Examining how elite S&C coaches develop coaching practice using reflection stimulated by video vignettes
Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify narrative types that illuminate how strength and conditioning (S&C) coaches used video vignettes in a guided reflection process to support the development of effective coaching practices. At the beginning of each week over a four-week period, eleven elite S&C coaches were sent a short video vignette clip of an S&C coach’s practice. They subsequently engaged in daily reflections in which they were guided to explore how the topic of the vignette aligned (or not) with their coaching practice. After the intervention, each S&C coach was interviewed regarding their process of learning from the vignette and from their reflections. Using a holistic narrative analysis of form and structure, results exemplified three narrative types: performance, achievement, and helper. S&C coaches whose reflections fitted the performance narrative type focused on their own practice with limited consideration of the athletes’ perspective or the vignette. The S&C coaches whose reflections fitted the achievement narrative type strove to accomplish goals with their athletes and were selective in considering the vignette. S&C coaches whose reflections fit the helper narrative type found that the vignette helped them to consider an athlete-centered coaching approach focusing on the athletes’ well-being as well as athletic abilities. Thus, S&C coach developers should utilise a guided reflection process that focuses on encouraging a coaching approach based on the helper narrative type.

Keywords: reflection, narrative learning, coach development, psychosocial coaching behaviours, vignettes
Introduction

Strength and conditioning (S&C) coaching organisations, including the UK Strength and Conditioning Association (UKSCA), the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA), and the Australian Strength and Conditioning Association (ASCA) have a focus on teaching standardised competency-based curriculums. Such instructional strategies are based on the instructional paradigm, where learning is linear and instruction centred (Paquette & Trudel, 2016). In this approach, extensive technical and coaching knowledge is fundamental to develop effective S&C coaching practice; however, learning is reduced to what the S&C coach should know (also known as “professional knowledge”). The International Sport Coaching Framework (ICCE, 2013) suggests that coaches should develop holistically, learning professional knowledge as well as interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge in order to develop effective coaching practice. In adopting a lifelong learning approach, coaches learn from experience through reflection, adding to their knowledge of how they interact with others (interpersonal knowledge) and who they are (intrapersonal knowledge).

Findings from recent research have provided evidence that S&C coach educators should consider more novel and innovative approaches, based on the constructivist paradigm (e.g., Ciampolini, Milistetd, Rynne, Brasil, & Vieira do Nascimento, 2019). Constructivist pedagogical strategies, for example narrative learning, emphasise active human development throughout life via personal perceptions of experiences (Baumgartner, Caffarella, & Merriam, 2006) and are in line with developing the coach holistically (e.g., Cushion et al., 2010). Narrative learning theory suggest that humans lead storied lives, meaning we live in, through, and out of narratives (Frank, 2010) and has been encouraged as an instructional strategy in coach education (McMahon, 2013). Through narratives, we make sense of the complexity of life and learn from our experiences. Research suggests that reflective practice encourages narrative learning (Szedlak, Smith, Day, & Callary, 2019). Reflective practice in sports
coaching has been encouraged (e.g., Gilbourne, Marshall, & Knowles, 2013) including in an
S&C context (e.g., Kuklick & Gearity, 2015). Reflection brings together thoughts of past and
present experiences and promotes internal dialogue of the meaningfulness and relevance of
coaching experiences (Knowles, Katz, & Gilbourne, 2012). As a result, the practitioner
generates thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that may initiate a change in applied practice
(Saylor, 1990). Thus, by examining S&C coaches’ reflective accounts, researchers and S&C
coach educators (e.g., UKSCA, NSCA, ASCA) are able to not only highlight what coaching
areas S&C coaches reflect upon, but more importantly, how their personal beliefs and values
contribute to why they develop specific behaviours and characteristics. This means that the
reflection process can be a useful tool to examine how S&C coaches’ narratives might
influence the development of technical as well as psychosocial coaching practice.

Reflection is an internal housekeeping process, meaning that it can be limited to what
an individual currently knows and how they perceive themselves to be effective (Moon,
2004). One suggestion of disseminating information that could further encourage narrative
learning, as well as enabling S&C coaches to consider new or alternative effective coaching
behaviours and characteristics, is the use of vignettes. Vignettes are non-fiction, evidence-
based, crafted stories. Through story, vignettes can be used to translate knowledge about
effective S&C practice to the coach. Frank (2010) suggested that stories have the ability to
arouse imagination and make the unseen compelling. Since memory, storage, and retrieval is
predominantly story based, Scott, Hartling, O’Leary, Archibald, and Klassen (2012) described
stories as generating an emotional impact. Indeed, vignettes stimulate an internal dialogue,
which is synonymous with initiating reflective practice (Saylor, 1990). As an example,
Szedlak et al. (2019) examined how elite S&C coaches responded to stories (vignettes) of
effective coaching. The authors reported how S&C coaches initially evaluated not only
technical coaching skills but also psychosocial behaviours that contributed to effective
coaching practice. In turn, the S&C coaches reflected on their coaching philosophy, including coaching values such as developing the relationship with the athlete through trust, rapport and respect, and using motivational strategies to engage the athlete. This process of reflection on the vignette allowed the S&C coaches to contemplate change to their coaching practice, which included practical steps to allow athletes more autonomy and ideas to gain insight through feedback surveys on how athletes perceived their sessions. Whilst this research provides evidence that vignettes are a useful instructional strategy to disseminate information and encourage reflection, exploring the S&C coaches’ narratives that guide how and why they decided to act and reflect on certain information and disregard other, would provide S&C coach developers with valuable information to enhance current coach development programmes. Using the same narratives developed by Szedlak et al. (2019), we conducted an intervention with S&C coaches with the aim to provide a novel and holistic strategy for S&C coaches to continue to develop their practice.

