

Donald N. Roberson**THE ART AND SCIENCE OF
TEACHING STUDENTS TO SKI:
ANDRAGOGY ON THE MOUNTAIN****UMETNOST UČENJA
SMUČANJA ŠTUDENTOV:
ANDRAGOGIKA NA GORI****ABSTRACT**

Students learn skills for sports and recreation in a variety of settings. This paper highlights a trip where I observed the College of Sports and Recreation (Faculty of Kinesiology) of Zagreb University during a required week of ski instruction. The goal of this trip was to teach and to test university students on basic skiing skills as well as to communicate how to teach children to ski. I evaluated this week of skiing from the perspective of lifelong education and in particular that of andragogy. In addition, this paper highlights how European universities are utilizing such practical courses in their curriculum. I incorporated the perspective of a participant observer during this week of skiing.

Keywords: participant observer, ski instruction, andragogy, lifelong education

POVZETEK

Študentje se spretnosti, ki jih potrebujejo za delo v športu in rekreaciji, učijo v različnih okoljih. Prispevek opisuje moje opazovanje študentov zagrebške Fakultete za kineziologijo na tedenskem tečaju alpskega smučanja. Cilj tega tečaja je bil študente naučiti osnovne tehnike smučanja, jo preveriti in jim tudi prikazati, kako otroke poučevati smučanje. Ta teden smučanja sem opazoval z vidika vseživljenjskega učenja in še posebej z vidika andragogike. Prispevek tudi osvetljuje načine, na kakršne evropske univerze izvajajo praktični del študijskega procesa, ki je del njihovih kurikulumov. V tem tednu smučanja sem izvajal metodo opazovanja z udeležbo.

Glavne besede: opazovanje z udeležbo, poučevanje smučanja, andragogika, vseživljenjsko učenje

INTRODUCTION

Students are learning skills for sports and recreation throughout the world. I observed the students of the Faculty of Kinesiology of Zagreb University during a required week of ski instruction. The goal of this trip is to teach and to test university students on basic skiing skills as well as to communicate how to teach children to ski. This paper highlights this class of experiential education, which is similar to other classes taught in many colleges throughout Europe. I will outline the course content as well as teaching methods of these classes. I evaluated this week of skiing through the general perspective of lifelong education. One purpose of this study was to learn more about how European universities are utilizing these practical courses in their curriculum. I incorporated the perspective of a participant observer during this week of skiing.

One of the interesting differences between universities in USA and Europe are the ways that final exams are administered. For example, in the USA finals are usually placed within a one-week period at the end of the semester. This final exam will count as part of the overall grade. However, in European schools the exam periods are usually a six-week term in January and February, and then again in June and July. The student must pass a written and oral exam which counts for a large part or the entire grade.

During this exam period, there are also many experience-oriented classes and various school trips and seminars. This is especially true among the colleges of sports, recreation, and leisure. For example, the Faculty of Sports and Recreation in Zagreb offers three weeks of ski instruction. Each student must pass beginning skiing, and the following year a more advanced lesson. The Faculty of Physical Culture at Palacky University in Olomouc, Czech Republic has six types of winter sports camps, including introduction skiing, alpinism, cross-country, as well as skiing for those with disabilities.

The ski week began as five buses left the college in Zagreb at 4:00 am. We drove six-and-a-half hours to the Dolomite area of the Italian Alps, to the village of Sappada, Italy. This small ski area, without many distractions, is ideal for teaching students how to ski. There were approximately 200 students and 25 instructors; each instructor was assigned 10 or 11 students based on skill. Most of the students had never skied.

I participated in one of the beginner classes and will share my experience as participant / observer in an international setting and without the use of language. There were several rules that helped to bring focus to this week, such as no alcohol, full participation in the activities, and repetition of the week if they fail the exam. The cost of the week was 2,000 Croatian Kuna or approximately 350 US dollars. There were three or four students in a room scattered across four hotels, two meals a day were eaten together in two large dining halls, and everyone rented skis or brought them from Zagreb to the ski area.

DESCRIPTION OF LEARNING ACTIVITY

Within two hours of arriving, all of the students and the teachers were on the slopes. After being divided into various groups according to skill, they spent several hours on the snow getting used to the skis as well as the cold weather. Our instructor had everyone face her, and we performed various exercises with the skis. This involved trying to ski a short distance across the beginner hill. She also had us to perform specific drills such as skiing on one ski. Every evening all of the

instructors met at a nearby café for a drink and to discuss the day. Most all of the instructors were also teachers who had completed a special class for ski instruction. Mobile phone numbers were exchanged and various details were discussed. Most of the instructors are colleagues, friends, and enjoy being together during this week in the Italian Alps. Walking through the quaint village of Sappada, the students and instructors were constantly in contact with each other.

