agree or disagree response; and three were totally open-ended. All
124 items had space for additional comments and asked student-coaches to state why they
125 answered as they did. Each student-coach was emailed an explanation of the study aims and
126 the voluntary nature of taking part, information about confidentiality and anonymity, and a
127 web link to the survey, which was hosted by the online survey tool SurveyMonkey
128 (www.surveymonkey.com). The first page of the survey repeated the information contained
129 in the email, and explained that all answers would remain anonymous, with student-coaches
130 notified that by "clicking" continue they would give informed consent for any submitted

131 answers to be used as data in the study. It was also made clear that, because answers were
132 anonymous, they could not be withdrawn once submitted as no identifying information would
133 be tracked or recorded at any stage of the data collection process.

134 ***Group interview***

135 Following closure of the survey, the first author (an academic tutor on the module and
136 experienced coach educator, trained in qualitative research methods) conducted three follow-
137 up group interviews (one with the members of each group blog). To aid consistency, an
138 interview guide was developed based on a review of heutagogy literature, and the first
139 author's initial inductive analysis of survey responses. The interview guide was crosschecked
140 for its potential to elicit relevant responses through discussion between the two authors
141 (Creswell, 2007). To reduce the potential for inhibited responses, before each interview
142 commenced, student-coaches were reminded that participation in the research project was
143 voluntary and assurances were made that anything they said would not impact on their
144 module grade in any way (Millward, 2012). Participants were also made aware of appropriate
145 ethical considerations (e.g., declaration of confidentiality, right of withdrawal) and provided
146 their informed consent.

147 Initial questions were deliberately broad and open-ended so as not to lead the student-
148 coaches' responses in any way (e.g., "so what was the module like?" and "how would you
149 describe your experiences on the module?"), followed by more specific questions relating to
150 the student-coaches' personal perceptions of their experiences of (and performance under)
151 what was intended to be a heutagogical approach to learning (e.g., "why do you think you
152 enjoyed that aspect in particular?" and "how did that compare to what you're used to?").
153 Follow-up probes were used where appropriate to clarify and explore these ideas further (e.g.,
154 "could you provide a specific example of that?"). Each interview was conducted in a relaxed
155 atmosphere using a classroom students were familiar with. Although the same questions were

156 asked in each interview, their order changed slightly depending on the direction each
157 discussion took (Patton, 2002). The interviews, which ranged in duration from 46-65 minutes
158 ($M_{\text{duration}} = 53.67$ minutes, $SD = 10.26$), were conducted by the first author and recorded in
159 their entirety using a digital voice recorder.

160 **Data analysis**

161 The open-ended responses to each survey, and any additional comments that were
162 made, were transferred to separate Microsoft Excel 2010 spreadsheets and each group
163 interview was transcribed verbatim, resulting in 86 single-spaced pages of word processed
164 text. After familiarizing himself with the material by reading the text several times, the first
165 author then conducted a line-by-line inductive content analysis (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994;
166 Patton, 2002), aided by the data analysis software Nvivo 10, and following a three-stage
167 process (Chesterfield, Potrac, & Jones, 2010; Côté, Salmela, Baria, & Russell, 1993; Nelson,
168 Cushion, & Potrac, 2013). First, information rich statements were identified as stand-alone
169 meaning units (Thomas and Pollio, 2002), then, they were listed and labelled, before being
170 compared for similarities and clustered together into raw data themes. Finally, the analysis
171 proceeded to a higher level of abstraction, whereby the raw data themes were built up into
172 larger and more general themes in a higher-order concept (Côté et al., 1993). This process
173 allowed for the constant refinement of the results until theoretical saturation occurred (Strauss
174 & Corbin, 1998).

