

“Discuss the differences between skill, ability and technique and explain how you would structure practices to enhance these components of a performance”

Skill, ability and technique are closely linked and each have a relationship with one another. To be successful at a particular sport, be it hitting a ball against a wall or representing your country at the olympics you must have skill, ability and technique.

I will start by clearly stating what skill, ability and technique mean individually.

Skill

Skill is an athlete's ability to choose and perform the right techniques at the right time, successfully, regularly and with a minimum of effort. Athletes use their skill to achieve athletic objectives e.g. jumping 9 meters in long jump. Skill is acquired and therefore has to be learned.

Ability

Ability is the make up of an athlete which we inherit from our parents. Abilities can be essentially perceptual, essentially motor or a combination of both. A number of different characteristics of your make up are concerned whilst talking about ability, for example height, strength and co-ordination. Most abilities to do with action are a combination and are referred to as psychomotor abilities.

Technique

Techniques are the basic movements of any sport or event, for example the block start in a 100m race is a technique. We combine a number of techniques to create a pattern of movement e.g. triple jump - running and then the hop, skip and jump phases.

The book 'Advanced PE for Edexcel' puts forward the equation:

“Skill = Ability + Technique.” (page 103)

This shows us the close connection. The book quotes:

“In order to perform a particular skill in sport, we must learn the required technique. In order to learn the technique fully, we must have the necessary abilities.”

This quote agrees with the idea that all three areas are needed to be a success at sporting activities.

Skill has been defined by a number of different experts. Here is a definition from 'Advanced PE':

“An organised co-ordinated activity in relation to an object or situation, which involves a whole chain of sensory, central and motor mechanisms.” (Page 102)

The above quote shows the distinct link between skill, ability and technique. Skill can be broken down into a number of different types:

Cognitive skills - involves thought processes

Perceptual skills – involves interpretation of stimuli.

Motor skills – involve the muscular system and concerns movement.

Perceptual motor skills – involves thought (cognitive), interpretation (perceptual) and movement (motor)

In order to perform any skill in sports, you must have the ability to do so. Your ability is generally seen as being innate (born with it), so to improve it you need to train. Here is a definition of ability:

“Motor abilities are innate inherited traits that determine an individuals co-ordination, balance, ability and speed of reactions” (R. Arnot and C. Gaines)

The difference between skill and ability is that a skill can be taught and changed and your ability is something that is inherited from your parents, is natural and cannot be taught.

In order to perform a particular skill in sport, we must learn the necessary technique. Technique is often confused with skill. To perform a particular skill in any sport you will have to a required technique.

There are a number of classification continuums that may be used in conjunction with each other to build up a profile of a particular skill. There is Knapp's open-closed continuum (page 104), which involves skills being categorised into open or closed skills. An example of an open skill is a tackle in rugby. It is very difficult to improve an open skill in any sport because the situation in which it occurs is always different but the skill will be improved over time through experience. An example of a closed skill is the shot putt. Closed skills can be improved easily due to the fact that there are no outside physical influences on the athlete, which means he or she can train easily for a closed skill. There are also further continuums such as coactive and interactive skills and also discrete and continuous continuum but I feel it is not worth going into detail on these.

To structure practices to enhance your performance for ability is very difficult as you are born with your abilities. However an Australian sports psychologist has found ways of improving hand/eye co-ordination by doing special eye exercises. These exercises are starting to be used more frequently in sports such as cricket to improve hand/eye co-ordination but they are not yet proven to work. Technique, according to most textbooks can be easily enhanced and improved. Your technique can be enhanced and improved by feedback from coaches telling you to change certain parts of your technique e.g. keeping your head over the ball whilst playing a forward defensive in cricket. This feedback can then be used to improve your technique and then you can go away and work on it in the next training sessions.

Conclusion

The idea that ability cannot be improved I believe is wrong. Speed, flexibility and hand/eye co-ordination can all be enhanced. Speed can be enhanced by working on muscular strength in your legs and hand/eye co-ordination can be improved by special methods, which have been put forward by experts on the subject. The idea that technique has to be good to improve certain skills I also think is wrong due to some sports men and women have irregular techniques but still excel in there sport such as Muttiah Murallitharan, who is one of the greatest spin bowlers in the world at the current time. The idea that skill equals ability plus technique is the perfect way to describe how to be able to achieve a particular skill. However there are a number of different aspects which come into consideration when performing a skill and being successful at that skill.

The definitions of the three practices in these components of performances put forward in the literature review section by the experts are all clear definitions that show the true meaning of the terms skill, ability and technique. The idea that ability cannot really be improved I disagree with because both some top experts and myself as an athlete believe that there are certain ways in which you can improve on aspects such as hand/eye co-ordination. The way in which technique can be improved is pretty straightforward but it creates other issues such as why some sportsmen or women with a poor technique still excel in their chosen sport? Overall skill is developed by having good ability and having a technique that suits your body type.

Bibliography

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