

III TEACHING/LEARNING

“It is not theory and concept we are feeding our students, but in order to function as a teacher/instructor on a highly effective level, we (the instructor) need to understand at least some of the most basic theories, concepts and frameworks in order to serve one of our basic functions as a teacher: designing a learning environment within which the student can and will learn, and do so without the shackles of a mostly 'convergent', technique focused approach to skiing.... It is the instructor that needs to understand concepts so the experiences he/she can design and facilitate serve the learning process optimally.” - Horst Abraham

1. Teaching Skills

Ski industry literature has many teaching process models and teaching cycle models. Master instructors utilize a variety of these, however, there are certain skills that they all share.

a. Observation/Awareness Skills - Certainly, as a snow sports instructor, you need to be able to observe someone skiing or riding and understand what you see. However, that physical observation of motor skills is only a small part of your development as a master instructor. You will also need to observe your clients cognitive and emotional state as well as their motivations. Search through your training manual and find examples that employ observation skills:

b. Communication Skills (Verbal and Non-Verbal) - While all of us speak and communicate every day, such practice may not render us necessarily skilled in this practice. Do a self-check on your communication skills. Ask a friend, spouse, family member about how they perceive your communication skills. Are you a good listener? Do you make yourself clear in a minimum of time? Are your verbal and non-verbal messages mostly congruent? How is your communicating energy? Too bubbly? Monotone? Screechy voice? Energized? What is the balance between positive, encouraging and critical messages? Since **affect** is so powerful, what is the feeling you tend to leave behind when completing a conversation? Can you use simple, clear language to describe desired outcomes? Can you put someone at ease when they are scared to death? How well do you listen to ‘what is not said’, but emoted? Are you comfortable with pauses in communication after asking a question, or do you, when answers are not quickly forthcoming, fill in the blanks? Often the most important communication is contained in the white spaces (i.e. between the lines).

Practice, practice, practice with other instructors. Ask for help when things are not clear to you, and be sure to balance ‘tell’ and ‘ask’ at about a 50:50 ratio. Be open about asking for clarification when you don’t understand something.

Sincere, heart felt communications will go a long way not only in transmitting data, but also in developing a relationship of trust with your client.

When meeting someone for the first time, describe what you do to open the conversation.

c. Analytical Skills - Analytical skills depend on knowledge and understanding on the subject matter. This also leads to confidence. As an instructor, you need to know not only about the discipline you will be working in (i.e. the physics and bio-mechanics), but also about people, what motivates us, how we all learn, etc. As a new instructor, you will not be expected to know ‘everything’, however, now is a good time to start to analyze your current knowledge base and what your short term and long term goals are. Peruse and research the PSIA and other material. Rate yourself in the following areas:

	Very Knowledgeable	Somewhat/ Need to Learn	Totally New to Me
Psychology/Sociology (People Physics)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Physics/Bio-mechanics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learning Process	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teaching/Facilitating Learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What/when is your first goal? _____

d. Organizing/Goal Setting/Planning Skills - The human mind is a goal seeking mechanism. Setting goals is a prerequisite to achieving goals. The clearer and the more compelling a goal, the greater the chance of reaching the goal.

Fundamental achievement goals emerge from the conversation with the guest where her/his reasons for taking a lesson are explored.

Beyond that, the instructor will have to help set goals that are learning and performance oriented, as the student may lack insight into setting realistic goals for her/himself.

Lesson planning and goal setting are core competencies of any instructor. Lesson planning represents a skill-set that needs to be practiced, honed and developed, much like practicing skiing/riding skills. In the absence of paying attention to lesson planning and goal setting, lessons become ‘problem solving’ lessons rather than goal achieving lessons. While there are many possible paths to achieving a goal, customizing the methodology to the student’s body type, learning style, time available, environmental conditions, is the mark of an effective instructor. A ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach is a tell-tale of a highly limited and limiting instructor.

For any goal, there are also a myriad of possible approaches, but only a select few approaches will best suit the student in question.

While the instructor will take the lead in setting developmental goals at first, the objective should be to increasingly make goal setting and goal getting a collaborative effort. This will often necessitate spontaneity and improvisation along the way! Human beings are not machines.

As you study the literature and research online, look for S.M.A.R.T. goal setting as a source for help in this matter. Is one of the S.M.A.R.T. points more important than the others? Why?

e. Entertaining/Performing Skills - As an instructor, you are ultimately the ‘one’ responsible for the guest’s experience. To make the guests experience a pleasurable one, you will have to wear many hats. In that sense, you will have to seamlessly multi-task most of the time while conducting lessons, always sensing which of the roles you are playing is needed most. In multi-person lessons, this capacity will be tested to the hilt, as each person may have different needs at any give time.

This is indeed an area where the more competent you are, the more confident you will be and the better you will perform.

While in training, we have the luxury of attending to each of the roles we play separately - a highly recommended practice; during lessons we need to constantly have our radar going to determine what is needed most right now with whom. While this multi-tasking proposition may be a daunting challenge for instructors in the early development phases, keen observation of human behavior and the study of such will quickly allow you to gain confidence in this regard.

Attention to detail in interpersonal relationships can be exhausting, far more so than any physical exertion during a day of teaching. Pay attention not to get distracted by your own ‘curriculum’ to missing important clues from the students.

One key to enhancing performance in this arena is by developing routines that help you stay abreast of both the general development plan, as well as paying attention to the guest and student. Rehearse routines for when you first meet and greet your guest. Develop other routines for setting goals, periodically assessing the process/practice focus; taking stock of what has been learned; checking on pace and time; checking for motivation and energy; etc.

Play is indeed a powerful way to learn. Play is generates energy as it taps into man’s natural instinct to ‘explore’ and learn. So, play and have fun! Isn’t ski instructing wonderful!

Remember one of your first and your most recent experience on the snow with a client. Have you changed or developed your performing skills? In what way? Would you like to change anything?

2. Teaching Process and Learning Cycle

Good instruction is based upon developing a reliable partnership with the guest and student. Create a shared understanding about the role you, the instructor, will play; identify the role the student will have to play; identify collaborative functions you and the student will have to engage in; introduce the importance of goal setting and learning about the motivation the guest brings to the lesson. Why are you taking the lesson? What results do you hope to achieve? What will achieving these results enable you to do?

Also start with the heart by connecting with the guest on more than a ‘skiing level’. Who are you? What turns you on/off? What excites you? What are things you have done that helps me understand you better? Here are some things I want you to know about me!

While the neophyte instructor limits himself to teach skiing in a very mechanical way, the more effective instructor connects with the student on many levels.

As you read through the PSIA and other materials, you will find good material on the teaching process and learning cycle. There are many teaching/learning models many of which share the following basic characteristics:

- 1) Meet, greet, rapport
- 2) Determine the desired outcome-goal
- 3) Assess - analyze the current reality
- 4) Design - goal setting
- 5) Focus Practice - with adjustments
- 6) Feedback & Celebrate Successes (acknowledge progress - catch the student doing something right)
- 7) Re-calibrate and repeat

Use the “Core Concepts” to help you develop a solid understanding of suggested teaching processes along with the practice examples for each specific development target. While these recommendations instruct you to a step-by-step approach to teaching skills, don’t allow this linear progression/teaching process to derail you from realizing that learning is not necessarily a linear process. Debrief yourself at the end of each lesson and note (yes, notebook) what you have learned from each lesson.

Write the steps of a ‘teaching cycle’ model that you will use and beside each step, write down the skills you will need to fulfill each step:
