The Learning Connection & Discipline-Specific Fundamentals

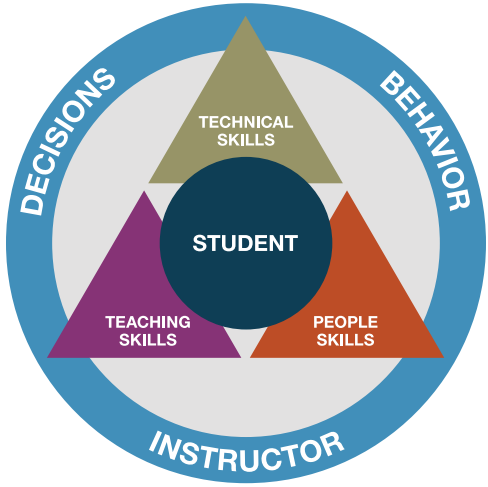
One basic question guides PSIA-AASI's approach to refining the educational tenets of the American Teaching System™: **What is great teaching?** This focus inspired the development, in 2015, of the **Learning Connection℠** – a framework, first introduced at the 2015 Interski congress in Ushuaia, Argentina, that offers simple guidance for creating deeper connections between student and teacher.

The Learning Connection emphasizes that great lessons rely on the instructor's ability to offer a blend of **people skills**, **teaching skills**, and **technical skills**. Whether students are new to skiing and riding or experts seeking greater mastery of their chosen sport, this approach creates informative, fun, and personalized experiences that keep students engaged in the learning process.

A balance of the three key skillsets of the Learning Connection can enhance all instructors' professional development. Yes, instructors must be technically proficient in their sport, but they also need to relate to their students on a personal level *and* adapt their decisions and behaviors to create a more student-centered and inspirational learning experience. The outer ring of the Learning Connection graphic (fig. 1) represents the critical role instructor decisions and behaviors play in creating the optimal learning environment.

In addition to "What is great teaching?" another question at the forefront of PSIA-AASI education programming is, **"What makes a great snowsports instructor?"** In developing new curriculum, the association worked to define the fundamentals of people, teaching,

Figure 1: The Learning Connection



and technical skills. These fundamentals are at the core of specific "learning outcomes" instructors can use to enhance their skills and guide inspirational teaching.

THE LEARNING CONNECTION

PSIA-AASI applies the Learning Connection framework across all snowsports teaching disciplines. Adaptive sports instruction uses these same discipline fundamentals applied to adapting the chosen sport to the individual learner. The people-skill and teaching-skill fundamentals are the same, regardless of the snowsport or type of student you're teaching, while the technical-skill fundamentals are snowsport-specific (fig. 2).

PEOPLE SKILLS

People skills are about communicating in effective ways to develop trust and achieve favorable relationships. Building rapport with students depends on instructors' self-awareness and their abilities to identify and adapt to guests' needs, motivations, and emotions. For students to feel confident taking risks and being open to new learning, instructors must first establish trust among the group.

Fundamentals

- Develop relationships based on trust.
- Engage in meaningful, two-way communication.
- Identify, understand, and manage your emotions and actions.
- Recognize and influence the behaviors, motivations, and emotions of others.

Figure 2: People Skills, Teaching Skills, and Technical Skills

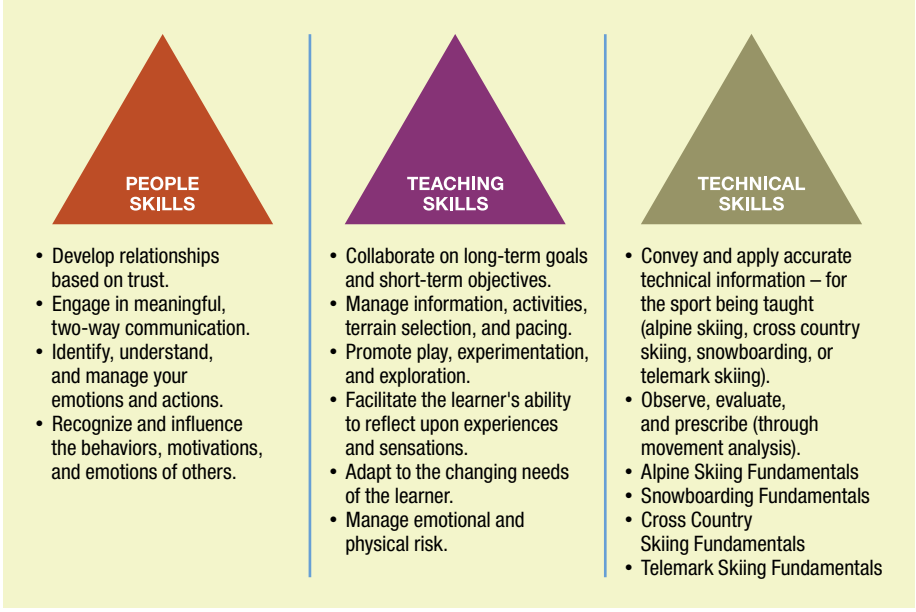


Photo 1: The ability to engage in meaningful, two-way communication is one of the four people-skill fundamentals.