**Method**

**Participants**

This study used criteria based purposive sampling (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) to recruit experienced, elite S&C coaches. Trudel and Gilbert (2013) suggested that experienced coaches have potentially the most to gain from the process of reflection since they have the knowledge to understand that there is not “one best way” to coach, thus utilising reflection as a means to think through different coaching decisions and options. Further, they are more likely to seek out alternative learning opportunities, often having exhausted traditional formal coach education programming. Given these suggestions, we identified two criteria for the selection of participants: i) a minimum of three years’ experience coaching athletes at an elite level, that is working with full-time funded athletes who represent their country at the highest achievable level (i.e., Formula one, World/European championship, Olympic/Paralympic...
games, National Hockey League and County Championship Division One); ii.) accredited by the UKSCA or a certified strength and conditioning specialist through the NSCA. This stipulation helped to deselect participants who are self-declared coaches, a trend common in the fitness context. We used these criteria to ensure that the S&C coaches had a thorough understanding of the elite performance environment and had built up a high level of context specific coaching skills. To recruit the S&C coaches, the first author approached leading S&C companies who had previously shown an interest in using reflective practice to develop coaching practice. Following these approaches, the companies internally advertised the reflective process as part of their S&C coach development programme. Whilst participation was voluntary, the S&C coaches who were recruited perceived this as a great opportunity to further develop their coaching skills and were highly motivated to fully engage with the reflective process. As a result, they completed their diary entries after every coaching session, with only the occasional entry being late. The final sample consisted of eleven S&C coaches (ten male and one female) covering the following sports: formula one motor racing (n=5), athletics (n=3), cricket (n=1), ice hockey (n=1), squash and boccia (n=1). Three S&C coaches resided in the United States of America, two S&C coaches in Finland, one in France and the rest in the United Kingdom. All S&C coaches spoke and wrote fluently in English. The S&C coaches had an average age of 31 years (SD=4.2) and an average coaching experience of 9.3 years (SD=3.1) with 7.1 years at an elite level (SD=2.6).

Research has proposed that initial reflection should be guided or shared by an experienced mentor to draw the person into deeper levels of reflection such as evaluating and reworking their own views and ideas (e.g., Knowles et al., 2012). This aligns with Frank’s (2010) conception of dialogical research, which proposes that participants and researcher co-construct data through a process of active dialogue. Thus, the first author, an experienced S&C coach and coach mentor, acted as the coach developer. He has over eleven years’
experience of coaching elite athletes (i.e., Olympic, World, European champions) and over
six years’ experience in mentoring S&C coaches, which included facilitating critical
reflection on coaches’ own practice. Further, he has theoretical knowledge of the process of
reflection through his PhD studies, and thus could provide feedback to the S&C coaches that
was in line with both their practice as an S&C coach, and with theoretical underpinnings.

Procedure

After obtaining institutional ethical approval for the study and written informed
consent from the participants, S&C coaches were invited to participate in the study. The
study had three stages: 1) a pre-intervention education on reflection; 2) the intervention
which included the video vignette, reflective e-diaries, and feedback from the first
author/coach developer; 3) a post-intervention semi-structured interview.

Stage one. The first stage of this intervention aimed to educate participants on how to
engage in the reflective process. We provided participants with an information pack in which
we outlined simple evidence-based guidelines and examples of how to engage in reflective
practice (i.e., Evans & Maloney, 1998; Moon, 2004). To familiarise themselves with the
process of reflective writing, all of the participants reflected on a coaching scenario at the end
of a coaching day. The aim of this first reflection was to allow the S&C coaches to practically
apply the guidelines we provided and thus become more familiar and comfortable with the
process ahead.

Stage two. Considering previous research regarding reflective practice (i.e., Knowles
et al., 2012) and heutogogical learning approaches, which emphasise that autonomous, self-
determined learning is a skill that takes time to develop (Stoszkowski & McCarthy, 2018),
the intervention stage lasted four weeks for each participant. It included three steps every
week: a) watching a video vignette once per week, b) completing daily guided reflections in
an e-diary, and c) sharing the e-diary and receiving feedback from the coach developer.
First, on the Sunday of each week, the participants watched a clip of the video vignette developed by Szedlak et al. (2019), which was made available via YouTube (i.e., first clip, first week, second clip second week etc.). The video vignette created by Szedlak and colleagues consisted of several individual clips (available at https://www.youtube.com/user/TheDavster101) and its design and development was grounded in research examining effective coaching practice that had been conducted and synthesised (Szedlak, Smith, Day, & Callary, 2018; Szedlak, Smith, Day, & Greenlees 2015). Through the vignette clips, we disseminated research-based information on effective S&C practice including psychosocial coaching behaviours. Participants were then prompted to reflect by considering a series of questions regarding their perceptions of the video vignette. These questions were included on an information sheet at the start of each week. With these questions, we aimed to understand which effective coaching behaviours and characteristics from the vignette clip they perceived as relevant to their personal coaching context. Questions included, “Can you identify any effective behaviours and characteristics of the S&C coach?”, “Does this relate to your own coaching practice, if yes would you like to share some of your experiences?” and “If you would like to change anything in your coaching practice as a result of watching the video clip, what would that be and how would you do that?”