175 To contribute to trustworthiness, participants were invited to read the transcription of
176 their interview and confirm its accuracy, as well as modify or expand upon any points where
177 perceived ambiguity was identified (Sparkes, 1998). This provided an opportunity for
178 member reflections (Smith & McGannon, 2017), during which, three participants offered
179 additional information. The second author reviewed the higher order themes and codes
180 generated by the first author, then both authors engaged in a collaborative analytic approach

181 (Bean & Forneris, 2017), whereby the themes were refined and/or re-defined and the most
182 relevant quotes for each theme were selected. Any coding discrepancies were discussed until
183 agreement was reached and data saturation was deemed to have occurred when no new
184 constructs were emerging from the data (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). A draft summary
185 of results was emailed to the participants, who all confirmed them to be an accurate
186 description of their experiences of the module. To promote resonance in the study, the results
187 are accompanied by illustrative quotes to help readers interpret the data in the most
188 meaningful and transferable way to them (Biddle, Markland, Gilbourne, Chatzisarantis, &
189 Sparkes, 2001).

190 **Results**

191 In total, 19 of the 26 student-coaches enrolled on the module completed the end of
192 module survey. Eighteen (94.74%) believed their peers were a useful source of learning, with
193 14 (73.68%) finding their group blog interesting and connected to their learning, 16 (84.21%)
194 saying they felt able to share their knowledge with others on the module and 15 (78.95%)
195 feeling they were developing skills they could apply outside of university. Sixteen (84.21%)
196 student-coaches said they felt in control of their own learning on the module, with 14
197 (73.68%) believing group blogs as used on the module provided a supportive context for their
198 learning and 15 (78.95%) perceiving that the module had helped them become a more
199 reflective thinker and practitioner. Twelve (63.16%) student-coaches felt the module had
200 helped them better understand general course content, with 17 (89.47%) feeling the module
201 had helped them construct new knowledge and 18 (94.74%) believing the module had given
202 them a better understanding of how they learn. Ten (52.63%) student-coaches agreed the
203 module had helped them to feel connected to their peers.

204 Qualitative analysis of the open-ended survey responses and group interview data
205 resulted in 32 raw data themes representing the student-coaches' articulation of their

206 experiences on the module (see Table 2). These were organized into 10 lower order themes
207 and, finally, three higher order themes: (a) attitudinal disposition, (b) knowledge and
208 experience, and (c) skill set. Although the results are presented as three separate themes, they
209 are inter-related and there is overlap across all of them. Pseudonyms were created to protect
210 participants' anonymity and are used with the supporting quotations throughout the following
211 sections. Quotes from survey responses, which were anonymous, are identified by a "SR" in
212 parentheses.

213 **Attitudinal Disposition**

214 *Attitude toward group blogging.* Some student-coaches described how they disliked
215 or did not enjoy the blogging element of the module, and therefore avoided it. For example,
216 Ben explained that "because I didn't enjoy it, I would avoid it as much as I could," while
217 Mark agreed "I wasn't a massive fan of blogging...so I felt like I'd just put it off as much as I
218 could." This discontent was often linked to a preference for more discrete and explicit
219 assignments that did not run over a prolonged period. In the words of Ben, "I'd rather just sit
220 and do something, like constant, and get it done, rather than keep coming back to it" and
221 David, "you know you can have like four or five days of just smashing that assignment and
222 then that's it it's gone."

223 In contrast, several student-coaches said they enjoyed the peer discussion that
224 blogging facilitated e.g., "I enjoyed it because it's a chance to talk about placement
225 experience" (SR) and "after the first few (posts) I was just looking forward to someone
226 commenting back and responding to them" (Lisa). Similarly, many student-coaches enjoyed
227 the additional freedom and independence they perceived that blogging provided, especially
228 when compared with more traditional coursework activities (e.g., written reports and essays).
229 James summed up this perception when he suggested "you could be a bit more
230 expressive...you didn't have to worry about constantly having to be referencing everything

231 and, you know, use long words and stuff,” Lisa agreed, saying “it was a lot more expressive
232 wasn’t it, it was all about you and your thoughts and other people, it wasn’t about, like kind
233 of that monotonous assignment writing.”

