Teaching Surf Instructors to Teach

National Surf Schools and Instructors Association

Instructors and Coaches Training Manual

Teaching Theory/Techniques
Part 4

Understanding Teaching Techniques

Real Educational Skills for Teaching Surfing

One of the primary differences between someone who can teach surfing and the professional surfing instructor is "knowing" what the final outcome should be and understanding what it takes to achieve the desired results. It is this understanding that enables NSSIA certified instructors to rise above other less-accomplished certification to achieve a greater level of excellence in their field. To achieve this, NSSIA certified surf instructors are provided training in formal education techniques applicable to both adult and child learners. In this section, the educational model used and endorsed by the NSSIA for teaching surfing is described.

The Mastery Educational Model

Mastery learning is an alternative method of teaching and learning that involves reaching a level of predetermined mastery on units of instruction before being allowed to progress to the next unit. Mastery does not mean competitive or advanced surfing skills; it simply means that students are catching and riding waves by themselves. The model is really a process whereby students achieve the same level of content mastery, but at different time intervals. Research has proven that the model has positive effects on student learning, especially in the areas of achievement, attitudes toward learning, and retention of content. Related to teaching surfing, what this means is that students with various levels of physical ability, background, and skills, can be taught to achieve the same final outcome alone or in groups, both in an organized and efficient manner.

The NSSIA mastery learning approach divides surfing skills into units that have predetermined objectives or expectations. Students alone or in groups work through each unit in an organized fashion. Students must demonstrate mastery of a particular skill, typically 80%, before moving on to a new skill. In our case, for example, students need to learn safe board handling and paddling skills before they can attempt to stand up. Standing up is not the final skill needed, but is a good intermediate skill that needs to be mastered. However, the final skill mastery is still being able to catch a wave and stand up by themselves.

Students who do not achieve mastery receive remediation through additional lessons, peer monitoring, small group practice, additional practices on their own, and in many cases, outside reading and study.

Additional time for practice (learning) is prescribed for those requiring remediation by the instructor at the end of each lesson. Students should continue the cycle of practicing and lessons until mastery is met. Studies have also shown that students with minimal prior knowledge of surfing have higher achievement through mastery learning than with traditional methods of instruction.

Primary Concept of Mastery Learning

Aptitude is the length of time it takes a person to learn. It is not related to how "bright" a person is (i.e. everyone can learn given the right circumstances), but rather how fast their physical and mental ability can adjust to a new skill set. The developers of mastery learning assert that this model is the most useful with basic skills and slow learners at

both the elementary and secondary level. Initially, group instruction is given to the entire class by the instructor, after which it is followed by sequential individual time for learning until mastery is met. The goal of mastery learning is success for the student. It is asserted that success in achievement, attitude, and motivation in the learning environment makes learning more effective.

How to Instruct Surfing for Mastery

The allotted time to learn must be adjusted to fit one's aptitude. IN A GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL LESSON, NO STUDENT IS TO PROCEED TO NEW SURFING TECHNIQUES UNTIL BASIC PREREQUISITE ABILITY IS MASTERED (ACCOMPLISHED). Note that there is a difference between "80% of students will master the skill set" and "each student will master at least 80 % of the skills necessary" before proceeding. The following is a list of procedures for using the mastery model:

1. The major objectives representing the purpose of a lesson are used to define the mastery of surfing. Again, mastery does not mean competitive or advanced surfing here. It simply means catching and riding waves by themselves and having fun.

2. Each surf lesson is divided into relatively small learning units, both with its own objectives and assessment. For example, water safety and board handling, reading waves, paddling into waves, and standing up on a wave. In our case, the same core objectives can be taught during each lesson, just with emphasis on more advanced capabilities as each lower level skill is mastered.

3. Learning materials (if used) and instructional strategies on the beach and in the water are identified; teaching, practice, skill set evaluation, re-teaching, and reinforcement, and finally a summative evaluation is provided for each student.

4. Each learning unit is preceded by a brief review on the beach that includes a question and answer period.

5. The results of review and question and answer period are used to provide supplementary instruction to help the student(s) overcome problems they may have had during the lesson.

6. Using the mastery model also allows the instructor to suggest additional training material (resources) that will help the student achieve a higher level of mastery prior to their next beach session.

