



# TEACHING TECHNIQUES

## TEACHING TECHNIQUES

This chapter will present some important aspects of teaching as they are used in coaching. Applying these ideas will help make your coaching efforts more effective and more rewarding.

Upon completion of this chapter, you will be better prepared to:

- identify and understand the four main links required to teach skills,
- identify the factors that influence learning,
- plan explanations and demonstrations of skills,
- realize the importance of planning how your athletes will practice the skills,
- provide feedback during practise.

### Factors That Influence Learning

For effective teaching, a coach must recognize the differences between athletes and their ability to learn skills. Specifically, the coach must pay close attention to the following dimensions of the players:

- Age and physical make-up
- Skill level
- Interest level

#### Age and Physical Make-Up

The age and physical attributes of players are important considerations when examining learning capabilities. For example, snap shots require a great deal of arm strength in order to be executed properly. Before puberty, most young athletes do not have the strength in their arms to correctly perform this shot. Obviously then, a coach who tries to teach snap shots to eight year-olds is not making good use of the time available.

#### Skill Level

The skill level of the players dictates those components of the game which are beneficial to introduce. For example, it would not be worthwhile to attempt to teach the concept of a 2-1-2 forechecking system to a group of eight and nine year-olds. Unless they are unusually skilled, most athletes in this age group will require training in basic skills; for example, balance, skating, and puck handling. To introduce skills beyond the athletes' physical and mental capabilities will primarily frustrate most players, while robbing them of the basic skill education which is vital to the development of young hockey players.

#### Interest Level

The interest level of the player is also a very important factor that affects learning skills. If an individual likes hockey very much and wants to participate, hard work and learning should naturally follow. However, if the player is there because the athlete's parents think it is important for their child to be a hockey player, the young athlete may show little enthusiasm. An athlete's reasons for participating in hockey will influence that athlete's interest in hockey and thus affect the coach's approach to the athlete.

In attempting to adhere to the aforementioned principles, the following points may act as a checklist in your pursuit of teaching excellence:

- **Teach only what a player can handle**

If a skill is too difficult, a player will become discouraged and learning will suffer. However, if a skill is too simple, the player will soon become bored. It is your responsibility as a coach to determine your players capabilities and create challenging yet attainable goals.

- **Teach new things early in a practice**

Young athletes learn best when they are fresh and alert. In teaching new skills at the beginning of a practice, the elements of fatigue and distraction are removed.

- **Work from simple to complex**

It is important to build a solid base before progressing on to new skill areas. In so doing, skill acquisition is simplified while athletes experience a sense of accomplishment as opposed to frustration. For example, first teach stopping without the puck, then with the puck.

- **Correct major errors at once**

Although you cannot expect an athlete to immediately execute a skill perfectly, you should not allow a player to practice major mistakes. Correct errors as soon as they occur to prevent players from developing poor habits which are difficult to rectify.

- **Repeat drills for short periods of time over many practices**

Correct repetition of a skill is essential for learning; however, you must guard against boredom by using a variety of short drills.

- **When practising skills players already possess, drills should be in game-like conditions**

Practising previously learned skills in game-like conditions is the best method to create carry-over skills into games. If practice of simulated game conditions does not take place, players will become frustrated when confronted with the increased dimensions of game conditions.

- **Praise good performance**

Positive reinforcement for a job well done enhances further learning.

## Coaching as Teaching

Coaching is a form of teaching. In hockey, teaching is what the coach does to assist players in acquiring knowledge, physical skills, techniques, and attitudes.

There are four main links in the chain of effective teaching:

1st Link:           Select a basic skill to be learned – identify what you want the athletes to learn.



- 2nd Link: Plan the explanation and demonstration – determine what to say, how to say it and how to show it.
- 3rd Link: Plan how the athletes will practice the skill.
- 4th Link: Provide feedback during practice – make constructive corrections and help the athletes maintain realistic goals.

**1st Link: *Select A Basic Skill To Be Learned***

Basic skills are not always easy to learn. In hockey, skating is the basic skill, but this skill is complex and difficult to learn. Passing or shooting the puck are actually easier skills to learn, but skating is the more basic skill.

There are a number of hockey skills that may be practised by one player; for example, skating, shooting, or puck handling. However, to practise passing and receiving the puck, like many other skills in hockey, requires two or more players.

