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## Abstract

Despite its obvious importance, we argue that assessment as a feature of coach education programmes has been overlooked in the peer-reviewed published literature. As a result, it is suggested that approaches to assessing sport coaches within coach education programmes can sometimes be ill-considered and lead to sub-optimal experiences for multiple stakeholders. To address this problem-situation, we tentatively propose five interconnected principles of assessment in the first section of this article. These include the integration of teaching, learning, *and* assessment; assessment as a means of developing metacognitive skills; authentic/practice-based assessment; clearly and transparently foregrounding success criteria; and collaboration within assessment activities. By considering these principles, we suggest that there is much to be gained by the coach education community. In the second section, we showcase how these principles have been adopted within a football coach education programme in Flanders (Belgium). With this example, we explain why assessment became a central concern of the organisation and how they developed an effective assessment approach. Finally, we invite considered discussion and comment on our paper, with a view to starting a conversation in an area which is scarcely spoken about.

Key words: coach education programmes; coach assessment; metacognitive skills; collaboration; rubrics.

## **Introduction and research context**

Sport coaches are central to achieving positive outcomes through sport (North, 2010; North et al., 2020) and as such, sport coaching is said to be societally important (North, 2017). Consequently, the roles and responsibilities of a sport coach are vast in both scale and scope. The International Council for Coaching Excellence (2013) report that sport coaching takes place in most countries worldwide with a variety of populations (e.g., young people and older adults) and across a range of diverse contexts (e.g., education, community/recreation, and professional sport). Offering a European perspective, Lara-Bercial et al. (2017) describe how nine million coaches are engaged in the delivery of sport throughout the European Union. Indeed, it could be argued that sport coaches represent one of the largest workforces on the continent. This is one of many reasons why sport coaching is increasingly of interest to governments around the world (North et al., 2019), as (in many cases) they invest considerable resources in recognition of the work undertaken (Lara-Bercial et al., 2020).

Against this backdrop, there is understandably a concern for the quality of coaching practice (North, 2017). For this reason, a growing amount of attention has been directed toward mechanisms for the professional development of sport coaches (Callary & Gearity, 2019). Coach education programmes, as one mechanism, have become increasingly important and valued by sport coaching stakeholders (e.g., employers) (North et al., 2019). While routes into coaching are becoming more diverse (McCarthy et al., 2021), coach education programmes designed and delivered by national governing bodies (NGBs) are still perhaps the most recognisable in the sector. These large-scale programmes typically require periods of compulsory attendance, exposure to a standardised curriculum and pre-determined learning outcomes, and result in certification (Nelson & Cushion, 2006). We deliberately use the term ‘large-scale’ to indicate programmes which are nationally recognised, centrally

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designed, and locally delivered (often by part-time affiliate coach educators). They are characterised by mass-market appeal, have a high throughput of coaches, and the subsequent certification is often essential to practice as a coach. Examples of these programmes include the FA Level 3 (UEFA B) in Coaching Football Programme

(<https://thebootroom.thefa.com/learning/qualifications/fa-Level-3-in-coaching-football-uefa-b>

) and the US Soccer C License

(<https://learning.ussoccer.com/coach/courses/available/4/course-info>). Despite often being

classified as homogeneous (Cushion et al., 2010), large-scale coach education programmes

do vary in their approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment. For instance, these can

include mentoring (Leeder & Sawiuk, 2020), reality-based learning (UEFA, 2015), in-situ

support (Chapman et al., 2019), heutagogical approaches (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2017), and

learner-centred (Paquette & Trudel, 2018).

Completion of a coach education programme is typically contingent upon the coach successfully navigating a single assessment opportunity (McCarthy et al., 2021). In many cases, this has meant that the coach is observed in standalone coaching performance, within a simulated environment, at the very end of the programme of study. Or, in some cases, a written examination is required to test knowledge and understanding (Vangrunderbeek & Ponnet, 2020). The resultant award or certification communicates to sport coaching stakeholders (e.g., employers, sport participants, coaching peers, and parents) that a certain standard has been met. With this, access can be granted to new professional opportunities which were previously unavailable. In some sports, certification is also becoming a requirement for licencing, with re-licencing contingent upon engagement in ongoing continued professional development (CPD) (UEFA, 2020).

Coach education programmes, as described thus far, have attracted considerable amounts of attention from sport coaching researchers. Indeed, much ground has been covered

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between the late 1990s and the present day with the goal of broadly increasing our collective knowledge and understanding of coach education (Gilbert & Trudel, 2013; Rangeon, Gilbert & Bruner, 2012). However, within the published literature, reference to assessment as a feature of coach education appears to have been largely omitted (Hay et al., 2012). For example, a significant body of work has examined the extent to which coach education programmes contribute to coach learning (e.g., Erickson et al., 2008; Mallett et al., 2009; Williams & Bush, 2019), *yet* this has often excluded the role of assessment *as* learning. In addition, studies exploring the relationship between coach education and coaching practice (e.g., Griffiths et al., 2018; McQuade & Nash, 2015; Nelson et al., 2013; Stodter & Cushion, 2019) barely discuss how authentic practice-based assessment (e.g., resolving a meaningful issue through a project-based assessment activity) can contribute to ongoing improved coaching practice. Finally, despite the importance of published literature that shines a light on coaches' experiences of coach education programmes (e.g., Chesterfield et al., 2010; Piggott, 2012; Vella et al., 2013; Vinson et al., 2016) there is little consideration of how and why assessment experiences are likely to colour wider programme experiences. For example, issues of assessment fairness, equality, and challenge point may dominate overall perceptions of the programme.

