Becoming a Coach in Developmental Adaptive Sailing: A Lifelong Learning Perspective

TIAGO DUARTE AND DIANE M. CULVER

University of Ottawa

Life-story methodology and innovative methods were used to explore the process of becoming a developmental adaptive sailing coach. Jarvis’s (2009) lifelong learning theory framed the thematic analysis. The findings revealed that the coach, Jenny, was exposed from a young age to collaborative environments. Social interactions with others such as mentors, colleagues, and athletes made major contributions to her coaching knowledge. As Jenny was exposed to a mixture of challenges and learning situations, she advanced from recreational para-swimming instructor to developmental adaptive sailing coach. The conclusions inform future research in disability sport coaching, coach education, and applied sport psychology.

Disability sport is a broad term used to designate sports that accommodate people with ambulatory, sensory, and intellectual disabilities (DePauw & Gavron, 2005). A classification system recognizes this diversity and aims to ensure competitive fairness, allowing athletes with different disabilities yet similar physical function to compete against each other (DePauw & Gavron, 2005). For instance, the International Paralympic Committee (2013) awarded 29 gold medal winners, divided by gender and class type, for the individual 100-m races at the London 2012 Paralympic Games (International Paralympic Committee, 2013). Within sailing, the system allows athletes with different types of disability to participate together in the same events (International Federation for Disabled Sailing [IFDS], 2013). To accommodate this spectrum of athletes, sailing permits a broad range of modifications to the boats ranging from simple seat adjustments that provide postural support to electronic assistive devices that allow athletes with high-level spinal cord injuries to control the boats by sipping and puffing air through two straws (IFDS, 2013). Such equipment innovations make sailing “one of the very few sports in which able-bodied sailors and disabled sailors can participate on equal terms” (IFDS, 2013).

COACHING IN DISABILITY SPORTS

The breadth of disabilities adds layers to what coaches need to learn (Burkett, 2013; Hanrahan, 2007). The few studies conducted on coaching disability sport underline barriers that coaches must overcome in order to build their coaching knowledge. Studies have pointed out that for disability sport coaches, coach education opportunities were very limited (Cregan,
Bloom, & Reid, 2007; Tawse, Bloom, Sabiston, & Reid, 2012), and there are minimal coaching materials such as books and workshops specifically designed for this unique context (DePauw & Gavron, 2005; McMaster, Culver, & Werthner, 2012; Tawse et al., 2012). It has also been found that the opportunities for disability sport coaches to act as sounding boards or to participate in communities of practice are limited due to the low number of coaches/peers with whom they might interact (McMaster et al., 2012). The paucity of learning situations available to disability sport coaches raises the question of how these coaches are learning. Looking at how coaches learn from a lifelong learning perspective might expand our understanding of disability sport coaching.

A particular group of coaching researchers (e.g., Callary, Werthner, & Trudel, 2011, 2012; Trudel, Gilbert, & Werthner, 2010) have used Jarvis’s (2009) theory of human learning because it is comprehensive and allows for a holistic view of coach learning. Jarvis emphasized that individuals have the opportunity to learn through every experience and that learning is lifelong. One’s biography is the sum of previous experiences through which one has learned (i.e., knowledge, skills, emotions). Jarvis stated “experience is when we are conscious of the world, are aware of the specific situation and know that we are having an experience, even if we do not actually acknowledge it at the time” (p. 30). Furthermore, Jarvis noted that having an experience depends on the person’s senses in order to perceive the external stimuli and become aware of the situation. Jarvis provided a complete definition of learning:

The combination of processes throughout a lifetime whereby the whole person—body and mind—experiences social situations, the content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or practically and integrated into the individual person’s biography resulting in a continually changing [or more experienced] person. (p. 25)

Thus, Jarvis (2006) proposed that a person’s biography is being constantly changed and developed as a result of learning that occurs within the life-world; that is, the combination of experiences in every context (i.e., life-wide) throughout time (i.e., lifelong). For Jarvis, primary socialization involves the initial interactions that children have with their primary caregivers and/or family members. As children grow and develop, they interact with a greater variety of people and learn in other settings, such as school and sports clubs, in a process of secondary socialization (Jarvis, 2006, 2009). Jarvis defined disjuncture as the feeling of unease an individual faces when previous experience and current demands are at odds leaving his or her biography unable to cope; it is an opportunity to learn. Finally, Jarvis affirmed that learning is a lifelong process in which we are continually becoming the result of our own learning.

