# The Learner-Centred Status of a Brazilian University Coach Education Program

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## Abstract

Previous research has suggested a shift from instructor-centred to learner-centred approaches in an attempt to improve coach education programs. To implement such crucial change it is essential to master the 'new language' and better understand educational contexts. The purposes of this article are to (a) highlight new social factors indicating an urgent need to change, (b) present a learner-centred framework based on the work of a recognized group of researchers (i.e., Blumberg, Cullen, Harris, and Weimer), and (c) analyse the learner-centeredness of a Bachelor in Physical Education program, especially with respect to its sport performance area. Based on the social factors explored throughout the text and the learner centred principles, results showed inconsistencies between the conceptual orientations mentioned in the 'official documents' and the teaching processes used in the Bachelor program. Recommendations for higher education leaders and instructors are explored.

**Keywords:** coach development, formal training, higher education, instructor, tertiary education

At the turn of the 20th century, it was strongly suggested that higher education institutions should make important changes in how they structure and deliver their services if they expected to still be perceived as a key pillar of society (Bridges, 2000; Gappa, Austin, & Trice, 2007). The pressure to change and adapt comes from a combination of many factors: Growing student enrolment including international students, financial constraints and increased competition among institutions, more research contracts with companies, emergence of interdisciplinary fields of study, faculty focusing more on research than teaching duties, more part-time faculty members, and increased accountability from the public in general (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Bush, Silk, Andrews, & Lauder, 2013; Clark, Moran, Skolnik, & Trick, 2009). To this list of pressure sources, we must add the students—the central element of why higher education institutions exist. The new generation of learners, often called Millennial students or Generation Y, entering colleges and universities are said to have their own characteristics (e.g., over-protective parents, pressure to achieve), expectations (e.g., high marks with minimal effort), and way of learning (e.g., prefer team work) (Côté & Allahar, 2007; Monaco & Martin, 2007).

Contrary to previous generations of students, the millennial students' learning approach has been characterised by their propensity to use various forms of technology in satisfying their desire to get instant access (for help and/or information) and immediate responses (Frand, 2000; Monaco & Martin, 2007). As opposed to many previous generations, a unique challenge for this group of students is increased uncertainty regarding future work as they may end up in careers that do not yet exist (Smith, Gamlem, Sandal, & Engelsen, 2016). Taking into consideration the nature of the students and what they need to learn throughout their academic experience, higher education in the 21st century has to offer learning environments that nurture the development of intellectual and practical skills along with autonomy, creativity, communication, and teamwork (AACU, 2007; Biggs & Tang, 2011; Wagner, 2012). To succeed, higher education institutions have to make a crucial shift regarding the kind of pedagogy they employ (Myers & Myers, 2015; Smith et al., 2016; Weimer, 2013). For Cullen, Harris, and Hill (2012, p. xvi): " : : : creativity and learner autonomy can indeed be taught and that many of the practices we know as learner-centred pedagogy are consistent with the strategies used to develop creativity and autonomy".

The call for an education system where learners are more active is not new. The work of John Dewey (1859–1952) and Carl Rogers (1902–1987) are good examples of seminal work in this regard. More recently, an article by Barr and Tagg (1995) titled 'From teaching to learning: A new paradigm for undergraduate education', is often positioned (Cullen et al., 2012; Weimer, 2013) as being instrumental in questioning the structure of the higher education system as it was at the end of the 20th century. These authors begin their article by stating: "We call the traditional, dominant paradigm the 'Instruction Paradigm'. Under it, colleges have created complex structures to provide for the activity of teaching conceived primarily as delivering 50-minute lectures – the mission of a college is to deliver instruction." (p. 13). Then they define the alternative paradigm, the 'Learning Paradigm', by saying: " : : : [the] purpose is not to transfer knowledge but to create environments and experiences that bring students to discover and construct knowledge for themselves, to make students members of communities of learners that make discoveries and solve problems" (p. 15). However, the authors note that restructuring higher education institutions based on the principles of the learning paradigm will be difficult and might take decades. This prediction seems to be true as many researchers are noticing that the approaches in our current educational system are still based on instructional models in which content transmission is viewed as the main (and often sole) consideration for learning (Cortese, 2003; Cullen et al., 2012).

Inspired by the work of Barr and Tagg, Weimer (2002, 2013) popularized the concept of 'Learner-centred teaching' (LCT) around five key dimensions: The role of the instructor; the balance of power, the function of content, the responsibility for learning, and the purpose and processes of evaluation. The main audience for Weimer's books is faculty striving to make their teaching more learner-centred. Among the advice Weimer gives to instructors, two are worthy of further emphasis here. First, not every course can be fully learner-centred and thus, lecturing is not to be avoided completely. Second, instructors and students will most likely show resistance to a learning context with new rules and roles.

