

# Teaching Styles

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## Introduction

Until Muska Mosston entered the teaching scene in the 1970s, leading theorists in the field of education placed the instructional process into two style categories. Teaching methodology followed a formal teacher-centered style or a more informal student-centered style. Mosston, however, proposed a catalog of several distinct styles of teaching that covered the entire continuum from teacher-centered to student-centered. His work had a considerable effect on the teaching profession.

A style of teaching, as defined by Mosston, is basically a set of decisions made in conjunction with the teaching act. As one moves along the continuum from teacher-centered to more student-centered styles, certain decisions are transferred from the teacher to the student. In the command style, decisions are made exclusively by the teacher. By comparison, most of the decisions are on the students' shoulders in the problem-solving method.

According to Mosston, all teaching decisions fall into three categories: *planning*, *execution*, and *evaluation*. These three categories constitute the anatomy of a teaching style. Any given style can be identified by the number and type of decisions made by the student.

- ◆ planning
- ◆ execution
- ◆ evaluation

### Planning

Is the student deciding where to perform, what to perform, or how much and how well? If she is, this would indicate that the student had a part in the *planning* phase of the lesson?

### Execution

Or, is the student deciding how fast to move or when to start and stop performance? These changes would indicate that a shift in decision making occurred during the *execution* phase.

### Evaluation

If a partner offers immediate feedback based on criteria set by the teacher, the *evaluation* process has been moved to the student.

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It should be noted that simply asking a student “how does that feel?”, or “why is that better?”, is not a shift in decision making; it’s simply a more humanistic approach to command style teaching. The teacher has often told the students exactly what to do and then simply asked for feedback. If students are given a set of directions and then allowed to perform on their own within a prescribed set of boundaries, the teaching style moves along the continuum to task. But following up the task by simply asking “How does it feel?” does not then transform the teaching style into guided discovery. At this point, the student has still not made any significant cognitive decisions, although they have been asked to sense kinesthetically what is happening.

Each style along the spectrum has advantages and disadvantages, and no one style is best all the time. It is also probable that hybrids of the styles have been or will be developed. Furthermore, research indicates that the most effective teachers vary their teaching behavior from class to class and even within classes.

Changing favored-teacher behavior is no small task. There are many factors to consider including the readiness of students to make decisions for themselves, and the teacher’s ability to curb his decision making behavior. If students have learned primarily through command or teachers are not used to relinquishing some control, a weaning period may be necessary. Go slowly. Start with only one or two decisions and try an alternative style for a small part of the lesson.

The following information has been compiled to help instructors understand how to effectively structure lessons in the various teaching styles.

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## **Command Style**

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Execution of command style simply requires that the teacher give a brief, but adequate explanation and an accurate demonstration. The student then follows instructions for performance and the teacher gives evaluation and feedback. New teachers who lack thorough knowledge of the subject matter will feel more comfortable with this style. However, if instruction time is short, and it is necessary to impart some very specific information, the command style may be the preferred choice, although pure command is rare.

### **Characteristics**

1. complete domination of all decisions by the teacher
2. relies heavily on demonstration
3. focuses on teacher and subject matter
4. role of the student is to respond to the teacher’s stimuli

### **Advantages**

1. uniformity—elicits specific responses
2. efficiency

### **Disadvantages**

1. not sensitive to individual needs
2. minimal intellectual involvement

Classic examples of command style teaching would be “follow me” or instructing the class to perform for the teacher in a “call down” fashion.

## Task Style

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Task style teaching is an extension of command in that the teacher still controls most of the important decisions. Delivery of the task is done by explanation and demonstration, but when it is time for performance, students can now start on their own, perform a certain number of times and then stop on their own. During this time, the teacher is free to observe and offer individual help and feedback.

### Characteristics

1. teacher makes all planning and evaluation decisions along with some execution decisions
2. student makes some execution decisions (i.e. task is explained and demonstrated and students start, perform and stop movement all on their own)
3. begin with one task at a time. Later, two to four variations of a task can be demonstrated so students can select the variation to perform.
4. independence from teacher begins to evolve
5. concept of a range of tasks permits everyone in class to participate according to ability

### Advantages

1. allows for individualization of instruction
2. allows for private feedback
3. better utilization of time or space

### Disadvantages

1. teacher must plan ahead and prepare more
2. student can avoid teacher contact or be overlooked by the teacher

Allowing all your beginner skiers to practice scooter skiing (sliding on one ski) at the same time for a designated number of passes across the teaching area after the initial demonstration and explanation would be a good example of task style teaching.