Photo 2: Fundamental teaching skills include collaborating with students on long-term goals and short-term objectives.

PHOTOS: LINDA GUERRETTE

TEACHING SKILLS

With trust established using people skills, teaching skills strengthen the connection between the instructor and student. Teaching skills create an engaging environment in which to foster student learning. To maximize learning, instructors plan, implement, and adapt the learning experience, and give students and opportunity to reflect on their experiences.

Fundamentals

- Collaborate on long-term goals and short-term objectives.
- Manage information, activities, terrain selection, and pacing.
- Promote play, experimentation, and exploration.
- Facilitate the learner's ability to reflect upon experiences and sensations.
- Adapt to the changing needs of the learner.
- Manage emotional and physical risk.

The Teaching/Learning Cycle

PSIA-AASI's Teaching/Learning Cycle (fig. 3) identifies phases in which the instructor and students interact to create the learning experience. These phases (which are covered in more detail in the *Teaching Snowsports Manual*) are:

- Welcome and Introduction
- Assess Students
- Determine Goals and Plan Experiences
- Create Experiences for Learning
- Guide Practice
- Review and Preview

Figure 3: PSIA-AASI Teaching/Learning Cycle

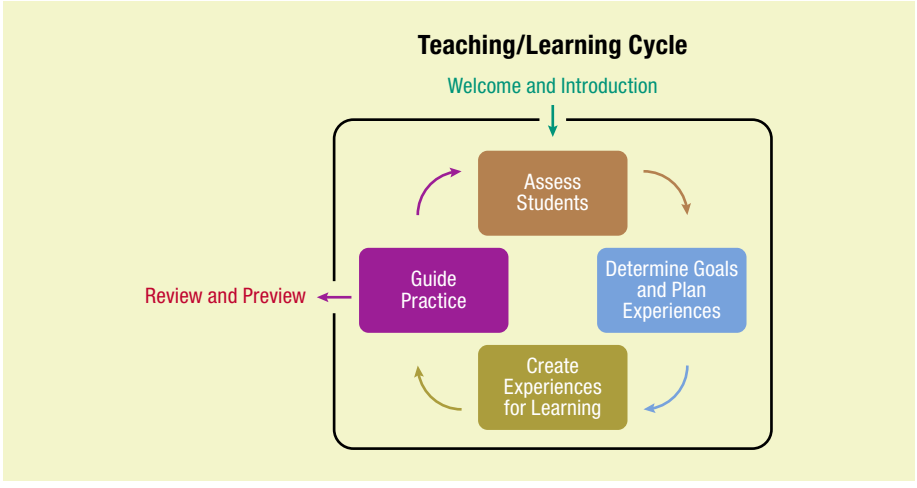


Photo 3: PSIA Alpine Team Coach Michael Rogan blends all Alpine Skiing Fundamentals for a fluid and precise descent.

LINDA GUERRETTE

TECHNICAL SKILLS

Technical skills bring teaching concepts to life with practical applications adapted to the student's ability level or desired outcome. These skills relate to the instructor's understanding of fundamental skiing or snowboarding mechanics and applying that understanding in lessons. Technical skills represent the ability to perform, understand, and explain the sport. In sharing technical skills, the instructor communicates certain discipline-specific aspects of movement and gives accurate demonstrations.

Professional-Knowledge Fundamentals

- Convey and apply accurate technical information.
- Observe, evaluate, and prescribe (through movement analysis).

Alpine Skiing Fundamentals

- Control the relationship of the center of mass to the base of support to direct pressure along the length of the skis.
- Control pressure from ski to ski and direct pressure toward the outside ski.
- Control edge angles through a combination of inclination and angulation.
- Control the skis' rotation with leg rotation, separate from the upper body.
- Regulate the magnitude of pressure created through ski/snow interaction.

Photo 4: PSIA Cross Country Coach Emily Lovett demonstrates powerful and efficient technique achieved through the XC Fundamentals.

