

Fencing and the new NCCP:

applying a competency-based model of education and training to fencing coaches in Ontario

January 2010

Introduction

The new NCCP system is based around the Competency Based Education and Training (CBET) model of coaching education, and reflects a system-wide paradigm shift, across all sports in Canada, from coaching certifications being based on “what a coach has been taught” (the *old* NCCP model) to “what a coach can actually do” (the *new* NCCP model). On the surface, this may sound like a fairly minor change, but in fact, the new NCCP model represents a completely different system for coaching development, education and certification.

Key elements of this new system are:

- The syllabi at each level of coaching award are driven by a Participant Development Model (PDM), which reflects the needs of athletes at every stage of development as defined in the Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) Model for fencing.
- The system uses a problem-based learning (PBL) approach to coach education. Coaches in training are presented with real or authentic situations and then encouraged to find solutions to problems which occur along the way. The mode of learning is highly active and highly interactive, allowing coaches to fully engage in the process.
- Evaluations are based around coaches demonstrating what they can actually do.
- Coaches are required to participate in ongoing training activities (of their choosing) to maintain their certification.

Integration with the Participant Development Model

The PDM for fencing identifies three clear streams of fencers: the *community* stream, the *instructional* stream, and the *competitive* stream. Participants in the community stream are generally completely new to fencing, and might be taking a few fencing classes as part of a physical education program, through a school or recreation centre, or as a special interest activity program. These participants typically fall into the Active Start and Fundamentals stages of the Long Term Athlete Development model. Participants in the instructional stream may also be new to fencing, although are not necessarily so, but they are typically enrolled in a more comprehensive instructional program than is offered in the community stream. These participants typically fall into Active Start, Fundamentals or Learn to Train stages of the LTAD model. Participants in the competitive stream are active competitors at some level of the sport (this could range from local to international). These participants are typically at the Train to Train or later stages of the LTAD model.

The new NCCP model currently plans to offer two coaching awards for the community stream, which focus on getting people engaged in the sport of fencing, one award in the instructional stream, which focuses on giving new fencers a strong technical base on which they can build as they progress, and three awards in the competitive stream which deal with the needs of the athletes as they progress through the different levels of competition and development.

Where are we now?

At the time of writing, Aide-Moniteur, the instructional stream award, is the only coaching award that is fully developed under the new NCCP. Animateur (the first community stream award) will be released shortly, but we are a little way away from full development of the other levels. *[In Ontario, we are offering the Community Instructor Certificate award as the first step in the community stream. Given that the module content is based on the proposed Animateur award, it is our hope that certified Community Instructors will be able to get NCCP accreditation at the Animateur level with little effort once it is available, but for now, it should be noted that this is a provincial, and not NCCP accreditation].* Further provincial level coaching awards which will complement and integrate with the NCCP program are also currently under development by some associations (including Ontario). In the interim, suitably qualified coach candidates wishing to continue their training and certification are encouraged to contact their Provincial Coaching Coordinators.

Why switch to the new NCCP model of coach education?

Although the old NCCP model of coach training was revolutionary when it was introduced about thirty years ago, recent advances in the fields of education, psychology and kinesiology (to name but a few) have drastically changed our understanding of the way that the human body develops and learns, and it is only logical that the frameworks we use for coaching athletes should adapt as our understanding in these areas grows. Interestingly, although the Coaches Association of Canada and the Canadian Fencing Federation have only begun using the new model recently, a problem-based learning method of education which required coaches to be able to prove that they had the necessary competencies has been used to train fencing masters around the world for many years. It seems a sensible leap, then, to explore ways of utilizing such a model for developing coaches at all levels of this sport.

How does Aide-Moniteur differ from old levels 1 and 2?

There are significant differences in the way that Aide-Moniteur coaches are trained, evaluated, and in the skills which they are required to have compared with Levels 1 and 2 under the old system. For many years now, it has been recognised that one common thread that links athletes who have achieved consistent international success across many different sports is that they have had access to excellent technical coaching from the time they started in the sport: once bad habits and poor technique are learned, they become very difficult to overcome. Thus, there is a much greater emphasis placed on teaching and demonstrating good basic technical skills for Aide-Moniteur than for the old Level 1 and 2 awards – indeed, a pre-requisite of starting the certification process for Aide-Moniteur is that candidates must be able to demonstrate technical skills equivalent to the blue armband level. People without this level of skill will be able to seek certification for the community stream awards, and will be able to pursue some provincial level coaching awards, but Aide-Moniteur coaches are expected to have a high level of technical skill and understanding that will allow them to give their athletes the solid early foundations which are now known to be required for optimal performance in later years.