There are very few studies on disability sport coaching and none that specifically address the sport of sailing. Moreover, there are important differences between the present study and the few others found in the literature. For example, Cregan et al. (2007) studied elite para-swimming coaches in Canada where the majority of swimmers are of classifications in which the athletes have less severe disabilities (e.g., limb loss of one or two limbs). In this study, coach participants noted that coaching athletes with more severe disabilities (e.g., quadriplegia) requires greater disability specific knowledge. Tawse et al. (2012) studied coaches of wheelchair rugby, a sport in which the majority of participants have suffered a spinal cord injury. Clubs for adapted sailors work with athletes of all levels of classification and development (IFDS, 2013). Adapted sailing requires frequent equipment adaptations, whereas in para-swimming, coaches are not called upon to make important equipment adjustments. McMaster et al. (2012) used Jarvis’s (2006) lifelong learning framework and looked at the different learning situations of five coaches, each of a different disability sport. Their learning biographies were examined
through the lenses of the researchers, given that an interview guide was followed. The present study also used Jarvis’s framework, however, a novel methodology afforded a much more in-depth look at one coach’s learning across a lifetime through that coach’s lens. The purpose of this research was to examine an adaptive sailing coach’s development using a lifelong learning perspective.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Life Story**

Narrative inquiries and other types of research methodologies that focus on biographical accounts have gained popularity within sport contexts, including a limited number of studies in sport psychology journals focusing on single participants (Culver, Gilbert, & Sparkes, 2012). Some examples include Langley and Knight’s (1999) investigation of sport involvement and the aging process of a senior-aged competitive sport participant; Jones, Armour, and Potrac’s (2003) examination of an elite soccer coach; and Kavanagh’s (2012) study of a Paralympic wheelchair tennis player. Such methodologies have yet to be used to explore coaches of athletes with disabilities. One type of narrative inquiry is life story, defined as “the story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what is remembered of it and what the teller wants others to know of it” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 8). The inherent bias involved with this research needs to be noted because not only does the teller choose what to tell but also the researchers choose which parts of the story to portray. A single participant life story does not aim to provide generalizations from a positivistic standpoint; instead, it affords the possibility of illuminating life’s complexities (Jones et al., 2003). Webster and Mertova (2007) argued, “Narrative tends to highlight critical episodes and events, and in so doing provides insights into human understanding, as well as manageable ways of focusing outcomes and recommendations for improvement” (p. 69). As a means to examine the way in which coaches learn to coach, the life story approach complements the lifelong learning perspective. For Jarvis (2009), learning is the result of the learner’s biography and the meaning the learner gives to a particular situation. The use of a methodology that allows the participant to freely explore the meaning of events and interactions with others in which or with whom learning occurred, therefore, is appropriate to answer the present research question: How has a coach learned—throughout her lifetime—to coach adapted sailing?

**Data Collection**

Data were gathered over a 6-month period using various methods: an online interview (OL int; 20 single-spaced pages), a modified Rappaport timeline (RTL), in-depth interviews (ID int; 86 single-spaced pages), and the analysis of personal documents (PD). The online interview (Salmons, 2012) was e-mailed and used initially as part of a pilot study to gather information from the participant about her coaching experience and background. The online interview used a semistructured interview guide (Patton, 1990) with open-ended questions (e.g., “In what situation did you start to coach?”) and closed-ended questions (e.g., “What ages are the athletes?”) previously used for research of disability sport coaches. After reading the answers of the online interview, it was clear that the coach’s profile surpassed the project criteria (as described next). Because of the relevance of her biography and possible contribution to the field, the study scope was increased in depth and breadth. Thus, the online interview was the precursor of the study, and some of the information found in it served to build probes during the subsequent interviews. The modified RTL (Langley & Knight, 1999) was used to explore the coach’s life milestones and guided the in-depth interviews. The RTL use entailed asking
Figure 1. A section from Jenny's time line.

the participant to elaborate, using a blank sheet of paper, on the most important events, people, facts, and contexts associated with her becoming a coach. The instructions given were to use a standard letter-size sheet of paper with a horizontal line on it indicating birth and present at opposite ends and to identify the year the milestone occurred. After 1 week, the coach returned the RTL elaborated on a roll of paper measuring 9 ft 2 in. long and 2 ft wide (293 cm long and 60 cm wide). Recently, Sparkes and Smith (2014) noted the use of time lines as an innovative way of graphic elicitation. An example of part of the RTL is presented in Figure 1.

The in-depth interviews were semistructured (Patton, 1990), with much elaboration and deviation providing a conversational tone, which is deemed appropriated for life story (Atkinson,
During five interviews that totaled nearly 6 hr in length, the purpose was to ask open-ended questions (Patton, 1990) that would elucidate what the coach meant by each word on the RTL (e.g., “Could you elaborate on the influence of the English department coordinator?”). The length of the RTL defined the number of interviews, once every aspect was covered, the in-depth interviews finished. To cover every aspect of the RTL, before each in-depth interview, the interviewer listened to the final minutes of the previous interview and made notes of the points not yet covered. A total of 70 pages of the coach’s personal documents (e.g., adaptive sailing documents, guides, e-mails, reports, and surveys) were also utilized as a source of data about the context of disability sport and to create probe questions for the in-depth interviews. The interviews took place at the researchers’ university campus and were conducted by the first author who has taken two graduate-level qualitative research courses. The first author has both personal and professional experience collaborating with disability sports participants in two countries. The second author teaches and studies qualitative methods in sport research and has been doing research on disability sport coaches for several years.