234 Notably, however, some student-coaches did not see the freedom the module provided
235 in such a positive light, with Kevin suggesting “there is just so much freedom in the
236 blogging...too much freedom.” There also appeared to be differences in opinion when it
237 came to the perceived usefulness of blogging for learning, with some student-coaches
238 believing it to be useful, e.g., “it has helped me understand the academic theory underpinning
239 the course” (SR) and “it helps me to develop and further my knowledge” (SR), while others
240 believed it to be somewhat less than useful, with one student stating quite definitively “I don’t
241 learn well from group blogging” (SR).

242 *Attitude toward structure.* In contrast to the heutagogical approach taken on the
243 module, several student-coaches exhibited a clear preference for much more frequent face to
244 face and/or classroom based sessions. This seemed to be both in terms of a perceived learning
245 benefit of more regular tutor-student contact e.g., “I guess for people who can learn this way
246 it is better than 'normal' sessions/lecturers. However, for me personally I prefer tutor-led
247 sessions” (SR) and attendance-based modules perceived as being “easier” e.g., “some people
248 like to take the easy route...turning up is easy... they don’t have to necessarily engage, they
249 just have to turn up” (Jordan). Student-coaches also reflected on the influence of set deadlines
250 on their behavior, with some being comfortable with a relatively distant final deadline date
251 for their ongoing “regular” input and participation. For example, Molly observed “it didn’t
252 really influence me, to be fair, I didn’t really think about the deadline on it. I just tried
253 blogging every week.” However, some student-coaches were clear they much preferred more
254 explicit and immediate instructions and/or guidelines on exactly what they needed to do and
255 when, with many using the urgency of a deadline the dictate their engagement. For example,

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256 David explained how “however long you feel you need to do an assignment you sort of just
257 set yourself up for the week before it and then you go ‘right I’m going to smash it this
258 week,’” while Michael added “if it had to be done by five o’clock that same day...I would be
259 more motivated to do it, rather than, you know what, I’ve been to that lesson and I’ve got two
260 weeks now to get it done.” Some student-coaches also compared the greater autonomy
261 offered on the module with the (in their eyes) distinct lack of “freedom” they had experienced
262 at school and/or in college, with many actually preferring the latter. Craig perhaps summed
263 this view up best when he explained:

264 At school, you didn’t have a choice, you sort of had to be there...it was like nine until
265 three o’clock...you were always in lessons...you would never have a time where you
266 wouldn’t be in a lesson...for me that’s a set routine, I’d prefer that...I would rather
267 have the structure and less control.

268 *Self-confidence.* Many student-coaches described the negative influence their peers
269 could have on their engagement in the module. For example, several student-coaches felt
270 inhibited by a desire to avoid offending their peers and held back from engaging when they
271 otherwise might have as a result. For example, Jerry suggested that “you don’t want to offend
272 them,” while Liz elaborated, explaining that how well you knew your peers would influence
273 any interaction: “because I don’t know them, I wouldn’t want to critique their work like that,
274 I wouldn’t want to go ‘well you could have done this and you could have done that,’ I don’t
275 know them.” Conversely, some student-coaches felt their motivation to participate in the
276 module suffered due to the attitude of some of their peers e.g., “although very engaged,
277 motivation has taken a hit when others aren’t supportive or engaged” (SR). A number of
278 student-coaches also outlined a clear desire for “someone else” to start or instigate discussion,
279 with many happy to take a “back seat” and rely on their peers to risk “being wrong” first. For
280 example, Jerry described how waiting “just sort of gives you an idea of what route you are

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281 going to go down, like if you look at other people's (posts) first, you think 'oh right, yeah,
282 I'm going down the right lines,'" while Tony agreed, adding:

283 I always like someone else to start off the conversation so then...I can develop from
284 that and maybe go off onto a different route...I couldn't do it off my own back, I
285 couldn't go 'right, I'm going to go and read about constraints leadership' or
286 something and write about it.