The coach needs to develop a general list of basic skills, beginning with the most basic and including the key components of each skill. For example, the basic skill of skating can be divided into four components: a) starting, b) striding, c) turning, and d) stopping.

**For the Coach**

You are asked to write a hockey coach’s manual. What skills would you emphasize in the columns below?:

- List the four or five most important basic hockey skills.
- Identify the order in which you think the skills should be taught. That is, what skill should be taught first, second, and so on to the last skill.
- Identify how the skills could be learned – alone or with others.

Most Important Basic Skills	Order Taught (e.g. 1st, 2nd)	How Learned		
		Alone	In Pairs	Three+

Compare your list with that of another hockey coach. Discuss the differences. It is important to realize that it is not necessary to agree on everything. You will likely agree on the most important basic skills but may disagree on the order in which the skills are taught. When you are coaching you will have a lot of freedom to teach skills in the order you think is most appropriate. However, it is important that your list is similar to that recommended by a good manual and also that it makes sense to you personally.

## **2nd Link: Plan the Explanation and Demonstration**

This is the planning you do to organize what you want to teach. From your list of basic skills, select one and follow this second link in the teaching chain planning how to explain and demonstrate the skill.

This link contains seven steps:

- **Step 1 - Select a skill and write down why it is important.**

Name the skill and explain briefly and simply what the name means, how the skill is used in hockey, and where and when it is used. Keep the explanation simple and brief. Total time for the explanation and demonstration should be no more than three minutes.

- **Step 2 - Select four or five main teaching points to emphasize.**

Each teaching point may be made up of two or three closely related ideas. If your participants are young, inexperienced, or have special learning problems, then select only one or two teaching points and keep the points as simple as possible.

Select short, descriptive, key words or phrases to highlight the teaching points during the demonstration. Rehearse the demonstration and use the key words until you know them well. Don't overload the learner by giving too many key words at the same time.

- **Step 3 - Decide if an aid would help.**

An aid is a chart, diagram, picture, film, or videotape. Do not use an aid unless you feel sure it will add something important to the demonstration. Good aids are most useful if they are posted on a wall or bulletin board so athletes can refer to them after the skill has been taught. Posting aids will help the players recall details of the demonstration. If an aid is to be used, rehearse with it until you feel comfortable.

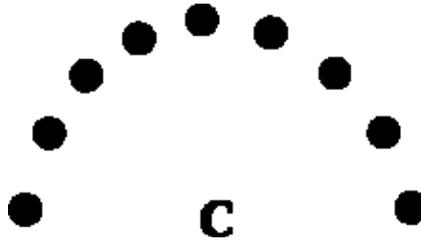
- **Step 4 - Select an effective formation.**

Consider the number of players present and decide what formation to put them in, where all will be able to see and hear clearly.

There are a number of formations that can be used effectively. The formations are designed so that every player can see the demonstration, plus hear any instructions. Three formations which are often used are:

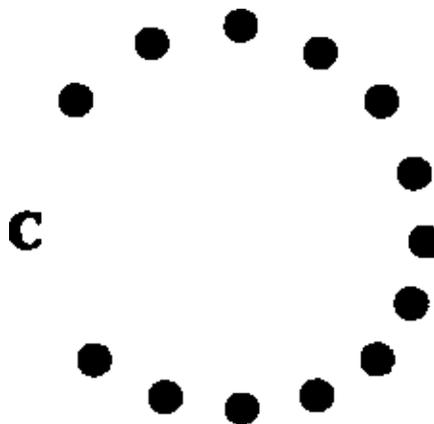
## Semi Circle

- allows closeness while preventing crowding
- provides a clear field of vision for all athletes and the coach
- creates a good stage for demonstrations and explanations



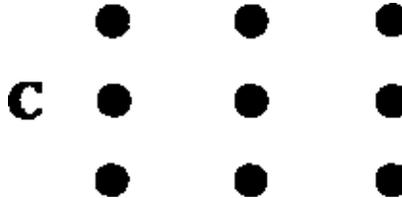
## Full Circle

- good format when dealing with large groups as it provides a clear field of vision for everyone
- it is important that the coach stand at the perimeter of the circle to ensure that the coach's back is not turned to any of the players



## Squad Formation

- good for setting up drills that use the full length of the ice



Whether you use these three formations or one of your own, ensure that all of your players are able to see each skill demonstration.