Second, participants completed a daily e-diary between Monday and Friday. As Day and Thatcher (2009) suggested, diaries can often prompt internal dialogue and allow for a greater understanding of why and how we do what we do. Thus, the e-diary acted as a means to initiate and record the process of reflection. The e-diary was semi-structured, meaning that through questions, we guided participants to re-evaluate and consider how the information they identified from the video might contribute to understanding and enhancing their current coaching practice. Questions included, “What went well or OK? Why?”, “What emotions did you feel throughout the session?”, “Why are these emotions important?”, “How might the
athletes perceive your action and emotions?” and “How would you like them to perceive you?” We encouraged the participants to use these questions as an initial stimulus rather than a simple question and answer, which gave the participants the latitude to use their personal style to express themselves.

The e-diary (a document shared between the coach developer and the individual coach in Dropbox) was chosen as a method to collect data. With the advance of technology, typed diaries may now be a more familiar method of writing and was easily shared with the first author (coach developer) at the end of every week (i.e., the Friday or Saturday). The coach developer immersed himself in the data through the process of reading and re-reading the diary entries before providing feedback to the participants. By becoming familiar with the data, the coach developer was better able to guide participants to actively consider practical or psychological change to become more effective in their coaching practice. Feedback was provided using the comment function in Microsoft Word, and highlighting text in which the coach developer noted which step of reflective practice the participant had engaged with and what the next step might be. For example, “You start to analyse your feelings here and brought it back to your relationship with the athlete. Can I encourage you to go a step further? Consider how you think the athlete perceived your actions and how did you want him to perceive them? Maybe you can reflect on your own values and philosophy, and talk a little more about how this feeling influences your coaching practice?” Recapping the main points of the feedback, the coach developer then provided a weekly summary of suggestions that the participant could consider for the following week.

The participants repeated this three-step process with a different clip of the video vignette each week for four weeks, reflecting in the e-diary only on days they coached their athletes. Since this process was intensive for the first author/coach developer, data collection spanned a period of six months because he worked with no more than two to three
participants at the same time. This time span allowed the first author to spend sufficient time
with the reflective entries.

Stage three. After each participant had completed the intervention, they took part in
an individual semi-structured interview that focussed on how they developed their coaching
practice including which psychosocial behaviours, if any, they developed, and how the video
vignette clips might have contributed. Sample questions for these interviews included “What
coaching behaviours or characteristics have you developed through this process?” and “What
practical changes, if any did you make to your coaching practice?” and “Did the video help
influence your decisions on what to change, if so how?” and “What have you learned from
the video that you maybe would not have considered otherwise?” The follow up interviews
were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. These closing interviews each lasted between
20-31 minutes.

Data analysis

We analysed the reflection and interview data using a holistic narrative analysis of
form and structure (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) following the steps outlined by Smith (2017).
We depicted, through the structure and form of narratives, how the process of reflection,
initiated by video vignettes, influenced the development of effective psychosocial behaviours
and characteristics within the context of S&C coaching. The strength of this method of
analysis lies in its ability to depict how humans make sense of their life experiences over time
(Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). It generates understanding of psychological
processes within their sociocultural context such as sports coaching (Smith, 2010). Our
analysis identified common narrative types S&C coaches use to make sense of their coaching
practice. To do so, the first author engaged in “narrative indwelling”, reading and re-reading
the accounts to identify the thematic focus for the development of the plot across participants’
accounts. Next, the first author investigated shared developments and common transitions
across the S&C coaches’ data in terms of the narrative form. More specifically, the first author identified objectives of the participants involved, the conflicts or obstacles of achieving them, and attitudes or emotions toward those circumstances. He then presented his initial findings of common narrative types and themes to the research team, who acted as critical friends questioning the initial interpretations and providing alternative suggestions. We repeated this process several times until we identified three dominant narrative types, the “performance”, “achievement”, and “helper” narrative (Table 1). These narrative types have been recognised in literature (i.e., Douglas & Carless, 2006, 2008). Five S&C coaches’ transcripts best fitted the performance type, three the achievement, and three the helper narrative type. It should be noted that the three narrative types are not an all or nothing approach, but rather a continuum (Blumberg, 2009), from “performance” through to “helper”, with achievement in between. This means that the S&C coach engages in an interplay between the dominant narratives depending on the specific coaching context and situation.

To analyses the structure of the narrative, we then constructed the axis of how the plot of each narrative was developed, keeping in consideration the experiences, present coaching situation, and possible changes in coaching practice of the participants (Smith, 2017). Furthermore, we analysed the sentence structure including use of language (i.e., use of first person pronouns). Second, we explored the content of each narrative type. Guided by previous research on reflective practice (e.g., Gilbourne et al., 2013; Knowles et al., 2012), effective coaching (e.g., Côté & Gilbert, 2009) and the knowledge translation process (e.g., Graham et al., 2006), we refined the identified themes within each narrative, particularly focusing how reflective practice and the video vignettes impacted coaching practice. For each emerging theme, the contributing authors acted as critical friends by encouraging alternative interpretations, comparison across participants and consideration in accordance with the identified narrative type.
Research findings have highlighted that stories are an effective strategy to disseminate knowledge to applied practitioners (e.g., Smith, Tomasone, Latimer, Cheung, & Martin Ginis, 2015). Thus, using creative non-fiction writing (CNF) techniques, we crafted three stories: “the helper”, “the performer”, and “the achiever” to present the findings. We used direct quotes and diary excerpts from all the participants that represented the identified themes for the specific narrative (Table1) and only added our own words (in italics) when clarification was needed. For example, “The Helper” story was made up of quotations that best represent the sub-themes of this narrative from the five coaches that fitted the helper narrative type. To ensure confidentiality, we used pseudonyms for the athletes that the participants spoke about. Whilst each of these stories describe one S&C coach’s engagement with the reflection process and response to the vignette, reference to athletes and S&C coaches are meant to be composites of all S&C coaches working with all athletes within the identified narrative type.

Using CFN to display our results fits well with the overall aim and philosophical approach (i.e., epistemological constructionism and ontological relativism) of this study, which views reality as multiple, subjective and created through relationship and dialogue with others (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). This means that the researcher is part of what is studied and “there can be no separation of the researcher and the researched, and values always mediate and shape what is understood” (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p 13). First, CNF encourages the researcher to engage in this co-construction process. The stories were co-created with the participants’ words and the author’s words, which represent the interpretative element of the analysis process. Thus, CNF enables the researcher to recreate lived experiences in ways that represent personal and social meanings, as such CNF provides more adequate representation of how S&C coaches develop psychosocial behaviours through the identified narrative types (McMahon, 2017). Second, Ropers-Huilman (1999) suggest that
CNF enhances the engagement of the reader as such stories can communicate the emotional complexity of the S&C coaches’ responses to the reflection process and the vignette.

**Enhancing rigor**

We invite the reader to consider the following quality indicators that we used to enhance the research process: rich rigor within the data collection and analysis processes, credibility, aesthetic merit, and generalisability (Smith, 2018; Smith, McGannon, & Williams, 2015; Smith & McGannon, 2018). First, we used multiple methods including written diaries, video vignettes, facilitation, and interviews to help generate a more nuanced understanding of the subject matter (Tracy, 2010; Williams, 2017). Second, in order to ensure credibility, which includes sincerity of the findings, we followed Tracy’s (2010) suggestions of author self-reflexivity (i.e., written diaries) throughout the data collection and analysis. The co-authors acted as “critical friends” to the lead author during this process, which encouraged reflection upon alternative interpretations in relation to the data (Smith & McGannon, 2018; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). To enhance the credibility of the facilitation process, the first author engaged in a twelve-week pilot study with an elite S&C coach to further develop his own skills of guiding the participants into more critical levels of reflection. Finally, we aimed to create three well-crafted, coherent, and engaging stories that invite interpretative responses from the reader, which further enhanced the study’s credibility (Tracy, 2010). Furthermore, and as Smith (2018) suggests, this creative writing process can encourage naturalistic generalisation (how findings resonate with readers’ experiences) and transferability (to what extent findings are transferable to another context).

**Results**

We identified three dominant S&C coaches’ narratives of learning that illuminate how video vignettes contributed to the S&C coaches’ reflective process, and whether and how that reflection influenced their development. In the results section, we present three stories that
typify the “performer”, “achiever”, and the “helper” coaches. The themes that are developed in these stories are represented in Table 1.

Table 1 near here

The Performer

At the end of the day, I have to focus on myself, how can I improve my coaching? That is what’s important. I am responsible for my performance and I know what I bring to the table. If I get better and become the best I can be, I know that [my athlete] Darren’s performance will improve as well. It’s logical for me. I have seen this over and over again in my coaching, so why should I change this approach? I want to be a successful S&C coach, so that is what why I am focusing on this process of reflection. It’s the most important thing in my life at the moment. Yes, you have to make sacrifices, I travel a lot and work ridiculous hours, but that is where I get my rush from. You cannot be less than 100% focused, or you just won’t succeed in this business.

Emotional detachment. I mean, watching the video, all I could think was attachment means emotion, which means clouded decision-making. That does not help in elite sport. I have a drive to self-improve and perform. I like to be in control and I want my athletes to trust in my coaching expertise. I’m thinking of Darren. He annoys me as he is often late to sessions, but as he is contracted by England and not us, I can’t really control what he does. I got some good work out of him and I have him playing again, something England failed to do. He is not without issues though. I constantly have to build him up. A lot of the time, I just want him to ‘man up’. International sport has many weak individuals, but I need him just to trust the programme that I have set. I find it hard not to give them the brutal truth. I believe that there are rules in place to develop athletes, and they should follow the programme and need to trust in my expertise.
Understanding oneself and developing athletes’ sporting success. There is no point on reflecting all the time on how the athletes feel and what they want. I’ll tell you why. Once I know what works with them, I stick with it and purely concentrate on making my coaching more effective. That has always produced great results. If I then started to reflect on individual athletes, I am sure I would find some negatives, because there will always be someone who does not agree with what I do, and in elite sport everyone has an opinion. But, I have to believe in myself, in my abilities and in what I can achieve. I know that about myself. I have achieved a lot and I know what works. I know how I can get the best out of the athletes. Sometimes, I have to temper being blunt and stating fact. I’m not sure I can dress up the situation any differently. I have, over the years, tried several approaches, sometimes a ‘cuddle’, sometimes a ‘stick’, sometimes a ‘carrot’ and sometimes all three, but now I am just brutally honest and direct with my athletes, the ‘stick’ seems to work best. The other day, one of my athletes wanted to do some extra work in the gym. I had to reign him in and remind him of the programme I set, I mean just get on with it. And I was right, his results speak for themselves. When we re-tested, he improved a lot in all tests, and I was pretty happy about it. Now he’s going to the National Hockey League and I know he will be one of the fittest and strongest guys there.