Consequently, this has left those responsible for coach education programme design and delivery with little guidance, or the tools required to give assessment the detailed consideration that it warrants. Understandably, the lack of a coach education and assessment lexicon has led to the well-intentioned borrowing and bolting on of concepts from other fields, resulting in disaggregated perspectives on assessment; for example, summative (i.e., an end-point, final, and singular assessment of an output against the required standard) *or* formative (i.e., ongoing, embedded, and learning-oriented summaries of progress against the eventual required standard) assessment. Our argument is consistent with the work of Hay et

al., (2012), which is perhaps the only work of its kind which places sole focus on assessment in the context of coach education:

Although learning and pedagogy have increasingly been recognised as foundational to the practice of sports coaching, as well as the development and progress of coaches, reflections on the contribution of assessment to these facets of the field are notably absent. (p. 196)

To exclude assessment from the coach education discourse is to miss out on opportunities to enhance coach education programmes. Indeed, Hay et al., (2012) claim that such an omission is “a significant oversight that both fails to recognise key aspects of pedagogy and learning, and overlooks opportunities for optimising coach and athlete development” (p. 189). Not only that, but the authors report how this may also undermine any wider programme-level andragogical ambitions; for example, where there is tension and conflict between the approach to programme design and delivery (e.g., authentic and collaborative) and the nature of assessment experience (e.g., simulated and individual).

The primary purpose of the present article is to draw attention to the problem situation as outlined above and propose a tentative solution in the form of five principles of good assessment practice. These principles are not definitive, nor represent any gold standard. Instead, we aim to encourage discussion and raise the profile of assessment as an important feature of coach education. Next, we offer an example of a coach education programme in Flanders (Belgium) which has adopted these principles. Through this, we hope to articulate why these principles were adopted, how they have manifested in practice, and the resultant outcomes which emerged.

### **A review of good assessment principles from the broader education literature**

As part of our ambition to draw attention to assessment in coach education, principles have been selected from the wider adult education literature based on the criteria of relevance

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and practical adequacy. As part of this work, it is important to situate these principles within the broader context of adult learning theory. Doing this makes clear and transparent the origins of the ideas which we propose, while emphasising the nature of their theoretical grounding.

Through the middle to the twentieth century, adult learning developed significantly as an area of scholarly and practical enquiry (Knowles, 1980). During this time, scholars and practitioners pointed out the various ways in which adults could be understood differently to children in respect to teaching and learning. Knowles (1980) summarised these differences (e.g., adults are more self-directed, they have rich experience as a resource for learning, their readiness to learn is increasingly linked to social roles, they look for more immediate applications for their learning) and advanced a set of conditions that educators might consider when designing and delivering learning programmes. These conditions can be summarised broadly as follows: 1) learners feeling a need to learn (linked to goals and roles); 2) in an environment characterised by mutual trust, respect, helpfulness, and freedom of expression; 3) where learners internalise the learning goals; 4) and accept a share of the responsibility for planning and operating the learning experience; 5) in which they are active participants; 6) and in which the experience forms a central part of the learning process; 7) and, finally, where they have a clear sense of progress towards goals. Clearly, there are general implications for assessment, in that assessment should be repositioned from a detached end-point event, to a more flexible, embedded, and self-directed activity that helps learners to maintain motivation and develop skills throughout a course of study. However, there are also different theoretical approaches to understanding learning that can be instructive as we develop a set of good practice principles.

While we acknowledge that adult learning can be understood through a wide variety of different theoretical lenses, a small number of learning theories have become dominant

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over time (Helle et al., 2006; Sjøberg, 2007). A general chronology can be traced, beginning with behaviourist-oriented theories of learning which pervaded an early understanding of education (Chambers, 2013). This approach to making sense of learning centred around arranging the environment in such a way that it could shape behaviour (e.g., repeated stimulus and response) (Bélanger, 2011). Since desirable behaviours could be learned, learning was assessed on the basis of observable behaviour change and/or the extent to which behaviours had been modified (Maclellan, 2005). However, over time, dissatisfaction with the approach grew and critics argued that by understanding adult learning in this way anything which could not be directly observed is lost (William, 1999). As such, cognitive theories of adult learning concerned with the learner and their capacity to make sense of the world around them began to dominate. As a largely asocial perspective, learning could be explained as the process of accommodating and assimilating new information through individual cognitive conflict resolution (Piaget, 2003). Assessment from this position, focused upon the integration and application of knowledge. However, arguing that this view of learning was incomplete, social learning theories became accommodating of the role of ‘others’ in the adult learning process. Indeed, learning as social construction has now become central to discussions about adult learners and learning (Adams, 2006). From this perspective, it is argued that knowledge is inseparable from the social world in which it is created (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Increasingly, this position on adult learning is informing many of the educational activities we see today (in Westernised countries at least) and a social-constructivist theory of learning offers the tools by which we can understand these (Fox, 2001; Rege Colet, 2017). Social-constructivism emphasises connection to the social world (participation within it), collaboration and shared meaning-making (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Activities are typically collaborative, dialogic and relational; while they are guided by the educator, progress is largely driven by the learners. In that regard, assessment centres around



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understanding the quality of the learner’s participation and the nature of their inquiry into complex real-world issues. It should be noted then, that assessment underpinned by this theory of adult learning may present design challenges. As Shepard (2000) points out, “so, we are asking a lot of ourselves and others... Nonetheless, we must try again. This vision should be pursued because it holds the most promise for using assessment to improve teaching and learning” (p. 12).