Weimer has influenced other researchers whose work is often presented as complementary. First, Blumberg's (2009) book— 'Developing learner-centred teaching: A practical guide for faculty'— provides a practical guide to help instructors and administrators to assess the learner-centred status of their programs, and to implement incremental changes. This systematic guide presents four stages along a continuum from instructor-centred to learner-centred approaches. Second, Harris and Cullen (2010) in their book 'Leading the learner-centred campus', argue that there is often a disconnect between institutionally espoused values and campus leaders' true operating values. Aiming to help institutional leaders (university chairs, deans, vice presidents, etc.), Harris and Cullen discuss the leadership qualities and specific knowledge needed, and then provide practical applications such as fostering faculty development, orienting new faculty, evaluating teaching quality, and renovating physical learning spaces. Finally, Cullen, Harris, and Hill (2012), in their book 'The learner-centred curriculum: Design and implementation', expound that the general curriculum needs to be re-examined for the institutions to be truly learner-centred. For these authors, the current model uses a curriculum that "is an inflexible, fixed collection of courses occurring in a prescribed, linear sequence, with little opportunity for electives or deviation" (p. 31). The postmodern model they present is a framework for curriculum design based on learnercentred principles.

Considering that "Researchers define learner-centred differently; some don't use any of the terms to describe treatments that most would call learner-centred" (Weimer, 2013, p. IX-X), the complementary of these four books is an asset. In an attempt to summarise the approaches espoused in these books, we compare some key characteristics of the instructor-centred teaching approach (ICT) and the learner-centred teaching approach (LCT) for each of the five key dimensions

(see Table 1). Also, based on the work of these authors, we suggest the following definition of a learner-centred institution:

> A flexible learning environment where teaching and learning strategies are used by instructors to support and facilitate the efforts of the students (individually and in groups) to achieve learning outcomes (knowledge base and learning skills) for their growth as creative and independent learners in ways that both satisfy the Department's/School's expectations for graduation, and also prepare them for an unknown future.

## Coach Education Programs

The certification of sport coaches is, to some extent, unique compared with other professions (Trudel, Culver, & Richard, 2016). Coaches can be certified through programs offered by National Governing Bodies and/or by universities; two very different educational contexts. It has been said that both types of programs have a role to play. The first is generally delivered to volunteer coaches over a short period of time (few weekends or weeks) and provides the minimum in terms of sport specific knowledge (Demers, Woodburn, & Savard, 2006). Coach education programs offered by universities have gained much popularity in the last few decades (Bush et al., 2013; Turner & Nelson, 2009; Zakrajsek, Thompson, & Dieffenbach, 2015). Generally, students will spend three to four years in these programs and there is generally a strong attempt to help student-coaches become reflective coaches (Trudel, Gilbert, & Werthner, 2010).

Paquette and Trudel (2016), in a recent analysis of the literature on coach education using Weimer's and Blumberg's conceptual frameworks, concluded that " : : : the majority of critiques and recommendations targeting coach education are not only closely aligned with the LCT framework, but in many cases, would be satisfied with the adoption of one or more recommendations made by Weimer to support LCT" (p. 60). Based on Blumberg's (2009) recommendations, it is largely unrealistic to have all courses in a coach education program be completely learner-centred. Indeed, the suggestion is that contextual factors must be taken into consideration when assessing the appropriateness and degree of learner-centredness including: (a) the type of students, (b) the level of the course, (c) the number of students enrolled in the course, (d) the content of the course, (e) the instructor's own personal philosophy of teaching, and (f) the culture or philosophy of the campus, department or educational program.

## Brazilian Coach Education Programs

The coach education system in Brazil has been cited as an interesting case to investigate due to its sizable cultural diversity and economic inequality (Rodrigues Marques, Nunomura, & Pombo Menezes, 2016) as well as the fact that, contrary to many other countries, coaching is an established profession. This means that to coach, Brazilians need to hold a university diploma called a 'Bachelor in Physical Education' (Milistetd, Trudel, Mesquita, & Nascimento, 2014). Galatti and colleagues (2016), in their analysis of Brazilian publications (in Portuguese) on sport coaching from 2000 to 2015, found that among the 82 published articles only two (Marchi & Ferreira, 2009; Nascimento, Ramos, Marcon, Saad, & Collet, 2009) focused on the 1998 legislation mandating a university degree in physical education for all coaches regardless of the context in which they coach. In both studies the authors indicated that programs tend to focus on the technical aspects of coaching using traditional teaching methods. A third article (Milistetd et al., 2014), published in an English language journal, provides information on the Bachelors in Physical Education delivered by 20 universities in Brazil. The analysis of these documents indicated, among other things, that the number of hours in the curriculum varied widely, and the programs tended to make the sport performance- focused students (the two other focus areas being health and leisure) more generalists than specialists, meaning they were more qualified to work in the participation sport coaching context than in high performance coaching.

In an attempt to contribute to the research area of coach education in higher education, and more specifically to the recent increase of sport coaching research in Brazil (Galatti et al., 2016), we decided to analyse the learner-centeredness of a Bachelor in Physical Education program, especially with respect to its sport performance area. The specific questions to answer were (a) What do 'official documents' published by the government, the university, and the department have to say about the learner-centred status of the Bachelor in Physical Education? (b) What do the course outlines have to say about the learner-centred status of the Bachelor in Physical Education? (c) Do instructors refer to elements related to LCT when talking about their teaching? and (d) What do students have to say about their study experience in this program?

