

3 TEACHING / LEARNING

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Being a teacher is one of the main roles a coach fulfils for their players. The ability to teach effectively, especially the technical skills of ice hockey, is very important for the development of the players and their enjoyment of the game.

3.1 Teaching Skills

The player needs to:

- Have fun and enjoy ice hockey.
- Be involved in activities that are challenging and ongoing.
- Receive reinforcement from coach.
- Experience success to build positive self-esteem.
- Play in unstructured activities.
- Have adapted game situations.
- Be introduced to the concepts of cooperation and sportsmanship.
- Increase physical development.
- Refine basic motor patterns.

Understanding these facts, the coach must teach and organize practices that are specific to the needs of their players and their team.



ICE HOCKEY

The playing skills of ice hockey can be divided in two parts: Technical Skills and Hockey Sense. The coach needs to concentrate on both of these skill areas to help their players develop into complete players.



WHAT ARE THE TECHNICAL SKILLS OF ICE HOCKEY?

At the most basic level the skills of ice hockey can be broken down into two categories that include all the technical skills of the game.

Offensive

- Skating
- Puck Handling
- Passing & Receiving
- Shooting
- Fakes
- Screening

Defensive

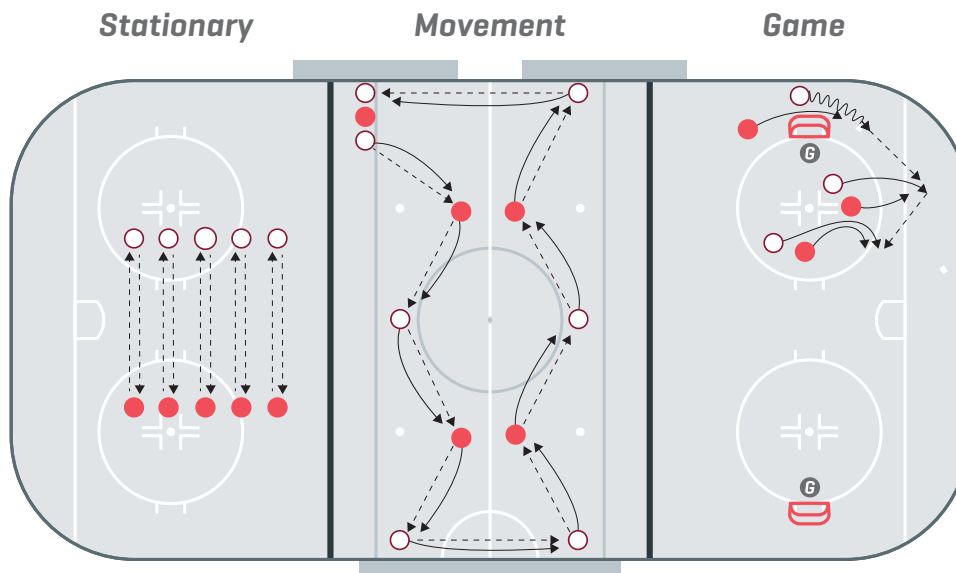
- Skating
- Stick checking
- Body checking
- Blocking shots

HOW ARE THESE SKILLS TAUGHT?

Teaching Progressions

There are four sections in the Learn to Play Practice manual, each with 20 practices. These practices have been developed to assist you in the running of this program. They have been designed within the context of the teaching progressions described in this chapter.

Learning is enhanced if it progresses from material that is: known to unknown – simple to complex. This material can be taught by progressively adding other elements in the teaching process; for example, Stationary-Movement-Game.



Teaching physical skills and technique involves a chain of events. There are four main links in this chain:

First link: Select a basic skill to be learned – identify what you want them to learn.

Second Link: Plan the explanation and demonstration – determine what to say and how to say it.

Third Link: Plan how the players will practice the skill.

Fourth Link: Provide feedback during practice – make constructive corrections and help the players maintain realistic goals.

First link: Select the basic skill to be learned

Basic skills are not always simple to learn. For example the basic skill in ice hockey is skating but it is actually a complex skill to learn.

Exercise: Basic Skills

What skills do you feel should be emphasized in the Learn to Play Program? In the columns below:

- Choose the most important basic skills.
- Identify the order in which you think they should be taught.
- Identify how they could be learned – alone or in combination with others.

