Competencies in High Performance

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Transcript of the presentation given by Mr Seirul·lo

PRESENTATION

It falls to me to speak about competencies in high performance, specifically in high-level competition where the level of competition is relative to an opponent; our discussion centres on how we assess and identify the competencies required to outperform that opponent during the various stages of the competition.

We believe this is a new topic; we are defining and discovering something, and this did not begin now but started a long time ago. For 25 or 30 years, we have been trying to assess individuals to determine their level of competence in the field of motor skills and competitive performance. And it turns out that this goes back much further. It goes back to the 'Garden of Eden'. Adam and Eve were there, happy; no one was assessing them, and suddenly God—who must have been just like us—came and said to them: 'Be careful, you may do whatever you like except eat the fruit of the tree of "good and evil"' (the first assessment test).

But it turns out that He had previously assessed the serpent, and the serpent, aware of its emotional capabilities, approached Eve, thinking—not without reason—that she would be more easily swayed: 'If you eat of this fruit, you will be like God; you will know everything that is good and evil' and she
she ate it and gave it to Adam. That is why we were punished by being cast out of Paradise, and we continue, clumsily, to persist in the same behaviour 21 centuries later. Ever since then, we have done nothing but constantly assess ourselves, constantly assess ourselves.

What is right and what is wrong? What should we do and what should we not do? When do we have a sufficient level of competence? Why are we competent? These are questions we have been asking ourselves throughout our lives. Ever since then, levels of competence have been defined for every kind of human activity. This is no less true in motor skills, where competence manifests itself physically – that is, macroscopically – making it more easily observable and measurable, with its level of performance and effectiveness defined through biomechanics, biology, and so on.

However, the individual engaged in a motor action is not taken into account. ‘This child has to learn to jump with feet together!!’ Why? Is the child interested in learning to jump with feet together? If we give them a reason to jump with feet together, the child will jump with feet together and is already competent at jumping with feet together. But in so-called ‘competency-based education’, we say: ‘He must do it with both feet together, jump more than 3.50 metres and, upon landing, maintain his balance for 5 seconds.’ Why? To justify our own competence. This is how we set competency levels for our pupils. We say this child has a higher level of competence because they are capable of jumping with both feet together three and a half metres, landing on the line where they want to, and, from there… also performing a forward somersault in the air. And they are more competent than the other child, who is less so, as they jump with both feet together and only clear a small line we’ve drawn on the floor or a small obstacle. And why is that one more competent than this one? Because of that damned physics, quantification, exact measurement – coming back to the same point: that we tend to maximise, to say that more of something is always better. And that is a mistake in human beings. It is a very serious mistake in human beings. Every human being has certain levels of competence that stem from their very nature as a human being. And I simply wanted to outline some frameworks to help you understand what a human being is. An interpretation of the athlete from the perspective of Complexity Theory.

Bioenergetic Structure
Conditional Structure
Coordinative Structure Socio-
Affective Structure Emotional-
Volitional Structure Expressive-
Creative Structure Cognitive
Structure Mental Structure …

Here, Master Seirul·lo explained the functionality and interaction of all these structures in human interactions, as a justification for the thesis on communication regarding competencies.

And if we understand what a human being is in this way—the complexity they possess—we will realise that we are faced with an impossible task. To assess a human being’s capacity, their motor skills?? Which is more difficult: a jump on a trampoline or performing a forward somersault? An absurd question, yet we pose it as an inescapable necessity; we label it a ‘situational motor competence’, or the management of one’s own body and movement, so that it can be compared with the achievements of a group, and we set about discovering who is more competent amongst them, in this or that task, for that is how we view it. And we’re confused!! For if we observe the Structures that make up a person and understand them as a Hypercomplex Dissipative Structure, we gain a holistic view of competence—rather than the non-linear one with which it is usually defined. We will understand them as the manifestation of the multiple interactions and feedback loops between the different complex systems that make up the various Structures. In each of the so-called competences, the level of optimisation of a particular system or subsystem within a given structure is manifested ‘primarily’.

This is why many competences are defined linearly, but it is a futile exercise, as we have millions of them and cannot reduce them to ‘informational’, ‘situational’, ‘instrumental’, and so on.

