

PSIA-AASI Celebrates its 60th Anniversary

HERE ARE 6 BREAKTHROUGHS FROM THE PAST 60 YEARS THAT CHANGED SNOWSPORTS INSTRUCTION

By Peter Kray



When PSIA's seven founders – Curt Chase, Max Dercum, Jimmy Johnston, Bill Lash, Doug Pfeiffer, Don Rhinehart, and Paul Valar – sat down to form the Professional Ski Instructors of America in May 1961 at Big Mountain in Whitefish, Montana, they had one goal: to create a standard of consistency for ski instruction that it would help draw new participants to the sport from across the nation.

Looking back 50 years after that momentous occasion, Lash said, "I'm proud of that moment for what it meant for ski instruction in this country. It created the basis for how we would grow the sport."

Now, six decades later, PSIA-AASI teaches everyone how to enjoy more than just alpine skiing; welcoming every snowsports discipline, ability, and person. Each winter, PSIA-AASI members embrace the opportunity to create lifelong adventures through education.

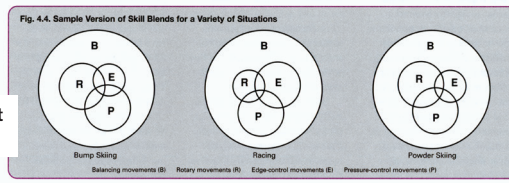
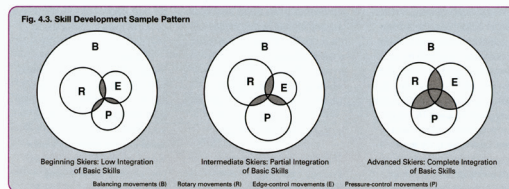
"The strength of our organization has always been the initiative of snowsports educators in different regions of the country coming together for the common good of the snowsports community," said PSIA-AASI Chief Executive Officer Nicholas Herrin. "It started with the unification of regional associations that existed before our founding in 1961 and continues to this day."

Here are six of the most notable teaching benchmarks from the past 60 years, which continue to inform American, and international, snowsports instructors.



Paul Valar and Bill Lash with an early copy of *The Official American Ski Technique*, PSIA's "White Book," which would set the first standards for ski instruction in the U.S. (Photo courtesy of the New England Ski Museum).

PSIA-AASI's Skills Concept rendered in Ven Diagrams.



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THE SKILLS CONCEPT

When the then U.S. Demonstration Team arrived at the 1975 International Ski Instructors Congress (Interski) in Strbske Pleso, Czechoslovakia, they brought with them a new method of teaching called, "The American Technique," which almost overnight would revolutionize ski instruction.

Based on the better known "Skills Concept," the American Technique focused on three technical aspects – a skier's rotary movement (i.e., turning), edging, and pressure control – with balance as the core, to give instructors real-time teaching tools to work on particular aspects of each student's skiing. "Skills let us focus on where people wanted to ski, and how they wanted to ski it," said Mike Porter, a member of the 1975 team, who went on to serve as its coach for many terms.

That fall, the Skills Concept and the American Technique were the highlight of a multi-page feature in *Sports Illustrated Magazine*, under the title "Easy as One Two Ski." The Skills Concept's lasting impact can be seen in technical manuals for every discipline, and as the technical basis for *The Learning Connection*.

"The Skills Concept was revolutionary then and is still very much the blueprint to look at, analyze, and discuss skiing in every aspect of the sport," said PSIA Alpine Team Coach Michael Rogan. "This concept – updated to focus on rotational control, edge control, and pressure control as integral to all turns and essential for maintaining balance – has been adopted for almost every other alpine country in the world. It is impossible to fathom the impact the Skills Concept has had on our sport and profession."

2 OPPORTUNITY FOR WOMEN IN SNOWSPORTS

When PSIA and Aspen hosted Interski in 1968, the U.S. Demonstration Team included nine women. But in those years the team was only assembled for each event, unlike now when members are selected for four-year terms. In 1980, Carol Levine (who in 2017 was awarded the PSIA-AASI Educational Excellence Award) and Ellen Post Foster (who won the award in 2015 and is a member of the Colorado and U.S. Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame) both earned spots on the PSIA Demonstration Team, now called the PSIA-AASI National Team.

Coming eight years after the 1972 passage of Title IX – the regulation prohibiting sex discrimination in education programs or activities receiving federal funds – equality in sports was still slow moving, especially in recognizing women for their abilities as athletes and coaches. The same was true in ski school locker rooms, despite women making up half of the snowsports consumer population. Levine and Foster, followed by Alpine Demonstration Team members Dee Byrne, Mermer Blakeslee, Nancy Oakes, Katie Ertl, and Megan Harvey were critical to opening doors for more diversity in snowsports instruction. In the late

1980s and '90s, women made inroads to the Snowboard Team (Kerri Hannon, Jane Mauser) and Nordic Team (Deb Ackerman Willits).