**Table 1   Comparison of Instructor-Centered Teaching (ICT) and Learner-Centered Teaching (LCT) Approaches**

| Dimensions | ICT Approach | LCT Approach |
|---|---|---|
| Role of the instructor | - Act as an expert who must lecture or demonstrate the course material<br>- Encourage individual work<br>- Ask questions and often provide answers<br>- Students in a passive role of taking notes<br>- Cover all material included in syllabus | - Act as facilitator, guide student activities<br>- Encourage collaborative works<br>- Encourage students to ask questions and come up with potential answers<br>- Use activities such as simulations, debates, problem-solving<br>- Show flexibility in amount of material to cover based on student needs and progress |
| Balance of power | - Assumed that courses belong to instructors and all instructors requirements / policies should be in course syllabus<br>- Instructors decide what is to be learned, activities and assignments, assessment weighting, and calendar (pace and order) | - Instructors discuss course syllabus and are open students' suggestions<br>- Instructors provide students with opportunities to (a) select some readings / assignments, (b) know (from day one) how many points needed for each grade standard, (c) self-evaluate some of their work, (d) evaluate their colleagues' work |
| Function of content | - Take for granted that all students have similar backgrounds<br>- Allow students to memorize content<br>- Cover all content prescribed because it is foundational to subsequent courses<br>- Develop knowledge-base | - Consider students' previous knowledge<br>- Encourage students to transform and reflect on content<br>- Prioritize learning over covering content<br>- Develop knowledge base and learning skills (disagree with each other; critical reflection) |
| Responsibility for learning | - Because students are not well prepared to take full responsibility, instructors use strategies (often based on grades) to control learning environment: mandatory attendance, penalties for missed deadlines or being late, bonus points for …, etc.<br>- Extrinsic motivation predominates | - Because students can learn to be more responsible for their learning, instructors will co-create learning environment and let students experience the benefits of good time management and consequences of being passive<br>- Intrinsic motivation predominates |
| Purpose and processes of evaluation | - Mainly summative (what grades to give) to identify the good students (use normal curve) | - Both formative and summative to gauge student progress to determine whether learning is happening |

## Methodology

An instrumental case study design (Stake, 2005) was used. It has been proposed that a case study is not only a methodological choice but also a choice of what to study, serving as a means for evaluating a process and its product at the same time (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). According to Stake (2005), an instrumental case study may focus on a specific problem or may help in refining a theory. The case has a supporting role in enabling a broader understanding of a particular phenomenon or population, from in-depth analysis of the process, examining contexts, activities, and relationships. Therefore, in our research project, the case can assist in the development of a deep understanding of the pedagogical dimensions (learnercentred principles) within the real-life context (a Brazilian university), from the perspectives of those involved (administrators, faculty, students). The research project was approved by The National Committee for Ethics in Human Research (n. 169.330/ 2012) and all participants freely offered their informed consent.

## The Case

Milistetd and colleagues' study (2014) on the Bachelor in Physical Education program delivered in 20 universities, revealed differences in the number of hours spent globally and also with regard to some specific components of the programs. The program we have chosen for this case is positioned at the mid-point regarding the range for the 20 programs previously studied: (a) the total of hours for the program is 3,200 (R = 2855–4250), (b) the hours for common core/fundamental courses is 825 (R = 770–1424), (c) the hours for coaching/sport specific courses is 900 (R = 320–1010), (d) the hours for

internships in sport is 150 (R = 0–420), and (e) the hours for cultural-scientific-academic activities (CSAA) is 240 (R = 120–300).

**Documents Analysed**

The composition of the learner-centred framework presented earlier allowed us to perform different types of analyses. First, we analysed three 'official documents' to reveal the explicit intent of the institution – the institutionally espoused values (Harris & Cullen, 2010) and the curriculum design tendencies (Cullen et al., 2012). In conducting this analysis, it was important to keep in mind that these documents were not produced using a learner-centred approach and therefore a large part of the content refers to the university's and the department's structure, including the characteristics (age, number, etc.) of their respective populations. The Ministry's document called 'National guidelines for undergraduate programs in physical education' was only six pages and provided general information for administrators in the Brazilian educational system. The University's document called 'The Undergraduate program regulation' was 30 pages long and focused on the rules for all university programs (e.g., student enrolment, course transfers, time limit to graduate, etc.). The Department's document called 'The bachelor regulation in Physical Education' was 129 pages that brought together information on various aspects (e.g., characteristics of the program, description of the three areas of health, leisure, and sport performance, course content, teaching strategies, etc.). The same procedure was used to analyse all of these documents. The first author, who had experience as a teacher in a similar program in another university and a good understanding of the learner-centred approach, read each document multiple times to extract the sentences that had clear links with the learner-centred framework. Then he translated this material to English for discussion/validation with his colleagues.

The second type of analysis focused on the content of a sample of course outlines (syllabi). For Harris and Cullen (2010, p. 103) the course syllabus is of great interest "because it represents the mind-set, the teacher's philosophy of learning, attitude toward students, and conceptualization of the course. When examined collectively, course syllabi can provide a picture of a department or unit's philosophy of learning". In most cases, instructors are required to provide course outlines with the following components: (a) course description, (b) course goals, (c) specific content, (d) teaching methods, (e) assessment details, and (f) references. Eighteen syllabi were selected to represent the different components of the Bachelor degree (see Table 2 in Findings section). The components are 'common core courses' (e.g., philosophy, biomechanics, nutrition), 'health & leisure courses' (e.g., health and life quality, recreation and leisure), 'coaching courses' (e.g., sport pedagogy, sport management, sport psychology), 'sport courses' (e.g., soccer, tennis), 'internship', and 'Cultural-Scientific-Academic Activities (CSAA)' (e.g., conferences, working with a researcher, working in a sport federation). The indicators (left side of Table 2) used to perform a deductive analysis of the syllabi come from our learner-centred framework. Specifically, they were developed from Harris and Cullen's (2010) matrix for assessing learning-centred qualities in course syllabi, and Blumberg's (2009) rubrics to assess the learner-centred continuum.