<i>Skills</i>	<i>Order Taught</i>	<i>How Taught – alone, pairs, 3+</i>

Now, compare your list with the suggested progressions in the Practice Manual. When you are teaching it is important that your list is similar to the sequence recommended in the manuals.

The Learn to Play Coach has been provided with a set of practice plans that progresses gradually and systematically through the skills to be learned in the program, beginning with the most basic and progressing to the more complicated skills.

Second Link: Plan the Explanation and Demonstration

This is the planning you do to organize what you want to teach. Although much of this has been done for you in the lesson plans, it is important you understand the sequence of events to follow in conducting a lesson.

This link contains seven steps:

Step 1 – Select a skill and write down why it is important

Name the skill and explain briefly how, when and why the skill is used in ice hockey. Total time for the demonstration should be 30–45 seconds.

Step 2 – Select main teaching points to emphasize

With your participants being young and inexperienced, select only one or two teaching points and keep these as simple as possible. Use short, descriptive key words or phrases to highlight the teaching points during the demonstration. Don't overload the player with too much information at the same time.

Step 3 – Decide if an aid would help

An aid is a chart, diagram, picture or videotape. Remember your participants are young and inexperienced, so an aid must be useful and understandable to the players. Good aids are most useful if they are posted on a wall or bulletin board so players can refer to them after the skill has been taught.

Step 4 – Select an effective formation

Consider the number of learners present and decide what formation to put them in where all will be able to see and hear clearly.



For this age group, the most effective formation is a semi-circle or open square with all players kneeling down. This eliminates most extra movement and focuses attention on the Coach. The players should be placed so they face away from any distractions.

Step 5 – Decide on what view or views players should see

Check out the best angles for viewing the demonstration. Plan to repeat the demonstration as many times as necessary rotating 90° or 180° each time to ensure that all players see it from all possible angles.

Total time for the demonstration and explanation should be no more than 45 seconds from beginning to end.

Step 6 – Decide on who demonstrates

Coaches should demonstrate a skill several times themselves and then ask a player to demonstrate it under their guidance. Use an ordinary member of the group as most players identify with average performers and learn best from them.

Being asked to demonstrate is rewarding and many members of the group should be called on to do it. However, remember some individuals do not like to get up in front of their peers to demonstrate.

Step 7 – Ask for questions

To make sure that players understand, ask if they have any questions. Answer all questions with respect, even if they have been covered during the demonstrations. Beginners find sport skills difficult if they don't know exactly what it is supposed to look like. Check to see that what you describe is what they think they are trying to do.

Third Link: Plan how the players will practice the skill

This link in the teaching chain is organizing a group to practice a skill that has been demonstrated. This is quite separate and distinct from planning and organizing the demonstration. The following steps will help you to plan effectively:

Step 1 – Review the practice environment

Answer the following questions as a basis for your planning.

- How many players are there?
- How much area is there available to work in?
- How much equipment is available?

Step 2 – Maximize activity

The object is to use as much of the space with as little waiting time as possible.

The following questions will help in planning the practice activity:

- Is it best to start participants working alone, in pairs or in small groups?
- Do players need to be moving or can they practice in one place? If they are moving will be enough clear area to move in?
- How can you make the groups as small and active as possible?

Some breaks in activity can be constructive – here are a few reasons:

- Time to rest in vigorous practices.
- When space available is too small for all to be active.
- When the amount of equipment is limited and it is not safe.
- To correct, re-teach or give further instruction.

Step 3 – Use clear, precise instructions

- Explain simply what is to be done.
- Use simple key words or key phrases to explain the main points of instruction.
- Carefully point out any special safety precautions.
- Always pause to see that your explanations have been heard and understood – watch the players' faces.

Step 4 – Move players into practice activity quickly

- The formation used to observe the demonstration should allow everyone to see clearly.
- If groups are used regularly, players should be assigned to specific groups.
- The instructor must take care to maintain control of players between the end of the demonstration and the beginning of the drill.
- Plan a simple, efficient method of distributing equipment if that is necessary.

Step 5 – Check and correct the practice pattern first, then check technique

When practice begins, your attention should be on the pattern of activity.

- Are groups spaced properly?
- Is there enough room?
- Are the players doing what you asked them to?
- Are safety precautions being observed?

If any of these things need attention, correct them immediately.