Today, PSIA-AASI is committed to working within its sphere of influence to make snowsports more welcoming to all people – inclusive of age; ability; disability; socioeconomic status; ethnic origin; nationality; and racial, religious, social, sexual, or gender identity.

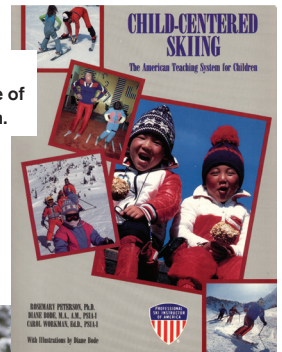
“We have strong and brave leaders like Carol, Ellen, and Dee to thank for helping pave the road for women in snowsports education,” said Robin Barnes, who is presently in her fourth term on the PSIA Alpine Team. “They each earned spots on the team because they were recognized as instructor-athletes who had a lot to offer our membership and our industry.”

Barnes noted that “Today, we enjoy building on that foundation with our Women’s Summit, Women’s Advisory Group, and Nancy Oakes Hall Scholarships, and recognize that it is both women and men who build, create, and innovate for snowsports education.”



Ellen Post Foster, Dee Byrne, and Carol Levine (center, front row in this 1984 photo) were among the first women selected to serve on the PSIA Alpine Demonstration Team.

Through the years, joyful smiles have always been a key outcome of children’s snowsports instruction.



The evolution of children’s instruction owes much to PSIA’s creation of the Junior Education Team in the 1980s.

3 THE JUNIOR EDUCATION TEAM

PSIA-AASI’s new Teaching Children Snowsports manual – released in Fall 2021 – supports a long tradition of quality kids’ instruction, compiling the education tools, on-snow teaching tips, and insight into how children think, react/socialize, and move.

The beginnings of this manual and preceding resources that supported the invaluable contributions of children’s instructors stretch back two decades to the creation of PSIA’s Junior Education Team. Better known as the JETs, this national group of kid-centric instructors worked with a laser-focus on program development specifically for children, helping to ensure that skiing and snowboarding resonated early with the sport’s next generation.

They created the Advanced Children’s Educator (ACE) program, which evolved into the Children’s Specialist credential, to assess

each instructor’s skill in teaching children. Their work lives on in The National Children’s Task Force, which helps guide innovation within PSIA-AASI’s Children’s Specialist community.

“The goal of Teaching Children Snowsports is to answer the question, ‘What makes a great children’s instructor?’ said PSIA Alpine Team member Kevin Jordan, who co-authored the manual with Mark Aiken, a member of Eastern Division’s Advanced Children’s Educator Team. “One of the challenges in writing a manual is to focus on application of various education theories to give instructors the tools they need when they’re ‘in the trenches.’ This is the legacy of the JETs and how instrumental that line of questioning is in evolving children’s instruction.”

4 THE CREATION OF AASI

In 1997, PSIA created the American Association of Snowboard Instructors (AASI), the world's first integrated snowboard instruction entity aimed solely at improving the on-snow riding experience for everyone from beginners to athletes at the highest level of professional competition.

Early AASI Snowboard Team members Dave Alden and Jane Mauser had already made history as the first snowboarders to demonstrate at Interski in St. Anton, Austria, in 1991, and PSIA published the first Snowboard Ski Instructional Manual in 1989. But according to AASI Snowboard Team Coach Eric Rolls, "Creating AASI helped snowboard instructors and educators carve their own path while staying connected to snowboarding's roots, especially the creativity and individualized expression."

Rolls said he thinks that because PSIA-AASI focuses on the indi-

vidual nuances of each snowsport on its own – including alpine, telemark, and cross country as well as snowboarding – there is actually more room for collaboration and understanding across disciplines. This is being fully realized, he said, through the close collaboration of national team members regardless of their snowsports specialty and the inclusion of identical people-skill and teaching-skill fundamentals in the certification standards for alpine, cross country, snowboard, and telemark instructors. All is in keeping with the promise and potential of PSIA-AASI's Learning Connection™ (see below).

"The AASI Snowboard Team continues to evolve the way we teach snowboarding while preserving why people love it so much," Rolls said. "I think the creation of AASI has allowed us to now have a better collaboration between all disciplines. When everyone's voice is heard, we can all create better outcomes."

