

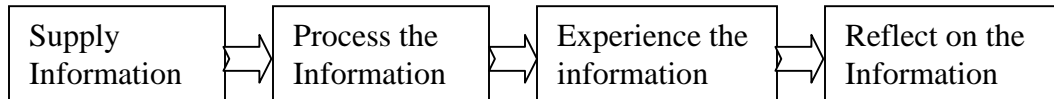


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Teaching a concept

There are four processes in teaching a new concept:

1. Supply information about the concept
2. Process, relate or analyze the concept
3. Experience the concept
4. Reflect on the experience to gather new knowledge or improve for the future



Example:

Start with a concept

Using a pick – the concept we want the player to learn is to dribble his/her defender into the stationary pick set by his/her teammate.

Supply Info

We want you to take your player below the level of the pick and then dribble your shoulder by the top hip of the picker.

Process the information

This is a good time to ask questions:

- Why do we want to take the defender below the pick?
- What is the importance of going shoulder to hip by the picker?

Experience

Have the player practice using a pick

Reflect on the experience

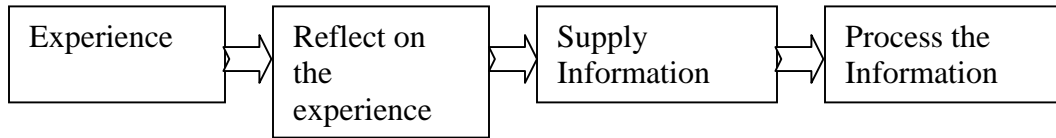
This is where questions can be used about what took place.

- What went well?
- What can you improve on?

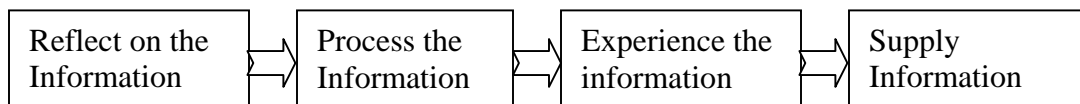
Most coaches follow the above example. I do think that many coaches have omitted the **processing** and **reflecting** stages of the model. Coaches who constantly tell their athletes what to do and do not ask appropriate questions have no idea if the athletes have the deeper understanding of the concept that comes with processing and reflecting. Also many athletes are playing too many games without ever experiencing any new concept or given the opportunity to reflect on what they have done. The reflections are done through the eyes of the coach or parent.

The teaching process does not have to follow the order presented above. In the **Games Approach** the athlete does the experience first. This is usually a modified game which emphasises the concept the coach wants. For example: Today we are going to play 3 on 3.

The only way you can score is if you initiate your score by maneuvering your defender into a stationary defender. The coach can then have the athletes reflect on what they have done. If information is needed it can be added. Through effective questioning the coach also see if the players have gained the deeper knowledge that comes from processing the information.

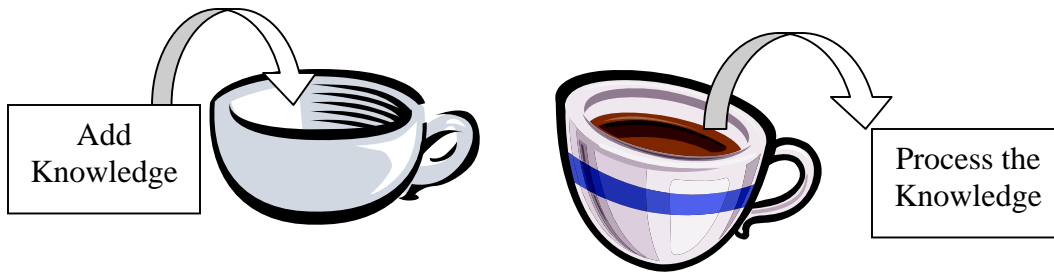


With a more experienced group of athletes you may start with a reflection from a past experience. This can be followed by questions to process the information. The coaches then sets up a learning experience to re-emphasize the key points. New information can be supplied individually as needed.



Supplying Information

I have always used the analogy of the empty and full cups to describe one’s knowledge of a given subject. For someone just starting out in a subject their cup of knowledge is empty and we as teacher/coaches must fill the cup up. For someone who has experience with the subject we need to draw from them their current knowledge.