The next five days were designed to prepare students to pass the upcoming ski exam on Saturday. This exam was a graded ski performance on the slopes where five judges would give each skier a grade from 1 to 5 (or from F to A) based on the demonstration of five skiing skills. We were told to be at the ski bus stop the next morning at 7:30 a.m.

The first day my class returned to the beginner's hill. Similarly to the previous day, we would warm up and perform various stretching exercises while on skis. We would walk with the ski on our left sides and then walk on our right sides. We would ski on one ski, and then we would ski on the other one. The teacher was very attentive, helpful, and encouraging, despite the poor snow conditions. We even practiced how to get on the ski lift. Eventually the teacher had us to incorporate various versions of the "snow plow." We would ski holding one leg up, and then with the other leg up. Later we took a break in the ski hut and everyone had a drink together. The class members were talking about their skiing experience, laughing, and enjoying being together. The teacher was also using this time to encourage them and to point out how to improve.

After the break, we worked more on various aspects of skiing. The instructor focused on posture, how to hold the poles, and to lean down using our legs and knees. We continued skiing from one side of the slope to the other. She stopped our class at 13:30, and told everyone to use the rest of the day to practice skiing. It was fun to ski in a relaxed atmosphere with the class as well as others on the trip.

After skiing and dinner, there was a class on some aspect of skiing. There was a one-hour lecture held in one of the hotel lobbies; everyone was intently listening and keeping notes. As the week progressed, the class was becoming friendlier and more comfortable, and I noticed how the students were helping each other improve skiing. It was also obvious the instructor knew how to help each student to progress to the next level.

Two nights later, there was a second lecture. After a brief discussion concerning too much partying and alcohol, the lecture focused on ski equipment such as boots, goggles, skis, poles, and gloves. The students were very attentive. Afterward, they filled out an evaluation of how they were doing and what they were learning about skiing. Each day continued as before – teaching, instructing, learning, and practicing. One day, a student paid for all the drinks in our class because he was late for the bus. Our class was becoming like a ski commune; we were enjoying being around each other and learning to ski together. One night, everyone was invited to a ski show put on by local skiers. We were joined with hundreds of other students from other countries, including Austria and Italy. This ski show combined music, lights, and skilful skiing for an inspiring evening.

METHODOLOGY

I incorporated the perspective of participant observer as the methodology of this paper. I am a stranger in this country, and I do not speak the language fluently. This style of research allowed me to cross these difficult barriers, yet make informed decisions. From the six-hour bus ride,

to meals, to skiing, to casual encounters, to meetings with instructors, I was involved in each aspect of this ski week. Every day I took notes and carefully recorded what took place during this time. In this sense I was a participant and an observer in the true sense of Bogdan & Biklen's definition: "Participant observation is an approach to qualitative research where the researcher spends prolonged periods of time in the subject's natural environment, unobtrusively collecting data. The researcher is simultaneously a participant and an observer" (2007).

Although qualitative research is not very common in the European sport faculties and still viewed upon with distrust I decided to use it to get an insight into teaching processes, unattainable by common quantitative research. Thomas, Nelson & Silverman state: "Qualitative research in physical education, exercise science, and sport science is still relatively new" (2005). Adding to the complexity of this, international research across language barriers is not very common. Therefore, I chose to focus on my own observations and participation during this ski week as my main method of research. My lack of ability to speak and understand the local language allowed for participant observation to be the most logical style of inquiry. During the day and each evening, I would make entries into a diary concerning the different activities. My own presence into this week of skiing was obtrusive enough; therefore I chose not to take notes or record data while I was around others. However, I did carry a small notepad and would make notes during the day when I was alone.

I was invited to go to this week of instruction by one particular professor who speaks English fairly well, and I was a part of her ski group each day. In addition, at the end of the day I would ask her various questions about what took place, and we conversed in English. Everything within her group was in the Croatian language; however, at times someone would speak to me, or give me some particular instruction in English. I was able to gain a close and intimate familiarity with this particular group of beginning skiers. This method of participant observation included informal discussions, direct observation, participation in the daily life of the group, and a self-analysis. Similar to ideas of Abu-Lughod (1988), I was somewhat of an insider or, as she would say, 'halfie anthropology.' Because I was an invited lecturer on this college, I knew about 25% of those who were attending. This allowed me to have more access to the various dynamics and programs of this ski week.