The certification process for Aide-Moniteur is also very different. Gone are the days of a single weekend clinic resulting in certification. Rather, for the Aide-Moniteur award, the training and certification process is far more comprehensive. Candidates who do not currently hold their blue armband (or higher) will first be required to attend an initial technical skills evaluation to ensure they have the technical competencies required for certification. All candidates are then expected to attend an NCCP Aide-Moniteur clinic. In addition to being provided information on teaching methods, risk management, analyzing performance and providing feedback, and making ethical decisions at this clinic, candidates will have their skills assessed against the requirements of the award. At the end of this clinic, candidates will be given a spreadsheet (called a "competency matrix") which identifies the requirements for certification, and shows how their demonstrated competencies compare with these requirements. Strengths and weaknesses will be identified by trained evaluators and assessors, and candidates will be given suggestions on how weaker areas might be improved to meet the required standards. Following this clinic, candidates will be required to submit a portfolio of written work which will be evaluated against a similar competency matrix. Again, feedback will be provided to candidates who will be given the opportunity to resubmit elements of the portfolio which did not meet the required standards. Once the portfolio is evaluated as complete and satisfactory, candidates will be invited to register for an evaluation at which their practical skills will again be evaluated against the list of competencies required for the Aide-Moniteur award in a formal examination. If the candidate is evaluated as being satisfactory (or better) in all competencies, they will be deemed to have completed certification for this award. If any elements are not satisfactory, candidates will again be provided with feedback via a competency matrix and action plan, and allowed the opportunity to be re-evaluated at a future date. Candidates have a maximum of two years from the time of the initial NCCP clinic to complete certification. Those who fail to do so will be required to retake the NCCP clinic and start the certification process anew.

In addition to formal clinics and evaluations, skills clinics, whose purpose is to teach coaches the skills required to coach athletes in the instructional stream will be offered by trained learning facilitators. Candidates are strongly encouraged to work (either formally or informally) with evaluators, learning facilitators and other experienced coaches to develop their coaching skills throughout the training and certification process.

How long does it take to complete certification as Aide-Moniteur?

The time it takes to complete the certification process varies considerably from candidate to candidate due to the nature of the evaluation process. Some candidates might already possess all of the competencies required for the Aide-Moniteur award. For these candidates, certification may only take a month or two (essentially as long as it takes them to complete the written portfolios). For less experienced coaches, the process might take considerably longer, depending on the strengths and weaknesses which are revealed on the competency matrix from the assessment clinic. Pilot clinics suggest that it normally takes approximately one year of supervised coaching experience before candidates are easily able to demonstrate all of the competencies required for the Aide-Moniteur award.

The Community Instructor Certificate

As mentioned above, the Community Instructor Certificate (CIC) is an introductory level provincial coaching certificate that is awarded by the Ontario Fencing Association (OFA). It is aimed at people who are relatively new to coaching, and those who are coaching in instructional programs (e.g. recreation centres, schools, clubs) which focus on people who are new to the sport (i.e. participants in the Active Start and Fundamentals stages of the Long Term Athlete Development model). Community Instructors may also be working with more experienced athletes, but the CI training program really focuses on building basic instructional skills for participants at early stages of fencing development. It is important to be clear that at the time of writing, this is not yet an NCCP qualification (despite all the references to NCCP contained within the documentation): the OFA is working with the Canadian Fencing Federation and the Coaching Association of Canada to get the CIC program recognised as the NCCP Initiation to Community Sport qualification, but this is a complex and time consuming process which is presently far from completion.

The process for becoming a certified Community Instructor is very simple. You need to attend a 'Community Instructor' workshop. In Ontario, these are run through the Regional Community Development Centres – please check the OFA website for upcoming courses. The CI workshop includes theoretical modules (The role and function of the CI; Participants and their sport needs; Ethical Practice; Basic rules and equipment; Planning a practice; Basic organisation of training competitions) and also practice sessions, with the opportunity to receive feedback from both facilitators and other instructors. Workshops are typically around 8 hours in duration.

Once you have completed the workshop, you need to put in 6 hours of practice working under an NCCP certified coach. Once you have done this, simply get them to write a letter confirming that you have spent at least 6 hours working under their supervision and submit this to the Ontario Fencing Association Office (info@fencingontario.ca). If you don't have easy access to an NCCP certified coach, please let us know and we will help you find a mentor who can sign off on your hours.

Once you submit your letter to the OFA office, you are all done, and you will receive a certificate in the mail to show that you have completed the CI Training Program!

Where do I go for more information?

Implementation of the new NCCP model for fencing awards is being supervised by the Canadian Fencing Federation via the Coaching Education Committee. At the time of writing, the contacts for this committee are Tim Stang, Program Administrator of the CFF, and Ranil Sonnadara, President of the OFA. Experienced coaches who feel they are able to demonstrate the competencies required for certification as Community Instructor should contact the Ranil Sonnadara. Those who feel they are able to demonstrate the competencies required for certification as 'Aide-Moniteur' or higher should contact the Program Administrator.

CANADIAN FENCING FEDERATION

Fencing-Coach Development Model

Community Stream

Community OP
Refining basic skills
Continue to "play" fencing
(Orange armband)

Animateur
Intro to basic skills
Learn to "play" fencing
(Yellow armband)

Entry

Instruction Stream

Aide Moniteur
Intro to basic skills
FUN-damentals
(Teach yellow and orange)

Entry

Competition Stream

Entry
Int'l
Ath

Comp HP
Train to Win

Entry
HP
Ath

Comp Dev
Train to Compete
(Teach red and black)

Entry
Comp
Ath

Comp Int
Train to Train
Prep. for entry level comp.
(Teach green and blue)