Remember, the acoustics in arenas can cause problems. If you must address your players when they are spread over the entire ice surface there are a number of effective methods of doing this:

- Stand in a corner of the ice surface facing your players and address them as a whole group.
- Address half of the group at one end then repeat your explanation at the other end.
- Explain to a group at one end of the rink while an assistant explains to a group at the other end.
- Stand at centre ice with your back against the boards and address each end of the rink separately.

Avoid teaching complex skills from these positions. At all times, speak loudly and clearly but avoid unnecessary shouting.

Observers at practices have a tendency to distract players. To overcome this, have your players face you with their backs to any possible distractions.

- **Step 5 - Decide on what view or views athletes should see.**

Mentally check out the best angle for viewing the demonstration. Plan to repeat the demonstration as many times as necessary rotating 90 degrees or 180 degrees each time to ensure that all athletes see it from the best angle. Remember, total time for the demonstration and explanation should be no more than three minutes from beginning to end (60 to 70 seconds is usually long enough). If it goes longer, it will have been repeated too often or too much detail will have been given.

Remember:

- avoid boredom and confusion
- be brief
- be seen by all ... heard by all.

- **Step 6 - Decide on who demonstrates.**

Having decided what is to be done, decide on who should demonstrate. Being asked to demonstrate may be rewarding. Many members of the team should be called on to perform demonstrations.

Coaches often demonstrate a skill themselves. However, if an explanation must accompany the demonstration, select an assistant coach or a player to perform the skill. Demonstration by you often means turning your back to your players thereby creating a poor line of communication. By having someone else perform the demonstration, the players enjoy the benefit of observing the skill and hearing a clear explanation of it.

In the case of simple demonstrations, use a member of the team – it does not have to be a top performer. Most group members identify with average performers and learn best from them. Beginners do not remember fine details to start with and they sometimes find the best performers discouraging to watch.

Some players do not like to get up in front of their teammates to demonstrate. A coach should respect these individuals' feelings by asking them before the practice if they would mind taking part in the demonstration.

- **Step 7 - Call for questions to conclude.**

To make sure that athletes understand, ask if they have any questions. Answer those which are related closely to the skill, but politely refer questions that are not to the point to a later time to avoid getting sidetracked.

All questions should be answered with respect, even if they have been covered during the demonstrations. If athletes are shy in the beginning, pose questions yourself and answer them yourself.

Novice athletes have difficulty doing a skill if they don't know exactly what it is supposed to look like. Check to see that what you describe is what they picture in their minds when they are trying to do it.

### **A Word of Encouragement**

At first, following these steps will take a lot of time. But if you use them frequently you will soon be able to go through them with only the briefest of notes.

Experienced coaches recall details of a demonstration and how to present it simply by recalling the name of the skill.

A sample plan for explaining and demonstrating skills is provided below for you to review. This plan applies the seven steps just explained to teaching the sweep pass in hockey.

### **A Sample Plan For A Hockey Skill Demonstration**

#### **Step 1 Select a skill: the sweep pass.**

As hockey is a game of swift movement and precision, the sweep pass is one of the most efficient and effective methods of moving the puck.

## Step 2 Select main teaching points to emphasize.

The explanation is for a left handed player performing a forehand pass to the player's right:

- while skating forward and dribbling the puck, the player spots an opening with which to improve the team's advantage,
- the player draws the puck slightly to the left of the midline of the body while keeping his/her eyes on the target,
- when the passing lane is open, the player sweeps the puck towards the target without slapping the puck or snapping the wrists,
- the player follows through towards the target with the stick remaining low to the ice.

### Key Words

- skating forward
- midline, eyes on target
- passing lane open, sweeps, without slapping
- low follow through to target

## Step 3 Decide on teaching aids.

Post a chart on the bulletin board with a summary of the four teaching points under a good action photo of a sweep pass. Later, when viewing a film on strategy, point out good examples of the skill.

## Step 4 Select a formation for demonstration.

Given a group of 16 athletes, 13 to 14 years of age, arrange in four squads of four players each, in double lines, front line kneeling and back line standing.

## Step 5 Decide on views for athletes.

Views should be provided of a left-handed player passing to both the left and right. Repeat the pass two or three times, outlining the important teaching points.





**Step 6 Decide on who demonstrates.**

A competent player, not necessarily the best, may demonstrate along with the coach, or two competent players may demonstrate, one at each end of the formation.

