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Nirvana or Never-Never Land: Does Heutagogy have a place in Coach Development?

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14 Abstract

15 Heutagogic learning is characterized by the notion of human agency. Power and autonomy
16 are placed firmly in the hands of the learner, who takes responsibility for, and control of,
17 what they will learn, when it will be learnt and how it will be learnt. As a result, if
18 sufficiently reflexive, heutagogic learners are said to acquire both competencies (knowledge
19 and skills) and capabilities (the capacity to appropriately and effectively apply one's
20 competence in novel and unanticipated situations). The complex and dynamic environment of
21 sports coaching, coupled with coaches' apparent preference for informal self-directed
22 learning methods (as opposed to more formalised educational settings), would therefore seem
23 perfect for its application. In this insights paper, we aim to stimulate debate by providing a
24 critical overview of the heutagogic method and consider it against the nature of coaching
25 skill. In tandem, we identify some essential pre-conditions that coaches might need to
26 develop before heutagogic approaches might be deployed effectively in coach education.

27 *Keywords:* coach learning; coach education; self-determined learning;

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29 Nirvana or Never-Never Land: Does Heutagogy have a place in Coach Development?

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31 Since its inception as an extension of andragogy (Hase & Kenyon, 2000), heutagogy,
32 or the study of self-determined learning (“heut” is derived from the Greek word for “self”),
33 has attracted increasing attention in wide a variety of education contexts including clinical
34 nursing practice (Bhoyrub, Hurley, Neilson, Ramsay, & Smith, 2010), teacher education
35 (Ashton & Newman, 2006), higher education (Canning, 2010), workplace e-Learning
36 (Canter, 2012) and engineering (Gazi, 2014). At face value, there is a lot to like. The
37 heutagogic learning process is characterised by highly autonomous learners taking personal
38 responsibility for, and control of, what will be learnt, when it will be learnt and how it will be
39 learnt. This continuous process occurs in real-time as the learner (if sufficiently reflexive)
40 becomes aware of deficits in their current skills, knowledge and/or capabilities through
41 interactions with their environment, and devises their own strategies for bridging the gap
42 (Hase & Kenyon, 2001; Hase, 2009). Heutagogic learners acquire not just competencies
43 (knowledge and skills) but capabilities (the capacity to appropriately and effectively apply
44 one’s competence in novel and unanticipated situations). As such, the complex and dynamic
45 environment of coaching (e.g., Collins & Collins, 2014) would seem perfect for its
46 application. When considered in tandem with the apparent preference of coaches to learn
47 through informal self-directed methods rather than more formalized educational settings
48 (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2015), the approach of learner determining the learning path and
49 being “the major agent in their own learning” (Hase & Kenyon, 2007, p. 112) seems to offer
50 a perfect solution. The reportedly successful use of heutagogy in teacher education (Ashton &
51 Newman, 2006; Ashton & Elliott, 2007), clearly an extremely close parallel, seems to clinch
52 it. This is the approach coach education has been waiting for!

53 Before we rush to cancel coach education courses however, there may be some issues
54 which need consideration. Heutagogic enthusiasts justifiably state the need for a level of
55 maturity and independence in the learner; characteristics which are also central to the
56 application of andragogic approaches (Knowles, 1975). It seems to us that some level of base
57 knowledge, together with an openness and commitment to self-reflection would also be
58 essential prerequisites. Accordingly, and in full acknowledgement of the very attractive
59 features which a heutagogic approach can offer, we wanted to provide a critical consideration
60 of the method. Therefore, we present an evaluative reflection in four sections. Firstly, we
61 offer more detail on the heutagogic approach as a continuum of andragogy. Secondly, we
62 consider literature which has looked at the essential pre-conditions which coaches need to
63 develop. Thirdly, we consider the nature of coaching skill, to see whether, or at what stage,
64 heutagogic approaches may be usefully deployed. Finally, our concluding section proposes
65 some structures which may already use the approach to good effect.

