

Describe 'Fitts and Posner's' phases of learning and explain how you would structure practices to enhance performance.

In order to start to learn a new motor skill our body needs to learn how to control its limbs in such a way that will benefit a certain action. Obviously we don't learn this straight away it takes time to learn and to process all this information so that we can improve and progress from being a novice to being proficient.

In 1964 Paul Fitts and Michael Posner developed a theory to explain how our body learns to do this. They divided it into three learning stages

1) The cognitive stage

This is first stage of learning where the performer learns what needs to be done. The performer needs to find out,

- What is required
- What task is to be performed
- What the rules are
- How to hold the equipment, e.g. a tennis racket

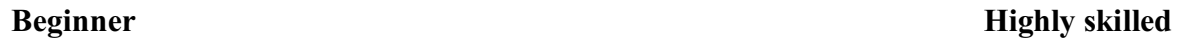
In this stage the emphasis is on the performer understanding what needs to be achieved, so that initial simple plans of action can be achieved. The cognitive stage is very exploratory and contains lots of trial and error in order to gain lots of feedback so that the performer can learn and improve. External feedback is also achieved via observing other performers at higher levels. The skill is mainly performed in a closed environment with as little outside variables as possible so the performer can achieve the basics. In this stage as the performer has little knowledge of what should be done the performer usually needs specific external feedback to improve. This stage is usually overcome in a relatively short time period.

2)The associative stage

This is the intermediate stage, and can take much longer than the Cognitive stage. During this stage the performer learns through many hours of practising in open and closed conditions as they try to refine their skill. The performer has learned the fundamentals of a skill and can performing it adequately and quite consistently under varying conditions. The cognitive feedback has been learned so that the different parts of the skill can be performed and co-ordinated together giving an outcome more in line with the performers expectation. Significant errors are detected and corrected with and without the help of exterior sources such as coaches and videos of their performance. The performer aims to refine the skill In this stage there is quite a lot of difference between a sports person at the top of this stage and one that has just entered it. Some performers never overcome this stage

3)The autonomous stage

A performer doesn't leap from one stage to another it is more of a gradual transitional movement as they develop their control and understanding through practice. This is best illustrated on a continuum



To structure practices for people at a Cognitive phase of learning the performer should observe another performer doing the correct skill. The person learning the skill should then try to mimic the skill. Whilst they are doing this the performer should have feedback from an external source like a teacher or a coach. The emphasis should be on understanding what has to be done and the vital parts of the skill should be achieved. To aid in the learning of the skill things like colourful equipment may be used so that the performer pays more attention to them e.g. bigger and brighter cricket bats and balls. The performer must be praised when good things are achieved to boost their confidence and notify that that part was accomplished well. These sessions should be quite short about 20-30 min.

To structure practices for people at a Autonomous stage of learning in this stage coaching should me in small groups in order to gain the most benefit as there will only be small errors in the skill which may otherwise be missed and wont be highlighted and improved upon. In this stage the emphasis is on what they are doing wrong with out the need for praise