The third type of analysis was undertaken regarding the interviews conducted with instructors and students in the sport performance area. To prepare the interview guides, pilot interviews were performed with representatives from each group. The goal for the instructor interviews was to document their perspectives on their teaching practices. Eight of the 11 full-time instructors involved in the sport performance area at the time of the study agreed to participate. After a brief welcome, instructors were asked to discuss their teaching approach (planning, delivering, evaluating) and to comment on the program of study in general. The interviews were conducted in Portuguese and lasted between 60–75 minutes. The transcripts were sent to participants via email to confirm the content, and no changes were requested. QSR Nvivo10 software was used to support the analysis of the interview transcripts (109 pages, single spaced) based on Braun and Clark's (2006)

thematic analysis approach, taking into consideration the five dimensions of the LCT framework (Weimer, 2002, 2013). The final codification (see Table 2) was approved after discussion/validation with two members of the research team.

The goal for the student interviews was to capture the students' perceptions of their journey throughout the bachelor program (especially the experiential learning activities) (Theoretical-Practical Classes, CPP, Internship, CSAA), and their general perceptions regarding how the program prepared them to be a sport coach. The number of students graduating from the program each year is around 60 and it can be estimated that around 1/6 of this cohort aspire to be coaches. Accordingly, eight students with a desire to be coaches were interviewed at the end of their fourth (i.e., last) year of the program. The student interviews lasted between 50–70 minutes and the transcripts were sent to participants via email to confirm the content, and no changes were requested. QSR Nvivo10 software was used to support the analysis of the interview transcripts (125 pages, single spaced) based on Braun and Clark's (2006) thematic analysis approach. The final codification was approved after discussion/validation with two members of the research team.

### Findings
This section is divided into three parts. We first present results of analysis of the 'official documents', followed by analysis of the syllabi along with the instructors' comments. Finally, we present the students' perspectives on the program.

### The 'Official Documents'
***Ministry's document.*** The main points included in the 'National guidelines for undergraduate programs in physical education' (Federal government of Brazil, 2004) are presented in Table 3. At the time of graduation it is expected that students will be equipped to work in one or more of three areas (i.e., health, leisure, and sport performance). By mandating that the programs provide not only fundamental knowledge and specific knowledge but also opportunities to apply these categories of knowledge (experiential learning activities), there is a desire to have students in an active role in the teaching-learning process.

***University's document.*** The University's document contains general information that is applicable to all programs offered by the University. Only a few sections of the document provide information directly related to the purpose of our study:
• The curriculum: Each program must include: (a) compulsory courses suggested by the National Council of Education, (b) compulsory courses to fulfil the program's needs, and (c) optional courses selected by the Department but these courses should not represent more than 20% of the curriculum.
• Students' merit: One Student Merit Medal and Diploma will be awarded per program during the graduation ceremony. The criteria are: (a) an academic achievement index of eight or more from a maximum of 10, (b) not having failed courses, and (c) not to having undergone disciplinary sanctions.
• Students' attendance: Instructors will record the students' attendance in each class using an official form, and students with less than 75% of attendance will fail the course.

***Department's documents.*** The information contained in the documents produced by the Department that had links with the purpose of this study are:
• Courses: On average, students will take four years to complete the program composed of 52 courses of which three courses are optional.
• Students as adults: The initial training (the program) must provide students with opportunities to be at the centre of their preparation and not assuming a passive role. Therefore, students should be treated as adults who have previous experience, a good level of cognitive maturity, learning style preferences, and the ability to take responsibility for their decisions.

• Sharing power: Autonomy and independence are at the core of the learning process but they are impossible to develop if the spontaneity of the students is inhibited. Thus, the learning process in higher education should provide a balance of power between instructors and students. The instructors should assume the role of learning facilitators instead of owners of the truth, and the students should be allowed to challenge what is presented to them.

• Competencies and skills: Initial training cannot be limited to the acquisition of more and more knowledge or sport-specific skills. The program should also help the students to develop their critical attitude and thinking. At the end of the program the students should be able to:

○ Plan, act, and evaluate programs in sport, leisure, and health;

○ Coordinate and manage multi-professional teams;

○ Show good decision-making and listening skills;

○ Demonstrate autonomy in their self-learning;

○ Show good leadership and communication skills;

○ Show creativity for future work in a changing society;

○ Use new technological resources in professional practice;

○ Contribute to production of new knowledge.

• Labour market: The development of physical education professionals has to consider the increasing need to take risks and be challenged because of the increasing speed of changes in society. Therefore, constant development in terms of flexibility and adaptability is needed to meet the requirements.

**The Syllabi and Instructors' Teaching Experiences**

The results of our analysis of the information contained in 18 syllabi and the comments of eight instructors when discussing their teaching (planning, delivering, evaluating) are presented in Table 2.