Critical of the vignette. I don’t think I changed anything in my coaching practice throughout this reflection process and to be honest, these videos are not revolutionary. I think this relational approach from the video works with some athletes, but not others. I mean I am not employed to be their friend or buddy, I am here to produce results and that is what I am best at. I always put effort into my programming and sessions, and I think the athletes see this and appreciate it. I believe this creates respect and trust, not the flexible, laissez fair approach focusing on rapport and relationship. The majority of athletes I work with do not want an involvement in the process, they want the outcome. So, if I am well prepared, that shows I
care and they will commit and do their part as well as they can. If I am not prepared, my athletes will not be as motivated. To be honest I would not change my own style as it has evolved and is adaptable and fit for purpose. The coach in the video is just not me, not my style at all. If I changed to become like him, I would not be true to myself.

**The Achiever**

When I look at my calendar and see that I have a session with Jordan I get positive energy. *Reflecting on this*, I have started to think why is it like this? Why do I get such a buzz out of it? Maybe it’s because my favourite athletes tend to be people that get excited and show their emotions about the programme just like I do. They know what we want to achieve together. That is what you coach for, it drives you to become a better coach.

**Emotional awareness and control.** The other day I felt a little under the weather, but I purposefully made an attempt to hide my negative emotions. *I was reminded of the videos:* The S&C coach showed a lot of emotions, but it was purposeful and motivational. I feel that consistency from the coaching staff, particularly this time of year, is a vital component to the training process. I have been guilty in years past of "wearing my emotion on my sleeve" so to speak, and letting it affect the daily training environment, sometimes positively and sometimes negatively. This time, I did not allow my cold to get in the way of the job. I know that when I am not 100%, I can be withdrawn, distant, and disengaging with my athletes. Mike does not respond to that very well. So, I made a conscious effort to involve Mike and Jordan in the session. Then, the highlight of the session came when we had a discussion around the use of heavy sleds for acceleration work. Jordan appeared to experience a moment of enlightenment and stated, "I learn something new every day". I could see that he appreciated the conversation, I think it allowed him to take ownership of the programme a little more. *I believe that we should allow our athletes to question and challenge us.*
However, those questions should be respectfully stated around how we achieve the goal we agreed upon.

**Understanding oneself enables understanding others.** This reflection process encouraged me to look inside and explore myself. It focused me on understanding what I did, how I did it, and whether it was effective? This is so important: how can I understand my athlete’s perspective if I have no clue about myself. *That reminds me of a session I had with Anna,* working on lateral agility, accelerations, and decelerations. I knew that Anna’s mind tends to wonder, and that it is difficult to keep her focused. My default coaching style would be to keep encouraging her and provide quite a few coaching cues, which usually works well in general. So, I decided to keep my cueing simple and to the point by providing two to three relevant cues per exercise in order to keep her mind on effective changes. It went well. With each rep she got better and better. I could see from her body language that she was starting to really trust me as a coach. *That trust is important, because without it, how can we achieve our goal? Another example: The other day,* I did this session with Jess, she gave me all the signs that she was super motivated *for the new exercises.* I tried to dig more into why she was so motivated. Something had clearly changed. But then I realised there was a problem, she wanted to do a totally different programme. I told her that it is fantastic to see her motivated in the gym, but that on this occasion, I will have to be tough because we need to stick with our original plan. She took it quite well and trusted me. I could actually see how she applied some of that motivation to our original plan. *I knew, I could be direct with her because I worked hard on building that relationship.* Actually, *that reminds me that* I have the tendency to sometimes hide my emotions when my athletes achieved a certain benchmark or win a medal. I mean, I am super happy, but I don’t show it out maybe as much as I could. I should have told Jess that I was really pleased with her attitude and effort in the session. I valued her commitment and understood that from a personal perspective, she made a sacrifice.
Adapting priorities to achieve goal together. The reflection process really helped me in understanding what my priorities are when I coach my athletes. I do believe that we need to develop the athletes holistically, that is what the video is all about, but in the first instance and if you ask the athlete, they want to achieve their goal, they want to win that medal. Yes, I want to work as a team, I want my athletes to be accountable and I want them to contribute, but it has to be for the right reasons, to achieve the goals we have set together. I have a great recent example. Jeff hadn’t managed to follow our action plan. He made it sound like it wasn’t a big thing and everything was under control. Previously, I would let him get away with it. But not this time. I knew if he would carry on like this, he would not achieve his benchmark targets and that could lead to deselection. So, I challenged him, which turned into a good discussion. He did not realise how serious the situation was. Sometimes being people-focused does not do the athlete any favours. But then on the other hand, people-focused does not just mean giving in. I think it also means that you have to make that conscious effort to understand how your athletes feel, like when I worked with Eva. She needed my support more than my technical expertise. She was quite timid, but so talented. She lacked confidence. The sessions I had with her were totally different. I was more reassuring, provided more feedback and we always had a debrief afterwards. Above all, I knew that if I could help her to become more confident and independent, she would be more motivated to engage in the programme. Teamwork can look quite different at times, but a team can only work effectively if they have a shared goal, something that satisfies each individual. The other day, I was so proud of helping one of my race drivers, Pierce, to achieve his goal. He won the race and will be promoted to F1 now. That was our biggest goal for two years. We worked hard for this, day in day out. We had our ups and downs but most importantly, we had a plan that we made together. We made sure we were both focused and gave our best. We supported each other motivating and encouraging each other when things
got tough. I have not seen such a happy guy for a long time, it was crazy, he kind of jumped in my lap. These experiences remind me of why I'm in the sport: I'm looking to impact people's lives in a way they did not think possible, to allow them to accomplish and feel things they did not know existed. I get pleasure, satisfaction, and fulfilment out of coaching these athletes. Working together to achieve this, was one of the highlights of my career.