66 **Heutagogy: A Rough Guide**

67 Heutagogy has its roots in a broad range of humanistic theories and learning
68 approaches including phenomenology (Rogers, 1969), action learning (Kemmis &
69 McTaggart, 1998), connectivism (Dron & Anderson, 2014), systems thinking (Akoff &
70 Emery, 1972), complexity theory (Waldrop, 1992), double loop learning, (Argyris & Schön,
71 1978) and transformational learning (Mezirow, 1994). It is also underpinned by the ideas of
72 constructivist theorists (e.g., Bruner, 1960; Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1972; Piaget, 1973;
73 Vygotsky, 1978), who purport that learners construct meaning from their own experiences.
74 Hase and Kenyon (2000), who first coined the term, envisaged heutagogy as a natural
75 extension of the earlier “-gogies” of pedagogy (i.e., the art or science of educating children,
76 Hinchey, 2004) and andragogy (i.e., the art and science of helping adult learners, Knowles,
77 1975). Typically, the former acknowledges teachers’ power and perceives them as a

78 knowledge “transmitter” (see Table 1), with learners framed as passive recipients of this
79 knowledge in compulsory learning environments, whilst the latter, although still tutor-
80 managed, assumes greater learner competence and independence and encompasses more self-
81 directed and problem-based learning (Anderson, 2013; Knowles, 1975). Although pedagogy
82 and andragogy both emphasize the acquisition of knowledge and skills (competencies),
83 heutagogy is said to go one step further by taking into account the complexity of learning and
84 emphasizing the associated importance of developing the capabilities of the learner in
85 addition to competencies (Hase & Kenyon, 2000; Hase, 2009).

86 A key tenet of the heutagogic paradigm is a belief in the notion of human agency,
87 with power and autonomy placed firmly in the hands of the learner (Ashton & Newman,
88 2006). As in an andragogic approach, the role of the educator is positioned as that of a
89 “learning facilitator” who guides the development of ideas and learners’ learning capabilities,
90 as opposed to transmitting the wisdom of others (Ashton & Elliot, 2007; Ashton & Newman,
91 2006); however, they fully surrender ownership of the learning path and process to the
92 learner (Blaschke, 2012). Heutagogy is said to recognize that “people learn when they are
93 ready and that this is most likely to occur quite randomly, chaotically and in the face of
94 ambiguity and need” (Hase & Kenyon, 2003, p. 3-4). As such, heutagogic learning is said to
95 be fundamentally emergent, dynamic and non-linear, with each learner’s path potentially
96 unique (Gazi, 2014; Hase, 2009). Moreover, according to Hase and Kenyon (2001),
97 heutagogy recognizes the need for flexibility in learner-generated contexts and content, as
98 “the teacher provides resources but the learner designs the actual course he or she might take
99 by negotiating the learning.” Heutagogy, therefore, promotes the processes and strategies that
100 learners engage with to further their understanding, not only of the subject or topic they are
101 studying, but also of themselves as learners. Importantly then, it is more than “just” self-

102 directed skills and knowledge acquisition, but an understanding of the stimuli learners need in
103 order to learn effectively (Canning & Callan, 2010; Gazi, 2014).

104 Learners educated within a heutagogic framework are said to benefit by becoming
105 better critical thinkers and problem solvers, they develop confidence in their perceptions and
106 learn to question their beliefs, values, assumptions and interpretations of reality from their
107 position of competence (Ashton & Newman, 2006); they are able to create their own flexible
108 curriculum and negotiate and plan their own assessment tasks (Hase & Kenyon, 2001; 2007);
109 they are motivated to research their own interests independently, are able to apply their
110 multidisciplinary learning to practice and to their personal philosophy, and embrace
111 collaborative learning and knowledge sharing (Canning, 2010); and they become self-aware
112 and able to articulate feelings, experiences and ideas (Canning & Callan, 2010). Based on
113 these characteristics, heutagogy has been positioned in the literature as being ideally suited to
114 the highly complex, often ambiguous, unpredictable and information rich world in which
115 learning now takes place (Hase, 2009). Similarly, it is purported to be more suitable than
116 “traditional” educational methods for recognizing and developing the complex array of skills
117 and characteristics professionals need for the modern workplace (Hase & Kenyon, 2000);
118 indeed, Hase and Kenyon (2000) suggest that the modern workplace is “no place for the
119 inflexible, the unprepared, and the ostrich with its head in the sand” (p. 5). Nevertheless, we
120 believe there are some important caveats and pre-conditions that coaches will require if they
121 if they are to garner optimum benefit from a heutagogic approach to their development,
122 which we turn to in the following section.