Near the end of the lesson period, the instructor allows the student to demonstrate what has been learned and not been learned so the instructor can suggest corrective instructional or practice tips to enhance skills prior to the next lesson.

Summary of the NSSIA Endorsed Educational Model

Mastery learning procedures are likely to enhance learning outcomes in most all subject areas regardless of individual student skill levels. Since learning in surfing is generally more ordered and sequential (i.e. study wave form, paddle, stand-up, ride), it is likely the best approach for teaching the sport. Mastery learning is not a new method of instruction, and its adaptation to surfing has proven highly successful. It is based on the concept that all students can learn when provided with conditions appropriate to their

situation. In a mastery learning setting, students are given specific feedback about their learning progress at regular intervals throughout the instructional period. This feedback will help students identify what they have learned well and what they have not. Conversely, traditional instruction keeps time constant and allows mastery to vary while mastery learning or systematic instruction holds mastery constant and allows time to vary.

The Surf Instructor and Group Dynamics

Much of our experience in organized education and outdoor learning takes place in groups. Surf camps as well as group lessons will have a significant influence on how the student approaches their learning experience. Such conditions also have a significant influence on the methods used by the instructor to facilitate the desired learning outcomes. This section discusses the role of the surf instructor as a facilitator.

Group Instruction Techniques[1]

Within the group-learning environment, the instructor serves as a facilitator and guide as well as the teacher. To facilitate is to help something (usually a process) move along. The word derives from "facile" which is French for "easy". To facilitate, then, is literally to make something easier. Facilitate does not mean "solving a problem" or "doing it for someone." It means doing something that makes a process run a little better. In our case, not only are we attempting to teach a possibly un-athletic student a difficult task, but we want to do it within the construct of a group environment. Basically, when a task such as learning to surf seems too difficult for a student, a facilitator is there to help. When a student or the group is involved in a desirable experience, the facilitator can be less obtrusive.

Instructor Skills

Hard skills are the methods, processes, procedures, and techniques, plus the use of outdoor equipment to gain competency in surfing. Hard skills are the commonly addressed and developed skills exhibited by surf instructors. Hard skills are tangible, relatively easy to teach, capable of being measured, and therefore easily evaluated in terms of success or failure of the students.

The hard skills may be broken into five components: physiological, environmental, safety, technical and administrative.

The physiological component includes those skills encompassing the maintenance of a sound physiological body and the physical restoration/treatment of an injured participant. The physiological components include, but are not limited to, physical fitness, promoting health, and treating bruises, cuts and common surfing ailments. Other examples of the physiological component of hard skills may include administering first or second aid, CPR, or bringing a hypothermic victim back to normal body temperature.

Environmental skills relate to the interpretation and protection of the natural surroundings. Training in the environmental component may include such competencies as interpreting weather systems, tides, and wave conditions, as well as understanding and

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[1] Parts of the following sections are derived from the paper, *Group Facilitation & Processing in Experiential Education, Outdoor Education & Adventure Training*, by James Neill.

promoting an environmental ethic such as those associated with the *Surfrider Foundation*. They also include identifying underwater obstacles and rip currents, evaluating crowded break conditions, and knowing what equipment will enable the student to learn successfully.

The safety component includes the skills necessary to render a safe activity, free from injury and secure from danger or loss. Some examples may include practicing the fundamentals of accident prevention and group security, taking necessary precautions, implementing risk management techniques and developing a critical eye for safety. For the surf instructor, this means making sure the students know how to handle their boards carefully, and the ability to convey proper etiquette to the students so they will not menace others or themselves.

Technical hard skills are the most common cornerstones for surf instructors. These skills are the ability to communicate to students the actual surfing techniques needed for optimum surfing performance.

Finally, the administrative component of hard skills incorporates the "behind the scenes" in managing, directing, operating, supervising and evaluating a surfing instruction program. These are the skills necessary to coordinate and run a successful lesson on the beach in possibly crowded conditions. This component refers to the program plan to evaluate, understand legal liability, and to be competent enough to have and conduct functional meetings. The administrative component may also include the capability of setting program goals and developing objectives for both students and instructors.

Beside the obvious skills, it is generally felt within the education community that a majority of the outdoor training programs, and the outdoor profession as a whole, falls within the development of interpersonal and human relations skills (soft skills) along with problem solving, decision making, judgment and other critical thinking competencies (conceptual skills).

