



Competency Based Training applied to the education of tennis coaches.

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses elements and key characteristics of competency based training for tennis coaches, using Tennis Australia as a case study. It outlines competencies, how they develop and also implications of introducing a competency based programme.

Key words: Competency based training, Australia.

Received: 1 August 2011

Accepted: 10 August 2011

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past ten years there has been a fundamental shift in the education of tennis coaches in Australia. The emergence of a coach development pathway, which identifies specific skill sets for coaches working with different levels of players in a variety of coaching environments (e.g., see Figure 1), has allowed educational programs to be tailored to meet the needs of coaches at different points on the pathway. Educational opportunities available to coaches have included formal accreditation courses, workshops/conferences, on-line video tutorials and mentoring. Advances in information technology and the internet have allowed for increased variety and flexibility in the provision of such professional development.

It is in the delivery of the formal accreditation courses that the most significant changes have been seen. The training by which coaches develop specific knowledge and skills (or competencies) has shifted from a traditional time-based content-driven approach to a competency-based approach.

COMPETENCY-BASED TRAINING

Traditional content-based training methods required presenters to deliver content within a specific time period and schedule tests for all participants to complete at the same time (Sullivan & McIntosh, 2011). The participants were often quite passive with the presenter delivering a "lecture." To achieve a pass, participants were required to reach a designated minimum level (e.g., 70%), often a combination of results from a written test and a practical assessment. The focus was on content delivery (i.e., what is it the coach must know?) and, if a participant was unsuccessful, limited time was available for individual assistance.

In shifting to a competency based training model, the focus moved to developing the coach's skills in addition to the underpinning knowledge required by the coach to execute and adapt these skills as required. Coaches no longer were required to achieve the minimum pass mark of 70% but were required to show competence in all areas (i.e., 100%).

Key characteristics

To understand competency based training we must first identify what a competency is. A competency may be defined as the application of specific knowledge and skill to a required standard of performance in a given situation. To implement a competency-based education program, a number of key characteristics must be considered (Norton, 1987):

- Competencies and the performance criteria used to assess the achievement of these competencies are carefully selected.
- Supporting theories are integrated with skill practice. Essential knowledge is required to be learned to support the development of skills.
- Training opportunities are flexible and include modes such as presentations, small group activities, practical simulations and online material.
- Practical training sessions and role plays closely replicate the workplace (e.g., player level, resources).
- Competencies and performance criteria are provided to participants prior to the commencement of training.

- Participants undertake a pre-training assessment to identify current competence in order to adapt the training program if required.
- Participants are encouraged to regularly reflect on their performance.
- Learning facilitators provide specific feedback to participants based on competencies being developed.
- Satisfactory completion of training is based on the achievement of all specified competencies.

Assessment

Assessment in a competency-based training framework differs markedly from traditional courses which often involved the achievement of a percentage score (from a combined written and practical score) to be awarded a “pass” or “fail” grade.

Participants undertaking competency-based training are required to provide evidence to show competence in each

competency and the specific performance criteria used to assess the achievement of this competency. A rubric is a tool which may be used in this assessment process (Stevens & Levi, 2005). Such a tool provides participants with clarity about the expected standard of performance, allows for consistency in assessment and encourages participants to not only self-assess but also take greater responsibility for their own development. A snapshot of a rubric is shown in Table 1.



ELEMENT OF COMPETENCY - ANALYSE AND CORRECT STROKE PRODUCTION AND TACTICS			
Performance Criteria	Beginning (B)	Developing (D)	Competent (C)
Individual and group progress is analysed and appropriate corrective strategies are selected	<p>Coach does not provide each player with specific technical coaching points</p> <p>Coaching points are very basic and global and are the same to all players</p> <p>Coaching points are not reinforced and vary throughout the session and in the closing of the session</p> <p>Player understanding is not checked through open or closed questioning</p>	<p>Coach provides most player with specific technical coaching points but it may be many</p> <p>Coaching points are not specific to individual players, and in general it is the same to all players</p> <p>Coaching points are not reinforced and vary throughout the session and in the closing of the session</p> <p>Player understanding is checked through closed questioning</p>	<p>Coach provides each player with 1-2 key specific technical coaching points</p> <p>Coaching points are specific to individual players, although some may be general to the group if all players have same technical flaw</p> <p>Coaching points are reinforced throughout the session and in the closing of the session.</p> <p>Player understanding is checked through open and closed questioning</p>

Table 1. A performance criterion from the Tennis Australia Junior Development assessment rubric.