Table 2   Analysis of Syllabi and Instructors' Comments Using Learner-Centered Teaching (LCT) Indicators

| LCT indicators | Common Core | | | | | | Health & Leisure | | Coaching Courses | | | | Sport Courses | | | | Internship | CSAA[a] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 |
| Function of content | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Evaluation of prior knowledge | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | |
| Knowledge base | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | |
| Learning skills | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | |
| Role of the instructor | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Lecturing | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | |
| Group discussions | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | | |
| Collaborative work | X | X | | X | | | X | | X | | | X | | | | | | |
| Problem based learning | | | | | | | | | X | | | X | | | | | | |
| Reflective journal | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | |
| Balance of power | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Students' choices | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | X |
| optional readings | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| optional assessments | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | |
| Form of assessment | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Presence in class (%) | 30 | 20 | 20 | | | | | | 10 | | | 20 | | | 10 | 30 | | |
| Written exams (%) | - | 30 | 60 | 60 | 90 | 40 | 60 | 40 | 40 | 80 | 50 | | 60 | 60 | 40 | 20 | | |
| Oral presentations (%) | 50 | 30 | | 30 | | | 20 | 20 | | | | 30 | 10 | | | 10 | | |
| Reports (%) | | | 20 | 10 | | | 10 | | 20 | 20 | 20 | 60 | 15 | 10 | 10 | 20 | 100 | |
| Homework (%) | 20 | | | | 10 | 60 | 10 | 20 | | | | 20 | | | | | | |
| Practical (coach's role) (%) | | | | | | | | 20 | 20 | | | | 15 | 20 | 30 | 20 | | |
| Self-assessments (%) | 10 | 20 | | | | | | | 10 | | | | | 10 | | 10 | | |
| Summative | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Formative | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | X | | | | |
| Responsibility for learning | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Literacy Skills | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Self-directed study | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| New technology | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Communications (Online Platform) | | | X | | | X | X | | | | X | X | X | | | | | |
| Hybrid courses | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

[a]CSAA = Cultural-Scientific-Academic Activities.

**Table 3  Ministry's Document: National Guidelines for Undergraduate Programs in Physical Education**

| Key Points of the Document | Details |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Bachelor in Physical Education | - Designed to offer a minimum of 3200 hours over four years<br>- Must prepare versatile professionals capable of working in different contexts (health, leisure, sport performance) |
| 2. The object of study is 'human movement' | - A deep understanding of the body in action |
| 3. Components: | |
|   3.1 Fundamental knowledge | - Courses on topics such as: sociology, philosophy, ethics, history, anatomy, physiology, human growth, etc. |
|   3.2 Specific knowledge | - Courses on topics such as: sport pedagogy, sport training, gymnastics, martial arts, fitness training, life quality, etc. |
|   3.3 Experiential learning | - Ensure theory-practice complementarity through Curricular pedagogical practices, Internship, and Cultural-scientific-academic activities |
|    - Curricular pedagogical practices (CPP) | - Opportunities to play the role of physical educator during courses |
|    - Internship | - Opportunities to apply knowledge in different contexts (health, leisure, sport performance) |
|    - Cultural-scientific-academic activities (CSAA) | - Opportunities to select a learning context to extend their knowledge. Examples of contexts: community work, research laboratory work, attending conferences, etc. |

*Function of content.* According to the syllabi, the instructors rarely spent time evaluating the previous knowledge of the students related to the content that was to be taught in the course. The focus appears to be on the knowledge base (i.e., specific to the course topic) while the objective of developing learning skills is absent. The only possible exception took this form: "Develop writing skills related to sport context" (Syllabus #14). In general, the instructors tend to be more concerned about what to cover or what will not be covered than by what is learned by the students. For Instructor 5, the students' lack of experience (general assumption) limits the quantity of content to cover: "I can teach every aspect of this sport but only a few elements focused on performance. We spend too much time on basic content because most students come without any real experience in the sport."

*Role of the instructor.* The instructors' main roles seem to be lecturing and facilitating group discussions. A few instructors facilitate collaborative works but these activities are rarely organized around problem-based learning principles. Except for one case (Syllabus #14), the instructors did not use a reflective journal for the students to report their reflections on the learning activities. Interestingly, a pattern of the teaching process emerged from the data. The instructor begins by teaching some theory (in the core or coaching courses) or technical/tactical movements (in the sport courses). Second, the students go into the community and observe how it is done in the real world. Third, the students teach their peers and/or people from community. It is worth mentioning that steps two and three might be absent when the instructor feels short on time. This quote illustrates this pattern: "After they [students] have learned the general content, the teaching methods, and the sport specific elements, I asked them to watch a training session and make a report on whether what I taught was present or not" (Ins. 3). It should be mentioned also that CPP does not seem to be well defined or understood by some instructors: "I confess, I was a little insecure about how to develop CPP activities. Each instructor seems to do it his way and there is no document telling how to do it" (Ins. 6).

*Balance of power.* When looking at how power is shared between instructors and students in terms of choices students can make, the data indicate that students rarely have the possibility to choose their readings or ways to be assessed. The only occasion where students are allowed to make a choice is when they select the context for their internship (Syllabus #17). The data also suggests that the syllabus seems to be the instrument used to tell students that the instructors are the ones who control the course: "We should present the syllabus at the beginning of each semester. The students should be aware of what will be developed during the classes and especially how they will be evaluated." (Ins. 6).