It is noted that each of these positions offer a unique and often overlapping explanation of the adult learning process and do speak (in varying degrees) to assessment. To this point, Taylor and Hamdy (2013) identify the way in which “the theories have developed from each other... different theories can be applied to maximise learning” (p. 1561).

Assessment according to each of the theories of adult learning is captured succinctly in Table 1. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to consider all principles of assessment as per each theory of learning, since social constructivism appears to inform an increasing amount of contemporary coach education programmes (Chapman et al., 2019; Dempsey et al., 2020, Paquette et al., 2014), this is where we have focussed our attention. We posit that the following five principles of assessment are useful to consider in the context of coach education programmes. We believe that by adopting these principles, there is much to be gained by coach education providers, coach educators themselves, and sport coaches.

**Table 1**

*Positions on Assessment According to Different Theories of Adult Learning*

<b>Theories of adult learning</b>	<b>Position on learning</b>	<b>Position on assessment</b>
Behavioural	Learning requires shaping and modifying behaviours to mimic and replicate those which are	Central to assessment, is the explicit observation of behaviour change. Assessment practice is

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	said to be desirable. Learners are active within the process and learning is observable. Learning is often sequential and driven by pre-determined outcomes.	concerned with making judgements about the extent behaviours now conform to those which are said to be desirable.
Cognitive	Learning is an internal cognitive process and therefore asocial in nature. The learner organises information and resolves discrepancies in a process of cognitive reorganisation.	Assessment is concerned with knowledge and the extent to which knowledge has been developed and applied. Assessment may include individual activities such as planning and critical reflection.
Social	Learning requires active participation in real-world tasks, as knowledge and understanding is co-constructed with others. This approach to understanding learning emphasises the role of others and the environment.	Assessment is collaborative, situated and reflects the dynamic nature of the learners' circumstances. There is a central role for the assessment of problem-solving, experiences and as such, assessment is a long-term activity.

### **Principle 1: Teaching, learning, and assessment activities should be integrated**

Assessment activities which are integrated with (rather than distinct from) teaching and learning activities, can make a significant contribution to coach learning (Adams, 2006; Hargreaves, 1997). This is a view shared by Shepard (2000) who argues, “in order for assessment to play a more useful role in helping students learn it [assessment] should be moved into the middle of the teaching and learning process instead of being postponed as only the end-point of instruction” (p. 10). Extending this argument further, Adams (2006) calls for more than a cosmetic reorientation of teaching, learning, and assessment, suggesting instead that the latter should be deeply embedded within the former from the very start of any programme of education.

As we relocate assessment within programmes of education, Shepard (2000) argues, “our aim should be to change our cultural practices so that students and teachers look to assessment as a source of insight and help instead of an occasion for meting out rewards and punishments” (p. 10). By reconceptualising assessment activities as any activity which

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generates insight about the learner and learning, teacher and teaching, we stand to enhance coach education programmes. Where activities are designed to generate insight about where the learner is currently at and how they're going (against a set of clear and transparent success criteria, as we discuss later), we suggest that they are valuable (Adams, 2006).

### **Principle 2: Assessment should contribute to the development of metacognitive skills**

Participation in programmes of study which are underpinned by social-constructivist principles of learning may require a sophisticated set of adult learning skills (McCarthy & Hounsell, 2019). For example, to be self-directed, driving inquiry independently, and self-monitoring progress, places a heavy burden on the learner's self-regulatory resources. Nevertheless, we contend that 'good' assessment practices can indeed support the development of those skills and capabilities over time (Stoszkowski & McCarthy, 2018). Sadler (1989; 2010) has long argued that ongoing formative (and peer) assessment is an important tool in the development of self-assessment proficiency. In complex tasks and assessments, students need to develop a clear sense of high-quality work and be able to recognise it; to judge their own work against this as they are doing it, and choose ways of making it better (Sadler, 2010). Bell (2010) also claims that project-based assessment (see also: Papanikolaou & Boubouka, 2010; Sart, 2014) has the potential to contribute to the development of proficient independent learners who are competent self-assessors. Skills such as these are deemed to be important not just in navigating the present programme of study, but also in becoming lifelong learners within the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Bell, 2010). Developing lifelong learners is increasingly the goal of many educational programmes (Pitman & Broomhall, 2009). We argue that this goal can be realised through the careful design of assessment activities. This includes using assessment as a mechanism not just to promote the learning of new material, but also the learning of *how to learn* the material. This is an argument reflected succinctly in the work of Cornford (2002):