Once the practice pattern is well established; then begin to check technique and details of the skill as players perform. This is an extremely important point. Stand or move around so you can see the whole group.

Fourth Link: Provide feedback during practice

Feedback during learning involves feeding back information to the players about their efforts to learn. It serves three important functions in learning:

Give feedback to guide improvement

Learning skills can be very confusing; there are many things to think about. The player needs to know what they are doing correctly so they can concentrate on the parts of the skill they need to improve. This is one of principles of skill development.

If players are not clear on what parts of the skill are being done correctly they may change these for the worse as they try to correct other parts of the skill.

Use feedback as a measure of progress

If a player knows that their list of questions about how to do a skill is getting shorter it will be easy for them to recognize improvement. Further evidence of an improved skill level can be measured. If a player can pass the puck accurately and hit a small target the athlete has a tangible evidence of improvement.

Use feedback to provide encouragement

While knowledge of improvement rewards us, so does approval, recognition and words of praise from people important to us such as family, friends, and, in ice hockey, the coach.

Criticism is the opposite of praise, unless constructive. It should only be used to stop dangerous or undesirable behavior and to replace it with acceptable behavior. Physical punishment is never acceptable, nor is extra, strenuous, physical work an advisable form of punishment.

3.2 Teaching Approaches

There are three approaches commonly used in teaching simple skills:

Imitation Method

Simple imitation is often the best way for players to learn. It requires them to focus on what is to be imitated or copied. “Watch this ... Try it”. Often the imitation is as accurate as it needs to be. You should then confirm it: “Yes. That’s it. Now remember that.” If necessary, have it practiced several times.

When minor corrections are required point them out in a clear, matter-of-fact way. If players have trouble picking up the correct action or movement then you should realize that, for some reason, it is not as simple as expected.

DEPC Method (Demonstration/Explanation/Practice/Correction)

This method is used extensively. It involves these steps:

- Have a demonstration first with minimal explanation.
- Allow the players to practice. Observe carefully.
- Provide feedback while practice continues if possible. If you must; stop practice, confirm correct actions and correct errors.
- Allow for more practice and correct in more detail.

Learn through Playing

One of the biggest threats for the development of ice hockey is that players are forced to play with a system too early in their development. At an early age playing has to be fun while learning a wide range of skills. A young player playing in a system too early may get stuck in one position for the whole career and his full potential may not be realised.

Too much emphasis and importance is placed on winning too early in a player's development. This means they are not able to make mistakes and that blocks learning! When developing the skills of ice hockey it should be done with the theme "learning by playing". To accomplish this, the Learn to Play Program uses different types of FUN activities and games.

The activities and games the players learn with are:

Playful activities: developing skills by playing.

Applied games: playing according to agreed rules and restrictions.

GSR (Game Situation Roles) games: learning the GSR by playing.

***Always remember
these words:***

***LEARNING IS MOST
EFFECTIVE WHEN
IT IS FUN!***

3.3 **Factors Affecting Learning**

The factors which affect the way in which an individual learns skills, can be viewed from a variety of different perspectives. The main ones are:

The Learning Environment:

- Should be completely under the control of the coach.
- There should be a reward for success given at every opportunity.
- Encouragement must be provided to assist in the improvement of skills.
- Focus on the player's ability not their personality.
- Focus on the correction of errors; Correct major errors at once.
- Provide free time to experiment with new skills in self-teaching mode.
- Factors which often inhibit learning:
 - Excessive enthusiasm
 - Negative attitude
 - Poor equipment
 - Poor teaching tools

Coach Qualities:

These qualities are familiar and are covered in the Coach section:

- Knowledge of the game, the components of the basic skills and how and when to introduce them.
- Be able to express their knowledge at the players' level of ability and in a manner which will motivate and challenge them.
- Relating to the players in a friendly, courteous and respectful manner.
- Ability to identify learning limits, skill level and level of interest of the players.
- Ability to judge the level of tolerance of the players so learning demand does not exceed what they can handle.
- Be prepared, creative and enthusiastic.

Other Factors:

- Guide and monitor the learning process; be aware of progressions in learning.
- New skills should be introduced on a solid basis; they should be built on previous practices and should be emphasized until mastered.
- Ice sessions should be planned around the level of ability and interest of the players, their ability to understand instructions and their attention span.
- Repeat drills for short periods of time over a large number of ice sessions.