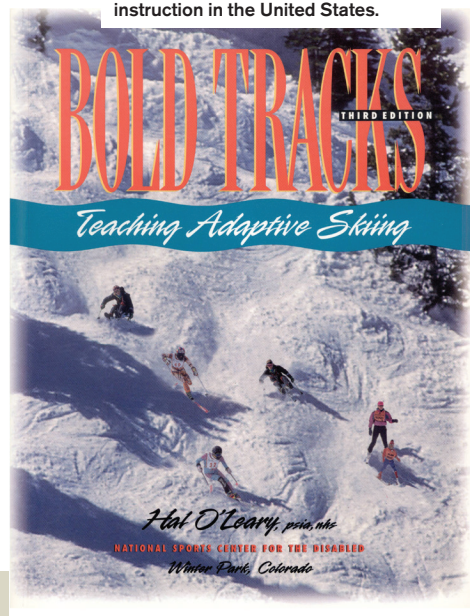


Snowboard instructors at a 1989 clinic at Colorado's Copper Mountain.



The many facets of adaptive snowsports factor into PSIA-AASI's educational tenets for adaptive instruction.

1987's *Bold Tracks* was written by Hal O'Leary, an early pioneer of adaptive instruction in the United States.



5 PIONEERING ADAPTIVE INSTRUCTION

America's active role in the development of adaptive instruction stretches back to the 1950's when Korean War veteran Lee Perry, known as "The Pied Piper of Adaptive Skiing," began to develop the first ski school for amputees at Mt. Hood's Government Camp in Oregon. Doug Pringle, a Vietnam veteran who lost a leg in combat, found his "life's work," in adaptive teaching, and became president of Disabled Sports USA Far West. PSIA began certifying adaptive instructors in 1984 and pioneering instructors such as Hal O'Leary and Gwen Allard (both members of the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame) wrote early adaptive teaching manuals, including O'Leary's *Bold Tracks*, published in 1987.

So, when PSIA-AASI's Adaptive Alpine Technical Manual was shared with the international snowsports instruction community at

Interski 2019 in Pamporovo, Bulgaria, it crowned the U.S. standing as the gold standard in terms of evaluating, understanding, and promoting adaptive instruction.

According to PSIA-AASI Adaptive Team Coach and manual co-author Geoff Krill, this manual represented "The first time that a true comparison was put into visual and verbal detail demonstrating that the Skills Concept matched seamlessly with the array of modalities within the adaptive world."

This was particularly enlightening insight for all instructors, Krill said, "because what we hold fundamentally true in skiing did not change when it came to various adaptive equipment and missing body parts. You still have to stand on it, turn, tip and bend something in order to make it down the hill."

The Learning Connection Model emphasizes student-centered teaching in which instructor behaviors and decisions encompass people skills, teaching skills, and technical skills.

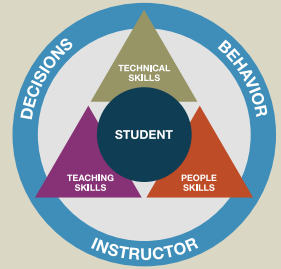
6 BUILDING THE LEARNING CONNECTION

The PSIA-AASI National Team introduced the Learning Connection at Interski 2015 in Ushuaia, Argentina, then took and even more detailed presentation to Interski 2019. This holistic view of snowsports instruction focuses creating an effective learning environment by applying a balance of people skills (which tie into each instructor’s self-awareness, ability to create trust, and communication skills), teaching skills (which strengthen the connection between instructor and student to create engaging lessons), and technical skills (which address good technique adapted to the student’s ability or desired outcome).

The fact that people-skill and teaching-skill fundamentals are the same across disciplines has helped foster a much more collaborative community both on the PSIA-AASI National Team, and at snowsports schools across the nation.

In 2018, the new Teaching Snowsports Manual was published, bringing to life the components of the Learning Connection, along with critical advice on communication, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, and effective teaching. In 2021 – thanks in large measure to ongoing efforts of PSIA-AASI’s Education Advisory Council, division leaders, and partners at Pennsylvania State University – new certification standards for most disciplines were approved by the PSIA-AASI Board of Directors, along with Performance Guides and a plan for implementing a nationally consistent certification process.

In using the Learning Connection to achieve more consistency while increasing the value of and integrity of its credentials, PSIA-AASI is carrying forth – in new and increasingly innovative ways – the vision of the association’s founders. In the words of PSIA-AASI Director of Education Dave Schuiling, “The entire process is the true definition of collaboration. We’ve established a greater level of trust that will carry us forward to help unite the snowsports industry to spur its growth.” 32



2018’s *Teaching Snowsports Manual* emphasizes interpersonal and intrapersonal skills.

Based in Sante Fe, New Mexico, **Peter Kray** is the lead writer for PSIA-AASI; focusing on emerging ski and snowboard trends, education, and on-snow innovation. His book, *American Snow* – available at shopthesnowpros.org – offers a deep dive into the history of PSIA-AASI. **Email:** pkray@thesnowpros.org

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