

# CAN ADULT LEARNING PRINCIPLES INFORM “BEST PRACTICE” STRATEGIES FOR COACHES OF MASTERS ATHLETES?

Justin MacLellan<sup>1</sup>, Bettina Callary<sup>2</sup>, & Bradley W. Young<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Human Kinetics, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, ON, Canada

<sup>2</sup>Department of Community Studies and Sport & Human Kinetics, Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS, Canada

## BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

Given that:

- **Masters athletes (MAs)** have specific preferences for coach behaviours, attributes, and tactics (Callary, Rathwell, & Young, 2015),

that link to:

- **Andragogy:** the art and science of helping adults learn (Knowles et al., 2012),

The **purpose of the study** was to explore and describe how elements of the andragogy in practice model (Knowles et al., 2012) might inform “best practice” strategies for coaches when working with MAs.

## WHAT DO WE KNOW & WHERE ARE WE GOING?

From these data and in accordance with other studies of coaching MAs (e.g., Callary et al., 2015; Rathwell et al., 2015), we note that:

- It is important to have a practice plan, but coaches may allow their athletes to exercise **autonomy** in navigating their training. The coach may provide **alternate workout times** and work with the athletes to ensure that objectives are met.
- MAs are often driven by **different participatory motives** and prefer coaching approaches that are tailored to the individual athlete.

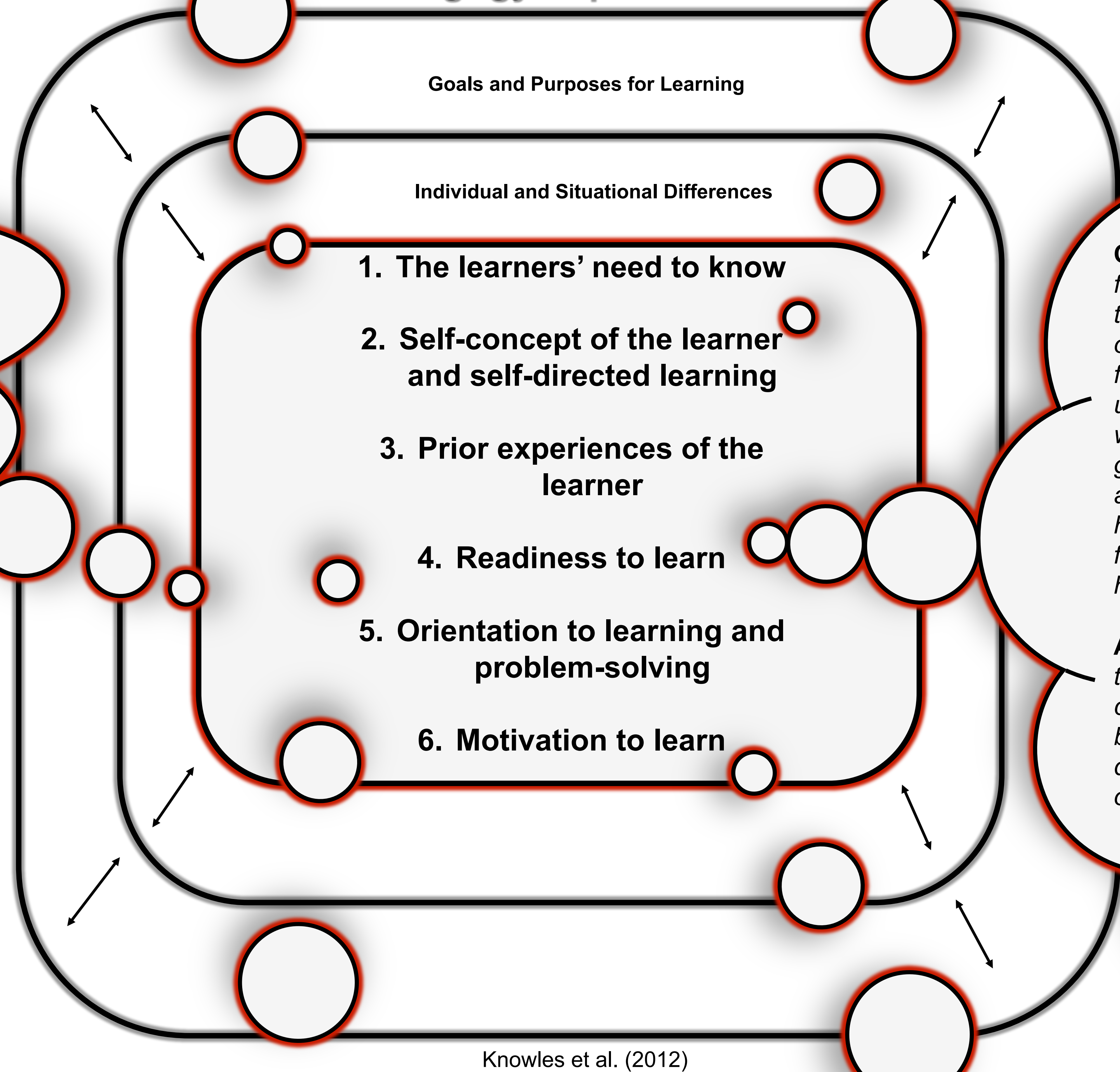
- In line with MacDonald et al.'s (2009) work, MAs' successful character beyond the confines of sport means that **life experiences** warrant patient and respectful coaching approaches.