The Participant

Criterion sampling (Patton, 1990) was used to recruit one disability sport coach. Some characteristics go over and above the minimum criteria and are noted as a bonus. Jenny Davey is a 34-year-old woman from the suburbs of a Canadian metropolitan city who has assumed a variety of roles in multiple disability sports (bonus) since 1994 and, most important, in adaptive sailing since 2002 (Criteria a and b). The programs in which she worked provided services to between 40 and 150 sailors with a disability (Criteria c). The sailors had different types of sensory, ambulatory, and intellectual impairments (Criteria d). Within sailing, Jenny coached introduction and development race teams (Criteria e). Multiple athletes progressed to Paralympic boat classes having competed at the Canada Games and a number of international competitions (Criteria f). Moreover, one athlete represented Canada at the Paralympic Games (bonus). Within the last 10 years, Jenny has worked as the program manager and head coach at adaptive sailing associations in three Canadian provinces (bonus). Jenny was responsible for managing a staff ranging from three to seven people (bonus). As a coach developer (bonus), Jenny was selected to design the National Coaching Persons with a Disability Professional Development Module for Canadian sailing instructors and taught the associated pilot Train-the-Trainer course to representatives from each province. Currently, Jenny is finishing a master of arts in coaching, studying how novice adaptive sailing coaches learn to coach (bonus). Such a profile would entail ample disjuncture (Jarvis, 2009), inciting the individual to engage in the learning process.

The project was approved by the authors’ university research ethics board. Although offered a pseudonym for anonymity as suggested by the ethics board, the participant chose to be portrayed under her real name. Not entirely novel, such praxis has previously been used in studies about athletes with disabilities (e.g., Brittain, 2004; Kavanagh, 2012). Pseudonyms were used to guard the privacy of the people who are part of Jenny’s life story.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed according to Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six phases of thematic analysis: familiarizing, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. The first phase stands for the process of knowing the transcripts, reading, and rereading the transcripts. Generating initial codes refers to the process of identifying features of the data that appear interesting to the researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Searching for themes occurred after the transcriptions were coded,
as codes were grouped into larger themes. The analysis of themes occurs on an ongoing basis. Reviewing themes resulted in themes being collapsed, separated, and discarded from the analysis. In Phase 5, defining and naming themes, the authors identified the essence of each theme and how it fitted into the overall study. In the final phase, producing the report, the aim was to provide sufficient support for the themes within the data relating to the research question. The process of identifying the themes was both deductive and inductive. The deductive portion used Jarvis’s (2009) theory of human learning to scaffold the main categories (e.g., primary socialization, learning from others, and life-world). Inductive themes (e.g., time frames, mentors) emerged as the first author worked iteratively through the phases of thematic analysis. Qualitative Solutions and Research International’s NVivo 10 qualitative data analysis software (QSR International, 2012) was utilized to organize and manage the data analysis.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness was enhanced through different means. Interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and transcribed verbatim. Given that the first author’s first language is not English, a reliability check was conducted on the transcripts, to ensure that the transcription accurately reflected the interview. Five random 10 min excerpts were checked, yielding a transcription accuracy rate of 97.96%, which indicates trustworthy transcriptions (Poland, 1995). The coauthors debriefed the research process on a constant basis, both with each other and with the other members of their research group, which met biweekly. The participant received the transcripts to edit and/or add any information; but, due the large amount of data, she chose to edit only the quotations used in the Findings section. However, ongoing informal, nonrecorded conversations allowed the participant to engage in respondent validation of the transcripts and the findings (Bryman, 2004). Two other strategies to enhance trustworthiness were the prolonged engagement of the first researcher (6 months for data collection but another year of interactions during the analysis and writing) and the use of a critical friend (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Finally, both the first researcher and the participant partook in bracketing interviews before the start of their respective projects (Rolls & Relf, 2006).

In this study there was also a potential conflict of interest because the participant was enrolled in as a graduate student at the same university as the researchers and was a member of the same research group. On one hand, this could have led to a smoothing effect of the findings. On the other hand, the trust and rapport that existed between the researchers and the participant potentially increased the access to data (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Finally, the participant’s choice to use her own name adds to the verisimilitude of the narrative account (Schwandt, 2001).

**FINDINGS**

**Jenny’s Story**

Four time frames (TF) were uncovered: (a) TF1: Early experiences, from her birth in 1978 to age 15 in 1993, presenting the influences of her upbringing; (b) TF2: Learning to teach, from 16 to 22 years old (1994–2001) when Jenny worked as an adapted swimming instructor and pursued a physical education and English degree; (c) TF3: Learning to coach, from 23 to 31 years old (2002–2009), when she worked as the head coach and manager at an adaptive sailing program in Province X; and (d) TF4: Learning to develop coaches, from 32 to 34 years old (2010–early 2013), when she worked at adaptive sailing programs in Province Y and Province Z and started her master’s degree in coaching. The findings portray both the visual aspects of the RTL and the stories gathered from the other data.
TF1: Early experiences

The RTL started with the word born inside a bubble. Jenny described herself as the third child, 9 years younger than her closest sibling. Having to keep up with siblings made her very diligent: “At that time, I did not understand the age difference, so I thought ‘Why can’t I do this if they can?’” In this mostly adult household, she described often being exposed to conversations that were beyond her maturity level: “I remember being pretty little and my sister would be talking about papers that she was working on when she was in high school and university” (ID int: 1). The influence of her parents’ occupations was acknowledged: “My dad was a teacher and my mom was a nurse, so from a very young age, I pictured myself having a job where I would work with people, helping them somehow” (OL int).

