



TEACHING TECHNIQUES PART 2

TEACHING TECHNIQUES – PART 2

Teaching hockey skills is a vital role for the coach. Knowing what skills to teach and how to help players learn these skills are two challenges every coach faces.

In Level I, four links in the teaching chain were identified:

1st Link	Select skills to teach and identify the knowledge and attitudes to go with them.
2nd Link	Plan the demonstration and explanation.
3rd Link	Plan ways for learners to practice the skill.
4th Link	Provide feedback and correct errors if necessary maintaining realistic performance goals.

With these in mind we will now provide information which will extend your knowledge on how to teach skills. The coach's ability to teach simple and complex skills will be greatly enhanced which should contribute positively to the success of his team.

Chapter Overview

- teach simple skills using two methods – the imitation method and the demonstration/explanation/practice/correction method,
- teach complex skills using shaping or chaining methods,
- teach principles and concepts,
- plan practices that simulate competitive conditions,
- use mental practice as a self-teaching technique with your athletes.

Teaching Simple Skills

What is a Simple Skill?

Care should be taken to label a skill as simple only when participants acquire it quickly and easily. When what appears easy to you is hard for learners to master, then you should label that skill as complex in the eyes of those learners.

There is a danger that you, as the coach, being thoroughly familiar with any skill about to be taught, may assume that it will be simple for all to learn. This error can lead to a negative attitude towards anyone who has trouble learning it. You may consider them to be stupid or lazy, or both. A simple sport skill is one that people can perform with very little practice.

This ease of learning is usually a result of the simplicity of the skill. Sometimes it is because participants have seen it performed many times by other people, either in person or on television (passive). For example, performing a slap shot is a complex skill. However, children who are interested in it, who watch a lot of television and who practice it on their own without any instruction, can often learn it quickly as though it were a simple skill.

So whether people consider a skill to be simple or complex depends both on how interested they are in it and how much experience they have had observing it. On the other hand, sometimes what appears to be a simple skill may be complicated by fear or nervousness.

Two Teaching Approaches for Simple Skills

There are two approaches commonly used in teaching simple skills:

- imitation method
- demonstration, explanation, practice, correction method

The Imitation Method

Simple imitation is often the best way for players to learn. It requires the player to focus on what is to be imitated or copied. “Watch this... Try it”. Often the imitation is as accurate as it needs to be. You should then confirm it: “Yes. That’s it. Now remember that.” If necessary, have it practiced several times.

When minor corrections are required point them out in a clear, matter-of-fact way. If players have trouble picking up the correct action or movement, then you should realize that, for some reason, it is not as simple as expected.

The Demonstration/Explanation/Practice/Correction Method

This method involves these steps:

- DEMONSTRATE FIRST with minimal explanation: “Watch this. Be careful to stand like this and hold the stick like this, then make the pass. Try it.”
- ALLOW FOR PRACTICE. Observe carefully, watching for correct features and common errors.
- PROVIDE FEEDBACK while practice continues if possible. If you must, stop practice and confirm correct actions and, if necessary, make suggestions to correct errors.
- ALLOW FURTHER PRACTICE and correct in more detail, if necessary.

This may be illustrated with the following diagram.