**Step 7 Questions.**

Ask if there are any questions about the skill and answer them briefly and directly.

**For the Coach**

**Planning an Explanation And Demonstration**

Select a basic hockey skill that can be practised by one or two players. Follow the steps in planning an explanation and demonstration. Include a reasonable amount of detail. Have another coach look over your plan and make comments to help see where your strengths and weaknesses are.

Step 1. Explain the skill and why it is important.

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Step 2. Main teaching points to emphasize:

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Key words or phrases:

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Step 3. Decide on teaching aids.

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Step 4. Select formation for demonstration.

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Step 5. Decide on views for athletes.

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Step 6. Decide on demonstrators.

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Step 7. Call for questions.

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### **3rd Link: Plan how the Athletes will Practice the Skill**

The next link in the teaching chain is organizing a group of players to practise a skill. This link is covered in Section 6, Practice Organization – Point 6.3 of this manual.

Preparing your practice to accommodate the specific needs of your athletes is very important. Select both individual and team skills which you feel need improvement. Organize your practice around the selected skills remembering the points previously mentioned in this chapter under the heading Factors That Influence Learning. Practices should be well-organized with specific goals stated, but flexibility is necessary in order to accommodate slow or fast learning.

Drills should be educational yet fun. If handled with imagination, a one-hour practice can focus on one or two skills without boring your athletes. Fresh ideas help maintain a positive teaching and learning environment.

Note: Please refer to Section 6, Practice Organization.

### **4th Link: Provide Feedback During Practice**

Feedback during learning involves providing information to the athletes about their efforts to learn. It serves three important functions in learning:

- to guide improvement,
- to measure progress,
- to provide either reward or punishment.
- **Provide Feedback to Guide Improvement**

Learning skills can be very confusing. There are many aspects to think about as is clear in the sweep pass example we have used.

First, the athlete needs to know what skills are being performed correctly to know what parts of the skill are under control. This is not a matter of being nice to the athlete by being positive. This is based strictly on sound principles of skill learning.

For example, if there are five or six questions in the mind of an athlete learning the sweep pass in hockey, it would help the athlete a great deal if feedback following practice answered two or three of the questions. For the remaining questions, through the player's own thinking and with help from teammates or the coach, he may be able to say: "Yes, I can draw the puck just past my midline while skating forward and keep my eye on the target while waiting for an open passing lane. By sweeping the puck and following through towards the target with my stick low to the ice I should perform an accurate pass."

If athletes are not clear on what parts of the skill are being done correctly they may change some aspects of the skill for the worse as they try to correct other parts of the skill.

- **Use Feedback as a Measure of Progress**

If an athlete knows that the list of questions about how to do a skill is getting shorter, it will be easy for the player to recognize improvement.

Further evidence of an improved skill level can be measured. If a player can pass the puck accurately and hit a small target eight out of ten times, and if this was not possible before, the athlete has a tangible evidence of improvement.

Often an athlete will recognize increased skill by a new feeling of naturalness and smooth action that replaces stiff, unnatural action ("it feels much better now!"), and this is further important evidence of improved skill quality.

- **Use Feedback as Reward or Punishment**

Knowledge of improvement rewards us, so does approval, recognition, or words of encouragement from people important to us; family members, friends, and coaches in particular. "Well done!" "Yes, excellent." "Good work." "I'm proud of you!"

Punishment is the opposite of reward. It is sometimes useful in stopping dangerous or undesirable behaviour and replacing it with learning desirable, acceptable behaviour. Physical punishment is never acceptable, nor is extra, strenuous, physical work an advisable form of punishment.

If you work players hard to get them into shape to play, it is not advisable to risk confusing such necessary work with punishment in the minds of those you coach. For example, if a player is misbehaving, send the athlete off the ice. To have players do extra skating should not be used for punishment. Skating is an important element of hockey and should not be associated with punishment.

Discuss why certain actions are dangerous or undesirable and present what is a better way to behave. On rare occasions when some form of punishment is necessary, you may decide not to allow the athlete to do something which the athlete really enjoys doing and explain why.

## For the Coach

### Feedback During Skill Practice

Use the hockey skill for which you planned on explanation and demonstration, and draw up a list of the three different types of feedback you might provide players with after they have practised the skill. Discuss your example with another coach to check on your understanding of feedback.