Soft Skills

Soft skills are defined as interpersonal and human relations skills; in other words "people skills." Soft skills, like hard skills, may also be divided into three components which include: social, psychological and communication.

The social component of soft skills incorporates the group interaction and welfare of the surf program participants. The social component may include the understanding of group dynamics, the ability to resolve group conflict, develop and provide a supportive climate (reassurance and encouragement), being sensitive to the needs of others and establishing effective group relations.

The psychological component combines the skills necessary in relating to the participants' presence of mind and behavior. Some examples of the psychological component include building a climate of trust regarding board safety within the group, as well as understanding what motivation is and how to stimulate it. Additionally, it may include promoting surf "stoke", overcoming students' fears of injury, understanding attitudes of others, and responding to a person's risks in a trustworthy manner.

The communication component combines written, verbal, and non-verbal transmission and exchange of information regarding the best surf techniques and things not to do on

your board. Examples of this component range from being able to "think on your feet" and speak clearly in front of a group, to interpreting non-verbal expressions (i.e. hunching of the shoulders, furrowed brow, pursed lips, unsteady balance, or heavy breathing of students). Often times, identifying non-verbal communication cues is one of the quickest and easiest ways to gauge a student's understanding of the information being taught.

Therefore, you (as a facilitator) first need a reasonably clear picture of what it is that you want to accomplish for a specific learner during each class; it also means you should assess, encourage, and direct each student. However, this also means that there is an obvious limitation on how many students a single instructor can effectively manage. Experience has shown that more than five students per single instructor will decrease the effectiveness of the group instruction. A good instructor to student ratio is 1 to 4 or less.

If all participants are complete beginners, and each has obvious physical limitations, then the job of evaluating a student's needs is easier. But if there aren't obvious indicators, the first beach session where the students jump up, and the first attempt to get each student to handle their board in the water should provide the indicators necessary to help decide on the outcome expected from a particular class and individual students.

Once you know what it is that you want to facilitate, it is useful to consider any other impeding forces that could be influencing how things turn out. Amongst these will be the personal attributes of participants, their individually different experiences, the group dynamics (how they interact), and the influence of the natural surf and beach environment.

Understanding Group Dynamics

Humans exhibit several characteristic behavior patterns when participating in group activities. When these group patterns are combined with goals of individual development (as is often the case in group surfing classes or camps), several issues can emerge.

An instructor needs to consider that given the diverse, yet common occurrence of groups engaging in adventurous learning activities, what is the nature of such group experience? The social dynamics that occur within groups over time vary from group to group, but also illustrate some commonalities. What all this means is that larger surf classes or camps encourage peer pressure to succeed as well as creating a shared feeling of success regardless of individual outcomes. Both these experiences are highly valued and sought after by beginning surfers of all ages. It is a measure of instructor success if these experiences and feelings are achieved.

Psychosocial Development and Why Youth Want to Surf

Research has shown that only around 4% of a surf session is spent riding waves. That percentage dwindles further when one also calculates the time spent waiting for the right swell, searching for the best break, and waiting to catch the right set wave. So why then, would someone, particularly a younger person, want to learn how to surf?

Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development is one of the best-known theories of personality in psychology. He believed that personality develops in a series of stages. His theory describes the impact of social experience across the whole lifespan. One of the main elements of the theory is the development of ego identity. Ego identity is the conscious sense of self that we develop through social interaction. According to Erikson,

our ego identity is constantly changing due to new experience and information we acquire in our daily interactions with others. In addition to ego identity, Erikson also believed that a sense of competence also motivates behaviors and actions. Each stage in Erikson's theory is concerned with becoming competent in an area of life. If the stage is handled well, the person will feel a sense of mastery, which is sometimes referred to as ego strength or ego quality. If the stage is managed poorly, the person will emerge with a sense of inadequacy.

Importance of Recreation

The importance of recreation in developing the physical, psychological and social abilities of children and youth is well documented. The trust placed in recreation as a factor affecting personal development is often based on personal experience, but there are also numerous studies that focus on the contribution of recreation to fostering the biological development and moral, social and civic activities of youth.

Participation by youth in structured recreation may have multiple effects on their development. While these may categorized in several ways, we divide them into two major categories: those having an impact on the physical and biological development of youth, and those affecting their psychosocial development.

