

It can be tempting to re-use the same lesson plan again and again; slow down and learn about your guests and what their priorities are.

analysis, causes and effects, and ways to teach. Why limit your own learning?

WAYS TO MIX UP YOUR TEACHING

Phase One: Assessment and Goal-Setting - Look Deeper than Quick Fixes

Don't rush to set up your game plan. At the outset of a lesson there is pressure on you to quickly pick a direction and make a plan. This is where it's tempting to use, re-use, and re-re-use lessons that have worked in the past. Instead of jumping to your default plan, slow down and look deeper. Extra time spent making turns and learning about your guests is worth the investment.

Identify priorities. Your whole class is in the back seat. And you could spend yet another lesson extolling the benefits of a balanced stance. But is that really the top priority for that class on that day? For any given group of students, there are all kinds of possible directions. Use the ages, interests, and specific wishes of the class to shape your plan. Add in the snow and weather conditions du jour. With all those variables, it's easy to see why every class you teach will be different.

Make synchronized turns behind your guest. Want the quickest route to understand someone else's movement patterns? Synch them. This never fails to illuminate timing and skill blending, which can help you create a tailored coaching plan rather than a broad-brush overview.

Bust Your Rut

Invite Creativity and Experimentation into Your Lessons

By Karin Kirk

"I teach the same lesson to 95% of my students," a lifelong instructor once told me boastfully. "They all have the same problem, and I can fix it the same way." He could read the skepticism on my face. "It always works," he added for emphasis. *Does it?* I couldn't help but wonder. Looking back on that conversation, I now have enough miles under my belt to know that a cookie-cutter approach is unlikely to be effective over the long haul.

It's tempting to fall into the one-size-fits-all mindset. It's true that many students have similar, non-ideal movement patterns: lots of skiers and riders are in the back seat or lean too far inside the turn. It's also true that addressing one or two key deficiencies will help most people. But there is so much more to our job than telling every guest the same go-to tips. Allowing your teaching to default into in a rut is not ideal for your students - but the person it hurts most is you. Why?

It's probably inaccurate. To a hammer, everything looks like a nail. To an instructor who always teaches upper/lower body separation, it looks like everybody needs more upper/lower body separation. While that may be true, is that really the most important thing to focus on?

You may be missing bigger issues and more important priorities. What's really going on with that student? You may not figure it out unless you are able to look beyond your usual diagnosis.

You are doing the guest a disservice. We are all very different in so many ways. Rubber-stamping your students causes you to miss out on recognizing people's individual abilities, prior experiences, goals, quirks, and motivations.

You are doing yourself a disservice, by not being open to a wider range of movement



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Help your students create the type of experience they are seeking – which will be different for everyone – and do so by incorporating technique that will help them get there.

Instead of looking for flaws, look for causes. Lots of students rush through the fall line, but why are they doing that? One person may do it because they're scared of accelerating. Another might actually like the aggressive feeling of whipping through their turns and jamming on their edges. These two students have a similar symptom but for virtually opposite reasons. Strive to understand not only what's happening, but *why* it's happening.

Underlying causes could involve the person's understanding, balance, skill, strength, or emotional state. If you can pinpoint root causes, you will likely open the doors to meaningful progress.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND CREATIVE TEACHING GO HAND-IN-HAND

Experiential learning is more than simply learning by doing; it immerses students in the process of experimenting, reflecting, and exploring. The fun part is that we don't always know where the lesson will lead, which prevents us from falling into a rut and teaching the same thing repeatedly.

Here are some ways to make your lessons more experiential, while also granting you opportunities to keep your teaching game fresh and authentic. (See more in "A Closer Look at Experiential Learning," in the Winter 2017 edition of *32 Degrees*.)

TURN SOME CONTROL OVER TO YOUR STUDENTS. Many of us are used to a "command and control" style of teaching. What happens if you let students lead the dance? This does not mean allowing chaos to reign over your school group. Instead it means inviting collaboration, pursuing open-ended experimentation, and reflecting on what works for each person.

