

Teaching Methods

& the use of Teaching Aids

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
- Any others you might consider using?

Verbal instruction

- This is a skill you will develop and can be used to very good effect
- Be audible at all times, check with the group if necessary. If someone is hard of hearing then position that student close to your mat. Change location if necessary.
- Maintain interest by using pauses, varying pitch and tone; match the mood of the practices
- Feel you can reiterate your teaching points, perhaps sometimes framing the same teaching point in slightly different ways.
- Be concise & use terminology pitched according to your student's needs
- 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 have or their lack of experience.
- Be grounded, open at the heart and completely present

Your 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 heels to the floor?)
3. **Passive:** shifting the focus to what is being done rather than 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.

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:

| I'd like you to raise your right arm | Can you raise you right arm up easily and smoothly? |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Okay, raising your right arm | How does it feel when you raise the right arm? |
| Lift your right arm | Can you breathe easily as you raise your right arm up? |
| Raise the right arm | Does the lifting of the right arm feel any different from the lifting your left arm? |
| Gently, the right arm is lifting | Notice if the lifting of the right arm feels differently from lifting your left arm? |

One possibility is to use more command type statements for the initial setting up of a practice, then moving into softer forms as students refine the pose or practice and move into exploration and self-questioning.

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 verbs which you might use to avoid the use of words such as push & pull, both of which create forcefulness?

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

Remember.....

- You will need to **reiterate** the same points, sometimes it is helpful to do this with different terminology
- 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!

Our use of demonstration

- Very useful when teaching something new or illustrating a particular point; also good for visual learners; for more advanced students less time spent in demonstration is required and for very familiar poses it 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.
- 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.
- 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; effective when cannot do a practice oneself, cannot easily speak whilst in pose or wish to show a pointer. Must have student's permission!
- Must try not over-use demonstration as showing every pose will mean students spend a great deal of time waiting; ideally mix verbal instruction, pure demonstration & working alongside students, as possible whilst meeting student's needs.
- Practice a pose yourself repeatedly until you are extremely familiar with the teaching points, refinements and safety pointers.

Working alongside students

- This can be very useful when we do not need to demonstrate a pose before students practice, either because it is **very simple or already familiar**, and we do not wish to rely purely upon verbal cues. For instance it may be 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. Occasionally using this teaching method will **add variety** and can help to **maintain a good pace**, so students are not always having to **watch** a demonstrate and then practice or purely rely in verbal instruction.
- 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, this is especially true when we start teaching especially 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.
- In particular we must ensure that we do not work alongside students when the practice does not allow us to observe the group, especially when there are safety issues present, for example working alongside a group when teaching sarvangasana or matsyasana would be not be ideal, and for a more beginner's class teaching adho mukha svanasana in this way would not be a good choice!

Partner work?

Pros

- ✓ Adds variety
- ✓ Unites the group
- ✓ Good physical aid to practice
- ✓ Can be fun!

If we chose 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.

Cons

- ✗ 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 with more interaction & use of visual/audio aids.
- How much time is devoted to presentation will primarily 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 classes so students are always gaining in knowledge as well as honing their skills. Ideally we will introduce a theme for each class.
- 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 quiet moment. For instance these can include:
 - The benefits of a practice just done or to be done
 - 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
- We can introduce theory and philosophy over the weeks and months and reiterate this information
- 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.

Are there any other teaching methods you might consider using?

- 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 methods might you use with beginner groups and more advanced groups?

The use of staging asana

This is an excellent tool which helps students to work at the correct level of intensity (and can be used for other practices also).

You will need to decide upon ways in which an asana can be broken down into simpler less intense versions and stronger more challenging 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 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.....

Teaching aids & resources

- *Which teaching aids or resources might you use?*
- *Which teaching aids/resources might you reasonably expect your students to bring to class?*