*Form of assessment.* The instructors assess the students using a summative approach composed of different evaluation tools, the main ones being 'written exams' followed by 'reports' and 'oral

presentations'. When the students have the possibility to evaluate themselves, the importance is 20% or less of the final mark (Syllabus #2). For some instructors, giving points for attending classes is a strategy to motivate students to participate and not an appreciation that learning is happening: "I need to give points for attending classes because it is how I can keep the students involved. If I don't give points for the practical classes, they don't do the activities." (Ins. 6).

***Responsibility of learning.*** Instructors tend to have developed a strong assumption that they need to control the learning environment because students are not mature enough: "Look, the students will only do what we ask if it is a grading activity. If I ask them to read an article to be discussed during the next class, only one or two students will do it." (Ins. 7). "The University offers many opportunities for students to develop themselves, but unfortunately it is only after graduation that they will see the opportunities they could have had but they did let go." (Ins. 8).

***New technology.*** Only a few instructors seem to use new technology in their courses and it was generally limited to telling the students that "Readings will be accessible on the Moodle platform" (Syllabus # 13) or, on occasions, to participate in a chat room.

***Two exceptional instructors.*** Among the eight instructors interviewed, two seemed to have a more LCT approach as shown by the content of their syllabus and some of their comments.

*Instructor 1 (syllabus #14)* – Four elements bring his teaching closer to LCT. First he looks at the students' prior knowledge: "I do first a life story of their sport experience to break possible rejection and avoid potential fear. I consider the experience that they have, not the performance, but the experience". Second, the students have the possibility to discuss the syllabus: "I discuss with them the syllabus. If they find that some content should be further explored or be allocated more time to develop, we can get into a consensus". Third, he is more concerned about what is learned than the content that must be covered: "Sometimes what was planned and the students' reactions are not what was expected, what do you do? We make changes. This insertion in real-time is positive for the student's independence". Forth, he includes formative evaluation: "After each evaluation the students can work to improve their grade individually or in small groups".

*Instructor 2 (syllabus #9)* – This instructor has his teaching based on some of the LCT principles. First, when assessing the students, he uses some forms of formative evaluation: "When I give the assessment grades to students, we correct together the assessment and if someone wants to improve the score according to the questions that were not good, they can retake the assessment". Second, he helps the students to combine theory and practice by asking them to reflect: "It's a concern that I have. I present the technical-tactical base of the sport, and then we discuss the educational potential of the activity. I make a real effort to show them more than theory". Finally, he builds collaborative learning activities with some elements of the problem-based learning approach: "For example, the topic was about defensive strategies. We discussed, they formed groups and worked for 30 minutes to find the best way to coach some aspects. After all of the presentations we discussed what happened from a coach's perspective."

## The Students' Perspectives

For the purpose of this article, we concentrate our analysis of the students' perspectives on five themes: (a) Balance between theory and practice, (b) Curricular pedagogical practices (CPP), (c) Internship, (d) Cultural-scientific-academic activities (CSAA), and (e) Students as future professionals. These themes are of particular interest because they are mentioned in the 'official documents' and as experiential learning activities they can occupy a central position in a LCT approach.

***Balance between theory and practice.*** For many students, the theory part of some courses was an important component of the program: "The Sport pedagogy course helped me a lot, especially the different methodological approaches. Before, I had no idea about that. The instructor taught me

that we could structure training in different ways" (Student 1). "While I was an athlete, I never tried to understand the tactical system like playing 5 × 1. Here I got the knowledge of why to do it and what are the advantages and disadvantages" (Student 2).

But other students found that there was sometimes too much theory and not enough opportunities to apply it: "I think in some courses there was too much theory and not enough practice. It is only when I started working at the club during the internship that I started to reflect about some concepts" (Student 3).

***Curricular pedagogical practices (CPP).*** As mentioned before, the Ministry's document expects that in each course there will be opportunities to play the role of instructor/coach – a way to force integration of theory into practice. How meaningful the CPP was varied considerably among the students. The CPP can be observation activities outside the University: "When I went to see an adult soccer practice, I understood what our instructor was talking about when he taught us the integrative training methods" (Student 1). "Many of our CPPs were restricted to observing basketball or soccer training sessions at a college, and making a report after. This had little impact for me" (Student 2).

CPPs can also be teaching their peers: "It was very important for me, firstly I was afraid because I did not know much about swimming. So, it was nice to be with colleagues to create a good relationship and increase confidence" (Student 1). "If we were going to coach real athletes, they would be much more rigid. Here if you start a poor activity, the classmates don't care and keep quiet" (Student 4).

***Internship.*** There is a list of clubs and sport organizations from which the students can select their internship contexts. The 150 hours reserved for the internship is divided into five components: Theoretical class (20 h), Observation (20 h), Planning with the University supervisor (30 h), Intervention (60 h), and Final report, including presentation at the University (20 h). Thus, students direct active participation (intervention) in a coaching context is limited. Although the University supervisor is supposed to observe students during their internship, the assessment is generally based only on the students' participation.

