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The Spectrum of Teaching Styles
Style F – Guided-Discovery

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This is the fifth in the series of teaching styles as presented by Mosston (1966) and then expanded as well as clarified by Mosston with Ashworth (1994). Each of the styles identifies and describes the instructional control of a lesson and who is charged with the decision making power. The lesson direction, activities and pace as well as the instructional interaction between participants are accounted for within the complex dynamics and anatomy of the teaching style as defined by Mosston. As dissected, presented and explained by Mosston, each episode of teaching behavior has decisions that are positioned into one of three distinct groupings (preimpact, impact and postimpact) that identifies the sequence of instructional conditions. The Preimpact decisions are those choices that are made prior to the lesson. The Impact decisions are those choices and interactions that are made during each instructional segment of the lesson. The final set of decisions, the postimpact decisions are those that are made following the lesson that bring closure to the episode and provide transition into the next.

Mosston’s Spectrum of Teaching Styles

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The first in the series was the Command Style (A) where the teacher makes all of the decisions in the teaching-learning process. These include preimpact (objectives; subject content; experiences; instructional support), impact (instruction delivery; formative assessment; teaching-learning process), and post impact (performance feedback; summative assessment). This style relies on the teacher’s know-how and is the most familiar as the teacher is responsible for all decisions made during each of the three phases of the lesson. The teacher, who is in total control, leads and learners respond in uniformity attempting to all reach the learning objective simultaneously.

In that same journal, the Practice Style (B) was presented and explained. This style is different because within the impact phase of instruction, the learner makes a series of choices based on the learning environment as well as the individual differences of the learner. The student performs learning experiences, tasks and drills designed as well as prescribed by the teacher. The student-participant determines the readiness to start, training intervals, pace and use of resources to support instruction. The accountability for the preimpact as well as the postimpact belong to the teacher, while the decisions during the phase of the lesson are the responsibility of the student-learner. As a result of dynamics of the Practice Style (B), as with the Command Style (A) of teaching, the process while direct, efficient and orderly, offers little creativity in the performance.

The Reciprocal Style (C) was presented in the Spring 2009 OAHPERD Journal. The teacher is
responsible for decisions in the preimpact and all the decisions associated with the selection of performance objectives, lesson content, group organizational structure, and assessment (criterion or task) sheets. The student-learner makes the decisions in the impact phase and is responsible for getting organized into groups. Then each individual group is in charge of the pace of achieving the objectives of the lesson. During activity, the teacher serves the learner as a resource to provide feedback and interpret the task assessment sheets. In the postimpact, the performance is observed by a member of the group who communicates with the student performing the skill. The focus is on adhering to the criteria on the task sheet and being constructive with comments to build confidence as well as strengthening performance. The teacher communicates only with the observer who is providing feedback, not the performer, on the technical aspects of the performance. The focus, for the teacher, is to build trust within the group as well as develop their powers of observation, communication and the social skills necessary to support a variety of developmental skills. The students are taking a more active role in the teaching-learning process in an effort to facilitate a deeper understanding of how skills are performed.

The Self-Check Style (D) (Fall 2009) continues to engage the student-learner with a more involved role in the decisions made within each of the teaching-learning process. The focus of this teaching style, once the teacher determines the learning objectives, the student-learners themselves must completely understand the technical aspects of the performance so that there is a baseline for self-evaluation. In this style, the teacher is still responsible for the preimpact decisions, the student is responsible for the impact decisions and the postimpact is shared with the student. While the student provides feedback on the performance, the teacher reviews and responds to the information on the task sheet. There is minimum communication between performers or with the teacher but technology can be used to provide as well as enhancement feedback.

The Inclusion Style (E) (Winter 2009) embraces the idea of individual differences and differing abilities to achieve success. The preimpact phase is similar to the previous styles but in this style, during the impact phase the student-learner makes all the decisions that impact the how, level of performance, learning activities, pace and it is all based on the learner's perception of his/her own ability. In the postimpact phase, both student-learner and the teacher assess performance. The teacher does not judge the level of performance. Only the achievement based on the student-learner's selection of a performance standard as presented on the task sheet prepared by the teacher during the preimpact phase. An example would be an instructional lesson that uses the Sportime International’s Jump Flags to teach jumping technique. The line is hung on a slant, creating the first challenge along with the six flags at each station providing a measuring device with which to assess success. The student-learner makes a decision of which flags to attempt to reach based on a perception of jumping ability and the height that can be reached. The decision of which number should be attempted to touch using correct jumping technique is the responsibility of the student. Assessing the performance in the postimpact phase is the responsibility of both the teacher and student-learner using the criteria on the task sheet.

Diagram 1 The Structure of the Spectrum

The Guided Discovery Style (F) of teaching is a highly developed trial-and-error process that is organized by the teacher to lead, by questions or challenging tasks, the student-learner to discover a predetermined correct answer (performance response, concept application, strategy resolution or the impact of a rule on play). The teacher serves as an instructional guide by presenting a series of questions, problems and challenges that channel the student-learner to a desired performance solution. Each instructional episode is based on the prior response and readiness to move to the next challenge.