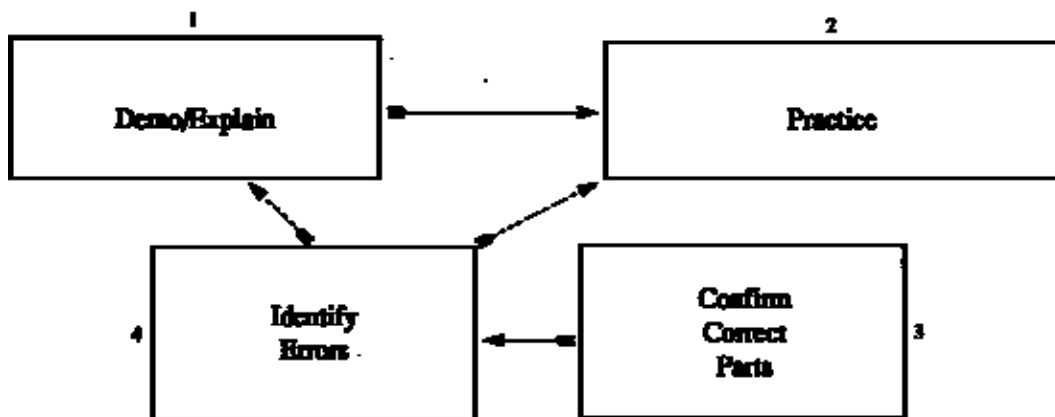


Figure 1: Simple Skill Learning Diagram



For the Coach:

Choose an important hockey skill and identify sources the young hockey player may use to learn by imitation and identify problems related to imitation.

SKILL	IMITATION SOURCES	IMITATION PROBLEMS
_____	1. _____	_____
	2. _____	_____
	3. _____	_____
	4. _____	_____

Explain how the demonstration, explanation, practice and feedback method would be more useful for the identified skill.

Teaching Complex Skills

What is a Complex Skill?

Complex (or difficult) skills are actions or movements to be performed by an individual that cannot be readily learned by either of the two methods described above.

It is the reaction of learners (players) that determines how difficult the skill is, not whether you think they should have problems or not.

Tips on Teaching Complex Skills:

Complex Skills must be Simplified

If a skill cannot be learned easily and directly, then it must be simplified and learned in a series of steps. There are three ways in which to simplify:

- **MAKE THE ACTION ITSELF SIMPLER** by leaving out some of the parts to begin with and adding them later.
- **PRACTICE THE SIMPLIFIED ACTION IN A SIMPLE SITUATION.** For example, a faking or feinting puckhandling action can be learned while a defensive player just stands in one place and does not complicate things by aggressive defensive action.
- **SLOW THE ACTION DOWN** so the learner can think through the steps as they are carried out.

The Coach's Attitude

Two aspects of your attitude will help promote learning of complex skills.

- Allow participants to try things out in their own way. You should give clear instructions but then allow players to suggest things that might help them learn. This will help, especially when participants are fearful or nervous about learning the skill. You should be sure that you know what they are trying to achieve and then leave the means of achieving it up to them as much as possible.
- For example, coaches may point out the importance of trying skills and give tips on how to improve the skill. Interested players practice a lot on their own and therefore find their own ways of achieving good training skills.
- Recognize that learning complex skills take time. Some actions or movements require a long time to learn. A goalkeeper, for example, may learn the basics of positional play early in his career but still be improving that technique four or five seasons later. A coach must be patient and not expect too much too soon.

It is also important for you to maintain a positive, helpful, encouraging attitude towards the long range efforts of the players. If patience is not shown, nagging, complaining and undeserved criticism often appear and act to discourage and upset the learner.

Two Teaching Approaches for Complex Skills

There are two commonly used approaches to teaching complex sports skills: shaping and chaining.

Shaping Complex Skills

Shaping is a word used to describe the way people learn to do a wide variety of things. It is similar to the way a sculptor begins with a shapeless lump of clay and gradually shapes it into a figure. The form takes shape gradually.

A youngster teaches herself to ride a two-wheeled bike this way. If left alone, she might first try to pick up the bike, then, holding the handlebars, walk along with it until it feels comfortable. Then she might put her closest foot onto the near pedal and pump herself along, coasting for a foot or so, then for a longer distance, to get the feel of steering. Next, she might straddle the bike and put one foot on the lower pedal and pump it like a scooter, coasting for a few metres. Gradually she would learn to coast with both feet on the pedals and, finally, to use the pedals and steer. The process might take three or four days. She does not begin by trying to ride the bike like her older sister does, getting on and pedalling. She begins by doing the things she feels confident she will be successful at.