- MAs **need explanation** of training procedures and decisions, and seek out rationale if it is not forthcoming.

- As evidenced in the application of the principles, the andragogy in practice model may provide “best practice” strategies to deliver effective coaching for MAs.

- More research is needed to further consider the psychosocial coaching approaches that address the unique profile of MAs. Such research could help inform the CAC's handbook on coaching MAs in better understanding the art of coaching this fast growing cohort of athletes.

### Andragogy in practice model



Knowles et al. (2012)

## 3

**Coach:** “I find adults, more so than teenagers, are very stuck in their ways sometimes. So, if you say something, it's not necessarily gonna click the first time. These little tips or adjustments, they need to be said again and again and again.”

**Athlete:** “Most of the athletes in our boat are very successful in their professions. So they come with a very strong personality. And you have to respect that you're talking to a person who has achieved a lot in their life. You can't treat them as if they're some subordinate individual that has no say in anything that they do.”

## METHODS & PARTICIPANTS

**Participants:**

- **One female dragon boat athlete**, aged 58, engaged competitively in the sport as a youth and MA, with 25 years of training.
- **One female dragon boat coach**, aged 22, engaged competitively in the sport as a youth, has 6 years of experience coaching MAs competitively, and an undergraduate degree in kinesiology and graduate training in sport psychology.
- **Both** compete internationally but with different clubs in different cities.

**Data collection & analysis:**

- Data were collected using **semi-structured interviews** (Creswell, 2014) with each of the two participants, each two hours in duration and conducted one year apart. Data were analyzed by organizing quotes into categories representative of the andragogy in practice model's six core principles.

## 5

**Coach:** “We do practices where I go out with a video camera and video the whole boat, and individuals within the boat. Then we sit down either individually or as a whole team and talk about what we're seeing and what they can improve.”

**Athlete:** “We were working on our finishes because our finishes weren't as strong as the other parts of our race. It wouldn't be the whole focus (of practice) but that was part of it. And we actually came up with a different plan. Right? So if the plan is not working, [the athletes and coach together] come up with a different plan that does work.”

## 2

**Coach:** “If they feel that they're not getting enough feedback, we're all available before and after practices for them to come and talk to us. Then outside of practice, if they want to get in contact with us, they're more than able to e-mail us or call us and say 'hey, I wanna meet with you half an hour before practice and work on this'.”

**Athlete:** “The coach asks for feedback from us. If we find that we're not working hard enough, we'll tell him and he'll make it harder, you know? Or if we're working too hard and we're all tired, then he'll change it accordingly. Right? It's a constant back-and-forth.”

## 4

**Coach:** “Masters athletes have jobs and families. Those are big factors. A lot of times they can't make it to every practice or every regatta because they have a family obligation. I just have to understand that and be willing to work with them through that. They want to be great athletes and dedicate as much time as they can to their sport, but they also have to provide for themselves and their family, so those are definitely aspects I have to consider.”

**Athlete:** “The coach is always conscious that everyone is an adult and many have children. He's offering suggestions and being supportive so that the athletes don't feel like they're short-changing any of their roles in their life.”

## 6

**Coach:** “I love coaching Masters athletes because I know they want to be there. If they're there, they're putting the time and the effort into it. They're not being forced there by anybody. And I find that I'm able to get a lot more out of somebody who wants to be there versus somebody who's being forced to be there.”

**Athlete:** “We made a conscious decision (to train) whereas younger athletes, maybe their parents have them going. Masters athletes made a conscious decision: 'I love doing this sport. I want to excel doing this sport and I want to do everything I can to achieve that'.”

## FURTHER READING

Callary, B., Rathwell, S., & Young, B. (2015). Exploring the lived experiences of master's athletes with coaches. *Sage Open*. doi: 10.1177/2158244015588960.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (4th ed.). London: SAGE.

Knowles, M. S., Holton III, E. F., & Swanson, R. A. (2012). The adult learner (7th ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

MacDonald, D. J., Horton, S., Kraemer, K., Weir, P., Deakin, J. M., & Côté, J. (2009). Application and reliability of the retrospective interview procedure to trace physical activity patterns in Master athletes and nonactive older adults. *Educational Gerontology*, 35, 1107-1122. doi: 10.1080/03601270902973540.

Rathwell, S., Callary, B., & Young, B. W. (2015). Exploring the psychosocial profiles of Masters athletes within the context of coached competitive Masters swim programs: A narrative approach. *International Journal of Aquatic Research and Education*, 9(1), 70-88. doi: 10.1123/ijare.2014-0068.

This project was funded by a SSHRC Insight Development Grant & a Joseph Armand-Bombardier CGS-M, a CBU RP Grant & a uOttawa Research Travel Grant. Please address correspondence to Justin MacLellan at jmac1074@uottawa.ca

Cape Breton University Happen.



uOttawa



A Suncor Energy business Une entreprise de Suncor Énergie

November 12 – 14, 2015 | Winnipeg, Manitoba  
**SPORT LEADERSHIP SPORTIF**  
Du 12 au 14 novembre 2015 | Winnipeg (Manitoba)