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Weinstein and Meyer (1994: 3337) argue that delivering content without instruction in how to learn the material is like giving somebody a state-of-the-art personal computing system without any instructions on how to assemble and use it. Effective instruction includes assuming responsibility for helping students learn how to learn the course material. (p. 361)

### **Principle 3: Assessment activities should be authentic and practice-based**

From the position of social-constructivism, learning occurs with others through participation in the social world. As such, learning is said to be situated (Lave and Wenger, 1991). From this perspective, good assessment practices are those which are located within the learners' immediate social reality; for example, solving real-world problems as they are encountered. Fox (2001) argues, "if the context is too removed from their horizon of expectations, they [learners] may well abandon the search for meaning, feeling either bored or confused, or both" (p. 31). This is consistent with the work of Baeten and colleagues (2010) who also make a case for authentic and contextualised assessment approaches in education (broadly). Therefore, we suggest that coach education programmes could design and deliver assessment activities which are tailored to the coaches' unique circumstances. Assessment activities can be organised in order to capture individuals' divergent goals and do so using diverse means. For example, encouraging coaches to problematise their own coaching practice and formulate driving questions to be explored through ongoing activities (such as the development of a tangible project). According to McCarthy (2021), with a deliberate focus on the learner and learning, assessment in coach education programmes can become an opportunity for identifying and working through individual and authentic coaching problems with the coach educator (and/or a wider group of 'others', as we see in principle five). Of course, we do recognise that good examples of this type of assessment

approach are beginning to emerge (see: Chapman et al., 2019; Gearity et al., 2014; McCarthy, 2021; UEFA, 2015) and call for more.

### **Principle 4: Assessment criteria should be shared, transparent, and appropriately challenging**

We argue that good assessment practice is characterised by making clear and transparent what is required to succeed. In the context of coach education programmes, that is to share and foreground what are often tacit views on both the task requirements and expected quality (Bearman & Ajjawi, 2021; Jonsson, 2014). This idea is consistent with the work of Shepard (2000), who states “the features of excellent performance should be so transparent that students can learn to evaluate their own work in the same way that their teachers would” (p. 11). Indeed, interpreting, internalising, and using success criteria requires high level metacognitive skills which should be deliberately developed as a feature of assessment activities (see Principle 2). According to Carless and Chan (2017), “unless students have a conception of what good work looks like, it is difficult for them to produce quality assignments” (p. 930). To have no success criteria would be an abdication of responsibility on the part of the coach educator; this is also inconsistent with the goal-oriented view of coach education (North, 2016; North, 2017).

Instead, the success criteria can be used as a fixed, shared, and transparent reference point against which it becomes possible to consider progress through the programme. For example, with the success criteria it becomes possible to answer questions such as: where am I at?, where am I going?, and how am I going? Indeed, these questions can become part of a process where feedback on performance is generated collaboratively (between and among coaches and coach educators). In the absence of success criteria, feedback could become largely ineffective (Ramprasad, 1983; Sadler, 1989), since “the main purpose of feedback is to reduce discrepancies between current understandings of performance and a goal” (Hattie &

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Timperley, 2007, p. 86). Thus, the coach educator has a distinct role to play in deliberately working with coaches to internalise and use the criteria themselves. Ultimately, it is desirable for coaches to become competent self-evaluators capable of generating their own feedback.

### **Principle 5: Assessment activities should be collaborative in nature**

Regarding the activity of self-assessment, studies in different fields of education (e.g., medicine) have repeatedly demonstrated that *unguided* self-assessment can be flawed and might be (in some cases) best avoided (Davis et al., 2006; Eva, 2008). Indeed, Wolff & Santen (2017) report that:

Individuals are unable to independently accurately identify their weaknesses and the majority of students believe they are ‘above average’, overestimating their performance. Thus, students often need support performing self-assessments, gathering and processing external feedback, and integrating this into subsequent learning plans. (p. 21)

Further, Hargreaves (1997) argues, “by assessing each others' work, students are able to appreciate the qualities of their own work.” (p. 407). As such, we make a case for assessment as a social and collaborative activity. When assessment is undertaken in this way, outcomes can include the shared development of metacognitive skills (their importance, outlined in principle two) (Carless & Chan, 2017; Papanikolaou & Boubouka, 2010), a greater appreciation of what good work looks like (Hargreaves, 1997), and the opportunity to continually adjust and refine work in response to peer-feedback (Baeten et al., 2008; Sadler, 2010). While we understand that collaboration is central to many learning activities on coach education programmes (see: Ciampolini et al., 2019; Paquette et al., 2014), assessment is still all too often an individual endeavour.