287 Several student-coaches also made explicit reference to the need for "confidence" if
288 they are to engage in the type of approach taken on the module, with one student-coach
289 reporting "I didn't blog at all as much as I wanted to as I didn't feel at all confident with the
290 idea of posting my views online" (SR), conversely, another student-coach said they "felt
291 confident because I knew what needed to be said and knew the correct way in doing it" (SR).

292 *Motivation.* A minority of student-coaches were clear that their main motivation to
293 engage in the module was simply to learn and improve e.g., "I'm very engaged in my own
294 learning as I want to continue to better myself at every opportunity there is" (SR) and "I feel I
295 always want to learn and understand not just my thought but other peoples'" (SR). However,
296 many more student-coaches were clear that the main motivating factor for what they did on
297 the module and why, was their overall grade and degree classification e.g., "I am determined
298 to get the best grades that I can...especially in 3rd year, I have upped my game and got
299 myself more organized to ensure that I do the best that I can" (SR). In similar fashion, Craig
300 made clear that "the grade is the ultimate thing...to get the grade that I want, I do the work by
301 the time it is meant to be done." A student-coach's motivation also appeared to have a clear
302 influence on their willingness to research and explore new or unfamiliar topics, which would
303 be an expected outcome of a heutagogical approach (as a set curriculum is eschewed). For
304 example, those student-coaches who were primarily motivated by learning for learning's sake
305 appeared to be more willing to explore e.g., "I find it exciting and intriguing to explore new

306 concepts and ideas in general” (SR), whereas those student-coaches most motivated by
307 grades appeared less willing, with Nina noting “I don’t want to be sat there writing a blog, I
308 hate anything to do with literature.”

309 *Personal standards and expectations.* Many student-coaches described their
310 frustration at the engagement of some of their peers on the module, feeling it was below the
311 standards that could be reasonably expected on a module of this type e.g., “it was frustrating
312 when others in the group didn't reply or get involved, even though it was an individual
313 task...it relied on others to reply and this was frustrating when they didn't” (SR). Offering
314 another perspective, Jordan suggested that some people lacked thought in their posts and “just
315 blogged for the sake of it...it’s not going to help anyone else, it’s just going to be some
316 boring drivel that’s wasting time.” Likewise, several student-coaches thought it was
317 important to maintain what they perceived to be good “etiquette” during the module,
318 especially when it came to the interactions with their peers. For example, Lisa described how
319 “if I left it more than a day, I’d feel bad because I’d left it so long...I’d want to get on and
320 comment back and try and see what’s going on and continue the conversation,” while Molly
321 said:

322 If someone had posted, I would read theirs’ at the time to have a look...maybe make a
323 comment, and then post mine, you know, being a bit respectful...I didn’t want
324 someone else to think that I didn’t respect their opinion.

325 Many of the student-coaches who exhibited this frustration also appeared to be those most
326 keen to take responsibility for their own development, as opposed to relying on their peers or
327 tutors for direction. One student-coach described how “it's down to you. Every module you
328 should be in control of your own learning and if not, then something is wrong. I felt I was in
329 control” (SR), while another said, “I like this way of learning as it is basically off our own

330 back...it's up to us to ensure that we stick to deadlines and get the work done without been
331 (sic) spoon fed" (SR).

332 *General views on learning.* The students-coaches' general views and perceptions
333 about learning appeared to influence their expectations of, and experiences on, the module. In
334 particular, those student-coaches who felt most comfortable being outside of their "comfort
335 zone" and with ambiguous content and situations, seemed to value the module more and take
336 more from it. For example, one student-coach described the module as "challenging, but in a
337 good way" adding that "to learn I believe you need to be challenged and push myself" (SR),
338 while Matthew highlighted his attitude toward nuance and uncertainty when he said, "I like
339 that though, when there's no right or wrong answer." As a result of undertaking the module,
340 some student-coaches appeared to see the value of applied experience and reflection more
341 than they had done before. For example, one student-coach suggested that the module
342 "encourages us to reflect on what we have done which has massively benefitted me as it has
343 allowed me to become a somewhat better coach" (SR), while another stated they were "a lot
344 more reflective than I was 12 months ago and the continued blogging has helped this" (SR).

