**A Challenge to the use of EDICT as an instructional tool in Irish Paddle Sports**

**Points to note:**

* The beauty of writing this piece is that there is no one answer to effective learning, everything written here is interchangeable and dependent on many factors. There will be exceptions to the fact in plenty of scenarios you can probably think of as you read.
* If you disagree with what is written here that is perfectly ok with me, please voice those disagreements. The idea on this article is that instructors in this country reflect on their own practices on an ongoing basis. If we do something a particular way because is “works best” you should understand why it “works best”.
* The TRUSTS model I have created is a quick fix example to provide context and comparison, it is tailored towards children and young adults.
* The model I have come up with does not encompass all strokes and techniques just like it is not feasible to use the EDICT principle when teaching a difficult skill like the roll.
* What I ask is simple, that you take some things from this article and test them out for your own sessions and see if it works for you.
* I know that most instructors just consider EDICT as a guideline not as set in stone, but I believe that this method of introductory coaching is giving instructors bad habits.

**My Background:**

In May 2009 I completed a Canoeing Ireland Level 2 Instructor Training Course and by March 2010 I was a qualified Level 2 instructor with the philosophy that the EDICT principle was the ‘best practice’ in terms of kayak instruction, this is the last certification I received from Canoeing Ireland. In the intervening years I have always had a keen interest in the ways in which people learn skills. In terms of kayaking this is not limited to coaching beginners but more so in my case to observing other instructors and monitoring their own methods of instruction. I’ve switched my whole life and career focus from Law to Physical Education where I am currently working in a school on placement.

**Canoeing Ireland:**

Before I go deeper into this discussion I must make it perfectly clear that this is not in any way an attack on Canoeing Ireland and their methods. I have worked closely with them in recent years especially those in the Training and Development Unit and the people there have always been very accommodating and are a huge positive to paddle sports in Ireland (I have also sent this piece onto their committee to see if they think there is anything in here worth considering). Like any business which delivers a service a review of best practices is something that should be done on a regular basis. As an outsider I am unaware if a revamp is currently in process for the current system, only that I know a very recent training course continues to teach EDICT as the staple method for skills coaching in paddle sports in Ireland.

As humans in any walk of life we adapt our practices to make what we do more efficient, it’s a natural instinct and one that we may not often notice. I was only made aware of how much my methods had adapted and diverged from the EDICT principle when I returned to do a Level 3 Instructor Training course in 2011, a certificate which I have yet to be assessed in. Hundreds of people have come back from these courses with incredibly positive things to say about how much they got out of it and learned. Maybe I am a black sheep but being honest I was disappointed with the course, not with my instructors, I had some of the best in the country but I had a feeling that I wanted something more from the course. We covered EDICT again, at the time I couldn’t put my finger on it but I felt there was something hugely unnatural about that process of learning we were being taught.

It wasn’t until I started studying physical education that what I felt began to transform into meaning and understanding. Recently I read a forum post where one of Ireland’s top paddlers in 3 disciplines was advocating strongly about the EDICT principle. This made me think that another side needs to be heard, the side that I have never put into words before but what I try to use now as the basis of my instruction. This is not taken from any other model it is my own thoughts as I procrastinate from lesson plans and teaching reflections

**Challenging the Philosophy of the EDICT principle:**

I will begin by challenging certain aspects of the EDICT principle, and, as I hate listening to problems without solutions myself I’ll try not to be a hypocrite and I’ll try to hastily come up with another “mock” model.

My biggest problem with the EDICT principle is **where the responsibility of learning lies**. You as the instructor are explaining the skill, then you are demonstrating it then requiring that the students imitate what you are doing before you the instructor corrects them and sets the task. I would say that **the onus of learning is fully on the instructor.**

Many of you may say ‘yes, obviously that’s the job of the instructor’ but to those people I will say that you must be unaware of the unlimited benefits of putting the responsibility of learning upon the learner. I will take a stab at guessing that some might be thinking ‘Oh no a long winded post about discovery learning’ but the concept of shifting responsibility onto the learner goes far beyond that.

In addition in EDICT the instruction is predominantly instructor to student and the benefits of student to student learning (or peer learning) is brushed upon in passing but not in my opinion emphasised enough.

