



TEACHING

A Model For Effective Instruction



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OBJECTIVES

- To develop a model for proper instruction
- To understand how to effectively communicate
- To understand the different levels of learning

A MODEL FOR INSTRUCTION

Although there are many ways to instruct young hockey players, the following approach has proven to be both easy to use and effective in teaching and/or refining skills.

1. Get the attention of the players.
2. Communicate precisely what needs to be learned.
3. Provide time for practice and feedback.
4. Evaluate results and take appropriate action.

STEP 1: ESTABLISH ATTENTION AND CONTENT CREDIBILITY

The attention of the players must be directed at the coach before instruction can occur. Be sure to arrange the players so that each one can see your actions and hear your instructions. Choose where you stand in relation to the players so that you specifically avoid competing with other distractions in the background. Often it is good strategy to have the players on one knee as you introduce a skill.

Immediately establish the precedent that when you speak, important information is being communicated. Point out that the team cannot maximize its practice opportunity when several people are talking at the same time.

As you begin your comments, establish the need for competence of the skill (why this skill is important) by relating it to some phase of successful team and/or individual play. An excellent way to gain your players' attention and motivate players to want to learn the skill is to mention how a local, regional or national-level player or team has mastered the skill and has used it to great advantage. The objective of

your comments is to establish the idea that mastery of this skill is very important to individual and team play and that the key elements of its execution are achievable.

Establish and maintain the precedent that when you speak, important useful information is being communicated.

The next and perhaps even more important task is to clearly establish in the minds of the players that they need instruction on this skill. This can be accomplished with the following steps:

1. Briefly describe the new skill and then let them try it several times in a quick-paced drill setting.
2. Carefully observe their performance and identify their strengths and weaknesses. Use the key elements of the skill as a basis for your observations.
3. Call them back together and report your observations.

This approach will allow you to point out weaknesses in performance on one or more key elements that were common to many, if not all, of the players. Using this approach will enhance your credibility and motivate the players to listen to and follow your instruction. Also, your subsequent teaching can be specifically matched to the needs (weaknesses) you observed. Of course, if in your observation of the players' abilities you determine that they have already achieved the desired skill level, then you should shift your focus to another skill. This could involve moving on to the next phase of your practice plan.

Individuals learn most effectively by focusing their practice attempts on one clearly understood element of skill performance.

When your players are at two or three different levels of ability, you may want to establish two or three instructional groups. This can be accomplished using the following three divisions:

Early Learning: focus on learning the key elements of the skill

Intermediate Learning: focus on coordination of all key elements

Later Learning: automatic use of the skill in game-like conditions

STEP 2: COMMUNICATE PRECISELY WHAT NEEDS TO BE LEARNED

When you and your players know their status on a given skill (strengths and weaknesses of their performance), conditions are well established for both teaching and learning. Because individuals learn most efficiently when they focus on one aspect of a skill at a time, it is important to communicate precisely the one key element of the skill on which you want the individual, pair, group or team to concentrate. Demonstrate the key element visually (and explain it verbally) so that all players know exactly what they are trying to achieve.

STEP 3: PROVIDE FOR PRACTICE AND FEEDBACK

Organize your practice time and select your drills or practice activity:

1. Provide as many repetitions (trials) as possible within the allotted time for instruction. Minimize standing in lines.
2. Provide specific, immediate and positive feedback on what they did correctly and then on what they can do to improve. Follow this with some encouragement to continue the learning effort.

Repetitions and feedback are essential to effective coaching. You can expect a direct relationship

between the gains in player performance and the degree to which you find ways to maximize these two dimensions of instruction. John Wooden, famed UCLA basketball coach, was found to provide over 2,000 acts of teaching during 30 total hours of practice, of which 75 percent pertained directly to skill instruction. This converts to more than one incidence of feedback for every minute of coaching activity!

Repeated trials and specific feedback on what was right, followed by what can be improved, with an encouraging "try again," produces results.

Feedback can be dramatically increased by using volunteers and/or players as instructional aids. Where instruction is focused on one key element of performance and the important aspects of performing the skill have been effectively communicated to the players, they are often as good (and sometimes better) at seeing discrepancies in a partner's performance as some adults. Working in pairs or small groups can thus be very effective in increasing both the number of trials and the amount of feedback that individuals get within a given amount of practice time. Also, by providing feedback, players are improving their mental understanding of how the skill should be performed.

STEP 4: EVALUATE RESULTS AND TAKE APPROPRIATE ACTION

Evaluation of player performance must occur on a continuing basis during practices and in the games. This is the only valid means to answer the question, "Are the players achieving the skills?" If they are, you have two appropriate actions to take:

1. First, enjoy it. You are making an important contribution to your players.
2. Second, consider how you can be even more efficient. Are there ways that you can get the same results in less time? Can even higher gains in skill be achieved within the same time allotment?

If the players are not achieving the instructional objectives, it is important to ask, "why?" Although it is possible that you have a cluster of players who are slower learners, this is seldom the case.

First, assume that you are using inappropriate instructional techniques or that you simply did not provide enough instructional time. A good approach to answering the “why” question is to go back through the instructional factors related to effective planning, teaching, communicating, discipline and/or conditioning and determine which of the guidelines or steps was missed and/or inappropriately implemented. Then alter your subsequent practices accordingly. Continuous trial, error and revisions will usually result in improved coaching effectiveness, which then translates into increased achievement by the players. In instances where you cannot determine what to alter, seek help from a fellow coach whose team is consistently strong in the skill(s) that are causing you difficulty. This is an excellent way to obtain some good ideas for alterations in your approach.

SUMMARY

Effective instruction is the foundation of successful coaching. It requires practices that include a clear communication of what is to be learned, a continuous evaluation of player performance on the objectives included in the practices, a systematic method of instruction, and the use of guidelines for instruction that have been associated with player achievement.

Systematic instruction includes establishing attention and content credibility, precise communication of what needs to be learned, providing many practice trials and plenty of feedback and evaluation of player achievement. Use of the guidelines for effective instruction (realistic expectations, structured instruction, order, grouping, maximizing time, success, monitoring and providing a sense of control) will maximize the results of instruction. Systematic instruction based upon these guidelines of effective instruction, incorporated into effective practice plans, will result in player achievement of the essentials of the game.