NO POSING. We always encourage a balanced, athletic stance, but students get there by doing it, not by being bent into a position on the side of a run and then told to maintain that position. What other approaches can lead to a similar outcome? For example, when I coach a student to *really* put the power down on their outside ski, they almost always adopt a balanced stance – authentically, not because I told them to stand a certain way.

YOU LEARN FROM YOUR STUDENTS, WHILE THEY LEARN FROM YOU. Each lesson affords us an opportunity to learn more about our sport, our mountain, and our job. Instead of thinking of your role as a dispenser of knowledge, consider each lesson a partnership for both of you. If you keep your senses open to the many possibilities that await, your lessons will never become stale.



The broader your teaching approach, the better you'll be able to teach a full range of lesson types. And the more you'll learn along the way!

Everything is a two-way conversation. Let the students guide you, not vice-versa. This is especially true as you set up your plan for the lesson. As much as possible, let the guests influence priorities, terrain, and the plan of action.

Phase Two: During the Lesson - Stay Open and Creative

There's more to teaching than correcting technique. Instead of always striving to correct weak spots in student technique, think of your job as enhancing their experience. Skiing and riding are supposed to be fun, and excessive disciplining is not fun. Help your students create the type of experience they are seeking – which will be different for everyone – and do so by incorporating technique that will help them get there. This may mean that some skill deficiencies get put on the back burner. That's okay. Address the most important things first, and the rest can come later.

Try a little experimentation. What would happen if you taught a new idea spontaneously? Go for it. Try something you've always wondered about, or maybe follow an insight that just popped into your head. Involve your students so that all of you can be part of a grand, on-snow experiment together. This type of impromptu creativity spawned my Adele-inspired progression to connect with the outside ski earlier in the turn ("*Hello to my outside ski...*"), which ended up being hilariously successful. [Editor's note: See page 64 for more music cues for learning.]

Be willing to abandon your plan. A capable teacher can recognize when something's not working and move to a new direction. Be sure to ask yourself and the guest, "Is this working?" Rather than, "This is working, right?" If you only look for what you want to see, you'll probably see it. That's called confirmation bias. Keep your mind open as you watch your students.

Phase Three: In Between Lessons - Build Depth and Versatility

Attend clinics or shadow top instructors' lessons to pick up new ideas. You can follow others' methods specifically, or you can take the nucleus of an idea and put your own spin on it. It's okay (even encouraged!) to borrow from someone else's bag of tricks. That's how we all learn and grow together.

Craft new teaching segments with peers. Try a spontaneous problem-solving session and toss around solutions to common teaching challenges. Ski/ride through a variety of drills and tactics. Encourage others to add to the topic, and keep the creativity flowing. In the end, you will all have learned a new way to teach something.



Think of each step of the lesson as a collaborative conversation. Ask lots of questions and look for the guest to lead you toward decisions on lesson priorities, terrain, and the plan of action.

Never stop learning. Teaching snowsports revolves around two key areas of knowledge: movement analysis and an understanding of people. These are both enormous fields of study, which means there is always more for us to uncover. Strive to stay open to new ideas, from within our sport and outside of it.

Challenge yourself to ride with different people, tackle familiar runs with a different approach, and explore new terrain. You'll have way more fun if you get out of your comfort zone and keep experimenting. Shaking up your routine will undoubtedly make you better at your job, too. You'll build breadth, stay on your toes, and maintain a fresh outlook.

At the end of the day, take note of the vibrant conversation that fills your locker room. That's the collective sound of everyone sharing the new experiences they had that day. We are all lucky to work in a stimulating – albeit crazy – environment. Staying open to many possibilities will make your lessons more rewarding, more productive, and way more fun. Best of all, you will never come home at the end of the day and exclaim that your job is boring.

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