Similar to many other children growing up in the suburbs of a Canadian metropolitan city in the early 1980s, she was exposed to several leisure activities and sports: “[I was] always playing outside—street hockey, tennis, cross-country ski, hide and seek” (RTL). Moreover, disability was a backdrop to her childhood. For example, her mother worked at the Metropolitan Association for the Blind: “Talking about her day, my mom happened to have a 95-year-old blind lady teaching her how to knit. The usual, you know? It wasn’t crazy” (ID int: 1). Her sister was a specialist in adaptive recreation.

My sister is 10 years older than me and she started teaching at the pool with the adapted swimming program when she was about 17. I really looked up to her and just assumed that I would do the same when I was older. She also became a teacher, so she and my dad were both inspirations for me. (OL int)

The first concrete opportunity for Jenny to follow her childhood aspirations occurred in 1994, and since then, Jenny has been teaching sports and/or coaching in multiple contexts.

TF2: Learning to teach

A line that divided Jenny’s sport experiences in and outside education was drawn on this section of the RTL. In terms of influential experiences inside education, she mentioned her participation in organized sports (e.g., swimming) during high school and university (e.g., sailing), and she spoke of her physical education degree. Outside education, Jenny emphasized the influence of the adaptive aquatics program on her process of becoming a coach. Jenny taught recreational adaptive swimming classes to children ages 3 to 16. From the start, she felt very welcomed by the community because the club was where her sister used to work and where Jenny had taken her swimming lessons:

I was Elizabeth’s little sister. I knew all those people, they were just people who were my sister’s friends and they were people who hung out at my house. . . . Then when I started working at the pool, it was interesting because I always felt so comfortable around all these people who were senior people in the building. (ID int: 1)

Some significant individuals from her childhood, including Jenny’s sister, were key people at the adaptive program, helping her feel very comfortable in that environment.

The swimming club was pointed out as integral to Jenny’s learning process. The organization was a recognized able-bodied Canadian swimming powerhouse that also ran adaptive programs. To maintain high standards of excellence, the club structured a number of initiatives to develop the instructors, such as monthly workshops and mentoring, but it also afforded unstructured interactions with others. Specifically regarding adaptive swimming, Jenny gave the following description:
Every fall before all the programs started up they would have a one-day workshop for the people who worked with the adaptive program and they would have [Dr.] Jeff from that article [on disability sport]. My sister would come in and they might have an occupational therapist come in; people would give a 45 minute talk. (ID int: 1)

Jenny named mentors who could be accessed as sounding boards. Explaining how the club designated a mentor for every new volunteer, Jenny said, “When you go to volunteer you are paired with an experienced instructor. . . . I volunteered with him for 10 weeks, every Sunday, all day” (ID int: 1). Moreover, Jenny had the advantage of having another mentor in Kyle, her sister’s best friend, a situation that afforded numerous interactions: “I think that I probably asked a lot more questions to Kyle than I would have had I not known him so well” (ID int: 1).

Jenny constantly sought interactions with other instructors as well. These exchanges were facilitated by the way the activities were organized at the gym or pool: “The kids would walk to the gym and there would be a dozen instructors who have taught them before, who know them. So you can ask a lot of people for tricks” (ID int: 1). Furthermore, Jenny discussed learning from the children’s parents and other caregivers, “Most of these kids also have other help; they would go to specialized schools. They had an occupation therapist, so sometimes you might be speaking to their parents about what other kinds of things they are doing” (ID int: 1).

About this time frame, Jenny reflected on her process of becoming, from being a beginner instructor in 1995 to a more experienced one in 2002.

I started when I was in high school and I stopped when I graduated from university. So you wouldn’t be the same person. . . . Some of it, it’s just like a skill-set that you develop. . . . When I went back two years ago [2010], it was so funny. Right away I have some little kid and I was helping her go up a ladder and without realizing all my movements of how to help this kid, where to put her hand, how to help her move the leg over, how to support her, it was just like picking up a sport again and going through it again; like muscle memory of what to do to help a kid to go up a ladder and the key phrases that you use and the way you speak, all of that just came back. (ID int: 1)

TF3: Learning to coach

For TF3, two major changes were observed in how Jenny organized the RTL. The first change was how she organized this time frame. She divided it into two sections: school year on the right and summer on the left. The school year column presented the years as a substitute teacher, the period as a full-time English teacher, and toward the end of the time frame, some winter sports activities. Her commitment to coaching was emphasized during an interview in which Jenny mentioned a joke she would tell about her full-time teaching career being her off-season job. This balance between her two careers was supported by the equal emphasis that both columns received on the RTL and during the in-depth interviews. The second major change related to the different roles Jenny took on in the aforementioned contexts. Although the first time frame portrayed a student/instructor who taught adaptive swimming at the recreational level, this time frame showed a professional in a variety of contexts who taught high school, coached more than 100 (mostly adult) athletes with a disability, and managed a team of adaptive sailing staff.