Another problem with EDICT is that it **does not specifically have a conclusion or review of student understanding.** Debriefs at the end of sessions have their place, but they are not as effective if you are not continuously getting students to reflect throughout the session. Trust me when I say that what you think the students know and what they actually know can sometimes be complete polar opposites.

**Critiquing the EDICT Principle:**

Here is the Principle:

**Explanation:** Let’s be clear I am a strong advocate of telling students what they will be doing on a particular session on the bank before we get in the water, if you are teaching them the turning stroke and the bracing stroke let them know before you hit the water.

Ask yourself though, “is explaining why we are learning a particular stroke as effective as building the curiosity within the students from the start of the learning process?”

We’ll get onto this later in this piece.

Although it is not a set ritual the method of getting students to raft up in order to hear the specifics of a skill is something which is strongly associated with the EDICT principle.

In my opinion this is wasting time on session management when you could be using the time to increase the levels of activity during the session. Rafting up in my experience breaks the continuity of any session and they are equally as distracting as they are functional. The slightest current or wind even in sheltered areas can distract from the point of being there.

Canoeing Ireland, to their credit specify to keep explanations short and sweet, this is in order to not overload students with information.

**Demonstration:** We are told not to overload students with information in an auditory sense when explaining. But by demonstrating skills you **are over loading them in a visual sense**, in any particular skill in kayaking there are several things happening at once, it is far too much for students to take in at any one time. In my opinion this is the wrong place in which demonstrations should take place and they are done by the wrong person.

Yeah sure, students get a vague idea what you are asking of them, but that is because by demonstrating full skill sets you are providing all the answers and not asking the questions. By being given the answers students are not thinking they are simply imitating. This leads us onto the next step.

**Imitating:** Of all the steps in this process this is the one which really irks me the most. As a instructor from Galway stated to me on the principle recently.

“I don't like it because it never addresses why you’re learning the skill.. It’s just like "this is how it is done. You try"

There is no room from manoeuvre or individual flair, students are doing without thinking, they are teaching their muscles but not their brains. Students in my experience only learn that something is right or wrong through trial and error. By not letting students do what comes naturally to them and learn by failing or by observing their peers being successful you are preventing the act of critical thinking (ability to engage in independent and reflective thinking). You as the instructors don’t need to tell them why something is bad practice or technique they will discover that for themselves.

For instance: the primary issue I always find at kayak beginner sessions is that students tend to lean back in their kayaks because it is more comfortable. Instructors I’ve observed are often at wits-end trying to encourage them to sit upright. I don’t blame students for slouching; the benefits to sitting upright in their kayaks are just words that you are speaking not experiences they can relate to.

Here is a scenario we can use:

*On the first beginner session a student falls out of their kayak, as this is an unnatural occurrence for many, attention will be focused on your rescue. You can use this as a ‘teachable moment’ by asking the group questions which allows them to think*

* *Why did \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ fall out of their kayak?--- Looking for students to come up with the words balance or stability.*
* *Do we have more balance in our kayak by leaning back or leaning forward?*
* *Get a partner and come up with the answer, you have 1 minute*

As an instructor or a coach I see my role as one of a facilitator, I am like a closed book who has the answers but students who want to improve must get the information they need by answering and in turn; asking questions.

Students must be facilitated to become inquisitive. This curiosity will peak when you the facilitator set **fun, meaningful and realistic goals/tasks for them to achieve.**

Students will want to be successful at these tasks and they begin to take responsibility for their own learning processes.

**Correct:** This can be an effective step in learning so long as it done in a certain manner. However the word ‘correct’ implies again that the instructor is simply going from student to student and saying ‘make sure the paddle stroke is wide’ or ‘glue your wrist to your forehead’. Students are doing what you are saying because you are in charge and have the shiny gear; not because they genuinely understand the reasons behind it. Like in the scenario above I believe in giving students the choices to enable them to discover the answers for themselves. This allows them to critically think upon the skill and their new found curiosity forces them to draw upon your knowledge as a facilitator through questioning.

This is also the place where demonstrations can be extremely effective through something known as “positive pointing”. You pick out a student who is doing the skill well and ask him to demonstrate it for the class. This is far more effective then you the instructor demonstrating it as you are expected to know it all anyway. When students notice their peer improving and receiving praise it makes the task more realistic and provides far more motivation for them to achieve what their peer is doing.