For many students, their internships were a eye opening: "We are used to coaching adolescents and adults—our peers, and then I was training children. It was something totally new. We had to come up with new learning strategies to keep their attention" (Student 4). "I even went through some troubling situations. For example, I had to deal with some parents. I realized that it is very important for a coach to deal with people and learn to behave in front of them" (Student 1).

Some students recalled some negative internship experiences: "Well, I did not do that much during my internship. I was just giving the balls to the coach" (Student 3). "The coach gave me the opportunity to coach his athletes, but I did not feel confident to coach because I was learning about that. I would have liked the University supervisor helping me but he came to see my internship only twice" (Student 5).

***Cultural-scientific-academic activities (CSAA).*** The CSAA activities are the students' choices to extend their knowledge. Many of the students selected a sport context. For some it was to become a better coach: "I have never been a high performance athlete, so I knew I had to give my best at the University to gain knowledge. I did three basketball courses, assisting the instructor in charge. I had a great experience as a coach" (Student 6). "My previous experiences were working with players individually. It was the first time I could lead a team and train a group. I was exposed to the problems and difficulties" (Student 7). But for others it was to explore new avenues:

I was in the office of the volleyball federation and I could see volleyball from another perspective than just playing. The statistical analysis of the matches can provide a lot of information like why an attacker is not playing well, the technical condition of the player that is harming the team, and so on. For me the team plays like an orchestra, the coach has to understand all the notes that each athlete can play (Student 8)

***Students as future professionals.*** Four key points can be extracted from the students' comments regarding how the program as a whole prepared them for their future professions. First, some of the compulsory courses did not fit with the students' needs: "When we arrive at the University, we have to take courses that we do not want. Many courses are compulsory but they make no sense as what we want to do as a professional. We are wasting time instead of working in the area that we want to learn" (Student 5). "I think I can identify many courses that are not going to prepare me to be a professional. Martial art has nothing to do with me and I only did it because it was mandatory" (Student 1).

Second, instructors teaching the course were reported to make a difference regarding relevance to the futures of the students: "It depends on the instructor. In the handball course, my instructor had a lot of experience but suddenly a new prof came with no experience at all. He tried but could not contribute because of his own experience" (Student 6). "There were courses where we could discuss more deeply. After each lesson in volleyball, we could give our opinion of what was good and what was not. It was an interesting exercise to reflect as coaches" (Student 2).

Third, the students' own learning mind-set was also a factor to consider: "The program offers several possibilities to develop as professionals, including in the coaching area. There are varsity teams, sports pedagogy labs, voluntary internships in social sport projects, but you know, most of the students just want to do the minimum" (Student 6).

Fourth, the Bachelor degree is only the beginning of a learning journey to become a coach:
Everyone comes in the program expecting something. Many want to become physical trainers and work in fitness centres, but those who want to be a coach will also have to take courses in sports federations or in other places. This program will not solve all the problems. I believe that the content and workload are satisfactory for an initial training. (Student 2)

**Discussion**
The purpose of the present study was to analyse the learnercenteredness of a Bachelor in Physical Education program, especially with respect to its sport performance area – the students interested in pursuing a career in coaching. Looking first at the documents provided by the Ministry, the University and the Department we can say that they are some contradictory messages about the desire to adopt a LCT approach. On one hand, there are statements supporting a learner-centred environment. The Ministry's document mentions that this diploma should prepare versatile professionals who will be able to adapt and work in three different contexts. The document also shows the importance of having learners in an active role by providing access to many experiential learning activities (CPP, internships, CSAA). The Department's document underlines the importance for instructors to share power with students who must be considered as adults being autonomous and independent with a potential to become an innovative, creative, collaborative, and decision-making person.

But at the same time there is a desire to strongly control and direct the students' learning journey, especially in the University's document. Students have limited freedom in the selection of their

courses, their presence in class is controlled, and if they are "good students" (high marks, present in classes, follow the rules) they can be the "student of the year". This is an extrinsic motivator that will not "bring the liberating message that learning matters more than grades, especially from vantage points later in life" (Weimer, 2013, p 176). Is this an environment where students can feel safe and supported to take risks and develop autonomy? For Harris and Cullen (2010, p. 19) the instructional paradigm is "a paradigm characterized by control over individuals, ownership of knowledge, and organizational fragmentation that fosters isolation and an unhealthy competition among all members of the institution". These characteristics certainly run counter to a LCT approach.

While these documents provide what is expected, the espoused values, the content of the syllabi along with the instructors' and students' comments have the capacity to bring us closer to what is happening in reality – the true operating values (Harris & Cullen, 2010). First, we can say that generally speaking, the instructors use an ICT approach because they: decide what students will learn, make the decisions about what course content, control the pace at which content is covered, set up the calendar, determine activities and assignments, establish course policies (attendance, due dates, etc.), and so on. Under such conditions, the students have extremely limited voice and they learn that the courses belong to the instructors (Weimer, 2013). The argument that students are not mature enough to take responsibility of their learning, "does not justify making all the decisions for them" (Weimer, 2013, p. 91). When will the students learn that many decisions come with consequences that we have to assume, if not in the supported and guided environment that Universities should provide?

