Remember that there are several different types of learning styles, to include visual learners, auditory learners & kinesthetic learners, meaning we need to **employ a variety of teaching methods overlapping images, words and touch**!

This means our choice of teaching methods can include the following possibilities:

* Verbal instruction
* Demonstration
* Working alongside students
* Individual coaching to include
	+ 1:1 demonstration
	+ 1:1 verbal cues
	+ Mirroring
	+ Physical adjustment
* Partner work (aiding each other, observing one another)
* Presentation
* Visual aids e.g., handouts
* Discussion……

**Verbal Instruction**

* This is a skill you will develop and can be used to very good effect; **it will ultimately be based upon your own familiarity with the practices**
* Be audible at all times, check with the group if necessary, and if someone is hard of hearing then position the student close to your mat. Change location if necessary.
* Maintain interest by using pauses, varying pitch and tone; match the mood of the practices
* Be grounded in your body, open at the heart and completely present
* Feel you can often reiterate your teaching points, perhaps sometimes framing the same teaching point in slightly different ways. Remember students will not hear everything you say and can learn to practice independently through repetition of the same phrases so do not be concerned about repetition.
* Be concise & use terminology pitched according to your student’s needs and levels of experience.
* Use student names as often as you can offering praise and encouragement but always avoid overly concentrating upon one or two students, who perhaps need extra guidance or more modifications due a condition they may have or perhaps that they are less able or experienced than others.

**Use of Language**

Consider the language you are using to teach. There are four basic types of communication:

1. **Imperative**: a command (Lower heels to the floor)
2. **Interrogative**: questions (Can you lower heel to the floor?)
3. **Passive**: shifting the focus to what is being done rather then who is doing it (Lowering heels to the floor)
4. **Subjunctive**: polite request, somewhere between a command and a question (Please lower your heels to the floor)

So, we can use very different terminology creating a different atmosphere or mood within the group; and whilst each of us will find our teaching style we do need to consider this aspect of our teaching, so you are more conscious about your choices.

*Consider the different feelings engendered by the following instructions:*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *Lift your right arm overhead* | *Okay, raising your right arm overhead or Now, lift your right arm overhead* |
| *Please lift your right arm overhead* | *Raise the right arm overhead, connecting the whole right side as you do so.* |
| *Float the right arm up overhead*  | *As you raise the right arm overhead feel the fingertips tracing an arc through the space around you* |
| *Raising your right arm overhead* | *How does the body feel having practiced to the right side, is there a difference between the two sides of the body?*  |

* Straightforward command statements are very useful when establishing the foundations of a practice (Lift your right arm to the ceiling) as they will be clearer, more precise and more easily followed with less thinking required.
* We can also introduce a quality to command type instructions (Float your right arm to the ceiling) which encourages a beneficial quality of movement
* Interrogative, questioning statements can help students to explore a practice, they can bring self-reflection to a practice, and are especially useful when helping students to determine if a modification is needed or how to safeguard a vulnerable area.
* Passive type instructions are particularly useful when leading students through a flowing practice, especially when you are practicing alongside. (Lifting your right arm to celling)

Very significantly remember that an approach to practice is being conveyed through your choice of words and this in and of itself can be transformative for a student.

Be aware:

* That you do not continually use the same phrase e.g. Now…. Okay…
* That you do not always refer to yourself e.g. I would like you to….

*Consider the different feelings engendered by using the following descriptive terminology:*

|  |
| --- |
| *Push your heels to the ground* |
| *Draw your heels towards the ground* |
| *Lower your heels towards the ground* |
| *Encourage your heels to move towards the ground* |

*Can you think of other verbs which you might use to avoid the use of words such as push & pull, both of which create an attitude of forcefulness?*

*Can you think of adverbs to create a certain quality of action e.g. gently?*

Also…..

* Think of ways to creatively describe a teaching point using a visual image e.g., imagine the spinal vertebrae are like pearls on a string, placing each pearl, one by one to the floor as you lower the back down
* Try to use the positive rather than the negative e.g., in warrior “to keep the knee safe and supported stack the knee above the ankle” rather than “the knee is very vulnerable and liable to injury so take care positioning it above the ankle”
* Avoid labeling a practice as difficult as this creates a negative mind set; we can always however introduce the challenge of working with least effort possible or breathing fully in an unusual position!

**Demonstration**

* It is very useful when teaching something new or illustrating a particular point; also good for visual learners; generally speaking, for more advanced students less time spent in demonstration is required and for very familiar poses may be unnecessary.
* Always be as visible as possible, even if this means changing your own position; can mirror the class e.g. say turn right foot as you actually turn left foot if you wish. It can be helpful to have two different mats in different locations.
* **Demonstrate the entrance, stay and exit** from a pose, giving students verbal cues as you proceed, including the use of the breath, outlining safety pointers.
* **Show the quality of practice that you hope to engender within your students,** which may mean initially describing a pose whilst showing it, and then doing a full demonstration whilst quiet.
* It is possible to stop the flow of the class and the group gathers around to watch a demonstration. This can be used to good effect on occasion.
* Can use a student or a helper which may be effective when we cannot do a practice oneself, cannot easily speak whilst in pose or wish to show a pointer. Although we must have student’s permission ahead of time!
* We must not over-use demonstration as showing every pose will mean students spend a great deal of time waiting and cooling down; ideally mix verbal instruction, pure demonstration & working alongside students to meet students’ needs.
* **Practice a pose yourself repeatedly until you are extremely familiar with the teaching points, refinements and safety pointers.**