Sport Psychology is generally defined as the "study of the mental factors that affect and are affected by participation and performance in sport, exercise, and physical activity". It also seeks to understand mental factors that affect performance in sports activities and applies these to enhance individual and team performance. For example, research-based applications may be used to improve performance by understanding "peak performance", managing emotions or minimizing the negative psychological effects of injury/loss. Unfortunately, sports psychology, while currently being applied to surfing, does not directly address the psychosocial development of individuals that just want to learn how and affiliate with the cultural aspects of a sport.

Richard Bennett and Surfing Research

Richard Bennett co-authored with colleague Peter Kremer three interesting papers: 1) The Psychology of Peak Performance among Elite Surfers; 2) The Psychology of Big Wave Riding and 3) Stress and Elite Competitive Surfing; and the research produced some interesting conclusions. While for many surfers big waves are an issue, Bennett believes that positively building confidence and focus is the key to overcoming barriers that are preventing a surfer from achieving their goals.

According to Bennett, "Everyone's potential is unlimited. The research I did in 2000 on peak performance showed that maintaining a strong personal foundation is really important. If you really want to achieve your goal surround yourself with people who are positive and like minded, which serves to reinforce that you are on the right track."

Literature dealing with the impact of structured recreation on biological development and on the acquisition of physical skills by youth aged 10 to 15 is principally oriented toward the study of physical activities and sports. While this stands to reason, it nevertheless reveals the inadequacy of data on the impact of other types of activities (that it, activities other than sports or those that are not principally directed toward physical activity) on the biological and physical development of youth.

The Adolescent Impact of Surfing

Adolescence constitutes an important period in the development of personal identity. As youths search for independence, relationships with parents and family also change. Once young people acquire independence, they acquire opportunities to explore their potential and develop skills. Adolescence is also characterized by a certain detachment from the egocentricity of childhood and a greater ability to put oneself in another person's position. This improved predisposition for understanding others is accompanied by an ability to assume responsibility for and display behavior viewed as moral or ethical, thereby reflecting a certain social awareness.

Throughout adolescence, friendship plays a crucial role in the development of identity and a sense of belonging. For better or for worse, peers have an influence on the development of self image and identity. Adolescence, marked by an individual's first love relationships, also constitutes an important period in the development of sexual identity.

Recreation plays a beneficial role in the process of self exploration by reinforcing self-esteem and self-concept, essential elements in creating a general feeling of well-being. Recreation is also believed to affect self-esteem by creating the feeling of being in control. According to Janice Butcher, it is imperative for adolescents to explore these feelings during the transition to adulthood

The influence of peer groups and parents is another determining factor for youth participation in structured recreation. However, there is little agreement over which group is more influential, parents or peers. We know that peer pressure is particularly strong among adolescents, who seek acceptance

Research has also demonstrated that outdoor experiences offer multiple benefits to children. They include gains in cognitive development, self discipline, creative expression, motor and language skills and social interactions. Children who regularly play in nature generally demonstrate greater self-esteem, are better able to handle stress and are often healthier. Many believe that outdoor experiences are critical to the development of a sense of wonder that is an important motivator for life-long learning.

Putting it All Together

The motivation for youths wanting to learn to surf can be summarized below. It's important to note that the youths themselves do not necessarily realize these motivators, plus, once started, failure to achieve even limited success will often lead to a serious sense of inadequacy.

- sense of competence
- biological development
- acquisition of physical skills
- moral and social abilities
- development of personal identity
- self exploration

- self esteem and ego
- peer pressure and acceptance

Teaching Young Kids

Kids are easy to teach since they have natural balance and are light on their feet. They also have no preconceived notion of difficulty or getting hurt during a lesson. However, the NSSIA strongly recommends that children under 8 years old have direct one-on-one training with an assigned instructor for safety reasons. One way of doing this is to start them out on a slightly larger board that the instructor can guide from the back while the child rides in. As the child gets more comfortable with the board, shorter push-in waves on a board by themselves will be easier and more controlled.

One technique that works well with kids (and some adults) is framing. Framing is creating a story, scenario, or metaphor around the activity. The "frame" in many uses is selected to be isomorphic - that is, consistent with easily understood common examples. The movie image "wax on – wax off" when rubbing wax on a board is a common example. As well, standing up from a prone position on the beach is easy, but it's just the way you stand up and how legs are positioned that is slightly different. Making sure you don't get cut off at the knees by turning the board sideways in front of an advancing wave is still another example.