As this section draws to a close, a succinct summary of each of the five principles outlined above, is provided in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Principles of Good Assessment Practice in Coach Education: An Initial Proposal*

<b>Principle of Good Assessment Practice</b>	<b>Description</b>
1. Teaching, learning and assessment activities should be <i>integrated</i>	Assessment is a feature of, rather than separate from, teaching and learning activities. As a result, assessment is viewed as ongoing and embedded as opposed to a terminal activity.
2. Assessment should contribute to the development of <i>metacognitive</i> skills	Assessment is concerned with the development of metacognitive skills in addition to subject knowledge and understanding. Assessment activities assume responsibility for helping coaches to learn (how to learn).
3. Assessment activities should be <i>authentic and practice-based</i>	Assessment is relevant to the coaches' immediate reality and provides opportunities to address concerns or resolve meaningful issues. Assessment activities satisfy divergent goals and motivations.
4. Assessment criteria should be <i>shared, transparent, and appropriately challenging</i>	All stakeholders of the coach education programme have a clear, shared, and transparent understanding of what good work looks like. Insight that is generated can be used as feedback, relative to the success criteria.
5. Assessment activities should be <i>collaborative</i> in nature	Assessment is a collective and social activity. Outputs are reviewed as a group and peers support each other to develop their work. Collectively, metacognitive skills are enhanced and so too is the overall quality of work produced.

**Assessment principles in use: the example of football coach education in Flanders**

Since 2009, football coach education programmes in Flanders (Belgium) have been organised by the *Vlaamse Trainersschool* (VTS; Flemish School for Coach Education), a cooperative association comprising of the government, private sport federations, and academic institutes for physical education (Vangrunderbeek & Ponnet, 2020). Each year, nearly 6,000 coaches are certified by VTS in over 50 different sports. In Flanders, VTS is the sole authority for all sport coach-related certification. VTS defines the required competences

for coaching in Flanders and monitors the professional development of coaches through granting certification to coaches who successfully complete education and CPD opportunities (Ponnet et al., 2021).

### **Football coach education and assessment within VTS: a short history**

Regarding the education and development of football coaches specifically, ‘Voetbal Vlaanderen’ can be considered as an important stakeholder. Voetbal Vlaanderen is the lead agency for football in the Flemish region and ultimately responsible for the administration and development of the game. Voetbal Vlaanderen as an organisation represents 2,651 sports clubs, 282,989 players and 18,673 active coaches (Sport Vlaanderen, 2021). Each year, around 1,500 football coaches obtain a formal VTS qualification at one of four levels representing 33% of all awarded sport coach qualifications in Flanders (Sport Vlaanderen, 2021).

In 2020, 56 separate football coach education programmes were organised by VTS at Level 1 (to become a certified ‘Initiator’, 64 hours), 26 programmes at Level 2 (to become a certified ‘Instructeur B’, 77 hours) and a further 12 programmes at Level 3/UEFA B (to become a certified ‘Trainer B’, 154 hours). This is broadly consistent with how football coach education is organised in most European countries and by many member nations of UEFA (UEFA, 2015). Level 1 is the first step on the coach education pathway and aims to contribute to the development of coaches who are working with players at a beginner or recreational (non-competitive) sports club Level, with a specific focus on youngsters (U6-U9). At Level 2, coaches learn how to provide and guide training sessions in a safe and enjoyable manner for youngsters active in a U10-U13 environment. This is consistent with programmes at an equivalent Level in other European nations (e.g., England, France, Germany, and Netherlands).



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At Level 1 (64 hours in total), the programme includes circa 12 contact moments (54 hours) for theory and practice, a 10-hour internship in the coach's own environment, and an assessment activity. At Level 2 (77 hours in total), the programme includes circa 14 contact moments (64.5 hours) for theory and practice, a 12-hour internship in the coach's own coaching environment, and an assessment activity. In total, 82 individual coach educators were recruited in Flanders to deliver these programmes at Levels 1 and 2. Programmes were delivered in a largely didactical-methodological (content-driven) manner and included elements of micro-coaching, reality-based (situated) practice, demonstrations (by the coach educator), and other learning activities. In Table 3, an overview is provided of how learning activities, related to the 'how to coach' strand of the curriculum, are scheduled within the programme on Level 1 (28h). A similar, more extensive, approach was applied at Level 2 (36h) (e.g., increased time afforded to planning, coaching practice, and reflecting on action).

**Table 3**

*Overview of 'How to Coach' Learning Activities on the Level 1 Programme*

<b>Timing</b>	<b>Learning activities on Level 1</b>
Programme start	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflect and complete own rubric</li> </ul>
Week 2 (4 hours)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demo-training/co-teaching of didactical principles U8/U9 (2-hour practice plus on-field feedback)</li> <li>• Didactical skills (2-hour theory)</li> </ul>
Week 7 (2 hours)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Didactical skills (2-hour theory)</li> <li>• Preparing training sessions in groups during this session and preparing individual training sessions before the next session</li> </ul>
Week 8 (3 hours)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Didactical skills 2v2 / 3v3 (2-hour practice plus 1-hour reflection):</li> </ul> Training session with U6 (2v2) and/or U7 (3v3) Observing peers and providing feedback during training practice Reflect, fill in, adjust own rubric Preparing individual training sessions before the next session
Week 9 (3 hours)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Didactical skills 5v5 (2-hour practice plus 1-hour reflection):</li> </ul> Training session with U8/U9 (5v5) Observing peers and providing feedback during training practice Preparing individual training sessions before the next session
Week 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Didactical skills 5v5 (2-hour practice plus 1-hour reflection):</li> </ul>