"One major drawback to observation methods is obtrusiveness. A stranger with a camera or pad and pencil is trying to record people's natural behaviour. A key word here is 'stranger'" (Thomas, Nelson, & Silverman, 2005: 352). Because of this, I tried to fit in as much as possible with the normal schedule. Participant observation is also defined "as a process in which a researcher established a many-sided and long-term relationship with individuals and groups in their natural setting for the purposes of developing a scientific understanding of those individuals and groups" (uk.geocities.com/balihar, 2007). Although they knew that I was not a part of their school, simply taking part gave me an insider position to observe what was happening during this week of ski instruction. Negotiating this tricky ground (Smith, 2005) put me in numerous situations such as skiing with students, talking with instructors, having meals with coordinators, riding transportation with participants, and in spontaneous snow fights.

I attempted to understand the action that was taking place around me. I was able to record these experiences in order to understand the educational component of this ski week. This demanding role of looking and listening also involved recording and remembering experiences during the day. I spent seven days with 220 people with whom I had no real affinity or friendships. I took

pains to fit in with this group, and rather than coming across as an educational researcher, I simply tried to be with this group and to ski with them. The access I had to this ski school was augmented due to eating each meal with one of the experienced instructors and his wife who spoke English. Any questions that I had concerning the ski school, the college, or the program were easily answered by this couple adding to the validity of this work.

The data recording process took place methodically each evening after I returned from skiing. In addition, during this time I would review my notes and add more information before I went to bed. My analytical abilities were thorough because of my background, experience with people in the field, previous work in skiing, and my interest in learning in outdoor settings. Each day, I would transfer all notes that I had taken during the day on to my computer, and I would add any material or information that I had received from the school.

I spent approximately seven days, with this group. I was with them in all of the ski locations. I was able to observe them in relaxed social situations. During the week, I became more involved with several students and teachers who also spoke English. I spent most of my time with those who could speak the English language. These resulted in a subjective adequacy of this research of time, place, social circumstance, language, and intimacy (uk.geocities.com/balihar, 2007).

After the week of skiing, I began to read and re-read the data. Similar to the ideas of Glaser and Strauss (1967), there began to emerge several specific ideas from all of the entries I had made to my data. Since I lived in Zagreb, I could check my ideas and emerging findings with students as well as teachers. Adding to this, this paper was reviewed and read by two of the instructors.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The leisure educator should consider what the reason for the success rate (95% passing grade) of this ski school was. Perhaps the students in the Sports College had the ability to learn to ski. Or, the interaction between the teacher and the students played a large role. Also, there is a social aspect of learning where close friends would help one another to improve, and there is also pressure to pass the ski test given on the last day. In addition to these factors, I observed a philosophy of experiential education (Lindeman, 1961), self-directed learning (Tough, 1979; 1971), andragogy (Knowles, 1984), and communities of practice (Wenger, 1998).

For example, learning by doing is a perspective proposed by Lindeman who states that true “education is life” (1961: 4). He states that the student’s resource of highest value is experience rather than required classes. According to Lindeman (1961), education is more than a classroom; it is the daily life of the student. He states education should extend beyond the classroom to incorporate self-expression, recreation and leisure. These ideas are also shared by Dewey (1995), Havighurst (1972), as well as Rogers & Freiberg (1994). All of these writers and educators would applaud the efforts to actually teach skiing while involved in the activity rather than sitting in a classroom. These students were learning by doing in an encouraging atmosphere of recreation while they were on the ski slopes.

One could notice different types of learning and motivation taking place among these students. This is similar to Houle (1961), who divided learners in his research into three groups: goal-oriented, activity-oriented, and learning-oriented. In this situation, the goal-oriented learner wanted to learn to ski in order to pass the test. The activity-oriented, though not as easy to discern,

used the week of skiing to help meet personal needs. They enjoyed being with friends and having fun together. The learning oriented has a strong “desire to know” and the “itch to learn” (Houle, 1961: 25). One of the significant findings from Houle (1961) is the influence of what he calls stimulators. Stimulators enjoy passing on their knowledge and encouraging others to begin to learn. Similar to Wenger (1998) these learners form their own communities or enclaves that add to this knowledge. For example, those who learned to ski quickly became stimulators to their friends. These powerful insights were passed on by friends who knew clearly how to communicate the skills of skiing. Various enclaves were obvious, such as certain instructors who skied together, the advanced student skiers, the beginners, and those just having fun.

Tough's (1971; 1979) research disclosed that most adults complete one or two learning projects a year, and the average person completes eight. These learning projects are a major, highly deliberate effort to gain certain knowledge and skill. This particular project of learning to ski had a focused attention of seven days and caring professional instruction. This learning does not occur in isolation; this self-planned learning is a collaborative effort in a facilitative environment. Most of the ski classes were over by 13:00 or 14:00 leaving time for the students to ski on their own.