How to Shape Skills

Shaping a skill might be described as follows:

- Briefly demonstrate/explain the complete skill to be learned.
- Use a simplified or incomplete version of the skill that includes the most important action or actions. Use something the participants will be successful in doing and allow time to practice the simplified skill.
- Add missing parts and the whole skill is shaped into a reasonable example of the finished product through practice.
- Encourage athletes who are having problems to try it other ways, or to get help from other learners, or seek out the coach.

Sample Shaping of a Complex Skill

The Snap Shot – While in Motion (right handed shot)

- Puck is drawn to the rear foot.
- Lower hand slides down the shaft of the stick.
- Begin to transfer the weight from the rear to the front foot.
- Observe the target; drop the head to look at the puck.
- Rotate the near shoulder to point at the target.
- Extend the wrists to draw the stick back slightly, then snap the wrists to flexed position as the blade contacts the puck.
- Transfer of weight continues forward.
- Arms and eyes follow through toward the target.

Here is a possible sequence to shape this skill:

- Stage 1 – The first objective is to get the main idea of wrist and stick movement. Then they can add weight transfer, body rotation and head action. Players should try this skill from a stationary position first without, then with a puck. There are many details to include for the action to be performed properly. Different players will leave out different parts and make different errors in what they do. During initial practice, coaches should not expect a complete, accurate performance as they might if a simple skill is being practiced.
- Stage 2 – When this action is being performed well, the same action is performed with a puck while moving forward, first in a glide then in a skating motion.
- Stage 3 – Set up accuracy objectives which are realistic (i.e. low, mid or high corner). Your expectations should not be too high.
- Stage 4 – Practice to improve mechanics, speed and accuracy of the shot should continue until it can be performed at full speed.

Remember, patience is a key word. Work these stages over several practices until each player can perform them comfortably. Moving ahead to accommodate the better skilled players will frustrate and perhaps discourage lesser skilled individuals. Similarly, ensure that you provide a sufficient challenge for the better skilled players.

At each stage, point out correct actions and be alert for errors. Bring errors to the attention of the players so that they may correct them.

Beginning in the Middle

Shaping often begins in the middle of a skill. A snap shot normally takes place from a moving position. Stage 1 began from a stationary position. After this was learned, the player went back to add the beginning of the skill, that is skating.

Having shaped the snap shot this way the player would be ready to perform this skill with the addition of a pass and reception with a teammate.

As the skill is refined you would begin to add offensive players, defensive players, game situations and so on. See “Specificity of Practice”, later in this module, for more on practicing for competition.



For the Coach:

Select a complex skill from hockey. In the space provided, develop a series of four or five stages by which this skill could be shaped.

SKILL: _____ SHAPING STAGES _____ : _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
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Chaining Complex Skills

Another common way to approach the teaching of a complex skill is to have athletes chain it together. A complex skill is made up of a number of distinct parts. Each part may be thought of as a link in a chain.

A player may start at the beginning of the chain and learn the first link, then add the second link and practice the two together. Then the third link can be added and all three practiced in a sequence, and so on until the chain is complete.

Complex skills themselves can be chained together a link at a time.

Chaining versus Shaping

Chaining differs from shaping in two important ways:

- Chaining begins at the beginning of a skill. Each part (each link in the chain) is learned in the same sequence in which it is performed in the complex skill. Shaping may begin with practice of any link in the chain that makes sense to the participants.
- In chaining, each part or link is practiced just as it will be performed in the finished skill. In shaping, the first attempts of the athlete may be so primitive that they hardly resemble the finished skill at all. For example, a young skater teaching himself to stop. His first activity was to skate, attempt using the edges slightly then run into the boards. If you were to ask him what he was doing and he was able to recall what the coach called the skill, he may say, "I'm learning a two-foot parallel stop".