**Task:** The whole learning process needs to be task-orientated in my opinion. The task needs to take up the vast majority of the time and needs to be fun, meaningful and realistic.

So there are my criticisms of the current system, some may be ones which Canoeing Ireland addresses already and some most of the instructors reading this may do already. To provide an answer as to how I would teach a skill I have hastily come up with a system which certainly needs refinement and more thought ( I have done all this in the last 2 hours) but in my opinion allows for a far more comprehensive learning experience

**TRUSTS Model for Instruction:**

**T-** Task

**R-** Review

**U-** Understanding through questioning

**S-** Skill Refinement

**T-** Task (Adapted Game)

**S-** Summary

**Scenario:** 2nd Beginner Lesson; Students have been briefed that they will be learning how to turn and brace today:

**Teaching the sweep stroke using TRUST:**

1. **Task:**

With no prior knowledge of the sweep stroke I will get students to engage in an all-inclusive game with the goal being to see if they can touch everybody else in the groups bow of kayak with their paddle. (Fun and Realistic)

1. **Review:** (Building interest and curiosity in students)

Who touched more than 5 bows? (Meaningful)

Who touched everybody else’s in the group bow?

Choose a student who did very well and ask him/her why they were so successful? (Building curiosity)

Wow John you were very successful at that game, how did you stop other people in the group touching your bow?

**Remember that question:**

“Is explaining why we are learning a particular stroke as effective as building the curiosity within the students from the start of the learning process? “

Students will overwhelmingly want to be successful at any particular task.

**Adapted Task**\*Hang on… I’ve just realised that nobody touched my bow!!!

Students chase you the instructor around for a minute.

1. **Understanding through questioning:**

“Why was it hard to touch my bow?”

“What did I do in order to turn quickly?”

Pick out a student to do a demonstration of how they turned their kayak effectively

“You all have one minute to tell me the best way in which to turn quickly”

* Students give you the teaching points, some good ones and some bad ones

1. **Skill Refinement:**

* Use the teaching points which students give you in order to refine their skills using peer and discovery learning.

“Ok partner up I am going to ask you to try certain skills and you and your partner must decide on which one is the best technique”

“Using a stroke close to your boat or far away when turning”

“Turning your kayak when leaning back or sitting upright”

“Bring your paddle from your toes to your hips or from your toes to the back of the boat”

“Should we be looking at the nose of kayak or where we want our nose to be?”

“So that’s the forward sweep stroke, the back sweep stroke is the opposite of the forward sweep stroke, can you and your partner figure out how to do it”

“Now combine the forward sweep with the back sweep keeping your boat going in the same direction” (at this point the instructor can demonstrate).

The benefits of peer learning is **not only that students observe and interact with each other, it also frees you up as the instructor** to go around the groups and offer helpful advice or question what their thought processes are. This shift in the responsibility of learning upon the students allows you a free role to get to the students who are struggling and give them positive helpful feedback. During this process you are also free to start organising the culminating task to the skill learning process.

1. **Task (Adapted Game):**

During the skill refinement stage you have put clothes pegs on student’s kayaks (front and back grab loops so that the skill refinement stage transitions nicely into the final task stage.

“Ok the aim of the game is to get as many clothes pegs as you can from each other’s kayaks. Remember to use effective turning to stop others from stealing your pegs” (Fun & realistic)

**Task Adaption (if there is time):** e.g. Ok let’s put the pegs back on our kayaks but in this round you can only use your back sweep stroke. (Another option is to combine it with another skill).

**“**How many pegs did you get” (meaningful)

“Can you get more in the next round?”

Using positive pointing to praise the students you feel could do with some!

1. **Summary:**

“What should we do in order to turn our kayaks effectively?”

Students relay teaching points to you, you can account for student understanding and learning.

If anything important has been forgotten by students you can reiterate it.

Thank students and let them know what we will be learning next.

**Conclusion:**

All that I ask is that you the instructor after reading this go out and try something new to see if it works for you. Even something as simple as starting your EDICT with a meaningful task instead of an explanation.

Thanks for reading I know it’s been a long haul

Andrew.