## Reciprocal Style

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Reciprocal style can be an effective method for changing the routine in class. However, merely working with a partner is not reciprocal style teaching unless one of the pair is also instructed to give feedback. Simply following or synchronizing with each other is variation of the task style. But, to be effective, give as much assistance to observer as possible without taking over the observer's role and list specific things in the performance to look for.

### Characteristics

1. teacher makes all planning decisions, some execution decisions and some evaluation decisions
2. students make some execution and some evaluation decisions
3. evaluation is carried on by another student in the role of an observer, corrector and reinforcer
4. teacher should speak only to teaching partner
5. all points of task summary apply in reciprocal

**Advantages**

1. immediate feedback
2. one-to-one student teacher ratio
3. mental practice
4. independence from teacher evolves

**Disadvantages**

1. student interaction may induce physical, emotional or intellectual dangers

An example of reciprocal style teaching in skiing would be the following: after explaining, demonstrating and possibly practicing skiing on the outside ski with the inside light ski off the ground, students would be paired off and instructed to follow each other and count how many times their partner touched the inside foot to the ground before beginning the new turn. Feedback could be given at the end of the run or during the run by counting out loud.

Although the feedback and evaluation is given by the student who is the designated peer instructor, the teacher maintains some control over the evaluation process by dictating the specifics of the feedback. This is especially important when students lack experience and the necessary skills to accurately analyze the total picture. In addition, call class back together to discuss task, answer questions, share suggestions and to assure the execution of the style.

**Small Group Style**

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This style is essentially a variation of reciprocal except that three or more people each have a functional group role—doer, observer or recorder. Otherwise, the characteristics and advantages and disadvantages are the same as reciprocal. Small Group also promotes interaction and communication among group members.

**Individual Style**

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The individual style is generally quite time consuming and probably not as applicable to skiing as it is to large self-motivated physical education classes. After all, students did not pay \$50 so that the instructor could hand out directions and disperse them to work independently. However, it does have implications for situations such as weekly ski classes or groups with diverse skill levels. Staff trainers might want to investigate this style.

**Characteristics**

1. teacher makes all the preparation and planning decisions, some execution and some evaluation decisions
2. student makes some execution and some self-evaluation decisions
3. extended periods of independence

**Advantages**

1. increases ability to self motivate
2. increases ability to self-evaluate

**Disadvantages**

1. must be planned in minute detail
2. teachers and students must be ready
3. qualitative evaluation requires specific cues

The following is an example of a quantitative form of the individual style:

*Item 1:* hop turns with a pole plant  
Complete 30 short turns on intermediate groomed terrain.  
Do this every day for seven days.

*Level I:* hop for 0-10 of the 30 turns  
*Level II:* hop for 11 - 20 of the 30 turns  
*Level III:* hop for 21-30 of the 30 turns  
Score your attempts.

As you can see, preparing several items like this along with a tally sheet would require extra time; and, a quantitative lesson is easier to prepare than qualitative or instructional individual lessons. However, in certain situations, it could be very effective.

# Crossing the Cognitive Barrier

## Guided Discovery Style

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In the guided discovery style, the teacher must decide on the target during the planning phase—i.e. before the lesson segment. Once the target has been decided, the teacher must determine the probable sequence of steps or questions which will lead students to the target. However, that sequence may very likely change based on the diversity of possible responses. The teacher must know the subject matter thoroughly in order to move the questioning back on track if an answer deviates from the intended response. Furthermore, students can use movement to respond. Answers do not always have to be verbal.

### Characteristics

1. teacher makes all planning and evaluation decisions and some execution decisions, but decisions must be modified as a result of student response.
2. student evaluation decisions become intertwined with execution decisions and teacher provides reinforcement for all responses
3. the question and answer process works towards a *single* goal
4. questions must be designed so that question 2 is based on the answer to question 1, question 3 is based on information from question 2 and so on
5. each succeeding question should narrow in on the target until the solution to the final question results in the desired discovery - a funnel effect
6. **the teacher always knows the answer, but students do not**

### Advantages

1. intellectual involvement/cognitive development
2. develops self-concept
3. understand process by which subject matter was developed

### Disadvantages

1. extremely time consuming
2. more difficult with very large or very heterogeneous groups

### Ground rules for the guided discovery style:

1. Always wait for a student response - do not worry about a few seconds of silence.
2. Never give the answer. If there are no answers, ask a simpler question.
3. Always reinforce student responses and ask them to “Go on” or ask for other alternatives. A “no” will inhibit further response.
4. Accept off-target responses and lead the group back on track with more questions,

Before the questioning begins, all students must be brought to a point where common understanding can be assumed. This may necessitate a preliminary statement or two. In addition, it is not necessary to teach the whole lesson in guided discovery. Start with easy concepts. For example, instead of explaining the idea of dynamic balance to your students, see if you can lead them to discover it. Other areas that work well in discovery type lessons include uncovering facts, relationships, limits, and how or why something happens.