Chaining is most suitable for complex skills, the parts of which are easy enough to learn just as though they were separate simple skills. It is important to point out that some complex skills, like stickhandling while in motion, may be broken down quite easily and the parts practiced separately and learned quite easily. But when one tries to add all the parts together, the job proves to be extremely difficult, if not impossible for some players.

The difficulty is that there is no method available that guarantees trouble-free learning of many complex skills. You must do the best you can with the best available; the shaping or chaining approaches or some combination of the two.

Forward Chaining

This term applies to skills that are chained together by having players start at the beginning of the action. They learn to do subsequent parts in the same order in which they are performed in the finished skill. This is the most common form.

Sample Forward Chaining: Forehand Sweep Pass (left handed shot)

- Learn the correct stance and body position (stationary).
- Establish the proper grip on the stick.
- Learn to control the puck.
- Place the puck in the centre of the blade.
- Draw the puck to the left of the body midline.
- Focus eyes on the target.
- Sweep the stick toward the target.
- Follow through to the target.

Backward Chaining

Some skills, but not all, may be built up by starting at the end of the skill and working backwards. For example, checking can be learned by backward chaining. By experiencing the pay-off of pinning an opponent to the boards, motivation and interest can be improved. This motivation can be used in teaching the entire process (i.e. angling, stick and body positioning, etc).

Another use of backward chaining is as an alternative for people having real problems learning a complex skill by either forward chaining or shaping.

Sample Backward Chaining: Forehand Sweep Pass (left handed shot)

- While in motion perform the sweep pass.
- Sweep the stick toward the target, with a good follow-through.
- Focusing the eyes on the target, draw the puck to the left of the body midline.

- Establish the proper grip on the stick.
- Place the puck in the centre of the blade.
- Control the puck.
- Learn the correct stance and body position (stationary).

As practice continues, all actions in the sequence are polished, improved and the entire skill is done under more realistic conditions.

Simplifying Complex Skills

Learning complex skills requires that they be simplified for the players by leaving out parts. The coach should not be too critical of early attempts to learn and should try to create conditions similar to those encountered in learning simple skills. This simplification of complex skills can be done by adopting one of three different approaches: shaping, forward chaining or backward chaining.

Coaches should use good texts showing teaching progressions from hockey and apply their own common sense to decide what to do in each complex skill they teach.

Try different approaches and see what works best for you.

Teaching Concepts and Systems

Complex ideas are built on simple facts. These simple facts can usually be combined into principles or rules that describe and explain many aspects of a sport, so that a whole lot of details do not have to be remembered at all times. In other words, it is easier for a player to think of maintaining a diamond formation when the team is short handed and on defence than to think “when the puck goes here, I go there, then if that player moves here, I go ...”

The general rule is to demonstrate first how a principle works, explain it in common words referring to the simple facts that make it up, then give it a name.

Most terms and names used in sport are reasonable and describe in some way what is done, or may refer to a person or place associated with the skill (e.g., Montreal system of forechecking).

You must remember that many hockey terms may be new to many players, or they may be familiar but have a different meaning. It is important that all players know and understand your terminology. Once this is accomplished, principles and concepts are more easily identified and understood.

Sensible associations of names and concepts or systems to be learned will aid learning, and will teach players to look for common sense in the concepts.

Specificity of Practice

Specificity of practice means what you do in practice is what you get in the competition.

The principle of specificity of practice can be summed up in the following two statements:

- Players will play and react in a game situation directly relative to what and how they have been practicing.
- The more closely you simulate game conditions in your practice sessions, the better the performance in the game will be.

Specificity – When to Use It

The principle of specificity of practice is most important at the intermediate and latter stages of learning.

In the early stages of learning, we are trying to simplify things so that the skill can be learned properly. Try to get players to think of only one thing (or work on one aspect of the skill), or have them perform the skill at a reduced speed. At this point do not introduce any extra stress, such as competition, as it would likely interfere with concentration on the task at hand.