Adding to this, Knowles (1984) discusses how adults learn by outlining a process called andragogy, in which the learner is self-directed, broad and diverse experiences are important part of one's education, the learner is at a stage in life where he/she is ready to learn, adult learning is problem-centred, and the adult is internally motivated. Knowles feels the facilitator of adult learning should create a climate conducive to learning, the learner should participate in every phase of this process, and that each learner should have a learning contract to carry out the process (Knowles, 1984). This seems to be a fair description of the week in Sappada; students were highly motivated to learn, and the instructor formed this atmosphere of andragogy. Knowles felt that education with adults was different than education with children. While sharing these ideas a friend from former Yugoslavia said: “You are doing andragogy...” (Knowles, 1984: 6).¹

Similarly, Goldberger, Tarule, Clinchy, & Belenky (1995) admonish the adult educator to incorporate issues of diversity and culture into ways of knowing. Knowles' perspective is based on the positive self-concept of the learner. In addition, the learner must have the motivation to become self-directed, they have a great deal of experience that adds to the learning, and there is a readiness to learn based on the development of the individual (Knowles, 1984). One of the main tasks of the instructor is to have the beginner skier to assume responsibility for their own skiing, especially trying to learn on one's own after the regular class.

Andragogy is the art and science of helping adults learn (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999). Art is a craft, a skill, a creative cunning that stresses ingenuity and subtlety. During the week of skiing there was a unique relationship between the student, the teacher and the class, as well as an incorporation of the stunningly beautiful natural surroundings. The artistic side of andragogy can allow for the melding of leisure and education by understanding the use of free time, the sheer fun of skiing, spontaneous humour while learning to ski, enjoying a meal with friends, and just sitting in the lodge watching the snow. Science implies knowledge attained through study and practice. This aspect of the ski week was evident by the specific style of ski instruction in which each instructor had been certified. All of the instructors had previous training together by professionals, and they met nightly to discuss ways to improve their class.

¹ Andragogy has been used as a term in Europe for years to identify education with adults (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

In this art and science of learning, there will be an interest in the individual learner who incorporates unique culture and various ways of learning. The facilitator will encourage participatory activities from learners so that one's unique situation and understanding can be incorporated into the learning process. Andragogy's informality allows the learner to be involved in his/her own learning experience as well as helping to set the parameters of the experience.

Knowles (1984) delineates this further in his andragogical model comprised of five tenets. First, the learner is self-directing and in charge of his/her education. The week of instruction started with the assumption that the student wants to learn to ski and will take advantage of every situation in order to pass the upcoming exam. Second, the learner's background and individual experiences are taken into consideration. Each individual's experiences will further reflect their unique culture, allowing for the incorporation of his or her own lifestyle and background. Some of the skiers were from mountainous areas and had experience in skiing, whereas others were from coastal areas and had never seen snow. Third, andragogy assumes there is a readiness to learn. The adult learner brings with them a need to know, a desire to learn something that will impact their life. Because of the exam, the cost of the week, skiing with friends, and the potential of a future teaching career, there was a readiness to learn. Fourth, the adult learner is life-centred and task-centred; adults learn within the context of work, family, community, and culture. Fifth, there is an internal motivation to learn. These five assumptions are hinged on an atmosphere that encourages learning as evident by the instructors' desire to help the students to learn.

Candy (1991) outlines the various myths of self-directed learning (SDL) and especially the misconception that SDL is carried out in isolation. He writes about the social implications of learning and ways that SDL is situated in the social context of the individual. Similarly to ideas of Wenger (1998), they both emphasise the importance of learning within a community. Adding to this was the pressure to pass the upcoming exam; friends would meet in the afternoon to help each other improve their skiing skills. Candy (1991) calls on the learner to apply critical reflection. The longer the ski week continued this socially self-directed skiing became more dominant. The students spent more time helping each other to learn during the free time. They had the opportunity to reflect on their skiing during the afternoons.

CONCLUSIONS

There are several applications from how this college in Croatia teaches skiing to their students. First, they went away from local surroundings to learn a specific skill. They did not just spend a weekend, they were learning for seven days in a leisurely atmosphere allowing time for personal learning, critical evaluation, and social learning. Second, they seemed to employ the philosophy of lifelong learning by emphasizing learning on one's own, appropriate instruction, and use of instruction from friends. Third, the social dynamic of learning is crucial in this week of instruction. The caring interaction of the teacher, going for breaks and drinks with each other, and lots of time together such as meals allowed for the social dynamic of learning. Fourth, there was also evidence of formal instruction in classes held at night, specific instruction by the instructor, and the upcoming test for certain skills. On a practical note, perhaps other schools especially in the USA would benefit by incorporating similar week long camps for specific instruction.

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