The following is an example of a simple guided discovery lesson that has worked well with children in a pre-ski activity:

- |                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| <b>Subject</b>     | balance  |
| <b>Purpose</b>     | to discover a basic athletic ski stance (Level I students)   |
| <b>Question 1</b>  | <i>What is one of the most important factors in learning to ski?</i>   |
| Anticipated answer | <i>Standing up.</i>  |
| <b>Question 2</b>  | <i>Can you give this ability to remain standing a name?</i>  |
| Anticipated answer | <i>Balance or balancing.</i>   |
| <b>Question 3</b>  | <i>Can you show me maximum balance?</i>  |
| Anticipated answer | <i>Some students will assume low football type positions and others will stand in various erect positions.</i>   |
| <b>Question 4</b>  | <i>Is this your most balanced position? Check by pushing. Most people will probably assume a lower natural stance than what you really want but wait!</i>  |
| <b>Question 5</b>  | <i>Could you now assume a position of less balance?</i>  |
| Anticipated answer | <i>Most will respond by reducing the size of the base.</i>   |
| <b>Question 6</b>  | <i>Now could you move to a position of still less balance?</i>   |
| Anticipated answer | <i>Most will now reduce the area of contact between their body and the floor. With two or three more steps, most students will be in a very high position with minimum contact between body and floor.</i> |
| <b>Question 7</b>  | <i>How is the unbalanced position different from the more balanced position?</i>   |
| Anticipated answer | <i>Balance is lower and wider; unbalanced is higher and narrower.</i>  |
| <b>Question 8</b>  | <i>Can you find the low balanced position again? How long (no hands resting on thighs) can you hold that position?</i>   |
| Anticipated answer | <i>After about 30 sec. in a football ready position, the students begin to tire.</i>   |
| <b>Question 9</b>  | <i>Could you hold that position for the entire ski day?</i>  |
| Anticipated answer | <i>Most students will tell you not very long.</i>  |
| <b>Question 10</b> | <i>Can you find a position in between the two points that will be very stable but not as tiring?</i>   |
| Anticipated answer | <i>An athletic ski stance.</i>   |

The student has arrived at the desired answer—an athletic ski stance—through a process of discovery orchestrated by the instructor.

## Problem Solving Style

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In the problem-solving style, students are given a specific question or task and directed to seek out alternative solutions. It may not be the most efficient way to teach a skill, but it is a valuable tool for conceptualization purposes.

### Characteristics

1. teacher has reduced decision making in planning, execution and evaluation
2. student now involved in all three phases of decision making
3. single problem may have several solutions
4. reverse funnel effect

### Advantages

1. develops conceptualization and acclimatization
2. great cognitive development
3. learn problem solving technique
4. creativity and individuality are developed

### Disadvantages

1. does not teach specific skills
2. no uniformity of performance

Problems must be designed so that solutions uncover the following: facts, relationships, preferences or validity, limits, concepts and variations. To develop problems to solve in a given subject matter, analyze the subject matter according to the preceding categories and develop a series of problems in each one.

Problems can range from the simple to the very complex. Here are a few easy examples for ski teaching:

#### *Concept:: edge control*

1. Can you move on your skis with minimal or no edging? (options include skid, slide, jump, traverse losing altitude)
2. Can you turn with as little edge as possible? (braquage, long flat ski turns with little shape)
3. Can you move with maximum edge? (edge lock, traverse, crab walk)
4. Can you turn with maximum edge? (fast GS, edge set hops etc.)

After exploring several alternatives, the teacher may wish to draw some conclusion. This can be done with a series of questions, or more than likely moving into a different teaching style.

## Summary

Remember, no one teaching style is “best” all the time. An effective teacher uses a variety of approaches depending upon the class and the circumstances surrounding it. In addition, it is also possible to combine styles and produce a “hybrid” that suits your strengths as a teacher. But whatever you do, start slowly and try new things in small doses. After awhile, you will find that you may become quite adept at several more difficult styles.

As for matching teaching and learning styles, according to the specialists in the field, this is still not a very refined process. However, it is possible to quickly assess your student(s) with a couple of questions that will indicate sensory preference, and information processing preference (are they global-conceptual thinkers or linear thinkers?). However, in a group lesson, with several learning preferences present, using a variety of teaching styles throughout the lesson may be your best defense.

## References

Dougherty, Neil J. and Bonanno, Diane. *Contemporary Approaches To The Teaching of Physical Education*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Burgess Publishing Co., 1979.

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