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Development of a Life Skills Self-Assessment Tool for Coaches

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ABSTRACT

Researchers have been increasingly interested in exploring how coaches can be best supported to explicitly teach life skills through sport. The purpose of the present paper is to describe the process of developing the Life Skills Self-Assessment Tool for Coaches. The tool represents a knowledge product designed for practical use on the ground, anchored in theory and backed by empirical support. The tool is available in four languages and accompanied by a “how-to” video, thereby enabling more coaches from around the world to teach life skills through sport.

KEYWORDS

Intentionality; knowledge product; positive youth development; youth sport

Youth sport is a highly popular activity that when appropriately structured can lead to positive youth development (PYD; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). Over the last two decades, PYD has been the preeminent framework through which psychosocial development has been examined in youth sport research (Holt, 2016; Qi et al., 2020). Within the PYD framework, it is postulated that the developmental potential of youth is maximized when they are viewed as resources to be developed rather than problems to be managed. Viewing youth as resources entails the nurturing of positive adult-youth relationships as well as the teaching of *life skills* (Holt et al., 2017; Lerner et al., 2005). In the context of sport, Gould and Carson (2008) defined life skills as “internal personal assets, characteristics and skills such as goal setting, emotional control, self-esteem, and hard work ethic that can be facilitated or developed in sport and are transferred for use in non-sport settings” (p. 60). An important component within the definition of life skills is *transfer*, defined by Pierce et al. (2017, p. 194) as:

The ongoing process by which an individual further develops or learns and internalizes a personal asset (i.e., psychosocial skill, knowledge, disposition, identity construction, or transformation) in sport and then experiences personal change through the application of the asset in one or more life domains beyond the context where it was originally learned.

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Turnnidge et al. (2014) outlined how life skills development and transfer can be facilitated by coaches through either an implicit or explicit approach. The implicit approach refers to coaches who focus on developing their athletes' sport-specific skills without deliberate attention or effort placed on the development or transfer of life skills. Conversely, the explicit approach refers to coaches who intentionally target life skills development and transfer in their coaching. In expanding on the work of Turnnidge et al. (2014), Bean et al. (2018) argued for viewing the implicit and explicit approaches on a continuum, with a combination of both approaches required for coaches to create learning climates that optimally facilitate life skills development and transfer. Specifically, the careful integration of both approaches in one's coaching practice may help youth become more aware of their existing skillset, thus enabling them to generalize their life skills beyond sport. This integration has been operationalized by Bean et al. (2018) in a 6-level continuum of life skills teaching, with each level acting as a building block enabling coaches to progress to increasing levels of intentionality. The first two levels of structuring the sport context and facilitating a positive climate represent implicit coaching behaviors. The next four levels of discussing life skills, practicing life skills, discussing life skills transfer, and practicing life skills transfer represent explicit coaching behaviors. The continuum was designed as a conceptual guide to help researchers situate how coaches approach life skills development and transfer.

To advance measurement efforts in youth sport research, Camiré et al. (2021) developed the Coaching Life Skills in Sport Questionnaire (CLSS-Q), a self-report measure consistent with the Bean et al. (2018) continuum allowing researchers to assess the extent to which coaches are intentional in teaching life skills through sport. During the scale validation process, 1,440 coach participants completed the CLSS-Q, with many sharing with the researchers how answering the items in the scale was very useful in getting them to reflect on their coaching. Thus, in addition to acting as a measurement tool, feedback received from coaches confirmed that the CLSS-Q had potential to be redesigned as a self-assessment tool, enabling coaches to self-reflect on their level of intentionality in facilitating life skills development and transfer. The purpose of the present paper is to describe the process of developing the Life Skills Self-Assessment Tool for Coaches (i.e., hereafter referred to as the "tool"), conceptually anchored in the Bean et al. (2018) continuum and directly derived from the Camiré et al. (2021) CLSS-Q. The development of the tool occurred in six steps: (a) conceptualization, (b) knowledge translation, (c) pilot testing, (d) graphic design and "how-to" video, (e) language translation, and (f) knowledge mobilization.

Conceptualization

The Camiré et al. (2021) CLSS-Q was developed as part of a research project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. As a requirement of funding, knowledge mobilization activities were embedded in the project design, which included creating from the CLSS-Q a knowledge product that could instigate coach reflection. During the validation process, the benefits of converting the CLSS-Q into a self-assessment tool were confirmed based on the numerous comments from coach participants. Canada has two official languages and thus, the first and second authors initially developed the tool in English and then translated it to French. They also collaborated with Brazilian colleagues, (i.e., third and fourth authors) to translate the tool in Portuguese and Spanish. The rationale for providing access to the tool in four languages was to increase its accessibility on a global scale, given that applied PYD resources are limited due to primarily being delivered in English (Strachan et al., 2020).

