

Discuss the role of Feedback in the learning of Skills

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Introduction

Feedback is used as a guiding tool and is central for good and successful coaching and learning. In order for a learner who is participating in a new sport or wants to develop that sport further, then feedback is essential if the sportsperson is to develop their skill and technique.

First before giving out feedback or guidance the qualified coach/instructor must assess their current ability in the sport in a match situation, which then the coach can observe and start the teaching when the problems and bad technique are identified by the coach and the performer receives feedback on the coach's findings. It is best if the performer is a beginner at the sport to teach them using visual and verbal guidance. The beginner can quickly understand the input information given by the coach, and can see a mental picture of the skill which would make it easier for the performer. The coach needs to demonstrate a few mistakes the performer is making, but it is very important that they do not dwell on the bad points or the performer will take it as criticism and could lose morale. A coach needs to use positive feedback to keep the performer motivated and encouraged to keep trying harder if they struggle with a certain aspect of training. Praising good performances and motivating them when they fail will stop the short attention span of new learner. Positive combined with continuous or concurrent feedback for the development of the performer. With the coach observing in close proximity during a match or a skill set into sub-routines, the coach can spot a wrong technique and using constructive feedback along with encouragement, correct the wrong technique. This way the performer will continue to be motivated and the learners learning will continue its rapid rise.

If a performer is learning to play tennis for the first time then visual feedback during the cognitive phase helps the learner to develop a mental image of the task and can perform the task with a lot more confidence. But this method requires a good, professional coach to guide and demonstrate the correct technique of the skill. For example I beginner is learning tennis for the first time, the coach would stop play and would demonstrate how to perform that technique properly using the progressive-part method. This means to break down the certain skill into sub-routines so the learner can identify visually in their heads what they have to do, e.g. demonstrating a stroke in tennis: BACKSWING-TWIST HIPS-FRONT FOOT FORWARD-STRIKE-FOLLOW THROUGH.

This way is much easier for beginners to pick up more complex skills this way. The coach uses the feedback technique of knowledge of results (good or bad shot) to see if the ball was hit correctly with the proper technique and achieved the desired effect the performer wanted, if not then the swing needs to be broken up again and practised more intensely. Then using extrinsic feedback combined with positive feedback the technique can be improved with the performer being encouraged every step of the way.

An elite tennis player does not need as much encouragement as a beginner or intermediate. They require more negative feedback from their coach and rely upon their fully developed kinesthesia using intrinsic feedback. They can determine themselves whether they have hit the shot correctly or not and can seek advice from their coach. They can feel if the shot is hit too hard or too much slice, etc. In an open skilled sport like tennis, the coach uses the knowledge of results feedback method to explain to the elite performer that their results are slipping and need to change an aspect in their game. Elite performers are not as sensitive to criticism as beginners are because they have more knowledge and understanding of the skill and can trust their own ability and can motivate themselves if they fail.

An intermediate would need continuous, constructive feedback to keep the performer constantly busy while learning at the same time. This would stop boredom and keep the learner focused. With encouragement the performer will be more motivated to learn more and step into the associative phase once the performer has learned the basics of the skill. Teaching the intermediate performer should be more focused on improving their skill in match situations. Using Distributed practice is a perfect teaching method because the learner can train constantly and enjoy themselves working hard and will enjoy the rest breaks given in distributed practice sessions. These rest breaks are a perfect opportunity for the coach to give feedback on knowledge of performance. This continuous feedback is essential for the performer because they can constantly improve their technique on the go without having to go away and learn by themselves. Distributed practice is also good for learners who lack fitness and experience.

The same method for teaching a racket sport can be used for a team game like football. Learning can be complicated and hard going for a beginner. This is Welford's model of information processing:

A learner can not take in and understand as much information as an expert or even an intermediate can. An expert's DCR process is much quicker, they have learned to use selective attention, to prioritise information and discard irrelevant information. Intermediates at a quicker rate than beginners but lack the sharpness and capability to 'bunch' information into relevant groups like an expert can, e.g. a football player ignores an aeroplane overhead but complies with the referee's whistle. When teaching football, a beginner needs lots of attention and encouragement, using positive feedback. They also need visual guidance as this reinforces feedback. Visual learning during the cognitive phase helps the learner to develop a mental picture of the task; a footballer would remember how their coach showed them how to use the instep of the boot and can perform the task properly. It is best to have one-on-one tuition with the coach to gain the basics of performing the skill. If a performer learns a skill, the skill will go into their STM (short term memory) and receives positive feedback and enjoys it, the skill will go into their LTM (long term memory) and will remember it. That is how positive feedback works in the aspect of encouraging the performer will make them remember what they have been taught. In teaching football the coach will use reciprocal and distributed practice teaching style to give freedom but with the coach able to command all activities and give feedback afterwards. The beginner will use guided discovery to discover their own style of play and practice learned skills. Continuous feedback is used for beginners in the same way as intermediates but the coach allowing the intermediate to use a more guided discovery approach to learning. Visual and verbal guidance used to help the cognitive phase and develop the understanding of the skill involved and to help the performer progress into the associative phase.

An expert however, has developed good kinesthesia and is in the autonomous phase. They can use intrinsic feedback to determine whether the skill needs improving because the performed skill does not instinctively feel right. The performer maybe off balance, too much back lift etc. The coach would use concurrent, constructive feedback using visual guidance to demonstrate how to performer and improve the technique even more. Using knowledge of performance feedback the coach would check the performance of the performer and check from week to week how they are progressing or not, or even that they have reached a plateau in their performance in which case the teaching and training methods need altering and maybe the tasks need to be more stimulating to re-motivate the performer into trying harder. The negative feedback would be used to point out the mistakes and how to improve them.

In an individual sport like indoor bowling the difference between a beginner and an intermediate is small. An intermediate would have developed small amounts of kinasthesis, whereas a beginner has not developed muscle memory yet. The coach would rely on knowledge of results to check whether the performer is improving. If not then visual guidance is needed to demonstrate how to perform it. Positive feedback always used to encourage them when they are not performing well or are struggling with a certain technique. The beginner needs one-on-one coaching to develop their cognitive phase learning. Using command style/reciprocal teaching the learner can remain motivated while making sure they are learning the proper technique. Experts use intrinsic feedback to further their skill, they can tell if rolled the ball to hard or soft and can keep on practising to improve. They have good kinasthesis to determine this. Concurrent is important so the learner can change their technique by each shot until they have a good result and will store that technique in their LTM. This is not possible during a football game because a coach can not stop a football match in full flow. It would de-motivate the performer and frustrate them when they just want to play a game without interruptions. This would also confuse the performer.