LINDA GUERRETTE

Cross Country Skiing Fundamentals (XC Fundamentals)

- Control the relationship of the center of mass to the base of support to direct pressure along the length of the ski(s).
- Control the timing of body movements while regulating power application through the skis and poles to optimize propulsion (Push-Off).
- Control the relationship of the center of mass to the base of support from ski to ski (Weight Transfer)
- Utilize body movements to manage momentum (Glide).

Figure 4: Cross Country Technical Model

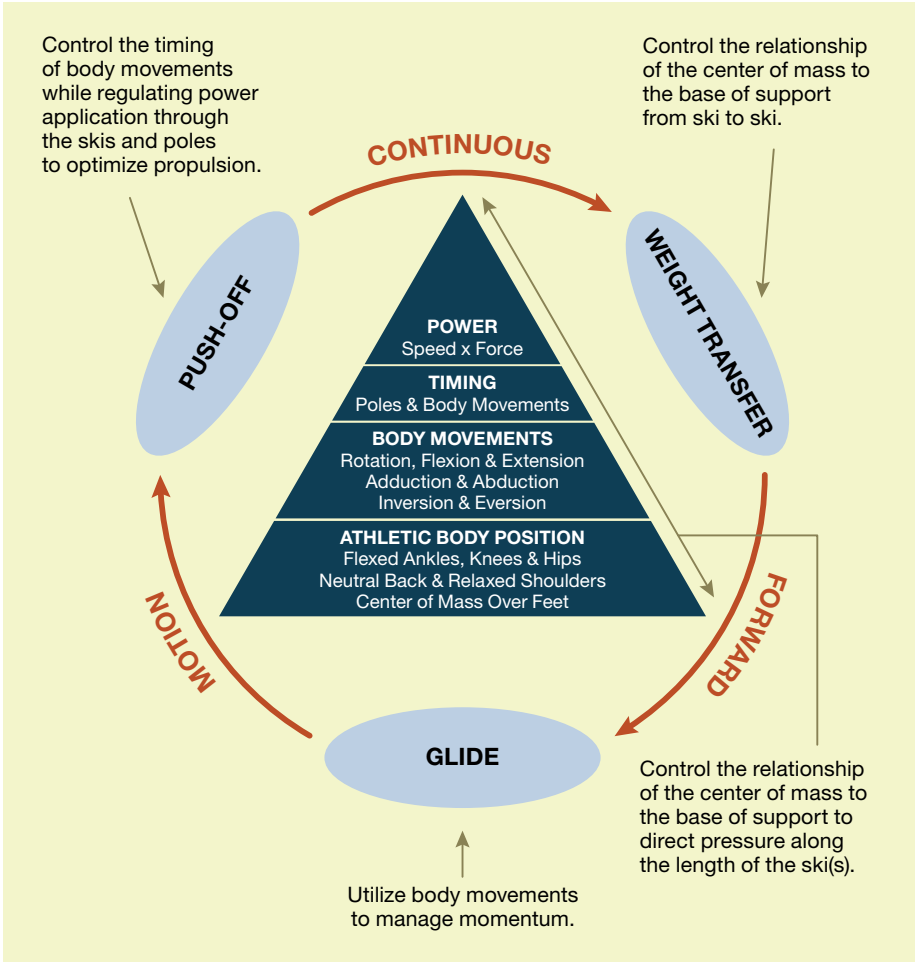


Photo 5: AASI Snowboard Team Coach Eric Rolls shows how the Snowboarding Fundamentals can be used to adjust board performances of tilt, twist, pivot, and pressure.

LINDA GUERRETTE

Snowboarding Fundamentals

- Control the relationship of the center of mass to the base of support to direct pressure along the length of the board.
- Control the relationship of the center of mass to the base of support to direct pressure across the width of the board.
- Regulate the magnitude of pressure created through the board/surface interaction.
- Control the board's tilt through a combination of inclination and angulation.
- Control the board's pivot through flexion/extension and rotation of the body.
- Control the twist (torsional flex) of the board through flexion/extension and rotation.

Photo 6: For PSIA Telemark Team Coach Greg Dixon – as well as the students he teaches and instructors he helps train – the Telemark Skiing Fundamentals promote precision and grace.

LINDA GUERRETTE

Telemark Skiing Fundamentals

- Control the size, intensity, and timing of the lead change.
- Control the fore/aft relationship of the center of mass to the base of support to manage pressure along the length of the skis.
- Control the lateral relationship of the center of mass to the base of support to manage pressure from ski to ski.
- Control the turning of the skis with rotation of the feet and legs in conjunction with discipline in the upper body.
- Control edge angles through a combination of inclination and angulation.
- Regulate the amount of pressure created through ski/snow interaction.