Some environmental aspects were seen to have had a crucial influence on her learning within the three most important contexts of this time frame: substitute teaching, full-time teaching, and running an adaptive sailing program. In the RTL, Jenny capitalized the words “Taught everything, everywhere!” to describe the 2 years of substitute teaching when she lectured in
French, in English, in classrooms, and in gymnasiums in more than 30 different schools, from pre-kindergarten through the last year of high school. Just above those words she wrote in bullet points the words “flexibility, think on feet, adapt, be courageous” to explain which skills she developed in this environment. Jenny described how she gained these skills:

I was already a pretty outgoing person to begin with, but it is kind of crazy because you show up in a different school every day, you don’t know where anything is, you don’t know how the kids are, you don’t know who to ask for help; you need to go and find out who to talk to. (ID int: 1)

Regarding her full-time teaching, the themes related to how this context supported Jenny’s reflective skills (e.g., planning). On the RTL, Jenny wrote, “The English department was the envy of all departments” and graphically emphasized the word collaborative as the main reason why the department was considered so enviable. This sharing environment was structured upon departmental meetings that happened every 8-day cycle and at special times of the year. The meetings focused on several goals, from the alignment of the language used to communicate with parents to planning and evaluating the year:

We made sure that they [the texts] all built upon each other; like, the kids in grade eight have done that, that’s going to be cool because in grade nine they’ll do this. So we were always planning. So even if you didn’t teach grade eight you’re always collaborating with teachers who did and planning so that all five years have a clear focus and pathway for the kids. (ID int: 2)

Jenny suggested that working in such a collaborative way carried over to her coaching life-world:

We had so many opportunities to raise our concerns, so many occasions to give each other feedback, with a lot of chances to enjoy working together, and I think that’s something that I always try to do anytime that I coach. (ID int: 2)

Similar to the TF2, the TF3 contexts were conducive to social interactions, creating learning opportunities: “If you go in any school, if you go hang out in the teachers’ room, teachers are always, always, always talking about their students and trying to problem solve” (ID int: 2). In addition, the sailing club gave Jenny the autonomy to build a sailing program from scratch. Jenny implemented an environment where everyone would learn from others: “I was there for eight seasons. It was certainly not perfect and I definitively have lots of areas that I’m not skilled at, but I think with the staff cohesiveness, I did a good job” (ID int: 2). Whereas, in TF2 Jenny mentioned the influence of four persons (two mentors and two former coaches), in this time frame she wrote the names of mentors (two at the school and one at the club), coaches (five from her program and two from other cities), and athletes (six). A major theme that emerged inductively was related to what she learned with the coaches that she named on the RTL. Within the group of coaches from the adaptive program, Jenny noted details of their biographies that were related to what they individually brought to the team. She presented the coaches as knowledgeable sailors (e.g., medaled at the Canada games, national youth champion) but also pointed out some characteristics that transcended sport (e.g., doctorate in statistics and university professor). For instance, Jenny wrote on the RTL that a coach who was studying engineering helped her to “be logical” and “use resources effectively.”
TF3 marks Jenny’s first years of teaching and coaching sailing. Although Jenny had a competent background in teaching swimming to children with developmental disabilities, in this time frame, she began coaching sailing to adults with physical disabilities. The data implied that Jenny paired with people from different contexts (and even cities) who would help the development of her learning. John, a sailor and occupational therapist at the Adaptive Sailing Association, was named as her mentor and supported her learning about physical disabilities. Chris, a coach in a large city, shared valuable managerial tips. Roger, a coach in a midsized city, often shared a coach boat with Jenny, observing and analyzing races as well as jointly doing race debriefs with her: “Roger and I always would be taking notes on our athletes, but also on everybody else [other athletes]” (ID int: 2). Finally, Kara and Doris, heads of the English department, were leadership role models, and Jenny strove to adapt and adjust the approaches of these models to her coaching style.

Such a deliberate approach to learning demonstrates how Jenny sought to be effective in advancing her coaching knowledge. Indeed, Jenny was chosen to create the “Sail Canada Athletes with a Disability” module in 2009, which is a recognition of her high level of expertise in the context of developmental adaptive sailing. As her commitments to school and sailing grew in size and scope, Jenny decided it was time to take a break and reflect on the direction she wanted her life to take. Near the end of this time frame, she seized the opportunity to coach at some international competitions, increasing her Paralympic network.

