



# Pathways into Coaching Sport with Disability

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## Introduction

According to Stats Canada (Stats Canada, 2008), in 2006 4.4 million Canadians reported having an activity limitation indicating a disability rate of 14.3%. Persons with a disability develop a more positive sense of self, personal empowerment, and a higher sense of connectedness to society when they participate in sport than those who do not participate (Ashton-Shaeffer et al., 2001; Depauw & Gavron, 2005). However, the research area of coaching athletes with a disability lacks empirical data and the current research is 15-20 years old (Depauw & Gavron, 2005).

The Canadian Policy on Sport for Persons with a Disability (2006) has 4 major objectives:

1. Enhanced Participation
2. Enhanced Excellence
3. Enhanced Capacity
4. Enhanced Interaction



It is also concerned with removing barriers to disability sport through increasing the research conducted in this area. This will address specific

concerns and challenges faced by coaches in sport disability, such as limited training opportunities and resources and a need to be extremely creative (Cregan, Bloom & Reid, 2007).

## Purpose

The purpose of this research is to identify key elements of the pathway into becoming a coach of a disability sport. What are coaches previous experiences and how do they learn to coach disabled sport? Here we take a closer look at two coaches in particular and distinguish similarities and differences between coaches of disability sport.

## Research Methods

Interviews were conducted with disability sport coaches discussing their experiences in sports. Also, using SurveyMonkey, a survey combining quantitative and qualitative data was created to collect demographic information and other information pertinent to Para sport organizations (e.g., Sport history of coaches, where and how many hours coaching per week) which will be circulated to coaches across Canada in the next month. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded using Nvivo software (QRS, 2010).