The general structure of the Brazilian Bachelor in Physical Education shares many characteristics with university-based coach education programs in other countries as it includes fundamental courses (physiology, nutrition, etc.), coaching courses (sport pedagogy, sport management, etc.), sport courses (athletic, gymnastic, etc.) and internships (Jones & Turner, 2006; Kuklick, Gearity, & Thompson, 2015a). One peculiarity in this case is the strong attempt to force the integration of theory into practice by providing many experiential learning opportunities. The amount of time students should spend in CPP activities, Internships, and the CSAA comprises approximately 40% of the program. Unfortunately, important issues diminish the learning potential. First, regarding CPP, (a) the time devoted can easily be cut for course content to be covered, (b) teaching/coaching peers can serve as an initiation but "does not replicate the authentic complexities of actual coaching contexts that coaches experience (Cronin & Lowes, 2016, p. 1), and (c) CPP seems not well defined or understood by some instructors. Second, the Internships and CSAA activities have very few requirements and the evaluation process is limited to grading the hours spent in the field and making reports. This is in contrast to best practice suggestions whereby such activities are understood as requiring "teaching strategies, including the deliberate integration of theory and practice, the development of specific learning outcomes for practice, and creative reflection exercises and assignments" (Stirling, Kerr, Banwell, MacPherson, & Heron, 2014, p. 14). Instructors using a LCT approach see the difference between keeping students active and offering real experiential learning activities that involve reflection, assessment, and learning tasks (Weimer, 2013).

In sum, it seems that 'on paper' there are some indications that the Bachelor in Physical Education program should be based on LCT principles but the implementation is lacking. Using the literature about learner-centred paradigms and studies on sport coaches' education programs, especially those conducted in universities, we provide some recommendations to help university leaders and instructors to move progressively toward a LCT environment.

1) Curricular change toward LCT is a challenge because it implies a shift in the learning paradigm. Therefore, many actors (leaders, instructors, students) will often show resistance (Blumberg, 2009;

Weimer, 2013). Thus, it is important to move progressively by offering faculty development workshops, especially for new faculties (Harris & Cullen, 2010) and to involve instructors who are already using learner-centred practices in their classes (Cullen et al., 2012). In this case we have identified at least two instructors who could play a key role. However, "When change occurs at the individual course level, students have learner-centred experiences by chance" (Weimer, 2013, p. 230). Convincing colleagues and administrators to work together is far from easy. Implementing a learner-centred teaching approach is more than adopting/changing a few ways of doing things. Early in the process, all actors need to learn to speak a 'new language' where new terms are used and usual terms can be defined differently (Cullen et al., 2012).

2) There could be a greater use of Problem-based learning (PBL). For Weimer (2013, p. 44), PBL "is a learner-centred method that puts students much more in charge of their own learning" if done properly. Studies undertaken in coach education programs in universities show that PBL can contribute to the students' learning but it requires an investment of time. Coaching being a complex social activity, the scenarios' credibility will depend on how much the problem and its presentation reflect the coaching reality (Araya, Bennie, & O'Connor, 2015; Jones & Turner, 2006; Morgan, Jones, Gilbourne, & Llewellyn, 2012).

3) The findings suggest that experiential learning activities such as the internships and the CSAA can play a key role in the students' preparation for their entry in the job market. However, it is not enough to identify a context and send the students hoping that learning will happen. Many studies on student-coaches' internships report good experiences and bad experiences (e.g., Dieffenbach, Murray, & Zakrajsek, 2011; Kuklick et al., 2015a). Suggestions to improve the quality of the internships are to (a) have clear a description of the support provided by both the University supervisor and sport/club supervisor, (b) discuss the students' expectations, especially for high-performance coaching contexts where pressure and political tensions are more present, and (c) equip the students with strategies and tools to reflect on their experience (Gomes, Jones, Batista, & Mesquita, 2016; Kuklick, Gearity, & Thompson, 2015b; Zakrajsek et al., 2015). The checklists and students' evaluation forms suggested by Smith (2008) are a good starting point to optimize the potential of experiential learning activities.

4) For Cullen et al. (2012, p. 159) the learner-centred curriculum cannot be addressed "without talking about technology and the many tools available that help us transform teaching". Researchers have recently evaluated the impacts of some technology applications in coach education programs including blogs (Stoszkowski & Collin, 2014), online meetings – chat rooms (Driska & Gould, 2014), video diaries (De Martin-Silva, Fonseca, Jones, Morgan, & Mesquita, 2015), and online reflective journals (Kuklick et al., 2015b). These studies have shown that new technology holds the potential to facilitate learning and make teaching more learner-centred but the instructors have to commit to investing time to learn new pedagogical skills and to support the interactions with and among the students (Reddan, McNally, & Chipperfield, 2016).

**Conclusion**
Blumberg and Pontiggia (2011, p. 190) suggest that: "Many institutions of higher education claim that they are student or learner-centred [but] few of them have data to show that their educational programs and courses actually are learner-centred". Therefore, we believe that by conducting this case study we are contributing to the research on coach education programs delivered in university settings. However, considering that the requirements for undergraduate coach education degrees tend to vary between institutions (Dieffenbach & Wayda, 2010; Milistetd et al., 2014) we caution about generalization. Our hope is that the present study will be a point of reference for researchers, administrators, and instructors, as it provides a perspective that challenges the current way of

designing and implementing curriculum and therefore "can be used to make sense of the [their] world" (Wenger-Trayner, 2013, p. 1).

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