



Assessment in competency based courses.

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ABSTRACT

The present article uses the Netherlands as a case study for outlining assessment in competency based coaches' courses. The article outlines the traditional method of coach education training. It then discusses the new aspects and benefits of competency based training.

Key words: Coach education, Competencies, Assessment, Netherlands.

Received: 17 June 2011

Accepted: 8 July 2011

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INTRODUCTION

Having been involved in Coaches' education for over 30 years for the Netherlands, I have assessed hundreds of coaches at our three levels of coaches' education. Two years ago, the Netherlands lawn tennis association (KNLTB) started to assess coaches in a different way, related to competency based learning. In this article we will look at the differences.

Towards competency based training

Since 2000, the Netherlands has aspired to be one of the world's top ten countries for sport. This has resulted in better facilities, funding, financial support and coaching. During this decade, coaching in the Netherlands has become more standardised across all sports, including tennis. Coach education and training has begun to be based around a competency based curriculum (see Van Klooster & Roemers 2011).

Elements to competency based training (Norton, 1987; as cited by Sullivan, 1995)

- 1) Competencies to be achieved are carefully identified, verified and made public in advance.
- 2) Criteria to be used in assessing achievement and the conditions under which achievement will be assessed are explicitly stated and made public in advance.
- 3) The instructional program provides for the individual development and evaluation of each of the competencies specified.

- 4) Assessment of competency takes the participant's knowledge and attitudes into account but requires actual performance of the competency as the primary source of evidence.

Competency based learning models- a definition:

A competency can be defined as a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Competencies are skills performed to a specific standard under specific conditions, where "A skill refers to a task or group of tasks performed to a pre-defined proficiency, often using motor functions and typically requiring the manipulation of instruments and equipment" (Sullivan, 1995, p1). In a competency based training system, progression and improvement is the mastery of specific knowledge and skills, and is learner-centred.

- 5) Participants progress through the instructional program at their own rate by demonstrating the attainment of the specified competencies.

COACH EDUCATION FROM THE BEGINNING

The KNLTB, the Netherlands's governing body for tennis, was founded in 1899. The Dutch Tennis Coaches Association was later founded in 1929 and is still the oldest 'sports union' in the Netherlands. Coaches' education started with ball-boys who, after several years of observing and listening, gradually started

to feed balls, act as sparring partners and teach. The oldest list on record with results of coaches' exams dates from 1948. Some of the older and most experienced tennis teachers administered exams to young novice teachers. The results were staggering. On a scale from one (lowest mark) to ten (highest mark) many times a 3, 4 or 5 appeared on the list; meaning the result was 'not good enough' and less than 20 % of the candidates had passed the exam.

Throughout the years, the courses, the tutoring and the demands to be placed on coaches became more appropriate and clear cut. However, the marks awarded to coaches taking such exams have always come under pressure because of alleged subjectiveness. In a famous Dutch book, 'Vijven en zessen' ('fives and sixes'), the mathematician and psychologist De Groot (1966) explained this subjectiveness- or at least the likeliness of subjectivity in exams.

Some of the dangers when taking exams: the teacher, also administering the exams:

- expects reproduction of the contents of all the lessons ("I presented/ dealt with it, so they should know");
- forgets his/her own level of knowledge when at the same age of the candidate;
- expects too much experience (while experience is in contradiction with the first stages of learning);
- includes his/her own development in the actual demands;
- forgets about nervousness of candidates.

In my experiences of over 30 years in taking 'old style' exams, I can remember many discussions about marks - being too low or too high

- between candidates, tutors and examiners. Very often calculation (adding, dividing and rounding off) would decide on the final result. In our coaches education system we always were honest and clear and we made sure to think of the importance and value of the result for concerning candidates. We were lucky to work for many years with the same team of tutors/examiners; so that the 'norms' could stay constant.

A NEW APPROACH TO ASSESSMENT

In competency based learning (CBL) subjectivity has been minimized, marks have become less important, the value of isolated theoretical knowledge has diminished and candidates determine themselves when they are ready to pass the exam. Our task (as conductors of coaches' education) has been to formulate our demands in clear, concrete and observable behavior. This clear description of observable behavior makes it possible for the candidate to work specifically on those

demands. Knowing what assessors demand from you makes it easier to prepare for that. If the criteria are well described, there is less room for subjective interpretation. Take two competencies for example, one well described and one not so well described: 'the candidate gives a good example' versus 'the candidate demonstrates the stroke at least two times, facing the player(s) and making sure the players can see the hitting shoulder, the contact point and the result of the ball'. The first description leaves ample room for interpretation or subjectivity.

The assessor could say: "I did not like that", "he should have done some more" or "he could have taken a better position".

The second (and longer) description leaves far less room for interpretation. The assessor should observe the demonstration of the candidate and decide on "yes, it meets the description" or "no, the demonstration did not cover the description".

Producing a clear list with all the criteria is a time consuming task; it is not easy to write down everything you want the candidate to master and show. The positive aspect of course is that producing a clear list with criteria is that assessments will be much more objective. With that, assessors also start to meet other important criteria for proper assessments: next to objective, assessments should be independent, trustworthy and valid. This means it should never give different results with different assessors and/or at different locations. Furthermore, the assessor cannot be involved with the candidate in any other role (tutor, learning facilitator, mentor).

Competency based learning models in vocational fields most often employ assessment strategies that are based on units of analysis that are more meaningful and readily assessable. Competency-based models ultimately rely on measurable assessment. In other words, if a proposed competency cannot be described unambiguously and subsequently measured, it probably is not a competency (Vorhees, 2001).

A list of coaches' competencies has been described on different levels, making it possible to differentiate between starting coaches and experienced coaches. The ITF produced papers with ready to use competencies. In this way all countries with the objective to improve coaches' education can benefit from those documents.

CONCLUSION

As previously stated, a competency has been defined as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes. With the new system of competency based training, the 'name' of the

examiner has changed to assessor and the exam has become the assessment. Theoretical knowledge - by itself - is of no value for the final result, although the danger is that during an assessment only 'coincidental' knowledge is being tested and candidates 'could get away' with a low level of ready-knowledge.

For this reason several institutes still maintain to take theoretical tests, just to make sure all theory has been processed. For practical assessment, the use of tools such as video recordings of coaching behavior by the candidate makes it possible to self-assess the performance and/ or to have an expert (experienced coach) evaluate and give useful feedback.



This allows for optimal preparation and improvement prior to the actual assessment. Coaches' education is still getting better and will be able to support countries to produce both more players enjoying the game as well as better players representing the country in different levels of competition-through competency based training.

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