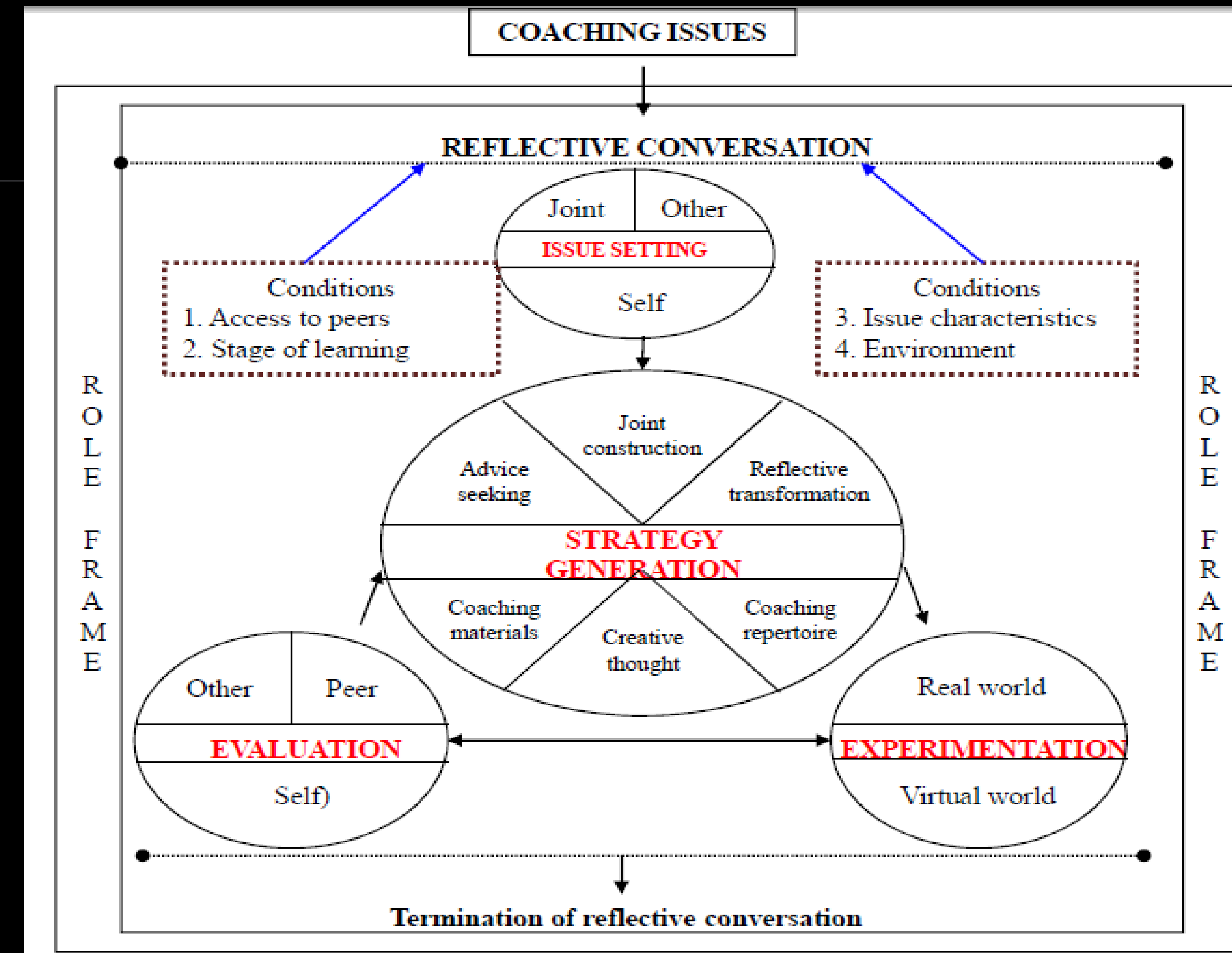


Figure 1. From Gilbert, W. & Trudel, P. (2001). Learning to coach through experience: Reflection in model youth sport coaches. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 21, 16-34.

	Sport Experience	Coach Learning	Coach Education	Strategy Generation
<b>Coach 1</b> Disabled Coaches wheelchair basketball	Played before disabled in competitive hockey	Through discussions with others, reflecting throughout the season and most importantly through hands-on experience	Basic NCCP for able-bodied basketball, not for wheelchair basketball	Uses decisions off those learned from previous coaches' methods/philosophies
<b>Coach 2</b> Able-bodied Coaches adaptive waterski and Alpine	Never was enrolled in sports as a child		CSF (Canadian Snowboarding Federation, Waterski and Wakeboard Canada NCCP courses (for able-bodied)	Uses Internet to adapt able-bodied drills to disabled-sport abilities  Uses break down and analysis of problem to find the appropriate solutions

Table 1. Summarizes the results of the qualitative interview with two coaches of disability sport. Yellow represents coach 1, red represents coach 2 and orange represents both perspectives

## Results and Discussion

Table 1 summarizes the main findings and shows that both the coaches engaged in a reflective conversation that fits the Gilbert and Trudel (2001) model. They used discussion with other coaches (advice seeking and joint construction), reflection on practices (creative thought and coaching repertoire), and the Internet (coaching materials) to generate solutions to coaching issues. As seen in other studies, both coaches emphasized in-the-field experience as the best way to learn and develop as a coach (Erikson et al, 2008; Gilbert, Gallimore, & Trudel, 2009). The two coaches found the generic NCCP too broad and agreed that a sport specific program for disabled athletes would be very beneficial to their learning and coaching skills (Cregan, Bloom, & Reid, 2007) and thought such a program might encourage others to get involved. The differences show that experiences prior to coaching may influence the manner of strategy generation (e.g., rely on past coaches' styles or create innovative solutions). Such biographical differences need to be addressed and accounted for in the National Coaching Certification Program.

## Conclusions

The two disability sport coaches come from very different backgrounds with dissimilar coach education experiences however they both enjoy the challenges of coaching disabled athletes. Strategy generation used by these coaches was similar to that used by the able-bodied sport coaches in Gilbert and Trudel's study, with heavier reliance on creativity. The results emphasize that a program organized by experts in the field for sport-specific coaching of disability athletes would help achieve the Canadian Policy on Sport for Persons with a Disability.

## References

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