123 **Characteristics of Self-Driven Development**

124 Reflecting statements made earlier in the paper, we suggest that a strong case exists
125 for an essential set of precursory skills, attitudes or characteristics (cf. the idea of capabilities
126 highlighted earlier) which are essential if the desirable benefits of heutagogy are to be

127 realised. We would intuitively suggest that there are several such precursors, some of which
128 seem to us to be sometimes explicit but always clearly implicit within the writings of
129 heutagogic theorists and/or supporters. For our purposes here, however, we will focus on two:
130 firstly, the important attribute of emotional maturity and secondly, the adult learner's
131 perceptions of knowledge and the learning process itself.

132 Emotional maturity or EM relates to how an individual perceives him or herself.
133 Defined as a "higher state of consciousness, guided by what one senses, feels, and intuits, and
134 one's heart" (Vajda, 2013, p.37), EM also relates to how well one is able to respond to
135 situations, control emotions, and behave in an "adult" manner. Accordingly, this attribute has
136 been suggested as essential for self-directed learners, giving them the capacity to respond
137 positively and reflect in a less ego-involved fashion when new and challenging perspectives
138 are apparent. For our present purpose, EM could perhaps be seen as a way to operationalise
139 open-mindedness in the face of views which contradict one's own. In any case, there are
140 some interesting if preliminary findings for the construct, with recent work highlighting the
141 positive correlations between EM and adult learning scores (Bhagat, Haque, Bakar, Husain,
142 & Khairi, 2016). Other data show more positive performance outcomes for students higher in
143 EM (Singh, Kaur, & Dureja, 2012). In summary, EM would seem to offer a good
144 representation of the attributes and attitude needed for someone to engage effectively in
145 heutagogy.

146 Our second exemplar precursor comes from the well-established work of Entwistle
147 and colleagues. In a seminal paper, Entwistle and Peterson (2004) examined how perceptions
148 of knowledge and learning acted to influence behaviour in adult learners; in their case, higher
149 education students. At one end of their developmental continuum, dualistic views of
150 knowledge were associated with a perception of learning as the storage of facts. At the other,
151 a transition only completed by a subset of students, a relativistic view of knowledge led

152 students to “seeing things in a different way” (p. 409) as the outcome of learning. Such
153 differences in perception have already been shown to impact on coach behaviour. For
154 example, Collins, Abraham and Collins (2012) demonstrated that experienced coaches at the
155 dualistic end were much less likely to source coach education opportunities than those at the
156 relativist end of the continuum. It also seemed an important factor in the coach’s drive to seek
157 out, or even willingness to consider, new ideas. As such, a coach’s placement on this
158 continuum would seem to be another important mediator for involvement in and impact of
159 heutagogic behavior.

160 **Stages of Evolution in Coaching Skill**

161 So, given that individual characteristics may impact of the efficacy or even likelihood
162 of heutagogy, would the coach’s level and/or nature of development also act as a mediating
163 influence? Research has already highlighted how the training and accreditation methods
164 employed may influence attitude towards innovation (Collins, Martindale, Burke &
165 Cruickshank, 2015). Of particular relevance, the use of an expertise-focused approach,
166 employing the ideas of Professional Judgement and Decision Making (PJDM – Abraham &
167 Collins, 2011; Collins & Collins, 2014) would seem to explicitly encourage a heutagogic
168 approach due to its emphasis on reflection, innovation and considering alternatives.

169 Such benefits should accrue for coaches at all levels, were such an approach to be
170 employed. Given the current predominance of competency-based assessment, however, it
171 may be that appropriate reflection and seeking for innovation will only “kick in” at higher
172 levels of qualification. As a consequence, heutagogic approaches may be more impactful with
173 more senior coaches. We would hope not, of course. Certainly, if all reflective coaches are
174 seen as experimenters (Schön, 1983) then heutagogy will work with all.