3.4 *Cross-ice Hockey or Small-area Games*

Cross-ice hockey or Small-area games, simply defined are technical and game-like competitive drills that use a playing surface that has been reduced in size and allows players to practice their hockey skills.

Small-area hockey actually has been around for as long as the game has been played. When players played on a pond did they use an ice surface 60 × 30 metres? No, they played in a small area that developed and sharpened their skills without the rules of off-sides, icing, penalties, face-offs, etc. Somehow coaches have moved away from this idea of practicing and playing in an environment with little control or structure, to one with greater control.

Many of the greatest hockey players to ever play the game will attribute their success to growing up playing on the ponds and not in highly controlled practices!

When the playing surface is reduced in size, young players are being correctly prepared for the speed and quickness they will encounter as they grow older. Can you imagine a child eight and under playing basketball using a ten foot basket? Cross-ice develops a positive environment, increases puck handling, and teaches puck protection by forcing players to play in smaller, confined areas.

3.5 *Practice*

Practising in small areas means that more players are on the ice but the group sizes are smaller. With more players on the ice it reduces the costs of the individual player for practicing.

This increases the ice usage and the efficiency of the practice by increasing the activity level of the individual player during the practice as their involvement time grows. Time spent waiting in line for the next chance to go is greatly reduced.

Players have more time with the puck for puck handling, passing and shooting. Drills are designed to focus on multiple skills and situations, increasing puck touches and situational repetition. On top of this the goalkeepers are more involved in the drills and get more shots to stop.

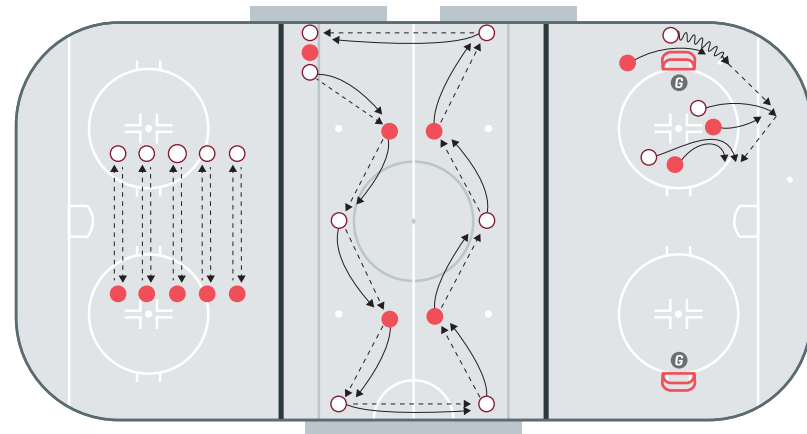
Practicing cross-ice and in small areas beneficial for all ages and levels, and is more fun for the players.

3.6 Play

The key playing benefits of cross-ice are that it promotes creativity, creates an environment for self-learning, increases player participation, speeds up the learning process, and improves decision making skills. As a result the player reads and acts quicker, maximizes skill learning and development, increases tempo, creates a positive environment and a passion to play.

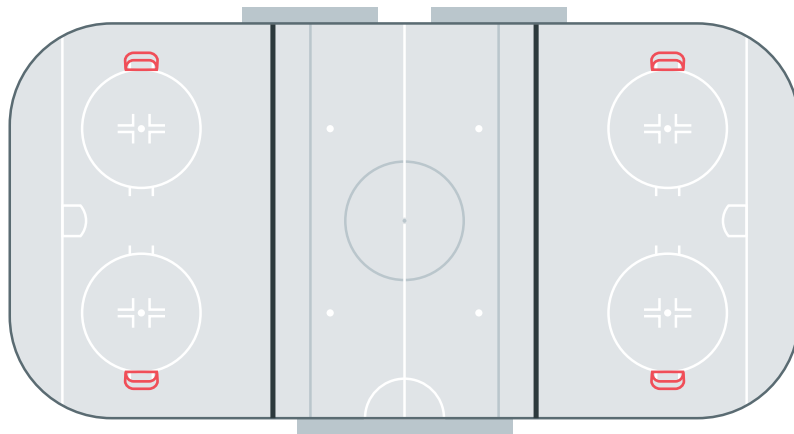
In small area games, players control the puck in tight situations and will typically have more shots on goal than in any normal drills – all while competing at game pace and having fun! This is a more competitive practice environment and players develop game strategies to make better decisions. Finally it reduces the need for traditional conditioning drills.