**Practicing alongside students**

* Occasionally using this teaching method will **add variety to the class.**
* Itcan help to **maintain a good pace**, so students are not always having to watch a demonstration and then practice, which can mean the class becomes very slow and students are simply watching for too much of the class time.
* It can be very useful when we do not need to demonstrate a pose before students practice it, either because it is **very straightforward or is already familia**r and we do not wish to rely purely upon verbal cues.
* It is especially useful when **first taking students through a sequence** of familiar poses or when teaching a simple standing pose where it is easy to see the whole group and all students can easily see you.
* However, there is a danger that we may unconsciously fall into the trap of practicing alongside our students as if the class is our own practice time, and this is especially true when we start teaching as we may feel practicing enables us to better describe the practice. This is not acceptable because we need to be able to closely observe our students and offer group & individual guidance as needed. **To avoid this situation:**
	+ we must rely on our own personal practice where we come to intimately know the practices on a theoretical and experiential level
	+ gradually learn to refer to our own imagined movements/feelings in our physical body as we teach
	+ use our view of students as they practice to help us give verbal cues

Ultimately this will mean we can carefully observe our students as they practice, seeing what information is needed. This may often be a gradual process.

* Sometimes when there are one or two new students it can be helpful to position them together in the class so that when the rest of the class are engaged with a practice you can go to these students and offer a more intimate demonstration or show a useful modification.

**Partner work?**

If we choose to use partner work, then we must set it up carefully and be aware of any potential safety problems; it is best used when you know the group well and know it will be well received.

* Adds variety
* Unites the group
* Good physical aid to practice
* Can be fun!
* Can take a long time
* Can create a lot of noise, so it is hard to instruct the group
* Some students want to work alone, have ‘me time’ or may lack confidence
* Students are not trained as assistants and so there may be safety issues

**Presentation & Visual Aids**

* Here presentation means taking the time to give some theory or philosophy to the group and if available we can always use flip charts, white boards, posters, handouts and so forth. Similar to a lecture but needs to be very short as the class time is primarily for practice.
* How much time is devoted to presentation will ultimately depend upon our own teaching style and the group we are working with, but it is always good to interweave some theory and possibly philosophy into our teaching, so students are always gaining in knowledge as well as honing their skills. Ideally, we will introduce a theme for each class. (more about themes later on)
* We must take care however that:
	+ We do not spend protracted periods of time simply speaking as yoga is essentially an experiential practice
	+ We do not present yoga philosophy as the only truth, more as offering food for thought!
* It is often best to give bite sized pieces of information throughout the class and this can be done in any moment, either before, during or after a particular practice. For instance, these can include:
	+ The benefits of a practice
	+ A theoretical point related to our practice
	+ A philosophical point for reflection
	+ A short story, extract from a text or piece of poetry for inspiration
* Visual aids are always good and handouts to take home are usually very well received and can be used to:
	+ Expand upon or reiterate information given in class
	+ Give practices to encourage home practice
	+ Inspire students to want to know more!

**Discussion**

* Sometimes a discussion can be a very helpful teaching method as it can:
	+ Generate interest in a particular aspect of yoga
	+ Help students clarify their own thoughts and experiences
	+ Encourage students to learn from one another
	+ Unite the group
	+ Help you in your lesson planning
* However, you may find that this teaching method takes too much time and students may be unwilling to speak out in class.

**Staging**

This is an excellent tool that we have already touched upon. Staging helps students to work at the correct level of intensity during asana and pranayama in particular.

You will need to decide upon ways in which an asana can be broken down into simpler less intense versions and stronger more challenging developmental versions; remembering that the simpler versions can be often used as modifications for those who are less able, less experienced or possess a medical condition. And of course, for those who can move on to a more challenging form this is also great preparation.

* You can demonstrate the first possibility, highlighting the teaching points, safety pointers and help students to explore their experience of this pose
* Then once students have practiced this you can demonstrate the second possibility, asking students to either stay with the first pose or if possible, move into the second pose. Here you will have to check and see all students appear to be working safely & effectively in the stronger pose and as necessary offer individual guidance.
* You might offer several possible versions of an asana…..

***Which teaching methods might you use with beginner groups and more advanced groups?***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * Verbal instruction
* Demonstration
* Working alongside students
* Individual coaching to include
	+ 1:1 demonstration
	+ 1:1 verbal cues
	+ Mirroring
	+ Physical adjustment
* Partner work (aiding each other, observing one another)
* Presentation
* Visual aids e.g. handouts
* Discussion
 | * Quizzes?
* Worksheets?
* Journals/diaries?
* Question & Answers? (usually start with who, what, where, why etc.)
* Debates?
* Buzz groups? i.e. small group discussion
* Homework?
* Reading?
* Workshops?
* Any others?.......
 |

*Which teaching aids/resources might you use within your teaching?*

*And of these which would you reasonably expect your students to bring to class?*

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