345 Those student-coaches who valued their peers as a source of learning also appeared to
346 benefit more from the module, in Michael's words "that helped...from your peers you can get
347 a different point of view...you can get different opinions", with another student noting "it's
348 good to be able to see how other students interpret questions and themes that you are
349 confused by" (SR). However, some students-coaches' experience on the module appeared to
350 be negatively influenced by what they perceived the role of the tutor to be, namely - that of a
351 "provider of knowledge" as opposed to a "facilitator of learning." For example, Jerry
352 explained how he found the module "frustrating, because...it takes longer. You know, you've
353 got to go and do it yourself, while, you know, you could have told me what X is and I go and
354 write a blog on it, that's easy," with Bill agreeing, adding:

355 I prefer that I turn up and you give us it and I write everything down and then leave. I
356 would rather come to a lecture, you tell us what to do, I write it all down, and I go
357 away and do a blog.

358 **Knowledge and Experience**

359 *Requisite knowledge.* There was a perception among many student-coaches that
360 worthwhile and productive discussion with their peers on a given topic required a foundation
361 of knowledge to be in place and that, without that knowledge base, they struggled to
362 participate. This was especially apparent both in terms of content knowledge e.g., “I didn't
363 understand the themes and felt confused reading people's blogs” (SR) and on knowledge of
364 appropriate written vocabulary to facilitate effective discussion, for example:

365 Through text it is very hard to put your opinion across and for it to come across in the
366 way you express, so sometimes others can misinterpret what you're trying to say and it
367 can become challenging and knock your confidence further (SR).

368 Many student-coaches also suggested that the depth of knowledge required to engage
369 in the module was greater than they were used to, especially those student-coaches who had
370 previously studied on a foundation degree. For example, Ailsa was adamant the module was
371 “just a totally different level...I just feel, like we've said before...it's just a totally different
372 level from the foundation degree,” while Bill recounted how “I think me and Matthew were
373 sort of like, it's a bit of a reality check to what we had to do and what we had to step up to.”

374 *Prior experience.* Many student-coaches felt they had never had to be independent in
375 their studies before, and struggled to get to grips with the module under study as a result. For
376 example, several compared the module with their prior educational experiences, especially at
377 college. In Bill's words “everything we did was in a classroom, we never did anything on our
378 own...we'd always do work in lessons as well, and coming into the blog it's sort of like...it's

379 a bit of a reality check.” Matthew agreed, and described how he felt ill-prepared for this type
380 of module, saying:

381 It was quite disappointing actually, because we had been told by other students who
382 came here from [feeder college], they said, ‘it’s a bit of a step up,’ in terms of
383 independent learning and stuff like that...I think for us, especially...that independent
384 learning, and adaptability...you had to adapt quick.

385 This lack of experience also related to the type of assignment utilized on the module (i.e.,
386 reflective group blogging), which was ongoing and undertaken over a prolonged period, as
387 opposed to a “one-off” written assignment (i.e., an essay, report etc.) or presentation. For
388 example, Mark described how:

389 When we did a foundation degree...we didn’t do any blogging or anything like that, it
390 was all assignments or presentations, or practicals...I’m not used to constantly doing
391 the same thing...if I had an assignment I wouldn’t do it two months prior and just to
392 do little bits.

393 Similarly, a common theme was an assertion by those student-coaches that they had largely
394 been “spoon-fed” during their previous educational experiences, including some other degree
395 modules they were studying. This contrasted sharply with their experiences on the module
396 under study, for example, Ailsa was adamant that “there is no comparison (laughing)...in
397 college you ask a question and you are given an answer...you are spoon fed, and then you are
398 totally just chucked in the deep end here,” while Tony recounted:

399 I remember at the start of college, I got a big book about that thick with everything in,
400 and you literally reworded every answer to what they had written in the book, and you
401 just put it into an assignment, and that was it, you got a distinction!