Knowledge translation

To maximize the likelihood that coaches would be motivated to complete the tool, the research team undertook several key revisions to the CLSS-Q, mainly making it more concise and more practical through a process of knowledge translation. As outlined by Straus et al. (2013), knowledge translation refers to a dynamic process involving interactions between researchers and knowledge users to make improvements in the application of knowledge, policies, programs, and practices. Specifically, the research team aligned its knowledge translation efforts with the Graham et al. (2006) knowledge to action (KTA) framework, whereby several knowledge creation and knowledge synthesis activities (i.e., Bean et al., 2018; Camiré et al., 2021) set the stage for the creation of a clear and concise tool. The following is a description of the tasks undertaken by the research team to translate key elements of the Bean et al. (2018) continuum and the Camiré et al. (2021) CLSS-Q into a user-friendly tool for coaches.

Tool structuring

The first task was to structure the tool by reorganizing the items and levels found in the CLSS-Q to create a tool with a standardized scoring system. The goal was for the tool to have six levels, with five items per level, for a total of 30 items. Most of the changes made to the CLSS-Q occurred for items targeting implicit coaching behaviors. Specifically, the first subscale of the CLSS-Q (i.e., structuring and facilitating a positive sport climate) has 17 items and integrates the first two levels of the

Bean et al. (2018) continuum (i.e., structuring the sport context, facilitating a positive climate). For the tool, the research team decided to split the first CLSS-Q subscale into two levels, consistent with the Bean et al. (2018) continuum. Of the 17 CLSS-Q items, 10 were retained in the tool; five items in level one and five items in level two. Removal of the seven items occurred during a research team meeting, with efforts aimed at retaining the 10 items most illustrative of their respective level. The four other CLSS-Q subscales each have five items, except for subscale three (i.e., practicing life skills), which has four items. Thus, a fifth item was created and added in the tool for the “practicing life skills” level (i.e., give them feedback when they use life skills in sport). In sum, through the removal of seven items and the addition of one item, a tool consisting of 30 items was created, with five items in each of the six levels.

Tool modification

The second task consisted of modifying the stem and the scoring. The CLSS-Q stem of “As a coach, I” was changed in the tool to “When I coach my athletes, I” to provide coaches with specific instructions directly tied to the act of coaching. The CLSS-Q is scored on a 6-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*), with coaches indicating the extent to which they agree with the statements made. From a knowledge translation perspective (Straus et al., 2013), the aim was to tailor the tool to meet end-user needs and so for practicality purposes, the research team wanted coaches to report the frequency of their coaching behaviors rather than their level of agreement. Thus, the scoring was modified to a 4-point scale from 0 (*never*), 1 (*sometimes*), 2 (*often*) to 3 (*always*), allowing coaches to report the frequency to which they exhibited in their coaching the behaviors described in the items.

Tool formatting

The third task consisted of formatting the tool in an easily accessible manner. The research team decided to create the tool as a PDF in a form-fillable format. Thus, the tool can be completed electronically (e.g., computer, tablet, phone), allowing coaches to add their scores and write their reflective thoughts directly in the document. The tool can also be printed and completed by paper/pencil. Further, the descriptions provided in the CLSS-Q (e.g., definition of life skills) have been significantly expanded in the tool. For instance, the first three pages of the tool are dedicated to (a) defining life skills and life skills transfer, (b) offering examples of life skills, (c) describing each level of the Bean et al. (2018) continuum, and (d) explaining the scoring system. Moreover, at the end of each level, practical guidelines are associated with specific score ranges

(i.e., score of 5 or less, score between 6 and 10, score of 11 or more) to provide coaches with clear indicators of what they are doing well and what they can improve on. These indicators are consistent with recommendations offered by Bean et al. (2018) and were synthesized by the research team, with efforts to translate the information using examples coaches can relate to and integrate in their everyday coaching.

Integrating reflection

The fourth task consisted of integrating a reflective exercise at the end of the tool composed of three open-ended questions that coaches can use to reflect on their life skills teaching: (a) “What are the things I believe I am currently doing well?”, (b) “What are the things I believe I could improve?”, and (c) “What strategies do I want to add in my coaching plan moving forward?”. The inclusion of these reflective questions is designed to compel coaches to take concrete steps in becoming more intentional in teaching life skills through sport. Once a first version of the tool was created, it was piloted with coaches to assess its real-world applicability.