Adult Learning

This section deals with the unique characteristics of teaching adults. Teaching adults is different than teaching young people because adults learn differently. The instructor functions as a guide for adults rather than a teacher by acknowledging the diversity and experience of the adult students in the class, the physical limitations of the various students, and the need for the instructor to regard each adult as equal in their first lessons. Some of the primary points for an instructor to consider with adult students are:

- Adults usually come with experience around the water
- Adults prefer to participate rather than just listen
- Adults need to maintain their self-esteem even when they are physically challenged
- Adults are motivated by results and want to see their own progress from lesson beginning to end
- Adults respond more favorable to a collegial, self-directed approach to learning rather than a directive approach (i.e. show them how and then let them try themselves).
- Adults prefer practical information

Adult students exhibit three unique styles of learning: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. For surfing, the visual and kinesthetic styles work the best. However, the best instruction approach is to offer some combination level of training so that students will achieve successful learning outcomes regardless of their preferred style.

- The visual learner prefers to see the concepts. In this case, they will learn from showing them physically how to paddle, how and when to stand on the board, helping them see how to read waves, and providing visual displays of where to

position themselves on advancing waves.
- The auditory learner wants to hear a solid description of what to do and often wants to read something related to learning how to surf if possible. For these students, cover each step in the training process while still on the beach. Then, while in the water, continue providing verbal encouragement and suggestions for improvement.
- Kinesthetic learners require constant practice until the learning is mastered. This means continue to repeat what you are trying to teach both on the beach and while you are in the water. This approach is most suited for private lessons with continuous one-on-one instruction.

Along with styles of learning there are also three distinct stages of learning. The dependent stage occurs during the introductory stages of learning. First time students, particularly those with no previous exposure to the sport, need structure, direction, encouragement and esteem from the instructor. During this stage the instructor provides lecture, demonstrations, and reinforcement. When questions are asked, respond simply and directly *without extending your answer into a speech*.

During the collaborative stage, the learner has some knowledge of surfing techniques, some background on surf etiquette, and is eager to try things on a board. The student needs practice, peer challenge, and peer esteem for doing well. The instructor interacts, evaluates, observes and provides feedback. Feedback should always include positive reinforcing words and expressions. Additionally, *a summary of the student's progress is essential after each lesson during this stage of learning*.

The final stage is the independent stage. This stage takes place when the student fully understands what to do and not to do, can handle his or her board in a safe manner, and only lacks the skills and ability that comes with practice. The instructor at this point becomes more of a coach than an instructor, providing feedback and consultation as necessary. Another important point for students at this stage of development is that *individual rather than group lessons are the most effective*.

Being Critical

There are ways to be critical while remaining charitable. The aim is not to "conquer" but to "come at truth Try to not to be right at all costs.

Daniel Dennett (b. March 28, 1942), offered a synthesized list of rules formulated decades ago by Anatol Rapoport, on how to compose a successful critical commentary:

•   You should attempt to re-express your target's position so clearly, vividly, and fairly that your target says, "Thanks, I wish I'd thought of putting it that way.

•   You should list any points of agreement (especially if they are not matters of general or widespread agreement).

•   You should mention anything you have learned from your target.

•   Only then are you permitted to say so much as a word of rebuttal or criticism.

According to Dennett, this is actually a sound psychological strategy that accomplishes one key thing: It transforms your opponent into a more receptive audience for your criticism or dissent, which in turn helps advance the discussion.

Wish List for a Perfect Instructor

The ideal instructor is a communicator, promoter, teacher, role model, advisor, and time-keeper. Ideally, the perfect instructor is:

- An instructor who knows how to tell a great story without drifting from the learning objective
- An instructor who remembers how difficult it is for a beginner to be in the lineup with waves coming towards them.
- An instructor who clearly ex plains what is needed and expected of the student.
- An instructor who provides suggestions for continuing improvement when not taking a lesson
- An instructor who actually surfs the way they teach
- An instructor who smiles and shows their love of both the sport and teaching
- An instructor who is available for questions when not on the beach giving lessons
- An instructor who is also a learner