402 Jerry added that when studying for A’ levels “you were just regurgitating what someone else
403 has already told you.”

404 **Skill set**

405 *Practical skills.* Some student-coaches found that broadening their knowledge by
406 reading around and researching a topic was difficult due to their lack of ability at finding
407 appropriate literature. As such, they found it difficult to provide evidence that would
408 underpin their ideas and expand upon the ideas of others. This was perhaps best expounded
409 by Tony when he said:

410 I struggled to add anything to anybody else's blog because I'd really struggle to find
411 any (literature)...and it wasn't because it's not there, it's just me, it was my ability to
412 find that literature. So, I struggled to engage as much as I should have done really.

413 Similarly, another student-coach suggested "the research was tough to find" (SR). Several
414 survey comments also suggested that some additional software skills would have helped
415 those motivated to engage with others' blogs in detail e.g., "I struggled with videos and
416 pictures etc. and sometimes putting my posts in the correct category" (SR).

417 *Self-regulation skills.* Many student-coaches suggested that self-discipline was a key
418 skill that was required if one was to excel within a heutagogical framework. For example,
419 Tony was clear "self-discipline, I think it's massive...I think if it's taught anything it's taught
420 that...the self-motivating, the self-discipline...you have got to be organized, you've got to do
421 everything...it's up to you...it's been so much harder," while Liz reinforced this view when
422 she said:

423 It was forgettable...There were a lot of times where after like a couple of weeks I'd be
424 like 'oh crap, I haven't blogged, I need to blog' and then I would panic...I think you
425 had to be disciplined with yourself.

426 Time management was also mentioned by several student-coaches as a core skill
427 required to succeed on the module. For example, David admitted that "my time management
428 was nowhere near as good as Jordan's or someone who could just go back to it the next day

429 without forgetting,” while Ben described how “I leave things late, I always have, I probably
430 shouldn’t, but I always leave things as late as I can, and obviously with the blog you can’t.” It
431 also appeared that time management became more of an issue at different times during the
432 academic year, particularly when assignments were due on other modules, at which time
433 some student-coaches struggled to manage their workload. For example, the assignments on
434 other modules appeared to take priority, largely as they were perceived to be more
435 “important.” Indeed, one student-coach described how “sometimes when other assignments
436 were due, I would say in my mind it (group blog) definitely took a back seat, whereas if it
437 was an essay it wouldn’t have” (SR), while Liz explained “it was the last thing on my mind,
438 other assignments were more of a priority than this one...you could tell nobody wrote
439 anything when big stuff was on.” In attempting to remedy some of these time management
440 issues, several student-coaches explained that their ability to establish effective habits and
441 routines played a key role. For example, Ailsa described how she set up her WordPress
442 notification settings “so that I got an email each time somebody blogged, and it was duly
443 down to me to obviously go on and read it and discuss it and look into it,” while Jordan said:
444 I don’t want to sound harsh, but I think I was a bit more organized so I could keep
445 track of it...at the end of the night coming in from coaching, just have a quick look
446 and thinking ‘oh I might just put a little comment down,’ or a just question, just to
447 prompt something.

448 Discussion

449 The purpose of the current study was to investigate student-coaches’ experiences of a
450 heutagogical approach to learning. The findings reveal that performance on, and perceptions
451 of, the module showed the approach to be differentially effective. For some student-coaches
452 (especially those transitioning from a foundation degree), the module appeared to be
453 distinctly unenjoyable and the heutagogical learning approach taken did not appeal to them.