Many countries and IIHF Member National Associations (MNA) have included cross-ice hockey into league play at the Under 10 age group. At any level of play, an average player may only have control of the puck for a few seconds during the course of a game. In a small area game, that same player may have over a minute of puck-possession time over 6–7 shifts in one 10 minute game. One cross-ice game can have the development benefits of 10–12 full ice games because of the closeness of the players to the puck and constant action.



3.7 *Advantages of Cross-Ice Practicing and Playing*

The IIHF Learn To Play Program is based on a model of practicing and playing ice hockey across the width of the ice surface, instead of along the full length of the ice surface. This cross-ice practicing and playing model has been used in many of the leading ice hockey nations in the world for a number of years and has stood the test of time. It has been shown that children who begin their ice hockey training in this environment have an outstanding hockey experience.



Parents may ask the question “Why should my child play cross-ice, what will they learn?” and say “I want my child playing on full-ice like the professionals do” That is the point, children are not adults, they see the world differently and learn differently to adults.

Let’s think about a child trying to skate with a puck from one end of the rink to the other.

– How long will this take? How much energy will this require?

In which situation will the child be more involved in a game?

– In the close space of the smaller cross-ice surface or the wide-open area of the full-ice surface?

A study of ice hockey games played on the full-ice surface by George Kingston found:

- In a sixty minute running time ice hockey game between 6–8 year old children, the average player had possession of the puck for 20.7 seconds.
- Top professional players were also timed and no player exceeded 85 seconds of puck possession time.
- Youth players had an average of less than 0.5 shots per game and professional players only 1.5 shots.
- In a sixty-minute children’s game the actual playing time of the game was 20 minutes and 38 seconds.
- Individual players are on the ice every third or fourth shift resulting in even less ice time.

The study concluded that:

- For young players in the “full-ice game model” of development, the youngest players would require between 180 games to have 60 minutes of actual puck possession time to execute their stick handling, passing, pass receiving and shooting skills.
- Professional players would require 60 games to ensure 60 minutes of puck control skill development.
- Many youth players never touched the puck in the game.

Practicing

- Children have more energy with which they can improve their skills when they are skating 30 meters across the ice surface instead of 60-meter length of the ice surface.
- Group sizes become smaller which means learning and teaching become more effective.
- Drills designed according to the varying skill levels of players within the group are easier to organize.
- More puck contact resulting in improved puck control skills.
- More repetition/frequency in drills in one ice session.
- Decision-making skills are enhanced.
- More decisions must be made more frequently at a higher tempo.

Playing

- Increased puck possession time for each player.
- Individual technical skills develop more quickly.
- More ice time for each player.
- Children remain active between their shifts with various activities in the neutral zone.
- Each player's activity increases greatly.
- Scoring skills are enhanced since the players have more shooting opportunities.
- The goalkeeper's reading of the game and reaction to changing game situations becomes more effective.
- More repetition for goalkeepers.
- The game is full of continuously changing situations.
- The speed in playing situations increases, which will require quicker mental and physical reactions by the players.
- Due to increased tempo, all of the team members take part in solving the playing situations, which leads to a sharing of responsibilities between the players.
- Hockey sense, or understanding of the principles of the game, is being developed at a young age.
- There are no unnecessary breaks in the game.

General information

- More efficient use of ice time and space.
- The size of the rink is in proportion with the size of the players.
- The child sized goal nets are in proportion with the size of the players.
- The middle zone is available for other purposes (player's bench, warm-up area, skill competition) while games are played in the end zones.
- The IIHF recommends that teams play with two or three units of four or five players and one goalkeeper which results in each player having more ice time.
- More ice time for practicing and playing is available to more teams within a single club.
- Many teams can practice together by sharing the ice surface.

General Spirit of Participation and Fun

- More children get a chance to play ice hockey.
- More children will experience a feeling of success when playing ice hockey.
- The same exciting and fun environment as a full-ice game is created.
- Both more and less gifted children will benefit from close/tight action on the ice.
- Children are excited and motivated to continue playing ice hockey.
- Ice hockey will be more appealing and rewarding to a wider range of children and their parents.