Selective reflection encouraged by the vignette. I found the videos very informative. I think the reflection process was a useful exercise and a great new skill for me to learn, but the videos were not vital, they probably did not contribute that much. They probably helped jumpstart the week, which was the main benefit for me. For example, the videos highlighted the importance of building relationships. If you do not build that trust with that athlete, you won’t work well together. When I was working with Liz, I developed such a great working relationship, we always achieved our targets. As a result, she did not really want anybody else leading her workout. That gave me a lot of confidence in my coaching abilities. On the other hand, some stuff from the videos, I disagreed with. I mean, you should encourage independence in your athletes but not to the detriment of the session objective, like Pete did when he changed the programme to accommodate for some tired athletes. I just think this is bad planning, he should have known that. I really learned through that reflection process, it forced me to replay the day in my head, it allowed me to examine the athletes’ perspective. I also enjoyed the facilitation on the reflection. I felt accountability to do the reflections, which encouraged me to learn and really master that skill. I took a lot of satisfaction from that learning experience. More importantly and from an applied point of view, I always came up with some action points to move forward. These were small goals for the next week, like being more deliberate in my coaching cues or providing positive feedback at the end of the session. I know that these small changes contribute to accomplishing our
459 vision. That is why I will give 100% to see these through, even if they are tough to implement.
460 I tell you, once you have achieved it, wow, you do really feel satisfied.

461 The Helper

462 I value the relationship built with the athletes and take every effort to understand their
463 life both within and outside their sport. I have a genuine interest in their life and also their
464 sport and welfare. I want to understand what their goals are and how I can contribute and help
465 them achieve. My athletes are heavily involved in my own life. It is probably my intrinsic
466 need to help others and solve their problems which led me become a coach. And it is for this
467 reason that I feel the great weight of responsibility to improve and develop myself and
468 basically “be ready for any obstacle” they might come across. That is not to say I am the
469 smartest or know all the answers, definitely not. Rather, it means, that I am trying to
470 constantly improve, learn and develop so as to be of best help to the athlete in front of me.

471 Emotional attachment. The video vignette helped me to understand how I am
472 building mutual accountability and collaboration with my athletes based on trust and respect.
473 For example, last week the video vignette helped me reflect on how I want the athlete to feel,
474 like an equal within the relationship, combining our individual skills to become more efficient
475 and effective. That lead to further debate and discussion with one of my athletes that
476 positively influenced how we programmed for future sessions. I would be so happy if these
477 conversations allow my athletes to have a voice and a say in the process. I want them to be
478 continually asking questions, challenging the status quo, and forcing me to improve my own
479 craft for their benefit. If they understand more, they can question more, and if they question
480 more, we can progress together a lot quicker. It’s what the video at the beginning of the week
481 was all about, where the athlete questioned the S&C coach and they had a great discussion
482 about the rationale of programme. I feel so pleased when they ask me questions it shows they
483 care not only about the programme but about our relationship. This is what I aim to create, a
close emotional bond with my athletes through transparency and openness. Last week for example, I felt a combination of nerves, tension, on-edge, worry, optimism, and apprehension for Michael’s competition. I want him to be able to have this opportunity to compete on this stage for the first time. I share his dreams and I feel largely responsible for his success and failures.

Understanding others and developing the athlete holistically. I am very passionate about his success, which is more than just success on the track, but success in enjoying the process and learning and growing as a person throughout this journey. This reflection process highlights to me that perhaps my hierarchy is a little skewed and I should remember that my athletes’ needs are of higher importance than a lot of other things on my agenda, so if my athletes are looking for help, then their needs come first. The biggest change for me was making a conscious effort to understand how my athletes might think or feel concerning a specific situation. I remember when I felt that Michael was disrespectful in terms of needing all the attention during a competition, and I thought how fastidious he was. But then, when I reflected on how he might be feeling I realised that this was just his way of dealing with pre-competition anxiety. It really helped me understand his perspective and I cut him a little slack.