TF4: Learning to develop coaches

The fourth time frame presented evidence of her pursuit of professional and personal learning opportunities in novel settings, such as working at adaptive sailing programs in other provinces and attending graduate school. On the RTL, Jenny mentioned the two different master of arts programs to which she applied and how they influenced the directions of her eventual pathway. Jenny drew a sad face to illustrate how she felt after being rejected by a highly recognized university. Below the year 2010 on the RTL, she wrote, “Margaret says, ‘Why don’t we go see what we can learn in Province Y?’” During an in-depth interview she contextualized her best friend’s quote as an attempt to raise her spirit. During the time she was in Province Y (2010), the line that divided the RTL in previous time frames disappeared. The year 2011 showed how Jenny’s acceptance to a graduate program opened the doors to work in a different province for a couple seasons and exposed her to “literature, colleagues, and friends [who] prompted me to reflect on coaching.” Moreover, 2011 also brought back the line that separated the sailing contexts from experiences at the university and with her family.

Similar to the previous time frames, in TF4, Jenny engaged in a retrospective description of her learning situations. However, in addition, she discussed situations as they occurred in real time. As demonstrated through the former time frames, Jenny had become a proficient head coach who worked in contexts where she utilized others to solve a challenge.

Unlike TF2 and TF3, when the organizations where Jenny worked purposefully designed access to peers (e.g., TF2 at the aquatic program, TF3 at the school), during TF4, Jenny played an important role in developing this learning situation. She mentioned a number of deliberate initiatives she created to connect with peers. For instance, Jenny sought information from the previous coach of the City Y program: “I literally sent him a word document that had 27 questions on it” (ID int: 5). Furthermore, she implemented weekly meetings in which novice staff members would “teach a disability to the group” (RTL) and collectively construct their knowledge. In another instance of learning through interactions, while working in Province Y, Jenny and Margaret engaged in critical reflections with a local head coach. The process of questioning the rooted assumptions about the program in which they had previously worked
was acknowledged to be an important part of understanding their practice: “We can see why we made our decisions in City X, that [talk] really made us think!” (ID int: 4).

Although Jenny kept learning from her peers (e.g., coaches, athletes, occupational therapist), in TF4, these interactions added two additional learning situations. First, she had been in charge of developing novice coaches for a while, and therefore was the novice coaches’ mentor. Second, the people from the other two provinces provided different perspectives on their unique philosophies of coaching, prompting Jenny to critically reflect on her own philosophy.

At the start of this time frame, Jenny had been a head coach for 8 years and involved in disability sport for 16 years. On the RTL, just below a circle that indicated the City Y disability sport association, she wrote, “By now my role, I think, is seen more as someone who comes in to ‘fix up’ disability sport associations.” This might explain why, as opposed to the data from the TF2 and TF3, new mentors were not named either in the RTL or during the in-depth interviews. At this stage she had been the mentor of novice coaches for a number of years. Jenny emphasized that mentors from the former time frames became friends and she constantly interacted with many of them.

Our data implies that both the social context and the challenges of the disability sport context were crucial factors in Jenny’s learning process. As a coach developer, Jenny acknowledged the necessity of strengthening the network among coaches. She advocated for coach participation in major competitions as a learning opportunity.

You have to send a coach there [major competitions]. Not only is it good for the sailors, but that coach is going to see all these different boat setups, they’re going to meet different sailors, they’re going to meet other coaches, they’re going to meet other program organizers, and they’re going to learn a ton. They’re going to get to know the community, they’re going to have so much fun and it’s going to keep them coming back. (ID int: 4)

The challenging task of finding materials specific to disability sport influenced Jenny’s decision to apply to graduate studies.

A lot is going to be similar to able-bodied sport of course—at the end of the day, an athlete is an athlete—but there are some aspects that are particular to coaching athletes with disabilities and it is hard for coaches to find information and support to learn those things. A lot of them end up feeling overwhelmed and burn out and get out of the sport, go back to coaching able-bodied athletes and we lose potentially great coaches. I experienced a lot of that frustration myself over the years, so I wanted to go back to school and learn more, both for myself and maybe other coaches as well. (PD: bracketing interview)

As a result, Jenny chose to conduct research on how a group of novice adaptive sailing coaches were learning coach, which would provide her with a better understanding to develop coach development programs for Sail Canada.

Finally, the findings revealed that, regardless her biography, every time Jenny worked at a new adaptive sailing club, she needed to deliberately engage in a process of learning the ropes to understand the different philosophies within each province.

**DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to examine how a developmental adaptive sailing coach learns to coach using a lifelong learning perspective. Although the findings were presented in a narrative format in which the richness and the complexity of the coach’s story was told, the
discussion focuses on the main concepts from our analysis (biography, life-world, and learning from others) and the themes.

