

The four cornerstones of successful teaching

A Tour Pro during a tournament can experience a range of emotions. If he shoots 82, he will be disappointed, having worked diligently on his game in practice and then feel as he has not received anything back. If he shoots 65 he will feel excitement and experience a flow of adrenalin. Well it can be the same for a golf teacher on the golf range – a really good session with a student where a good learning exchange has taken place and both the student and teacher feel motivated and excited – a poor session with a student and the lesson feels as though it has lasted for ever, with just a feeling of frustration evading. So how can you learn to shoot 65 on the range? Well, here in this article we outline what I consider to be the four cornerstones of successful teaching.

Technical knowledge.

The birth of technical knowledge starts with one's own game. Intricacies in the swing can be studied and learnt visually from study and reading, but the inside "feeling" of different movements can only come with experience in the actual "doing". The next stage is PGA Training – this gives you a structure, a backbone if you like, on which to develop your knowledge. But the majority of training comes from a multitude of external sources such as books, videos, your own teaching journal, watching other teachers, conferences etc – basically self education.

Analysis

Analysis is fault diagnosis. If a mechanic looks into a car engine, and then replaces the head gasket perfectly, but then finds out that it is in fact the gearbox that needed renewing despite all the mechanic's hard work the car will not work. It's the same with the golf teacher. Analysis should

start a long time before the pupil hits his first shot. Denis Pugh once said to me the concept of "clues". This comes from a verbal exchange with the pupil. If the pupil says that he is hitting the ball right and weak, immediately a teacher may think "OK at impact the clubface is open etc". Further clues come from obviously the ball flight and also the divot pattern. Just as Tour Pro has a pre shot routine, I feel it is important for the teacher to have a diagnostic routine, in order to collect as much information as you can before making the diagnosis. Then I like to use video and computer playback in my teaching and I feel this is like the "X-ray machine", so that you can check your analysis.

Pacing of instruction

Pacing of instruction is something that comes with experience. Cutting it up into small bite sized chunks. Could you remember 20 words of a foreign language in the next 10 minutes? And then remember them in one month's time? But could you remember one word a day, for the next 20 days, and then remember in one month's time? Learning is a series of steps, connected together, like a staircase. Break it down until the pupil can do it. A patient who is ill may benefit from a carefully controlled prescription of medication, but if you swallow the whole bottle immediately you are likely to become more ill, and it's the same with golf teaching. Try too much, and you'll probably regress. Get it just right, and the buds of progress will always emerge before the end of the lesson. I often feel that a cop out often used by a less experienced teacher is that "you must take one step back, to go two forward". Well let's be realistic here. If you go for a lesson and you are not hitting the ball

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Technical Knowledge

- PGA Training
- Own Game
- Books/Videos
- Magazine articles
- Internet sites
- Teaching Journal
- Watching other Teachers

Analysis

- „Clues“ (verbal questioning)
- Ball flight
- Divot pattern
- Video/computer
- Diagnostic Routine

Communication

- „Teacher talk“ don't use it
- Creative imagery... the language of the brain
- Pupil type... seeing/hearing/feeling
- NVC... (body language, voice tone etc)
- Building belief, not disbelief... praising what is good, outlining what can be improved
- Linking the lessons

Pacing of Instruction

- What is the pupil aiming to achieve
- What is the pupil capable of
- Breaking it down into very small steps
 - (1) without the club, without the ball
 - (2) with the club, without the ball
 - (3) with the club, with a contact point
 - (4) with the club, with the ball
- Taking the pupil THROUGH the Experience to Learning

very well, but then the teacher introduces a new movement and then you can't hit any good shots you are probably barking up the wrong tree. I feel that although in certain instances the pupil may lose some consistency with a new movement, his best shots should look and feel much better than anything before, and this should be immediate, in most cases.

It is also important that the teacher has a clear picture of what the pupil is capable of, and what the pupil is aiming to achieve. It's no point working on a client's fade if he is reasonably happy with that shape and it's really a poor short game that is letting him down. Agree the objectives with the student at the outset of a course of lessons.

The last point with pacing of instruction is that learning should be interactive, and the role of the teacher is to lead the pupil through the learning process. Lecturing is not learning!

The fourth cornerstone is **communication**, being able to communicate your knowledge and analysis to the pupil. How do you best achieve this? Well, in my opinion the language of the mind is imagery. What is imagery? The mind does not communicate with the body through words, but with images. An image is difficult to define exactly because it is not something that is tangible, but it's the combination of picture, hearing, feeling - a visualization. And the best way to transfer these images from the teacher his pupils is through analogies. An analogy is a linguistic device that we use to create an association between two things that where previously there was no association. A common metaphor that you may of heard already may be "when playing a bunker shot feel the swing is the same as though you would if skimming a pebble

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across a lake". Now to try to explain these movements accurately in words may take a long time and consequently come across as unclear and

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confusing, but by associating the new movement with a similar action the pupil may have already been familiar with, you immediately create an understanding. Minimize the verbal information whilst maximizing its affect. Butch Harmon once said, "Less is more".

Avoid "Teacher Talk" - this is language such as "laid off" or "weak left hand". Say this and some pupils will then go to the gym to try and strengthen the muscles in the hand!

I strongly believe that a golf teacher's primary role is to build belief in his student. Praise build confidence, constant criticism destroys confidence. It is important to praise the student for what he does well, but of course outline the area for improvement.

The key with the four cornerstones is that you are only as successful as your **weakest** part. A teacher with great technical knowledge and analysis skills, will not find success if he doesn't pace the instruction correctly. Conversely a great communicator will not be able to diagnose accurately if his technical knowledge is poor - you need to be conversant in all four areas. So the next time you spend a day out on the lesson tee, think about a few of the ideas we have discussed, and hopefully you will be able to finish the day feeling as though you have shot a 65!