Skill: \_\_\_\_\_

- Feedback to guide improvement: What are some aspects of the skill that the athlete might be doing correctly which you can point out?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- Feedback as a measure of progress: What are some ways that evidence of improvement can be provided?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- Feedback to provide reward or punishment: What can you say to reward the athlete? If punishment is necessary, what would you do?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Teaching Assessment Scale For Coaches

The following assessment is intended to rate how you are doing in the teaching element of your coaching. To assess your abilities, as soon as possible after a practice in which you conducted a demonstration of a new skill, rate yourself. Better still, have another coach familiar with the material included in this chapter, rate you while the practice is going on. The rating results can be discussed with you and then used as a guide for improvement. You can guide your own improvement, but it is invaluable to have a second opinion to see yourself as others see you.

Some items listed below will not apply to every practice. These may be marked NA (for not applicable) in the column at the right. Each rating should reflect, in general, how you taught during the practice. You may wish to add a line for comments for any item.



In the column at the right indicate the most appropriate rating for each item as follows:

- 5 – very well done at all times
- 4 – quite well done all or most of the time
- 3 – Okay but still room for improvement
- 2 – weak but shows signs of promise
- 1 – very weak or badly done all the time
- NA – not applicable for this practise

<b>A. Explanation and Demonstration</b>	<b>Rating</b>
A1 Was the skill taught in a way suitable for this group of athletes?	_____
A2 Were the reasons for teaching the skill simply and clearly explained?	_____
A3 If an aid was used, did it improve the presentation of the skill?	_____
A4 Were the important teaching points given?	_____
A5 Did the formation allow all to see and hear while avoiding distraction?	_____
A6 Was the demonstration repeated enough times so the actions Were clearly observed by all?	_____
A7 Were questions answered reasonably well?	_____

<b>B. Practice of Skills</b>	<b>Rating</b>
B1 Was the change from demonstration to practise handled Without delay or confusion?	_____
B2 Did the planning for practice account for the following:	
• the number of players?	_____
• the area available?	_____
• equipment available?	_____
• the physical dangers or safety hazards?	_____
B3 Were groups of athletes arranged so that players with similar experience, size, aggressiveness, were practising together?	_____
B4 During the early stages of practice did the coach first give attention To the pattern of activity (e.g. spacing, direction of movement, distances covered and, if necessary, correct it before correcting skills?	_____



- B5 If unforeseen safety problems developed, were they dealt with Effectively? \_\_\_\_\_
- B6 Was there maximum activity most of the time with resting for Constructive purposes, such as catching one's breath, safety or listening? \_\_\_\_\_
- B7 Were most instructions readily understood? \_\_\_\_\_
- B8 Were athletes required to pay attention? \_\_\_\_\_
- B9 Were key phrases from the teaching points used during practise? \_\_\_\_\_
- B10 Was the voice clear and well projected? \_\_\_\_\_
- B11 Was a reasonable amount of time spent moving around and Carefully observing what the players were doing? \_\_\_\_\_

**C. Constructive Correction**

**Rating**

- C1 When the group was stopped for feedback, was full attention Acquired before proceeding? \_\_\_\_\_
- C2 Were correct aspects of skills pointed out and rewarded before errors were pointed out? \_\_\_\_\_
- C3 Was good effort, hustle, concentration, or other evidence of Good attitude pointed out and rewarded? \_\_\_\_\_
- C4 Were errors pointed out in a firm matter of fact manner and not in a punishing way? \_\_\_\_\_
- C5 Were the most important errors pointed out first and less important Ones later? \_\_\_\_\_

Review the scoring. Notice those areas where you scored well. Choose one or two areas as your own personal goals for improvement.



Immediately following practice and while it is still fresh in your mind, you may wish to use the mini-scale below to provide you with a quick overview of your teaching skills. You can then use this scale as a guide when completing the preceding more detailed assessment. For each skill, select the word which best reflects how you feel about your teaching.

Skill	Very Good	Good	OK	Needs Work
• Shows enthusiasm	_____	_____	_____	_____
• Uses proper voice level	_____	_____	_____	_____
• Maintains eye contact	_____	_____	_____	_____
• Demonstrates effectively	_____	_____	_____	_____
• Uses appropriate language	_____	_____	_____	_____
• Uses short, descriptive key	_____	_____	_____	_____
• Calls for questions	_____	_____	_____	_____
• Provides effective feedback	_____	_____	_____	_____