175 There is further evidence of the self-directed development approach implicit within
176 the work of Collins, Collins and Carson (2016) on intuition. Their examination of high level

177 coaches in adventure sports and rugby demonstrated the use of Type 1 and Type 2 thinking
178 (Kahneman, 2011) when quick-fire decisions were taken. As a matter of course, the coaches
179 in this study tended to reflect back on quick decisions, an action often leading them to seek
180 out new areas of knowledge to ensure both current and future decisions were optimised.
181 Taken with earlier ideas, this suggests that the self-driven search for new knowledge which
182 characterises heutagogy may be a characteristic of higher level coaches, or at least (reflecting
183 the previous section) those with the right precursive attributes as well. Whether this is as a
184 result of individual tendency, experience or training awaits investigation.

185 **Conclusion**

186 We hope to have offered a reasoned argument that heutagogy could be a useful part of
187 the coach development diet but, perhaps, only for certain individuals who have acquired a
188 level of maturity, attitude and approach which equips them for it. There is certainly evidence
189 for what such a level would comprise of. For example, the importance of metacognition to
190 coaching has already been shown, especially in hyper-dynamic environments such as
191 adventure sports (Collins, Carson & Collins, 2016). It would seem that the challenges
192 inherent in adventure sports coaching may “encourage” or even require coaches to take a
193 more heutagogic approach than their peers in more traditional sporting paradigms.

194 There is also evidence that better preparatory education may facilitate heutagogy.
195 Work on the use of online blogs as a tool in coach development has shown that, whilst some
196 benefits can be gained by using the approach with student coaches, these benefits are greater
197 and more impactful once certain educational inputs have been completed (Stoszkowski &
198 Collins, 2015b; Stoszkowski, Collins & Olsson, 2015).

199 Finally, there are already programmes of study which incorporate many elements of
200 the heutagogic approach. The Professional Doctorate in Elite Performance (UCLan, 2016)
201 offers coaches and others an opportunity to self-initiate study in a chosen area of vocational

202 interest, albeit that subsequent outputs must be externally structured to meet the requirements
203 of the degree. We would suggest that a totally heutagogic programme leading to an academic
204 award is some way off. However, it is good to report the successes associated with this first
205 application of its principles.

206 In concluding our critical overview of heutagogy, we should reiterate some pragmatic
207 points. Firstly, whilst there will always be some individuals who will employ this approach,
208 we would suggest that only some will optimally benefit from it. We do feel that changes to
209 the educational and accreditation processes employed may generate some extremely
210 beneficial enhancement of individual openness and curiosity (Collins et al., 2015) and that
211 this, in turn, would lead to a more heutagogic environment. That is, however, a more multi-
212 faceted argument than is appropriate here. Secondly, we would argue that there will always
213 be a need for some tutorial or leadership role, making the exercise closer to andragogy than
214 heutagogy in its purest sense. After all, there are so many urban myths and confusions which
215 permeate even the most learned of professions: a situation which led Kirschner and van
216 Merriënboer (2013) to observe of the education profession whether “learners really know
217 best” (p. 169). Of relevance to our present purpose, this paper was somewhat critical of the
218 learner as self-educator approach. Perhaps we are best closing with a recent quote from an
219 author writing on heutagogy: “learners will require ongoing instructor guidance and support
220 throughout the learning process if they are to develop the capability of self-direction”
221 (Blaschke, 2012, p. 66). So, in summary, although not an unachievable never-never land, it
222 would seem that nirvana may still be someway off!

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Table 1

The Pedagogy-Andragogy-Heutagogy Continuum

Aspect	Pedagogy	Andragogy	Heutagogy
Locus of control	Teacher directs what, how and when anything is learned	Self-directed	Self-determined
Level of cognition	Cognitive	Meta-cognitive	Epistemic
Developmental emphasis	Acquisition	Competency	Capability
Role of teacher	Designs the learning process, imposes material	Enabler or facilitator	Develop the learner's capability
Focus of learning	Subject centred, prescribed curriculum and planned sequences	Task or problem centred	Pro-active context shaping
Reasons for learning	Learn in order to advance to next stage	Learn when they experience a need to know	Learning is non-linear and based on identification of the potential to learn in novel situations
Learner's experience	Little worth	Important	Greatly important

Adapted from Blaschke (2012), Ekoto and Gaikwad (2015) and McKeown (2011)