How to Use It

Once a skill is learned, in order to prepare for competition, it is important to simulate competitive conditions in practice.

In preparing for situations where the player's level of activation or competitive stress is increased, the principle of specificity becomes more important. This is because under stress, the response that has been practiced (dominant response) will be even more likely to occur (i.e. the performer will revert to automatic reactions).

What to Simulate

Some of the conditions to simulate in practice sessions in order to have your players practice in a more specific manner are:

- fatigue (playing or competing when physically tired)
- competitive stress (gradually increasing the level of competitive stress)
- (performing a pass with a checker on you is different than performing a pass unchecked)
- opponent strategy (practice different game situations which dictate different strategies (i.e. powerplay or penalty killing situations))
- Practice sessions should use game-like conditions as much as possible, possibly even with spectators watching, uniforms on, officials, etc.



Negative Transfer

You should always remain aware of the dangers of negative transfer, that is, learning the wrong thing. Teaching players to raise the backhand as high as they can may lead them to believe that this is always the way to perform this shot. Should an opportunity for a low backhand shot arise, the player will be unprepared. The shot should be learned as an all-purpose tool.

You should isolate any drill habits that may be producing negative transfer and restructure the practice session in a way that will eliminate them. For example, lack of pressure in shooting drills permits a slow release of the shot. By implementing pressure, players will be forced to utilize the quick release, which is essential for effective shooting during competition.

High Speed Specificity

Specificity of practice is extremely important in high-speed activities. Drills run at half speed produce proficiency at half speed, not at full speed.

Critical Moments

High levels of activation which may be found in intense competition bring out the well-learned response. As the pressure of the game increases, it is important that the exact responses required for successful competition have been isolated and practiced.

For example, a goalkeeper facing a penalty shot late in a tie game should have practiced under similar conditions that he expects to face at that moment (i.e. the speed, the effect of additional pressure and any other variables which may be operating at the time).

For the Coach:

Drawing upon the principles of specificity, design a practice situation that prepares your players for a potential problem which could occur in competition.

Mental Practice

Mental practice refers to the mental rehearsal of performance skills. The players actually run through various skills or movements in their minds.

There is a mental image or picture in the mind's eye (visualization) of the action. It is like running your own video tape replay in your mind or being inside your own video tape seeing out.

What Does Mental Practice Do?

Mental practice can help perfect various sports skills.

- It helps reinforce the memory of how to do the action.
- It helps players learn in a more efficient way.
- It serves as an immediate reminder to guide the action. The plan of action is reviewed before being put into operation.
- It may help the learner to concentrate on the action, to focus their attention, and thus avoid or minimize distractions that might otherwise interfere.
- It may become a habit that will be carried over from learning to actual performance.
- Rehearsing mentally what to do helps successful players control their attention, ignore distractions and produce high quality results.
- It is sometimes useful as a means of acting out a game tactic. (For example, a player can practice what to do if faced with specific one-on-one situations)

How to Do It

When learning sports skills, some athletes find it helpful to silently repeat the "key word" description that goes along with the action, either before actual practice or as the action is imagined. If a player chooses to think out the key words, they should be very nearly the same as summaries of one or two main teaching points used by the coach during teaching sessions.

Added to words about technique or strategy (what to do), should be words about quality of movement. Therefore, as the players wait to practice the forehand sweep pass, they go through it mentally, imagining the action and, in some cases, matching it with a word description; "Draw the puck back, eye on the target, sweeping arm action, follow through to the target."

As the actual pass is tried, the player attempts to reproduce what was practiced in the mind. As skills improve, players should attempt to visualize the skill as perfectly as possible in their minds and then just let it happen (with no word reminder).

Encourage your players to engage in mental practice before each trial of a new skill, while waiting for a turn, while resting, between games and between practices.

One important point to keep in mind – the better (or more vivid) the visualization of the skill, the better the result will likely be.