I’ve come a long way from thinking that a good S&C coach is one who just develops technical knowledge. I mean this is what the video was all about and to see that I have created a similar relationship based on trust, respect and openness with my athletes makes me feel that I do make a difference. That is my priority. Like Michelle, when I first worked with her, she was 17 years old, shy and lacking confidence. I always had time for her. Eventually she just opened up and we had some great discussions around her sporting and personal life. Throughout our time together I saw her develop as a person, now she is happily married, has two kids and runs her own business. She still pops in for a workout and we have a chat and a
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coffee afterwards. Isn’t that what coaching is all about? That reminds me of a conversation I had with Melanie, another athlete I worked with a while ago, when she was upset about me leaving for a new job. I wish that I was able to bottle that conversation, to store it and share it with every athlete I coach. She told me that she found her own "why" for the sport. It is so incredibly important, you need to know why you are doing it and Melanie always listened to outside influences, her parents, her friends, the pressure to get a medal to be accepted, funding etc. Now, she tells me I helped her to find her real motivation, which is her love for the sport. She told me that even if suddenly all of the elite support and opportunities would be stripped away, her love for the sport would still stand, which made her more positive about the future and her life outside the sport. Being part of her journey that is what fulfils me as a coach.

Vignette initiates and triggers reflection I enjoyed this reflection process and I think the videos really helped me. When you watch the video, something will jump out from it and stick in your head for the rest of the week and as you reflect you take that into consideration. When you reflect, you ask yourself what is the context here? The video springs to mind and off you go. My reflections of the video always began with the main theme of the video. What is the S&C coach going through in the video and how does that apply to me? When he talked about trust, I was like OK, ‘trust’, if that was me and my athlete, how would I empathise? How would that have played out? If that was the athlete during the video talking about me, what would they have said? And again, that taught me something that I never actually considered if I am perfectly honest. For me this process of reflection was definitely quite cathartic. It helped me to actually express my emotions in a way that I could learn from it. For example, a few days ago when I coached a particular group of athletes, I thought it did not go that well and that I had really messed it up. I reflected about it, recalling the video and how the S&C coach always reflected positively at the end of the day. So, I tried the same and...
came to the conclusion that it was not as bad as I thought. Then, the following day, I spoke to my fellow S&C coach and he did say that this group is difficult to coach, which made me even more positive about it. You know, sometimes you just say “that is rubbish” and you just leave it and get depressed, but this reflection process allowed me to re-evaluate and actually gave me time to think about how I can improve my coaching.

**Discussion**

This study presents an innovative approach highlighting how the S&C coach develops effective coaching characteristics and behaviours through the process of reflection stimulated by a video vignette. In particular, the findings illuminate how different narrative types help us understand the idiosyncratic ways that guide the decisions of S&C coaches to develop or not develop coaching practice through a reflective process with video vignettes. In agreement with previous literature (e.g., Callary, Werthner, & Trudel., 2012; Knowles et al., 2012; Kuklick & Garity, 2015), the findings of this study strengthen the use and value of reflection to develop coaching practice within the elite sporting context. The reflection process allowed the S&C coaches to consider inter/intrapersonal skills as well as their level of professional knowledge, which are essential to develop effective coaching practice (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Werthner and Trudel (2009) suggest that research has neglected to identify why one practitioner may emphasise certain learning situations as key, while another may value and make use of quite different situations. Our results suggest that, depending on the situation, the S&C coaches may have leaned towards one narrative with influences from other narratives, which explained why they responded to the learning situation in the ways in which they did.

Indeed, some participants (i.e., participants who fit the helper and achievement narrative) were stimulated to reflect by the vignette, whereas others (i.e., participants who fit the performance narrative) gave limited consideration to the vignette. We note that the narrative presented in the video vignette was built on empirical data (e.g., Szedlak et al., 2015, 2018).
that specifically examined psychosocial characteristics and behaviours, and thus, we found it was in line with a helper narrative. This particular learning situation appeared to be more valuable from a learning perspective to those S&C coaches who fit the helper and achievement narrative type, as the information disseminated by the video vignette (helper narrative) fits closely to the S&C coaches pre-existing dominant narrative (Cushion, 2018).

From an applied standpoint, we therefore suggest that S&C coaches and coach developers should be aware of their dominant narrative type in order to consider alternative types when appropriate.

The reflection process, independent of the S&C coaches’ dominant narrative, enhanced the S&C coaches’ level of self-awareness. Previous researchers have highlighted the importance of self-awareness in developing effective coaching practice (e.g., Anderson, Knowles, & Gilbourne, 2004) as personal characteristics, including values and character traits, will influence how a coach determines what constitutes effective coaching practice for a given situation (e.g., Nelson-Jones, 2014). These characteristics should not be taken as a limitation of one’s coaching approach, but according Petitpas, Giges, and Danish (1999) offer a rich resource on which the coach can draw. Our findings illustrate how the S&C coaches started to pay more attention to self, analysed interactions, and became aware of their limitations, self-interests, prejudices, and frustrations. Miller, Anthony, & Oldham (2011) suggest that increased self-awareness can result in coaches being in a better position to manage themselves and their practice effectively. Our results illustrate how some S&C coaches became more aware of the social, psychological, and emotional dimensions of coaching with a specific focus on building relationships and understanding the athlete’s perspective. Such a coaching approach is often described as holistic (Jones & Turner, 2006), or athlete/person-centered (Miller & Kerr, 2002), meaning that the S&C coach considers an...
athlete’s personal and sporting context and sees the long-term health and well-being of the athlete as central to the coaching process.