Pilot testing

To ensure the tool was tailored to meet end-user needs, it was pilot tested with eight coaches, three from Canada and five from Brazil. The pilot testing occurred with the English version of the tool given that at this stage, it had yet to be translated to the other languages. The three Canadian coaches (two males, one female) coached soccer and ice hockey. The three coaches had a mean age of 32.3 years ($SD=14.4$) and had been coaching for an average of 10.8 years ($SD=12.5$). The five Brazilian coaches (three males, two females) coached basketball, volleyball, handball, and futsal. The five coaches had a mean age of 31.8 years ($SD=5.4$) and had been coaching for an average of 6.2 years ($SD=2.5$). The eight coaches were purposefully recruited by members of the research team based on their ability to complete the tool in English and their experiences as youth sport coaches in recreational and competitive programs offered to male and female youth athletes of a broad age range (i.e., 4 to 20 years). The coaches completed the tool and were also asked to provide written feedback in four areas: (a) length (How long did it take you to complete the tool?), (b) clarity (Is the language clear?), (c) relevance (Do you see yourself using this tool?), and (d) any additional feedback (Do you have any suggestions for improvement?). Pilot testing reinforced the worth of using the research team’s language capacity to translate the tool in French, Portuguese, and Spanish, particularly based on the feedback of Brazilian coaches.

Generally speaking, the coaches who took part in pilot testing offered positive feedback, stating how the tool was concise, clear, and relevant. Nevertheless, certain revisions were made to the tool based on coaches' suggestions. First, small changes were made in the practical guidelines for the wording to be more motivating and encouraging, especially when coaches scored themselves 5 or less on a level. The wording changes were meant to support coaches in becoming more intentional in teaching life skills and in efforts to avoid the guidelines being perceived as criticism. Second, some coaches discussed the challenges associated with coaching at level 6 (i.e., practicing life skills transfer) and the real-world feasibility of scoring oneself as "always" operating at that level. To address this challenge, the research team revised the wording of the practical guidelines in level 6, stating that for those scoring 11 or more: "You can be genuinely proud of your efforts as very few coaches ever attain this level of intentionality". Lastly, the coaches suggested minor changes be made to some of the examples provided in each item to help with comprehension. For instance, the example "I explain what the different facets of leadership include" was changed to "I explain what the different components of leadership include, such as listening and delegating". Following the revisions made after pilot testing, the tool was forwarded to a graphic designer.

Graphic design and "How-To" video

In order to offer coaches a visually attractive and user-friendly tool, a professional graphic designer was hired. The research team worked closely with the graphic designer for several months to present the information in an engaging manner. This collaboration included, for example, visually displaying how the six continuum levels act as building blocks and using specific colors and icons to differentiate each level. Several versions of the tool were created and reviewed until a final 12-page version was agreed upon, comprised of (a) front cover (1 page), (b) introduction and instructions (3 pages), (c) the tool itself, with each level on a separate page (6 pages), (d) an optional reflective exercise (1 page), and (e) back cover (1 page).

In order to increase the tool's ease of use, the research team and the graphic designer created a short "how-to" video (see [Supplementary file 1](#)), working closely together to create the different scenes and develop the script. A professional narrator was hired to narrate the script in English, with subtitles embedded for accessibility purposes. The video was kept under two minutes in length to attain a balance between retaining viewer attention while also communicating the essential information coaches need to use the tool in an effective manner.

Language translation

Once English versions of the tool and the video were finalized, both knowledge products were translated to French, Portuguese, and Spanish by members of the research team. Each version of the tool and video script was verified by a native speaker outside of the research team. For the tool, four distinct PDFs in a form-fillable format were created (see [Supplementary files 2–5](#)). For the Portuguese version, on the back cover, a link to www.lifeskillbrasil.com was added based on the work of the third and fourth authors. For the video, two versions were created and uploaded to YouTube: (a) English narration with embedded English subtitles (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g9fXa23cJY4&t=1s>) and (b) English narration with optional French, Portuguese, and Spanish subtitles (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZBGTK18_T0k).

The language translation was performed to increase knowledge product usage beyond English speaking countries, thereby helping advance life skills research and practice on a global scale (Holt et al., 2018). According to www.ethnologue.com, English (Rank 1; 1.268 billion speakers), Spanish (Rank 4; 538 million speakers), French (Rank 5; 277 million speakers), and Portuguese (Rank 9; 252 million speakers) are all in the top 10 most spoken languages in the world, meaning that the four versions of the tool have much potential to be employed across the globe.

Knowledge mobilization

Once final versions of the tool and the video were prepared in the four languages, the research team proceeded to dissemination. The two knowledge products were first shared with School Sport Canada (i.e., national governing body for school sport in Canada) and the Alberta Schools Athletic Association (i.e., provincial governing body for school sport in Alberta), given that they were the two official partners on the research project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Both organizations have used a variety of channels to disseminate the tool and video via websites, coach email lists, and social media accounts to thousands of coaches.