Primary Socialization

During TF1, the findings showed that Jenny’s life-world was composed of a highly educated and active family. Jarvis (2009) acknowledged the importance of the significant others with whom children identify during primary socialization and implied that what is learned during that time is carried by the person throughout life. As reported by Jarvis, children begin to learn to “reflect their social position through the significant others with whom they share meaningful situations” (p. 74). Callary et al. (2011) indicated that what five women coaches learned from their family upbringing and the social context of their childhood influenced their interest in pursuing coaching as a career and the ways they chose to coach. McMaster et al. (2012) also commented on the parental influence of a coach who started in disability sport as teenager. Nash and Sproule (2009) mentioned parental influence on coaches’ philosophies. Moreover, being active since a young age and participating in several sports were related to coaches’ learning (Callary et al., 2011).

Despite the fact that disability sport literature stresses the importance of focusing on the athletes’ abilities instead of their disabilities (e.g., Cregan et al., 2007; Hanrahan, 2007), Brittain (2004) noted that there is a stigma surrounding people with disabilities, which can make the ability-first focus challenging. The “learning to knit” example, however, exemplified that although knitting is commonly related to one’s ability to see, a person who is blind can knit and can even teach knitting patterns to someone with sight. This and other narratives, so common in Jenny’s childhood due to her mother’s and sister’s occupations, helped to positively shape Jenny’s perceptions toward people with disabilities. Taking Jarvis’s (2009) view, during Jenny’s primary socialization, she was exposed to disabilities in several ways that helped her to see the person first, before the disability. Although not the focus of this study, Brittain’s point about the negative perceptions of persons with a disability could be addressed through future research on how coach education might lessen the feelings of disjuncture that coaches may feel when first encountering athletes with a disability.

Life-World

Three main overarching themes emerged inductively from the category life-world (universities, clubs, and schools). Becoming is a complex process and the life-world encompasses the wider society in which the person lives (Jarvis, 2009). Evidence implied that all three contexts that composed Jenny’s life-world produced numerous disjunctural experiences, offering a rich environment for learning. Within coaching science, a number of authors (e.g., Nash & Sproule, 2009; Werthner & Trudel, 2009) implied that coaches expanded their development through their experiences inside and outside of sport.

First, Jenny’s development as a coach was intimately related to the university courses she took. She studied physical education and English for her undergraduate degree and was doing a master of arts in coaching. Therefore, it is clear that she values learning in an educational context. For Côté and Gilbert (2009), a coach’s professional knowledge is composed by sport specific knowledge (e.g., tactical, technical), sport pedagogy, sport psychology, and physiology among other areas. Jenny’s enrollment in the English bachelor’s degree was a way to acquire pedagogical knowledge, whereas other areas related to sports were developed through her bachelor’s degree in Physical Education. McMaster et al. (2012) also found that university education made an important contribution to coaches’ professional knowledge as one coach mentioned being able to adapt and build equipment due to his engineering background.
Second, the several clubs that she either volunteered or worked at represented another theme that emerged. The workshops offered in adaptive swimming in the mid-1990s contrast with the lack of these types of learning situations pointed out in the disability sport literature (e.g., Cregan et al., 2007; DePauw & Gavron, 2005). Although these workshops were available mainly to the instructors of the swimming club, Jenny sought out to develop similar initiatives when leading the adaptive sailing programs. A common critique of large-scale coach education is that it is decontextualized (Nelson, Cushion, & Potrac, 2006). Having experts visit the sailing clubs improved both the contextualization of the large-scale coach education content and the contact between experts and instructors, which in turn facilitated the creation of network learning opportunities initiated by the instructors (Werthner & Trudel, 2009). Another interesting finding is that in TF2, Jenny valued the workshops provided by the club, which supports Trudel and Gilbert’s (2013) suggestion that a novice coach might benefit more from clinics and workshops than an expert coach because the novice coach is constructing her or his base of professional knowledge.

The schools at which she taught were the third inductive category. Differently than the previous two categories in which she focused on the professional knowledge acquired, the job as substitute teacher taught her about interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge (Côté & Gilbert, 2009) because she was working with so many different colleagues and students in many different contexts. The findings about Jenny’s experience as an English teacher echoed with Ruch (2005), who proposed that collaboration, provision of a clear vision or goals, and appropriate feedback are crucial to developing reflective skills in social workers. Comparable findings of empirical studies that borrowed Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theory of situated learning and investigated social learning in coaching (e.g., Culver & Trudel, 2008; Occhino, Mallett, & Rynne, 2013) discussed how work environments can enhance coach learning. Jarvis (2009) also mentioned the work of Lave and Wenger to exemplify the process of learning about a job where an individual moves from a newcomer to a more central role in an organization. Evidence implied the overlap between the contexts that composed Jenny’s life-world and her involvement with mentors and peers, which leads us to our next category.