The findings of this study extend previous research noting the dominance of the performance narrative in elite sport (Carless & Douglas, 2009; Douglas & Carless, 2006, 2009) and showing its relevance in the coaching context with five S&C coaches fitting the performance narrative type. Coaching is strongly associated with maximising performance success and winning (Light & Robert, 2010). S&C coaches, in part, are accountable for and dependent on accomplishing such outcomes (EIS, 2019). Therefore, it is understandable, and to some degree necessary, for the S&C coach to take a performance-oriented coaching approach, as their job security might be dependent on performing to achieve these targets (e.g., Abraham, Collins, Morgan, & Muir, 2009, Light & Robert, 2010). Whilst previous researchers have discussed the negative influences on mental wellbeing and life after sport of athletes that fit the performance narrative (e.g., Douglas & Carless, 2008), our findings highlight that the reflection process allowed S&C coaches to explore how their performance narrative positively contributed to their coaching practice. Nonetheless, these findings should be understood with caution as coaches who single-mindedly focus their learning on achieving performance success may be doing so at the expense of their athletes’ holistic development (Douglas & Carless, 2006; McMahon & Penney, 2013).

Although the S&C coaches who fitted the performance narrative type developed self-awareness, they were reluctant to take risks or depart too far from the status quo of accepted technocratic practice in order to try a more holistic coaching approach. These S&C coaches advocated a high priority to follow procedure with set and expected coaching responses, which often takes place in a coaching context subject to power relationships and deeply held anti-intellectual beliefs (Abrahams et al., 2009; Thompson, Potrac, & Jones, 2013). Researchers have suggested that such a coaching environment is not conducive to develop
reflective practice (i.e., Abraham et al., 2009; Light & Robert, 2010; Schön, 1987), as it does not encourage individuality, appreciation of differences, facilitation of generating new ideas, and active experimentation. Corroborating this literature, our findings indicated that coaches who fit the performance narrative often simply rejected the helper coaching approach presented in the vignette, as they perceived it not to be effective practice that contributed to athlete success. Stodter and Cushion (2017) have proposed that coaches learn by filtering a learning experience through an individual filter (biography acting as a frame of reference) and a contextual filter (understanding of situation, whether concepts would work or not). Thus, in order to develop holistic approaches for coaches who fit the performance narrative, it may be wise for coach developers to filter these ideas into a situation (vignette) that these coaches may more easily relate to. Since our findings indicate that these coaches can associate with some of the characteristics of the achievement S&C coach (i.e., self-improvement to achieve a common goal), this may be the place to start.

Douglas and Carless (2006, 2009) have emphasised the need for more narrative types to be identified in sport to provide alternatives to the dominant performance narrative. Carless and Douglas (2012) further suggest that considering alternative narrative types, with diverse conceptions of success, promotes mental well-being at the elite level. An original finding is the identification of the helper narrative and the achievement narrative in this study, providing alternative narratives in S&C sport coaching. Our results suggest that S&C coaches who fit the helper narrative type encourage an athlete-centered coaching approach, primarily focused on providing social support. Research has highlighted that an enhanced level of social support has a positive effect on the well-being of the athlete (Miller & Kerr, 2002; Reblin & Uchino, 2008). Thus, our results suggest that coaches who fit the helper narrative have a great potential to develop psychosocial characteristics that form part of a holistic coaching approach. S&C coaches who fit the achievement narrative are able to prioritise whether to
focus on sporting success or holistic development to achieve the common goal. Achiever S&C coaches predominantly focus on the efficacy of teamwork, which can enhance productivity and effectiveness (e.g., McEwan & Beauchamp, 2014; Mendelsohn, 1998). As a result, after engaging with the vignettes, the S&C coaches who fitted the achievement and the helper narratives developed psychosocial behaviours and characteristics including empathy, trust and care, inspiration, and motivation, which are important in becoming an effective S&C coach (e.g., Szedlak et al., 2015, 2018). S&C coaches who fit the helper narrative type were open to be challenged and willing to learn from the vignette, whereas the achievement narrative prompted S&C coaches to prioritise what to reflect upon.

The study is not without its limitations. While we acknowledge the under-representation of female coaches in this sample, every effort was made to recruit elite S&C female coaches but they are generally under-represented across the world (O’Malley & Greenwood, 2018). In summary, this study provides an original account and strategy to develop psychosocial behaviours and characteristics in S&C coaches through the use of reflection and video vignettes. Our findings highlight that the video vignettes prompted discussion by all S&C coaches but appeared to be more impactful with the S&C coaches who fit a non-performance narrative. Furthermore, our findings corroborate that the elite coaching context tends to elicit the performance and in some case the achievement narrative, despite research (e.g., Szedlak et al., 2015, 2018) suggesting that a helper narrative type is effective in this context. Thus, S&C coach developers should provide opportunities for S&C coaches to develop an alternative approach to include in their instructional strategies “toolbox”, the helper coach, who encourages a holistic, athlete-centred coaching practice as advocated by the International Sport Coaching Framework (ICCE, 2013).
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