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(3 hours)	<p>Training session with U8/U9 (5v5)</p> <p>Observing peers and providing feedback during training practice</p> <p>Preparing individual training sessions before the next session</p>
<p>Week 11</p> <p>(3 hours)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Didactical skills 5v5 (2-hour practice plus 1-hour reflection):</li> </ul> <p>Training session with U8/U9 (5v5)</p> <p>Observing peers and providing feedback during training practice</p> <p>Reflect, fill in, adjust own rubric</p> <p>Preparing a weekly and/or monthly plan in groups</p>
<p>Internship</p> <p>between weeks</p> <p>7-12</p> <p>(10 hours)</p>	<p>Within the own coaching environment (club)</p> <p>Individually preparing, providing, and reflecting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 training session with U6 (2v2)</li> <li>• 1 training session with U7 (3v3)</li> <li>• 3 training sessions with U8 or U9 (5v5)</li> <li>• Coaching 1 competition game U8 or U9 (5v5)</li> </ul> <p>In groups, a choice between:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparing a mini tournament (U6 or U7)</li> <li>• Fundamental movement skills session (U6 or U7)</li> </ul> <p>At least 16 children should participate</p>

Since successful completion of these coach education programmes is a necessary step on the pathway to employment (as a football coach in Flanders), VTS seeks to ensure that coaches meet or exceed a specific standard and that this standard is recognised by stakeholders across the sector. Therefore, prior to 2020, assessment was considered solely as a means of understanding whether the required competency levels had been met by coaches at the end of the programmes. Indeed, assessment for VTS was consistent with the paradigm of measurement and judgement. Objectivity and rigour in the assessment process, as well as validity of the grade or certification awarded, were important features. Within this Flemish coach education context, it has historically not been customary to deliberately use assessment as a mechanism to enhance coach learning, instead it has been used *only* to measure and judge coach competence. At this point, it becomes important to note that the article is not intended to deliver a critique of competency-based assessment, quite the opposite. Instead, we aim to highlight the efficacy of a competency-based approach which goes beyond assessing *what* the coach does, to explore with the coach *how* and *why* they do it. Through this example, we aim to show how competencies can be important way-finders on a

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programme of study, as they are shared, integrated, and foregrounded. Our position on competency-based assessment is consistent with that of Gervais (2016), who suggests the approach can “evaluate mastery of learning by students through their demonstration of the knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, and behaviors” (p. 99).

Prior to 2020, within all Level 1 and 2 programmes coaches were assessed based on their performance while coaching a single 20-minute activity, within their club context. Coaches were instructed by the coach educator, in consultation with the head coach of the local club, to focus on a specific goal for their session. A single coach educator was responsible for making judgements on coaching practice against the success criteria defined by VTS. What is important to note, is that the criteria were not necessarily communicated explicitly to coaches before nor during the programme. After the assessment opportunity, coaches were not yet provided with a final ‘score’. The score was only provided between two and four weeks later. No additional feedback was provided to coaches, but if they requested detailed information after receiving their score, most coach educators would be willing to provide this (although the quantity and quality would be variable).

### **Rethinking the role of assessment as a feature of coach education programmes**

In 2020, significant changes were made to the way in which football coaches were assessed across all Level 1 and 2 programmes. While assessment had previously represented (philosophically and practically) an opportunity *only* to measure and judge coach competency, it now became considered *also* a means to facilitate the learning of football coaches. To that end, assessment practices shifted away from singular summative opportunities for the coach to perform, toward meaningful, embedded, and learning-oriented activities. As part of this, and among many other changes, success criteria (in the shape of rubrics) became shared with coaches (principle four). By this we mean, coaches could see clearly what was required of them by the end of their Level 1 or Level 2 programme.

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Moreover, frequent no-consequence/low-risk formative assessment opportunities were integrated into the programme to generate insight (e.g., ‘where is the learner currently at in their journey?’) for coaches and coach educators (principle one).

The success criteria (housed within the rubrics) very clearly highlighted four distinct areas of focus, required by each of the programmes. Coaches’ progress against each of the success criteria would now be scored on a four-point scale from insufficient to excellent. These areas of focus included: the coach as a learning expert/facilitator (what-to-coach and how-to-coach skills), an educator (pedagogical skills), a manager (organisational skills), and an animator (fun and motivation as key features of all practice). In addition, the rubric deliberately placed emphasis on (and thus, demonstrated the value of) specific attitudes which the organisation believes to underpin effective coaching practice. Examples of such attitudes include passion, social interaction, interest, integrity, and conscientiousness. According to Hay et al. (2012) assessment is a message system and communicates to coaches what is valued; thus, by deliberately drawing attention to specific attitudes in the rubric coaches perceive these to be important. During their training, coach educators were compelled to model these attitudes within the work they do with coaches (principles four and five). Hamachek (2009) reports that such an approach is valuable since “consciously we teach what we know, unconsciously we teach who we are” (p. 209). Examples of concrete competences that are being assessed and the corresponding assessment criteria are provided in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Rubrics: Examples of Assessed Competences and Success Criteria (Level 1)*