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454 Indeed, many of these student-coaches seemed to perceive the reason they struggled on the
455 module was directly because of their prior educational experiences (e.g., at school and
456 college), which appeared to value procedural, competency based learning and assessment, a
457 “model” not uncommon in many coach accreditation and development systems (Collins et al.,
458 2015). For many of these student-coaches, it seems that the outcome goals of what they were
459 doing on the module (and their degree programme) were also a key mediator of their
460 experiences. For example, many of the student-coaches who “struggled” on the module were,
461 by their own admission, there “just” to tick the boxes required to obtain their final degree
462 award. It appears the heutagogical approach to learning design taken in the current study
463 might not be conducive to that.

464 In contrast, however, several other student-coaches evidently enjoyed the module and
465 the opportunities afforded by the heutagogical approach were both positive and
466 transformational. This group differed from those who were less complimentary about their
467 experiences in several ways. For one, they seemed more inclined to want to learn for the sake
468 of learning, and their expressed commitment and satisfaction with the new levels of challenge
469 they experienced were another distinguishing characteristic. Returning to the aims of the
470 present study, these differences therefore need to be considered against any claims made for a
471 heutagogical approach to coach education. Notably, heutagogy is said to develop knowledge
472 and skills (competencies) *and* capabilities (the ability to use them appropriately and
473 effectively in novel situations, Stoszkowski & Collins, 2017). Our results suggest that, at
474 least in this relatively short period of exposure, this did not take place. Rather, it seems
475 student-coaches might require both competencies and capabilities “up front” in order to
476 benefit from a heutagogical approach, that is a set of prerequisite appropriate knowledge,
477 possession of an appropriate skill set and an attitudinal disposition/willingness to use them.
478 Of course, it remains to be seen if earlier exposure to this learning approach, coupled perhaps

479 with the “front loading” of requisite knowledge, skills and attitude, would make the method
480 more universally acceptable and effective. For the moment, however, the concerns raised by
481 Stoszkowski and Collins (2017) would appear to hold some validity. Heutagogy is *not* a
482 universal panacea, or perhaps, not yet!

483 **Conclusion**

484 Assuming that the approach taken on the module was genuinely heutagogic, and that
485 our method of collecting feedback was open enough (both, we believe, fair assumptions), the
486 present study suggests heutagogy is a potentially useful method in coach education and
487 development. However, we have also highlighted what for us are some essential caveats to
488 the use of what is an immensely appealing and face valid method. There is clearly a lot of “it
489 depends-ness” in it, and several implications fall out of this.

490 Firstly, there is a need to consider the results against the outcome measures often used
491 in coach education and accreditation (Mallett, Trudel, Lyle, & Rynne, 2009): specifically,
492 how well do the demonstrated benefits of the heutagogic approach taken match the
493 evaluations most commonly used? Notably, application of a traditional knowledge based test
494 in this case may well have resulted in poor scores for those coaches who benefitted most from
495 this approach. Indeed, against the short term aims employed in most sport’s governing body
496 awards, what is “good” knowledge or skill or attitude? Some of these factors are easier to
497 measure than others; however, we perhaps tend to the easier to assess (for a range of reasons).
498 Therefore, coach educators may have to tolerate low “marks,” at least initially, when
499 employing this type of approach.

500 Secondly, we should stress the tendency for the coach education and development
501 field to embrace new approaches; perhaps uncritically and prematurely (Stoszkowski &
502 Collins, 2014). Traditional learning approaches, and certainly formal coach education, has
503 come in for substantial criticism in the recent literature (Nelson, Cushion, & Potrac, 2013),

504 but are we certain that it is less effective? Surely it depends. Could heutagogy be another
505 potentially evangelical push toward a specific method of developing coaches? It is but one of
506 *several* methods and coach developers must know the limitations of it as well as what the
507 potential precursors to its' successful use might be. In this regard, we would support an
508 approach that looks for overlap between approaches and develops a more nuanced inclusive
509 model (cf. Abraham & Collins, 2011), albeit with a strong theoretical and evidence-grounded
510 base. As stated earlier, andragogy has something to offer, even without a wholesale change to
511 a new system! Perhaps more hybrid models are the way forwards, especially when the longer
512 term development of coaches across a pathway is considered.