For every profession and every occupation, specific intra- and inter-systemic interactions are necessary for an individual to be considered competent; the same applies to the ‘motor activity’ of our pupils during PE lessons, in which we must facilitate interactions with the environment of such a nature that they elicit sufficient responses to engage, preferably, certain systems within those Structures that we seek to activate selectively. In terms of performance, particularly with Bioenergetic and Conditional Education, we develop many and varied competencies, as we achieve interactions between the endocrine system, the neuromuscular system, the circulatory system, the respiratory system, etc. These interactions provide us with the energy to live and to move – the dynamic manifestation of life. It is assumed that certain skills in the field of health can be defined, practised and assessed solely by linear means, such as running for 15 minutes and noting the number of metres covered. Is running for 15 minutes every day healthy? I believe that 10 minutes twice a week is just as healthy. What matters is that they are able to do it, that they know how to vary their routine, that they understand why they are doing it, that their emotions and interests align with running, that they are accompanied by the people they love and with whom they share a bond, that through this they find ways to express themselves within the natural environment in which they live, and that it contributes to their mental well-being… How can we possibly assess all that based on running 1.5 km in 15 minutes? And if someone else runs 3.45 km, are they more competent? We still believe that maximising any single performance makes us more competent. But that’s not the case. It’s the total scope of interactions we can achieve across all the systems within the different structures that make up the human being. Because one person, depending on their genetics and training, is capable of achieving high conditional levels – great strength, great speed, great… Others, by contrast, without having such strong muscles, are highly efficient in terms of coordination; others are cognitively more adept, anticipating situations, able to assess their surroundings in advance and pick up on the major signals combined with the minor ones – the spatial and temporal nuances.

So what must we do? We must ensure that our approach to motor practice encourages the involvement of all these aspects of the human being. We must optimise them so that the individual is competent at their own level. No more competent than that!! Because sometimes, being more competent leads to mistakes – in what way? Perhaps they lack creativity, or have no mental strength to sustain an effort, or are unable to identify their own significance within the context of their practice, or lack the desire and will to remain in a state of practice. And that is what happens in high performance and in top-level competitive sport. What are the competencies of these individuals? The very best in everything. No. It is not the very best in everything. It is the individual who is capable of engaging most extensively across all these areas of the structures of ‘their self-structuring’ who is highly competent. The one who performs. And this is much more so in team sports than in individual sports. Because individual sports often exhibit significant imbalances in certain emotional and socio-affective aspects compared to team sports.

I do not mean by this that one is better and the other worse (because I do not believe there is anything that is better or worse). Everything that can be done is good, provided it can be done within the scope of one's level of interaction. I therefore believe that we are following a line of thinking—from my point of view, a mistaken one—by defining competences based on the behavioural analysis of a specific motor need. On the contrary, we understand that competencies are the result of interactions, feedback loops and synergies between the various systems that constitute the structures making up the human being; when stimulated by integrated situations of interaction, these are optimised through a continuous and unique process of self-organisation.

Thank you very much.

QUESTIONS

1.

I'm glad you asked about Iniesta because I think he's the best footballer in the world*. He's been here at La Masia since he was 12, and until last year he hadn't done any conditional training. His own biology and specific training have enabled him to get where he is today without doing any strength, speed, endurance or flexibility training… and you might say, 'Is that a lie?' It's true!! What does that mean? It means that, despite being very weak and lacking in endurance, not very fast and lacking in just about everything – in the sense of 'lacking' as you understand it – he has 'hypertrophied' – or, as we'd put it, optimised – his cognitive, coordinative and emotional structures, and so on. He gets much more enjoyment out of playing a good pass or keeping the ball in play with a pass than out of scoring a goal. These qualities, which he has been drawing on throughout his life, now require him to take it one step further so that he can apply them and tackle any opponent and situation; he simply needs to understand what his opponent is like and what they are capable of bringing to the game alongside his teammates. Because in competitive sports, the main challenge lies with the opponent; assessing them gives us a benchmark for what to do to outplay them and, by creating unfamiliar situations for the opponent, enables us to demonstrate a high level of skill in the flow of the game – just as Iniesta does with that 'apparent' ease in outmanoeuvring opponents and shaping the play to suit the demands of the match at any given moment.