Competence	Insufficient	Doubt	Good	Excellent
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Providing instruction	Unclear instruction. Players barely know what is expected from them. Lack of demonstration.	Long or unclear instructions. Players are active, but only after a while.	Instruction is succinct and concrete. Players begin activity right away.	Short periods of instruction in different ways; these include questions for understanding.
Training preparation	No preparation.	Minimal preparation. Lots of improvisation. Training is not adapted to the context (e.g., players, materials, and field).	Well-prepared training plan, adapted to/relevant for the context.	Digital, well-organised training plan, adapted to/relevant for the context and specified learning goals.
Passion	Taking no initiative or responsibility. Little to no effort to contribute.	Does as instructed. Evidence of little extra work or devotion.	Takes ownership and thinks from a broader perspective. Acts fast and is passionate.	Anticipates, shows engagement, and feels responsible for own learning trajectory. Demonstrates enthusiasm.
Fun and motivation	No fun and energy evident during practice. Children are not laughing, not motivated, and not active.	Some (forced) attempts to integrate fun during practice. Neither players nor coach are shining.	Enthusiastic and motivating approach (verbal and non-verbal). Teaching methods offer some challenge.	The training lives! Shining coach with challenging training methods. As a result, the players are very enthusiastic.

Prior to, during, and at the end of the programme each coach was required to self-assess their current level of competence (against the success criteria, which remained stable throughout the programme) and identify future learning needs (principle one). Further, coaches were encouraged to include feedback from their peers and coach educators when undertaking such work. As such, this feature of assessment became collaborative and discursive in nature (principle five). Coach educators were expected to undertake activities like this on a frequent and sustained basis; albeit as much as realistically possible across a 64-

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hour (Level 1) and 77-hour (Level 2) programme of study. The intention was to continually generate insight about the learner and their learning, in order to provide optimal support. Indeed, everybody on the programme was expected to take responsibility for each other's learning which was novel and challenged the historic conceptions of a teacher-learner dyad (principles two and five). It is worth noting that insight generated through assessment activities at Level 1 was also used as a starting point for the Level two programme. The objective was for coaches to look back at their prior learning paths, the progress they have most recently made, and planned actions for future growth (principle two). Facilitating all this work required significant changes to the strategies and approaches used by coach educators involved within these programmes.

### **The role of the coach educator: from 'sage on the stage' to 'guide on the side'**

As a result of this work, since 2020, the role of the coach educator across football Level 1 and 2 programmes within VTS has transformed. There was a required shift from 'instructor and teacher' towards 'facilitator and collaborator'; from 'sage on the stage' to 'guide on the side' (King, 1993). Much of this shift has been demanded by a new position on assessment and the potential contribution of assessment to coach learning. Central to the role of coach educator now, is to: build and cultivate a social learning environment; stimulate interaction and collaboration among programme participants; generate insight with coaches which may be used as feedback; and nurture the potential of each individual learner with due consideration of biography, personal resources, current circumstances, and goals.

To guide coach educators with this ambitious work, several support mechanisms were deployed by VTS. First, and most straightforward, the number of coach educators working on each programme, and supporting coaches, was doubled from one to two. While this did have an impact on the programme fee payable by the coach participants, this increase was commensurate with the increase in quality of experience. Secondly, the decision was made by

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Voetbal Vlaanderen to design and deliver a programme of professional development (20 hours) for the coach educators, to reorientate and support them in their ‘new’ roles. During their training, coach educators were engaged and challenged to learn how to deliver an assessment experience based on this new vision. Each coach educator was required to *pass* this programme to be appointed to their role of delivering the Level 1 and Level two football coach education programmes. Indeed, coach educators were afforded the opportunity to experience assessment as their coaches would, in a very deliberate feature of their coach educator training (principle four).

Alongside this support mechanism, coach educators were provided with other learning opportunities including mentoring, additional short courses (e.g., exploring ideas such as interactive teaching, activating prior knowledge, and learner-centredness), participation within communities of practice, and digital learning content (e.g., literature). Indeed, as coach education programmes become increasingly sophisticated (complex, flexible, and open-ended), an increasingly highly skilled workforce is required to deliver them (McCarthy, 2021). This support for coach educators can be regarded as a means of attempting to address this (while realising more can still be done) and to value the work which they do within the system.

As outlined above, the way in which football coaches were assessed as a feature of their Level 1 and Level 2 coach education programmes changed in 2020. This can be viewed as a deliberate decision by Voetbal Vlaanderen and VTS to adopt a strategy where assessment is integrated with teaching and learning and thus, deeply embedded within the programmes (principle one). To illustrate the differences between both ‘old’ and ‘new’ approaches, a comparative overview is provided (see Table 5). Within this overview, pre-and post-2020 assessment strategies are considered against each other, *and* the principles of ‘good’ assessment practice as suggested in the first part of the article.

