

# Canada

## Student Centered Teaching Method

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Ski instructors often specialize in teaching specific age groups of students, whether it be toddlers, teenagers or seniors. So, what in fact makes those instructors great at their job? At Interski, I was lucky enough to participate in one of Canada's on-snow workshops led by Tracey Fraser. Tracey's workshop focus was on a student-centered method of teaching.

This method was broken down into 4 elements:

1. Decision making method (*decisions made while teaching*)
2. Choosing the situation (*the environment we use in order to learn, based on consideration of students*)
3. Skiing objective (*a part of reflective learning*)
4. Technique (*correct movements made while skiing*)

Tracey also touched on:

1. Retention of women in the sport
2. Psychological and Biomechanical considerations in skiing
3. The difference between engaging with kids and engaging with seniors.

### The Elements

In the '*decision making method*' it is important to create a learning contract with two-way communication. We should not be afraid to get to know our students. Who are they? Why are they here? Do they have any injuries you might need to take into consideration? You are then able to plan a lesson based around this information. It's all about engaging with your student so they feel comfortable to learn.

When you, as the instructor, '*choose the situation*' you are using the environment to the best of your ability to aid your student's learning. For example, if your student finds it difficult to ski in low light conditions perhaps get them to ski right behind you or next to the tree line on the run. Maybe they want to get better at skiing bumps, would you take them into the iciest moguls on the mountain to practice? The environment we choose for our guests is critical in the aid of their learning.

The '*skiing objective*' refers to what our guests would like to achieve in the lesson. Reflective learning is a great way to think about what the skiing objective might be for a specific task. For example, Tracey gave us a task of making rhythmical short turns. She asked us to reflect on what our skiing objective might be while making these short turns. Do we want to go faster, slower or maybe just maintain our speed? Do we struggle to grip the snow? What about our pressure control through the slushy conditions, will it be even or will it be hit and miss? These questions gave our group its skiing objectives. Once the task was completed Tracey made sure she related back to the group to define the outcome. Once you know the desired outcome, you can start to give a motor

pattern to your student. This is a part of the turn we look at and a movement in that part of the turn we want to develop to help our students' skiing objective.



Part of this reflective learning philosophy is to give our students the appropriate drills/exercises/tasks to really reinforce the motor pattern. This allows your student to know when they're doing it correctly or when they're not. However, it's

important to give your student cues, to help them understand what feeling is right or what is wrong. For example, if you're trying to get your student to try an edge roll, let them know that if they're doing it correctly they will maintain their speed. If their skis don't have enough edge their speed will decrease.

### Psychological and Biomechanical Considerations in Skiing

Tracey has helped form a 'Women In Skiing' committee with the aim of engaging more women to stay in the sport, whether they're ski instructors or skiers in the public. To help retain women in the industry, the committee firstly needed to ask each other a few questions:

1. Do women think differently to men and do we, as instructors, need to cater for that?
2. Are women built differently to men and are considerations needed for that?

The answers are yes and no. It's impossible to classify all women into one group because we're simply not the same. With this in mind the committee came up with a two-part module: Psychological and Biomechanical considerations in skiing. Rather than putting women in a separate skiing category to men, they decided to group everyone together. We all think differently to each other and everyone is built in their own unique way.



In ski lessons, the psychological mindset can refer to the 'get goers' and the 'planners'. Some people like to try things first and discuss the aim of the task afterwards, while others like to hear more information about the task before giving it a go. This can also change depending on how comfortable the group

is or how many runs they've skied together during the day. The way Tracey introduced this psychological mindset to our group during the workshop was by giving us the option to try a task or stay with her to learn more. The task was to make turns and pick up one ski. A few of us jumped in straight away with a variety of interpretations. Some were doing white pass turns, others were simply skiing on one ski the whole way down. As a whole, most of the group stayed to get a better understanding of the task. It was an interesting way to split our group and it definitely was not divided by gender!

Biomechanically, we are all built differently. This means the way we move will differ. It's important to stop trying to make all our guests look alike but rather look at what happens with their ski on the snow and make sure that every skier has the best alignment for the most efficient skiing possible. Women have a



natural Q-angle which means we can balance differently to men. Women are also 6-10 times more likely to have an ACL injury than men. We must place our guests in the strongest stance possible to help with their movements into the right technique.

### **Kids and Seniors**

What exactly is it about teaching a child that is so different to teaching an adult? What do you, as the instructor, have to do or how do you have to think differently to engage with a child? One of the biggest things that came up in our workshop with Tracey was when teaching a child to ski we need to 'talk less and ski more'. Kids are here to have fun, therefore we need to be fun! Tuning into your inner child, changing your tone of voice and your body language to suit the age you're interacting with.

Even though we are teaching and having fun, we still need to implement a decision-making process and create a safe environment in which our students can learn. To determine a skiing objective for kids, the motor pattern development needs to be appropriate for the specific age group. With this in mind, what considerations need to be made when teaching an older age group?

In the decision-making process, our questions need to be a little more specific. Do they have any injuries you should be aware of, how is their eyesight, how is their hearing, how long will they need to warm up for in the morning, what are their endurance levels? The risk of injury to seniors is significantly higher and consideration needs to be given to these issues. Therefore, a senior's motor pattern development must take ability, strength and coordination into

consideration, as well as teaching correct technique, to ensure the students get the most out of their lesson.

In conclusion, I thoroughly enjoyed Tracey's on-snow workshop for Canada. It was really interesting to think a bit more in depth about what we do as instructors to provide the ultimate lesson based around our guests' age, ability, build and mindset. Remember, it's up to us to set our students up for success in order for them to ski well, ski all day long and end the day with a smile!