At the ages you mentioned earlier, a talented player may seem good at everything if their talent has developed in the area of physical conditioning, and if we focus our training primarily on that; after all, someone who is strong, resilient and fast appears to perform every aspect of the game well. However, do not be misled by early success based on physical conditioning alone. We have many examples of footballers who have made it because they were strong, big and tall, and who, in their youth and in the early stages of their motor development, were talented and highly competent – because they scored goals, or dominated the midfield, or covered long distances for long periods, or were very fast, or were excellent at heading the ball, or jumped high, and when they reach the age of 20, they are on a par with everyone else in terms of physical conditioning and bioenergetics, they fade away, because they have done nothing but this, and have not optimised the rest of their physical attributes in harmony with their physical conditioning, as Andrés did.

This happens in any sport, but also in any area of professional life. Anyone who doesn't develop cognitive, emotional and affective skills, etc., alongside their specific field of expertise, is only competent in that field, and that is a serious mistake. You also know that there are many typical 'absent-minded geniuses'. And what are they like? Well, it's someone who possesses nothing more than a level of isolated competence and is a physical disaster; they harbour a hatred of nature, are alone at home, dislike being with anyone and live in a peculiar, fixed manner; they have no desire whatsoever for creativity or expressiveness because their world is 'two plus two equals four', and they are competent only in their linear and singular knowledge. I am exaggerating so that you can see how essential an ecological and complex observation of human beings is.

What I mean by this is that I believe, in our practice of motor skills for education, we are obliged – because no other subject does so – to engage with all these other dimensions. And the problem with our profession is that we have focused solely on setting out competencies in purely motor aspects, in isolation from the other values involved in interacting with others within a setting – the classroom – enriched by those predominantly motor-based situations where the pupil's engagement should lead to the optimisation of all their structures.

In this way, we have lost our prominence in education, as the public sees that we teach things of little or no importance for the development of future citizens, and Physical Education is justified solely as a health-promoting practice that instils certain healthy habits, thereby losing teaching hours and prominence within the school curriculum. But they are clear about this with us because Andrés has shown us the way …

** Confirmed later.*
Other international experts have also singled out Andrés Iniesta as the best player in the world. Furthermore, on 30 August 2012, Andrés Iniesta, a footballer for FC Barcelona, won the UEFA 'Best Player' award, beating his team-mate Leo Messi and Real Madrid's Cristiano Ronaldo in the final vote.

2.

I think so, and I'll go back to what I was saying a moment ago. Our general studies at university and the training of physical education graduates and specialist teachers have focused primarily on acquiring the knowledge needed to achieve levels of competence in the conditional and, at times, the coordinative domains – though not generic coordinative skills, but rather those specific to particular motor skills, that is, those that make up the various sports – and this is how these competences have been assessed.

Following the model of other school subjects, physical education today only continues as a professional social activity through the practice of a sport, which offers talented individuals the possibility of paid participation in some form during a certain stage of their lives. Only for a select few who choose a specific specialism wisely can this serve as an economic solution—almost always a temporary one—and on rare occasions does it provide a lasting solution to their circumstances.

I believe that the complexity paradigm has enabled us to view human beings from this ecological perspective, so that their capacity for movement can be understood from a viewpoint which offers them the possibility of being educated – which is distinct from practising a sport, however many so-called 'educational' values may be attributed to its practice and training.

This alternative should be presented at INEFs and other training centres, but this is not currently the case. This is possibly because it does not happen in other training subjects within other university faculties either; there, too, ‘education’ is equated with ‘training’ – that is, knowledge of a specific subject – and ‘specialist monsters’ are created and trained in … However, little by little, the ecological paradigm is being taken into account to foster a better understanding of human beings, whatever their activity may be.

In our training centres, we must train graduates in this dimension so that they can develop a conception of their pupils in line with this paradigm. In this way, they will be able to educate differently but also train differently, by understanding that a volleyball specialist has different motor skills to a boxer, and that these are impact sports which require similar values in the other structures, albeit with distinguishing features. Or, for example, a tennis player and a badminton player – both of which involve dynamic, indirect impacts – might share a high degree of coordinative similarity but be clearly different in other structural aspects, which would be of great use to us in designing training sessions.

Those of us with degrees in this field understand that we would not only be highly effective at introducing new ways of training, but could also be powerful optimisers of human potential, whether or not people are athletes, as we would be providing them with something that benefits their lives, helps them live in society, and contributes to building a better society for everyone.