Current Status And Application of Instructional Strategy Research

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"Have you heard the latest way to teach . . . ? This new method seems to be the "in" thing and by next year half the schools in the State will be implementing this approach, so we here at this school should follow the trend."

Does the above conversation and thinking sound typical of the happenings in the world of education? Attendance at professional teacher meetings and/or a review of the current educational literature would seem to support this observation. Teachers are constantly besieged with material involving new or revised teaching methodologies or instructional strategies. For most teachers, the selection of an instructional strategy is a primary responsibility.

How does the teacher decide what instructional strategy to employ? The teacher's selection may be because the strategy is compatible with their philosophical beliefs, or based on past experiences of what seems to work, or because the strategy is in vogue. These hardly seem to be scientific and totally valid reasons for making such an important decision. If the teacher does make an effort to seek out evidence from the research literature concerning what instructional strategy to employ, what will he/she find? It is the purpose of this paper to present an overview of the instructional strategies that may be employed in teaching motor skills and, more importantly, how the psychomotor research literature supports their usage.

Instructional Strategies

Although several definitions of instructional strategies can be found in the literature, the definition used in this paper will be as follows: An instructional strategy is the vehicle or delivery system by which ordered information is imparted to the learner by the instructor or some other informational providing source. The instructional strategy involves the mode of operation used to transmit knowledge from the source of knowledge to the receiver, the learner. The effect of various teaching strategies (transmission systems) on learning will be of concern later in this paper.

What are the various strategies that are available to the instructor of motor skills? In his book Teaching Physical Education, Mosston (1966) has attempted to classify and define the strategies available. By combining Mosston's work with recent research literature, the instructional strategy model presented in Figure 1 was created (Note 1).

This model presents two aspects of the current instructional strategy situation. The arc in the model shows five basic strategies that can be employed in the learning environment. The horizontal continuum presents the strategies generally used in laboratory research attempts to investigate the effects of instructional strategies on learning/performance of motor skills. A horizontal continuum is used to illustrate
Figure 1. Instructional Strategies Model

Listed in parenthesis are the styles from the current Mosston Model (1981) that are comparable to those selected to be presented here from the earlier model (1966). The spectrum of styles presented are not a complete representation of the Mosston Models.

The laboratory research since most of these efforts have used strategies described as bipolar. Thus, the placement of the laboratory-employed strategies at the ends of the continuum. Let us look at the basic strategies available as shown on the arc of the model (Note 2).

The COMMAND STRATEGY, at the far left, is a teacher centered strategy. The teacher tells the learner what to do, how to do it, and when to do it. The command strategy allows little, if any, individualization and involves very limited cognition on the part of the learner.

The next strategy, labeled the TASK STRATEGY, is more open-ended than the command strategy. Generally, under the task strategy learners still perform the teacher directed activity but are allowed to perform on their own. This allows learners some control over when they perform, and possibly even over the number of attempts they make.

The next two methods, GUIDED DISCOVERY and PROBLEM SOLVING, are difficult to differentiate. Some writers have interpreted these terms to be analogous, while others have defined these strategies in such a way that they would be placed differently on this model. Generally, as suggested by Mosston (1966), in guided discovery the teacher uses statements in the form of questions to initiate the learning process instead of using exclamation words as in the command or task strategy. However, prior to the learning experience the teacher has determined the specific subject matter to be learned. The question format developed is used to structure the learning process so that the learner will display the response desired by the teacher. Since the learner is not told what the desired response is, the guided discovery process does allow for cognition on the part of the learner in determining the appropriate response to the presented questions. It