A CASE STUDY – INTRODUCING A COMPETENCY-BASED COACH EDUCATION PROGRAM IN AUSTRALIA

Tennis Australia adopted a competency-based approach to coach education in 2006. The shift to this approach presented a number of challenges and required significant changes to be made not only in the development of the courses but also in the way in which they are delivered.



Figure 1. Current Tennis Australia coach education pathway.

Criterion based training development and assessment

Careful selection of competencies and performance criteria is critical in the development of a robust competency-based education program. Therefore, a thorough review of the skill sets required by coaches at each level of the coaching pathway was undertaken prior to writing the competency statements. Competencies with similar themes were grouped together to form units of competency. For example, the Tennis Australia Junior Development course (equivalent to the ITF level 1) is designed to train coaches to develop players under 12 years of age. After consideration of the knowledge and skills required by coaches working in this role, seven units of competency were developed. These are:

- Apply coaching methods to meet the needs of junior sports players
- Undertake coaching activities in accord with professional and legal standards
- Coach junior players to develop fundamental perceptual motor skills
- Reflect and improve on professional coaching role and practice
- Plan coaching programs for junior sports players
- Interpret and apply rules of tennis
- Coach junior tennis players to develop stroke production and tennis tactics

These units of competency are made up of a number of elements of competency, each with specific performance criteria that are the standards by which coaches are measured. The training provided to coaches is structured to build the knowledge and skills of coaches to meet these standards. The major shift in the delivery of the training has been from a "lecture" model to a "learning through doing" model, with a range of thinking tools and practical activities to engage the participants being used to facilitate learning.

The assessment tasks have been developed to allow coaches to provide evidence of their competence on an ongoing basis during the training. For example, in the Junior Development course, one of the assessment tasks requires coaches to deliver three 30-minute lessons. Each lesson is conducted on a different size court – red, orange then green – with different ages and levels of players. There is sufficient time between assessments for coach reflection and learning to take place. The increased focus on the selection of relevant competencies and performance criteria, with the delivery of the accompanying training program, have resulted in coaches developing the

specific skill sets required to work effectively in their coaching roles.

Assessment as part of the learning

Assessment is ongoing in a competency-based learning environment. Prior to attending the course, coaches undertake an "assessment for learning." This process allows the course coordinator to assess the coach's current competence against the competency standards in order to tailor the program to their needs and to ensure they are placed with the most suitable Learning Facilitator. On-going assessment of a coach's knowledge and skills is conducted during the training through observation and formal and informal assessments. Coaches are continually receiving feedback from their Learning Facilitator about their performance and while the formal assessment tasks are designed to measure "assessment of learning", coaches report that significant learning occurs through this process (i.e., learning through assessment).

Learning Facilitators not Presenters and Assessors

Referring to those delivering training as Learning Facilitators instead of Presenters and Assessors has sent a clear message about the role of these individuals. Participants now view their Learning Facilitator as someone who is responsible for helping them to develop and improve. Likewise Learning Facilitators understand their role is not simply to present information and then assess the participant's ability, but to use each and every opportunity within the course to facilitate learning and improve in the level of competency of each participant.

In summary, competency-based training in the delivery of education to tennis coaches provides an opportunity to develop specific skill sets in coaches at each level of the coach development pathway. It allows for flexibility in delivering and assessment which in turn can better cater for the individual needs of coaches. Quality training with rigorous assessment will facilitate the development of quality coaches with the knowledge and skills to engage and develop the players of today and tomorrow. However, investigation is required to evaluate the effectiveness of coach education pathways and formal education courses to ensure the continual improvement of education programs.

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