513 Finally, and with regard to the particular coach development context employed in this
514 study (i.e., a bachelor degree programme), there is a potential 'socio-political goals' position
515 that must be considered. Namely, the "what's the point of education?" tautology. Is the aim to
516 simply get through the process with the best degree possible and get a well-paying job? This
517 is a fairly utilitarian and (perhaps) sensible view, especially if (at the time of writing) a
518 student in the UK is "investing" upwards of £27,000 in tuition fees alone across a three-year
519 bachelor degree programme - there are obvious benefits to coming through the system with a
520 1st class versus a 3rd class degree after all (Tomlinson, 2008). As such, it is certainly a
521 perspective common amongst those starting on the educational pathway, whether through
522 degree study or a NGB system. However, as educators, we would surely aspire to more than
523 that. This is where we are in complete agreement with our colleagues in terms of heutagogy.
524 Nevertheless, it is an exceptional individual who recognizes the need for relativism,
525 especially at an early stage: this is not a normal thing (cf. Entwistle & Peterson, 2004). For
526 approaches such as heutagogy to gain a hold, there seems to be a necessity to educate coaches
527 to a level so that they see a need for relativism (Collins, Abraham, & Collins, 2012). In
528 summary, to educate towards *and* to realize the potential advantages of a heutagogical

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- 529 approach to learning. Where this might best fit within a development pathway or coaching
- 530 career will be the topic of a subsequent paper.

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Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Age (years)	Gender	Coach Level	Sport	Experience (years)
Ailsa	21	F	L2	Soccer	5
Peter	22	M	L2	Soccer	5
James	22	M	L2	Rugby League	4
Steven	21	M	L1	Soccer	3
Lisa	21	F	L2	Soccer	5
Mark	21	M	L1	Soccer	3
Ben	21	M	L1	Soccer	3
Paul	21	M	L2	Rugby Union	4
Tommy	21	M	L1	Soccer	3
Nina	21	F	L2	Netball	6
Roger	22	M	L2	Soccer	4
Jerry	21	M	L1	Soccer	3
Robin	22	M	L1	Rugby League	3
Matthew	23	M	L2	Soccer	4
Tony	23	M	L2	Rugby Union	4
Bill	21	M	L2	Soccer	4
Liz	24	F	L1	Netball	5
Sophie	21	F	L1	Multisport	3
David	21	M	L1	Soccer	3
Kevin	21	M	L1	Soccer	3
Molly	22	F	L1	Martial Arts	3
Jordan	21	M	L1	Athletics	3
Martin	21	M	L1	Soccer	3
Craig	22	M	L1	Soccer	3
Michael	21	M	L1	Soccer	3
Danny	21	M	L1	Cricket	3

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Table 2

Results of Qualitative Analysis of Raw Data.

Raw Data Theme	Lower Order Theme	Higher Order Theme
Didn't enjoy so avoided Enjoyment of more freedom and independence Enjoy peer discussion Preference for discrete one-off assignments Perceived usefulness for learning	Attitude toward group blogging	Attitudinal disposition
Desire for face-to-face taught sessions Influence of explicit deadlines Preference for school-like structure	Attitude toward 'structure'	
Influence of peer dynamics Reliance on initiative of others Confidence	Self-confidence	
Desire to learn Grade as major motivator Willingness to research and explore new areas	Motivation	
Frustration at engagement of others Importance of etiquette Take responsibility for self	Personal standards and expectations	
Comfort with challenge and ambiguity Perception of tutor's role Value of applied experience and reflection Value of peers for learning	General views on learning	
Discussion requires knowledge Level of knowledge required	Requisite knowledge	Knowledge and experience

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Never had to be independent	Prior experience	
Never had to do ongoing assignments		
Spoon fed at school/college		
Research skills	Practical skills	Skill set
Competency with software		
Establishment of habits and routines	Self-regulation skills	
Self-discipline		
Time management		
Managing varying assignment workload		