Learning From Others

Three main overarching themes emerged inductively in every time frame from the category “learning from others” (mentors, colleagues, and athletes). Although the importance of mentors in coaching was recently reviewed (Jones, Harris, & Miles, 2009), the findings lend some support for recent coaching studies that portrayed the evolution of mentoring throughout time. Case studies on expert coaches (Nash & Sproule, 2009; Occhino et al., 2013) and a survey with coaches of different levels (Nash & Sproule, 2012) implied expert able-bodied coaches considered mentors as very important for advancing their knowledge during initial stages of coach development, but this importance was not mentioned at later stages. The findings of this study implied the same change in the mentoring bond where Jenny was the mentored protégé at the beginning of her career, later evolving to a mutually respected colleague with her mentors (Nash & Sproule, 2009, 2012; Occhino et al., 2013). It should be noted that as was the case for Jenny even being mentored 1 day a week for 10 weeks might establish a long-lasting relationship and enable a new coach to learn the job culture. The second theme that emerged was colleagues. It is reasonable to imply that in disability sport, everyone involved in the sport (e.g., coaches, staff members, occupational therapists) could be an avenue for learning (Cregan et al., 2007; Tawse et al., 2012). Tawse et al. (2012) noted the importance of staff members from an integrated support team (i.e., sport psychologists, physiotherapists) in elite wheelchair rugby. Moreover, our findings support McMaster et al.’s (2012) notion of openness
of disability sport coaches. The present research can expand our understanding concerning
the importance of colleagues from outside the sport who are not related to athletes, such as
the teachers and coordinators, from the different schools where Jenny worked. Moreover, the
use of the RTL allowed the researchers to access Jenny’s life-world outside the sport (Jarvis,
2009).

Athletes were the third theme in this category of learning from others. Close communication
with athletes is a major aspect of disability sport (Cregan et al., 2007; Hanrahan, 2007).
Jarvis (2009) proposed that whenever the learner can no longer take the world for granted,
disjunction or an opportunity to learn occurs. Because every athlete is unique and the need to
adapt is crucial, being able to work with athletes with a variety of disabilities (e.g., ambulatory,
sensory, and intellectual disabilities) offered Jenny the opportunity to learn different strategies.
Hanrahan (2007) emphasized the importance of optimal communication for those working with
athletes with disabilities. Moreover, Hanrahan implied that the disability could be overlooked
in some cases. In adaptive sailing, the disabilities must be addressed before athletes get on the
water due to the number of arrangements necessary to transfer athletes to the boats. Therefore,
the ability to build rapport and to discuss the athletes’ needs is paramount in adaptive sailing.

Limitations

Several limitations of this research need to be addressed. As previously mentioned, there are
limitations to having a single participant study and even the potential of smoothing (Webster &
Mertova, 2007). To counter this, we endeavored to use various trustworthiness strategies and
thick description to permit readers to draw their own conclusions (Jones et al., 2003). Whereas
the themes discussed represent some major aspects that emerged from the data, the story of a
life is broader and more complex than what was exposed in a few pages; thus, we do not intend
to say that we completely understood Jenny’s learning process. Moreover, the uniqueness of
Jenny’s story does not allow us to generalize these findings to other disability sports; however,
sport administrators, coaches, and other practitioners involved in disability sports can learn
from her story. Finally, Webster and Mertova (2007) warned narrative researchers to be aware
of biased recall, exaggeration, and so on, in participant stories. Our participant’s decision to
use her real name lends at least some weight to the honesty of her story.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to examine the process of becoming of an adaptive sailing coach from
a lifelong learning perspective (Jarvis, 2006, 2009). The findings revealed that Jenny’s life-
world exposed her to various contexts that optimized her learning process in several ways. The
contexts in which Jenny learned were shown to be very collaborative and, in turn, conducive
to knowledge creation (Jarvis, 2009; Ruch, 2005). Evidence implied that social interactions
(Culver & Trudel, 2008; Jarvis, 2009) acted as a major part of how Jenny developed her
coaching. As time progressed, Jenny was exposed to a multitude of challenges and learning
situations that contributed to her becoming. Within each time frame, Jenny named a number of
people who were available to help her learn and develop (e.g., mentors, professors, colleagues,
and athletes). The findings also implied the identification of peers within different areas of
expertise and mentors who became close friends at more advanced stages of learning (Jones
et al., 2009; Occhino et al., 2013). Furthermore, the methods employed in this study involved
the participant reflecting on her learning as well as interacting with the first researcher about
her learning experiences.
This study has the potential to contribute to the coach education and the sport psychology domains. The study’s implications for coach developers, whether working with coaches in able-bodied or disability sport, imply that optimal learning environments can be shaped when administrators take into consideration the promotion of different learning opportunities and how to engage learners in their own learning process. The study’s use of the Rappaport time line unveils a simple, prospective tool that sport psychologists can use when consulting with coaches and athletes. For instance, a sport psychologist could use the timeline to raise a coach’s self-awareness when assisting her or him to develop a coaching philosophy. Also, the timeline, using a past–present–future configuration, could be used to uncover aspirational stories that could guide goal setting with athletes and coaches. Beyond the aforementioned, this study documented the power of collaborative environments for knowledge construction, an insight that sport psychologists might use when working with coaches and athletes as well as other actors within disability sport.

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