In the preimpact phase of the lesson, the teacher determines the idea, principles, skills and strategies to be included in the lesson, most time coming from a pre-determined curriculum. Once the outcome has been identified, the teacher also develops the activities to lead the student-learner to a desired performance solution. Each instructional episode is based on the prior response and readiness to move to the next challenge.

Diagram 2 The Anatomy of Any Style of Teaching on the Spectrum
to each less-than-correct performance so that the new challenge will lead to the desired performance outcome. The learning objectives are determined by the teacher as well as the ability-based sequence of events but the pace through each of the challenging tasks is the responsibility of the student. At the beginning of the planning process, during the preimpact phase, the performance expectations and other instructional elements are identified. When they are presented at the beginning of the teaching-learning process, it is important to link them to the assessments that will be used to measure how successfully the learner has achieved the stated outcomes.

The teacher and the student-learner share control of the decisions in the impact and the post impact phases of the lesson. As the student-learner explores the challenging activities, based on the correctness of the response to the questions and challenges, the learner blazes the path to the outcome. As a performance is assessed by the learner, teacher or a peer-observer, progress toward a correct response is a shared responsibility. As the student-learner responds, receives feedback based on performance assessment, then both the teacher and student-learner determine the next challenge which moves the learning to the next step and helps to define the route that will achieve the best results. More challenges are presented, the responses assessed and the feedback is used to create the route to a successful performance. This phase of the teaching-learning process takes a great deal of instructional time due to the repeated attempts (trial and error) and performance analysis. A very skilled learner could take as few as one challenge/response to reach the pre-determined outcome, where an unskilled learner could take countless attempts that repeat performances or even very small steps on the path toward the outcome for a variety of reasons which require assessment and refocus on the outcome.

Decisions-Making Within The Guided Discovery Style of Teaching

Soccer Unit - Class # 6

TASK: Kicking a Moving Soccer Ball into the Goal from a distance of 25 feet in front of the goal

Performance Objective # 1:
Performance Objective # 2:

Lesson Organization:

Warm-up Activity:

TASK # 1 is presented: A rolling ball is to be kicked into the goal 3 out of 5 times, using an instep kick with the dominant leg, from a distance of 25 feet being rolled by a partner from 10 feet away on the ground.

Questions or alternate tasks are presented. They elicit alternate responses to guide the student into the predetermined response.

Participant Performance

Skill Analysis using “Key Reference Points” on the task sheet and Technique Assessment by self and observers

Summary Analysis

Successful Response
Technically Correct

Unsuccessful Kick
Technically Flawed or Weak Kick

Repeat the task to achieve the Performance Standard
Practice using Feedback to Strengthen Performance

Modify task elements to increase challenge

Predetermined Task Achieved

The teaching-learning process involved in the Guided Discovery Style (F) is a sometimes slow and a very time consuming progression as the less skilled student-learners work toward the desired performance. The teacher must prepare a series of ability-based paths and pre-teach the students on how to observe the performance, self-assess, modify performance based on feedback and re-engage the trial-and-error process to discover the best path. One full set of practice-performance-feedback trials must be completed with an assessment as well as feedback before the pathway to the next challenge can be selected or a repeat is necessary due to a failure. Once the next step in the process is determined, the trial-and-error course towards the correct response can be continued until success is achieved based on accomplishing the outcome stated in the preimpact phase. Some questions may be repeated and some performances must be tried, tried and tried again until the response yields enough feedback or the attempt is successful so a new challenge can be explored. The teaching-learning environment for this teaching style must be a nurturing and supportive one, where the teacher, student-learner and peer-observers are accepting of this discovery process and willing to accept an unsuccessful performance feedback and repeat the task until the desired outcome is achieved.

The practice phase of the lesson is a step-by-step discovery that must be organized so that the learner has the opportunity to try and retry the same challenge over and over until the correct response is achieved. Each of the participants, learner, teacher and peer-observers, must be able to provide frequent feedback that in some cases is nearly the same. Patience is a quality that is a fundamental requirement when searching for the correct response takes time. For example, if a soccer ball is being kicked, all of the techniques that impact the player’s positioning and the variety of modifications that change the flight of the ball must be explored. It is also important for the learner and peer-observer to understand that in the guided discovery style, a correct response by happen-stance is not a correct response; it must be repeated, again and again.

As stated previously, it is the challenge of the task, the statement of what a correct response is and the organization of the practice that takes the enormous amount of instructional time in the guided practice style of teaching. It is the teacher’s responsibility to incrementally arrange modifications that are selected by the learner based on the quality of the response. These trial-and-error “fixes” need to also be grouped by area and designed to address errors or different ways the learner can strengthen a performance. Within an area the “cues” that the teacher