It is my contention that we as coaches too often assume that the cup is empty and continue to “tell” the athletes what to do. As we move to a more athlete centred game it is important that we ensure that the athletes not only has the knowledge, but has processed the information to the point where he/she understands the how, why and when of the information.

Process the knowledge: Questioning is recognized as one of the best ways to determine an athlete’s knowledge. In working with coaches on using questioning I have observed that it is not an easy process to learn. Most of us were not coached this way and we often struggle to find the right questions.

Most beginning people use the *TV game show* approach. In this situation the coach knows the answer he or she wants. When the answer is not given the response is “NO, wrong answer”.

Here is an example:

Question from Coach

“What **should** you do when the defense goes under the screen?”

Answer from Athlete #1

“Pick up the ball and look to pass”

Coach, “No”, any one else”

Athlete #2, “Keep your dribble and go back the other way”.

Coach, “no”

Athlete #3, “Shoot????”

Coach, “Yes” that’s correct. You all should have known that.”

Subconsciously you are saying to the athlete’s is that the only answer that matters is the coaches’ answer. Over time people will stop giving answers or only give what they think you want to hear. Also there is no analysis involved. It does not lead to deeper understanding of the **why**, **how** and **when**. Each of the above answers was correct to some degree or in some situation that may occur. Later on in the season the coach will be faced with a situation where a player will shoot a ball going under a screen that was a bad decision. The players will remember the inconsistent and be confused. A better approach is to honor all answers.

Question from Coach, “What **can** you do when the defense goes under the screen?”

Answer from Athlete #1, “Pick up the ball and look to pass”

Coach, Very good! That’s one thing, any one else”

Athlete #2, “You could keep your dribble and go back the other way”.

Coach, “Yes excellent anyone else”

Athlete #3, “Shoot?”

Coach “Yes” very good that’s correct. We now have three ways. In this situation which would be the **best** decision.

Athlete #1, “Shoot the ball”.

Coach, “Why?”

Athlete #1, “Because Billy is the best shooter on our team and it is in his shooting range.

By honoring each answer

- You show the athletes that you truly want to know what they think. This will pay off later on as the season progresses when you really do what to know what they think. They will say what they think not what they think you want to hear.
- You also eliminate later confusion when you must correct or qualify your previous answer.
- You force them to process the information at a deeper level.

Often with young athletes coaches try to use questions to draw information from the players. The coach has a specific answer in mind. The coach knows to honor each answer, but finds it is taking too much time to get the correct answer. In these situations you must give some information or knowledge. The types of questions you can ask are now based on processing the information. For example:

The coach wants the players to run wide on the fast break. He wants to use questioning to draw the answer from the children. After 2 or 3 minutes of futile attempts the answer he/she wants has not been given. What should you do? A better method would be to supply the athlete with the information and then ask processing questions?

Coach, "When fast breaking we want you to run wide. That means one big stride in from the sideline. Who can tell me why we would want to do this?"

This is a **process questions**. It requires think about the information. Others might be:

- How can we get to this position quickly?
- Why one big stride from the sideline?
- Why is it important that we run?
- What would be the exception to this rule?

This last question is very important. It shows players that there are options. (Note: you don't run wide if the basket is open. Go to the rim. You run wide because there are defenders back and you want to stretch them out)

Experience

As coaches we need to create situations where the players will experience the concept. Modifying the rules of the game or drill is a key way to emphasize the concept. Players need lots of repetition early in the learning experience. It is also key that if a decision is required that they be given reads to help determine which option to use. When we do too many drills on air the players do not learn this vital step. Time spent on your own or in unstructured play is vital in processing the information. Players who play too many structured games may never gain the deep understanding of how, why and when. This is especially true if players are specialized by position in the developmental stages. I have talked about these extensively in articles on guided defense.

Reflection

It cannot be emphasized enough the importance of giving the athletes the time to reflect individually first on the experience. The coach needs to save his/her thoughts till later. How and what questions should dominate. I have sent out notes on debriefing before.

Summary

- Recognize when you have to give information or take information out of the athlete
- Use questions to probe for deeper understanding not as a way to gain trivial information.
- Like athletes learning a new skill it takes time for us as coaches to improve on this skill. Only with practice will it improve.