**Table 5**

*A Comparative Table of Assessment Approaches on VTS Football Coach Education Programmes, Pre and Post 2020.*

<b>Principles of ‘good’ assessment</b>	<b>Football coach education in Flanders (before 2020)</b>	<b>Football coach education in Flanders (since 2020)</b>
1. Teaching, learning, and assessment activities should be integrated	<p>Assessment took place at the end of the programme.</p> <p>Assessment of the end-product only (pass/fail procedure for certification).</p> <p>Feedback is optional and only offered at the end of the programme. Feedback is not necessarily valued, and the provision of feedback will depend largely on the coach educator and if they have time.</p>	<p>Assessment is a central aspect of the teaching and learning process and not distinct from it. Assessment is integrated, ongoing, and embedded.</p> <p>Assessment is considered as something which contributes to coach learning.</p> <p>Insight is collaboratively generated on an ongoing and sustained basis (through deliberate activities) which can be used as feedback to help the coach make progress.</p>
2. Assessment should contribute to the development of metacognitive skills	<p>Metacognitive skills (plus attitudes) were not assessed.</p> <p>Self-reflection was stimulated by coach educators, but remained very individual in nature (e.g., no group reflections).</p>	<p>Metacognitive skills are considered important; indeed, progress through the programme is dependent upon them. Therefore, they are deliberately developed and assessed.</p> <p>There is a specific focus on the requisite skills for lifelong learning. For example: task orientation (what am I to do?), goal setting (what am I to achieve?), planning (how to reach goals step-by-step?), self-monitoring progress, assessing outcomes in relation to actions, and reflection (what can I learn from the process?).</p>
3. Assessment activities should	Priority was given to the requirements of the	With a clear and transparent set of success criteria (housed within



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be authentic and practice-based	programme, and not the needs and wants of the coach.	the rubric) the coach can determine the direction of their study and focus.
4. Assessment criteria should be shared, transparent, and appropriately challenging	The success assessment criteria were not necessarily shared with coaches before or during the programme.	Assessment criteria are made clear and transparent from the very start of the programme.  Sharing success criteria by way of a rubric increases transparency and manageability.  All feedback is directly linked to the success criteria within the rubric and is offered on a frequent and sustained basis.
5. Assessment activities should be collaborative in nature	A single coach educator is solely responsible for assessing the coach in a hierarchical teacher-learner dyad.	Coaches (self), peer-coaches, and two coach educators have a shared responsibility for assessment.

At the time of writing, feedback from coach educators who are working with the new assessment approach is, so far, positive. Specifically, they report that coaches are much clearer about what is required to succeed. As a result, coaches became much more involved in the assessment process and took on more responsibility in contributing to the learning of their peers (principle five). By providing feedback to each other on a regular basis, a ‘safe’ learning environment was established, and coaches began to perceive that everyone can be a learning resource. Indeed, the *new* rubrics played a large part in this outcome and encouraged both peer *and* self-assessment (principle four). While such gains could be made on relatively short programmes such as those described within this example, the authors are hopeful that further internalisation of success criteria over a longer period of time (e.g., Level 3/UEFA B, 150 hours) would lead to even greater outcomes. For example, it may be possible for coaches to take on greater responsibility for ongoing self-assessment well beyond the confines of a course (principle two).

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However, despite the positive account provided within this example, bringing about and sustaining change to the assessment approach was not straightforward. From a policy perspective, VTS still needed to quality assure/standardise all coach education programmes. Therefore, any shift in assessment philosophy, principles, and practice was subject to close scrutiny. Not least because football coach education programmes, the first programmes to adopt such principles within the context of VTS, represented 31% of all coach certifications awarded by VTS on Levels 1 and 2 in 2019 (Sport Vlaanderen, 2021) (i.e., this was a high-risk endeavour). However, in this specific case a number of contextual features made the ground fertile for change and enabled many of the shifts described and explained within the example above; in sum, change was the result of a confluence of factors. First, new leadership within the organisation brought new ideas and tools to do this work. For example, particular individuals were theoretically well-informed and had prior experiences working in education. Second, coach education in football across Europe was undergoing its own general transformation, which saw concepts such as in-situ support (The FA, 2016) and reality-based learning (UEFA, 2015) become popular. Indeed, there was also a wider set of ideas from the published coach education research that were most marked in this period, many of which are discussed within this article. It is reasonable to suggest that VTS and other, similar, organisations would no doubt been aware of this research narrative and susceptible to influence from it, however implicitly (McCarthy, 2021). While detailing each of the multifarious contributing factors would require a manuscript many times the length of this, we wish instead to make the general point that change of the kind outlined within this article is largely reliant on individuals, interpersonal relationships, organisational culture and socio-cultural issues (North, 2017).

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

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Recognising that research concerned solely with assessment as a feature of coach education is sparse, the present paper sought to make a much-needed contribution by offering five principles of good assessment practice. If adopted, as in the case of VTS, we believe that these principles serve to enhance the learning and development experiences of sport coaches and other sport coaching stakeholders, while moving the field forward. However, our intention throughout has been to propose these principles with humility (cognisant of the fact that there is little similar work) and be tentative with our suggestions. Therefore, we hope that this paper can mark the start of a much bigger conversation about assessment in coach education and as such, we invite responses. In this spirit, our intention has been to provide researchers with a 'place to begin' and encourage others to explore and develop the ideas presented within this paper. For example, we believe that there is benefit to further theoretical and conceptual development and the publication of more case studies like the one which is included here. Telling the research story in this way paints a recognisable picture for coach educators and coaches (North, 2017) and thus, increases the likelihood of positive change within our community.

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