The third and fourth authors also proceeded to disseminate the tool and video across their networks in Brazil. First, the tool was shared with academic colleagues across universities in Brazil. It was also posted on www.lifeskillbrasil.com as well as “Life Skill Brasil” social media platforms to reach key stakeholders and coaches within the Brazilian sport system. In addition, the third and fourth authors serve as consultants in sport federations and multisport clubs in Brazil and used these channels to

forward the tool to thousands of coaches. The third and fourth authors also contacted the Brazilian National Council of Physical Education to disseminate the tool amongst their members across the country. Finally, the tool and video were shared during lectures, seminars, and coach education courses led by the third and fourth authors.

All members of the research team have made use of their social media accounts to disseminate the tool and video within the academic community. Close colleagues in Europe, Asia, and the Americas have also been emailed the tool and video directly. From a KTA perspective (Graham et al., 2006), the research team will continue to make efforts to monitor knowledge product usage through analytics providing data on reach and user engagement. For example, some of the metrics to be employed will include the number of tool downloads on partner websites, the number of video views on YouTube, and Twitter and Instagram analytics (e.g., impressions, engagements).

Implications and future directions

Knowledge translation/mobilization is an intricate ongoing process

The research team engaged in knowledge translation efforts (e.g., group discussions, pilot testing) to understand how notions from the Bean et al. (2018) continuum and the Camiré et al. (2021) CLSS-Q could be translated to provide coaches with a useful self-assessment tool. Importantly, KT is an ongoing process, meaning that evaluative efforts will continue to be needed to collect feedback and understand how the tool is distributed and used globally (Holt et al., 2018). Cultivating partnerships with sport organizations has been and will continue to be useful in disseminating the tool on a large scale (Holt et al., 2018). Further, such partnerships are crucial in sustaining lines of communication between researchers and coaches. From a KTA framework perspective (Graham et al., 2006), the research team will continue to engage in the different steps of the action cycle, namely monitoring knowledge use, evaluating outcomes, and sustaining knowledge use through ongoing projects.

Reaching beyond English-Speaking audiences is crucial for broad uptake

As research on PYD and life skills development continues to grow in countries around the globe (Qi et al., 2020), it is important to create evidence-informed knowledge products and tools that can be used beyond English-speaking populations. The collaboration established between the members of the research team facilitated translations of the tool beyond English, thereby contributing to enhanced life skills research and practice

on a global scale. Moving forward, it will be important to closely monitor how the tool is used by coaches, especially those operating in countries where concepts such as *life skills* and *transfer* are not common in coaches' vocabulary. It is hoped that the tool can instigate reflection in coaches from around the world, getting them to think about how they can integrate, with varying levels of intentionality, life skills messages and activities in their coaching. Ultimately, what is most important is that coaches use the tool as a means to monitor their life skills teaching efforts, adapting their coaching approach based on the reality of their immediate sport context.

Conclusion

This article aimed to describe the process of designing the Life Skills Self-Assessment Tool for Coaches. For researchers, the article provides a vivid example of how theory (i.e., Bean et al., 2018 continuum) informed measurement (i.e., Camiré et al., 2021 CLSS-Q), which then informed practice (i.e., development of the tool). Additionally, the article illustrates the significance of embedding knowledge translation and knowledge mobilization activities in research projects, which can have many positive outcomes beyond the world of research.

For coaches, the article offers a practical knowledge product in the form of a life skills self-assessment tool that can be used to assess one's level of intentionality in teaching life skills through sport. With the tool being available in four languages, and accompanied by a "how-to" video, coaches from around the world can become more aware of their role in teaching life skills through sport. Coaches who plan to use the tool should consider completing it prior to the beginning of their sport season, thereby gaining a baseline assessment of their perceived life skills teaching behaviors. Using their baseline assessment, coaches can then revisit and complete the tool anew at their chosen frequency (e.g., weekly, monthly) based on how closely they wish to track their progress over time. As there is often a tendency for participants to exaggerate self-report data when there are extended periods between the reported behaviors and the completion of a self-report tool (Tourangeau, 2000), coaches should use the tool as quickly as possible after a practice, competition, or game. Coaches should also be encouraged to score themselves honestly, to minimize the limitations of self-presentation and socially desirable responding common with self-report tools (van de Mortel, 2008).

For sport administrators, those who wish to support life skills development and transfer should encourage the coaches within their organizations to complete the self-assessment tool. Additionally, sport administrators

should facilitate social learning environments where coaches can collectively talk about the tool, debrief their scores, find solutions to their challenges, and share their strategies as it relates to teaching life skills through sport. However, to remain true to the tool's intended purpose of promoting coach self-assessment and reflection, sport administrators should tread carefully as it pertains to potentially using the tool for coach evaluation purposes.

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