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PRACTICE AND RECIPROCAL STYLES OF TEACHING IN PRIMARY SCHOOL PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Review by Jeffrey Tan and Steven Tan

INTRODUCTION

Physical education in Singapore primary schools is generally taught in half-hour slots, three times a week for primary 1 to 3, and twice weekly for primary 4, 5 and 6. In this short period of time, there is only so much a teacher can do before time runs out. Furthermore, given the constraints of space, equipment and a class of thirty six to forty pupils, there is this never ending dilemma of organizing students for maximal participation.

In the bid to maximize activity time in a lesson, primary school physical education (PE) teachers tend to give students little freedom in deciding what to do or how to do it. To some, the *command* style with its ability to elicit a high degree of uniformity, conformity and efficiency in time use, is often adopted if the objective is to teach a specific skill within a relatively short period of time (Toole & Arink, 1982).

Frequently used for mass instruction, the command style requires all students to perform the same task at the same pace. The teacher first explains and demonstrates the required task. Then a command signal (e.g., voice, whistle) is given, and the pupils perform each movement or activity en masse accordingly. Examples of this style can be observed in classes of dance, gymnastics, calisthenics, aerobics, track and field, game relays, and sport-skill drills.

Some young children may require the teacher to structure their learning experiences by making all the decisions, i.e., what to do, where to go, when to start and stop, how to do it, number of repetitions and for how long, and the quality of performance. But as learners get older, they should be taught and provided with opportunities to participate in the decision-making process. Pupils should be given different amounts of freedom to respond, depending on learning objectives and variances in ability levels.

This article will review two alternative teaching styles from Mosston & Ashworth's (1994) *Spectrum of Teaching Styles: practice and reciprocal*. These two styles can be used by primary school PE teachers to foster student learning and fulfil developmental needs. As there appears to be no single, perfect style of instruction, a teacher needs to have a repertoire of teaching styles in order to accomplish different objectives in given situations (Joyce & Weil, 1986).

REVIEW OF RESEARCH

Like the command style, both the practice and reciprocal styles are under the reproduction cluster of the teaching spectrum. Styles within this cluster represent teaching options that foster the acquisition and replication of past skills and knowledge (Mosston & Ashworth, 1994). However, both styles are quite distinct from the command style.

Using the Practice Style

In the *practice style*, some of the decisions made by the teacher in the command style are given over to the students. Like the command style, the teacher begins with an explanation and demonstration of the task to be accomplished. However, unlike the command style, the teacher does not give commands for every movement, task, or activity. For example, the learner decides when to start the task, or determines the pace of performing each task. While the learners practise the task(s), the teacher has time to move around, observe individual performances, and offer feedback to them.

The *practice style* in operation can be used in two ways. These are the teacher-rotated format and student-rotated format.

1. Teacher-rotated format

- a. Teacher prepares a circuit of several tasks to be accomplished in the learning area.
- b. Each activity station comprises a different task with a designated number of students.
- c. Learners are given task sheets to assist them in remembering what to do and how to do the task.
- d. The sheets also serve to enhance time-on-task (TOT) behaviour.
- e. After several minutes, the teacher rotates the students systematically from one station to another.

2. Student-rotated format

The second format is similar to the first, except that the students decide on the order of the stations, time spent at each station,

and when to move on to another station. Goldberger (1992) suggests that this student-rotated format is more effective for lower-ability children, as they can spend more time on the tasks which they have not mastered yet.

Using the Reciprocal Style

The *reciprocal style* is characterized by its conditions for immediate feedback and the social relationships between peers (Mosston & Ashworth, 1986). The major difference between the command or practice styles and reciprocal teaching is that students assume more responsibility for observing the performance of their peers and providing feedback on each attempt. In this style, the teacher moves among the students, helping to clarify the task for them, and giving additional assistance as necessary.

1. The teacher prepares a task sheet that describes the task(s) to be practiced with evaluative criteria, as well as the amount of time or number of trials to be accomplished.
2. One student is appointed as the performer while his/her partner evaluates the performance using the teacher-designed criteria sheets. Each sheet may include pictures or diagrams as well as descriptions so that the student-observer can determine when the student-performer has done each aspect of the task correctly.
3. After the first learner completes the task, they then switch roles. Thus immediate, one-to-one feedback can be provided during and after the task.

CONCLUSION

Research has found the *practice* and *reciprocal styles* to be effective in motor skills acquisition (Goldberger, 1992; Goldberger, Gerney, and Chamberlain, 1982). The *practice style* in particular proved to be the most effective in teaching a psychomotor task. This was because it was able to provide maximum TOT behavior as well as systematic feedback from the teachers.

However, when the objective was to develop social skills, then the *reciprocal style* was most appropriate (Goldberger, 1992; Goldberger, *et. al.*, 1982). This style enhanced the self-image of the learners

(Dougherty and Bonanno, 1987). The image of being an instructor and assisting in the learning process can be a rewarding experience for the student. Reciprocal learners have also been found to provide more feedback, express more empathy, offer more praise and encouragement to each other, and request more feedback from each other (Goldberger, 1992).

Both styles have their advantages and disadvantages that are peculiar to each. No one style should be used exclusively. Dougherty and Bonanno (1987) have suggested using different styles to suit the needs of the learners and the situation.



IMPLICATIONS

The **reciprocal** style, for example can be used for:

1. *The early stages of skill acquisition where immediate feedback is essential.*

For example in hockey, when students are first learning the push pass, the teacher can divide the class into pairs and get them to practice against the wall. As one partner executes the skill (i.e., using the hockey stick to push the ball against the wall for x number of times) the other partner, with the aid of a criteria sheet, will provide comments and feedback on the techniques used.

2. *Teaching a very complicated skill movement.*

For example, the headstand. The teacher can break up the entire headstand into different, simplified stages, and divide the class into groups of threes. As one student executes stage x of the movement, the other two can provide support and feedback for the learner.

3. *For purposeful social interaction.*

The act of giving and receiving feedback puts the learner in situations demanding honesty, appropriate verbal behavior, patience and empathy. Thus reciprocal teaching provides opportunity for learners to accept each other regardless of personal success or failure. Hence this style is a good relationship builder.

4. *The practice style can be introduced once basic skills have been acquired.*

For example: in basketball once the students have learnt the skills of dribbling, passing and shooting, they can be divided into smaller groups to maximize skill practice at specific stations. The teacher can move among the students, correcting errors, offering encouragement and making suggestions to modify the activity to fit the more specific needs of students.



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